Bible Companion Commentary: Genesis

Bible Companion Commentary, Volume 1

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BIBLE COMPANION COMMENTARY: GENESIS

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BIBLE COMPANION COMMENTARY: GENESIS

GENESIS

PREFACE

This commentary is based around the New European Version of the Bible, which is generally printed with brief commentary on each chapter. This commentary is the hard copy of the more detailed commentary found on the *Bible Companion* app.

Are there errors of thought and intellectual process in these volumes? Surely there are. Let me know about them. But don't fail to see the wood for the trees. Never let the wonder of the simple, basic Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Kingdom become obscured by all the angst over correctly interpreting this or that Bible verse. Believe it, respond to it, be baptized into Him, and let the word become flesh in you as it was so supremely in Him.

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Duncan Heaster

GENESIS CHAPTER 1

1:1 *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth*- Genesis 1 begins with the summary statement that God created "in the beginning". But this Hebrew word *reshit* can refer to a period of time at the beginning, rather than a specific moment in time (see Job 8:7; Gen. 10:10; Jer. 28:1). If a single moment of time was intended, then other Hebrew words could have been used, e.g. *rishonah*. How long this period was, or the processes used, are simply not spoken about. I suggest that "heavens and earth" is a merism, i.e. putting two words together in order to describe something greater. I don't believe, therefore, that we are to divide the term into "heavens" and "earth". This verse is a simple statement that in the beginning, perhaps over a period, all things were created by God. The process used is not commented upon.

But the zoom of the record then focuses upon the preparation of the *eretz* / the "earth". Analysis of Gen. 1:2-2:4 demonstrates that we are reading here of the "earth" being prepared, rather than created. Sure, God created planet earth and all things else, that much is stated in 1:1. But the focus of all the cosmos is upon the *eretz* , and the structure of the record goes further and reveals that the pinnacle of that creation was in the man formed on the sixth day. Significantly, the Pentateuch begins with the account of the creation of "heaven and earth" and concludes with Moses appealing to the "heavens and earth" of Israel (Dt. 32:1; 33:28).

The Hebrew for "beginning" is very often translated "firstfruit". The suggestion may be that the creation we are to now read of is but a firstfruit; and indeed, James 1:18 appears to allude here in saying that through the creative word, we are "a kind of firstfruits of all His creations". The implication

straightaway is that this creation is but a firstfruit, with far greater promise implied in future ages.

"Created" doesn't have to mean 'from nothing'. You can create something, without that 'creation' implying that you brought matter into existence. The Genesis record of creation is alluded to so often, especially in Psalms, Isaiah and Paul' writings, as being the basis for God's creation of a new creation of persons; re-working the chaos and disorder of their lives into something beautiful and to His glory. Later usages of "create" are paralleled with 'calling forth / into visibility', and especially "forming" or moulding. This, I suggest, is what the "creation" here may refer to. And yet there is indeed the visual impression given of a creation from nothing, *ex nihilo*. That would be because effectively the new creation, the re-ordering and re-building of human life, is tantamount to something totally new.

One of the most fundamental differences with the creation myths is that Genesis 1 presents God as uncreated, having no beginning, and focuses upon what *He* created- whereas the other records seek to explain where their gods came from and how *they* were created: "These foreign creation myths recount not only the origins of the visible world, but, at the same, of the gods. Genesis 1, however, distinguishes itself radically from these all sincere there is no such theogony. This observation indicates the grandeur of Israel's religion" (Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1997) p. 126).

1:2 *Now the earth was formless and empty; darkness was on the surface of the deep and God's Spirit was hovering over the surface of the waters*-There is fair debate over whether Gen. 1:2-2:4 is poetry or not. Redneck creationists argue it is not- because they consider this is a literal scientific account of creation. But there is fair evidence that it is in fact poetry- although the rhyme is in terms of the ideas rather than assonance of the words. The

material is based around the number seven. Gen. 1:1 has seven Hebrew words, 1:2 has fourteen; 2:1-3 has 35 words [5x7]; *Elohim* is used 35 times; "firmament" and "earth" 21 [3x7] times each; and "it was so" and the comment that God saw "good" in it occur seven times each. The numerical value of the Hebrew words is also full of 'seven' patterns. This isn't quite what one would expect in a scientific account. And what was God intended to do in explaining origins? To explain them in scientific terms comprehensible and acceptable to a modern person? Or in terms acceptable to a primitive Israelite? I suggest He avoids that conundrum by presenting the creation account as limited only to *eretz* Israel, and presenting it as a drama, a kind of Divine slideshow.

The speeches in the book of Job are likewise poetry; these were therefore surely not the words that literally fell from the lips of Job and his friends. But that does not mean that the words are not inspired, nor does it make them myth. The poetic structure of Genesis 1:2-2:4 can be seen reflected even in translation; the work of each day is described within the same rubric: "There was evening and morning... God said... It was so... God saw that it was good... there was evening and morning". The account of creation is not evenly balanced, i.e. there is more detail given to some things than to others. This isn't what we would expect if the text is intended to provide a literal account of creation. The Bible uses various genres- it is a collection of poetry, direct statement, history, letters etc. Inspiration and revelation are two different things. All the Bible is inspired, but not all of it is a specific "Thus says the Lord...". The words of Job's friends are recorded by inspiration, but God Himself says that they were not all true. We are to interpret, to perceive the genre, the essence being communicated. And nowhere is that more true that in the creation record.

So I suggest that we should read Genesis neither as literal history, nor as myth. It is a dramatic presentation of the origin of Israel, produced in a particular context at a specific time, and re-worked in the context of Judah's captivity and God's intention to re-create Israel at the restoration. The entire text from Gen. 1:1-2:4 is poetic; this itself surely warns us not to read this as a literal, blow by blow account of historical creation. If such a historical account was provided, we surely would find description and argumentation employed. But instead, we have a kind of poetry. Victor Hamilton has spotted many examples of chiastic structure within the section, and also within the individual verses. Take Gen. 1:5- Hamilton translates this as "God named the light 'Day'; the darkness he named 'Night'"; and he observes that the structure of verb- indirect object / indirect object – verb in the Hebrew text is essentially poetic. (Victor Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17* (Eerdmans, 1990) p. 118).

The earth- I will be arguing that *eretz* here, as in much of Genesis and the Hebrew Bible, refers specifically to the land of promise. I have elsewhere discussed the definition of *eretz* at length- see *The Last Days* Digression 3 'The earth- land- *eretz*'.[1] The Spirit "flutters" over the waters in Gen. 1:2, just as God like an eagle [a symbol of the Spirit] "flutters" over Israel in bringing about their creation as a nation (Dt. 32:1). The point is, what God did at creation, He can do at any time.

Understanding *eretz* as referring to the land promised to Abraham enables us to read the account of the flood as describing a local event in that area. The watery formless waste of the Genesis 1 creation drama is repeated in the flood; a re-creation occurs, with Noah taking the role of Adam. I suggest that the same geographical area is in view- *eretz* Israel, rather

1. http://www.aletheiacollege.net/ld/d3.htm

than the entire planet. Likewise the events of Babel and confusion of languages make more sense if they refer to a localized situation within the *eretz* of greater Israel; the list of nations descended from Noah's sons in Genesis 10 all refer to the peoples within *eretz* Israel, rather than having any global reference. The nations mentioned there are found elsewhere in the Bible- and they refer to peoples within the land promised to Abraham, and not outside of it. No comment is made about e.g. Aborigines, African tribes or American Indians. Note also that later Biblical allusions to the flood speak of it as representative of God's judgments upon Israel; and this has an added appropriacy if the reference is to the same geographical territory. Noah was to take both clean and unclean animals into the ark, and we are surely intended to think that the later classification of clean and unclean animals was used. But that classification concerns animals known in *eretz* Israel. The intention was to keep life going on the *eretz* after the flood. There was no classification of all the animals of Australasia or the Amazon into clean or unclean, and no special comment on specific animals from those regions; the special comments on clean or unclean animals were all concerning animals known within the *eretz*.

The sons of God marrying the daughters of men resulted in the *eretz* falling into sin; I suggest this refers to the people of God who had been placed in the *eretz* marrying the other surrounding peoples. The language used about the state of things in the *eretz* is exactly that used by the later prophets concerning the situation in Israel. The people were frightened by the "giants" they met in the land of Canaan (Num. 13:33), likely connecting them with superhuman beings. These *nephilim* [LXX *gigantes*] had their origin explained by Moses in Genesis 6- the righteous seed intermarried with the wicked outside of the *eretz*, and their offspring were these *nephilim*, mighty men of the world.

We read that people moved eastward and settled in Shinar before building Babel (Gen. 11:2); but 'east' is relative to a fixed, defined area on earth. If we insist that it means the entire planet, then it's hard to conceive where 'east' would be on a sphere like planet earth which is rotating on its own axis. But it makes sense within the boundaries of the *eretz* promised to Abraham. The same can be said of the account of Adam and Eve leaving Eden and moving east (Gen. 3:24), and the rejected Cain likewise heading east (Gen. 4:16).

Jer. 27:5[2] alludes to the creation record in speaking of how God had 'made' [the Hebrew word means more 'prepared' than 'to create'] "earth" and would give it to the king of Babylon: "I have made the earth, the men and the beasts which are on the face of the earth by My great power and by My outstretched arm, and I will give it to the one who is pleasing in My sight". It's significant that Gen. 1:1 speaks of God creating all things- *bara*. But this word is paralleled in the later account with another word which has the sense of 'making' / preparing. The "earth" was to be given to Nebuchadnezzar- clearly it is the specific *eretz* of Israel which is in view, and not the entire globe. Jer. 27:6 actually defines the *eretz* as also including Ammon, Moab, Sidon and Tyre- all areas within the *eretz* promised to Abraham.

If we understand Eden as being within the *eretz* Israel, then the Biblical predictions that the ravaged land of Israel would become as Eden take on an obvious appropriacy (Is. 51:1; Ez. 36:35; Joel 2:3). It is the same geographical area in view. Note that the garden was *in* Eden (Gen. 2:8), on the east of Eden. Adam and Eve were sent forth from the garden to the east- in the direction of Babylon (Gen. 11:1), which was built east of Eden. This clearly looks forward to the expulsion of Israel from their land, to Babylon, and confirms the equation of Eden and *eretz*

2. http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer%2027.5

Israel. Adam's place in Eden was dependent upon him obeying the "commandment" of Gen. 2:16, and a related word is used of how Israel's place in the land / *eretz* was also contingent upon their obedience to Divine commandment (Dt. 30:16).

Now the earth was formless and empty- This Hebrew phrase *tohu wabohu* is important in defining the "earth" spoken of as Israel. The Hebrew better means an "uninhabitable wilderness", although there is the idea of chaos also present. The same phrase is used in Jer. 4:23-26[3] about the state of *eretz* Israel after Israel had been exiled from it and it had been judged by God. There are other creation allusions in that passage: "I looked on the earth, and behold, it was *formless and void* (*tohu wabohu*); and to the heavens, and they had no light (cp. Gen. 1:2[4]... the fruitful land was a wilderness... there was no man, and all the birds of the heavens had fled". The first audience of Genesis 1 was Israel, as they were travelling through a wilderness to the promised *eretz*. It has been claimed that *tohu* means "deserted", and this would have relevance for the Jews in exile in Babylon, where Genesis was likely edited, being encouraged that God could indeed re-form the *eretz* they had left, and turn chaos into the beauty of His Kingdom. Note how the NASB margin offers "wasteland" for "formless". The same word is used in Dt. 32:10 about the wasteland where Israel were located when Genesis was first given- for their instruction. Dt. 32:11 continues the creation allusion by speaking of God as a bird 'hovering over' Israel- the same word used to describe how God's Spirit hovered over the surface of the waters (1:2).

As to whether there were previous creations before our own, my basic sense is 'Yes, probably there were'. The earth being "without form and void" (Gen. 1:2) uses a phrase elsewhere used

3. http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer%204.23-26

4. http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gen%201.2

to describe the judgment that has come on an order of things (Jer. 4:23; Is. 24:10; 34:11). It may be, therefore, that there was a previous creation on earth which was destroyed in judgment. John Thomas in the first section of *Elpis Israel* suggests (without much direct support from the Hebrew, it must be admitted) that the command to Adam to " replenish the earth" (Gen. 1:28) implies to re-fill, as if there had been a previous creation that was destroyed, presumably by water. "In the beginning" , perhaps a huge period of time ago, God created the heavens and earth. But the present creation can be seen as being constituted some time later, after the previous creations. When during the six days of creation He said " Let there be light" this may not have necessitated the actual manufacture of the sun; this was presumably done "in the beginning" . But the sun was commanded to shine out of the darkness (2 Cor. 4:6), and therefore from the viewpoint of someone standing on the earth, it was as if the sun had been created. The earth was covered with water at the time the present creation began (Gen. 1:2). This would mean that the destruction of the earth by the flood in Noah's time was actually a repeat of something God had previously done. This sheds light on His promise to never again destroy the earth with water: "I will stablish my covenant with you; neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of a flood; neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth" (Gen. 9:11). This sounds as if destruction of the earth by flooding had happened several times before. It's almost as if the God of all grace is showing Himself progressively gracious to earth's inhabitants: 'I've done it before several times, but now I promise you humans, you new race of inhabitants upon whom my special love is to be shown through My Son, that I'll never do it again'.

Formless- Later allusions to the creation record parallel God's creation with His forming or molding. Isaiah's descriptions of God forming and molding the earth to be inhabited by His people clearly refer to His creation of the specific land of Israel, to be inhabited by the returning exiles (Is. 43:1,7,10,21; Is. 44:2,21,24; Is. 45:18). The drama starts off with the land of promise being formless, waiting for God to form it into something habitable. I suggest we have here a kind of prologue to the Pentateuch. The creation is described as a series of six events, observed by someone standing on earth with it happening all around them. This is how Job begins. Clearly the book of Job is poetry, it is drama, and whilst Job was a historical person [at least, other Scripture alludes to him in this way], it is unlikely that the friends literally spoke in poetry, or that his loss of children was balanced out by gaining new ones, as if the pain of the loss was thereby compensated. And so the drama of creation is a poetic way of explaining to Israel in the wilderness where their promised land had come from. Just as it would be unwise to push the prologue of Job into a strictly literal framework of interpretation, so with the drama of creation which we have in early Genesis. The promised land being initially empty and formless speaks directly to the situation of the land when Israel first heard these words of Moses; they were travelling towards that land, whilst God was preparing it. Creation is therefore described in these terms, to remind them that the God of the cosmos was no less powerful in creating Israel. This is the sense of the many creation allusions in the restoration prophets. The deserted, abandoned land was to be re-formed by the same creative power which made it in the first place. The Babylonian invasion had made the land formless, empty and dark (Jer. 4:23), using the very words of Gen. 1:2 about the land before God began to prepare it for His people.

The surface of the deep- The usage of the more poetic "deep" rather than "sea" sets up allusion to how the Israelites came out of the deep to enter the land (Ps. 106:9; Is. 51:10; Is. 63:13), just as the 'land' is portrayed in this drama as it were emerging from the deep. "The surface of the deep" occurs only three times in the Hebrew Bible, and one of them suggests that at this time, God was preparing the land for His people: "When he prepared the heavens... when he set a compass upon the face of the depth" (Prov. 8:27). The allusion to Genesis 1 presents God as preparing rather than creating *ex nihilo*. He as it were is marking out with a pencil how He is going to prepare the material. And the focus of all His creative work was the earth, the land, and the people upon it, i.e. Israel.

God's Spirit was hovering over the surface of the waters- This rare word translated 'hovering' is to be found in the description of God hovering over the wilderness / formless land from whence He took His people (Dt. 32:11). The point is, what God did at creation, He can do at any time in the creation / formation of His people. In almost every phrase of the creation account, there appears reference to the creation of Israel. The land and people of Israel are frequently identified- appeals for the *land* to mourn obviously refer to the *people*. The later allusions to the creation record are therefore far more than simply allusions to God's creative power; they are so frequent because the same *eretz* or land is in view as that which is centre stage in the drama of creation which opens the history of Israel. And out of our formless and chaotic lives, the Spirit brings forth a new creation. The Genesis account of creation is very much of re-creation and re-ordering, forming beauty out of pre-existing chaos brought about by judgment. And this is what the Spirit is doing in the lives of all those born of the Spirit. The way the Spirit hovered above the waters of baptism at the Lord's baptism clearly alludes

here; and His baptism is programmatic for our baptism of water and Spirit. The language of Jn. 3:3-5 about being born out of water and Spirit may well allude here too; as the land arose from the waters, so the new life arises from the waters of baptism, with the gift of the Spirit from then onwards forming the new creation in that reformed, recreated life and person.

In the first group of three days, we read of things appearing in the sky (days one and two), then the seas (day three), and then the land (days three and four). In the second three days, things again appear in the sky (days four and five), then the seas (day five), and then the dry ground (day six). This strengthens the impression that we are being presented with a dramatic presentation, rather than a strictly literal, historical account of events. I write of 'impressions', and of course the interpretation of any Bible passage is in a sense deeply subjective and personal. I can only say that reading Genesis 1 and 2 as literature, I don't get the impression that this is symbolic; it isn't a case of dragons with stars on their tails as we have in the book of Revelation. I also do not get the impression that there is an attempt to provide a scientific explanation of the creation process; neither in ancient nor modern terms. I do get the impression that we are to read the record literally, and later Scripture clearly takes Adam as a literal person- I don't see the days as being presented as anything less or more than literal days. This is evidenced by the fact Adam was created on the sixth day but died at less than a thousand years old at some time after the seventh day. And yet clearly the record has elements of drama to it. I prefer therefore to liken the 'creation' account to a Divine drama or slideshow, observed by someone on the *eretz*. The events literally happened, in this dramatic presentation which serves as a prologue to the Pentateuch; just as the events of Job 1 are a prologue to the book, and are clearly drama. They happened literally enough-

in the drama. But that is not to say that they are strictly literal, historical, verbatim

1:3 *God said-* The creation record emphasizes that God spoke, and it was done. Creation was through a spoken word. This contrasts with the creation myths, which nearly all claim that the present world emerged from conflict between good and bad gods; or that the world came forth as a kind of self-birth or self-reproduction [the pagan forerunner of atheistic evolution], or the gods playing with dust in their hands. The Biblical record is strikingly different, demonstrating that God is omnipotent of Himself, His word is all powerful, and there is no personal Satan or other cosmic force of evil. The new creation likewise comes about through the word of the Gospel.

Let there be light, and there was light- The sun was 'created', or appeared, on the fourth day. It has been argued that this light was therefore the *shekinah* glory of God. But I think that is an unnecessary argument. "Let there be light" doesn't have to mean that light or the sun was then created, because I suggest the creation of all things in the cosmos was already touched on in 1:1. If we understand the whole record as a drama unfolding before an observer, we are to imagine dawn breaking, light appearing- and then on day four we find that this light comes from the sun. The same term describes the appearance of light at sunrise; and the sun or light isn't created at a sunrise, but it is observed as appearing (s.w. Gen. 44:3; Ex. 10:23[5]; Neh. 8:3[6]). But in the Divine drama now unfolding, light as it were appears upon the *eretz* like a spotlight shining on a dark stage. Paul powerfully uses this image to speak of the light of Christ breaking into our otherwise chaotic and formless lives to re-work that same material into something beautiful. The "heavens and

5. http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Exod%2010.23

6. http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Neh%208.3

earth" were already in existence (1:1); therefore all we now read about can't refer to their creation, but rather their appearance in the drama which is being unfolded. The whole language of "let there be light" doesn't sound as if the creation of light is in view; but rather pre-existing light is summoned to appear. Rev. 22:5 pictures a return to beginnings in saying that there will be light in the new Jerusalem, but no need of the sun [not 'no sun', but no need of it]. We see here how the provenance of 'creation' in Gen. 1:2- Gen. 2:4 is paralleled with the *new* Jerusalem, suggesting that the old creation drama was likewise centered around the *old* Jerusalem.

"Let there be" and "and there was..." translate the same Hebrew word, used twice in the sentence. The idea presented is that the Divine word of command was its fulfilment. The new creation is brought about by that same word of total power. What God says is as good as done. This explains why the Bible often uses language beyond and outside of our conceptions of linear time. The future is now. To the eye of faith.

It would seem from later Scripture that the orders and intentions outlined by God on the six literal days are *still* being fulfilled. Take the command for there to be light (Gen. 1:3,4). This is interpreted in 2 Cor. 4:6 as meaning that God shines in men's hearts in order to give them the knowledge of the light of Christ. The command was initially fulfilled by the Angels enabling the sun to shine through the thick darkness that shrouded the earth; but the deeper intention was to shine the spiritual light into the heart of earth-dwellers. And this is still being fulfilled. Likewise the resting of God on the seventh day was in fact a prophecy concerning how He and all His people will enter into the "rest" of the Kingdom. The Lord realized this when He said that even on Sabbath, God was still working (Jn. 5:17). The creation work had not *really* been completed in

practice, although in prospect it had been. In this very context the Hebrew writer comments that although we must still enter into that rest, "the works were finished from the foundation of the world" (Heb. 4:3).

The Genesis creation account repeatedly alludes to the Baal myths of creation- in order to show that it is God and not Baal who controls the cycles of nature and has brought an ordered creation out of chaos. Moses states early on in his inspired account that God created light. The Egyptians considered that light was in itself a great god, Re. And "in Persian cosmology...light...is uncreated and eternal" (J. Skinner, *Commentary On Genesis* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956)). So to say that the one true God created light, and light is not a god in itself, was a radical thing. And hence the account of the fourth day of creation is longer than the accounts of the other days; because the sun, moon and stars were seen as gods in themselves. The moon god, Sin, was thought to be the one who "fixes day, month and year". But Genesis 1 teaches that it is the one God who created the moon, who set the moon and stars to define time periods. There was only one God, one creator. We are to look beyond all created things to the Creator behind them. The peoples around the Israelites worshipped created things as if they were God. Moses was teaching that no, there is only one God, and we must primarily worship Him rather than anything which He has made. Paul brings out the error of worshipping the created rather than the Creator. And this echoes down to our day; where we can so easily worship the 'idols' of which this world is so full, rather than the ultimate Creator. That there is only *one* Divine Creator is a challenge to *any* form of idolatry.

1:4 *God saw the light, and saw that it was good*- This shouldn't be read as meaning that God looked at what He had created, and was impressed by His own handiwork when He saw it in

physical existence. That would seem strange for an omnipotent and omniscient God. The idea could equally be that God looked at the light because it was good, recognizing it was good, whereas He doesn't look at the darkness; His looking at the light as it were made it "good". The light of the new creation is clearly presented in John's gospel as the Lord Jesus, who was alone "good" in God's eyes. Seeing or looking in Hebrew thought is connected with presence. The Father in that sense cannot look upon evil (Hab. 1:13), but He looks upon the Son, and we are in Him, and thereby in His presence acceptably.

God divided the light from the darkness- This is the language of God's 'creation' of Israel when He gives them light and divides them from the darkness of Egypt (Ex. 10:21; 14:20). The division of light from darkness was the prelude to Israel's inheritance of the prepared land; and thus it was at the beginning of creation. Likewise, prior to their entrance to the land, they heard the voice of God Himself coming out of the thick darkness (Dt. 5:23) just as it did in this record of the creation of the land. Judah in Babylon were in darkness (Is. 42:7); a darkness created by God just as much as the light (Is. 45:7). They were brought to light in their return to a restored land: "Darkness shall cover the land, and gross darkness the peoples; but Yahweh will arise on you, and His glory shall be seen on you" (Is. 60:2). This imagery is taken directly from the drama of creation, and the same 'land' is surely in view. The connections between the restoration prophecies and the creation record are so strong that my personal belief is that Moses' initial creation account was re-written in Babylon, under inspiration. I suggest Moses was the original inspired author because of the way parts of the Pentateuch are attributed to him in other Scripture, and because of the obvious relevance of

the work for Israel in the wilderness, whom he was leading and teaching.

The idea of "division" is of separation; it is the word used of how God separates His people unto Himself. The division was in that God proclaimed a difference between light and darkness; what previously had been an apparent mixture of light and darkness is now clearly divided. This is helpful to all those who are part of the new creation. Outside of the Spirit's creative work, all seems an endless blur of grey. Moral truth and error is not apparent; people live according to feelings, or what society at their time defines as light and dark, good or bad. In the new creation, we progressively come to perceive light and darkness, and the chasmic difference between them.

1:5 *God called the light day, and the darkness He called night-* To name something was understood as effectively creating it (see on 2:20). So this naming was not *per se* creating these things, for they were already created in 1:1. Likewise Adam's naming of the animals didn't literally create them, but effectively brought them into known existence. And again likewise with God's calling or naming of things in the creation account after 1:1. As noted on Gen. 1:4, in the new creation, there is a labelling and crystal clear definition of light and darkness; darkness and light are called out for what they are. No longer are we left in the endless shades of grey which arise from human reflection upon ethical and moral issues. And the calling out of those things is in His word. Just as it was His voice which declared what was light and darkness.

There was evening and there was morning, one day- Many have wondered why the Hebrew day begins at sunset and ends in the morning. The answer presumably goes back to the timing of creation- implying God started work on day one in the darkness, and the evening and the morning became the first day (Gen. 1:5)- and the sequence thus continued. God's creative activity

begins with all of us in the darkness, and creatively works to bring us through to the light. Interestingly, *ehad*, translated "first" in Gen. 1:5, can imply 'unified'. The two periods- day and night- become united into one "day". The light and the dark, the created and the not yet created, the achieved and not yet achieved, are somehow united in God's understanding of our 'days'.

Paul, writing to those who thought they believed in the unity of God, had to remind them that this simple fact implies the need for unity amongst us His children, seeing He treats us all equally as a truly good Father: " If so be that God is one... he shall justify the circumcision by faith, and [likewise] the uncircumcision through faith" (Rom. 3:30 RV). Unity amongst us is inspired by the fact that God seeks to be one with us, exactly because He is Himself 'unity', one in Himself. The Rabbis have always been at pains to point out the somewhat unusual grammar in the record of creation in Genesis 1, which literally translated reads: "One day... a second day... a third day", rather than 'One day... two days... three days', as we'd expect if 'Day one' solely referred to 'firstness' in terms of time. "The first day" (Gen. 1:5) therefore means more strictly 'the day of unity', in that it refers to how the one God sought unity with earth. "*Yom ehad,* one day, really means the day which God desired to be *one* with man... the unity of God is a concern for the unity of the world" (Abraham Heschel, *Man is Not Alone* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1979) p. 123). The spoken word of God is what brought light and darkness together in some meaningful synthesis; as noted on Gen. 1:4 and above on :5, there are now no longer the endless shades of grey in our lives. There is clear definition of right and wrong. And it is only God's creative work which enables us to synthesize the light and darkness into daily understanding. The Hebrew for "night" can suggest that which turns away [from the light]. This is very much the conception of

John's gospel, presenting the Lord Jesus as the light, and all else as a turning away from that light, because of a preference to remain in evil deeds.

1:6 *God said, Let there be an expanse in the middle of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters-* The language of "an expanse" is to me one of the clearest evidences that we are reading a reported drama and not a scientific, historical account of creation. Some creationists claim that it refers to a water or ice canopy which came to earth at the flood. But this just will not do, for the same word translated "expanse" or "firmament" occurs later in the Bible, as if it still existed (e.g. Ps. 19:1; Ps. 150:1; Dan. 12:3). And the water released at the flood came from the clouds as well as from beneath the earth; there is no mention of this 'firmament' dissolving. God had already created the heavens and earth in Gen. 1:1, so the 'firmament' cannot refer to space or the atmosphere; that was already there if the heavens were already created. Further, the Hebrew word itself refers to something which is beaten out, a dome covering the land. It was intended to separate the waters from the waters, and something solid is implied by that alone. If it were indeed a canopy of water, then it would not be separating the upper waters from the lower waters- because it would itself be water. Gen. 1:20 in Hebrew speaks of the birds flying on the face or surface of this 'firmament', as if it were a constraining dome. We are invited to picture the clouds pinned to it above, and birds constrained by it beneath. Seeing that birds can fly through clouds, it will not do to claim that this "firmament" is merely the sky or a water canopy. A water canopy would have made the earth too hot for humans to live on. Why use the unusual and hard to define Hebrew term translated "expanse" or "firmament" if in fact merely the sky or atmosphere was intended? And why use a word which implies something tangible and material?

There are other Hebrew words which mean 'space' as in the gap between two objects; but they aren't used here [consider the Hebrew words used for 'space' in Gen. 32:16; Josh. 3:4; 1 Sam. 26:13]. Rather is there the idea of a "firmament"; this is not the same as saying 'there was a space'. Job 37:18 uses the verb related to the noun "firmament" in saying that God "spread out ['firmamented'] the sky, which is strong, as a molten looking glass". The allusion is clearly to a common Ancient Near Eastern belief that there was such a dome over the earth. But later Biblical allusions to the firmament state that it is the platform upon which God sits and His cherubim ride (Ez. 1:23,25,26; 10:1 etc.). The firmament was understood as a solid structure and not simply the atmosphere. Is. 40:22 continues this understanding, although in the context of Israel, by saying that God "stretches out the heavens like a canopy, and spreads them out like a tent to live in". Moses saw God Himself enthroned upon such a blue firmament. My suggestion is that this was a prop, as it were, in the drama of creation; and above it is enthroned God and the Angels. But they are enthroned upon and over *Israel*. That is the point. Perhaps this is why day two of creation is the only one which lacks the Divine comment, that He saw what He had made and it was good. This expanse / firmament was part of the furniture on the stage, as it were, and not a reference to anything which He had materially created. The description in :14 and :17 of the planets as "lights" firmly located or "set" within this 'firmament' again gives the impression of a fixed dome, into which the lights are inset like spotlights shining down on a stage. And again, this is all appropriate to a person standing upon earth; for in reality, the planets are located at vastly differing distances from planet earth. We have similar language in Ezekiel 32, where we read of a kind of de-creation of Egypt, with the lights in her firmament going out as if they

were strobe lights being turned off over a stage: "When I shall extinguish you, I will cover the sky and make its stars dark; I will cover the sun with a cloud and the moon shall not give its light. All the bright lights of the sky will I make dark over you and set darkness on your land, says the Lord Yahweh" (Ez. 32:7,8).

The restoration prophets speak of how God will as it were re-create Israel when He restores His people to their land. And the verb *raqa*, to spread out, to 'firmament', is used about the earth / land of Israel, paralleling the spreading out of the land to the spreading out of the heavens above it: "He that created the heavens, and stretched them out; He that spread forth the land" (Is. 42:5); "He that stretches forth the heavens alone, that spreads abroad the earth / land by Himself" (Is. 44:24); "Him that stretched out the land / earth" (Ps. 136:6). Clearly, the 'firmament' was seen as a dome over the land of Israel; what was seen in the drama of creation was going to be repeated at Israel's restoration. That restoration will not involve a literal creation of land out of nothing.

The idea of the creation scene occurring beneath a covering is one of many connections between the creation record in Genesis 1, and the tabernacle. There are so many points of contact:

- As creation was achieved by a series of successive Divine commands being fulfilled, so the tabernacle was created in obedience to Divine commands, and was inspected by God and found good, and was blessed (Gen. 1:31 = Ex. 39:43).

- The creation was "completed" (Gen. 2:1) as the tabernacle was (Ex. 39:32).

- God finished His creation work (Gen. 2:2), as the tabernacle was a "work" that was "finished" (Ex. 40:33).

- The completed creation and tabernacle were both Divinely blessed (Gen. 2:3 = Ex. 39:43); and creation and tabernacle were both "sanctified" on completion (Gen. 2:3 = Ex. 40:9).

- The tabernacle was built in response to seven successive Divine speeches to Moses, each beginning with "The Lord spoke to Moses" (Ex. 25:1; 30:11,16,22,34; 31:11,12). This obviously connects with the seven days of creation, and some Jewish commentators perceive similarities between the events of the creation days, and the material constructed for the tabernacle in each of the matching sections of Ex. 25-31. Thus "sea" was created on the third day (Gen. 1:9-11), and it was in the third command that the bronze laver or "sea" was commanded (Ex. 30:16-21). And the seventh speech (Ex. 31:12-17) mentions the need to keep the Sabbath, which was the theme of the seventh day of creation.

- The significant theme of 'separation' in creation (Gen. 1:4,6,7,14,18) is reflected in the 'separation' of holy and less than holy in the tabernacle (Ex. 26:33) and the associated legislation regarding separating clean from unclean.

- Both creation and the construction of the tabernacle were the work of God's Spirit (Gen. 1:1; Ex. 31:3; 35:31).

- The tabernacle was finished as the new started (Ex. 40:17), continuing the connection between tabernacle and creation.

- The "firmament", literally 'the beaten thing', uses the same word found in Ex. 39:3 and Num. 16:39 for the beating of metals into material for tabernacle usage. The precious stones of Gen. 2:12 are the very stones found in the breastplate.

- Adam's role was to dress and keep the garden (Gen. 2:15); but the Hebrew words used are elsewhere used for "worship" and for dressing and keeping the tabernacle. The whole phrase "Behold I have given you..." (Gen. 1:28) occurs later when the Priests are told what God has given them (Ex. 31:6; Lev. 6:10; Num. 18:8,21; Dt. 11:14).

- As God walked in the garden of Eden (Gen. 3:8), so He would walk in the midst of the camp of Israel in the wilderness (Dt. 23:15).

The point is that the *eretz* and Eden were presented as God's tabernacle, with the man of the *eretz*, Adam the first Israelite, intended to keep God's ways and do His service within it. My point is that the focus of Genesis 1 is upon Israel and God's people within that *eretz*, rather than being a literal account of the creation of the cosmos from nothing.

We note again as on Gen. 1:4,5 the idea of division; as light was separated from darkness, so the waters were divided. The new creation is very much about division and separation- not simply *from* evil, but more positively, *unto* God's things.

1:7 *God made the expanse-* A different word to that translated "created" in 1:1. It has been well observed that in the six days of creation God is *preparing* this land for man and not *creating* it. Indeed, the Hebrew word translated 'made' in the context of creation can be used just as in English we speak of 'making a bed'. We don't mean we created a bed, but that we prepared the existing materials for usage. The Hebrew word is used in just this sense in places like Dt. 21:12 [to 'make' fingernails]; 2 Sam. 19:25 [to 'make' feet] and 2 Sam. 19:24 [to 'make' a beard]. And this is exactly relevant to Israel in the wilderness being led to a land which their God had prepared for them. The *eretz* is presented to us in terms of its relation to the seas (:10) and sky (:20)- rather than with reference to the further cosmos, stars etc., as would be required if the *eretz* referred to the whole planet.

And divided the waters- A phrase repeatedly used of the dividing of the Red Sea so that Israel could pass on "dry land" (:9). The creation and formation of Israel is consistently described in creation language- because it was exactly their

creation which the creation drama speaks of. And the new creation likewise in each heart is to modelled on this same huge creative, re-ordering power seen here.

Which were under the expanse from the waters which were above the expanse- Such references to location ("under... above") imply a flat surface is in view, from the viewpoint of a person standing on the earth.

And it was so- There is a very positive feel in the record of the natural creation- each creative action is concluded with the comment "And it was so"- literally, "it was Yes" (Hebrew). This same positive upward spiral will be found in lives which submit to God's new creation.

1:8 *God called the expanse sky. There was evening and there was morning, a second day-* The Hebrew means to call out, to proclaim. This fits the idea of a Divine drama unfolding, with the voice of God as the narrator. The idea of a drama or slideshow helps us better address the question as to whether the events of Genesis 1 literally happened. 'What happened in the film'. 'What happened next in the slideshow?'- such questions have a 'literal' answer. The observer, in whose shoes we are placed by the drama, saw these things literally happen as they were presented to him. Whether that is what literally happened in order to create the cosmos is not the question in view. The creation of all things was briefly addressed in 1:1, and then the spotlight moved on to *eretz* Israel. Likewise the New Testament presents Adam as the first man, and yes indeed he is presented as the first man in the Genesis record. But that record is a drama of creation, focusing specifically on *eretz* Israel and the man and people of God upon it. No attempt is made at wider explanations concerning the rest of the planet or indeed the cosmos. The things recorded were indeed literally seen by the observer; I am

not much attracted by attempts to make the events all purely symbolic or mythical. They are presented as literal events.

1:9 *God said, Let the waters under the sky be gathered together to one place-* See on 2:24. "One place" means just that, and the term often refers to the Jerusalem sanctuary or tabernacle. The reference does not fit comfortably with the idea of all water on the globe being gathered into the various ocean basins. Which is how we have to read this if we want to understand the record here as explaining the literal creation of planet earth. There are inland seas, and the distribution of the oceans hardly fits the idea of "one place" as it is Biblically used. The gathering of the seas or peoples is envisioned as being to "one place", the sanctuary of Yahweh.

Let the dry land appear- This hardly sounds like the actual creation of the dry land; rather does it fit admirably with the idea of a drama or slow motion slide show [as it were] being recorded in words, from the standpoint of an observer. The events of the various days of creation are visions, acts in a drama, whereby the *eretz* of promise appears, as it were, out of the sea; the mist covering it is gathered up into clouds, the dry land appears etc. The drama is recorded from the standpoint of a human standing on the already created earth, watching it happen. This was God's creation story; it was how He wished Israel to dramatically conceive of the creation of their land, as opposed to accepting the fanciful creation myths they had encountered in Egypt. The "seas" are spoken of in the plural whereas the *eretz* is singular. There are various islands and continents on planet earth; the focus is on a particular land mass, the *eretz* of Israel. If we wish to read this as referring to the emergence of the continents, then "land" would have to be in the plural; but it isn't. A particular land is in view.

1:10 *God called the dry land earth-* This does not specifically state that the earth is flat, but it's significant that there is no mention of it being a sphere; and the words would rather suggest that a flat earth was in view. But this makes sense if the "land" in view is that of Israel. This would also explain why there is no obvious reference in Genesis 1 to the 'earth' as being spherical, which we would rather expect if the global planet was in view. This explains why Is. 40:28 speaks of 'God creating' (the same words as in Genesis 1) "the ends of the earth / land". The Hebrew for "ends" means a frontier, a border, a corner. If we are insistent upon understanding the *eretz* as referring to the whole planet, then we are left with the conclusion that the Bible speaks of a flat earth, with literal ends and boundaries to it. I suggest however that Isaiah is understanding the Genesis creation as referring specifically to the bringing about of the land of Israel. The borders were created, in that they were defined by God and then the enclosed territory was promised to Israel. In the same way we read of God creating the north and south- of the land of Israel. We have similar language in Is. 45:18, where the 'creation of heaven and earth' is cited as evidence that God didn't therefore create the earth / land in vain, but to be inhabited; and this is in the context of God assuring Judah that they would return to their land, for He had created the heavens and land of Israel in order that the land should not remain waste, for that would have meant creation in vain, but rather to be inhabited- by the returned exiles. The new 'heavens and earth' which were to be created are defined specifically as being Jerusalem and a restored Judah (Is. 65:17,18).

The gathering together of the waters He called seas- Perhaps a reference to the three 'seas' which are spoken of in Israel, the Dead Sea, the Sea of Galilee and the "Great Sea", the Mediterranean. Waters and flooding are Biblical symbols of

judgment. God can be seen as gathering together the previous judgments, and bringing order and beauty out of condemnation. Which is exactly why the creation narrative is so repeatedly used as the pattern for our transformation by the work of the same Spirit.

God saw that it was good- This comment is specifically about the earth / *eretz* which has now 'appeared'. The *eretz* is very often called the "good" land, using the same Hebrew word translated "good" in the repeated declarations that the created *eretz* and all in it was "good" (Gen. 49:15; Ex. 3:8; Num. 14:7; Dt. 1:25,35; 3:25; 4:21,22; 6:18; 11:17 and many other times). The making "good" of the land can be understood as a function of God's seeing or looking upon it. The land was in His eyes, in His presence, as the idiom can mean.

1:11 *God said, Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed-* The same words used in Amos 7:2 for how the "grass of the earth", i.e. the land of Israel, was eaten up by her invaders. The emphasis is upon how the *eretz* was to be filled with vegetation as a result of seed being distributed. This lays the basis for the promises to Abraham concerning the spread of His seed throughout the *eretz*.

And fruit trees bearing fruit after their kind, with its seed in it, on the earth; and it was so- This particular emphasis upon fruit trees with edible fruit appears strange if the whole planet is in view. But it suddenly makes sense if the *eretz* in view is in fact the garden, to which we will be introduced in Genesis 2. That garden was full of fruit trees which had fruit on them. Likewise the reference to "grass" is relevant to the land of Israel; for not all areas of planet earth have grass or fruit trees.

1:12 *The earth sprouted vegetation, plants yielding seed after their kind-* Again this is not the language of creation from nothing. Rather is the visual impression given of vegetation

arising, having already been created and now planted in the earth of the *eretz*.

And trees bearing fruit, with its seed in it, after their kind; and God saw that it was good- The record focuses on the grass and fruit trees- characteristic of Israel. There is no attempt to mention every aspect of the plant and animal creation, but only those things which are felt to characterize Israel. There is no focus upon the creation of bushes, or even trees generally; the focus is on fruit trees. The text is clearly not even attempting a scientific explanation; rather are we seeing something impressively visual, fruit trees, appearing on the stage in the drama being unfolded. As noted on :11, the language of seed and fruit is full of spiritual imagery. It is the people of Israel who were to fill the face of the earth with (spiritual) fruit (Is. 27:6).

1:13 *There was evening and there was morning, a third day-* We note the Hebraic way of progressing from evening to morning, the darkness towards the light; whereas in western thought, the day begins with night and fades into darkness. This is reflected in the sense that the past was wonderful, the present is far worse, and the future will be awful. Whereas from God's perspective, the darkness is past, and the best is ahead. At least for the believer.

1:14 *God said, Let there be lights in the expanse of sky to divide the day from the night-* The Hebrew idea is: 'Let the lights in the expanse be for separating the day and night...'. The actual planets, sun and moon etc. were already created in the "beginning" (1:1); but now in this Divine slideshow presentation, they play a specific role over the *eretz* of Israel. The stars do not of themselves divide day from night. God had already divided light from darkness in :4; now we learn how He did it. Again, we are not being given a blow by blow account of strict chronological creation.

Let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days and years- This is the language of the Mosaic feasts. The GNB offers "religious festivals" as a fair translation here. The stars were placed in order to tell Israel beneath them when to perform the rituals of Divine worship. Again, we are invited to see the 'land' upon which these heavenly bodies shined as the land of Israel, inhabited by God's people.

1:15 *Let them be for lights in the expanse of sky to give light on the earth-* The "lights" in view are hardly the entire cosmos, because not all planets shed light upon planet earth. The stars likewise are spoken of giving light on earth (:16,17). If we are going to limit the reference of the lights and stars to those relevant to planet earth, we are tacitly admitting that the creation record is not speaking of the creation of literally all planets, or all things. It is therefore no problem, surely, to accept that in fact the record here may not be speaking simply of part of the cosmos, i.e. planet earth, but of a part of the planet, the *eretz* promised to Abraham. We note that God "prepared" the "light [s.w.] and the sun" (Ps. 74:16). This is a direct statement that the 'creation' record in Genesis 1 speaks of the preparation of things rather than their creation *ex nihilo*. Note that the moon is not of itself a light source- it reflects light. Yet in this drama of creation, the moon over the *eretz* is presented as a bulb which is switched on, thus giving light on *eretz* Israel. These lights were intended to give light on the *eretz*. Perhaps believers or Angels are in view. The idea of giving light is clearly suggestive of sharing the light of God's word. It may be that these lights don't refer to the stars, because they are "made" in :16. In this case, Moses is seeing a special creation around the *eretz*, and the lights in view here are not referring to literal planets.

1:16 *God made the two great lights-* I have noted earlier that 'made' is used in the sense of 'preparing', as in 'making a bed'. The

heavens and earth, a merism for 'everything', had already been created in 1:1. We are to imagine at this stage of the drama the preparation of two great lights, and then placing them inset into the 'firmament' or dome (:17). The plants and vegetation had already appeared on the previous day, which would have been impossible without the sun. Their appearance was apparently instantaneous. Clearly this is all part of a drama which we are invited to watch unfolding, entering into the man standing on earth seeing it all come about, rather than seeking to read all this as literal acts of the historical creation. This answers the obvious objection: "How could light be produced on the first day, and the sun, the fountain of it, not be created till the fourth day?". In the drama presented, the sun is only revealed on 'Day Four'. This is strong evidence for thinking that the whole drama is being recorded from the viewpoint of a person standing on earth. It is not, therefore, a literal explanation of the historical creative process.

The sun and moon are only "great" relative to the earth; so we are not reading here of an explanation of the cosmos, but are seeing things described from the viewpoint of a person on earth.

Having recently left Egypt, the Israelites had been exposed for 400 years to the idea that Ra, the sun God of Egypt, was ruling the world. But Gen. 1:16 teaches that the God of Israel created the sun, the sun was not uncreate as the Israelites had been taught, and he ruled only by God's fiat and allowance. Even if people wanted to believe in a sun God who ruled- the point being made was that the God of Israel was far above that sun god, had created the sun, and given it power to 'rule'.

It's possible to perceive significance in the colours of the things created. The record starts with black and white, day and night; then the blue sea and sky; then green grass; now yellow sun; and finally man is created from the *adamah*, the red soil.

This would then complete a rainbow, and we note a rainbow appears when God as it were re-creates the *eretz* after making it a watery mass again at the flood. Again we are invited to see the provenance of the flood as being that of the *eretz* of Genesis 1, and there are good reasons for believing the *eretz* of the flood to refer to a specific part of the Middle East rather than the entire planet.

The greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night- Rulership of day and night is hard to apply to the literal sun and moon. The concept of rulership suggests we are to see something more than literal creation here.

He also made the stars- This is added as an afterthought, almost. The focus is upon sun and moon. Seeing sun and moon are almost insignificant compared to the other stars in the cosmos, we are obviously being given a very earth-centred account, rather than an explanation of the entire cosmos. The pagan creation myths gave priority to the stars, which they considered critical in determining human fortune; but God's account says that He brought them into being, but gives no great emphasis to them. Joel 3:15 speaks of the sun, moon and stars no longer shining when Israel is overcome by; again, the message is that the creation record is focused upon *eretz* Israel. The literal stars are billions of light years away, and if they were suddenly created, they would not be immediately observed by an observer standing on earth. Again it stands to reason that we are not reading a literal account of creation, but rather a dramatic presentation of how things appeared to an observer on *eretz* Israel.

For want of a better way of putting it, the spiritual culture of God comes through so sublimely in these records. He began His written revelation with the comment, as an almost throw-away clause, that "He made the stars also" (Gen. 1:16). The vastness

of that creation, far more wondrous and extensive than just this planet, is treated *en passant*. The actual resurrection of the Lord Jesus is likewise not recorded; we only learn of it from the recorded witness of those who went to the tomb, and who later met the Lord.

1:17 *God set them in the expanse of sky to give light to the earth-* The stars don't really give light to the earth as in the entire planet. This strengthens my suggestion that the account of creation here refers to a vision seen, and the focus is upon *eretz* Israel rather than the globe. The lights which are placed in the material "firmament" or "expanse" are as it were spotlights fitted into a stage set, giving light in various forms upon the specific territory defined as the "earth" or *eretz* which is the stage upon which our attention is focused. We are as the stars (Dan. 12:2) in giving light to others. The mediation of light was therefore through various heavenly bodies, of different magnitudes and each giving light in a different way. And this is exactly how God's self revelation operates towards His people, coming through people, prophets, leaders and Angels.

1:18 *And to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness. God saw that it was good-* The sun, moon and stars do not literally divide light from darkness. This would support my suggestion that Genesis 1 describes a kind of slideshow of creation, with a material dome in which the planets are set. The planets all being set within the same dome, or firmament, they divided light from darkness in that they were located on the dome [“firmament”] which did so. This all sounds like a description of some kind of model, a theatrical set above which lights appear, waters gather, land appears, grass shoots forth etc. The language of 'ruling over' nudges us to see in it something symbolic. For the sun and moon do not in any literal sense 'rule over' day and night.

God had divided light from darkness in Gen. 1:4; now we read that He created or better "made" the solar system in order to divide light from darkness. So clearly we aren't reading a chronological account of creation. At best we are reading what He "did" on one "day", and then how this came about on a later "day".

1:19 *There was evening and there was morning, a fourth day-* The Divine concept of "day" is the very inverse of how humans would intuitively understand a day- beginning with dawn and ending with night. His day begins with the evening of darkness, and concludes with the light. Out of our darkness, He creates eternal light, and that is how His eternal day concludes- in light, not in the closure of darkness. This is the dramatic inversion of all evil which is the ultimate hope exhibited in the gospel of God's Kingdom.

1:20 *God said, Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures-* "Swarm" translates a word implying that the waters "brought forth" these creatures. The literalist reading, following the KJV, would have to conclude that the creatures somehow originated from H2O. The sentence makes more sense surely if we read this as drama- the spectator saw the creatures swarming out of the water. This was how it appeared, visually, to the observer. But that was for the purpose of the dramatic scene, and shouldn't be read to mean that the creatures evolved as it were out of water.

The creation account was the basis for the de-creation, if you like, of Egypt through the plagues. The same Hebrew term for 'the waters swarming' is used in Ex. 8:3 about how the Nile water swarmed with frogs. As He made the waters "swarm" in Gen. 1:20, so He made the waters of the Nile "swarm" with frogs (Ex. 7:28) in order to save His people from a no-hope, chaotic, disordered, hopeless situation.

The idea of the Hebrew word for "swarm" is of "abundance. We have been given life in Christ, and "life more abundant" (Jn. 10:10)- an allusion to how the natural creation brought forth life 'abundantly' (Gen. 1:20). Those who have become part of the new creation are to experience this same 'abundance' of life- whether trapped in poverty, difficult family situations, ill health or even clinical depression. The 'abundance' of our lives is to be what makes us different from those in the world- we are to salute not only our brethren because we are living "more [same Greek word translated 'abundantly'] than others (Mk. 5:47). There is a power at work in us which does "exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think" (Eph. 3:20).

And let birds fly above the earth in the open expanse of sky- The idea is that the birds arose out of the water. This is clearly not a scientific statement, but rather a visual account of how the scene looked to the observer of the drama. The AV more correctly reflects the Hebrew word for "firmament": "fowl that may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven". The birds are described in Hebrew as flying 'across the face of' the "firmament" rather than "in" it. This further supports the idea of a dome, arching across an area of flat land, with the birds moving across the surface of it- the same surface where the planets are spoken of as being "set". This is clearly not a literal scientific explanation of material creation, but rather does it seem to describe the appearance seen by the observer of this Divine drama in which the dome or firmament is a major stage prop.

1:21 *God created-* Again, the idea is that He "made" things, but 'making' is used about making things out of pre-existing material, rather than creation from nothing, *ex nihilo*.

The large sea creatures- Most of the other Biblical occurrences of the Hebrew word refer to large creatures which live in rivers- serpents, crocodiles etc. Why the strange focus upon just one

kind of water creature? Surely because the record is focusing upon the animals of the *eretz* which lived in the rivers which formed the boundaries of *eretz* Israel. Remember that "sea" can refer to any body of water, and not necessarily a saltwater ocean.

And every winged bird after its kind. God saw that it was good- It might seem axiomatic that birds have wings, but the stress upon wings may well be because of the pagan, and Babylonian specifically, belief in winged gods. This is another reason for believing that the Genesis record was edited, under inspiration, whilst the Jews were in Babylon. The point being that it was Israel's God who had created all winged beings.

1:22 *God blessed them, saying, Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas-* This is presented as a command which the animals, especially fish, had the capacity to understand and choose to obey. For the same language will later be used in the command to Adam and Eve. Again we are being nudged to perceive that this record of creation is intended to be understood as having a strong figurative element to it. For fish in their literal sense do not listen to Divine commandment and then decide as to whether or not to obey. If there is no element of choice implied, then the concept of commandment seems misplaced and inappropriate.

And let birds m*ultiply on the earth-* The same words used about the multiplication of animals in the land / earth which had been the territory affected by the flood (Gen. 8:17; 9:1). This command of God to animals surely wasn't understood by them; it makes more sense as part of a dramatic presentation, where Yahweh's voice addresses the scene rather than literally the animals. The specific command is for birds to multiply on the earth; when birds typically live above the earth in nests on trees. The idea is that the multiplication on earth, in obedience to Divine commandment, results in birds flying above, higher

than, where they began. The command to multiply on the *eretz* is going to be used later about the multiplication of Abraham's seed on the *eretz*, with the implication they had the potential to arise so much higher.

1:23 *There was evening and there was morning, a fifth day-* As noted on :19, the Divine concept of "day" is the very inverse of how humans would intuitively understand a day- beginning with dawn and ending with night. His day begins with the evening of darkness, and concludes with the light. Out of our darkness, He creates eternal light, and that is how His eternal day concludes- in light, not in the closure of darkness. This is the dramatic inversion of all evil which is the ultimate hope exhibited in the gospel of God's Kingdom.

1:24 *God said-* One major difference between Genesis and the pagan creation myths was that Moses told the Israelites that God created everything by His word. He spoke, and it was done. This was markedly different to the [then] popular myths of gods hatching eggs, or procreating to produce the world. Repeatedly, later Scripture alludes to the fact that it was by the word of God that the world was created; and that same powerful, re-forming, saving word was and is that heard by His people still (Ps. 33:6,9; 104:7; 147:15-18; 148:3-5; Is. 40:26; 44:23; 48:13; 50:2; 55:10). A. Heidel comments: "The word of the Babylonian deities was not almighty. On the contrary, the word of the creator in Gen. 1 is almighty. He commands and the result is in perfect conformity to his command...there is a profound difference between the Bible and non-biblical religions" [on this point of the word being the agency of creation]. This feature of Genesis 1 paves the way for Ex. 25:1 and many other passages later in the Pentateuch recording how "God said...", and Israel therefore ought to obey His word of command in 'creating' the tabernacle out of existing materials. Thereby they would show

themselves at one with the Angel-elohim, who had earlier likewise obeyed God's word of command in creating the world. God spoke, and it was done. And so when God speaks now to His *elohim*, His people- it ought likewise to be done.

Let the earth produce living creatures after their kind, livestock, creeping things- The Hebrew translated "produce" has a wide range of meaning. The account of the emergence of animals from Noah's ark is clearly intended to be understood as a re-creation on the *eretz*. The same word is used of how the animals 'came out of' the ark and likewise began to reproduce abundantly in the earth (Gen. 8:17,19; 9:10). This doesn't mean they were created *ex nihilo*, they appeared on the *eretz*; and that is the same picture we have here in Genesis 1. The word is used of how rivers were produced, or sprung out, of the land of Israel (Dt. 8:7), and frequently of the 'coming forth' of Israel from Egypt. So I suggest the drama of creation at this point saw the animals of the *eretz* arising out of the *eretz*. This is not to say that animals were created from dust, because that would require a different Hebrew word. Here, *eretz*, the land, is used.

God created matter. Ultimately, all that exists was made by Him; and by faith we believe that things which now exist were not made from what already existed apart from God. The Genesis record of creation, however, emphasizes how God brought order out of chaos. He brought this present world of beauty and order out of a darkness that brooded upon a sea, and from an earth that was "without form and void", the Hebrew images behind the words implying 'a chaos'. The frequent references to the earth and sea 'bringing forth' (e.g. Gen. 1:12,24 "produce") use a Hebrew word which means 'to let something which is within to come out'. The present world was created by a re-organization of things which existed in some form before. This means that when our own lives, or the collective life of

God's people, appears to be in chaos- then we can in faith reflect that God has brought beautiful order out of chaos, and He can likewise powerfully bring order to what seems hopeless. This is the context of the creation allusions in the laments of Ps. 74:12-17; 89:10-15; Is. 51:9 etc.

And animals of the earth after their kind; and it was so- We can understand this as the observer of the drama viewing specifically the animals native to the earth / land of Israel appearing; likewise the birds which appeared on the *eretz* in :22 would refer specifically to birds known to *eretz* Israel. Likewise the lists of clean and unclean animals we encounter later in the Pentateuch are all animals known within *eretz* Israel, they are not a global list. If the intention of the record is to describe the entire animal stock of the planet, the emphasized additional phrase "of the earth" would appear superfluous. This would explain too why there is particular emphasis upon *fruit* trees. Such trees are not in every land of planet earth, but they were characteristic of Israel.

1:25 *God made the animals of the earth after their kind, and the livestock after their kind-* As noted on :24, the reference here is to the specific animals of the *eretz*, the land promised to Abraham. The command in :24 to "let the earth produce..." these animals is now put into operation by God. The idea is that He states His intention, and then puts His word into operation on the ground. The impression is given that His word is then operationalized. And His spoken word to this day has that same pregnancy of power. The oft repeated "after their kind" suggests that all the various animals within their respective families were created. The impression is of the creation of families, even within the animal kingdom. And as we will see later in the Genesis record, the creative purpose of God operates through families.

And everything that creeps on the ground after its kind. God saw that it was good- The same word used later in the Pentateuch for the "creeping" animals which were unclean. But here we learn that even those 'creepers' were created by God and pronounced "good". Hence Paul argues that there is nothing unclean in itself (Rom. 14:14). The distinctions between clean and unclean were therefore purely for teaching purposes, and not because the "unclean" were unclean of themselves; for here they are pronounced "good" because of their very presence or 'seeing' before God. Here, then, we see the great hope of the Gospel- the unclean were created by God and can be "good" in His presence or eyes.

1:26 *God said, Let us make man-* Adam is presented as the first man, and the genealogies of Genesis 5 and 10 trace the developments of genealogy from him. But the list of nations in Genesis 10 relate specifically to the peoples found in the land promised to Abraham. This relieves us from worrying about whether there were other people around before Adam, or from where his children found marriage partners. The focus of the account is upon the land promised to Abraham; and the later Biblical mentions of Adam as the first man can be understood as continuing this Israel-centered focus which we find throughout the Bible. The Bible is the Divine history of His relationship with His people and their land; it doesn't attempt to chronicle human or global history beyond that.

The *elohim* in view here can be understood as an intensive plural referring to God Himself. But the word is once translated "angels" in the KJV. In this case, man is made in the image and likeness of God, as manifested through the angels. Thus man is made in the image and likeness of God, as manifested through the Angels. These words cannot apply to man's mental image, because by nature our minds are totally distanced from God and

in many ways fundamentally opposed to His righteousness. " For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are my ways your ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." (Is. 55:8,9). Therefore the image and likeness which we share with God must be in physical image. Whenever Angels have been seen on earth they are described as having the form of men - e.g. Abraham entertained Angels unaware, thinking that they were ordinary men. Our creation in the image of God surely means that we can infer something about the real object of which we are but an image. Thus God, whom we reflect, is not something nebulous which we cannot conceive of.

"Let us make man" (Gen. 1:26), "Behold, the man has become like one of us" (Gen. 3:22) and "Come, let us go down" (Gen. 11:7) are examples from early Genesis of a plural being used about God. Franz Delitzsch analyzes the Hebrew constructions here at great length, concluding that these verses manifest a "communicative plural", implying God conferring with His council. Perhaps here we have the Angels making a joint decision, as they did at Babel: "The LORD came down to see the city and the tower which the children of men builded (again, the language of limitation, as if God had to make closer inspection- the 'LORD' must therefore be the Angels). . Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language" (Gen. 11:5,7). And in Gen. 18 we have an example of Angels discussing their policy with regard to one of their charges in the physical presence of the saint: . . "and Abraham went with them (the Angels) to bring them on their way (they were therefore in his presence). And the LORD said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do? For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him. . " (v. 17-19). This conversation was presumably inaudible to Abraham. Who knows what

conversations go on between our guardians as we sit with Bibles in our hands, obedient to God, and our Angels decide how much to reveal to us in accord with how they know we will behave in the future? The cherubim and living creatures are representative of the Angels. See on Ez. 3:13.

I note that Trinitarians are increasingly recognizing that their standard arguments are weak. There was a time when Gen. 1:26 would be often quoted to support the Trinity. But it's now widely recognized that there are several Hebrew words which have plural endings, and yet refer to a singular entity- e.g. panim means "face". Nearly always, elohim is referred to in the singular by the grammar surrounding it. Thus "Christians have traditionally seen this verse as [proving] the Trinity. It is now universally admitted that this was not what the plural means to the original author" (G.J. Wenham, Genesis 1-15 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1997) p. 27). The note in the NIV Study Bible likewise takes the approach that this passage refers to Angels: "God speaks as the Creator-King, announcing his crowning work to the members of his heavenly court".

The Hebrew construction used here has been described as "a plural of deliberation". C. Brockelmann describes it as "a form of speech which occurred primarily in self-deliberation". In other words, an individual may use a plural to describe his or her decision. Take David's words in 2 Sam. 24:14: "Let *us* fall into the hand of the Lord...but let not *me* fall into the hand of man". Ezra 4:18 has a King saying: "The letter ye sent unto *us* hath been plainly read before *me*". In Is. 6:8 we read the same of God Himself: "Whom shall *I* [singular] send, and who will go for *us*?". And this would enable us to better understand God's decision making in Gen. 11:7: "Go to, let *us* go down, and there confound their speech". The same sort of thing occurs in modern English slang: "Let's see..." = 'let me personally consider'; 'Give

us that pen' = 'Give me that pen'; 'We was just...' = 'I was just....' So "Let *us* make man..." may refer to God's personal self-deliberation in making human beings; to a Semitic reader of the original, it would emphasize the vast passion which God Almighty put into this decision. And it therefore follows, that He passionately wishes to have a very definite purpose with us, that He *so* loves us, and wishes only our eternal good.

In our image- The kings of Babylon and the ancient world were called 'the image of God'. Here we see the huge value ascribed by God to the human person. It's not at all that the leaders are God's image and the rest of humanity of no significance. All God's people are His king-priests to reign on the earth (Rev. 5:10). Many of the creation myths emphasize the infinite gap between the gods and man, and how this was particularly manifest at creation. But the true account of creation emphasizes God's closeness to man and His particular focus upon not only the earth and solar system, but specifically *eretz* Israel.

When we read that we are made in God's image, the Hebrew word for 'image' is that to be used later throughout the Old Testament concerning the 'images' of idols. Hence the awfulness of Israel making images of the false gods, in human likeness (Ez. 16:17)- because this was a studied statement that they rejected the one true God as their creator, in His image. If we are made in God's image, then we simply cannot admit the existence of any other image of God- which, in the end, is what all the gadgetry and idols of this world amount to.

After our likeness- James 3:9 speaks of "...men, which are made in the similitude of God." Our creation in the image of God surely means that we can infer something about the real object of which we are but an image. Thus God, whom we reflect, is not something nebulous of which we cannot conceive.

Ezekiel saw God enthroned above the cherubim, with the silhouette of "the likeness of a man" (Ez. 1:26; 10:20); it is God Himself who is located above the cherubim (2 Kings 19:15 RV). All this has a practical import; because we are in the image of God, because it is imprinted on every part of our bodies, we must give that body to God, just as men were to give the penny which had Caesar's image on it to Caesar (Lk. 20:25). Commenting on this matter in relation to Gen. 1:26,27, Risto Santala writes: "There are two Hebrew words here, *tselem*, 'image' (in modern Hebrew 'photograph'), and *demuth*, 'figure' or 'similitude'... these expressions are very concrete. God is a person and he has a definite form and being" (*The Messiah In The Old Testament In The Light Of Rabbinical Writings* (Kukkila, Finland: BGS, 1992), p. 63).

And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the sky, and over the livestock, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth- This continues the use of royal language which we noted in the idea of the image of God. It was royalty who 'exercise dominion over', but here that invitation is to Adam. And it is to us too, insofar as we dominate the natural mind and extend Kingdom rule over all creation. The language of "dominion" is used of how Israel were to subject the peoples living in the land / *eretz*. They failed to do so, and were therefore dominated by them. The animals of the *eretz* are thereby presented as symbolic of the inhabitants of the land, whom Israel were to provide light to, care for and lead / be masters over. We can reason back that Adam and Eve failed in this, being dominated by the serpent rather than dominating it. Right at the beginning of the Bible, the "beast" is therefore introduced as symbolic of the entities dwelling within the *eretz* promised to Abraham, who were to be dominated and cared for by God's special creation, Israel His people. And this symbolism

continues and recurs in later Scripture, particularly in Daniel and Revelation. Misunderstanding or ignoring Genesis has led to all manner of fanciful historical interpretations of the beast.

1:27 *God created man in His own image-* The impression is again given that God states His word of intention, and then fulfils it. His word is, therefore, pregnant with power and certain of fulfilment. This is the inspired narrator's comment upon the preceding account of how God had decreed "Let us make man in our image". This comment shows that the *elohim* in view amount to God Himself personally- not so much Angels, and certainly not a Trinitarian godhead, which is unknown to the Bible text. If any plurality was in view, the narrator here would have written of God creating man 'in *our* image'. The plural I therefore take as being an insight into God's mind, just a man may say to Himself "Let's ['let us'] see... let me just make this...'.

In God's image He created him; male and female He created them- This comment seeks to show in what we are differentiated from God. And in contrast to the animals, there are no species of human beings, all humans are one and the same.

The creation of man is clearly given special attention; the word 'create' is clustered three times in that one verse alone: "God created man in His own image. In God's image He created him; male and female He created them" (Gen. 1:27). God addresses man directly, in a way He is not recorded as doing to the other created things and animals (Gen. 1:28,29). The Pentateuch, and the book of Isaiah, repeatedly insists that Israel are not to have images of God; the reason is that they have an image of God constantly before them, in their own bodies. We are to share God's immense human focus, perceiving the unique value and meaning of the human person. In passing, focus upon the welfare of the rest of creation is all well and good, but it must not lead us away from God's emphasis upon the

unique value of human beings. God is, if you like, the humanist *par excellence*. Unlike the emperors of Babylon and the ancient world, the one true God doesn't need to have images of himself built throughout his empire, as evidence of His ownership; we humans are witnesses to Him. And moreso in the new creation, made spiritually after the image of the Lord Jesus, who in spiritual terms was the exact replica of His Father (2 Cor. 4:4; Col. 1:15).

The Babylonian Marduk myth and Ras Shamra epic has the creation story reaching a climax and crowning conclusion with a temple being built for Marduk the creator. The Biblical record is quite different- the climax to the story is the creation of a man. We see in this the supreme importance attached to humanity by the one true God; and this tacitly paves the way for the explicit New Testament teaching that the human body is the temple of God (1 Cor. 6:19)- supremely of course demonstrated in the Lord Jesus, who was in person the temple (Jn. 2:21).

1:28 *God blessed them-* No pagan creation myth includes the idea of the Divine Creator then *blessing* His creation. Here we see the surpassing grace of God. He lavishes His love upon what He created. None of the creation myths include such a wonderful feature. Within Genesis, this idea of blessing of course paves the way for God promising to "bless" the children of Abraham, and the blessings upon them with which Deuteronomy concludes (see too Lev. 9:22; Num. 6:22-24). The pagan creation stories sometimes spoke of the things created by the gods then blessing *them*. The Sumerians recorded that at 'creation', "The whole universe, the people in unison, to Enlil in one tongue gave praise" (S.N. Kramer, *Sumerian Literature and the Bible* (Rome: Pontificio Instituto Biblica, 1959) p.107). But the true God, the God of all grace, not only creates His people and other creatures, but then blesses *them*! And the spirit of

that grace should be seen in all our relationships. The Sumerian and Babylonian myths speak of people being created in order to serve the gods, "to bear the yoke of the gods" (S.G.F. Brandon, *op cit* p. 115), to relieve them in their everyday work. But the Genesis creation has God creating man and giving him great freedom, and blessing him. It has often been rightly observed that the first use of a word in Scripture should influence how we later understand it as we read through the Bible. 'Blessing' in Gen. 1 is clearly related to the ideas of fertility and reproducing. When we later read that God has 'blessed' us His people with the Abrahamic blessing of forgiveness (Acts 3:24-26), the implication is that this must lead to some bringing forth of fruit. We can't simply be passive to what we've received. We must go forth and multiply it, in sharing it with others, in bringing forth spiritual children, in creatively forgiving others...

And God said to them, Be fruitful, multiply- This contrasts sharply with the pagan ideas that fertility and reproduction required rites and sacrifice. The silence of the Biblical record about anything like this stands in opposition to this. The simple statement is that human reproduction is a result of God's gracious blessing of man, and requires no ritual to realize it. "Be fruitful, multiply, replenish the earth" is the language of Israel multiplying in the land of Israel (Dt. 6:3; 30:5,16; Josh. 24:3). Adam, the first Israelite, was intended to do this; but like Israel, he was distracted by the serpent, whom he failed to dominate and subdue as commanded.

What happened in Eden was that the garden was planted, Adam was placed in it, and commanded not to eat of the tree of knowledge. The animals are then brought before him for naming; then he is put into a deep sleep, and Eve is created. *Then* the very first command Adam and Eve jointly received was to have children, and go out into the whole earth (i.e. out of

the garden of Eden) and subdue it to themselves (Gen. 1:28). The implication is that this command was given as soon as Eve was created. There he was, lying down, with his wife beside him, " a help meet" ; literally, 'an opposite one'. And they were commanded to produce seed, and then go out of the garden and subdue the earth. It would have been obvious to him from his observation of the animals that his wife was physiologically and emotionally designed for him to produce seed by. She was designed to be his 'opposite one', and there she was, lying next to him. Gen. 2:24 implies that he should have cleaved to her and become one flesh by reason of the very way in which she was created out of him. And yet he evidently did not have intercourse with her, seeing that they failed to produce children until after the fall. If he had consummated his marriage with her, presumably she would have produced children (this deals a death blow to the fantasies of Adam and Eve having an idyllic sexual relationship in Eden before the fall). Paul saw Eve at the time of her temptation as a virgin (2 Cor. 11:2,3). Instead, Adam put off obedience to the command to multiply. There seems an allusion to this in 1 Cor. 7:5, where Paul says that married couples should come together in intercourse " lest Satan (cp. the serpent) tempt you for your incontinency". Depending how closely one reads Scripture, there may be here the suggestion that Paul saw Adam's mistake in Eden as not 'coming together' with his wife.

As Adam and Eve were to "be fruitful and multiply" in the land / Garden of Eden (Gen. 1:28), so Noah and his sons were to do just the same in the same land after the flood (Gen. 9:7); and the children of Abraham were promised that they would do likewise in the very same land (Gen. 35:11).

Replenish the earth, and subdue it- I suggest that this is parallel to caring for the garden of Eden, which is therefore the *eretz*. See on 2:15. The only other references to 'subduing' in the

Pentateuch are to Israel subduing *eretz* Israel (Num. 32:22,29; Josh. 18:1). The *eretz* was to be understood as Israel. As to whether "replenish" implies a previous creation, see on 1:2. Adam and Eve were disobedient; because the serpent subdued them, rather than they having dominion over it. And Israel likewise were subdued by the inhabitants of Canaan, rather than subduing them. The descriptions of the promised land, covered with good trees, whose fruit could be freely eaten, were reminiscent of the descriptions of Eden. Israel were to enter that land and tend it, as Adam should've done; they were to learn the lesson of Adam and Eve's failure in their possession of Eden. But as Eve lusted after the fruit, so Israel lusted after the fruits of Egypt. As Adam and Eve failed to "subdue" the garden of Eden (Gen. 1:28), so Israel failed to fully "subdue" [s.w.] the tribes of the land (Num. 32:22). They subdued a few local to them; but they never really rose up to the reality of being able to have the whole land area promised to Abraham subjected to them. And so Lev. 26 and Dt. 28 promised a curse to come upon the land [of Eden / Israel] for their failure within it, just as happened to Adam and Eve; and of course ultimately they were driven out of the land just as Israel's very first parents had been.

There is good internal reason to think that the Pentateuch likewise was re-written in places to bring out the relevance of Israel's past to those in captivity. Consider the use of the word *pus*, 'scatter'. It was God's intention that mankind should scatter abroad in the earth and subdue it (Gen. 1:28); but it required the judgment of the tower of Babel to actually make them 'scatter' (Gen. 11:4). Thus even in judgment, God worked out His positive ultimate intentions with humanity. And this word *pus* is the same word used with reference to Judah's 'scattering' from the land into Babylonian captivity (Ez. 11:17; 20:34,41; 28:25). The intention, surely, was to show the captives that they had been

scattered as the people had at the judgment of Babel / Babylon, but even in this, God was working out His purpose with His people and giving them the opportunity to fulfil His original intentions for them.

Have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth- The Hebrew word for "dominion" likewise elsewhere refers to having dominion over *eretz* Israel by driving out or conquering the peoples who lived there (1 Kings 4:24). The Messianic King was to have dominion over the land promised to Abraham, the *eretz* (Ps. 72:8). The “fear and dread” of humans which fell on the animals after the flood is clearly linkable with the “fear and dread” which was to come upon the inhabitants of Canaan due to the Israelites (Gen. 9:2 = Dt. 1:21; 3:8; 11:25). But as Adam failed to have dominion over the serpent, so Israel failed to subdue the land and its inhabitants.

The most basic principle behind the symbolism of the beast is found in Gen. 1:28, where man is told to " have dominion over" (Heb. 'to break to powder', cp. Dan. 2:35) the beasts. This was to teach him the need to dominate the bestial instincts of the flesh. Thus the beasts are set up as representative of the flesh. Indeed, Strong defines the Hebrew word for 'beast' as fundamentally meaning 'raw flesh'. It is therefore understandable that the devil (sin), the beast and the serpent are linked in Rev. 12:9, and that Prov.28:15 parallels " a wicked ruler" with a wild bear or lion; the beast epitomizes the sinful person who controls it. The Apocalyptic beast of the earth (Rev. 13:11) must look back to the common phrase " beast of the earth" in Genesis (e.g. Gen. 1:25).

1:29 *God said, Behold, I have given you every herb yielding seed, which is on the surface of all the earth, and every tree, which bears fruit yielding seed. It will be your food-* Surely this doesn’t

mean that Adam was to literally eat of every tree and herb on the planet. Adam was invited to eat from all the plants which were on the surface of the *eretz*. Unlike in the present creation, they were all edible by him. Again we have the implication that we are not reading here of how our current planet came about, but of something more specific and local, with especial reference to Adam. The parallel account in chapter 2 says "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat" (Gen. 2:16). I suggest that the *eretz* in view is the garden of Eden. See on Gen. 2:19. Not all plants on the surface of the planet are edible, and so this sits more comfortably with reference to a specific, localized area of planet earth. The objection of course is that such inedible plants were a result of the fall. But the Biblical record of the fall doesn't say anything to the effect that once Adam sinned, the Angels, as it were, sped around the planet smashing the place up and making many plants inedible. This is an argument from silence. The Genesis record doesn't state that- although it is required by those who believe that the *eretz* includes the whole planet, and that references to all plants and animals on "earth" is to be read on a global level. This creates all manner of practical and moral difficulties; were the Siberian tigers only created after the fall, when their habitat had become cold and inhospitable, etc etc. For the record stresses that everything was created according to its species, both plant and animal, before the fall. It is far more natural to read the changes required by the fall as applying to Eden / *eretz* Israel, rather than the whole planet. The whole phrase "Behold I have given you..." occurs later when the Priests are told what God has given them (Ex. 31:6; Lev. 6:10; Num. 18:8,21; Dt. 11:14). We see here a hint that the situation before Adam's personal fall can be partially restored in the experience of God's obedient people.

1:30 *To every animal of the earth, and to every bird of the sky, and to everything that creeps on the earth, in which there is life, I have given every green herb for food; and it was so-* The animals and birds were given all the leafy plants of the earth as food, whereas Adam was given all the fruit bearing plants to live from (:29). This sounds like a special situation in a localized area. Because some species are designed to eat other animals, some plants aren't edible by animals, and some fruit bearing plants aren't edible by man; some birds only eat fish, not plants. To argue that this was all a result of the curse means that we are positing that new species were created after the fall. But the record appears to disallow that. I suggest all manner of logical and scientific problems are avoided by reading the "earth" here as a specially designated area on the planet, where there were special conditions. The message seems to be that in the *eretz*, which I suggest was the same as Eden, there were only herbivores. When Adam sinned and was exiled from the garden and *eretz* Israel, the carnivores from the surrounding world moved in. And that is exactly what happened when Israel sinned "like Adam" and were exiled from their land; the carnivorous beasts moved in. And the beasts of Daniel and Revelation refer, I suggest, to Israel's enemies moving in upon her land and sanctuary.

1:31 *God saw everything that he had made-* The "everything" refers to the creation of man on the sixth day. Man was God's "everything"; the rest of creation had been described as "good" in God's eyes, but man was seen as "very good". The drama of creation has come to a climax. Gen. 1:1 begins with the comment that God created literally all things, and then from Gen. 1:2 the focus is upon the creation of *eretz* Israel, and now the focus narrows down to man within that land- God's people. And we sense the especial Divine focus and thrill in Adam.

And, behold, it was very good- Adam alone was "not good" . Adam and Eve together are described as "very good" (Gen. 1:31). Paul seems to have this in mind when he says three times that "it is good" to be single (1 Corinthians 7:1,8,26). But what's the point of this paradox? Perhaps Paul's point is: 'In the old, natural creation, it wasn't good that a man should be alone. But now, in the new creation, it's good that a man does try to live a single life, because as Adam married Eve, so we are now married to Christ'. Or it may be that attention is being drawn to the fact that God's provision of Eve was the first of God's countless concessions to human need. It was God's intention, ideally, that Adam be single, therefore he was potentially "good" in his single state. But he couldn't handle it, therefore God made him a partner. And therefore Paul says that to live the single life is "good" . But in the same way as God made a concession to Adam, so He does to believers now; "but if they cannot contain, let them marry".

"Behold" invites us to look upon this creation as God did; to see the goodness in it, particularly in mankind whom He created; to take a positive rather than a negative view.

There was evening and there was morning, a sixth day- The English translations generally miss the point that days one to five are described as e.g. 'a second day', 'a third day'. But the determinate "*the* sixth day" (Hebrew-missed by many translations, including NEV) is different, to highlight the importance of the creation of Adam. This is yet another reflection of the supreme value and meaning God attaches to the human person. And His perspective is to be ours.

Previous Creations

As to whether there were previous creations before our own, my basic sense is 'Yes, probably there were'. The earth being " without form and void" (Gen. 1:2) uses a phrase elsewhere used to describe the judgment that has come on an order of things

(Jer. 4:23; Is. 24:10; 34:11). It may be, therefore, that there was a previous creation on earth which was destroyed in judgment. John Thomas in the first section of *Elpis Israel* suggests (without much direct support from the Hebrew, it must be admitted) that the command to Adam to " replenish the earth" (Gen. 1:28) implies to re-fill, as if there had been a previous creation that was destroyed, presumably by water. " In the beginning" , perhaps a huge period of time ago, God created the heavens and earth. But the present creation can be seen as being constituted some time later, after the previous creations. When during the six days of creation He said " Let there be light" this may not have necessitated the actual manufacture of the sun; this was presumably done " in the beginning" . But the sun was commanded to shine out of the darkness (2 Cor. 4:6), and therefore from the viewpoint of someone standing on the earth, it was as if the sun had been created. The earth was covered with water at the time the present creation began (Gen. 1:2). This would mean that the destruction of the earth by the flood in Noah's time was actually a repeat of something God had previously done. This sheds light on His promise to never again destroy the earth with water: " I will stablish my covenant with you; neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of a flood; neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth" (Gen. 9:11). This sounds as if destruction of the earth by flooding had happened several times before. It's almost as if the God of all grace is showing Himself progressively gracious to earth's inhabitants: 'I've done it before several times, but now I promise you humans, you new race of inhabitants upon whom my special love is to be shown through My Son, that I'll never do it again'.

All That Fall

It was presumably in one of the previous creations that the Angels were developed. They have knowledge of good and evil, just as fallen man has (Gen. 3:22). This could suggest that they too had the experience of temptation and choice between sin and obedience. Job speaks of the angels who were charged with folly as if this fact was well known (Job 4:18). Bro. Thomas suggests that the " angels that sinned" in 2 Pet. 2:4 lived at this time. There is no doubt that this passage in Peter, and the parallel in Jude, has some reference to Korah's rebellion. However, there are many such warnings to God's people which combine reference to more than one historical event, and it could be the same here: as if to say, 'History repeats itself. The angels that sinned so long ago went through in principle the same process of apostasy as Korah's company, and you too are capable of falling from grace in the same basic way'.

Apostasy has a long continuity; all who fall follow a similar pattern, ultimately sharing the same apotheosis. It could even be that the fall of the Kings of Tyre and Babylon (Is. 14; Ez. 28) are recorded in the language of an angel / " anointed cherub" who wanted superiority over the others, and who then fell from Heaven (Ez. 28:14; Is. 14:13,14 cp. Eph. 4:10). There are strong similarities between these passages and the Jewish understanding of Angels that sinned before creation. These similarities would be in order to show the same kind of historical continuity: between the Angels who once sinned, and spiritually blessed men who turned away from what they could have had. The fact that *all* the Angels *now* are righteous and incapable of sinning (cp. Lk. 20:35,36) doesn't mean that Angels never sinned in a previous creation. But the point to note is that they are now in the grave, chained in darkness- not running around as evil spirits causing mischief. They are " reserved unto judgment" (2 Pet. 2:4), when " we shall judge angels" (1 Cor. 6:3).

The Wonder Of It All

From these thoughts comes a powerful devotional point. God, who existed from eternity, has doubtless been *active* from eternity. He is Spirit, and His Spirit is essentially His power in action. There was at least one previous creation, involving the Angels. The fossil record, if indeed it can be taken seriously, would suggest that there were plants and animals (e.g. dinosaurs) which lived millions of years ago. These may have been part of those previous creations. And yet Adam was the first human being (1 Cor. 15:45), created around 6,000 years ago.

The human race which descended from him has generally rejected God. The majority of His chosen people, Israel, rejected Him to the point of crucifying His Son. But for such a small group of people, existing at such a small time and in such a tiny physical area in the perspective of infinite time and space, God gave His only begotten Son. The Lord Jesus didn't physically exist before His birth; He wasn't some kind of time traveller who had shown up in previous creations. The *only begotten* Son of God was born for the very first time. This is the pure wonder of the narratives of His birth. He was a human being, not an Angel, because He shared the nature of those He came to redeem (Hebrews 2 develops this at length). The *only* and *begotten* Son of God was a human being because He came to save just a few million (or however many) little human beings on this little insignificant planet, a pin prick in the vastness of space *even within this present creation*, people who lived out their history for just a few thousand years compared to infinity. And this only son of His was born to an illiterate young girl, and then the crying, gurgling *Son of God* was laid down in a cattle stall (Luke, the doctor who appreciated the need for hygiene, so emphasizes this: Lk. 2:7,12,16), because the other guests in that cheap hotel couldn't make space for a heavily pregnant woman (again, Luke

the sometime-gyn doctor would've sensed the shame of it). And this was the beginning of the *only and ever begotten Son of God*, who dwelt light years away from that humble barn. It's almost too wonderful to believe. There will be many " ages" to come, as there have doubtless been many " ages" of previous creations already (Rom. 1:25; 9:5; Heb. 13:8); but for our " age" alone was the only begotten Son of God given as a representative of *us*, the humans who live in this brief " age" . God thus describes Himself as a first timer falling in love with His people; as a young marries a virgin, so God marries us (Is. 62:5); Israel were as the lines graven on a man's palm, with which he was born (Is. 49:16). Thus from absolute eternity, we were the great " all things" to Almighty God, the God of all, all past and future creations.

We may well ask why space is so big, why there were countless previous creations, why out of all the teeming species and forms of life on this planet (and perhaps others), God's salvation in Christ is only for human beings, whom He represented in His very nature; why out of all humans, only a few are called, and why out of those few called are even fewer chosen; why in the past He *delighted t*o chose Israel, one of the smallest and unlovely nations, and their small, despised land, as *His* land and *His* people (and in principle He has done the same in His calling of the new Israel)... and the answer may be that God has arranged it this way in order to show us the magnitude of His humanly senseless love; that He has given *so* much, even His Only Son, for *so very few* in such a very small geographical area in such a very short time span. Brethren, think on these things. Look up at the night sky and like father Abraham, struggle, successfully, to believe the wonder of it all.

GENESIS CHAPTER 2

2:1 *The heavens and the earth were finished, and all their vast array-* My suggestion has been that the creation of the cosmos is briefly spoken of in Gen. 1:1, and then we have a dramatic slide show of the preparation of the *eretz* Israel. But we are being told here that the intention of the creation of the cosmos was not finally fulfilled until Israel was created and populated. Paul shares a glimpse of this when he writes of how all things are for our sakes. The "vast array" translates the common Hebrew word usually rendered "hosts". Again the hint is that we are to see in these "hosts" a representation of beings, be they Angels, Israel or God's people generally. The "array" may refer in the first instance to the stars, but they are connected as belonging to "the heavens and earth". This would mean that the stars are presented as belonging to the earth; they are the array around the earth, as it were. This is the impression given in chapter 1, where the stars and lights in the firmament are to give light upon the earth / *eretz*. This is not the literal function of the physical stars and planets; the planets of the solar system revolve around the sun, not around the earth. But this is how they are presented, both here and in the account in chapter 1. Again, we are not being given a literal account of how the cosmos came into being; at best we are being given a perspective from someone standing on earth, to whom it could appear that all the "array" of the heavens circle around the earth. But this isn't bad science; the "creation" envisioned here is a special

"model" as it were, and the "hosts" of heaven do indeed circle around the *eretz*. All things are for Israel's sake and for the sake of that territory. Yahweh is Yahweh of hosts, the God of the hosts of Angels and of His people; and they are all centred around the things of the Kingdom, the *eretz*.

2:2 *On the seventh day, God finished His work which He had made-* Heidel understands the grammar here to mean rather "God declared His work finished" (Alexander Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951) p. 127). Seeing nothing was created on the seventh day, this would make sense. The finished work of God in creating all things, the whole universe, is therefore only finished in the creation of His Kingdom-land *eretz* and His man- the Lord Jesus and all who are in Him, the second Adam. Quite literally, all things were on account of the Christ, and thereby all things are for our sakes. Let us never therefore feel insignificant in the vastness of the cosmos. Let us never again slip into a sense that we are meaningless, that the scale of the cosmos means that therefore we are without significance. Quite the opposite. The scale of the cosmos and the range of life forms even on planet earth are simply in order to provide scale and context, in order to bring home to us our intense significance before the loving Father who created us.

When Moses "finished the work" of the tabernacle (Ex. 40:33), there is clear allusion to God 'finishing the work' of creation.

And He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made- "Rested" is Heb. S*habbat*. Remember that the creation record alludes to contemporary creations myths in order to deconstruct them, and to teach Israel Yahweh's version of creation. The suggestion has been made that much of the Hebrew language in early Genesis alludes to similar words in the surrounding languages which were used in the creation myths of the pagan peoples. In this case, the allusion would be to the Akkadian *shappatu*, the day of the full moon, the 15th day of the lunar month, a day when sacrifice had to be offered to appease the moon god, hence the word meant 'the day of the quieting [cp. 'rest'] of the heart' [of the god] [Victor Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17 (*Eerdmans, 1990) p. 142) . The contrast is that in the Biblical record, God 'rested' from the colossal works of grace He had performed throughout the week in the preparation of His land for His people. He was not resting because He had been appeased by human sacrifice, but rather because He was at rest / peace / at quiet after all His expenditure of energy in the grace of creating all things for His beloved people.

The Mesopotamian legends speak of the flood being sent to stop man destroying Enlil's "rest" by his noise. The Mesopotamian gods sought for a "ceasing from toil", "rest from labour"- identical ideas to the Hebrew concept of shabbat. This was why, it was claimed, the gods first created man and put him to work in their garden- so that they could "rest" (Joseph Campbell,

The Masks Of God: Vol. 3, Occidental Mythology (New York: Viking Arkana, 1991) p. 103). This background is alluded to in the way that Genesis speaks of man being cast out of tending the garden of Eden as a punishment- scarcely something the gods would wish if man was there to save them working there. God speaks of Him giving man a shabbat as a rest for man from his labour. And the flood, although it was Divine judgment, ultimately worked out as a blessing of 'rest' for man in that the 'world' was cleansed from sin. Thus 'Noah' was given that name, meaning 'rest', "because this child will bring us relief from all our hard work" (Gen. 5:29 G.N.B.). Adam's work in Eden wasn't onerous; his work when cast out of the garden was hard. The wrong ideas are clearly alluded to and often reversed- in order to show that a loving God created the world for humanity, for our benefit and blessing- and not to toil for the gods in order to save them the effort. The 'rest' so sought by the Mesopotamian gods was actually intended by the one true God as His gift to humanity.

A unique feature of the Genesis account of creation is that God is described as resting on the seventh day. No creation myth includes this feature. Moses developed this theme later, when he taught that therefore, man was to rest on the seventh day likewise. Whilst God is omnipotent, there is what I have called elsewhere 'the limitation of God'- in that He *portrays Himself* as somehow limited, only allowing Himself to use some of His limitless power. This idea of a God who seeks to come so close to us that He limits His

limitless power is altogether wonderful. The pagan gods were all some kind of supermen, untouched by human emotions and limitations. But the true God is not like that; He has always wished to come so close to His creatures. In a related way, the Genesis record brings out how God has delegated so much freedom and freewill to His creations. Gen. 4:20-22 explains how it was human beings who themselves developed skills of metal working, cattle breeding, music etc. The creations myths of the world surrounding the Israelites assumed that these *very things* were "the outcome of the internal conflicts of the gods". The Sumerian legends taught that things like ploughs and axes were created by the gods, and they should be praised for them. Moses teaches a far higher respect for humanity, in keeping with the hugely-significant teaching that man was made in God's image.

When Elohim rested on the seventh day, the implication is that they were tired- language impossible to apply to God Himself. The Hebrew for "rested" does not only mean that He ceased, but that He ceased for a reason. Ex. 31:17 is even clearer- "In six days the LORD made Heaven and earth, and on the seventh day He rested, and was refreshed"- the word used to describe refreshment after physical exhaustion, e. g. regarding David and his men at Bahurim when fleeing from Jerusalem (2 Sam. 16:14). Notice in passing that the Angels who gave the Law of Moses are often mentioned specifically as instituting the sabbath (e. g. Ex. 31:3; Ez. 20:12,13,16,20)- because it is "the sabbath (the rest) of the Lord" (Lev.

23:3)- i. e. of the Angels who rested on that day back in Genesis. The fact man was to physically rest on the sabbath as a replica of how the Angels "rested" on that day implies that they too physically rested. The 'language of limitation' in Scripture may well often refer to the Angels rather than God personally.

2:3 *God blessed the seventh day, and made it holy, because He rested in it from all His work which He had created to make-* God is spoken of as resting on the seventh day as if all creation has been finished. This is indeed what it sounds like- and from God's perspective, it was true. He had spoken, and so it was done. *He* through His word had created. The Angels were now working it all out in practice, having 'set it up' in the six literal days. This view of the record explains two verses which would seem to defy any other sensible interpretation: "God blessed the seventh day... because that in it he had rested from all his work which God had created to make" (2:3 AVmg.). God "had created to make" by the seventh day. He had created, because His word was as good as executed; but the things were not all made. But He had "created to make". Likewise Gen. 2:5 speaks of the day that the Lord "made the earth and the heavens, and every plant of the field before it was in the earth, and every herb of the field before it grew". Now this is saving the best for last. Here surely is concrete evidence for the thesis presented. The plants were made before they were actually in the earth. This doesn't mean that they were made in Heaven and then transplanted to earth. Surely it is to be read in the

context of all the other hints that God stated His commands regarding creation, and this was as good as it all being made. But in material terms, it all appeared some time later.

God made the seventh day holy at that time; yet that doesn't mean that *we* must always sanctify or make it holy. He sanctified or made holy various things, not least the tabernacle and the Levitical priesthood (Ex. 29:44). But we are specifically taught that we need no tabernacle nor Levitical priesthood because they have been replaced in Christ. And it's the same with the Sabbath. He is our rest, our means of being at peace with God without works- every moment of every day, not just one day out of seven. The emphasis is upon God sanctifying the seventh day rather than Israel sanctifying it; it was a reminder that God and not their works sanctified them (Ex. 31:13). That lesson is now taught and commemorated in Christ and not in ritual observance. So the fact something was sanctified or made holy in Old Testament times was to teach something; no day is any more holy of itself than any other day. Likewise all the firstborn were made holy to the Lord (Num. 3:13) but that doesn't mean that we have to treat firstborn likewise today.

The stars in particular were thought to be in control of human destiny but the Genesis record emphasizes that they are merely lights created by God with no independent influence, therefore, upon human life on earth. The sun, the moon and the stars were all worshipped as gods in the Middle East but in Genesis

1 they are simply created things made by God. Genesis 1 is based around the number 7- and the practical issue of the creation record was that Israel were to remember the seventh day as Sabbath. Yet this was a purposefully critical commentary upon the Babylonian views. "According to one Babylonian tradition, the seventh, fourteenth, nineteenth, twenty-first, and twenty-eighth days of each month were regarded as unlucky: Genesis however, declares the seventh day of every week to be holy, a day of rest consecrated to God (2:1-3)" (Gordon J. Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary Genesis 1-15*, (Waco TX: Word Books) Vol. 1 p. 49).

2:4 *This is the history of the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created, in the day that Yahweh God made the earth and the heavens-* "The history of the generations" is often interpreted as meaning 'This is the account of...'. But the phrase is used in Genesis many times, and it means just that- an outline of the generations of people. The term refers to people, not material things. This adds weight to the impression that the creation record is an account of the preparation of *eretz* Israel for God's people within it, and that the heavenly "hosts" created (see on Gen. 2:1) are to be understood as representing God's people, His hosts, who were to be the spiritual light of the *eretz*. The focus of the account is upon people- and the whole structure of the account reflects that, beginning with an almost casual statement about the creation of all things, then focusing upon the *eretz* Israel, and then focusing upon Adam. Then the

creation record of Genesis 2 repeats the creation story but is totally focused upon Adam and Eve.

2:5 *No plant of the field was yet in the earth, and no herb of the field had yet sprung up-* The AV appears more faithful to the Hebrew here: "These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens, every plant of the field before it was in the earth, and every herb of the field before it grew". This seems to confirm the suggestion made that the creation record is not speaking of origins, but rather of the preparation of the *eretz* for the habitation of God's created people. The plants and herbs were created before they were placed in the *eretz*. They are part of the general creation which is briefly spoken of in Gen. 1:1. The rest of the record in Genesis 1-3 speaks of how those things were ordered and prepared in relation to *eretz* Israel. And here we have that pretty much stated- those things were created before they were placed in the earth / *eretz*. 2:5 says that *every* plant and herb was created "before it was in the earth". The definition of "every" is therefore 'every plant and herb in the *eretz*'. What is in view is every plant or herb known to *eretz* Israel. If we insist on reading 2:5 as a literal record of creation, then we have the prospect of every herb and plant being created and kept somewhere and then placed on planet earth. Even the most ingenious redneck creationists would be hard put to come up some scientific explanation of that, seeing that plants and herbs depend upon each other and the environment

of planet earth in order to live. I suggest that my idea that the record is a Divine slideshow or drama, observed by someone in *eretz* Israel, makes far better sense.

Quite simply, the plants Israel knew had been made by God and somehow transplanted or moved into the land, just as one does when developing a garden. It was Moses' understanding that on entering the land, God would be planting Israel there (Ex. 15:17; Num. 24:6), just as God had planted in Eden (Gen. 2:8 s.w.).

The early chapters of Genesis were intended as the seed bed from which Israel would understand that they had grown. The nature of the record of creation was therefore primarily for their benefit. The lesson for us likewise must be- that what God did at creation, He can in essence do in our lives and experiences too. The record of Gen. 1-3 especially opens up in a new way when viewed from this angle. Difficult parts of the account seem to fall into place. Gen. 2:5 says that the creation account explains how God created "every plant of the field before it was in the earth / *eretz* / land [promised to Abraham]". Quite simply, the plants Israel knew had been made by God and somehow transplanted or moved into the land, just as one does when developing a garden. It was Moses' understanding that on entering the land, God would be planting Israel there (Ex. 15:17; Num. 24:6), just as God had planted in Eden (Gen. 2:8 s.w.).

For Yahweh God had not caused it to rain on the earth. There was not a man to cultivate the ground- This

doesn't have to mean that there had never been rain on the planet. It's saying that there was no rain on the *eretz*. There is no statement that there never had been rain on the *eretz*. If that was the intention, surely other language would have been chosen. But the idea of *God not causing rain to fall on the land* [of Israel] is quite common in the later Scriptures. We think of the situation at the time of Ahab. God not causing rain on the *eretz* is a result of His judgment. The *eretz* had been judged, in terms of the record in Genesis 1, it was formless and made empty, covered in the waters of judgment. "There was not a man" is likewise an idea later used in the Bible concerning how *eretz* Israel would be left without a man to cultivate its ground- as a result of Divine judgment (Jer. 4:29; Ez. 14:15; Zech. 1:21; 7:14). So we are being told that the plants were outside the *eretz* because it had been judged and was empty and dry; but now they are to be brought into the *eretz* because a river was now providing water. This was exactly the situation with Elijah- there was no rain on the *eretz* as it was under judgment, but he was kept alive by a Divinely provided river.

Mist came out of the land, there was no rain on the land [there may have been on the rest of the planet], it was watered by a canopy over the land. Now this would have had tremendous significance for Israel in the wilderness, likewise under a canopy of cloud each day.

The lack of "a man" is alluded to in the prophetic statements that there was "no man" on the *eretz* because of God's judgments upon it during the exile;

and God's search for "a man" was met in Messiah (Is. 41:28; 50:2; 59:16; Jer. 4:25). Thus we are set up to expect the Lord Jesus to be just whom Paul later declares Him to be, the second Adam. His role was to cultivate the plants in order to bring forth fruit; and this indeed is the Lord's work with us through the Spirit. And the arena of our spiritual fruitfulness will be the Kingdom of God, the *eretz*.

The plants needed "a man to cultivate" them. Because there was no man in Eden, therefore the plants weren't put there. But the plants had been created before they were placed "in the *eretz*", i.e. Eden. This is what Genesis 1 is saying- the creation of all things is briefly mentioned in 1:1, and then the rest of Genesis 1 is about the arrangement and preparation of the *eretz* to receive those things after a time of Divine judgment had fallen upon it. The argument is that the *eretz* and man within it were intimately connected; without man upon it, there could be no creation or paradise as God intended. This was so relevant to the Jews in Babylon who were tempted to remain within Babylon and not return to their chosen *eretz* and re-create God's Kingdom there. It was likewise relevant to a displaced Israel tramping through the wilderness to enter that *eretz*, constantly tempted to quit the dream and return to Egypt. Israel and their land were inextricably linked from creation.

I recall as a young convert being deeply disturbed when I realized that there were many myths of creation existing in the peoples that surrounded the Israelites [the Sumerians, Babylonians, Canaanites,

Egyptians, Hittites etc.] which were extremely similar in some aspects as the Genesis record of creation. Indeed, in a few places the correspondences are almost verbatim the same- "There was not yet rain...there was not yet a man to till the ground" (Gen. 2:5) reads very similarly to an Egyptian text that speaks of "When there was not yet rain...when there was not yet the fear that came to be...".

I assured myself that all those peoples must have copied their ideas from the Genesis record, rather than vice versa. But I was never totally comfortable with that view. Having now read through some of the myths and reflected upon the situation, and faced up to the fact that some of them were around well before Moses wrote Genesis, I've come to another view. It seems to me that the Genesis record, under inspiration, is a commentary upon those myths, telling Israel the truth, bringing out where they were wrong, and why. One Egyptian myth claimed that man was created from dust, and then the goddess Hat-Hor holds the symbol of life to the mouth and nose of the created body. You can see the similarities with the Genesis record. The Gilgamesh Epic also has a primeval man seeking to eat forbidden fruit. Many creation myths included the idea of the first woman having two sons, who then have conflict with each other and even commit fratricide. The tension between farmers and cattle raisers in southern Babylonia was at the root of a number of myths very similar to the Cain and Abel account. But Moses, under inspiration, is giving Israel the true account,

after their long period under Egyptian influence. So Genesis may *allude* to the other stories closely- as they were myths and legends which would've been well known to Israel as they walked through the desert. They would've discussed them, and some probably believed them. And so Moses wrote Genesis to show them where the truth really was from God's viewpoint. This explains something which has been widely observed by students of the ancient Middle East: the Israelites had no myths in their culture. The surrounding nations [cp. the world around us] were full of poorly defined and contradictory myths relating to life's origin. But the Israelites were different. They had ultimate truth for them clearly laid down.

Genesis itself was part of a five volume, Divinely inspired masterpiece. The purpose of Genesis was to teach God's people something in their day, whenever and wherever that was or is experienced by the readers / hearers of the book. This is why so many parts of the Bible allude back to the Genesis record of creation, in seeking to inspire faith *now* that God will powerfully act creatively and dramatically in *our* lives today.

2:6 *But a mist went up from the earth, and watered the whole surface of the ground*- LXX "But there rose a fountain out of the earth, and watered the whole face of the earth". This would then be the river of Gen. 2:10 which went out of the garden. The idea of a fountain arising and watering the earth is the language of later Scripture, especially Revelation, about the fountain which shall flow from the new

Jerusalem. The *eretz* is yet again associated with *eretz* Israel and the Jerusalem area particularly. The idea of an underground stream suggests a subterranean ocean of living water, and this is the basis of the prophetic pictures of a stream of living water issuing from the temple (Ez. 47:1-12). Again, the idea is that the fountain of Eden was located where the temple was and will be restored again there in the future when Eden is restored.

The argument could be that until there was a man to cultivate the land, there was a mist or fountain which watered the ground. This would explain why in John's Gospel, the second Adam, the Lord Jesus, likens Himself to a spring giving living water (Jn. 4,7). And all in Him likewise will have this same function (Jn. 7:38).

2:7 *Yahweh God formed man-* The Hebrew has the sense of forming as a potter, and the Hebrew translated "dust" can equally mean 'clay'. Later allusions to this state that God is the potter, and Israel the clay in His hand (Is. 64:8; Jer. 18:4-6; Rom. 9:21). Adam, the man of the *eretz* [see later] was to be seen as Israel, created to be in their land, just as all God's people were created to be in His Kingdom. This was of especial meaning to the first audience- Israel in the wilderness, travelling towards the promised land, and likewise to the later audience- Israel in captivity in Babylon awaiting restoration to the land. They had been created for a purpose- to inherit the land / Kingdom prepared for them, and all the power of creation was behind that intention. And this is no

less powerful encouragement to we who also wonder, in our weakness, quite why we are here, and whether really there is a Kingdom ahead of us. There indeed is, and all the power of creation was to this end, and is behind us as we travel there. This would explain the frequent allusions to God's power in creation which we find in the restoration prophecies, as well as in Moses' encouragement of Israel to enter the land, particularly in Deuteronomy.

From the dust of the ground- "Ground" here is *adamah*. Adam effectively means 'dust'; a powerful statement that man is but dust. Gen. 3:19 will later comment that Adam was taken out of, or, 'from among' (Heb.), the ground / dust. He was an extension of it, just as the Lord Jesus, the ultimate Adam, was taken out from among the rest of the dust of the earth. And in Gen. 28:14 (cp. Dan. 12:2) we are to find Abraham's seed likened to the dust of the earth. Adam and later the Lord Jesus were taken out from among the dust, He was of the same nature as all the promised seed. A correct grasp of Genesis forbids all the low grade theology about the Trinity which later developed, leaving such theories stillborn.

But there is a parallel between *adamah* and *eretz*. Adam was made from the dust of the *eretz-* he was an Israelite, as it were, a man of the *eretz* or land. Just a few examples of the parallel will demonstrate the point:

"Every living substance was destroyed from the face of the earth [*adamah*]... they were destroyed from the earth [*eretz*]" (Gen. 7:23)

"Joseph bought all the land [*adamah*] of Egypt for Pharaoh... so the land [*eretz*] became Pharaoh's" (Gen. 47:20)

"You shall inherit their land [*adamah*]... a land [*eretz*] that flows with milk and honey" (Lev. 20:24)

"The land [*adamah*] which You have given us... a land [*eretz*] that flows with milk and honey" (Dt. 26:15).

Dt. 4:32 is significant: "For ask now of the days that are past, which were before you, since the day that God created man on the earth, and from the one end of the sky to the other...". Man, Adam, was created on the *eretz* of Israel, and this area is parallel with "the one end of the sky to the other". The sky, or "heavens", was considered to meet the land at its 'ends'. 'Heaven' was thought to touch the earth at its 'ends'. This is not how things are of course in scientific reality. But I suggest that instead of ridiculing the Bible as teaching a flat earth, we rather consider the possibility that the allusion to creation here is made with the understanding that the creation record specifically spoke of the preparation of the *eretz*; that land, the land promised to Abraham, did indeed have boundaries or 'ends', and in the dramatic slideshow of Genesis 1:2-2:4, it would be fair to say that the heavens did indeed meet the earth at the boundaries. This kind of language is very frequent. Babylon is

spoken of in Dan. 4:11: "The tree grew, and was strong, and the height thereof reached unto heaven, and the sight thereof to the ends of all the earth". The 'earth' clearly refers not to the whole planet, and likewise the 'heaven' which it touched is not to be read literally.

Critics often note that the creation record of Gen. 1:1-2:4 uses *elohim* and the record of the creation of man uses *Yahweh*. That is correct, but I think they are wrong to suggest that we therefore have here two different records which have been stuck together. It's all a question of focus. Gen. 1:1 gives the brief statement that God created all things, in the beginning. Then, the focus moves to *eretz* Israel, and then to man. The question of cosmic origins is dismissed, irrelevant compared to the wonder of God's focus upon His people and His land. And many believers need to likewise stop their obsession with origins, and refocus upon the wonder of the things of the Kingdom / *eretz* and the things of the Name of Jesus Christ, the second Adam. So we then in chapter 2 have the huge focus upon man intensified by more detail being provided about Adam, and the zoom of the screen moves in beyond the *eretz* to a particular part of it, the garden planted in the east of Eden, the Jerusalem area. "Yahweh" is now used because this is God's covenant name, the name He uses in relationship with man; He as *elohim*, the mighty One[s], created all the physical stuff; but He as Yahweh relates to man personally. The zoom of the

camera progresses seamlessly once we perceive what is going on.

And breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul- This is clearly alluded to in Ez. 37:9, where the Spirit / breath is breathed into the corpse of Israel to revive them. We are to see in Adam's creation the spiritual revival of all the true seed of the Kingdom. True life is only spiritual life; we are only truly alive when we have received the Spirit. All other forms of life are in fact not life at all. "Breath of life" is not *ruach* but *neshamah*; however the two words are paralleled, e.g. in Job 27:3; Job 32:8; Job 33:4; Job 34:14; Is. 42:5; Is. 57:16. In the latter two passages, the whole language of the gift of the breath of life is again applied to spiritual life being given to a recreated people of God.

As Gen. 2:7; Ecc. 12:7 make clear, the spirit / life is given by God to our bodies; it doesn't come from anywhere else. There is no reincarnation. And this is no painless Bible fact; it demands that we live lives that are *His*, and not lived out as if our spirit / life / soul is *ours*. The fact that God "holdeth our soul in life", a reference to Gen. 2:7, means that David wanted to "make the voice of his praise to be heard" (Ps. 66:8,9). This was the meaning of the basic facts of creation for David!

"Living soul" or creature is exactly the word used about the animals (Gen. 1:20,21,24,30). The animals also have a breath of life within them, given by God. In man's case, this looked ahead to how God's people

can become spiritually alive by the gift of the Spirit. So often, having the breath of life in the nostrils becomes a Biblical idiom for 'being a live human being'. This must be given its full weight in the consideration of whether aborting a fetus, in whose nostrils there is no breath of life, is in fact murder.

2:8 *Yahweh God planted a garden in Eden, in the east-* Eden is introduced without definition. It is a fair assumption that this is the *eretz* / earth which has just been "made". The very concept of "East" presupposes that a specific portion of territory on earth is being spoken about. Because looking at the globe as a sphere revolving upon its own axis, there is no 'eastern' part of a revolving sphere. Such points of the compass demand that a defined territory upon planet earth is being spoken of. The lack of introduction to this idea suggests that "Eden" is the "earth" we have just seen 'made' in chapter 1. Eden is portrayed as being surrounded by water- the rivers Euphrates, Tigris, Pison and “Gihon, the same river that flows through the whole land of Cush” (Gen. 2:13). Seeing that Gihon is also a river near Jerusalem, we wonder whether after the flood, the course of this river was changed to begin in the centre of the *eretz* (1 Kings 1:33; 2 Chron. 32:20). Cush is Egypt (Gen. 10:6). The *eretz* promised to Abraham was bounded by the same rivers- the Nile and Euphrates (Gen. 15:18). The course of rivers surely changed after the massive upheavals associated with the flood, but all the same, the impression is given in Genesis 1 that the *eretz* was a flat area bounded by waters. This is the picture of

the promised land and the garden of Eden which we have later in Genesis. This would also explain why *eretz* Israel is often spoken of as again becoming like Eden- for the same geographical area is in view (Is. 51:3; Ez. 36:35; Joel 2:3), and Israel's sin within their land is likened to Adam's sin in Eden (Is. 66:17; Hos. 6:7). This also makes sense of the way that the prince of Tyre is spoken of as being in "Eden the garden of God" ..."upon the holy mountain of God" (Ez. 28:13,14)-thus associating Mount Zion, the temple mount, with Eden. I have written more about the identity of Eden with Israel at http://www.aletheiacollege.net/ld/31.htm . This holy mountain may well be identifiable with Ararat, 'holy hill' (Gen. 8:4). The flood likewise destroyed the *eretz*, and a new beginning was made from Mount Zion. More thoughts about this at http://www.aletheiacollege.net/ld/d3.htm . Note too that Eden is presented as being a place of gold, silver and precious stones- all of which are associated with God's sanctuary in Zion (Hag. 2:7,8; Rev. 21:18).

There are many references in later Scripture to God planting, and nearly always they refer to God planting Israel in their own land. This confirms us in understanding Eden as Israel. Some of the more significant references include:

- Ex. 15:17 "You shall bring them in, and *plant* them in the mountain of your inheritance, the place, Yahweh, which You have made for yourself". This recalls the creation of Adam outside of Eden and then bringing him into it.

- Num. 24:6 Israel were "as gardens by the riverside, as aloes which Yahweh has planted, as cedar trees beside the waters". Trees planted by God in an idyllic setting by water is exactly the language of Eden. The same figure of God planting Israel in their land as trees is to be found in Ps. 44:2; 80:8,15; Is. 5:2; Jer. 2:21; 12:2.

- Dt. 6:11 and other references speak of Israel being given a land full of trees which they had not planted- which was Adam and Eve's situation in Eden. Ps. 104:16 actually says that it was God who planted the trees in the *eretz* Israel.

- 2 Sam. 7:10 "I will appoint a place for My people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in their own place, and be moved no more". "Appoint" translates the same Hebrew word used for God's 'putting' of Adam in Eden (Gen. 2:8).

And there He put the man whom He had formed- "Formed" is the word used of how the Divine potter "formed" clay into the people of Israel (Is. 43:1,7,21; 44:2,21; 45:9,11; 64:8; Jer. 18:6). Adam represented the people of God, who were to subdue the *eretz*. They were "put" into that land, just as we are all placed into a life situation which is optimally designed for us to be fruitful and useful in God's work. "Formed" is used of how David was "formed" in the womb (Ps. 139:16; as Jer. 1:5). The creation is therefore ongoing in every human life; "forming" is used also of the creation of a person's wiring or psychology, the formation of the spirit or heart of a man (Zech. 12:1; Ps. 33:15). And it is used of the "forming" of Messiah

(Is. 49:5). The creation of humans therefore refers not simply to our physical body, but to our hearts. We are all given a unique personality type and psychology, which the Father works further upon through the Spirit.

2:9 *Out of the ground Yahweh God made every tree to grow-* As in the account in chapter 1, there is special emphasis upon the trees. Ez. 31:3-9 speak of Assyria [which was located within *eretz* Israel] as being a powerful tree in "the garden of God", with all the trees subject to him. "All the trees" surely refer to all the nations subject to Assyria, and they were all located within *eretz* Israel. "All trees" therefore do not refer to all trees / nations on a global level, but relative to the territory promised to Abraham. We can safely infer that Eden, the garden of God, refers to *eretz* Israel.

There is clearly a connection between how both man and vegetation are portrayed as formed out of the ground / dust. The trees were not made from pre-existent seeds, like Adam they are presented as special creations. The similarity serves to highlight the difference. Man alone is described as having the Spirit to enliven him, turning him into a living soul or creature. Unless we receive the Spirit, we are likewise existing merely on the level of animals and plants, made from dust, to return thereto. In this observation lies the need to carefully assess any denials of the Spirit's operation in our lives. For if we have not the spirit of Christ, we are none of His; for all our much vaunted Biblicism and good theology.

That is pleasant to the sight, and good for food- The text here suggests that every created tree was good for food and pleasant to the eyes. Not all trees are in these categories. So we have in view not a global creation, but a specific creation of a limited number of plants and animals- those found in Eden, the *eretz* / earth which is here the focus of all things. The fact other trees existed implies there may well have been the existence of other human beings outside of Eden; and that solves the question as to where Adam and Eve's children obtained their partners from. Adam was "the first man" as presented in the Bible, and in the sphere of the history of God's Kingdom which is what the Bible is all about. Just as Bible prophecy (in my view) has nothing much to say about the nations outside the *eretz*, likewise this creation narrative has little to say nor imply about other areas.

Again, similarity serves to highlight a difference. The fruit of the forbidden trees was "also" pleasant to the sight... but the difference is that it supposedly offered knowledge, and this appealed to Adam and Eve.

The description of the fruit as "pleasant to the sight" (Gen. 2:9) is found in the Gilgamesh epic about the trees in the garden of the gods. But that myth is alluded to, and Israel are told what *really* happened in the garden.

The tree of life also in the middle of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil- The Bible begins with the tree of the lives [Heb.], and concludes in Revelation with men eating of the tree and there

appearing a forest of trees-of-life. Our experience of salvation will be the basis of our witness to men in the Millennium, just as it should be now. On the basis of our experience of reconciliation with God, we have been given "the ministry of reconciliation", in that God "hath put in us [Gk. settled deep within us] the word of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5:18,19). I have suggested that Eden is the land / *eretz*, and "the midst" of that *eretz* is the sanctuary, Jerusalem, Zion (the Hebrew term is thus used in 2 Chron. 32:4). Yahweh's voice and presence was found in the midst of (NEV "among") the trees of the garden (Gen. 3:8); "middle" here is s.w. "among" in Gen. 3:8. The idea of Divine presence and word appearing between two things is very much that of Num. 7:89, where Yahweh's voice and presence issue from between [s.w. "in the middle of"] the two cherubim.

The Proverbs several times speak of our having some kind of experience of the "tree of life" now. And likewise the Lord offers "eternal life" to His followers as a present experience. In this we see how the curse has already begun to be lifted for those led of the Spirit.

The attraction of the trees was that they apparently offered eternity immediately, and the knowledge of things which were beyond the ability of Adam and Eve to cope with. These are the essence of so many temptations today, if not all of them.

2:10 *A river went out of Eden to water the garden-* The river "went out" or 'sprung up' out of Eden. Dt.

7:7-9 describes *eretz* Israel in the very language of the creation record, suggesting that it is the same territory, *eretz* Israel, which is in view: "Yahweh your God brings you into a good land [the same words used in 1:10 about the land being pronounced "good" by God], a land of brooks of water, of springs and underground water gushing [s.w. about the river which "went out" of Eden into the rest of *eretz* Israel] into valleys and hills; a land of wheat and barley, vines, fig trees and pomegranates; a land of olive trees and honey; a land in which you shall eat bread without scarcity. You shall not lack anything in it; a land whose stones are iron and out of whose hills you may dig copper". Eden is described likewise as full of precious stones.

"To water the garden" is alluded to in the idea of God watering Israel and its people (Is. 27:3; 43:20). This source of water is clearly behind the Lord's teaching that His Spirit is as living water, by which the new Israel are to live.

And from there it was parted, and became four headstreams- This is hard to translate or visualize, but I suggest the idea is that Eden was surrounded on each compass point by water. This is the equivalent of the *eretz* being presented in Gen. 1 as an area of land which appeared with the waters gathered around it. Remember that the Hebrew ideas of 'rivers' and 'waters' are similar. Eden, like *eretz* Israel, was surrounded by waters, and rivers / waters in the Bible usually represent the Gentile world. The flood doubtless changed the course of the rivers in the *eretz*,

but the impression remains that the same basic rivers surrounded both Eden and *eretz* Israel according to the boundary definition of Gen. 15:18- because they refer to one and the same area. The "Gihon" of 2:13 flowed through Cush, i.e. Egypt (Gen. 10:6); and the boundaries of *eretz* Israel were from the Euphrates to the river of Egypt.

The parting of the one water source into four may mean that when the *eretz* was "divided" by the topographical changes wrought by the flood (Gen. 10:25), four currently known rivers came from it. The water source became four rivers by which the *eretz* was to be defined. Note that on Gen. 2:13 I suggest that "Gihon" is a reference to the Nile. I have suggested that the creation narrative is effectively a vision from the viewpoint of a person within the *eretz*. It could be that visually we are being asked to envisage a fountain of water, which then divided into the four rivers which we are invited to see as the boundaries of that land.

2:11 *The name of the first is Pison: this is the one which flows through the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold-* "Havilah" could refer to a person rather than a place (Gen. 10:7; 1 Chron. 1:9). The Hebrew means 'circular' and may suggest that the garden was encompassed by Havilah; in this context, see on Gen. 2:12 *Gold....* The present tense suggests that the initial audience of Genesis knew the area. I suggested on :10 that the four rivers refer to four rivers by which the *eretz* came to be defined after the flood; the Nile (see on :13), the Tigris to the north and Euphrates to the

East (:14). The southern border of the *eretz* is never clearly defined- unless we take this reference to the "Pison" as referring to a river or wadi, perhaps now dried up, which was to define the southern border. The reference to gold could connect with the Queen of the South, or Sheba, who brought gold to Solomon. This would then refer to some boundary in what is now Saudi Arabia.

2:12 *And the gold of that land is good. There is aromatic resin and the onyx stone-* Note that what men count as the most materially valuable things were outside the garden. What was in the garden was relationship with God and work for Him, not material ease and wealth.

2:13 *The name of the second river is Gihon: the same river that flows through the whole land of Cush-* See on Gen. 2:10. The land that borders (Heb.) Cush or Ethiopia is the Nile; the same Hebrew phrase is used for the "river of Ethiopia" in Is. 18:1 (where it is the border of Egypt) and Zeph. 3:10. The connection between Gihon, a water source in Jerusalem, and the Nile is in that the river which once flowed in Jerusalem before the flood is now the Nile, after the topographical changes in the *eretz*; but this is memorialized by the fact that there is still a Gihon in Zion.

2:14 *The name of the third river is Tigris: this is the one which flows east of Assyria. The fourth river is the Euphrates-* The present tenses may mean that this is now, after the flood and the remaking of the topography in the *eretz*, where these rivers flow. I

suggested on :10 and :11 that the rivers are being used to define the borders of the *eretz* after the topographical changes brought about by the flood.

2:15 *Yahweh God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden-* Adam was a man of the *eretz* and the *eretz* was effectively Eden. The Hebrew need not mean that Adam was created outside of Eden. He was taken in the sense of commissioned, and placed in Eden to keep it. "Garden" can imply a walled area; the idea is that this was a separate area to be kept as paradise.

To cultivate it and to keep it- Note that there was work before the fall, just as there will be when Eden is restored. The Kingdom of God is no tropical holiday. Laziness is not at all what God is about. And our eternal future with Him will be of active, working service. “Keep” could well imply ‘protect’, and this has various implications which are beyond us in that it is unclear what it need protecting from; perhaps from influences and even people from outside of the *eretz*, just as Israel were to keep His Kingdom pure from defiling influences. Clearly all was not ultimately perfect- it was “good”. If the garden required such care, it follows that vegetation there was not as it were self-caring; the *eretz* was created in need of man, reflecting how in a sense, God is in need of man. Israel needed to be in their land, they needed the land and the land needed them. The decorum and appropriacy of the language surely suggests that Adam’s mission to care for the *eretz* was of a local, manageable scale. See too on Gen. 2:19. He surely wasn’t required to

tend every plant or animal on the planet, but within a more local territory. The command here in 2:15 surely repeats that of Gen. 1:28 "fill the earth and subdue it". The subduing of the *eretz* was his mission; but this is defined here in 2:15 as working and keeping the land in the garden of Eden, again supporting my suggestion that the *eretz* was Eden.

We can easily imagine how the people of Israel were prone to be confused by all the mythology they had encountered in their surrounding world. Being illiterate and having no inspired record from their God as to how to understand the past, they relied on dimly recalled traditions passed down. Hence Moses was inspired to write the Pentateuch. It is full- as so much of Scripture is- of allusion to the surrounding religious ideas- not because it in any sense depends upon them, but because it seeks to allude to and correct them. And further, the Torah labours how the one true God is so far superior to all the other gods whom Israel were tempted to believe in. In contrast with Near Eastern mythology, which had men as the lackeys of the gods to keep them supplied with food, the God of Genesis makes man and woman in His own image and gives them responsibility for His creation.

2:16 *Yahweh God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat-* Literally: 'Eat! Eat!'. This was a command to eat from every tree of the garden. They were all fruit trees, therefore. This is the equivalent to Gen. 1:29 in the creation narrative: "God said, Behold, I have given you... every

tree, which bears fruit yielding seed. It will be your food". Note the repetition of "every tree", confirming that the arrangement of the *eretz* in chapter 1 is being explained from a different perspective in the Eden account of chapter 2. But the geographical territories concerned are one and the same.

2:17 *But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat of it-* Adam alone had been commanded not to eat the tree of knowledge. Yet when Eve speaks to the serpent, it is evident that Adam had told her about it, but not very deeply. She speaks of "the tree that is in the midst of the garden" rather than " the tree of knowledge". She had been told by Adam that they must not even touch it, even though this is not what God had told Adam (Gen. 2:16,17 cp. 3:2,3). So we are left with the idea that Adam turned to Eve and as it were wagged his finger at her and said 'Now you see that tree over there in the middle, *don't you even touch it* or else there'll be trouble, O.K.'. She didn't *understand*, he didn't *explain* that it was forbidden because it was the tree of knowledge, and so she was deceived into eating it- unlike Adam, who understood what he was doing (1 Tim. 2:14). Adam's emphasis was on not *committing* the sin of eating the fruit; he said nothing to her about the need to multiply and subdue the earth. The next we know, Adam and Eve have separated, she is talking to the snake, apparently indifferent to the command to *subdue* the animals, to be their superiors, rather than listen to them as if they actually had superior knowledge. When the snake questioned: "Yea, *hath*

God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree..." (Gen. 3:1), Eve was in a weak position because Adam hadn't fully told her what God had said. Hence she was deceived, but Adam wasn't. So, *why* didn't Adam tell her more clearly what God had said? I would suggest that he was disillusioned with the wife God gave him; he didn't have intercourse with her as he had been asked, he separated from her so that she was alone with the snake. "The woman, whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree..." (Gen. 3:12) seems to reflect more than a hint of resentment against Eve and God's provision of her.

The lack of reference to the tree of life may be because it only bore its fruit every month, according to Revelation. This would suggest that the potential for eternity was there, but not immediately available; and that they sinned within the first month. "Knowledge" in Hebrew thought doesn't usually mean theoretical, academic knowledge; but rather experience or relationship. The desire to experience good and evil is at the root of all sin and temptation. The desire for the apparent 'goodness' of sexual experience would be the classic example; and the desire to vicariously experience good and evil from the comfort of our screens would be another. Adam was being asked instead to focus on doing God's work. The Father was to guide Adam to the experience of good and evil in His own way according to His program; and He knew that this must be developed in baby steps. But Adam, so typically human, wanted it all immediately, and on his own terms.

For in the day that you eat of it you will surely die- The Hebraism simply means 'You will really die'. Adam didn't die in the day he ate of it; and thus we are introduced to God's grace toward sinners, and what the reality of forgiveness means in practice. Attempts to make this text mean that he was given a mortal, sinful nature seem to me forced at the very best. Punishing a sinner by making him 'sinful by constitution' seem to me very far from what the text here is actually saying. And all we posit about human nature we are saying about the Lord Jesus, who had our nature and yet was "holy, harmless and undefiled". "You will surely die" is only one word in Hebrew, repeated twice: "Die, die!". It echoes the construction at the end of :16, "Eat, eat!" ("Freely eat", NEV). The choice was to "eat, eat!" or "die, die!". If he had got on with God's work and been satiated by His provision, he would have had no appetite for the forbidden fruit. And this is so true of us. We have been given talents and we are to trade them; to get on with our calling in the work of the Kingdom garden, and temptation will then seem the less attractive. This is the key to dealing with temptation, rather than trying to find the steel within our soul to resist what appears so overpoweringly attractive with our knuckles white from the stress. None of us have that kind of iron in the soul.

The punishment of death which is introduced in early Genesis was created and executed by the same one God who also created the world and the opportunity of eternal life. Gilgamesh and the pagan myths

presented whole groups of gods as responsible for and presiding over death and the underworld, and another, separate, pantheon of gods as involved in creation. The Biblical emphasis upon one God is significant and unusual; it is Yahweh who sends man back to the dust from which He created him, and the same Yahweh who is in total control of *sheol* [the grave or underworld], and in a sense even present there (Dt. 32:22; Job 26:6; Ps. 139:7,8; Prov. 15:11; Am. 9:2). The state of the dead is defined in Genesis as a return to dust, and later Scripture emphasizes that this means unconsciousness, for the righteous merely a sleep in hope of bodily resurrection. This was radically different to the ideas espoused by the peoples amongst whom Israel travelled and lived. The dead dwell in silence (Ps. 94:17; 115:17) having returned to dust, and as such don't become disembodied spirit beings which were later understood as 'demons'. The whole concept of demons was in this sense not allowed to even develop in the minds of God's people by the definitions of death which Moses presented in the Pentateuch. The utter supremacy of God is taught in the Genesis record in a way it never is in any of the other myths.

2:18 *God said, It is not good that the man should be alone-* By the end of the sixth day, all had been pronounced "very good" (Gen. 1:31). So this is providing more detail regarding the creation account of chapter 1. The creation of woman was after Adam had first interviewed the animals of the *eretz* and found them incompatible for helpers in his work.

Woman was created on the sixth day. The decorum of the language surely requires that on the sixth day Adam met all the animals and named them. This would be appropriate for all the animals in the garden, but not for every animal on planet earth; see on 2:19.

I will make him a helper suitable for him- "Make" is the same Hebrew word used in chapter 1 for the making or creating of things. But here, the woman is made not *ex nihilo* but from pre-existing material, Adam's rib. And so likewise the 'creation' or 'making' language of chapter 1 doesn't have to mean *ex nihilo*. The role of both woman in marriage and the church / Israel of God is made clear here; we are the Lord's helpers in His work in the garden / Kingdom. We are "suitable", the Hebrew meaning to stand opposite, to be the equal complement. Her formation from His side rather than His feet likewise speaks of this equality, to the end Eve may assist Adam in his mission and calling in the things of the Kingdom.

2:19 *Out of the ground Yahweh God [had] formed every animal of the field, and every bird of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. Whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name-* This rather stretches credibility to imagine every species of animal and bird of the Amazon being brought to Adam in Eden for him to name, within the course of a day; for he found no appropriate helper, and so Eve was created for him on the sixth day. The more comfortable reading is to assume that every bird and animal known within *eretz* Israel, the garden, was named by Adam. See on

2:15 and Gen. 1:28 and 1:29. “God formed” can quite legitimately be translated “had formed”. The focus of Genesis 2 is upon the creation of Adam and Eve within Eden; it is not a literal attempt to explain creation in any scientific sense.

"To see what he would call them" in Hebrew means just this. God had granted Adam freewill, and He was waiting to see / understand / perceive what Adam would decide to name the animals. And His own language and purpose is able to absorb the freewill decisions of man; for whatever Adam called the animals of Eden, God accepted that as their name in His revealed language in the Bible. This little incident perhaps exercised Adam’s freewill in preparation for the test which was to come. In Hebrew thought, to name something was a statement of their subordinance to the one who names. God had commanded Adam to have dominion over the animal creation, and He encouraged his obedience by inviting him to name the animals. The Father likewise uses commandment and asks us to serve Him as part of a program which is intended to induce our spirituality.

The language also implies God was interested in the freewill decisions of Adam; He perhaps limited His omniscience as He limits His omnipotence, in order to "see" Adam, to get to know him, to see how his mind worked as reflected in what he named them.

2:20 *The man gave names to all livestock-* “In the ancient world, things did not exist until they were

named... The name of a living being or an object was ... the very essence of what was defined, and the pronouncing of a name was to create what was spoken". John H. Walton, *Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011). This concept is being alluded to; but Adam of course was not thereby the creator of all the animals he named. And yet the idea is that all the animals in *eretz* Israel were named by Adam and were effectively 'created' or brought into known being by this naming process.

The pagan creation myths tend to leave man as created, as a servant to the gods. The implication is that the true meaning of life is the same as our mere existence. We are created to exist, so, we just exist. That's what life is about. This isn't existential, philosophical nonsense. That's a sad, real, concrete fact of what this life is about for many people on the earth. They're just existing. The Genesis record, however, gives more purpose to life than just existing. Adam was created, and he started existing. But, as the account brings out, he couldn't find the meaning of life by merely existing in an ideal physical, material situation. Just like people today don't find satisfaction in that, either. He needed Eve; he needed some form of human community, of fellowship, of binding with others, in order to find fulfilment. And so it is with us, driven as we are towards isolationism and individualism by the abuses of society around us.

And to the birds of the sky, and to every animal of the field- The record invites us to see this process as happening the same day Adam was created; for the

creation of man and woman is spoken of in chapter 1 as occurring on the same day. For him to name all the birds on the globe within one day is unrealistic. Surely we are being asked to deduce that the creation in view covers only a limited part of earth's surface; "the sky" in view is that over the *eretz* and not the entire sky above the earth. It could be argued that "the field" is put here for "the earth"; the enclosed territory in view, the "field", is Eden, the *eretz*, and not the entire planet.

But for man there was not found a helper suitable for him- this connects with the statement in Gen. 2:20, that God made Adam a helper, because no animal had been found appropriate for him and his work. The opposition of ideas is between him *seeking to find* a helper [which search failed], and God *making* a partner for him. And this is a profound commentary upon the union between man and woman in marriage. No amount of searching for a partner will be ultimately successful; the partner is made by God. Marriages truly are made in heaven, in this sense. This principle has profound relevance to the internet generation, who go out online to try to find a partner. An appropriate partner is ultimately of God's creation, rather than human searching.

2:21 *Yahweh God caused a deep sleep to fall on the man, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place-* The Hebrew for "rib" is often translated "side". This is replete with reference to the gash in the Lord's side at His crucifixion, through which His bride was created, from His water and blood. This may well have reference to the crucial role

of water baptism in the creation of the Lord's bride, which is the church. The "deep sleep" speaks of the depth of the Lord's death, the hardest and most profound death died by any human. The same word is used in Gen. 15:12 of the "deep sleep" upon Abraham, prefiguring the Lord's death, through which the covenant of salvation was confirmed. The closing or shutting of the flesh may speak of the Divine victory against the flesh in His Son, on account of which we who are in Him shall be saved from our flesh.

2:22 *He made the rib, which Yahweh God had taken from the man, into a woman, and brought her to the man-* The implication is that the rib was taken away somewhere, worked upon, and then brought to Adam. This may look forward to our formation for the Lord, and then being presented to Him at the last day. We have been "reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and without blemish and unreproveable before him" (Col. 1:22). We now are in process of being brought to the Lord Jesus.

2:23 *The man said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh!-* Clearly alluded to in Eph. 5:30 AV, confirming we are correct in seeing Eve as representative of the bride of Christ: "For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones". "Flesh" and "bones" are several times used together as an idiom for 'the whole person' (Ps. 38:3; Prov. 14:30; Mic. 3:3). Eve was totally like Adam; and in this we see a visual demonstration of the unity of nature and purpose between the Lord Jesus and His people.

Again, understanding Genesis would leave theories like the Trinity stillborn. The core attraction between Adam and Eve was that they were the same. Whilst opposites do indeed attract, that is but superficial. The essential attraction between the Lord Jesus and us, His attraction to us and ours to Him, is because of our commonality of nature and mission in this world. In this we see the huge practical import of understanding that the Lord was our representative, of our nature.

She will be called 'woman', because she was taken out of Man- As just noted, the mutual attraction between Adam and Eve, as between the Lord Jesus and ourselves, is because of our closeness of nature. The Hebrew words for "woman" and "man" are connected, just as they are in English. The woman was part of the man, and yet the male is born out of the female; thereby the man and woman need each other. 1 Cor. 11:11,12 is Paul's inspired reflection upon this verse: "Neither is the woman without the man, nor the man without the woman. For as the woman is of the man, so is the man also by the woman". The same mutuality is therefore to be found between the Lord Jesus and His bride. He is in need of us. He is not indifferent, passing time in Heaven without emotions nor feelings, until the moment comes to return to earth. He is bound up with us, as we should be with Him.

Marriage as ordained by God was clearly intended to have a spiritual dimension, and marriage to an unbeliever nullifies or ignores this intention. God created Adam and gave him the command not to eat

of the tree; He then created Eve because Adam alone was the only thing "not good" in an otherwise "very good" creation. It could be argued that the provision of Eve was in order to "help" Adam not only in God's work of tending the garden, but against temptation. The whole story of Eve's creation teaches that in Christian marriage, there is one specific woman intended for the believer. David Levin's translation brings this out:

"*This one* at last, bone of my bones

And flesh of my flesh,

This one shall be called Woman,

For from man was *this one* taken".

This sense that 'this is the *one* for me' can only ultimately and lastingly be true in the context of Christian marriage. The creation record teaches that the bond between parents and children is somewhat temporary- for the children must leave them and cleave to their partner. But the bond between man and wife is to be permanent, and is an ever increasing process of being 'joined' to each other by God. Insofar as the man represents Christ and the woman represents the church, this speaks of how we are progressively bonded with Christ and feel a decreasing bond with our natural background.

2:24 *Therefore a man will leave his father and his mother, and will join with his wife, and they will be one flesh-* They initially disobeyed this. See on Gen. 1:28.

As explained on :22 and :23, the nature of creation explains the attraction between male and female within the Divine sphere; it is because of this that "therefore" a man desires to join with his wife. This same natural attraction, to connect or re-connect with the opposite sex, is reflected in the natural attraction of the Lord Jesus toward us, and we toward Him. It is only human dysfunction which interferes with this; atheism and rejection of the claims of Jesus are in my view a psychological reaction against religion and those perceived as representing God on earth. "They will be one flesh" is "they two will be one" in the LXX, and the Lord Jesus and the New Testament prefer this reading. Two becoming one would axiomatically rule out polygamy; indeed, many relationships Biblically recorded, and currently experienced, amongst faithful believers are in contradiction to the ideals laid down here. Failures to rise up to these ideals is therefore no basis for condemnation or rejection.

As a couple "cleave" or 'join' to one another, so they become one flesh (Gen. 2:24). But this becoming one flesh is interpreted by the Lord Jesus as meaning that God actively joins the couple together (Mt. 19:6); as *they* cleave to each other in the process of married life, so *God* joins them together. Clearly the Lord understood Gen. 2:24 as speaking of the process of marriage, rather than simply the ceremony of a wedding. In passing, note that the Hebrew idea of two becoming one has already been used in Genesis-the morning and evening, the day and night, were

fused by God into one day (Gen. 1:5- the same Hebrew phrase is used). Similarly we read of the waters becoming, or being made one, by God (Gen. 1:9). It's as if the immense power of God in creation is unleashed in His bonding of man and wife together. To put that asunder is to fight against the very creative power of God. Mal. 2:15 comments that the purpose of the two becoming one was in order to produce a Godly seed.

The Genesis record describes how woman was taken out of man, and yet in marriage man and woman become "one flesh" again. A man will desire to "cleave" to his wife (Gen. 2:24), literally to chase, follow hard after. The desire to chase a woman and marry her is therefore a natural urge that will always play itself out. There is a natural desire within human beings to achieve this rejoining. The lonely world in which we live, with the breakdown of the extended family and local community, makes loneliness all the more poignant.

The earliest anticipation of the one body was the fact that man and woman become one flesh / body in the marriage process. If we are all members of the one body, this fact requires us to strive for unity with each other. We can't just sit back and think 'OK, so there's one body'; rather like a married couple can't just say they are one because they are " one flesh" . They must work on it if they want to be truly one. And likewise with the one body of Christ.

2:25 *They were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed-* The implication is that after the fall, they were ashamed and knew their nakedness. These two words are frequently used about Judah's judgment- they were made naked and ashamed by the exile from the *eretz*. Jer. 9:19 speaks of them being ashamed having forsaken the *eretz-* an allusion back here to Adam's exile from the same *eretz*. Hos. 13:15 speaks of Israel's spring and fountain being ashamed and no more- a reference to the spring of Gen. 2:6 LXX.

Eve was created from Adam and brought to him. I have explained above that on one level, this speaks of the bride of Christ taken from His pierced side, through the work of the blood and water. We are now before Him, naked, known completely by Him, and yet unashamed because of His love (Rom. 1:16; 5:5; 9:33; 10:11), just as the Lord is unashamed of us now (Heb. 2:11). But it's a case of now, but not yet. For the language of being presented without shame before our Lord is picked by the New Testament in describing our final union with Him at the last day (2 Cor. 11:2; Col. 1:22; 1 Jn. 2:28; Jude 24).

Ongoing Creation

There is no doubt in my mind that the six days of creation were six literal days of 24 hours. There is no suggestion in the way the Lord Jesus and Paul both quote from and allude to the Genesis record that it is to be taken figuratively. Israel were to keep the seventh day as Sabbath and creatively labour in the six other

days (which was just as much a command as the keeping of Sabbath), because " in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the seventh day" (Ex. 20:11). Adam was the first man, and Eve was the mother of all living human beings. >From one blood all were created (Acts 17:26). It is emphasized that God created through His word of command; He said, and it was done (Ps. 33:6,9; 148:5; Is. 40:26; Jn. 1:3; Heb. 11:3; 2 Pet. 3:5). God is outside the constraints of time, and outside the possibility of His word not being fulfilled. Therefore if He says something, it is as it is done, even if in human time His command is not immediately fulfilled. Thus He calls things which are not as though they are (Rom. 4:17). It is in this sense that the Lord Jesus and those in Him are spoken of as if we existed at the beginning; although we didn't physically. And so God spoke the words He did on six literal, consecutive days, and the orders ('fiats' is the word Bro. Hayward uses) were therefore, in this sense as good as done. But the actual time taken to carry them out by the Angels may have been very long. The Genesis record can then be understood as stating these commands, and then recording their fulfilment-although the fulfilment wasn't necessarily on that same day.

Indeed, it would seem from later Scripture that the orders and intentions outlined by God on the six literal days are *still* being fulfilled. Take the command for there to be light (Gen. 1:3.4). This is interpreted

in 2 Cor. 4:6 as meaning that God shines in men's hearts in order to give them the knowledge of the light of Christ. The command was initially fulfilled by the Angels enabling the sun to shine through the thick darkness that shrouded the earth; but the deeper intention was to shine the spiritual light into the heart of earth-dwellers. And this is still being fulfilled. Likewise the resting of God on the seventh day was in fact a prophecy concerning how He and all His people will enter into the " rest" of the Kingdom. The Lord realized this when He said that even on Sabbath, God was still working (Jn. 5:17). The creation work had not *really* been completed in practice, although in prospect it had been. In this very context Paul comments that although we must still enter into that rest, " the works were finished from the foundation of the world" (Heb. 4:3).

Another example is the command uttered on the sixth day to make man in God's image. The creation record in Genesis 2 is not about a different creation; it is a more detailed account of how the Angels went about fulfilling the command they were given on the sixth day. The process of bringing all the animals to Adam, him naming them, becoming disappointed with them, wishing for a true partner need not therefore be compressed into 24 hours. It could have taken a period of time. Yet the command to make man, male and female, was given on the sixth day. However, this may have taken far longer than 24 hours to complete. Indeed, the real intention of God to create man in His image was not finished even then; for Col. 1:15

interprets the creation of a man in God's image as a reference to the resurrection and glorification of the Lord Jesus. *This* was what the Angels had worked for millennia for, in order to fulfil the original fiat concerning the creation of man in God's image. Even now, we see not yet all things subdued under Him (Heb. 2:8); the intention that the man should have dominion over all creation as uttered *and apparently fulfilled* on the sixth day has yet to materially come to pass. The Angels are still working- with us. For 1 Cor. 15:49 teaches that *we* do not now fully have God's image, but we will receive it at the resurrection. Therefore we are driven to the conclusion that the outworking of the creation directives regarding man in God's image was not only in the 24 hours after it was given, but is still working itself out now. The new creation is therefore a continuation of and an essential part of the natural creation; not just a mirror of the natural in spiritual terms.

I can foresee that the objection to this thesis would be that God is spoken of as resting on the seventh day as if all creation has been finished. This is indeed what it sounds like- and from God's perspective, it was true. He had spoken, and so it was done. *He* through His word had created. The Angels were now working it all out in practice, having 'set it up' in the six literal days. This view of the record explains two verses which would seem to defy any other sensible interpretation: " God blessed the seventh day...because that in it he had rested from all his work which God had created to make" (2:3 AVmg.). God " had created to make"

by the seventh day. He had created, because His word was as good as executed; but the things were not all made. But He had " created to make" . Likewise Gen. 2:5 speaks of the day that the Lord " made the earth and the heavens, and every plant of the field before it was in the earth, and every herb of the field before it grew" . Now this is saving the best for last. Here surely is concrete evidence for the thesis presented. The plants were made before they were actually in the earth. This doesn't mean that they were made in Heaven and then transplanted to earth. Surely it is to be read in the context of all the other hints that God stated His commands regarding creation, and this was as good as it all being made. But in material terms, it all appeared some time later.

And let's take deeply to ourselves the power of God's word as revealed here. He has spoken to us and of us, He has promised us His salvation and the inheritance of the earth. It is as good as done. Our difficulty in grasping this in the Genesis record of six literal days creation is continued in our hesitancy to apprehend the utter certainty of our promised salvation and the spiritual heights into which we have therefore already been translated.

GENESIS CHAPTER 3

3:1

The passage talks about "the serpent". The words "satan" and "devil" do not occur in the whole book of Genesis. The serpent is never described as an angel. Therefore it is not surprising that there is no reference in Genesis to anyone being thrown out of heaven. Sin brings death (Rom. 6:23). Angels cannot die (Lk. 20:35-36) , therefore angels cannot sin. The reward of the righteous is to be made equal to the angels to die no more (Lk. 20:35-36). If angels can sin, then the righteous will also be able to sin and therefore will have the possibility of dying, which means they will not really have everlasting life. The characters involved in the Genesis record of the fall of man are: God, Adam, Eve and the serpent. Nobody else is mentioned. There is no evidence that anything got inside the serpent to make it do what it did. Paul says the serpent "beguiled Eve through his (own) subtilty" (2 Cor.11:3). God told the serpent: "Because thou hast done this..." (Gen.3:14). If "satan" used the serpent, why is he not mentioned and why was he not also punished? Adam blamed Eve for his sin: "She gave me of the tree" (Gen. 3:12). Eve blamed the serpent: "The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat" (Gen. 3:13). The serpent did not blame the devil - he made no excuse. If it is argued that snakes today do not have the power of speech or reasoning as the serpent in Eden had, remember that a donkey was once made to speak and reason with a man (Balaam);

"The (normally) dumb ass speaking with a man's voice forbad the madness of the prophet" (2 Pet. 2:16). And the serpent was one of the most intelligent *of all the animals* (Gen. 3:1). The curse upon it would have taken away the ability it had to speak with Adam and Eve. But it was an animal. God created the serpent (Gen. 3:1); another being called "satan" did not turn into the serpent; if we believe this, we are effectively saying that one person can enter the life of someone else and control it. This is a pagan idea, not a Biblical one. If it is argued that God would not have created the serpent because of the great sin it enticed Adam and Eve to commit, remember that sin entered the world from man (Rom. 5:12); the serpent was therefore amoral, speaking from its own natural observations, and was not as such responsible to God and therefore did not commit sin. The serpent was a beast of the field which God had made (Gen 3:1). Yet out of the ground [Heb. *adamah*- earth, soil] God formed all the beasts of the field, including the serpent (Gen. 2:17). So the serpent was likewise created by God out of the ground- it wasn't a pre-existing agent of evil. Note the snake, as one of the beasts of the field, was "very good" (Gen. 1:31)- hardly how one would describe the serpent according to the orthodox reasoning. The Torah doesn't speak of purely symbolic, abstract concepts; there is always a literal reality, which may then be interpreted in a symbolic way. The serpent, therefore, begs to be understood in this context as just that- a serpent. The view has been pushed that the serpent is to be read as a symbol of our human or animal nature. This would

mean that Eve's nature deceived Eve, and such a separation between a person and their nature is problematic to say the least. This view runs into huge difficulties- for how could Eve's nature be punished in a way separate to her punishment, in what way was her deceptive nature created by God like the animals, and how just was Eve's personal judgment in this case... and the questions go on, continuing to be begged the more we think about it. Some suggest that the serpent of Genesis 3 is related to the seraphim. However, the normal Hebrew word for “serpent”, which is used in Genesis 3, is totally unrelated to the word for “seraphim”. The Hebrew word translated “seraphim” basically means a “fiery one” and is translated “fiery serpent” in Numbers 21:8, but this is not the word translated “serpent” in Genesis 3. The Hebrew word for brass comes from the same root word for “serpent” in Genesis 3. Brass represents sin (Jud. 16:21; 2 Sam. 3:24; 2 Kings. 25:7; 2 Chron. 33:11; 36:6), thus the serpent may be connected with the idea of sin, but not a sinful angel. Note that the enmity, the conflict, is between the woman and the serpent, and their respective seed. The serpent is presented not so much as the foe of God, but the enemy of mankind. The promise that the seed of the woman would crush his head is echoed in the words to Cain in regard to sin: "Its desire is for you, but you will be able to master it" (Gen. 4:7). The snake is to be connected symbolically with human sin, not any superhuman Satan figure.

The entire Pentateuch is alluding to the various myths and legends of creation and origins, showing what the truth is. Moses was seeking to disabuse Israel of all the myths they'd heard in Egypt, to deconstruct the wrong views they'd grown up with- and so he wrote Genesis 1-3 to show the understanding of origins which God wished His people to have. The serpent had a major significance in the surrounding cultures. It was seen as a representative of the gods, a kind of demon, a genie. But the Genesis record is at pain to show that the serpent in Eden was none of those things- it was one of the "beasts of the field". No hidden identity is suggested for the serpent in Genesis. J.H. Walton comments: "The Israelites [made no] attempt to associate it [the serpent] with a being who was the ultimate source or cause of evil. In fact, it would appear that the author of Genesis is intentionally underplaying the role or identification of the serpent... In Canaanite literature the role of chaos was played by the serpentine Leviathan / Lotan. In contrast, the Biblical narrative states that the great sea creatures were simply beasts God created (Gen. 1:21). This demythologizing polemic may also be responsible for avoiding any theory of conspirational uprisings for the existence of evil... there is no hint in the OT that the serpent of Genesis 2-3 was either identified as Satan or was thought to be inspired by Satan. The earliest extant reference to any association is found in Wisdom of Solomon 2:24 (first century BC)... the earliest reference to Satan as the tempter through the serpent is in *Apocalypse Of Moses* 16-19, contemporary to the NT... in the writings of the

church fathers, one of the earliest to associate the serpent with Satan was Justin Martyr" (J.H. Walton, 'Serpent', in T.D. Alexander and D.W. Baker, eds, *Dictionary Of The Old Testament And Pentateuch* (Leicester: I.V.P., 2003) pp. 737/8). Even within Judaism, it is accepted that the idea that the serpent was Satan is not in the text itself, and arose only within later Rabbinic commentary: "The interpretation... according to which the serpent is none other than Satan... introduces into the text concepts that are foreign to it... the primeval serpent is just a species of animal... it is beyond doubt that the Bible refers to an ordinary, natural creature, for it is distinctly stated here: Beyond any best of the field that the Lord God had made" (Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary On The Book Of Genesis* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1998 ed.) Vol. 1, pp. 139,140).

Now the serpent- If the entire family or genus of snakes were intended, we would expect to read something like "the serpent and his kind". But the language here suggests we are reading of a specific singular animal, a unique creation. I suggest that "the serpent" was a specifically created animal, an "animal of the field" but a special creation, which died for all time as its punishment- thus looking forward to the final, eternal destruction of sin, all forms of temptation and death, as envisioned in Gen. 3:15. The serpent was real enough, but it also represented sin and temptation. But the symbolic must have a basis in the literal and historical. Paul alludes to the serpent as if it were literal (2 Cor. 11:3). The Hebrew word means literally

to hiss or whisper, but it also has the idea of experience (s.w. Gen. 30:27 "I have learned *by experience*"). The root of temptation is the desire for experience, rather than accepting the experiences God plans for us.

Many of the creation myths feature some kind of serpent, but always as some entity far more than a literal animal. The Genesis record alludes to these myths, which Israel in Egypt would have been exposed to and probably accepted, in order to deconstruct them. This doesn't mean that Genesis is myth; the very opposite. It presents God's take on those myths. The myths tend to present the serpent as a dragon figure, similar in appearance to the Biblical cherubim. Some cherubim-like figures uncovered in Egypt are in fact winged cobras (Bernard F. Batto, *Slaying the Dragon, Mythmaking in the Biblical Tradition* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster / John Knox Press, 1992) p. 60). But the Genesis record clearly differentiates between the serpent and the cherubim. "Serpents figure in various Ancient Near Eastern myths in a demonic way" (J. R. Porter, *The Illustrated Guide to the Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) p. 29). The Sumerian god Ningishzida [meaning 'Lord of the tree'] was portrayed as a serpent (John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews & Mark W. Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary To The Old Testament* (Downers Gove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2000) p. 32). But the Genesis record is insistent that the truth is different, and that for the Bible believer, the serpent

was an animal, not a god, not a cosmic dragon nor a demon, but a literal "beast of the field" created by the one God just as all the other animals were created.

Let's ever remember that Genesis was initially produced by Moses in order to educate the Israelites in the wilderness. The Egyptians venerated the serpent and glorified death as a reward; Moses shows that it is to be abhorred as the symbol of sin, and death is a curse and the wages of sin.

Was more subtle- The great temptation for Israel in their *eretz* was Canaanite idolatry; the tribes of the land are described with the same word in Ps. 83:3 ["crafty counsel"]. Baal was seen as a god of wisdom; perhaps the literal serpent represented all such idolatry, tempting Israel to 'play God', to assume His wisdom, which is the essence of every temptation. As there was a snake who was there in the 'land' of Eden, so there was the equivalent amongst Israel- the false teachers, the tribes who remained, etc., the "serpents of the dust" who would be the cause of Israel's destruction (Dt. 32:24- an evident allusion to the language of the snake in Eden).

Than any animal of the field which Yahweh God had made- This suggests the serpent was indeed an animal, created by God. The serpent was cursed more than the other beasts of the field (Gen. 3:14); the most superior animal was brought down beneath the others, by having to crawl on its belly. Those who argue for a non-literal serpent would presumably have to read this as meaning: 'The serpent was more subtle

than any of the animals God had made [although it was not an animal]'. I suggest the more comfortable reading of the text is: 'The serpent was one of the animals but was the most subtle of them all'. The question of interpretation is hard to resolve by appeal to the original Hebrew alone. The preceding chapters 1 and 2 have stated that all things and all categories of things exist because they were created by God. So the serpent was a created being- in which category was it to be placed, if not as an "animal of the field"? If we are intended to see the serpent as not created by God, then surely that would be stated. The whole context is about creation or bringing into being by God. The implication is surely that the serpent was one of the animals God had made. We can break down the text like this: The serpent [A] was more [B] than [C]. The question is whether [A] is part of [C], i.e. was the serpent [A] one of the 'animals of the field' [C]. The same kind of Hebrew construction is found elsewhere. In each case, the idea would be that [A] is part of and included within the category of [C]. Thus Israel [A] were not more in number [B] than any other nation [C] (Dt. 7:7). But Israel were a nation, included within the [C] category. "I [A] am more foolish [B] than any man [C]" (Prov. 30:2). The writer was a man, he was a member of the category [C]. Likewise Is. 52:14 "His [Messiah's] [A] face was more marred [B] than any man [C]". Messiah was a man, He was part of the category of [C], but He had the most marred face. Ez. 15:2 might be the clearest: "What is the vine tree [A] more than [B] any tree [C]?". The vine tree is a tree, a member of the category

[C]. And so the serpent [A] was more subtle [B] than any animal of the field [C]. The serpent was part of that category, it was an animal of the field made by God. Genesis 3 is right at the beginning of the Bible. It would seem to me inappropriate to begin the Biblical revelation with symbolic language. Symbol and figure don't function that way in literature. We begin with literal things, and then later in the literature, those literal things are employed as symbols. Thus Paul truly observed that "it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and only then the spiritual" (1 Cor. 15:46). When we read Revelation and encounter dragons and the like, the genre clearly demands we understand them as symbolic of other things. But we don't have that kind of genre at the start of the Bible. So whilst the serpent clearly is used to represent things later on in the Bible, I believe that here at the start, it is a literal serpent which is in view.

Sin entered the world by Adam, not by the serpent (Rom. 5:12). But see on Gen. 3:14 *eat dust*. If the serpent were purely figurative, then we would surely expect to find Paul giving the serpent a place in the entry of sin into the world. But he doesn't. I have suggested that the 'creation' account in Genesis 1 is a dramatic presentation explaining how *eretz* Israel was prepared for habitation. I then developed the similarities between that *eretz* and Eden. But Eden was a literal place; and Adam and Eve are understood in later Scripture as literal beings. And so I see no hint within the genre of Genesis 3 which suggests that the serpent is to be read purely symbolically. If Gen.

1:2-2:4 is poetic or dramatic, then there must come some point at which the genre changes- for the rest of Genesis is not in that genre. I suggest that cut off point is at Gen. 2:4. The natural must come before the spiritual and allegorical interpretation of it. Just as Adam represented Israel, and his exile Eastward from the *eretz* looked ahead to Judah's exile to Babylon, so the creature known as the serpent represented that within the *eretz* which caused God's people to sin and be expelled from it. Just as Eden, Adam and Eve were literal, so was the "serpent". But as they each represented things, so the serpent did too. The besetting temptation of Israel was the cult of idols, Baal in particular, and this was represented by the creature known as "the serpent". Just as the serpent "deceived" Eve (Gen. 3:13), so the same word is used of how false teachers deceived Israel into idol worship (Jer. 29:8). The Hebrew for "serpent" has a wide range of associations, most of them connected with false worship. Just as Adam and Eve should have not meddled with the serpent and instead brought it under their dominion, likewise Israel were warned not to meddle with those who 'serpent' (AV "use enchantment", the verb form of the noun for "serpent"; Lev. 19:26; Dt. 18:10). The literal animal known as the serpent, which differed, I suggest, from snakes of today, represented various things- not least, the temptations which led to Israel, God's specially created people, being exiled from the *eretz*. It represents other things too. But this is not to say that "the serpent" is merely symbolic. To say this runs the risk of a serious [and common] error in reasoning,

whereby something abstract is made symbolic of something else. 'Love', e.g., an abstract concept, cannot be symbolic of e.g. grace. So a symbolic entity, e.g. "the serpent", could not be itself symbolic of something else, e.g. sin or temptation. Literal things can represent abstract things or point forward to other things- the blood of the Mosaic sacrifices symbolized the atoning work of the Lord; the High Priest symbolized the Lord; the manna symbolized the word of God; the waters of the exodus symbolized the water of baptism, etc. But the symbolism functions because a literal thing or entity is used to represent something more abstract. If Adam, Eve and Eden were literal, and the creation or placement of animals and plants in Eden was literal, then it would seem gapingly inappropriate for a symbolic non literal "serpent" to appear in the record.

He said to the woman, Has God really said- We note he omits the covenant name of God, Yahweh. The Hebrew interpretted as "really" could mean to the effect that "Yes, although God has said". The AV fumbles towards this with "Yea, hath God said...". The idea would then be to imply 'Although God has surely said this, are you sure that the sentence will really be carried out?'. This would then pave the way for the serpent's lie in :4: "You *won't* surely die". The temptation here is set up as the archetype of all human temptation. The thought is presented, and the fantasy extends from that thought.

'You shall not eat of any tree of the garden?'- This was intentionally misrepresenting the commandment.

They had been told to "eat, eat!" of all the trees, with the exception of one. Misrepresentation of God's word, making God out to be unreasonable, is at the heart of all temptation. The Lord's wilderness temptations show the same process. God is not unreasonable, and He will not give us any temptation too great for us. Sin is not inevitable; and He doesn't wish us to be disobedient, but rather obedient. It is simply not so that the possession of human nature means that we shall inevitably sin; for the Lord had our same nature, but was undefiled.

3:2 *The woman said to the serpent, Of the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat-* Eve knew the commandment, and that the serpent was either misrepresenting or misunderstanding it. She and Adam had been commanded to "eat, eat!" of all the trees. It was their lack of obedience to this which left them not satiated, not away from the middle of the garden, and therefore prone to greater temptation. She interprets that command to "eat, eat!" as simply meaning that "we *may* eat". If she had more zealously perceived God's commandment to do positive things, she would not have struggled so much with the one negative commandment- to *not* eat of one tree.

Adam's sin is indeed everyman's. The account of Adam and Eve's sin is in essence the account of every sin and fall into temptation, and is alluded to on nearly every page of the Bible. God had told Adam to each *in abundance* from *all* the trees of the garden (Gen. 2:16,17). Eve tells the serpent that they can simply "eat" (she doesn't mention 'in abundance')

from "the trees of the garden" (she doesn't mention 'from *all* of them'; Gen. 3:2,3). If Adam and Eve had enjoyed God's blessings as He intended, there would not have been such a pull into the temptation. Appreciating the blessings God has given us, with regular prayers of thankfulness throughout the day (meal times are a great opportunity to remember to do this) will likewise lead us away from temptation; minimizing His blessings propels us towards it. Each time we fail in this, we are repeating Eve's sin. Likewise we can discern a positive focus by Eve upon the object of temptation; God had told Adam and Eve to eat in abundance "from all trees of the garden" but not to eat "from the tree of knowledge". Eve repeats this to the serpent by inserting the word 'fruit': "From the *fruit* of the trees of the garden we may eat, but from *the fruit* of the tree that is in the middle of the garden...". Focusing on the forbidden fruit in such detail is a sure way to ultimately succumb to the temptation. Or again, the command to not eat of the tree was twisted by Eve into saying that God had commanded that they were to not even *touch* it. She put a fence around the law [or Adam did, in explaining it to her]- and it had the opposite effect. Paul alludes to this by saying that Jewish regulations such as "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch... are of no value in checking the indulgence of the flesh" (Col. 2:21-23). In all these things we find Adam to be everyman, to be me, to be you, to be us.

3:3 *But of the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat of it,*

neither shall you touch it, lest you die'- The command to "eat, eat!" of all the other trees was intended to keep them away from the temptation which was in the midst of the garden. For they would have been moving elsewhere in the garden to all the various trees, to taste their fruits. And they would have had no appetite for anything else, if they were satiated by eating the other fruits. God's commandments are not mere tests of obedience; rather they are designed to elicit obedience, and to make the temptations less attractive. See on :2.

God had not told Adam not to touch the tree. The command not to eat the tree had been given to Adam alone, before the creation of Eve. He had relayed it to Eve, but had placed a fence around the law by telling her not to even touch the tree. He thus reveals a simple understanding of temptation and the need to try to ensure obedience to commandment. But he added to the commandment, rather than explaining to Eve and encouraging her to positively engage in the Lord's work elsewhere in the garden.

3:4 *The serpent said to the woman, You won't surely die-* The first lie, continued in various forms throughout all religions, not least in the false doctrine of the "immortal soul". The one true faith is unique in our belief in the mortality of man. And yet sin entered the world by Adam (Rom. 5:12), not by the serpent. The serpent was a special creation, set up and positioned by God as part of the environment required for the testing of Adam and Eve. John Thomas helpfully described the serpent as "amoral", reasoning from an

animal viewpoint but not ultimately the first sinner. This torpedoes any idea that the serpent was some kind of sinful being cast out of heaven onto earth. That whole fantasy is not only unBiblical, but is morally and logically as ridiculous as ordering a convicted pedophile and psychopath out of the courthouse into a school playground, with the judge arming him with a rifle.

The implication of the serpent was that God in fact didn't love Adam and Eve, and was trying to keep them from having some higher experience which He selfishly kept to Himself. Our temptations are likewise associated with a denial that "God is love". If we accept the love of God for us, His passionate desire to save us, so much temptation would be stillborn. The woman was under the impression that they would die if they ate or touched the tree. Perhaps the serpent was touching the tree- yet was not dead. Temptation becomes the stronger when we see others advertising the fact they have sinned and apparently avoided the consequences. Our world is full of this. And so this ancient record becomes timeless in its relevance.

3:5 *Rather God knows-*

The implication was that God is not love; He somehow wanted to hold humanity back from having the ideal experience. When of course the opposite is true; Yahweh is all about salvation, Yahoshua, and sharing His nature with us, in His love. All the temptations connected with doubting the love and

saving purpose of God... are all seen in this first temptation. So much depression and addiction arises from this same disbelief in God's love.

That in the day you eat it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God-

The temptation to "be like God" was that which the Lord Jesus refused through submitting to the death of the cross (Phil. 2). We are tempted to "be like God" in that we all have a tendency to 'play God'; to assume we can judge [when we lack the ability to ultimately judge], to assume we know better than God, to refuse to accept His hand in our lives... The implication was that God unreasonably wanted to keep them in subjection, and that there was ultimate freedom to be had in rebellion against Him. Man to this day likes the idea of freedom, but seeks it in the wrong way; and actually if offered total freedom, doesn't really want it. The Lord promised that He could make us "free indeed". Through baptism we change masters; from service to sin, to serving God. And this is the path to true freedom, when we shall be given "that which is our own" (Lk. 16:12). Ultimate personal freedom and self determination is what God wishes to give us. But it is all the same a gift from Him, and cannot be arrived at by our own power grabbing.

Knowing good and evil- It has been suggested that there was a creation previous to our own, i.e. to that recorded in Gen. 1. It is also conceivable that the present angels came to have an awareness of “good and evil” (Gen. 3:5) through having been in a similar

situation to what we are in this life. That some of the beings who lived in that age did sin is not to be ruled out; but all this is the kind of speculation which men love to indulge in. The Bible does not tell us of these things but tells us clearly what we need to know about the present situation, which is that there are no sinful angels; all angels are totally obedient to God.

The temptation here is set up as typical of every temptation. The essential desire is to play God, and to think that God somehow is holding cards close to His chest that He doesn't want us to see, that He is in a sense mean, trying to stop us enjoy ourselves. Perhaps all sin is a form of playing God, whereas Phil. 2 alludes here in saying that by contrast, the Lord Jesus did not even consider grasping such equality with God. The desire to experience "good and evil" is what makes so much fiction and entertainment so attractive to us; it is a vicarious experience ['knowledge'] of good and evil. "Knowing" is often a Hebraism for 'experience'. The idea is not that the woman would receive theoretical knowledge of what was right and wrong. She could experience good and evil, so she thought, in a way which was forbidden. This desire for forbidden experience, or experience beyond our ability to cope with, is what drives so much human lust and misbehaviour. The experience we can cope with has been given to us by God. The serpent implied that by eating the fruit, they would know good and evil; whereas they didn't know good and evil. But they did know good and evil in the sense that they had been given a choice of obedience or disobedience. This

confirms the suggestion that 'knowing' refers more to experience.

'God knows... that you will know good and evil' is a play upon the word "knows", twice repeated. The idea is that God doesn't want you to share His knowledge / experience. Again, God is presented as unreasonable. God does indeed want to share Himself and His nature with us; but we must be educated and prepared for this. The essence of all temptation is to want to snatch it right now, to take the crown without the race or the cross. Hence Phil. 2 alludes to all this, in saying that *instead* of grasping such equality with God, the Lord died on the cross. We all think we can handle such experience right now; the primitive and inappropriate desires of a child actually continue throughout human life, just in different forms.

3:6 *When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes-*

This was true of all the trees; they were all "Pleasant to the sight, and good for food" (Gen. 2:9). Again we see an insight into human psychology- that which tempts us is in fact only so unique in our perception. More rationally observed, it is no better than anything else. A house, car, illicit relationship or gadget becomes obsessively attractive not because it is in fact unique, but because this is how we perceive it. They had been told to "eat, eat!" of the trees; had they obeyed this, then this particular tree would not have seemed so attractive. We note the reversal of the order from "pleasant to the sight, and good for food" to "good for

food and a delight to the eyes". How did she realize the tree was good for food? Presumably because the serpent had eaten from it, yet had not died. Practicing sin without apparently experiencing consequences is one of the most powerful advertisments for sin.

And that the tree was to be desired to make one wise- We naturally enquire how she realized all this by merely looking at the tree. Surely there was no visual evidence of all these things. This leads to the suggestion that the serpent was implying that he had eaten of the tree, and had not died. The command not to eat of it was specifically to Adam and Eve.

Pride is the root of our desire for knowledge / experience. The later command not to covet what looks good is very much rooted in a warning not to commit Eve's sin of seeing the fruit and yielding to temptation (Ex. 20:17 = Gen. 3:6). 1 Jn. 2:16 surely alludes here, demonstrating again that this is the archetypical temptation, the essence of every human temptation; for like Eve, all men "would be wise" (Job 11:12): "For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh ["good for food"] and the lust of the eyes ["a delight to the eyes"] and the vain glory of life ["to be desired to make one wise"], is not of the Father but is of the world". The last of the three parallels is especially instructive. Her desire to be wise was in fact the vain glory of life. Her desire for knowledge / experience was related to pride, "vain glory". Babylon and Tyre are presented as the corporate embodiment of all these things; their desire for wisdom and their

pride are paralleled in the prophetic condemnations of them (Is. 47:10; Ez. 28:5,7,17).

We have here exhibited the simple fact that desire of itself may be natural; but it is not therefore acceptable to indulge the desire. It is axiomatic that desire is natural; but Eve was called to self control, to not simply do what was her desire. This may sound obvious, but increasingly we are bombarded with the idea that whatever may feel natural is therefore legitimate to fulfil. But the Godly way of life is different, radically so.

It seems that God punishes sin in a way which is appropriate to the sin. Consider how David so often asks God to take the wicked in their own snare- and how often this happens. The punishment of Adam and Eve was appropriate to the sins they committed. What Adam wasn't bothered to do, i.e. have intercourse with his woman, became the very thing which now every fallen man will sell his soul for. They ate the tree of *knowledge*, they *knew* they were naked, and then Adam *knew* Eve (Gen. 4:1); this chain of connection certainly suggests that sexual desire, whilst not wrong in itself, was part of the result of eating the tree. There is an artless poetic justice and appropriacy in this which seems simply Divine. What they couldn't be bothered to do became the very thing which has probably generated more sin and desire to do than anything else. Adam was to rule over Eve as a result of the fall- the very thing he wasn't bothered to do. Eve's punishment was that her desire was for her husband- perhaps suggesting that she too had no

desire for Adam sexually, and therefore was willing to delay obedience to the command to multiply. They were both driven out of the garden- perhaps reflecting how they should have left the garden in obedience to God's command to go out and subdue the natural creation to themselves. Because Adam wasn't bothered to do this, even when it was within his power, therefore nature was given a special power against man which he would never be able to overcome, and which would eventually defeat him (Gen. 3:17-19). This all shows the logic of obedience; we will be made to pay the price of obedience even if we disobey- therefore it is logical to obey. Note in this context that the Hebrew behind "Desirable to gain understanding" in Gen. 3:6 "can also be translated, without notable alteration, as "desirable in order to become childless"" (H. Reckons, *Israel's Concept of the Beginning: The Theology of Genesis 1-3* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1964) p. 270)- suggesting they didn't want to have children, they didn't want to obey the command to multiply. And therefore the curse was that they would indeed have children and suffer in doing so.

The frequent command "You shall not covet" (Ex. 20:17 etc.) uses the same Hebrew word translated "desire" when we read of how Eve "desired" the fruit (Gen. 3:6); yet Israel "desired" the wrong fruit (Is. 1:29). As Eve saw the fruit and fell for it, so the people of Reuben and Gad saw the land East of Jordan and imagined how good it would be to have it, despite having been given 'all the land' West of Jordan to

enjoy [cp. Adam and Eve's dominion in Eden] (Num. 32:1,2,7). In all these allusions [and they exist in almost every chapter of the Bible] we are being shown how human sin is a repetition in essence of that of our first parents. The insistent emphasis is that we should rise above and *not* be like them. And yet this call for personal effort and struggle with ourselves in order to overcome sin is muted and misplaced by all the stress upon a supposed Devil tempting Eve, pushing the blame onto him, and thereby de-emphasizing our role in overcoming sin within ourselves. And so we see so many loud-mouthed condemners of the Devil totally not 'getting it' about the need for personal self-control and spiritual mindedness in daily life and private character.

What were the motives of Adam and Eve for sinning, for accepting the serpent's suggestion? Considering this can help open a window onto the question of the *origin* of Adam's sin. They were attracted by the idea of "knowing good and evil". But this phrase is elsewhere used in the Bible about how an adult 'knows good and evil', but a child can't (Dt. 1:39; 2 Sam. 19:35; Is. 7:16). Adam and Eve were immature; like children, they wished to 'grow up', they resented the restraints which their immaturity required them to be under; they wanted, just as children want, to be the all-knowing adults / mature people whom they had seen the Elohim as. As children long to escape from what they see as meaningless and onerous restrictions, whilst having no idea what this would really mean in practice and how un-free it would

really be- so Adam and Eve were attracted by the idea of having the knowledge of good and evil just for the bite of the forbidden fruit. I find this a perfectly understandable explanation of the *motive* for Adam and Eve's sin. It seems a quite imaginable exercise of the freedom of choice and behaviour which God had given them. There is no hint that 'Satan made them do it', or that they were 'possessed' by some sinful spirit. They did just what we so often do- misused, wrongly exercised, their freewill and desired that which was inappropriate. Simple as that. There's no need to bring in an external Satan figure to explain what happened.

She took of its fruit, and ate; and she gave some to her husband with her, and he ate- The focus of the camera is zoomed in close up upon the couple and their eating. This sin is that of every man. In this sense, we all sinned "in Adam" (Rom. 5:12 Gk.) and therefore "in Adam all die" (1 Cor. 15:22). We are not unjustly suffering; for each of our sins was a result of succumbing to the same essential temptations as Adam did. Even if we didn't sin "after the similitude" of Adam's sin, we have done so in essence (Rom. 5:14). We would have done the same if we were there; as our own history of sin and weakness makes clear. Eve was deceived; but Adam was not deceived (1 Tim. 2:14); yet they both suffered punishment. This opens a window onto the question of whether people are innocent before God if they sin as a result of having been deceived. Sin is sin, and therefore sins of ignorance had to be repented of and atoned for under the Mosaic law. Adam put up no resistance; he didn't

remind Eve of the law. Eve believed the lies of the serpent; Adam just "did it". Both received appropriate judgment. Adam may have reasoned that Eve had eaten the fruit and not died; therefore God's word was not sure. In this case, he would have failed to give due weight and detailed reflection to God's word; for the death penalty was to be in the day they ate of it. Perhaps his conception of days was limited, if this happened on the first day of the new world.

The beast systems, as Babylon and Assyria before them, were false Kingdoms of God. The beast has the power to give *pneuma* to the image / body of the first beast (Rev. 13:15)- an evident mimicry of God's creation of Adam. They appear to offer, here and now, the things of the Kingdom, and the fleshly-minded are persuaded by them. This is all playing out the drama of Eden again; the serpent offered equality with God, the wisdom of God, when it was actually the wisdom of the serpent. Adam and Eve grasped for what was offered, unlike the Lord Jesus, who refused to grasp at equality with God (Phil. 2 is full of allusion to the events of Gen. 3). What happened in Eden is in essence the epitome, the prototype of all temptation and sin (1 Jn. 2:16 = Gen. 3:6). Every one of our temptations has an element of this; we are tempted to grasp for what looks like the Kingdom here and now. Pentecostals are an evident example of this; they think they can obtain the full healing and physical ecstasy of the future Kingdom here and now. And on a more common level, there are many of us who reach out for the supposed fulfilment of hobbies,

the supposed peace and 'security' of a nice home and bank balance, when these things are actually a false fulfilment, peace and security, the peace and security of Satan's Kingdom which is a counterfeit of the spiritual fulfilment, peace and security of Christ's Kingdom.

I suggested that the serpent had eaten of the tree and thus became an encouragement to Eve to sin without apparent consequence. Eve's eating of the fruit was therefore likewise a great temptation to Adam to do so. This is how sin spreads in society, and how individuals give in to temptation. They see others giving in, and apparently not experiencing bad consequence but rather enjoyment. All of this should remind us that we are called in Christ to the most extreme individualism known to man; to stand with our backs to the world, if need be. To remember that the wages of sin really will be death. Because they are doing it, we must not. Because of our loyalty and relationship to the Father and Son. Yet we go astray "like sheep"; the Lord's death on the cross was neccessary to get us forgiveness for this "iniquity" of going astray like sheep (Is. 53:6). The herd instinct is so powerful within us. It is only utterly personal relationship with the Father and Son, in the power of the Spirit, that will empower us to bee the individuals we are intended to be.

3:7 *The eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked. They sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves loincloths-* Adam and Eve were "made naked" in the sense that they now realized their

nakedness. The idea is alluded to in Ex. 32:25 and Mic. 1:11, where we read that Israel were "made naked to their shame" by their idolatry. Again we see Adam's sin as being presented as Israel's sin; the punishment of being cast out of the *eretz* precisely matches that of Israel, who were cast out from the same geographical area. Is. 32:11 also alludes here- Judah are as a naked woman revealed as naked, who makes a loincloth for herself in shame. The fig being a symbol of Israel, we have here the hint that the religion of Israel alone could not cover sin; the blood of the lamb provided by God was needed.

Nakedness being revealed is a figure of judgment (Ez. 16:36,37). And yet we can pass beyond condemnation, through accepting the Divinely provided covering. The images here are used elsewhere of how nakedness can now be covered even in this life; Ex. 20:26; 28:42 has the priests covering their nakedness, Ez. 16:8; Hos. 2:9 speak of God covering Israel's nakedness; and we can now cover our nakedness and be unashamed before God (Rev. 3:18). The idea seems to be that in this life, we can be covered in Christ and therefore be unashamed before God; but ultimately we shall return to the situation in Eden, naked before God and unashamed. We will really believe that our sin is no longer a barrier between God and man; we can be ourselves, unashamedly so. And in Christ we know something of that even in this life.

3:8 *They heard the voice of Yahweh God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his*

wife hid themselves from the presence of Yahweh God among the trees of the garden- For *Presence,* see on Is. 63:9. Strictly, "the face". The idea is surely that they spoke with God face to face before the fall. Revelation concludes the Bible with the promise that we shall [again] see Him face to face when Eden is restored on earth. The cool or evening of the day could well mean that this was the first day of their lives. If the fall happened soon after creation, this would explain why there was no fruit on the tree of life, which according to Revelation bore its fruit every month; and also why Adam and Eve had not yet gone forth and multiplied.

We note that God's presence or face is parallel with His voice. This continues a theme of the narrative; creation was by a word, and God's face is manifest in His word. It is before this that man experiences shame at his disobedience. This is not to elevate Bible study to the point of justification by intellectual prowess. But in our age, God's word and voice is in the Bible, as articulated through the word made flesh, His Son.

The frequent statements that God will hide Himself from Israel as a result of their condemnation (Dt. 31:17,18; Dt. 32:20; Is. 1:15 etc.) must be balanced against the fact that in reality, it is sinful man who hides himself from God (Is. 29:15; Jer. 23:24; Rev. 6:16). And here in Eden, in wrath God remembered mercy. He didn't hide Himself; instead He went out to encounter those who had hid themselves from Him. David complained that God was hiding His face from him (Ps. 13:1; Ps. 27:9; 30:7 etc.), which suggests that there is an element to which God's face

is not now generally hidden from those who live the spiritual life before Him. He hides His face from our sins (Ps. 51:9) if we are justified / counted right in His presence by faith. Part of the new covenant we have entered is that God will not hide His face from us *because* He has poured out His Spirit upon us (Ez. 39:29). The effects of the fall are being gradually undone in the lives of the believer, through the work of the Spirit. As God walked in the garden of Eden (Gen. 3:8), so He would walk in the midst of the camp of Israel in the wilderness (Dt. 23:15). Again we see the effects of Adam's personal fall being undone in the experience of God's faithful people, even in this life.

There are many allusions to Adam in the book of Job- Zophar in chapters 11 and 20 accuses Job of being as Adam, and Job denies this by way of allusion and specifically at Job 31:33. But then the whirlwind comes, and God speaks out of it to convict Job that he is indeed as Adam. The translation of *ruach hayom* in Gen. 3:8-11 as God walking "in the wind of the day" totally misses the point- the idea is of a theophany of *ruach*, Spirit wind, and Adam trying to hide and shelter among the trees from the blast of the wind. And out of that wind, God speaks and convicts him of his sin. This is what happened to Job as the wind approaches throughout Elihu's speeches, and then he is called to account and recognition that he is as Adam. The description of Behemoth in Job 40:15 is relevant, for this is the term used for the "cattle" above which the serpent was cursed (Gen. 3:14).

3:9 *But Yahweh God called to the man-*

The gathering is both then and now; our gathering into the net, our first response to the Gospel, is a gathering unto judgment. The Hebrew idea of 'calling' very often implies a calling to give account- e.g. God calling Adam to account (Gen. 3:9), Pharaoh calling Abram to account (Gen. 12:18), and Abimelech likewise (Gen. 20:9- other examples in Gen. 26:9,10; Dt. 25:8). Our calling to the Kingdom is effectively also a calling to give account. The point is, we must act now as men and women will do so on their way to judgment and the meeting with their ultimate destiny. Then we will not be bickering amongst ourselves or worrying about our worldly advantage; then, only one thing will matter. And so now, only one thing matters.

And said to him, Where are you?- This and the questions in Gen. 3:11 and Gen. 4:9 are obviously rhetorical; God knew the answers, but was seeking to elicit something from the couple through His questions. And that "something" was repentance; and it could be that we are invited to judge to what extent their repentance was complete. What score would we give them out of ten? What God wanted them to ask themselves was "What have I done?". But He asks Adam "*Where* are you?". We too need to stop and let ourselves be asked this question in the midst of life. For where we are is effectively who we are, and a function of what we have done. This is why the Hebrew word translated "where" is also rendered "how"- e.g. "*How* shall I pardon you for this?" (Jer. 5:7). God uses such rhetorical questions to try to

elicit repentance: where / what / who are you... (Gen. 4:9; Num. 22:9; Is. 39:3). And He arranges circumstance so that He asks us similar questions in the midst of life.

3:10 *The man said, I heard your voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked-*

The admission he was naked was tantamount to accepting that their fig leaf covering was inadequate, and that God's gaze saw through it. He had of course been naked before; even a blind man knows when he is naked. But Adam now felt that nakedness because he was ashamed of himself and his body.

And I hid myself- The rejected one talent man says 'I was afraid, and so I hid *my talent*'. Adam said: 'I was afraid, and I hid *myself*'. The talent God gave that man was therefore himself, his real self. To not use our talent, to not blossom from the experience of God's love and grace, is to not use ourselves, is to not be ourselves, the *real* self as God intended. Adam's fear and sense of shame is presented as being because of hearing God's voice, rather than simply at the physical presence of God. Again we see the supreme status of God's word. But like us so often, Adam laments and admits the consequence of his sin, rather than immediately confessing. In all this we see the frequent pattern of all sin and the slow, Divinely guided struggle towards repentance.

The Assyrians led Israel away into captivity [s.w. to make naked], "they discovered her nakedness" (Ez.

23:10), and yet in their sin Israel made themselves naked (2 Chron. 28:19 cp. Ex. 32:25; Gen. 3:10).

So many commentators have noted that Gen. 1-3 is one of the most misused and misunderstood sections of the whole Bible. But why? They give no significant explanation. I'd suggest it's because humanity [and that includes theologians and formulators of church doctrine] squirms awkwardly under the glaring beam of the simple record of human guilt. And therefore the serpent has been turned into a superhuman being that gets all the blame; and human sin has been minimized, at the expense of the plain meaning of the text. The whole structure of the Biblical narrative is concerned with the guilt and sin of the man and the woman; the snake isn't where the focus is. Von Rad, in one of the 20th century's most seminal commentaries on Genesis, understood this clearly: "In the narrator's mind, [the serpent] is scarcely an embodiment of a 'demonic' power and certainly not of Satan... the mention of the snake is almost secondary; in the 'temptation' by it the concern is with a completely unmythical process, presented in such a way because the narrator is obviously anxious to shift the problem as little as possible from man" (Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis* (London: S.C.M., 1966) p. 85). The record keeps using personal pronouns to lay the blame squarely with Adam: "*I* heard... *I* was afraid... *I* was naked; *I* hid... *I* ate... *I* ate" (Gen. 3:10-13; and compare Jonah's similar confession of sin in Jonah 4:1-3- Jonah appears to allude to Adam here). Nobody reading the Genesis record with an open

mind would surely see anything else but the blame being placed on humanity; as I have repeatedly stressed, the words 'Satan', 'Lucifer' and the idea of the serpent as a fallen Angel are simply not there in Genesis. They have to be 'read in' from presuppositions, which ultimately have their root in pagan myths.

3:11 *God said, Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?*- As noted on :9, these rhetorical questions were not for God's benefit. They were designed to elicit fuller repentance from Adam. The answer to "Who told you...?" was "I myself, because I ate the tree of the knowledge of good and evil". But Adam didn't give this answer, although God was seeking to elicit it. It was not the serpent who had told Adam that he was naked. It was Adam's own conscience, enlivened by the forbidden fruit. And so the loving Father's question pierced right through to Adam's conscience and innermost being. He works according to the same pattern in our lives too, arranging situations which elicit such questions and realizations within us. The required answer to the second question was obviously "Yes, and I am very sorry". We are surely being invited to grade the extent of Adam's repentance, in order to more quickly, openly, transparently and fully accept our own failures, and repent as required.

3:12 *The man said, The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate*- See on Gen. 2:17. As noted on :11, the man did not immediately

come to total repentance. He states mitigating factors first, with the implication that God was somehow responsible for his sin because He had given Eve to Adam- and she had led him astray. We are left to conclude that we cannot blame sin on situation, nor on others. Ultimately, there is no situational ethic. We stand responsible for our sins before God, and we need to simply accept that. God makes no comment upon Adam's words; exactly because we are invited by the narrative to assess them. The Lord alludes to Adam's words in Jn. 17:11,24, where He describes His bride likewise as those whom God gave Him- but He died for her, the very opposite of what Adam did, allowing her to lead him to death.

3:13 *Yahweh God said to the woman, What is this you have done?-* The question is broad, rather than a specific questioning as to whether the woman had eaten the fruit. What she had "done" was not only to eat the fruit, but to give it to Adam. But she at this stage doesn't respond to that aspect of the question; she wishes to blame everything on the serpent. The question was rhetorical, a cue for her repentance. Her repentance, as it stands at this point, is evidently incomplete; the narrative encourages us to imagine her later reflections and fuller repentance.

The woman said, The serpent deceived me, and I ate- As noted on :12, we are invited to assess the level of repentance here. Like Adam, the woman blames her sin on mitigating factors, rather than simply accepting it and repenting. She blames circumstance, as we all often do; with the implication that it's God's fault as

He allowed the circumstance. Whereas in the parable of the vineyard in Is. 5, God teaches that He has done all that is possible in order to give us the ideal environment in which to bring forth spiritual fruit. We are left to assume they repented more fully in due course; the question is left open ended in order to elicit our own reflections and introspection about the nature and extent of our own repentance. For their sin is that of every man and woman. Paul in Rom. 7:11 speaking of how sin "deceived me... slew me" is alluding here: "The serpent deceived me, and I ate". In Romans chapter 5 (and see on Rom. 3:23), Paul has repeatedly taught that Adam is everyman. And now he includes himself in this, by applying the language of the failure in Eden to himself. Likewise his finding the commandment ordained to life becoming the means of death (Rom. 7:10,13) may reference Gen. 2:16,17. Yet whilst Adam is indeed everyman to Paul, Adam was perceived as Israel in much Rabbinic writing; and Paul saw himself as the personification and epitome of Israel (see on Rom. 7:9,10). The Greek translated "deceived" really means to seduce. How did sin seduce Paul through or by means of the Law of Moses? Surely in the sense that Paul fell for the temptation to justify himself by means of obedience to that Law. The false prophets of Judaism deceived the people as the serpent did to Eve (s.w. Jer. 29:8; 37:9). But because he didn't keep the Law perfectly, he was therefore condemned to death, and in a sense, received the sentence- and in that sense sin by means of the Law "slew" Paul. The only other time the word for 'deceived / seduced' occurs in Romans is in the

practical section, which in this case again alludes to this doctrinal section: "[the Judaizers] by fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple", as the serpent deceived Eve (2 Cor. 11:3 s.w.). Just as Paul deceived himself, fell to the seductive idea that we can be justified by works of obedience to the Law, so the Judaizers were teaching the same. By so doing, they were sin personified- they were doing the work of "sin"- using the attraction of obedience to a legal code to seduce believers into a position where they were in fact going to be condemned to death- because under that sphere, there can be no justification, no declaring right, for those who have in even one sense infringed Divine law. It's all a complicated yet powerful way of saying that we simply must not and cannot be in the sphere of relying upon works; which means we have to just accept the gift of salvation by grace, much as all within us cries out against it.

Paul's autobiographical passage in Romans 7, where he describes his sinfulness and the results of it, is actually expressed in terms of Adam's fall in Eden. So many phrases which he uses are lifted out of the LXX of Genesis 3. The evident examples are: "I would never have known what it is to covet, if the Law had not said, You must not covet [cp. Eve coveting the fruit]... when the command came... sin [cp. the serpent] beguiled me... to kill me... sin resulted in death for me by making use of this good thing... who will rescue me now from the body of death?". Adam is presented to us as 'every man'; and so Paul applies this

to himself, and yet through the allusion to 'every man' in Adam, he sets himself up also as our example.

2 Cor.11:2 shows Paul likening Corinth ecclesia to the guileless Eve in Eden, not yet having sinned, all innocence and uncorrupted beauty. And yet he saw himself as the Eve who had been deceived and punished by death (Rom. 7:11,13 = Gen. 2:17; 3:13); but he saw them as the Eve who had not yet sinned. This was no literary trick of the tail; he genuinely felt and saw them as better than himself to be- such was the depth of his appreciation of his own failures.

The Hebrew for "serpent" can suggest 'a whisperer'. It was the whisper of suggestion which was the deceit; and such whispering, within our minds, is the basis for our own temptations.

3:14 *Yahweh God said to the serpent, Because you have done this, you are cursed above all livestock, and above every animal of the field. On your belly you shall go, and you shall eat dust all the days of your life-* There were no rhetorical questions to the serpent, because God was not seeking to lead the serpent to repentance; it was an amoral creature. The Hebrew *min* translated "above" is also translated "among"; the radical idea is "a part of... out of". The same word is found in Ex. 9:20: "He that feared Yahweh *among* the servants of Pharaoh"; Ex. 28:1 "Take Aaron and his sons... from *among* the children of Israel"; Lev. 19:8:"That person shall be cut off from *among* his people". Both context and the meaning of the word surely require that the serpent was one of, amongst, the livestock and

animals of the field- it was an animal. Snakes today can hardly be described as "livestock"- suggesting that the serpent was not a snake as we now know the species.

It's tempting to think that there must be a connection between the serpent and snakes we see today. But snakes do not eat dust; and in any case, there are many varieties of snake. Yet Genesis 3 speaks of a specific creature. My suggestion therefore is that the serpent was a literal animal, on legs, which could speak, or was given the power of speech, like Balaam's donkey. Its punishment was to crawl on its belly and eat dust. It's hard to describe snakes as 'crawling', which implies legs or paws; and they don't eat dust. The serpent was part of the environment required to bring about the testing of Adam and Eve. But its punishment was to crawl and eat dust- and then, this creature died and is now extinct. That is why we continue to read of the man and woman in the record, but nothing more is said about the creature known as the serpent. It died and was never any more, foretelling how the final conflict with the serpent's "seed" or spiritual descendant would likewise end in total and permanent destruction. In the description of Eden restored in Isaiah 65, we encounter the cryptic comment: "And dust shall be the serpent's food" (Is. 65:25), as if to say that although Eden will be restored, the judgment upon the serpent was permanent, and there will be no serpent in the restored Eden. It did not reproduce, in contrast to the curse on the woman, which allowed for reproduction.

The comment that he was to eat dust "all the days of your life" could suggest that this creature would eat dust and then die- and never reproduce. The "seed" of the serpent refers to those having the characteristics of the historical serpent.

Phil. 3:19 has a number of allusions to the serpent, the conflict predicted in Gen. 3:15 and the fall of Adam in Eden: "*Enemies* [cp. 'enmity'] of the cross of Christ. Their end is *destruction*, their god is the *belly* (s.w. Gen. 3:14 LXX), they glory in their *shame*". The context speaks of the Judaizers- they are presented, by way of allusion, as the serpent.

3:15 *I will put enmity between you and the woman-* In contrast to the friendship between Eve and the serpent. I have argued that whilst the serpent in Eden was a literal serpent, it represents the conflict within the *eretz* between God's people and sin / temptation / idol worship etc. Ez. 25:15 and Ez. 35:5 use the same word to speak of "the old enmity" between Israel and the other inhabitants of the land. This old enmity continues to this day. The 'oldness' of it refers surely to the enmity in Eden, between the serpent and the children of God. In the first instance, we can imagine some undefined particular conflict between the serpent and Eve. Perhaps she particularly hated the creature, and fought with it until she killed it by a blow to the head, after it had initially wounded her heal. This scenario would be absolutely psychologically likely; and the serpent would likewise have hated Eve. In the bigger picture, Eve's conflict with the serpent speaks of the struggle unto death

between her great descendant, the Lord Jesus, and all the things represented by the serpent- the temptations, sins, wicked persons, deceivers who have all the family likeness of that creature.

Gen. 3:15 prophesies that God *will* put hostility between the serpent and the woman. This is not what we would expect to hear if this were indeed speaking of a pre-existent Christ and Satan. According to the orthodox understanding, the enmity between them occurred in Heaven *before* Satan supposedly came down to earth. Notice, too, that according to the Biblical record in Gen. 3:15 it is God who created this hostility, whereas the common view implies it was Satan's hatred of God which was the original enmity.

And between your offspring and her offspring- Most usages of *zera*, "offspring" or "seed", when referring to a singular individual, refer to an immediate offspring rather than to some far off descendant. Perhaps the promise of salvation could have potentially been fulfilled in a son of Eve, but this didn't happen, the required conditions weren't met [whatever they were], and so the fulfilment of the promise was deferred until the Lord Jesus. This kind of promise and then deferment and reapplication of fulfilment is common in the Bible's prophecies. In Hebrew thought, to be "a son of" something or someone means to be identified with that entity, and to have its characteristics. If indeed the offspring of the woman is the Lord Jesus, we are surely to read Eve ultimately in a positive light; despite her sin and the slowness we have noted in her repentance. That initial inadequacy

in repentance was presumably replaced by not only full repentance, but also a spiritually minded desire to put right the damage she had done; not least by perhaps literally fighting the serpent unto its death. It was this characteristic which was seen so fully in the Lord Jesus.

He will bruise your head, and you will bruise his heel- There's something of a wager here. Either the man kills the snake by hitting it on the head, or the snake will bite the man's heel. He has to kill it outright, first time. See article "David and Goliath" in 1 Sam. 17. Rom. 16:20 implies that all Christian believers have a part in this victory bruise over the serpent, in finality at the last day. In the Lord's death, we see Judaism as the "generation of vipers" (Mt. 23:33), and the Lord as the offspring of the woman overcoming them and their particular manifestation of the serpent. "His heel" and not "their heel" suggests that the offspring of the woman refers to a singular individual, the Lord Jesus. It refers to all believers insofar as they are in Him.

The statement here is that the serpent's head would be bruised, whilst he would bruise the heel of the male seed of the woman. This is part of the curse upon the serpent. The serpent is different from "snakes" generally. It was a specifically created being, which could talk and which stood on legs. It was now cursed to crawl on its belly and eat dust [something snakes don't do]. It would only be able to bruise the heel of the man who crushed its head. It was not able to stand up higher to attack any other part of the man's

body. The serpent came to an end; because a son of the woman, perhaps literally Abel, crushed it to death with a blow to its head. In the fight, the serpent bruised his heel, but with no fatal effect. The idea was that man would finally overcome sin. And this is the good news. Hence Abel is warned that sin was crouching at the door, but he could have mastery over it, as Abel had done (Gen. 4:9). The seed of the woman was the Lord Jesus, and that of the serpent is sin. He won the victory at the cross, with His death being only a temporary wound. And through this, all the descendants of the woman would win the fight. In this life, we fail- temporarily. As Paul laments in Rom. 7. But the comfort is that man shall ultimately win the battle against sin. But what's important is to be part of the fight, to struggle against sin, to feel the conflict. Rather than to be like the unspiritual mass of humanity who have no sense of personal struggle against sin.

The Lord was beaten up at least three times: by the Jewish guards, by Herod's men and by the Roman soldiers. In a literal sense He was bruised for our iniquities, and chastised for us to obtain the peace of sin forgiven (Is. 53:5). And the Father surely foresaw all this back in Gen. 3:15, where the promised seed was to be *bruised*.

We have so often over-reacted against others' error to the extent that we ourselves almost fall into error. A classic example of this is in our perception of Mary. We all tend to be children, and therefore victims, of reaction. Our recoil so often blinds us to some aspects

of value in the things we reject. Over reaction against Roman Catholic abuses can lead us to almost overlook the woman who was and is to be blessed and honoured above all women; the woman whose genes and parenting contributed to the sinless Son of God. Gen. 3:15, the classic prophecy of the birth of Jesus, is actually a specific prophecy of Mary *the* woman who would give birth to the Lord. It was not to be merely " *a* woman" but the seed of a specific woman, the Hebrew implies- *the* woman, i.e. Mary. Her spiritual perception is really something to be marvelled at, bearing in mind it was developed and articulated in a teenager who was likely illiterate. All this said, Elisabeth Fiorenza sums up the other side of the reality of Mary: "The [correct image of the] young woman and teenage mother Miriam of Nazareth, probably not more than twelve or thirteen years old, pregnant, frightened and single... can subvert the tales of mariological fantasy and cultural femininity. In the center of the Christian story stands not the lovely 'white lady' of artistic and popular imagination, kneeling in adoration before her son. Rather it is the young pregnant woman living in occupied territory and struggling against victimization and for survival and dignity. It is she who holds out the offer of untold possibilities for... christology and theology" (Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, *Jesus- Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet: Critical Issues In Feminist Theology* (New York: Continuum, 1994) p. 187).

The mutual antagonism between the two groups of travellers in Proverbs is rooted in the opposition

between snake and woman in Gen. 3:15: "He that is upright in the way is abomination to the wicked" (Proverbs 29:27).

Gen. 3:15 clearly prophesies the hope of redemption from human sin, through the descendant of the woman [the Lord Jesus Christ]. The pagan myths had no such concept of salvation from sin. Sin against the gods could hasten death and obedience to them could prolong life, but there was no hope of real forgiveness of sin. And therefore there was no hope of eternity in a promised land such as was preached to Abraham in later sections of Genesis and which was developed as a golden thread throughout the entire Bible, namely the good news of the future Kingdom of God on earth. Even a superman like Gilgamesh had to face the day of death, "the unsparing death". The hope of the resurrection of the human body implied in the promises to the Jewish patriarchs in Genesis and made explicit in later Scripture was simply unknown in the pagan myths. It should be noted too that obedience to Yahweh wasn't seen as always, in every case, extending mortal life now; because from Genesis onwards, the Bible presents the perspective of God's future, eternal Kingdom as the time for reward and immortality. There are times when God takes away the righteous from the evil of this life (Is. 57:1- probably alluding to what God did to Joash, 2 Kings 22:20 cp. 23:29). There are other Biblical instances where the wicked have long life and prosperity in this world. This is because the Bible presents the ultimate judgment and reward of human life and faith as being

at the last day, and not right now. In Gilgamesh and the pagan myths, only some of the gods had hope of resurrection, e.g. Marduk (as mentioned in the Enuma Elish, Tablet 6:153,154). But humans certainly didn't. The implication of resurrection in the promises to Abraham, and the specific statements about it in the later Old Testament (e.g. Job 19:25-27; Dan. 12:2), thereby reflects a colossal value and importance attached by God to the human person. What the pagan myths reserved only for a few gods, Yahweh offers to every human being who believes in His promises.

It's noteworthy that the prophecy of Christ's crucifixion in Is. 53:10 underlines that it was *God* who 'bruised' Christ there. Gen. 3:15 says it was the seed of the serpent who bruised Christ. Conclusion: God worked through the seed of the serpent, God was [and is] totally in control. The serpent is therefore not a symbol of radical, free flying evil which is somehow outside of God's control, and which 'bruised' God's Son whilst God was powerless to stop His Son being bruised. Not at all. God was in control, even of the seed of the serpent. However we finally wish to interpret "the seed of the serpent", the simple fact is that God was in powerful control of it / him. Walter Brueggemann summarizes the situation: "The Old Testament itself offers none of the material through which Satan emerges as the popular figure of tempter and devil. The propensity of Christians to reach such a role in Genesis 3 is to project backward into the text from later texts" (Walter Brueggemann,

Reverberations of Faith: A Theological Handbook of Old Testament Themes (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), p. 188).

3:16 *To the woman He said, I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth. In pain you will bear children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you-* All judgment is appropriate to the sin which it is a response to. Perhaps Eve ought to have concentrated upon obeying the commandment to multiply, and she could have done so before the fall without pain. She likewise ought to have had more desire to support Adam in his mission and work in God's garden; but instead she desired the serpent's rulership rather than her husband's. And so she was punished by losing the psychological independence which she had previously had. Childbirth had been possible before the fall; that was not the punishment. It was pain therein which was the punishment. Her husband was to have ruled over her in that she was designed to support him in her work; but now she was to have a desire towards him which would effectively rob her of the independence she had once enjoyed and abused. "Desire" is literally a reaching out towards; instead of putting forth her hand to reach out to the forbidden fruit, she would instead reach out towards getting a husband, which would result in him ruling over her.

The same Hebrew words for "desire" and "rule" occur in Gen. 4:16: "And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him" (AV). The referent in the context is unclear; it could be sin, or it could refer to Abel, whom Cain was jealous of. But the idea is

that whatever or whoever we desire ends up effectively ruling over us. Whatever is desired comes to dominate the desirer. This is not therefore a command for men to rule over their wives; rather is it an observation on the nature of things, stating that by reason of having a desire for a man, the woman thereby allows the man to ruler over her. And this is part of the curse.

3:17 *To Adam He said, Because you have listened to your wife's voice-* Eve is not recorded as having spoken. Our example is our voice; just as Peter says that the Christian wife can convert her unbelieving husband by her example, "without the word" (1 Pet. 3:1). The same phrase 'listen to... voice' is used in Gen. 3:10 "I heard Your voice". Maybe the emphasis is on "your wife's voice", rather than God's voice. Romans 5 describes Adam's failure in a number of parallel ways: transgression... sin... offence... *disobedience"* (Rom. 5:19). "Disobedience" translates a Greek word which is uncommon. Strong defines it as meaning 'inattention', coming from a root meaning 'to mishear'. It is the same word translated "neglect to hear" in Mt. 18:17. Adam's sin, his transgression, his offence was therefore not eating the fruit in itself; it was disobedience, neglecting to hear. That this neglecting to hear God's word seriously was at the root of his sin is perhaps reflected in God's judgment on him.

We note that the reasons given for judgment avoid stating the obvious: "Because you ate the fruit"

And have eaten of the tree, of which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat of it'- There is so often a

connection between sin and its punishment. The sin of eating (3:6,12) called forth a judgment which five times uses the word 'to eat' in 3:17-19. Clearly judgment is appropriate to the nature of the sin; the judgment is often to actually do the forbidden action.

Cursed is the ground for your sake- The same words are used about the cursing of the ground of *eretz* Israel because of Israel's disobedience, with associated cursing of the animal creation there (Dt. 28:18). This yet again confirms that the *eretz* in view is that of Israel rather than the whole planet. So we are not to imagine the Angels as it were smashing up the whole planet because Adam sinned. Rather, the paradise in Eden, the *eretz* whose preparation was described in Genesis 1, was again overrun by the vegetation and beasts of the surrounding world; just as happened in a moral sense when God's people went into captivity.

The classical view of the fall supposes that as Eve's teeth sunk into the fruit, the first sin was committed, and soon afterwards Adam followed suite, resulting in the curse falling upon humanity. But was the eating of the fruit in fact the first sin? If it was, then Eve sinned first. Straight away, the Bible-minded believer comes up with a problem: the New Testament unmistakably highlights Adam as the first sinner; by *his* transgression sin entered the world (Rom. 5:12). So sin was not in the world before *his* transgression. The ground was cursed for the sake of *Adam's* sin (Gen. 3:17). This all suggests that Eve wasn't the first sinner. The fact Eve was deceived into sinning doesn't mean she didn't sin (1 Tim. 2:14). She was punished for her

sin; and in any case, ignorance doesn't mean that sin doesn't count as sin (consider the need for offerings of ignorance under the Law). So, Eve sinned; but Adam was the first sinner, before *his* sin, sin had not entered the world. We must also remember that Eve was deceived by the serpent, and on account of this was "(implicated / involved) in the transgression" (1 Tim. 2:14). "The transgression" . Which transgression? Surely Adam's (Rom. 5:14); by listening to the snake she became implicated in Adam's sin. The implication is that "the transgression" was already there for her to become implicated in it by listening to the serpent. This is the very opposite to the idea of *Adam* being implicated in *Eve's* sin.

The record of Adam's sin and the resulting curse can seem simplistic; the punishment seems to far outweigh the crime, the colossal penalty appears out of proportion to the sin. And yet in that apparent lack of proportion is the very essence of the message-that sin, any sin, is really that serious. There can never again in our understanding be any such thing as a little sin, a breaking of God's law which is inconsequential. The more we reflect upon the deceptively simple record of Adam's sin, the more we perceive how Adam's choice is that of everyman in every sin; it was a choice between a total "yes" or a total "no" to God. The desire was to know "good and evil"; and this term is used as an idiom for "everything" (Gen. 24:50; 2 Sam. 14:17,20), the whole area in between good and evil is in this sense "everything" (cp. Gen. 31:24; 2 Sam. 13:22). Adam

and Eve were attracted by the possibility of experiencing everything, of having the total knowledge, the omniscience, which is with God alone. Their failure was more than simply eating a fruit; it involved rebellion and pride, a desire to be equal with God. It was *human* pride which clearly lead to the greatest fall imaginable; it was *man* who wanted to rise up to be like God. To fantasize about *Satan's* pride and fall is to tragically miss the entire point of the narrative. It seems that human religions have struggled by any means to wriggle out of the simple message- that human sin brought about the fall.

In toil you will eat of it all the days of your life- God had stated that Adam would surely die in *the day* he ate the fruit. He is made to suffer consequences for his sin, but God forgave him and did not slay him that day. He was told he must till the ground "all the *days*" [plural] of his life (Gen. 3:17)- reflecting how in wrath God remembered mercy and gave Adam many more days.

3:18 *It will yield thorns and thistles to you-* The terms occur together only in Hos. 10:8, speaking of judgment to come upon *eretz* Israel. Is. 32:13 speaks of thorns and briers coming upon the *eretz* of Israel. Again I suggest we are to see this curse as a de-creation of the paradise prepared within *eretz* Israel, rather than a global, blanket statement about changed conditions throughout the planet. As thorns and thistles came up in the land [and those plants are unknown in some parts of the planet], so they did

again when Israel were driven from their land (Gen. 3:18; Hos. 10:8). As Adam was punished by returning to dust, so Israel would be destroyed by dust (Dt. 28:24). The judgments on the *eretz* are therefore appropriate to *Israel* and do not, I suggest, generally describe things on a global scale. Literal thorns and thistles only afflict parts of the planet- they are appropriate to the land promised to Abraham but not to the tundra or the Polar regions.

Prov. 24:30,31 envisage a field overgrown with thorns and thistles as a result of a man's lack of wisdom and hard work. The way of wisdom is to accept the parameters within which we must now live; 2 Thess. 3:10 seems to argue that those who deny these parameters, not working yet expecting to eat, are not to be assisted. We are to work by wisdom to live as far as we can beyond the curse rather than glorifying it.

And you will eat the plants of the field- The command had been to "eat, eat!" of all the trees of the garden. Adam and Eve had presumably not been obedient to this, and therefore were attracted to the forbidden fruit. As noted on :17, the judgment was appropriate to the sin being judged, in this case, the sin of omission in not eating all the fruits of the trees. Now, they were to have to eat the fruit of the earth, in order to survive. Instead of eating the fruits of the trees within Eden, they were to eat the plants of "the field", the area outside Eden.

3:19 *By the sweat of your face will you eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken.*

For you are dust, and to dust you shall return- The picture is of a man sweating even as he eats his food. The command to cultivate the earth is therefore an invitation to working on ourselves to bring forth fruit. The simple truths taught here are resisted by almost every culture and religion; there is always the idea of conscious survival of death, and that somehow we are more than dust. It's possible to argue that many aspects of the judgments were specifically relevant to Adam and not necessarily to his posterity; for unlike Adam, we are not taken out of the earth at our conception or birth, we are not built from literal dust. And not all men work in agriculture for a living. And some "eat bread" without labouring for it (2 Thess. 3:10 alludes here), and many do not go on working their fields literally right up to their deaths, as implied here.

The Hebrew for "ground" is also translated "land". The idea of returning to the land is therefore laced with hope; the same words are used in Gen. 28:15 of Jacob returning to the land promised to Abraham. Likewise of "returning to the land You gave to their fathers" (1 Kings 8:34; Jer. 16:15; Jer. 42:12). It was to therefore be through death and resurrection that we can return to the ultimate land. In wrath He remembers mercy; throughout these judgments there is laced the hope and language of redemption. And in any situation we too are called to discipline others, there must be this same hope and working towards redemption.

The punishment of death which is introduced in early Genesis was created and executed by the same one

God who also created the world and the opportunity of eternal life. Gilgamesh and the pagan myths presented whole groups of gods as responsible for and presiding over death and the underworld, and another, separate, pantheon of gods as involved in creation. The Biblical emphasis upon one God is significant and unusual; it is Yahweh who sends man back to the dust from which He created him, and the same Yahweh who is in total control of *sheol* [the grave or underworld], and in a sense even present there (Dt. 32:22; Job 26:6; Ps. 139:7,8; Prov. 15:11; Am. 9:2). The state of the dead is defined in Genesis as a return to dust, and later Scripture emphasizes that this means unconsciousness, for the righteous merely a sleep in hope of bodily resurrection. This was radically different to the ideas espoused by the peoples amongst whom Israel travelled and lived. The dead dwell in silence (Ps. 94:17; 115:17) having returned to dust, and as such don't become disembodied spirit beings which were later understood as 'demons'. The whole concept of demons was in this sense not allowed to even develop in the minds of God's people by the definitions of death which Moses presented in the Pentateuch. The utter supremacy of God is taught in the Genesis record in a way it never is in any of the other myths.

Moses speaks of how God says to each dying man "Return, you children of men" (Ps. 90:3)- as if Moses understood to speak the words of Gen. 3:19 to every man who dies. Likewise the Lord spoke as if the Jews of His day ought to be *hearing* Moses and the

prophets speaking to them in urgent warning (Lk. 16:31); yet despite studying their words syallable by syllable, the Jews didn't in fact perceive it was a living word speaking to them directly and urgently.

3:20 *The man called his wife Eve, because she was the mother of all living-* If Adam only named his wife after the fall, we find yet another reason for thinking that the fall occurred very soon after creation. Everything in the surrounding context here is negative, and this probably is too. Adam first called his wife "woman", but after the fall he called her "Eve" because he recognized she was the mother of living ones. By doing so he seems to be recognizing his failure of not reproducing through her as God had originally asked him. The way they immediately produce a child after the fall is surely an expression of their repentance. The curse upon them involved bringing forth children, and this is effectively Adam's curse of Eve. Similarly he names his son "Abel", the Hebrew word usually translated "vanity", also in allusion to the curse. Read this way, we can more comfortably understand "the mother of all living" as not necessarily meaning that all human beings descended from Eve. For I have demonstrated at length that the focus of the Genesis creation is upon the situation in *eretz* Israel, and there is no attempt at explaining the origins of things on the level of the cosmos or the planet earth. When we read that Eve was "the mother of all living" (Gen. 3:20), this was in its primary application explaining to the Israelites in the wilderness where they ultimately originated from. Israel were to trace their first origins

and parents back not merely to Abraham, but to Adam and Eve. Num. 35:3 [Heb.] uses the term to describe the "all living" of the congregation of Israel; indeed, that Hebrew word translated "living" is translated "congregation", with reference to the congregation of Israel (Ps. 68:10; 74:19). Note how the Hebrew idea of 'all living' repeatedly occurs in the account of the flood (Gen. 6:19; 8:1,17 etc.)- which we will later suggest was a flood local to the area which the Israelites knew and which had been ultimately promised to Abraham. "All living" things which were taken into the ark therefore needn't refer to literally every living thing which lives upon the planet, but rather to those species which lived in the flooded area, the earth / land / *eretz* promised to Abraham. I've explained elsewhere that the garden of Eden can be understood as the land promised to Abraham, perhaps specifically being located around Jerusalem, the intended geographical focus for God's people; and that the term *eretz* can be used to describe the land promised to Abraham rather than the whole planet.

I suggested on :15 that there was a literal conflict between the woman and the serpent after the sin. This may have resulted in Eve hating the serpent and killing it. Adam maybe named her "life" or "mother of life" in recognition of how this had opened the way to restored life with God in the end.

3:21 *Yahweh God made coats of skins for Adam and for his wife, and clothed them-* Adam sinned, and God responded to that ineffable tragedy by giving him a

"coat" of skin. The same Hebrew word is used concerning the priestly robe. Here we see again the positive nature of our God. There was Adam, pining away in the shame of his sin; and God dresses him up like a priest, to go forward to gain forgiveness for him and his wife; and perhaps later on he used that same coat in coming to God to obtain further forgiveness for others through sacrifice. Rev. 13:8 speaks of the lamb slain from the foundation of the world; so presumably a lamb was slain, setting up the principle that without shedding of blood there is no remission of sins. And here we meet the idea of the imputed righteousness of the slain lamb (the Christ) being imputed to us. Note that "made" is the same word used of God's 'making' of things in the creation record of chapter 1. That creation was a 'making' from pre-existing material, rather than *ex nihilo*.

3:22 - see on Gen. 1:7,8

Yahweh God said, Behold, the man has become like one of us- One of a number of examples in Genesis of God being in internal dialogue and almost struggle towards a decision (Gen. 1:26; Gen. 6:3,7; Gen. 8:21,22; Gen. 11:6,7). It could refer to Angels, but it could equally be the Hebrew plural of majesty, whereby a plural is used for a singular being. In a sense, God allowed man to become like Him. This is a guarantee that He is just as capable of allowing us to be coming fully like Him in the promised transformation to the Divine nature at the last day.

Knowing good and evil- The Hebrew idea of 'knowing' effectively speaks of experience or relationship. The idea here is not so much that Adam and Eve now knew how to tell good from evil in moral terms, but rather that they would now experience good and evil. One simple implication is that God almighty has experience of evil; He is not separate from our sufferings nor is He unable to enter into them. And that feature of God was expressed in its ultimate term in His begetting a Son, who would suffer across the entire physical and psychological spectrum of human experience.

If we insist that the "us" refers to Angels, then we reflect that it was presumably in one of the previous creations that the Angels were developed. They have knowledge of good and evil, just as fallen man has. This could suggest that they too had the experience of temptation and choice between sin and obedience. Job speaks of the angels who were charged with folly as if this fact was well known (Job 4:18). John Thomas suggests that the "angels that sinned" in 2 Pet. 2:4 lived at this time. There is no doubt that this passage in Peter, and the parallel in Jude, has some reference to Korah's rebellion. However, there are many such warnings to God's people which combine reference to more than one historical event, and it could be the same here: as if to say, 'History repeats itself. The angels that sinned so long ago went through in principle the same process of apostasy as Korah's company, and you too are capable of falling from grace in the same basic way'.

Now, lest he reach out his hand, and also take of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever...- Here again in wrath God remembered mercy. To allow fallen humans to live eternally in that state would have been cruel. Again, judgment for sin still expresses God's grace and sensitivity toward the human condition.

3:23 *Therefore Yahweh God sent him out from the garden of Eden-* As noted on :22, the "therefore" means that the sending of Adam out of Eden was an act of grace, albeit shrouded in the experience of judgment. We note that the couple are addressed in Adam; "him" and not "them". This may explain why Adam is spoken of in Rom. 5:12 as the "one man" by whom sin entered the world, when in fact it was Eve who appears to have sinned first in chronological terms.

To cultivate the ground from which he was taken- Adam was made from that "ground" and was to return to it. But in his lifetime, he was "to cultivate" that ground. This suggests that human life is lived within the parameters of the curse, but throughout it, we are to cultivate that condition to produce fruit. Solomon makes the point that he who cultivates his ground shall have blessing, and this is the way of wisdom (Prov. 12:11; Prov. 28:19). Again we have the hint that accepting the parameters of our fallen condition, but working within them for fruit, is the way of wisdom and blessing. Indeed Jer. 27:11 speaks of cultivating the ground [the same words are used] within the *eretz* as the sign of blessing.

3:24 *So He drove out the man-* Just as Adam and Eve were exiled to the East, so Judah fled East of Jerusalem (Jer. 52:12-16) and then further East, to Babylon. Babylon [which is Babel] was built by men travelling East from Eden (Gen. 11:2). Again we see an identity between Eden and the land of Israel. The garden is not spoken of as being destroyed, suggesting that the hope of returning to Eden was always the ultimate plan God worked towards. The Hebrew for "drove out" is used of the Canaanite nations being driven out of the *eretz* (Ex. 23:28-31) by an Angel (Ex. 33:2; 34:11), and of Israel too being driven out of the same area (Ez. 36:5; Hos. 9:15). The language of driving out suggests reluctance on Adam's part; another indication that his response to his sin was not initially of an ideal quality. He excused himself, and then resisted the judgment which came. Instead of dying the very day he sinned, Adam was instead driven out of Eden. This seems to be an example of where God can change His mind and ameliorate His judgments, by grace alone, as He did with Nineveh. And He does so even when His grace isn't appreciated by those like Adam who are experiencing it.

And He placed Cherubs at the east of the garden of Eden, and the flame of a sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life- Eden, the trees of life and knowledge and the Cherubs are no longer around, and there is no record of their removal. We are therefore encouraged to see this entire situation as the creation account of chapter 1- a kind of vision, which is all the same to be treated as real and literal

enough, and yet which cannot be pushed to its final term as literalism. That is not the genre of the material.

It could be argued that the Cherubs were not Angels but some visual representation of Divine entities; on the basis that there was to be no image made of anything in heaven, and yet the pattern of cherubim are found in the tabernacle (Ex. 25:20) and the temple, and here we have what appear to be literal visual replicas, as were the winged figures over the mercy seat. But it has to be said that the visions of the cherubim and living creatures all seem to have Angelic associations. One of the clearest is that the cherubim were to keep "the way" to the tree of life (Gen. 3:24), whereas the keeping of the way is later said to be in the control of Angels- e.g. in Gen. 18:19 the Angels decide Abraham will keep "the way of the Lord", implying they were the ones guarding it; and in Ex. 32:8 the Angel talking with Moses on Sinai comments "They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them" (see too Dt. 9:10,12). But this is not to say the cherubim were themselves Angels. They appear to be identified here with the flaming sword, and we recall Ps. 104:4 "Who makes His angels spirits; His ministers a flaming fire".

Umberto Cassuto, as one of Judaism's most painstakingly detailed expositors of the Torah, has observed that the entities referred to in Genesis 1-3, such as the serpent, the cherubim etc., are spoken of in such a way that implies that Israel were familiar with the ideas. Cassuto notes the use of the definite article-

the cherubim, *the* flaming sword- when talking about things which have not been mentioned earlier in the record. He concludes that therefore these things "were already known to the Israelites. The implies that their story had been recounted in some ancient composition current among the people . The intention of Genesis was therefore to define these ideas correctly, to explain to Israel the truth about the things of which they had heard in very rambling and incorrect form in the various legends and epic stories they had encountered in Egypt and amongst the Canaanite tribes.

The Hebrew idea of 'placing' has the sense of tabernacling. Hence Vine: "At the east of the Garden of Eden, He caused to dwell in a tabernacle the Cherubim and the flaming sword". Both the wilderness tabernacle and the Jerusalem temple faced east. The idea was that Adam was being taught that there was a way back to Eden although in this life, Eden was unobtainable in its full sense. And by offering sacrifice and worshipping East of Eden, he was as we are- on the very brink of eternity and direct face to face fellowship with God. Perhaps the fire from the flaming sword devoured the sacrifices as a sign of acceptance. According to Ez. 1:10, the cherubim had faces, and this would explain why Cain lamented that he had been driven out from the faces [plural] (Gen. 4:14 Heb.). In our days we have no such visible sanctuary; but we can in Christ partake in some sense of the tree of life (Prov. 3:18), so certain is the offer and experience of the life eternal for the

believer today. We stand both in the tabernacle, and in some hazy sense even beyond it- in Christ.

According to Lk. 19:23, the Lord will shew the unworthy how they could have entered the Kingdom. This is after the pattern of rejected Adam and Eve having the way to the tree of life clearly shown to them after their rejection (Gen. 3:23,24). Again, notice how the judgment is for the education of those judged and those who witness it. He will shew them how they should have given their talent, the basic Gospel, to others, and therefore gained some interest.

Adam: The First Sinner

The classical view of the fall supposes that as Eve's teeth sunk into the fruit, the first sin was committed, and soon afterwards Adam followed suite, resulting in the curse falling upon humanity. What I want to discuss is whether the eating of the fruit was in fact the first sin. If it was, then Eve sinned first. Straight away, the Bible-minded believer comes up with a problem: the New Testament unmistakably highlights Adam as the first sinner; by *his* transgression sin entered the world (Rom. 5:12). So sin was not in the world before *his* transgression. The ground was cursed for the sake of *Adam's* sin (Gen. 3:17). This all suggests that Eve wasn't the first sinner. The fact Eve was deceived into sinning doesn't mean she didn't sin (1 Tim. 2:14). She was punished for her sin; and in any case, ignorance doesn't mean that sin doesn't count as sin (consider the need for offerings of ignorance under the Law). So, Eve sinned; but Adam

was the first sinner, before *his* sin, sin had not entered the world. We must also remember that Eve was deceived by the snake, and on account of this was "(implicated / involved) in the transgression" (1 Tim. 2:14). "The transgression". Which transgression? Surely Adam's (Rom. 5:14); by listening to the snake she became implicated in Adam's sin. The implication is that "the transgression" was already there for her to become implicated in it by listening to the serpent. This is the very opposite to the idea of *Adam* being implicated in *Eve's* sin.

So I want to suggest that in fact the eating of the fruit was not the first sin; it was the final physical consequence of a series of sins, spiritual weakness and sinful attitudes on Adam's part. They were mainly sins of omission rather than commission, and for this reason we tend to not notice them; just as we tend to treat our own sins of omission far less seriously than our sins of commission. What happened in Eden was that the garden was planted, Adam was placed in it, and commanded not to eat of the tree of knowledge. The animals are then brought before him for naming; then he is put into a deep sleep, and Eve is created. *Then* the very first command Adam and Eve jointly received was to have children, and go out into the whole earth (i.e. out of the Garden of Eden) and subdue it to themselves (Gen. 1:28). The implication is that this command was given as soon as Eve was created. There he was, lying down, with his wife beside him, "a help meet"; literally, 'an opposite one'. And they were commanded to produce seed, and then go

out of the garden and subdue the earth. It would have been obvious to him from his observation of the animals that his wife was physiologically and emotionally designed for him to produce seed by. She was designed to be his 'opposite one', and there she was, lying next to him. Gen. 2:24 implies that he should have cleaved to her and become one flesh by reason of the very way in which she was created out of him. And yet he evidently did not have intercourse with her, seeing that they failed to produce children until after the fall. If he had consummated his marriage with her, presumably she would have produced children (this deals a death blow to the fantasies of Adam and Eve having an idyllic sexual relationship in Eden before the fall). Paul saw Eve at the time of her temptation as a virgin (2 Cor. 11:2,3). Instead, Adam put off obedience to the command to multiply. There seems an allusion to this in 1 Cor. 7:5, where Paul says that married couples should come together in intercourse "lest Satan (cp. the serpent) tempt you for your incontinency". Depending how closely one reads Scripture, there may be here the suggestion that Paul saw Adam's mistake in Eden as not 'coming together' with his wife.

But Adam said something to Eve (as they lay there?). He alone had been commanded not to eat the tree of knowledge. Yet when Eve speaks to the serpent, it is evident that Adam had told her about it, but not very deeply. She speaks of "the tree that is in the midst of the garden" rather than "the tree of knowledge". She had been told by Adam that they must not even touch

it, even though this is not what God had told Adam (Gen. 2:16,17 cp. 3:2,3). So we are left with the idea that Adam turned to Eve and as it were wagged his finger at her and said 'Now you see that tree over there in the middle, *don't you even touch it* or else there'll be trouble, O.K.'. She didn't *understand*, he didn't *explain* that it was forbidden because it was the tree of knowledge, and so she was deceived into eating it- unlike Adam, who understood what he was doing (1 Tim. 2:14) (1). Adam's emphasis was on not *committing* the sin of eating the fruit; he said nothing to her about the need to multiply and subdue the earth.

The next we know, Adam and Eve have separated, she is talking to the snake, apparently indifferent to the command to *subdue* the animals, to be their superiors, rather than listen to them as if they actually had superior knowledge. When the snake questioned: "Yea, *hath* God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree..." (Gen. 3:1), Eve was in a weak position because Adam hadn't fully told her what God had said. Hence she was deceived, but Adam wasn't.

So, *why* didn't Adam tell her more clearly what God had said? I would suggest that he was disillusioned with the wife God gave him; he didn't have intercourse with her as he had been asked, he separated from her so that she was alone with the snake. "The woman, whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree..." (Gen. 3:12) seems to reflect more than a hint of resentment against Eve and God's provision of her. Not only was Adam disillusioned

with Eve, but he failed to really take God's word seriously. Romans 5 describes Adam's failure in a number of parallel ways: "transgression... sin... offence... *disobedience* (Rom. 5:19)". "Disobedience" translates a Greek word which is uncommon. Strong defines it as meaning 'inattention', coming from a root meaning 'to mishear'. It is the same word translated "neglect to hear" in Mt. 18:17. Adam's sin, his transgression, his offence was therefore not eating the fruit in itself; it was disobedience, neglecting to hear. That this neglecting to hear God's word seriously was at the root of his sin is perhaps reflected in God's judgment on him: "Because thou hast hearkened unto *the voice of thy wife*..." rather than *God's* voice (Gen. 3:17).

Adam's sin was therefore a neglecting to seriously hear God's word, a dissatisfaction with and effective rejection of his God-given wife, a selfish unwillingness to leave the garden of Eden and go out and subdue the earth (cp. our natural instincts), and a neglection of his duty to multiply children in God's image (cp. preaching and pastoral work). All these things were sins of omission; he may well have reasoned that he would get round to them later. All these wrong attitudes and sins of omission, apparently unnoticed and uncondemned, led to the final folly of eating the fruit: the first sin of commission. And how many of our more public sins are prefaced by a similar process? Truly Adam's sin was the epitome of all our sins. Romans 5 points an antithesis between Adam and Christ. Adam's one act of disobedience which cursed

us is set off against Christ's one act of righteousness which blessed us. Yet Christ's one act was not just His death; we are saved by His life too (Rom. 5:10). Christ lived a life of many acts of righteousness and refusal to omit any part of His duty, and crowned it with one public act of righteousness in His death. The implication is that Adam committed a series of disobediences which culminated in one public act of commission: he ate the fruit.

There are three lines of argument which confirm this picture of what happened in Eden which we have presented. Firstly, Adam and Eve were ashamed at their nakedness. Perhaps this was because they realized what they should have used their sexuality for. Eating the tree of knowledge gave them knowledge of good (i.e. they realized the good they should have done in having children) and also evil (the capacities of their sexual desire?). Adam first called his wife "woman", but after the fall he called her "Eve" because he recognized she was the mother of living ones (Gen. 3:20). By doing so he seems to be recognizing his failure of not reproducing through her as God had originally asked him. The way they immediately produce a child after the fall is surely an expression of their repentance.

Secondly, it seems that God punishes sin in a way which is appropriate to the sin. Consider how David so often asks God to take the wicked in their own snare- and how often this happens. The punishment of Adam and Eve was appropriate to the sins they committed. What Adam wasn't bothered to do, i.e.

have intercourse with his woman, became the very thing which now every fallen man will sell his soul for. They ate the tree of *knowledge*, they *knew* they were naked, and then Adam *knew* Eve (Gen. 4:1); this chain of connection certainly suggests that sexual desire, whilst not wrong in itself, was part of the result of eating the tree. There is an artless poetic justice and appropriacy in this which seems simply Divine. What they couldn't be bothered to do became the very thing which has probably generated more sin and desire to do than anything else. Adam was to rule over Eve as a result of the fall- the very thing he wasn't bothered to do. Eve's punishment was that her desire was for her husband- perhaps suggesting that she too had no desire for Adam sexually, and therefore was willing to delay obedience to the command to multiply. They were both driven out of the garden- perhaps reflecting how they should have left the garden in obedience to God's command to go out and subdue the natural creation to themselves. Because Adam wasn't bothered to do this, even when it was within his power, therefore nature was given a special power against man which he would never be able to overcome, and which would eventually defeat him (Gen. 3:17-19). This all shows the logic of obedience; we will be made to pay the price of obedience even if we disobey- therefore it is logical to obey.

Thirdly, there seems evidence that the eating of the fruit happened very soon after their creation. Eve hadn't seen the tree before the serpent pointed it out to her (Gen. 3:6); and consider that they could eat

of all the trees, but not of the tree of knowledge. But what about the tree of life? This wasn't forbidden, and yet had they eaten of it, they would have lived for ever. We are told that this tree brings forth fruit every month (Rev. 22:2); so presumably it had not fruited, implying the fall was within the first month after creation.

The practical outcome of what happened in Eden is that we are to see in Adam's sin an epitome of our essential weaknesses. And how accurate it is. His failure was principally due to sins of omission, of delaying to do God's will because it didn't take his fancy. Time and again Biblical history demonstrates that sins of silence and omission are just as fatal as sins of public, physical commission (e.g. Gen. 20:16; 38:10). To omit to hate evil is the same as to commit it (Ps. 36:4). Because David omitted to enforce the Law's requirements concerning the transport of the tabernacle, a man died. His commission of good didn't outweigh his omission here (1 Chron. 15:13). The Jews were condemned by the Lord for building the sepulchers of the prophets without erecting a placard stating that their fathers had killed them. We have a debt to preach to the world; we are their debtors, and yet this isn't how we often see it (Rom. 1:14). Israel sinned not only by worshipping idols but by thereby omitting to worship God as He required (1 Sam. 8:8). Adam stayed in the garden rather than go out to subdue the earth. Our equivalent is our spiritual selfishness, our refusal to look outside of ourselves into the world of others. Because things like

disinterest in preaching or inattention to subduing our animal instincts are sins of *omission* rather than commission, we too tend to overlook them. We effectively neglect to hear God's word, although like Adam we may make an appearance of half-heartedly teaching it to others. And even when we do this, like Adam we tend to focus on *avoidal of committing sin* rather than examining ourselves for the likelihood of *omission*, not least in our lack of spiritual *responsibility* for others. Because of his spiritual laziness, Adam's sin led Eve into deception and thereby sin, and brought suffering on untold billions. His sin is the epitome of ours. So let us really realize: none of us sins or is righteous unto ourselves. There are colossal ramifications of our every sin and our every act of righteousness on others.

Notes

(1) There are similarities in more conservative Christian groups; e.g. the father or husband who lays the law down about the need for wearing head coverings without *explaining* to his wife or daughter *why*.

GENESIS CHAPTER 4

4:1 *The man knew Eve his wife-* See on Gen. 3:6 *To be desired to make one wise.* The couple had been commanded to have children before the fall. Perhaps their sin of omission was appropriately judged by humanity being given such a strong desire for sexual experience, which is designed for procreation. What they couldn't be bothered to do now became the very thing humans are crazy to do at all costs. Or it could be that they sinned on their first day of life in the garden. For Adam only got around to naming Eve after the fall; and there was apparently no fruit on the tree of life, which according to Revelation bore its fruits every month.

She conceived, and gave birth to Cain- Think of what the Hebrew word "Cain" means- for he is alluded to by the Lord as the epitome of the "devil", the "murderer from the beginning", the archetypical sinner (Jn. 8:44- perhaps because Adam and Eve's sin was forgiven, whereas Cain was the first impenitent sinner). "Cain is defined on the basis of a double Hebrew etymology, as 'possession' (from *qana* = acquire) and 'envy' (from *qana* = be envious)" (Martin Hengel, *Property And Riches In The Early Church* (London: S.C.M., 1974) p. 1). Personal possession is almost- almost- inextricably linked with envy, and led to the lies and murder for which Cain was noted by the Lord. To have a strong sense of our personal 'possessions' will lead us into the same sins. Indeed, it's the epitome of 'the devil'. The naming of Cain would suggest a cynicism in Adam and Eve, although Eve is set up as the prototype for the Lord Jesus [as the seed of the woman] and Adam is the basis for the second Adam, the Lord Jesus. This could all suggest that they later repented more fully.

There is no direct linguistic connection between 'Cain' and 'Canaan', but there may well be a word play, as they sound similar. In this case, the Canaanites with whom Israel were to struggle were to be seen as the spiritual descendants of Cain. But Moses wrote Genesis, presumably during the 40 years wandering. He therefore wrote it in a context- of explaining things to Israel as they stumbled through that wilderness, wondering who they were, where they came from, where they were headed- and which of the myths about 'beginnings' they heard from the surrounding peoples were in fact true. The Israelites, for example, encountered the Kenites [Heb. *Qeni*], a wandering, nomadic tribe whom nobody wanted much to do with as they were perceived to be cursed (Gen. 15:19; Num. 24:21,22). Gen. 4 explains *why* they were like this- they were the descendants of Cain [Heb. *Qayin*], who was punished with an unsettled existence because of his sin.

And said, I have gotten a man with Yahweh's help- "Gotten" is really 'redeemed' or 'purchased', and is a play on the word 'Cain'. It could be that Eve hoped that their redemption was to be achieved through this child. Her disappointment in Cain would therefore look ahead to the failure of Israel and the Jewish system to bring about redemption, even if it were in some ways potentially possible through them. It has been suggested that the Hebrew here could be translated "A man, the Yahweh", Rotherham "I have gotten a man even Yahweh", as if she hoped to see Yahweh manifest in this man child. In this case, we would have another indication that Cain could have potentially been the Divinely provided seed and Saviour- but he messed up, because he failed to perceive the need for blood sacrifice to atone for sin. This again would confirm how Jn. 8:44 reads him as a prototype of Israel gone wrong. It could be that we see similar Messianic hopes in the naming of Seth, and also of Noah, whom

it was hoped would remove the curse upon the earth (Gen. 5:29 LXX). These early people clearly expected the coming of a Messianic man child, born of their seed. But they were disappointed at every turn- sharpening their need for the Son of God.

4:2 *Again she gave birth, to Cain's brother Abel. Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a cultivator of the ground-* Adam's curse had been to cultivate the ground; but Abel evidently saw beyond the parameters of the curse, and kept sheep instead. Just as we too can see and act beyond the parameters of our fallen condition, whilst still subject to it. Or this could be another evidence that the judgments pronounced upon Adam were directed at him personally, and not all his descendants were to experience every aspect of them. For not all get their living from the soil. Perhaps we can see in Cain's love of the ground a glorification of the curse; for "cultivator" translates a Hebrew word more commonly translated "servant" or "worshipper". It was by their choice of employment that the brothers were demonstrating their thinking about God. They knew animal sacrifice was required; and Abel concerned himself with this as a means of daily livelihood.

4:3 *As time passed-* This could refer to some appointed feast or sacrifice day approaching.

It happened that Cain brought an offering to Yahweh from the fruit of the ground- The fact his offering wasn't accepted suggests that animal sacrifice had already been instituted, and Cain was not simply judged as having offered a second best, but rather as having offered something distinctly unacceptable. He failed to perceive that he too was a sinner, needing remission of sins connected with the shedding of blood (Heb. 9:22). Perhaps he like many today chose to blame his weaknesses on his parents

and environment, rather than taking personal responsibility. Perhaps he lacked the humility to ask his brother for an animal.

4:4 *Abel also brought-* The Hebrew can mean that he also brought an animal, as if he also brought fruits of the earth as Cain had done. In this case, we see Cain representing the Judaist attitude of justification by works; whereas Abel recognized his sin, and the need for atonement through blood shedding. The works of his hands were offered as gratitude for that gracious forgiveness; whereas Cain thought that his own works alone were the basis for acceptability with God. This same difference in motivation for works is alive and well today.

Some of the firstborn of his flock and of its fat. Yahweh respected Abel and his offering- Many connections are visible in early Genesis to the later law of Moses (here to Num. 18:15-17). There were elements of that law in existence from these early days onwards. The respect of Yahweh was presumably shown by the fire from the cherubim / flaming sword consuming the sacrifice, as happened when Samson's parents offered (also Lev. 9:24; 1 Kings 18:38; 2 Chron. 7:1) . Yahweh's respect was to "Abel [personally] and his offering", as if a person's sacrifice is "them". We are not simply acceptable to God by making a few cursor movements on a screen, by purely internal ideas. There has to be sacrifice in some form. Heb. 11:4 says that God testified to Abel's sacrifices, because he was "righteous". But his shedding of blood was a recognition of his own unrighteousness. Belief in forgiveness therefore of itself makes us "righteous" in that if sin is forgiven, then righteousness is imputed to us.

4:5 *But He didn't respect Cain and his offering. Cain was very angry, and the expression on his face fell-* The 'faces' of the cherubim and flaming sword did not accept Cain's offering, God did not "look" ["respect"] toward it, and so Cain's face also fell. 1 Jn. 3:12 explains that Cain slew Abel because his own works

were "evil" and his brother's "righteous". To trust in our own works is "evil", and to confess our sin and throw ourselves in faith upon the Lord's shed blood is "righteous". We have here presented for all time the root of jealousy- a sense that another is closer to God than ourselves. This has been the deep motive for so much tension and evil between brethren. And we are warned against it right at the beginning of the Biblical record.

4:6 *Yahweh said to Cain, Why are you angry? Why has the expression of your face fallen?-* Another example of the questions in early Genesis being rhetorical. God was as ever, seeking repentance and reformation; and He provokes questions in our consciences for the same reason. We too need to probe the reasons for our anger. The question "Why are you angry?" often reveals our own inadequacies and depth failings. The instinctive reply is "Because he / she / you... did this or that". But the ultimate reason is because we have sinned or failed. All through these early chapters we see God's earnest passion for human repentance in the light of human sin, rather than judging or rejecting immediately.

4:7 *If you do well, will it not be lifted up?-* The Hebrew in this verse is hard to conclusively translate. I have earlier suggested that Cain assumed he was 'doing well', was justified by his own works, and had no sin to be atoned for. In this case, the idea would be: 'If you really are righteous by your own works, would your sacrifice not have been accepted?'. And so the paradox is that by confession of sin and recognition of weakness, we are righteous before God. Acceptable sacrifice, in whatever form, is based around recognition of sin and a rejection of all works-based thinking.

The LXX here is worthy of consideration. Due weight must be given to the fact that the New Testament nearly always quotes from the LXX rather than the Masoretic text [the Hebrew Old

Testament]; and when there is a difference between the two texts, the New Testament often quotes the LXX rather than the MT. The LXX here suggests what I have developed elsewhere in this exposition- that the sin of Cain was not in offering non-blood offerings, but in his attitude to his brother Abel: "Hast thou not sinned if thou hast brought it rightly, but not rightly divided it?". His offering was "right", but his attitude to his brother was wrong. It could even be that the Lord alludes here in saying that if we bring our gift to the altar and *there* remember that we have some issue with our brother- we are to sort that out first, as a priority, otherwise we will be offering unacceptably (Mt. 5:23,24).

If you don't do well, sin crouches at the door. Its desire is for you, but you are to rule over it- "Sin" could here be read as referring to a sin offering, an animal which God had sent to the door of the sanctuary, providing Cain with every opportunity now to do what was right. Likewise, the sacrificial lamb has been conveniently provided for all sinners and all those who think they can be justified by works. Just as the animal was made to come and crouch down at the entrance to the sanctuary, so God really does all possible to provide us with the way to acceptable fellowship with Him. Cain as the firstborn was the family priest. He apparently lost credibility when the fire came down and consumed Abel's offering, but not his. Immediately it seemed that Abel was going to usurp Cain as the family priest. Therefore he was told to offer the animal that was 'crouching' at the door of the meeting place, and then "unto thee shall be his [Abel's] desire, and thou shalt rule over him" (Gen. 4:7 AV). Surely this means that if Cain had openly recognized his mistake and then done the right thing, he would have risen to even higher levels of spiritual credibility with his younger brother.

The language of desire and rulership is taken directly from the curse upon Eve in relation to her desire for Adam.

"Sin" however can be read literally, as sin. There is a doctrine of a new creation in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17), whereby we really can be made new people. This is a ladder to reach to the stars. We can overcome sin, bad habits and thought patterns; sin may seek to get us, but we can rule over it. We may well think that we can't; the way was set, the die cast, the destiny mapped out, the genes determined; our background, upbringing, life path was as it was, and so we are as we are. But we *can* be made new. Sin need no longer have dominion over us, as Paul says in Romans 6; or as early Genesis puts it here, "you shall rule over [sin]". We are not debtors to sin (Rom. 8:12)- sin is not inevitable. But most people fail to see beyond the very limited horizons of both their nature and their immediate life. Earth's curvature means that we can't see beyond horizons; but we can, if we wish, *know* what is there.

John Steinbeck, who was hardly a Biblical Christian, was fascinated by the early chapters of Genesis, and his 1952 novel *East Of Eden* is evidently his commentary upon them. And he finds no place for a 'Satan' figure. Instead, he is struck by the comment to Cain that although sin crouches at the door, "do thou / thou mayest rule over him". Steinbeck concluded from this that victory over sin and the effects of Adam's sin is possible; and therefore we're not bound by some superhuman Satan figure, nor by an over-controlling Divine predestination to sin and failure. There's a passage in chapter 24 of the novel that bears quoting; I find it deeply inspirational, and another example of the practical import of the correct understanding of early Genesis: "It is easy out of laziness, out of weakness, to throw oneself onto the lap of the deity, saying, "I couldn't help it; the way was set". But think of the glory of the choice! That makes a man a man. A cat has no choice; a bee must make honey.

There's no godliness there... these verses are a history of mankind in any age or culture or race... this is a ladder to climb to the stars... it cuts the feet from under weakness and cowardliness and laziness... because "thou mayest" rule over sin". The practical inspiration ought to be evident; all further commentary is bathos.

4:8 *Cain said to Abel, his brother, Let's go into the field-* This may simply mean that they exited the sanctuary together. The whole record here is replete with connection to the sin of Adam and Eve, Divine questioning, and the subsequent punishment and banishment expressed in very similar terms. At this point, the parallel is that as the serpent "talked" to Eve, so Cain "said" or 'talked' with Abel- the same word is used (Gen. 3:1). We could therefore infer that perhaps the 'going into the field' was a going away from the sanctuary of God, and the talking together was about some form of rebellion against Divine commandment; to which Abel, unlike Adam and Eve, refused to listen.

It happened when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel, his brother, and killed him- The reason is supplied in 1 Jn. 3:12: "And why did he kill him? Because his works were evil and his brother's righteous". Spiritual jealousy is the root of murder, literal and symbolic. Jealousy of this sort is indeed as cruel as death. John's argument continues, presenting Cain as representative of "the world", the Jewish world in John's immediate context, and "whoever hates his brother" within the ecclesia.

4:9 *Yahweh said to Cain, Where is Abel, your brother? He said, I don't know. Am I my brother's keeper?-* Again, the questions in early Genesis are rhetorical, and this interrogation of Cain matches that of Adam and Eve ("Where are you?", Gen. 3:9); see on :8. Cain, the epitome of 'the devil' (Jn. 8:44), was characterized by the attitude that he was not his brother's keeper.

It was for this reason that his sacrifice wasn't accepted; it was not impossible for God to accept non-blood sacrifices (Num. 15:17-21; 18:12,13; Dt. 26:1-4). But the Lord Jesus perhaps offered a commentary on the incident when he said that our offering can only be accepted if we are first reconciled to our brother (Mt. 5:24). Cain's insistent lack of responsibility for his brother was the real sin, and therefore his sacrifice wasn't accepted by God. He wanted to serve God his own way, disregard his brother, justify his jealousy and disagreement with him... to be a private person. But this was the basis of his rejection.

"I don't know" may effectively mean "I know [him] not". Not recognizing our brethren as brethren is an age old sin. Cain as the older brother was indeed his brother's "keeper". Here we see another connection with the sin of Adam and Eve, noted on :8. They were to "keep" the garden (s.w., Gen. 2:15); and they didn't, instead they lusted after the forbidden fruit and Eve chatted with the serpent. We could infer that keeping his brother had been a commandment to Cain; it is this lack of responsibility which is the root of all hatred of our brethren. If care for them is paramount, then hatred is excluded. If they offer better than we do, then our basic sense of care for them will preclude all jealousy complexes.

4:10 *Yahweh said, What have you done?-* The Hebrew can as well be translated "Why" or "How". Again, God was seeking to probe Cain's conscience, to lead him to repentance. Mary's words to the Lord Jesus "Why have you done this to us?" are a rebuke- as if she implied that Jesus had sinned / done wrong by what He had done? Surely her faith in a sinless Messiah was now put to a brutal test by a domestic upset; just as, in barest essence, ours is too by such things. Yet notice that she frames those words in the LXX language of Gen. 3:14; 4:10; 1 Sam. 13:11. Those allusions

would imply that she felt Jesus had sinned; and yet at the same time as revealing that gross lack of perception, another part of her mind is still back in Scripture.

The voice of your brother's blood cries to Me from the ground- Perhaps the implication is that Cain had covered Abel's body and blood with soil, thinking God wouldn't notice it. The same idea is found in the souls beneath the altar, where the blood drained down to, crying for vengeance (Rev. 6:9). This again makes Cain the prototype of all persecutors of the Lord's true people, represented by Abel. Whilst there is no conscious survival of death, these metaphors indicate the degree to which the lives [blood] and record of dead believers live on within God. And their lives as it were cry to God for response from Him. The teaching of Rev. 6:9 is that this response will ultimately be at the Lord's return and the final judgment. The phrase 'crying unto the Lord' is frequently used for prayer. But prayer is perceived by God as far more than words verbalized; our life situation, our essential spirit, is read by Him as prayer. It matters not how good we are at verbalizing things; He reads our lives and spirits as a prayer to Him. And so God read the blood of Abel; and that of the Lord "speaks better things than that of Abel" (Heb. 12:24).

The blood of Christ is personified as a voice that speaks to us, a better word than the voice of Abel's blood which *cried out* it's message (Heb. 12:24 NIV; Gen. 4:10). This is after the pattern of how the commanding voice of Yahweh was heard above the blood sprinkled on "the atonement cover of the ark of the Testimony" (Num. 7:89 NIV). The blood of both old and new covenants enjoined the obedience of God's *word* upon those sprinkled with it (Heb. 9:19,20). The blood and God's word were linked. The blood of the dead believers in Christ likewise cries out from under the altar, demanding vengeance on this

world: on the Catholic, Protestant, Babylonian, Roman, Nazi, Soviet systems that slew them for their faith (Rev. 6:9). To God, their blood is a voice, just as real as the voice of Abel, which cried out (in a figure) for judgment against Cain (Gen. 4:10).

4:11 *Now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand-* The idea may be that the ground cursed Cain by becoming barren for him (:12); and he was a cultivator of the ground. Hence the Amplified Version: "You are cursed by reason of the earth". Earth opening its mouth may suggest there was an earthquake, as in Num. 16:32; Num. 26:10; Dt. 11:6. The blood was "received"; and the words for receiving blood are used multiple times of how the priests took or received the blood of the sacrifices, reflecting God's acceptance of them. Abel's death was therefore accepted by God; and Cain's evil hand in it was actually part of Abel's final acceptance with God. Truly no weapon formed against us can ultimately prosper, even if it leads to our death.

4:12 *From now on, when you cultivate the ground, it won't yield its strength to you-* Again, judgment was appropriate to the sinner. For Cain had cultivated the ground and had thought that the fruits of such labour would be acceptable with God. Perhaps again we see God remembering mercy in this judgment; for cutting off Cain's ability to do his preferred works, of producing agricultural produce, might have led him to subsequently throw himself upon God's grace. And as noted on :8, this is another link with the judgment of Adam. We note that the land not 'yielding her strength' is a term used of how God would judge Israel within the same *eretz* if they sinned (Lev. 26:20; Dt. 8:18 Heb.). As with the judgment upon Adam, I am inclined to see the judgment as specifically upon Cain, as it was specifically and uniquely upon Adam. We die in that we sinned in Adam, we would have done what he did, and we in essence

have done the same (Rom. 5:12). But all the details of his specific judgments are not necessarily true for all men. Likewise, the land would yield its strength to the obedient, and would not do so for the disobedient.

You shall be a fugitive and a wanderer in the land- Again, it appears that a particular area is in view rather than the entire planet. Such wandering until death is the language of the condemnation at the last day, "wandering stars" (Jude 13), dogs wandering rejected outside the city (Ps. 59:15 s.w.). "Fugitive" implies he was being hunted, and that there was some concept at this stage of the Mosaic "avenger of blood" in such cases. Who would have persecuted him? Presumably the other, unrecorded, children of Adam and Eve. Or if indeed Genesis 1 and 2 speak specifically of a creation within the *eretz*, there would have been other people around. "Fugitive" is the same word used of Israel's condemnation in the wilderness, wandering in rejection (Num. 32:13), and "wanderer" of their wandering in the Gentile world under Divine condemnation (2 Kings 21:8; Jer. 4:1).

4:13 *Cain said to Yahweh, My sin-* He puts "sin" for "condemnation for sin". In this sense the Lord bore our sins; He was not a personal sinner, but He died the death of a condemned sinner.

Is greater than I can bear- Put together two Bible passages: Cain felt that his condemnation was greater *than he could bear*, and so God put a mark upon him so he wouldn't be slain (Gen. 4:13,15). Now 1 Cor. 10:13: God will not allow us to be tested *more than we can bear*, but will make a way of escape so we can bear it. I take this as meaning that if God is even sensitive to the feelings of a condemned man like Cain, rather like putting an animal to sleep in a humane way... then we who are saved in Christ can take comfort that even in this life, we will not be asked to bear the unbearable, and yet we have the prospect of

eternity in front of us when this life is through. And in a very quiet, sober way, we have to respond with gratitude: 'Wow'. God will not even punish the rejected more than they can bear. This reflects His ultimate grace.

Recognition of personal sinfulness will finally swamp the rejected, as it should have done in their day of opportunity. There may be with some a desperate further appeal for mercy, after the pattern of Cain, who tried to desperately reason with God: "My punishment (220 times rendered "iniquity") is greater than I can bear" (Gen. 4:13 AV). "Bear" is the Hebrew word usually used for bearing away of sin. Cain finally recognized his own sin, and the need for atonement. Adam likewise confessed his sin as a result of God's questioning (Gen. 3:10). Realization of sin will finally be elicited (Num. 32:23 LXX; Ez. 6:9; Jude 15). Cain saw that he couldn't carry away his own sin. His words are surely a reference to the Lord's invitation to take hold of the animal sin offering that was crouching at the door (Gen. 4:7 Heb.). The Lord had offered Cain a way of escape through the blood of the lamb, a recognition that his own works couldn't save him. But he refused that knowledge; only to be finally and unalterably condemned, and thereby taught his desperate need to resign his own works and trust in the blood of the lamb. And so it will be at the last day. If men refuse to know their own desperation and need for the Lord's sacrifice now, then they will be made to realize it all too late. Zedekiah likewise wept in his condemnation (Ez. 7:27), knowing that he could have taken hold of God's offer through Jeremiah. Note how Cain is "cursed from this land" (Gen. 4:11 LXX)- the land / earth of Israel, the area of Eden before the flood. Being expelled from the land was his condemnation; just as Israel were later cast out of their land in condemnation. He left God's land and lived in the land of Nod / wandering, at the entrance to Eden (4:16).

According to the RV margin of Gen. 4:16, Cain lived "in front of Eden"- he didn't go far away from it, he set himself as near to the entrance as he could. Likewise Israel chose to stay "many days" in Kadesh (Dt. 1:46), on the very border of the promised land, after their rejection from inheriting it. It is significant that Israel and Judah were taken into captivity in areas on the edge of the land promised to Abraham- Babylon, just the other side of the Euphrates, and to Egypt, just the other side of the Nile. The point simply is that the rejected will so want to get back into the land / Kingdom. Like Israel, hanging their harps on the trees by the rivers of Babylon, pining for the land they had been rejected from.

Ps. 112:10 speaks of the wicked gnashing with their teeth and melting away, suggesting that the slinking away process goes on even in the outer darkness; they wander, but in their aimless wandering they slowly slink yet further away from their Lord- the one who once fain would have carried them on His shoulders, gathered them under His wings. It's a terrible picture. Cain, in typifying all the rejected, felt that his condemnation was something greater than he could bear (Gen. 4:13). This is alluded to in a telling way in 1 Cor. 10:13: for the righteous, they will never be tested more than they can bear, but a way of escape will always be made possible. But for the rejected, there will be no escape. It will be something too great to bear, and somehow they have to go on existing in that state. Thus the rejected will seek death and not find it (Rev. 9:6), after the pattern of Judas bungling his own suicide after realising his condemnation [thus his bowels gushed, although he was attempting to hang himself]; they will also seek the Lord, all too late, and not find Him either (Prov. 1:28; Jn. 7:34).

4:14 *Behold, you have driven me out this day from the surface of the ground-* Cain reasons against God's judgment of him; and

to some extent he is successful. The judgment is ameliorated. On :8-12 I have suggested that Cain's sin and judgment is based upon that of Adam and Eve. And likewise, the judgment that they would die in the day they sinned was ameliorated. And so for all time we have established God's openness to dialogue, His grace, His willingness to change His judgments, as Israel so often experienced.

Being driven out from the literal ground of the *eretz* was what happened to Israel when they were taken away from their land into captivity. Thus again we see Cain set up as representative of rejected Israel, which is how John's gospel and letters likewise understand him.

I will be hidden from your face, and I will be a fugitive and a wanderer in the land. It will happen that whoever finds me will kill me- "Face" can be "faces", and may refer to his expulsion from the sanctuary where the cherubim stood, between man and Eden. There was clearly some kind of vengeance for blood system, as we find later in the Mosaic law. The people he feared would presumably have been his own brethren. Cain seemed to assume that if he was near the sanctuary, he would not be killed; and we see this idea perpetuated in 1 Kings 1:50,51; 1 Kings 2:28. To be sent away from the faces / presence / sanctuary of Yahweh was a tragedy for him; likewise the rejected in the last day will not shrug it off, they will desperately wish to abide in His presence whom they didn't care for in their lives. We today are to love the Lord's presence, and rejoice in it, as David often does in the Psalms.

After the pattern of Cain and Adam (Gen. 3:24; 4:14), and also the idea of the wicked being *cast* into the darkness of condemnation, it seems that the rejected will be forcibly driven away. Cain was driven out from the faces, the presence of the land of Eden, where the Lord's presence was (Gen. 4:14).

Presumably this driving out was done by the Angels. We are left to imagine the ultimate tragedy of Cain going forth from the presence of the Lord (Gen. 4:16 s.w. "face" 4:14), and the rejected 'going away into...' (Mt. 25:46). The tragedy of rejection is well reflected in the way the Lord speaks of how "great was the fall" of the poorly built house (Mt. 7:27).

4:15 *Yahweh said to him, Therefore whoever slays Cain, vengeance will be taken on him sevenfold. Yahweh appointed a sign for Cain, lest any finding him should strike him-* There is no promise that Cain will not be killed, but rather some kind of sign was placed upon him, warning of sevenfold vengeance for taking his life. And this apparently worked, for we will not read of Cain's death at the hands of men, and indeed he went on to have his own children. Again we see God's gentleness even to the condemned; He didn't wish Cain to suffer unbearably, and modified the judgment to that end. And this God is our God. He was open to dialogue even with the rejected Cain; how much more to us.

4:16 *Cain went out from Yahweh's presence-* This interview between God and Cain therefore occurred in the sanctuary, with Eden just the other side of it.

And lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden- "Nod" is literally "exile". But he chose to live East of Eden, as near to the sanctuary as he possibly could. Again, we see how the rejected do not just shrug and run away from it all. They will desperately seek acceptance, until the second death takes them. And we too should earnestly seek His sanctuary now, and do nothing at all which might exclude or discourage others from it.

4:17 *Cain knew his wife-* She could have been his sister. But if we understand the record in early Genesis as only concerning the *eretz*, the land later promised to Abraham, then she may have been a woman from outside that area.

She conceived, and gave birth to Enoch. He built a city, and called the name of the city, after the name of his son, Enoch- Cain's judgment to wander and be a fugitive was therefore mitigated in response to his wishes; for he became a settled urban dweller. We marvel at God's consideration even to the rejected. Such is His grace and gentleness. "The way of Cain" is associated in Jude 11 with rampant materialism which replaces God, and also with false religion. "Enoch" means 'dedicated' or 'initiated'; "the way of Cain" was of false religion. Having been expelled from Yahweh's sanctuary, he built a city and dedicated his son as the priest- all east of Eden, as if he liked to think that his city and priest could become the way back into Eden. The city was "dedicated" or "initiated"; it was a city which was identified with a person, namely his son Enoch. All this suggests a religious element to the settlement. Rome likewise was a city founded upon the murder of the founder's brother. "He built" is rendered "he was building" by Keil, as if building the city was what consumed the rest of Cain's life. He spent his lifetime trying to prove the curses upon him as untrue- and yet all the same he died, separated from the sanctuary. And this in essence has been the pattern in so many sad lives.

4:18 *To Enoch was born Irad-* According to some (H.P. Mansfield, Basil Atkinson), "Irad" means 'urban dweller', and as noted on :17, the idea of urban dwelling had become an obsession with Cain and his family, as if to try to prove wrong God's judgment that he would wander and be a fugitive. All men try to act outside of the parameters of our own judgment for sin, effectively denying their humanity; but unless we throw ourselves upon God's grace, as Cain failed to, then we shall likewise eternally perish. But "Irad" can also mean "fugitive". In this case we would see evidence of the failure of Cain's attempt to stop the curse of being a fugitive, through setting up a walled

urban environment for his family. Ultimately, the parameters set by Divine judgment cannot be slid beyond, even though many devote their lives to trying.

Irad became the father of Mehujael- "Formed of God". This might suggest some re-thinking, a recognition that human beings are not brought into being solely by the power of the flesh. But the problem with Hebrew names is that they are capable of a very wide semantic range- Mehujael can also mean "smitten of God", as if God judged him. The same root word for "Mehuja" is soon to be used of how God "destroyed" the earth through the flood (Gen. 6:7; Gen. 7:4,23).

Mehujael became the father of Methushael- "Strengthened man of God". If names are indeed significant, then we may be justified in hoping that for these two generations, of Methushael and Mehujael, there was some revival of spirituality, which came to an end in Lamech. This is typical of human families- generations of unbelief interspersed with occasional generations of belief.

Methushael became the father of Lamech- "Strong youth" or "striker down", as if he rejoiced in his own strength.

4:19 *Lamech took two wives: the name of the one was Adah, and the name of the other Zillah-* Polygamy is mentioned here along with a number of other things which whilst not sinful in themselves at the time, were all indulged in to a point where finally the earth was full of wickedness and needed judgment. Their names also suggest an emphasis upon the cosmetic and superficial; "Adah" = "ornament", "Zillah" = "shadow".

4:20 *Adah gave birth to Jabal, who was the father of those who dwell in tents and have livestock-* "Jabal" means "wanderer". As noted on :17 and :18, Cain had spent his life trying to ensure that the curse of being a nomad would not pass upon him and his descendants. But God's judgment will finally come true, as we

see here. The tent dwellers were not a reference to all nomadic peoples on the face of the planet; clearly the reference is to a limited group of people, presumably in the area of the *eretz,* the land promised to Abraham.

4:21 *His brother's name was Jubal, who was the father of all who handle the harp and pipe-* "Jubal" can mean "jubilant". The impression given is of a family who were intelligent, resourceful and given to worldly pleasures. But "Jabal" can also be defined as "pleasure". The picture presented is of a family devoted to their own pleasures and profit.

4:22 *Zillah also gave birth to Tubal Cain, the forger of every cutting instrument of brass and iron-* "The lance forger", according to some readings. The idea is of weapons. Lamech not only alludes to Cain (see on :23,24), but includes the name of Cain in his own son. Lamech clearly was the seed of Cain and glorified the fact.

Tubal Cain's sister was Naamah- "Pleasant / sweet". Her name may be mentioned because of her significance; perhaps she was one of the daughters of men whom the sons of God, the righteous line, intermarried with and were caused to fall away by (Gen. 6:2).

4:23 *Lamech said to his wives, Adah and Zillah, hear my voice. You wives of Lamech, listen to my speech, for I have slain a man for wounding me, a young man for bruising me. If Cain will be avenged seven times, truly Lamech seventy-seven times-*

4:24 *If Cain will be avenged seven times, truly Lamech seventy-seven times-* This proud boast was effectively playing God. For it was God who pronounced seven fold vengeance upon any who touched Cain; and Lamech with no justification simply appropriates such protection to himself, and declares the vengeance even greater. He twisted God's words in order to justify killing a man who touched him in some way (:23). So

often this happens; God's words of judgment against a person or His promise of protection for them are twisted around in order to justify human pride and vengefulness. The way the Lamech of Seth's line dies at 777 (Gen. 5:31) might suggest that his proud boast came to an end in death, as does every form of pride.

The Lord in turn switches Lamech's words around when He urges us to *forgive* seventy times seven each day (Mt. 18:22), i.e. even when repentance appears insincere. In the Lord's book, forgiving is the opposite to the desire for vengeance; our unforgiveness can therefore be traced to a mistaken, misplaced desire to take vengeance ourselves.

4:25 *Adam knew his wife again. She gave birth to a son, and named him Seth, for God has appointed me another child instead of Abel, for Cain killed him-* Here we see yet another hope for a Messiah, a Saviour figure who would be appointed [= "Seth"] by God as the seed of the woman. All these hopes didn't come to anything; perhaps they potentially could have done, and were only ruined by human dysfunction. The whole experience was used to deepen an understanding and desire for the Lord Jesus. "Appointed" can also mean "substituted", which is the more exact meaning of "Seth". He was hoped to be a substitute for Abel, a kind of resurrected form of Abel; but in the end, death is death, and there can be no substitute; only a representative sacrifice which we identify with in faith.

4:26 *There was also a son born to Seth, and he named him Enosh. Then men began to call themselves by Yahweh's name-* "Enosh" is the usual Hebrew word for "man" in the sense of a mortal, coming from the root meaning frail or feeble. Perhaps it was this recognition of weakness and mortality which led men at that time to call themselves by God's Name; and the same principle is to be seen today. It is those who perceive their own frailty who call upon themselves the Lord's Name in baptism

into Jesus (Acts 2:21). "Call... by" can as well mean to call out to, or to name. The idea may be that the believers now began to call God by His Name Yahweh, although Gen. 4:1 could imply that Name was always known from the beginning. Calling upon His Name may suggest that there developed a conscious division between those following "the way of Cain", and those who identified with Yahweh. To call Yahweh's Name upon you was another way of saying that you had entered covenant relationship with Him (Dt. 26:17,18; Is. 44:5; Is. 63:19; Zeph. 3:9), just as believers do so today through the conscious act of baptism. So maybe this was part of the conscious division developed between the "way of Cain" and that of Yahweh.

GENESIS CHAPTER 5

5:1 *This is the book of the generations of Adam-* A Hebraism for "an account of the story of...". This phrase is found throughout Genesis, introducing the various sections: Gen. 2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10; 11:27; 25:12, 19; 36:1; 37:2. The focus of the material reduces each time; from the heavens and earth, to Adam, to the faithful line through Seth, to Noah, to Abraham, to Jacob, to Joseph.

In the day that God created man, He made him in God's likeness- This is to be connected with how Adam had a son "in his own likeness" (:3), as if to imply that the Divine likeness is passed on through procreation. This "likeness" therefore refers to something physical rather than spiritual or mental; for His ways are far above ours, and we are to take on His mind through wilfully being open to His Spirit. The word is used of how Ahab had an image made in the likeness of a god in Damascus. The word definitely has 'physical' suggestions. These reflections are hard evidence that God is not totally immaterial, but exists as an actual entity. Admittedly all terms such as corporeal, physical, material etc. leave us beneath "the tyranny of words"; but all the same God is real and actual, creating a man after His likeness, in the same way as that man then procreated according to his likeness, which was God's.

The common view of the times was that only the ruling classes were created in the image of God. The Ancient Near East was full of images to rulers which were called "images of God". The Caesar cult continued this. Only the supreme ruler was the image of God. But Genesis deconstructs this, and states that each and every man is in the image of God. The prophets lament how Israel worshipped images which had no breath / spirit in them (Hab. 2:19; Jer. 10:14; 51:17). Rather than perceive that

they were each living images of God, filled with His Spirit, Israel preferred to avoid such personal responsibility by instead creating and worshipping another image of God. Perceiving we ourselves are in the image of God inspires responsibility. And we would rather avoid that and try to claim that God's image is not in me, but in something else. The Ancient Near East considered priests to be men in the image of God who had His Spirit in them. Genesis is saying that every man has this; we are all priests. It was God's intention that Israel should be a nation of priests, as the new Israel are to be a "royal priesthood". But both natural and spiritual Israel have largely shrunk from this responsibility, and preferred to see the image and spirit of God in others or elsewhere, anywhere, apart from in themselves.

Egyptian inscriptions show that the Pharaohs were considered to be made in the image of God, unlike the mass of society who were supposedly not in God's image and could therefore be abused as animals through heavy taxation etc.. For humanity were seen as born into slavery. The name of the Pharaoh Tutankhamen means the “Living image of Amun”. Later, the Assyrian king Esarhaddon was described as "the very image of Bel" the god of Assyria. The theology of Yahweh directly challenges this. All men are in His image, and there is no two or multi tier view of society, whereby just the ruling caste was in God's image. And this has meaning for today, where effectively a hyper wealthy class has emerged sitting on the backs of a vast majority of minimum wage labour. And indeed there is developing a servile, standardised mass mentality. Man is becoming dehumanized, personality is becoming bleached to conformity, strong characters are fewer, as society drowns in depression and nihilism. All because we resist the call of our own bodies and natures, to understand that we are in God's image and can rise above to something infinitely more noble and worthy.

We see the Ancient Near Eastern view of these things challenged again when the Torah declares that all land belongs to Yahweh and shall be the eternal possession of His people. Not some propertied class. There are many Egyptian references to the Pharaohs being begotten in the image of the gods; the Biblical record states that we are created in His image *and likeness*. I suggest the "likeness" is an invitation to see that we have the potential to "be like Him" in a mental and spiritual way; a dimension quite missing in the Egyptian theology which Moses is here deconstructing. "We shall be like *Him* / Oh how rich the promise". Creation has indeed been made subject to vanity, but for the believer, it has been "subjected in hope" (Rom. 8:19-21).

Another aspect of the Egyptian / pagan idea which is deconstructed is the idea that gods only beget gods in their image. Thus the *Enuma Elish* 1:16, "Anu begot Nudimmud in his likeness". But in reality, God begets children in His image who are all of humanity; for Gen. 5 is a genealogy of men. And they are in the image of man as well as in God's image. We see here the value and dignity attached to the human person, reflected in our respect for all persons, including our enemies. To treat others as made in the image of God is so difficult when they are the brutal, cruel, foolish, dogmatic, judgmental, unkind... but they are still in the image of God, no matter how marred and distorted, and we are to treat them accordingly.

5:2 *He created them male and female, and blessed them, and called their name Adam, in the day when they were created-* The record intentionally confuses the singular "Adam" with the married couple. This may explain why Rom. 5:12 speaks of sin entering the world by one man, Adam- when Eve was equally part of the transgression. We also see a reflection of the unity God perceives between married couples whom He joins together. Here and in :1, we are reading of the events of "the

day when they were created". The fall of Adam and Eve and the issues with Cain and Abel are overlooked; because this account is focusing upon the development of the more spiritual line which emerged through Seth, culminating in Noah; whereas chapter 4 has given us the line of evildoers through Cain, and this will climax in the way that the sons of God [the righteous] intermarried with the daughters of men [the line of Cain] until only Noah was left righteous.

5:3 *Adam lived one hundred and thirty years, and became the father of a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth-* As noted on :1, this begettal of a son after his own image and likeness is to be connected with how he had been created in God's image and likeness; which surely refers to the physical rather than the moral. Much is therefore implied here about the nature of God Himself. This is why Israel were not to make any physical form or image of God; because it would take them away from appreciating that they themselves as persons were the image of God. God has a form, for we are made in His form and likeness; but Israel didn't see that form and were not to make any image of it (Dt. 4:12,15). And as the Lord reasons, what has God's image on it must be given to God. We are His, wholly and totally, by reason of the image we bear. As noted on Gen. 4:25, here we see yet another hope for a Messiah, a Saviour figure who would be appointed [= "Seth"] by God as the seed of the woman. All these hopes didn't come to anything; perhaps they potentially could have done, and were only ruined by human dysfunction. The whole experience was used to deepen an understanding and desire for the Lord Jesus. "Appointed" can also mean "substituted", which is the more exact meaning of "Seth". He was hoped to be a substitute for Abel, a kind of resurrected form of Abel; but in the end, death is death,

and there can be no substitute; only a representative sacrifice which we identify with in faith.

We naturally enquire of the connection between the statements that God created man after His own image and likeness, and that then man begat children after *his* own image and likeness. There is a correspondence between father and son, clearly seen between Adam and Seth. And we are being told that this reflects the correspondence between Adam [and every man] and God. Adam was in this the sense "the son of God" as Luke 3 states. This is why God describes Himself as our "kinsman redeemer" (Ps. 9:11-13; 2 Chron. 24:22). Man is therefore God's nearest kin, because the avenger of blood was the nearest kin to the man slain. In the context of Genesis, God has just now shown in Gen. 4 that He is the avenger of Abel's blood. Genesis 1 repeatedly states that everything in creation was created "according to its kind", its own distinctive type or class. But when we come to the account of man's creation, we read that he was made in God's image and likeness. After His, Divine, kind. This gives yet more dimension to the simple invitation to view God as our Heavenly Father.

We could read :1 as implying that Adam was created after God's image and likeness in the day that he was created [otherwise that phrase is somewhat redundant], but that image was marred as a result of the fall. And over the generations, that image becomes progressively less as men beget their children after *their* image and likeness. Or we can take this :3 as explaining to us in what sense we are created after God's image and likeness. We are to Him as a child is to its human father. We have the father's image, but somewhat uniquely refracted in a way that means we are not the splitting image of our fathers, but yet our image and likeness is related to them in a distorted, diluted sense. It is emphasized twice in :1,2 that God made man in His image

"in the day that God created him". This phrase would appear redundant, especially as it is stated twice, unless we understand it to mean that before he sinned, Adam [which was the name for 'Adam and Eve'] was in God's image. But man is still in that image, although not completely. This is why the genealogy of Genesis 5 starts with God. "The book of the generations of Adam" begins not with Adam, but with God begetting Adam. In this sense Adam was the son of God (Lk. 3:38). He is the Father, and we are a family begotten in His likeness. But that family is all humanity. "We are indeed His offspring" (Acts 17:28). And so all men are to be respected; James says we should not curse men because they are made in God's image. This likely interprets Gen. 9:6 "Whoever sheds man's blood, his blood will be shed by man, for God made man in His own image".

In this sense, God's creation of Adam was a begettal of a son. And thereby we are empowered to understand the new creation of a spiritual man within us as being also a kind of begettal by the Spirit. In this sense, the virgin birth of God's Son the Lord Jesus doesn't unduly set Him apart from the rest of us who have been begotten by the Spirit, as John's writings make clear. So whilst we are physically in God's image and likeness, the degree of likeness is at times obscure, and at best diluted, distorted and only a refraction of the original light. But in the Lord Jesus at the time of His death, in the mind and character He had there, we see "the form of God"; and we are invited to let that mind be in us which was in Him there (Phil. 2). He there was the supreme manifestation or image and likeness of God, in human flesh. He was a man amongst men, man as God intended man to be, and as we shall finally be. And that mind, image and likeness is to be allowed in us ["let this mind be in you..."]. Just as Adam was in God's image 'in the day that he was created', so we can return to that image and even fuller, through the Lord

Jesus who is the image of God, and His exact likeness (Col. 1:15). As Alan Hayward put it, He was "the man with the face of God". The Lord Jesus in His time of dying reached the exact image and likeness of God, although He was in the form / image of a servant as well as being in the form / image of God. The Father's side was refracted through His humanity, being "found in fashion as a man". And through the work of the Spirit, we are being conformed and transformed into that same image (2 Cor. 3:18; Col. 3:9,10 "Do not lie to each other, seeing you have put off the old man with his doings, and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator"). For "He shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6). And we are not to turn away from that face, but to let it transform us through allowing the work of His Spirit in the new creation of men and women after His image and likeness, which is that of God: "Now the Lord is the Spirit and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there the heart is free. But we each, with an unveiled face and reflecting the glory of the Lord [Jesus], are all transformed into *his likeness* from glory to glory by the Lord the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:17,18).

We don't fully get there in this life, but the joy of resurrection is that we will: "And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly" (1 Cor. 15:49). Paul there alludes to Gen. 5:3 LXX , where Adam produces a son who bears his image, just as God made Adam in *His* image. Paul sees this as coming true at resurrection, but of course right now the Lord is a "life giving spirit" in our new creation and new birth of water and spirit. We are now being progressively changed into His image, from glory to glory (2 Cor. 3:18). We as believers were predestined to be conformed to the image of God's Son (Rom. 8:29); a process that starts now and comes to

final conclusion at the day of judgment. Then, God's desire to have children in His image and likeness shall be finally fulfilled.

And so by following this theme through the Bible, we come to understand ourselves, who we are. We are shown what it is, to be human; how high we are rather than how low we are, and what great potential there is in being human. Every man being in the image of God, there are no 'mere mortals', no 'ordinary people', 'standard blokes', produced by some random evolutionary process. Recall how in the account of creation, everything was brought into being by the statement "Let there *be*...", but man is different: "Let us *make* man after our likeness". God will finally make a man more precious than fine gold, even the gold of Ophir (Is. 13:12). The Lord had totally our nature, and showed us what was possible. We see that we were born for great things, we see how high is our potential, and so we are inspired to rise above our human side. For we are made in the image and likeness of God, but also in human image and likeness. The teaching of Gen. 5:1,3 can perhaps be seen as a balancing out of the dimension presented in Gen. 3 and Gen. 4- that we are indeed fallen and sinful. But that does not consign us to inevitable failure. And if we are in Christ and open to His transforming Spirit, we shall progressively be changed [back, or more fully] into the Divine image as it is in Him; and then be physically and totally changed into it at His return, although the Father's image and likeness will be refracted through us each in a unique way, just as Adam's image and likeness was in his children. Man was born to respond to God; He is not far from any one of us, because we are made in His image and there is something intuitive about relationship with Him. Altheism is therefore an unnatural denial of our own Father- usually because of false images of Him. As made in God's image, we are half way there as it were.

But so many don't want it, or pull out of the formation process, declining the new creation. Ps. 82:6,7 implies Israel were given that option, but instead they allowed the side of being in their father's image and likeness to dominate: "I had taken you for divine beings [I said 'You are gods']... but you shall die as humans / men". And their father was "the devil", the flesh, the Lord commented. This is why He quoted these words to them when they wrongly accused Him of pretending to be God. The Lord's quotation was therefore saying that yes, He was indeed in His Father's image and likeness- but that was possible for them also. But they were allowing the side of "their father the devil" to dominate. Perceiving these things provides the pastoral answer to our complaints about our sins. People tell us they are having an affair, are secretly addicted to alcohol, or whatever. And we point out to ourselves our own failures. And what are we to say, to ourselves and to others? "You can do better than that. You were born to better things". For we are in the image of God, and can be transformed into it far more. And so it can help at times to reposition our understanding of sin, in terms of failure and immaturity in rising up to reflecting the glory of God as we have seen it in the face of Jesus Christ.

The connection between :1 and :3 further shows that we have the image of God and also the image of our earthly father. Adam's son was both the image of God and of Adam. We are mixed, mongrels between flesh and Spirit. Which is why all bad men have some good in them, something of the Divine; and all good men are never completely good but have the human image and likeness as well in some points. But we are offered the opportunity to be reborn, reformed, recreated, after God's image and likeness which was seen perfectly in the Lord; to become the image of the Heavenly just as surely as we bore the image of the earthly.

Time and again, the Torah told Israel to live justly in things great and small, because "I am Yahweh your God". We are made in His image, and should live like Him in respect of all men who are all also in His image. To be like Him becomes our passion; to be holy "because I am holy". As the old hymn says,

"Be Thou my vision, O Lord of my heart;
Nought be all else to me, save that Thou art".

Who He is, His image, "That Thou art", is to be all for me, our vision and our heart's sole desire. To be like Him.

"Be Thou my vision, O Lord of my heart;
Nought be all else to me, save that Thou art.
Thou my best thought, by day or by night
Waking or sleeping, Thy presence my light.
Riches I need not, nor vain empty praise;
Thou mine inheritance, now and always.
Thou and Thou only, first in my heart,
Great God of Heaven, my treasure Thou art.
Be Thou my wisdom and Thou my true word.
I ever with Thee and Thou with me Lord.
Heart of my own heart, whatever befalls.
Still be my vision, O Ruler of all
Be Thou my battle shield, sword for the fight,
Be Thou my dignity, Thou my delight.
Thou my soul's shelter, Thou my high tower
Raise Thou me heavenward, O Power of my power.
Thou my great Fatherand I Thy true son,
Thou in me dwelling, and I with Thee one.

5:4 *The days of Adam after he became the father of Seth were eight hundred years, and he became the father of sons and daughters-* We can assume that he had many. But the faithful line was through only one of them, Seth; and that too had all but spiritually died out by the time of Noah. It must've been hard

for Adam and Eve to see their scores of children and thousands of grandchildren, great grandchildren etc. all fall away from the faith; for there were none righteous by the time of Noah. We can assume that they themselves kept the faith; for Eve's later hatred of the serpent and struggle with it until she killed it became programmatic for the true "seed of the woman" subsequently. The line of Seth alone were the only "seed of the woman" whilst Cain's line, and presumably the rest of the children, were the seed of the serpent.

5:5 *All the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years, then he died-* The genealogies emphasize "death", a reminder that indeed death passed upon all men (Rom. 5:12). The longer lifespans could be explained by the different environment and climate before the flood; there had been no rain before the flood, and the canopy of water came down to earth at the deluge. This canopy may have shielded people from harmful radiation.

5:6 *Seth lived one hundred and five years, and became the father of Enosh-* There is an Enoch around the same time in the line of Cain, as listed in Gen. 4. And there are several similar names at the same points in the genealogies through both Seth and Cain. I have suggested above that these two lines are effectively the seeds of the serpent and the woman developing, although by chapter 6 they have intermarried until Noah alone is left faithful. Why the similarities, and at the same time? Perhaps we are to conclude that the seed of the serpent appears similar to the seed of the woman and even imitates her, externally. Just as the Assyrians offered life in their kingdom to Judah in the language of the Kingdom of God on earth- sitting under their own vine and fig tree etc. Likewise the antiChrist is a fake Christ, an imitation of the true.

5:7 *Seth lived after he became the father of Enosh eight hundred and seven years, and became the father of sons and daughters-* The ages recorded here differ markedly between the Masoretic [i.e. Hebrew] text, the various versions of the LXX, and Josephus. The New Testament, under inspiration, repeatedly quotes the LXX in preference over the MT [Hebrew text]. Luke's genealogy of Christ only makes sense when compared against the LXX rather than the MT. It is worth noting that if the LXX genealogies and ages are followed, and the manner of New Testament quotation encourages us to follow them, then the Lord was not born at 4000 years after Adam, and so 2000 AD was not 6000 years after creation. This has drastic implications for the "6000 year plan" theory, with the Millennium anticipated as the seventh day "sabbath of rest".

5:8 *All the days of Seth were nine hundred and twelve years, then he died-* "He died" runs as a refrain here (Gen. 5:5, 8, 11, 14, 17, 20, 27,31). The reality of the curse upon Adam, of paradise lost, is being brought home.

5:9 *Enosh lived ninety years, and became the father of Kenan-* The longer lifespans would imply a far stronger race than we now experience. Each woman may well have had a few hundred children. Coupled with the long lifespans and healthy environment, there would have been a few million people alive by the time of the flood. And out of all of them, only Noah was found righteous. This mass population explosion is another connection between our last days and "the days of Noah".

5:10 *Enosh lived after he became the father of Kenan, eight hundred and fifteen years, and became the father of sons and daughters-* Perhaps this was from whom the faithful Heber the Kenite was descended (Jud. 4:11,17; Jud. 5:24).

5:11 *All the days of Enosh were nine hundred and five years, then he died-* "Enosh" is translated "mortal man" in Job 4:17, and

is used in the sense of man in his humanity and weakness. And so man dies.

5:12 *Kenan lived seventy years, and became the father of Mahalalel-* "Praise of God". It's questionable how much significance we should attach to the meaning of names; but this meaning would encourage us to again see some spirituality in the line of Seth.

5:13 *Kenan lived after he became the father of Mahalalel eight hundred and forty years, and became the father of sons and daughters-* We may enquire as to why one son is chosen for mention, when that son may not have been the firstborn, and then this point is made a measuring point in the life of the person. Perhaps the idea is that the birth and raising of the faithful seed who would continue the line of the seed of the woman was the most significant point in their long lives. And so in many ways it is with believing parents and family lines today.

5:14 *And all the days of Kenan were nine hundred and ten years, then he died-* "All the days" is a metaphor meaning "the length of the life". Our lives are counted in days by God; for each day ought to be significant.

5:15 *Mahalalel lived sixty-five years, and became the father of Jared-* The rubric in the genealogies is clear- how long a person lived before they had a significant child, how long they lived afterwards, and then a note that they died and their final age on death. This is exactly the style of the king lists found amongst the Egyptians and Sumerians. We must ever remember that the Pentateuch was originally produced for the Israelites in Egypt. The idea would have been that this line of the seed of the woman were actually kings; such rubric was only used for the kings. That might have been literally true, but I suggest the idea is that ordinary faithful people within the seed of the woman were

kings in God's eyes. Indeed all the faithful shall be king-priests (Rev. 5:10).

5:16 *Mahalalel lived after he became the father of Jared eight hundred and thirty years, and became the father of sons and daughters-* The mention of other sons and daughters may be to highlight the significance of the one who was faithful and through whom the line of the seed of the woman continued. In some genealogies, being the father of a person may simply mean that you were their ancestor. Generations were skipped. But giving the ages of the person when they had a child was perhaps to flag that this is not the style here. The genealogy of Cain in chapter 4 isn't recorded in this way; no time periods are mentioned.

5:17 *All the days of Mahalalel were eight hundred and ninety-five years, then he died-* There appears to be an intended contrast with the line of Cain, the seed of the serpent, recorded in Gen. 4. Cain's children have a note made of their secular achievements; nothing like that is mentioned in the line of Seth, the seed of the woman. Worldly advantage and achievement mean nothing for those whose focus is upon being the seed of the woman. Worldly achievement and contribution to society is of absolutely no moment in the eternal record.

5:18 *Jared lived one hundred and sixty-two years, and became the father of Enoch-* Jared had this child somewhat later in life. Perhaps this reflects a lengthy search for a Godly wife; or perhaps his earlier children were spiritual failures and weren't therefore the ones through whom the seed was to be preserved.

5:19 *Jared lived after he became the father of Enoch eight hundred years, and became the father of sons and daughters-* The genealogy will conclude with Noah being the only faithful believer even in the line of Seth. This means that his contemporaries had rejected the faith; the reality is that the vast

majority of the children of these faithful men didn't remain in the faith. It would have been a most depressing and disappointing environment for those who were spiritually minded.

5:20 *All the days of Jared were nine hundred and sixty-two years, then he died-* The genealogy through Cain in chapter 4 doesn't mention this repeated note that "he died" which we have here in the genealogy of the faithful. Perhaps we are to conclude that for the seed of the serpent and those "in the way of Cain", death is something they can't cope with and act as if it doesn't happen to them- although it does. The seed of the woman fully accept death, it is part of their necessary path towards eternal salvation.

5:21 *Enoch lived sixty-five years, and became the father of Methuselah-* Adam Clarke and others see "Methuselah" as meaning something to the effect of "When he dies, it [or judgment] shall come". And he died in the year the flood came. Jude 14 mentions that Enoch prophesied of judgment to come upon the world of his day. This would suggest that there had been a revelation about the flood before Noah received the command to build the ark. He would've obeyed, encouraged by Methuselah. The threat of judgment was therefore hanging over the earth for many centuries before the flood came; they were a society without excuse, and the gradual falling away of the faithful until only Noah was left would've been an awful period to live through. And the days of Noah are as our last days.

5:22 *Enoch walked with God after he became the father of Methuselah for three hundred years, and became the father of sons and daughters-* Walking with God in a Genesis context reminds us of how God walked in the Garden of Eden, and fellowshipped with Adam and Eve before their sin. This may be another hint in early Genesis that the effects of the "fall" could in essence

and principle be overcome in the lives of the Godly; just as John's gospel records the Lord offering "eternal life" right now, presenting Himself as the tree of life. The Kingdom is both now and not yet.

5:23 *All the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty-five years-* This presents Enoch as ending his mortal life much earlier than the others mentioned in this genealogy.

5:24 *Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God snatched him away-* This may well imply a snatching away from persecution. The Hebrew is used for taking away from something to something else, but not necessarily death, in Gen. 2:15; Dt. 30:4; 2 Kings 2:1-18; Ez. 3:14; Ps. 49:16; 73:24. Although he was snatched away from some form of persecution, he still died. Both Enoch and Noah are described as "walking with God" and both were saved from destruction / judgment upon the wicked; but they both still died eventually. The seed of the serpent and that of the woman have always been in conflict, and so it would be no surprise if Enoch was persecuted by the line of Cain recorded in Gen. 4. But the standard rubric here in chapter 5 concludes each account with "and he died". That is notably absent here. But immortality was first granted to the Lord Jesus, who thus became the firstfruits of the redeemed. Enoch all the same had sinned and surely had to taste of death. The Bible knows nothing of immortal souls living in heaven after death; and even that approach fails to make sense of the pointed omission of the standard note that "he died". For immortal soulism claims that *on death* the supposed immortal soul goes to heaven. So the problem of his death being unrecorded remains. Heb. 11:5 says that Enoch "was not found", he was not grabbed as others intended, because God "removed" him (Gk.) so that he should not see death- i.e. the death that others intended, at that point. And yet he surely died, for Hebrews 11 says that all

those mentioned in that chapter, including Enoch, "died", in sure hope of reward at the last day (Heb. 11:39,40). He died, because God removed him from the death others intended; rather like Moses was effectively taken away to death by an Angel. Paul likewise seems to suggest that he was given the opportunity to die, but he chose to remain (Phil. 1:23,24). I suggest the "and he died..." was omitted in order to continue the idea that for the seed of the woman, even if they remain within the physical parameters of the curse, they are in another sense free from it. God in grace gradually reduced some aspects of the curse in the lives of His children, the seed of the woman. We see this likewise in how the Law of Moses, which was likewise "added because of transgression" (Gal. 3:19), was amended and ameliorated as time went on. I have demonstrated elsewhere that Gentiles were initially forbidden to eat of the Passover, but this was amended later. Sinners were to have their children punished for some generations (Ex. 34:7), but by the time of Ezekiel 18 this had been ameliorated.

5:25 *Methuselah lived one hundred and eighty-seven years, and became the father of Lamech-* The righteous seed was not born to Methuselah early in his life. Perhaps he had to search long to find a Godly wife; or maybe his other children slid away into the mass apostacy of that period.

5:26 *Methuselah lived after he became the father of Lamech seven hundred and eighty-two years, and became the father of sons and daughters-* We wonder why Lamech was not saved in the ark, and why he died relatively young. We can assume that he fell away from the faith, whilst his father and son [Noah] remained faithful. To hold to the faith amidst such mass apostacy, including amongst your immediate family, is notable indeed. Or it could simply be that he died younger than the others because of persecution or natural causes.

5:27 *All the days of Methuselah were nine hundred and sixty-nine years, then he died-* Methuselah lived longer than any other recorded man, dying in the year the flood came; see on Gen. 5:21. Perhaps his longevity was a reflection of God's blessing upon him. A more negative reading would be that Methuselah fell away from the faith and perished in the flood.

5:28 *Lamech lived one hundred and eighty-two years, and became the father of a son-* As noted on :26, we are left to assume that Lamech fell away from the faith, or died relatively young. His faithful father Methuselah outlived him. Lamech was the sixth from Adam in this list, just as there was a Lamech the sixth from Adam in the line of Cain (Gen. 4:16-24). This highlights how the two lines were parallel, with the seed of the serpent being but a mimic of that of the woman; just as the antiChrist is a fake, imitation Christ, and this world, the kingdom of men with its offers and claims, is but a fake Kingdom of God.

5:29 *And he named him Noah, saying, This same will comfort us in our work and in the toil of our hands, because of the ground which Yahweh has cursed-*

Perhaps they hoped that this would be the seed of the woman who would bring the curse on the ground to an end. Clearly this hope for a Messiah figure would have been significant in the thinking of the faithful. Or did Noah's parents expect Noah to be the child who would do all the hard menial work for them, so that they would suffer less from the curse placed upon the ground in Eden? This might explain why Noah had children when he was 500, far older than others of his time (Gen. 5:32- Noah's father had had his first children at 182, Gen. 5:28; Seth had his first child at 105, Gen. 5:6; Enos at 95, Gen. 5:9; Cainan at 70, Gen. 5:12; Mahalalel at 65, Gen. 5:15; Jared at 162, Gen. 5:18; Enoch at 65, Gen. 5:21; Methuselah at 187, Gen. 5:25); Gen. 6:18 implies that Noah only had three sons,

whereas for people with such long life spans we'd have expected him to have had far more than that. He only had three children- for he prepared the ark to save "his house" (Heb. 11:7) and Gen. 7:1 is quite clear: ""Go into the ark, you and *all* your household"- his whole household was his wife, three sons and their wives. Period . Perhaps we get the picture of a man who was the underdog, the farm worker, the sidekick of the family, whose own family life was delayed and limited by this background. Perhaps he turned to alcohol for comfort (hence Gen. 9:21). But it was he whom God chose to save, he alone who was righteous in that generation which perished. It was the quiet, broken man who was saved. The Hebrew word for "Comfort" [a play on 'Noah'] occurs later, when we read how God "repented" that He had made man (Gen. 6:6,7). Lamech's desire for 'comfort' was fulfilled but not as he imagined; not through his son being his personal slave, but rather in God changing His mind about humanity and making a new start. We get what we desire, in essence; and so we need to desire the right things. Another alternative is that we are to understand 'comfort' in 5:29 as only one possible translation; the idea could be that Lamech hoped that his son Noah would be the one who would bring about repentance / changing in God regarding the curse upon the earth. In this case, we see Lamech hoping that this son of his would be the promised "seed of the woman" of Gen. 3:15, a Messiah figure. However, the Lamech of 5:28 may well be the Lamech of Gen. 4:18-22; both Lamechs are described as having Methuselah as their father. As often in early Genesis, this would be a case of one history being recorded in one chapter and then another one in the next- as with the two creation accounts in Genesis 1 and 2. In this case, if Lamech is the same Lamech, then Noah had very gifted and high flying siblings. His brother Jabal was the leader of the cattle owners (4:20); his brother Jubal

was the leading musician of the age (4:21); Tubalcain his other brother was the leader of all the metalworkers. Lamech was the first polygamist, who killed a young man for a slight insult and boasted about it; and whose wife Adah means 'decorated / adorned'. These were people of the world. And Noah was the sidekick brother who was to do all the menial farm work so the rest of them could pursue their careers and social lives. Against this of course it can be argued that there are differences in the genealogies of chapters 4 and 5. However, in the context, Gen. 6:1-4 describes how the lines of Seth and Cain intermarried [the sons of God married the daughters of men] and it could be argued that the genealogies we have aren't complete, generations are skipped, and 'having a son' could be understood in a wider sense than referring to a son directly fathered by the person concerned. 'Lamech' in Hebrew is comprised of the three central letters of the Hebrew alphabet and it could be argued that this reflects his 'joining' function [as it does in other Semitic literature], in joining the Sethite and Cainite lines together. The resemblances between the six names in Gen. 4:17,18 with six in chapter 5 is striking, and they both culminate in Lamech, as if he was the one in whom the lines mixed. Interestingly, Lamech in Gen. 4:24 speaks of 77 fold vengeance coming upon him; and the Lamech of Gen. 5:30 [the same Lamech?] dies at 777 years old. It also needs to be carried in mind that Semitic 'genealogies' aren't always chronological; they are constructed in order to make various points or develop themes, as in the genealogies of the Lord in Matthew and Luke.

The same root word for "Noah" is found in 2 Chron. 6:41, where the ark of God 'rested' or 'Noah-ed' in the tabernacle. When the ark 'rested' on Ararat ['holy hill'] the same word is used (Gen. 8:4). A case can be made that Ararat was in fact Mount Zion, where the ark was later to 'rest' in the temple. The

'resting' of the ark was therefore the fulfilment of God's intention in Noah- God's salvation is described as a "promised rest" (Heb. 4:10,11), and it was prefigured in the final resting of the ark. Thus the final salvation of God is to be understood in terms of God 'resting' with us, in us, within His ark. He labours and struggles too... for us. And those struggles will only be at rest when we are saved in the last day; a Father's eternal struggle for His children. The 'rest' spoken of in Noah's name was thus a rest for God. Noah's going out of the ark into a cleansed, pristine world was therefore symbolic of our going forth into the Kingdom at Christ's return.

It's significant that the various Mesopotamian legends about a flood all speak of there being conflict between the divinities before the decision to flood the earth was taken; and then quarrels and recriminations between them after it. The Biblical record has none of this- the one true God brought the flood upon the earth by His sovereign will, and He lifted the flood. In the legends, the hero of the flood [cp. Noah] is exalted to Divine status, whereas in the Biblical record Noah not only remains human, but is described as going off and getting drunk. Throughout pagan legends, the Divine-human boundary is often blurred- gods get cast down to earth and become men, whilst men get exalted to 'Heaven' and godhood. This gave rise to the idea of 'angels that sinned' and were cast down to earth. But in the Biblical record, the Divine-human boundary is set very clearly- the one God of Israel is *so* far exalted above humanity, His ways are not ours etc. (Is. 55:8), that there can be no possibility of this happening. The exception of course was in the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ- but even He was born as a genuine human upon earth, and [contrary to Trinitarian theology] He was no Divine comet who landed upon earth for 33 years. The whole idea of the Divinity and personal

pre-existence of Jesus Christ is simply not Biblical. The Mesopotamian legends speak of the flood being sent to stop man destroying Enlil's "rest" by his noise. The Mesopotamian gods sought for a "ceasing from toil", "rest from labour"- identical ideas to the Hebrew concept of *shabbat*. This was why, it was claimed, the gods first created man and put him to work in their garden- so that they could "rest". This background is alluded to in the way that Genesis speaks of man being *cast out* of tending the garden of Eden as a punishment- scarcely something the gods would wish if man was there to save them working there. God speaks of Him giving *man* a *shabbat* as a rest for man from his labour. And the flood, although it was Divine judgment, ultimately worked out as a blessing of 'rest' for man in that the 'world' was cleansed from sin. Thus 'Noah' was given that name, meaning 'rest', "because this child will bring us relief from all our hard work" (Gen. 5:29 G.N.B.). Adam's work in Eden wasn't onerous; his work when cast out of the garden was hard. The wrong ideas are clearly alluded to and often reversed- in order to show that a loving God created the world for humanity, for our benefit and blessing- and not to toil for the gods in order to save them the effort. The 'rest' so sought by the Mesopotamian gods was actually intended by the one true God as His gift to humanity.

5:30 *Lamech lived after he became the father of Noah five hundred and ninety-five years, and became the father of sons and daughters-* He died relatively young compared to his contemporaries, five years before the flood. We can assume he was supportive of Noah's life work until he died. But I suggested on :29 above another possible take on Lamech.

5:31 *All the days of Lamech were seven hundred and seventy-seven years, then he died-* I suggested on :29 that his death

at 777 would connect him with the Lamech in the line of Cain, who pronounced a multiple seven curse upon others.

5:32 *Noah was five hundred years old, and Noah became the father of Shem, Ham, and Japheth-* see on Gen. 5:29. The flood came when Noah was 600 (Gen. 7:11), yet he spent 120 years preparing it (Gen. 6:3). So it's possible that he wasn't married when the call came to build the ark; he'd have explained his life mission to his wife, and she'd have been his first convert. Alternatively, if he were already married at 480, they had many years of barrenness in their marriage. Given the long lifespans in those days, this would've been very hard to take. Yet he didn't take another wife. He was "moved with fear", 'reverently apprehensive' at what God told him, and prepared the ark in order to save his family (Heb. 11:7). Yet he began doing this before he had any children, and perhaps before he was married. He had faith that he would one day have a family, in accordance with God's invitation to make an ark in which to save his family. The mention of three sons being born in one year might mean they were triplets. Perhaps there was a far higher incidence of multiple births in those days, just as lifespans were far longer. This would mean that there would have been a veritable population explosion going on in the lead up to the flood- another connection with our last days, which are "as the days of Noah".

The flood came when Noah was 600. He was building the ark 120 years, from when he was 480. He was told then that the ark was to house his children and their wives (Gen. 6:18), when as yet he had no children. He went ahead and started building in faith, and 20 years after starting his barren wife had triplets. For it seems they were his only children. He raised them in the knowledge of what was to happen, and they persuaded their

girlfriends / wives of this too. A truly wonderful example of the Spirit of Christian living.

Ez. 14:20 could imply that Noah's sons and daughters in law were saved by his faith and intercession, rather than their own righteousness: "Though Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, as I live, says the Lord Yahweh, they would save neither son nor daughter; they would save only their own lives by their righteousness". He presumably had other children, and his three sons and their wives presumably had children and grandchildren. But none of these were saved. They would've been destroyed amongst the wicked. We can imagine the deep division within the family as a result of Noah's commitment to the ark project, his belief in judgment to come and God's word. Or maybe the rest of the family were killed due to the conflict with the line of Cain. Or it could be that for some reason, the family was afflicted with barrenness, as were many other faithful in the Biblical record. I suggest this because Noah is described as preparing the ark for the saving of his household, and his three sons and their wives and Noah's wife are described as "all of your household" (Gen. 7:1). But it could be that he was commanded to prepare an ark for the saving of his household (Heb. 11:7), but many of his family refused the salvation made potentially available to them.

We note that there are recorded here 10 generations from Adam to Noah, and there are also 10 generations recorded from Noah to Abraham (Gen. 11). Each of the final generations in each list is recorded as producing three siblings. The lifespans are nearly always divisible by five... the seventh in the list is highly significant, etc. These and many other such features lead us to question whether we are to read these genealogies as strictly literal. The genealogies in Mt. 1 and Lk. 3 are clearly structured to make a point, and this indeed was how genealogies were used

in ancient literature. On the other hand, it could be argued that just as there is pattern in nature, reflective of the Divine higher hand, so there is in the lives and development of God's people over history.

GENESIS CHAPTER 6

6:1 *It happened that when men began to multiply on the surface of the land, and daughters were born to them-* Longer lifespans, stronger human stock and perhaps multiple births (Noah had triplets- see on Gen. 5:32) would have contributed to a huge population explosion, akin to what we have in these "last days" which are "the days of Noah". The implication is that the population explosion was related to the intermarriage of the faithful with the unfaithful of which we will now read, leading to the total declension from the faith apart from Noah. The connection would simply be in the fact that the faithful were so outnumbered; they preferred to marry into the line of Cain, rather than remain faithful. We sin "like sheep", Isaiah 53 says. For all our so strongly imagined independence and sense that we are original and strong, we are all hopelessly influenced by the herd instinct. The sheer size of the unbelieving population weighed heavily upon the faithful, until they gave in and joined the apostate majority. This highlights the faithful strength of mind and individual conscience which there was in Noah; and he is set up as our pattern in these last days, which the Lord saw as prefigured in "the days of Noah".

The flood myths give basically two reasons for the cause of the flood- the world was overpopulating [especially according to the *Enuma Elis*], and there was a battle between the gods which resulted in earth being flooded. Moses' explanation alludes to this but was radically different- the population growth was a result of God's blessing, and the flood came because of human sin. And, no cosmic battle which resulted in earth's inhabitants suffering because of it. Time and again, the surrounding myths sought to minimize sin, whereas Moses' record highlights it. Sadly, Jewish interpretations went the same way as the flood

myths, with the Book of Enoch likewise attributing the flood and all human suffering to an Angelic revolt. Time and again, the difference between Moses' account of history and the surrounding myths is seen in the fact that Moses emphasizes human sin.

6:2 *That the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful, and they took for themselves wives of all that they chose-* The first recorded marriage out of the Faith was when the sons of God (the believers) saw the daughters of men (the women of the world), that they were "beautiful" (translated "better" 72 times; i.e. they *preferred* them to the faithful) (Gen. 6:2). Partners were chosen on the basis of appearance, rather than spirituality. And so it has ever been. They "chose" who they wanted, rather than marrying within the line of the seed of the woman or to spiritual women. The forbidden fruit always appears more beautiful; and the language of 'seeing' something as beautiful and attractive, and then taking it in sin, is all the language of Eve's failure with the forbidden fruit. The next verse describes how because of this, God decided to destroy mankind after 120 years. The corruption of God's way at that time was epitomized by marriage out of the Faith. The situation just before the flood is a type of that in the last days (Mt. 24:38); marriage out of the Faith will be a major problem for our last generation, according to this type.

Signs within the ecclesia seem to herald the Lord's coming even clearer than those without. As a prelude to the flood, the Sons of God married the daughters of men (Gen. 6:2)- the true believers married unbelievers. However, the "sons of God" often refers to Israel (Is. 43:6,7; 63:8; Jer. 31:20; Ez. 16:20; Mal. 1:16; 3:7), hinting that there will be a big Jewish inter-marriage problem in the last days too. There is ample evidence of this.

6:3 *Yahweh said, My Spirit will not strive with man forever, because he also is flesh- "Strive with"* has been interpretted as

"remain with" by some (E.A. Speiser) and the LXX. In this case the connection would be with the later statements that the flood took life away from all in whom was the breath of life. But "strive" is the more natural reading. I suggest rather than the Spirit of God sought to work with men to make them spiritual; but He never unduly forces. Yet He does struggle with men, as He did with Jacob and as was epitomized in his struggle with the Angel; and yet He never forces. Peter says that the Spirit of Christ was in Noah and it was this which witnessed to Noah's audience. Paul seems to allude here, when he criticizes the Galatians for having such a struggle between flesh and Spirit-when instead they should completely surrender to the Spirit: "But I say, walk by the Spirit and you shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh. For these are contrary to each other. You may not do the things you would like to!" (Gal. 5:16,17). God will not battle with man endlessly; there comes a point when He will no longer try, and judgment must come, with the resultant destruction of the flesh. This is what happened at the flood.

In 2 Pet. 2:5 Peter says that Noah was a preacher of, or [Gk.] 'by' righteousness to the people around him. Yet in 1 Pet. 3:19 Peter says that Christ preached to those same people through His Spirit. The resolution surely is that although Noah had never met the Lord Jesus, he lived according to the same Godly spirit as did Jesus; and this was his witness to his world. In this sense the spirit or disposition of Christ was found in all the Old Testament prophets (1 Pet. 1:11). There is ultimately only one Spirit (Eph. 4:4). The same spirit of holiness which was in Jesus was likewise thus in Noah. "The Spirit", the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ are all equated in Rom. 8:9. The ark 'was' Noah for those 120 years. When the ark 'rested' on Ararat ['holy hill'] the same word, 'Noah', is used (Gen. 8:4). Likewise the things of the Lord

Jesus and the salvation which is in Him, both for ourselves and others, should be likewise identified with us.

The withdrawal of a man's Spirit by God, as with the withdrawal of the Spirit gifts, is to be seen in some sense as God's judgment of man. Gen. 6:3 LXX and RVmg. implies this.

The Gilgamesh flood stories are significantly lacking in attaching much value or significance to human moral behaviour. The flood happened as a result of arguments amongst the gods, or because they just didn't want so many human beings on the earth- and not because of human sin. According to Gen. 6:3 (cp. 1 Pet. 3:20; 2 Pet. 2:5) there was a period of grace for 120 years before the flood, during which time Noah preached and urged people to repent. Such grace and pleading with man isn't found in the pagan myths because they fail to locate the root cause of the flood in human sin. And the gods of the various pantheons knew nothing of grace. God's appeal to humanity via Noah is in sharp contrast to the way the Gilgamesh Epic speaks of the flood being a secret which the gods carefully hid from man. The Epic records how Utnapishtim loaded the ark with his silver and gold lest it be destroyed (Gilgamesh Tablet 11:80-85 and 94,95); the Biblical record says nothing of this, speaking only of how living creatures and people were saved by the ark. Clearly life and people are of more importance to God than wealth, which cannot ultimately be saved. The ark of Gilgamesh had sailors to sail it, and "the pilot" is recorded as leaving the ship at the end of the flood. The Biblical ark had no sailor nor pilot apart from God. The Gilgamesh hero of the flood escaped it despite the will and intentions of the gods, who had decreed man's destruction. Noah was a Biblical hero because he believed in God's gracious desire to save him.

Yet will his days be one hundred twenty years- This could mean that lifespans were reduced, but people kept living to great

ages right up to the flood. So I take this as meaning that after 120 years, the judgment would come. The name "Methuselah" had been predicting this for over 800 years already. Knowing the destruction that would come on all except Noah, God waited in the hope that more would be saved. He as it were hoped against His own foreknowledge that more would saved (1 Pet. 3:20). Likewise God told Ezekiel that Israel would not hear his preaching (Ez. 3:7); and yet Ezekiel repeatedly prefaced his preaching addresses with an appeal to *please hear* God's word (Ez. 6:3; 13:2; 18:25; 20:47; 34:7; 36:1,4). He was hoping against hope; his preaching work was asking him to attempt the impossible. To make a nation hear who would not hear. Jeremiah likewise was told that Israel wouldn't hear him (Jer. 7:27), but still he pleaded with them to hear (Jer. 9:20; 10:1; 11:6; 16:12; 17:24; 38:15); God's hope was that perhaps they would hearken (Jer. 26:3) although He had foretold they wouldn't. Jeremiah was told not to pray for Israel (Jer. 7:16; 11:14; 14:11) and yet he did (Jer. 14:20; 42:2,4). It was the spiritually minded lifestyle of Noah in those 120 years which was his witness to the world of his day. Peter says in 1 Pet. 3:19 that Christ through His Spirit preached to the people of Noah's day.

The Lord Jesus / bridegroom "tarries", the same Greek word translated 'delay' in "my Lord delayeth his coming". The Lord does delay His coming- the man's mistake was in acting inappropriately because of this. God's judgments likewise "waited", or delayed, in Noah's time (1 Pet. 3:20)- presumably for the 120 year period of Gen. 6:3. In a similar way, the judgment on Nineveh preached by Jonah also delayed- it came in the end, but their repentance meant that it delayed at that time.

THE FLOOD AS A TYPE OF THE LAST DAYS

It is a commonly stressed theme throughout Scripture that the days of Noah are a type of the last days of AD70. The clearest is in Mt. 24:37: "As the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the son of man be". It is generally understood among us that the events of AD70 and the " coming" of the Lord then, point forward to that in the last days. Thus it is not surprising that a number of passages describe the AD70 judgments of Israel in terms of the flood; which suggests that they also have reference to the last days:

- 2 Peter 3 is a clear example, describing the destruction of the Jewish system in AD70 as being by fire as opposed to water used in Noah's time. Yet the chapter also has reference, e.g. through it's links with the new Heavens and earth of Is. 65, with the destruction of the present age at the Lord's return.

- Nahum 1 describes the coming judgements on Israel in terms of mountains and hills splitting, and there being a great flood; all Genesis flood language.

- Dan. 9:26 describes the Romans in AD70 destroying "the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood", the LXX implying with a *sudden* flood, as in Noah's time.

- Is. 54:9 describes the judgments on Israel being "as the waters of Noah". The end of the flood, the end of Israel's judgments, therefore typifies the second coming.

- In the light of this the Lord's parable about the man building on sand whose house was destroyed when the heavy rain came (Mt. 7:25,27) must have primary reference (as so many of the parables do) to the judgement on the Jewish house in AD70. Those who built on sand as a result of not hearing Christ's words were the Jews- also described as shoddy builders in Mt. 21:42; Acts 4:11; 1 Pet. 2:7; Mic. 3:10; Jer. 22:13.

We can therefore look at the Genesis record of the lead up to the flood and be confident that every detail has some relevance

to our time; and therefore grasp the reality of the fact that we should feel the same tenseness and intensity as Noah did as he waited for the rain. Note how Jesus' return is described as the rain in 2 Sam. 23:4; Hos. 6:3; Joel 2:23.

- Our present population explosion has only been paralleled in Noah's time. The longer life-spans could have resulted in each woman bearing up to 200 children; bearing in mind the lack of present constraining factors such as adverse climate, space, physical degeneration of the human stock over 6,000 years etc. which we now face, it is likely that in the 10 generations from Adam to Noah up to 2,000 million people were produced.

- These longer life-spans would have resulted in a great accumulation of knowledge and skills in the arts and sciences. Gen. 4:22 describes Tubal-Cain (contemporary with Noah) as "an instructor of every artificer in brass and iron", hinting at technical education and industrialization. Similarly Jubal was "father of all such as handle the harp and organ" (Gen. 4:21); a growth in so-called culture (i.e. sophisticated pleasure- educated Christians please note). Note the emphasis on education- "an instructor... father... father" .

- Cain's first big city (Gen. 4:17) no doubt spawned others. Complex, selfish city life would have been apparent at Noah's time- as it is supremely throughout our modern world.

- "Lamech shall be avenged seventy and seven fold" (Gen. 4:24) he boasted. Does this hint at the war preparations and a spirit of personal vengeance and pressing for one's 'rights' which fills the earth today?

- There is an emphasis on there being a "father" of all the cattle keepers, all the musicians, and an instructor of every metal worker (Gen. 4:20-22); implying the kind of commercial cartels and unionism which we have today?

- Job 22:15-18 comments on the people living just before the flood that they cast off all commitment to God and yet God " filled their houses with good things" ; i.e. material wealth despite a viciously God-forsaking attitude. Exactly the scene today.

- One of the few women mentioned as being contemporary with Noah was Adah- meaning 'to decorate, ornament'. And of such women the sons of God took wives of all that they chose (Gen. 6:2). Dolled up women picked up at will by sex-mad men could not be a more telling parallel with our age. Note too how the three periods picked out in Scripture as having major similarities with the last days- Sodom, Noah's time, Israel in AD70- all have the common feature of sexual misbehaviour. There can be no doubt that this is a major indication that we are in the last days.

- Given this apostacy of the sons of God and the unwillingness of the world to listen to Noah's preaching (2 Pet. 2:5) the size of the ecclesia must have declined, until it was only 9 strong. 'Methuselah' means 'When he dies, it shall come'- suggesting that he died a few days or weeks before the flood came. We can imagine the ecclesia falling away one by one until it was just that old brother, the middle aged Noah, and his three faithful sons (no doubt he had other sons and daughters who he failed to influence). The small, declining size of our ecclesias and the total apathy to our preaching should not discourage us- as with all negative things, a positive message can be read into them in the light of Scripture. And the message here is that such things clearly indicate that we are in the last days. The only people to survive the temptations of these 'last days' before the flood were one family unit. As these events are so pregnant with latter day relevance, it may be that we are to perceive here a faint hint that strongly led family units are the way to survive the last days. Noah is described as " the eighth" (2 Pet. 2:5), perhaps alluding

to the fact that of the eight people saved in the ark, he was " the eighth" ; he put the others first. The three who escaped the judgments on Sodom, another type of the last days, were all members of the same family; possibly implying the same thing. It must surely be significant that our strongest members are often from families with other strong members.

However, the general spiritual apathy grieved God at His heart, we are told. This reminds us of the often overlooked fact that God is an emotional being- the world today grieves Him, and it is to be expected therefore that He is all the more intently watching us, to see whether we are going to keep ourselves separate from the spirit of this desperate age.

6:4 *There were aggressive men [Nephilim] in the earth in those days, and also after that, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men, they bore children to them. Those were the mighty men who were of old, men of renown-*

There is no mention at all of "the sons of God" coming down from heaven. Why assume these "sons of God" are angels? The phrase is used concerning men, especially those who know the true God (Dt. 14:1 (R.S.V.); Hos. 1:10; Lk. 3:38; Jn. 1:12; 1 Jn. 3:1). If believers are to be made equal to angels (Lk. 20:35,36), will they still experience the same carnal desires which then motivated the sons of God, or have the possibility of giving way to them? Of course not! Luke 20:35,36, clearly says that the angels do not marry: "They which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the

resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage... for they are equal unto the angels". It is commonly believed that the angels who are thought to have sinned came down to earth at the time of the garden of Eden incidents, but Genesis 6 concerns the time of the flood, which was many years later. The Hebrew word for "giants" in Genesis 6:4, is also used to describe the sons of a man called Anak in Numbers 13:33. Freak human beings of unusual size or strength are sometimes born today, but it does not mean that their parents were angels. We are not specifically told that the giants were the children of the "sons of God". "There were giants... and also *after that*... the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men" (:4).If Angels married women, then who were the children, and what were they like? The apocryphal book of 1 Enoch claims that the offspring were "evil spirits" and witches (1 Enoch 15:8–16:1) – but the Bible is utterly silent about this.

The word "nephilim" comes from a Hebrew root meaning 'hackers or assailants'- implying arrogant gangs strutting round assailing people at will. Job. 22:15-17 R.V. gives the same impression. Compare this with the gang warfare and intimidation of the Americas and many countries, which is going to take over the *eretz* promised to Abraham. We already see it, in the images of Islamist fighters wandering around the *eretz* today.

The Hebrew syntax here would suggest that this is a notice that at this time, there were giants in the earth. The giants aren't described as being the offspring of the relationship between the sons of God and daughters of men. The word "giants" has two possible meanings: "fallen ones" (which would be relevant to their being the "sons of God" who had spiritually fallen away) and "assailants, hackers, tyrants" – the definition provided by Martin Luther and H.C. Leupold (H.C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis, Vol. 1* (Ann Arbor, MI: Wartburg Press, 1942), p. 250).

This is the root of the Hebrew word for "giant", and is used in 2 Kings 3:19,25, to describe a vicious attack on the Moabites by Israel. Thus we get the impression that there were men, perhaps of great physical size and strength, who went around viciously attacking people. They became famous (or infamous) – "men of renown". Job (22:15–17) comments upon them: "Hast thou marked the old way which wicked men have trodden? Which were cut down out of time, whose foundation was overflown with a flood: which said unto God, Depart from us". Notice that this refers to men, not angels. The intention of Moses in Genesis was to explain Israel's surrounding world to them, and deconstruct the false ideas they encountered in surrounding myth. The people were frightened by the "giants" they met in the land of Canaan (Num. 13:33). These *nephilim* [LXX *gigantes*] had their origin explained by Moses in Genesis 6 – the righteous seed intermarried with the wicked, and their offspring were these *nephilim*, mighty men of the world. Note in passing how Ez. 32:27 LXX uses this same word *gigantes* to describe pagan warriors who died– no hint that they were superhuman or Angels.

The Israelites were aware of the existence of unusually large people – the Zamzumin, Zumin, Rephaim, Nephilim, Emim, and Anakim (Dt. 1:28, 2:10,11, 20,21, 3:11). The bed of Og, King of Bashan, a Rephaim, was nine cubits long, over four meters (14 feet) – Dt. 3:11. In Canaanite mythology these giants came from intermarriage between human beings and the gods; but Moses in Genesis 6 is surely addressing this myth and correcting it. He's saying (by implication) that this didn't happen, but rather the Godly seed and the wicked intermarried; and yes, at that time, there were giants in the earth, but they were judged and destroyed by the flood, and the implication surely was that the Israel who first heard Moses' inspired history could

take comfort that the giants they faced in Canaan would likewise be overcome by God.

"And also after that" could be placed in brackets, as by the NET Bible. The idea would be that the *nephilim* in the *eretz* were encountered later in the history of the *eretz*, and indeed the term is used about the giant inhabitants of Canaan in Num. 13:33 (see note there). The Anakim or giants were descendants of Noah, but the point is that they were the equivalent of the strong warriors who strutted the *eretz* earlier, and who were judged and destroyed by the flood.

Umberto Cassuto pays special attention to the reference to the sons of God and daughters of men in Gen. 6, demonstrating that the "giants" are *mortal*, they were to die at best after 120 years; and they were on *earth* not in Heaven. Thus the Canaanite myths, which ironically later Judaism re-adopted, were deconstructed by Moses. He summarizes Moses' intention in the Genesis 6 passage as being to teach Israel: "Do not believe the gentile myths concerning men of divine origin who became immortal. This is untrue, for in the end all men must die, because they, too, are flesh... you must realize that they were only "on earth", and "on earth" they remained, and did not become gods, and they did not ascend to Heaven, but remained among those who dwell below, upon earth... the intention of the section is to contradict the pagan legends regarding the giants" (Umberto Cassuto, *Biblical And Oriental Studies* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1973) Vol. 1 pp. 21-28).

The claim that this verse refers to Angels marrying men has many problems. There is no mention here of “the sons of God” coming down from heaven- and such a fall supposedly happened at the time of Adam's fall, not now, many generations later. Why assume these “sons of God” are angels? The phrase is used concerning men, especially those who know the true God (Dt.

14:1 (R.S.V.); Hos. 1:10; Lk. 3:38; Jn. 1:12; 1 Jn. 3:1). If believers are to be made equal to angels (Lk. 20:35,36), will they still experience the same carnal desires which then motivated the sons of God, or have the possibility of giving way to them? Of course not! Luke 20:35,36, clearly says that the angels do not marry: "They which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage... for they are equal unto the angels". The Hebrew word for "giants" in Genesis 6:4, is also used to describe the sons of a man called Anak in Numbers 13:33. Freak human beings of unusual size or strength are sometimes born today, but it does not mean that their parents were angels. We are not specifically told that the giants were the children of the "sons of God". "There were giants... and also *after that*... the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men" (:4). If Angels married women, then who were the children, and what were they like? The apocryphal book of 1 Enoch claims that the offspring were "evil spirits" and witches (1 Enoch 15:8–16:1) – but the Bible is utterly silent about this.

The idea of cosmic beings coming to earth and having sexual relations with human women is a classic piece of pagan myth; and the Jews came to adopt these into their interpretations of the Genesis 6 passage, e.g. In the Book of Enoch. Josephus brings out the similarities: "The angels of God united with women... The actions attributed to them by our tradition [note that – "our tradition", not Scripture itself!] resemble the bold exploits which the Greeks recount about the Giants" (*Antiquities of the Jews* 1.3.1). Clearly, Jewish thinking sought to accommodate the pagan myths.

We have shown that the "sons of God" may refer to those with the true understanding of God. The "sons of God' of every generation have kept themselves separate from the people of the

world, and are warned by God not to marry such people because they will influence them away from following the true God (Ex. 34:12,15,16; Josh. 23:12–13; Ezra 9:12; 1 Cor. 7:39; 2 Cor. 6:14–16). Genesis 3:15 describes how the seed (descendants) of the serpent would be in constant conflict with the seed of the woman (cp. Gal. 4:29). The early chapters of Genesis highlight the fact that there were these two sorts of people; the descendants of Seth called themselves "by the name of the Lord" (Gen. 4:26 A.V margin) and comprised the righteous "sons of God", the seed of the woman. By contrast, the descendants of Cain, are described as being associated with murder and instituting polygamy (Gen. 4:23,19), the art of weapon production (Gen. 4:22) and entertainment (Gen. 4:21). The names of these people imply that at this time they started an alternative, apostate, system of worship to replace the true worship of God, which angered God; e.g. Cain named a city after Enoch, whose name means "dedicated"; Irad means "eternal city"; Mehujael means "God combats"; Lamech means "Overthrower" (of the truth ?). The sons of God marrying the daughters of men would therefore describe the inter–marriage of these two lines, so that only Noah and his family were the "seed of the woman" at the time of the flood.

Careful reflection on Genesis 6 indicates that the "sons of God" must have been men:

– They "took them wives of all that they chose". This process of choosing an appealing woman for marriage is so obviously something experienced by men. Notice how the "sons of God" probably took more than one wife each – "wives of all that they chose". This was a characteristic of the seed of the serpent (Gen. 4:19), showing us that the two lines had merged; because of the sons of God marrying the daughters of men, God said that in 120 years' time, He would destroy man (Gen. 6:3) in the

flood. Why should God punish and destroy man if the angels had sinned? Seeing that angels cannot die (Lk. 20:35,36), there would have been no point in destroying the earth with a flood to try and destroy them. Things fall into place far better if the "sons of God" were men: therefore God said, "The end of all flesh(mankind) is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with (from) the earth" (Gen. 6:13). The violence on the earth which vv. 3–5 associate with the apostasy of the "sons of God" arose through man – man, not angels or the Devil, had filled the earth with violence: another reason God brought the flood was because the earth had become corrupt. Why did this happen? It was corrupt, "for (because) all flesh had corrupted His way upon the earth" (Gen. 6:11,12). Man had corrupted the true way of God – due to the sons of God, who understood "the way", mixing with the people of the flesh. "The way" is a phrase used to describe the true understanding of God (e.g. Gen. 3:24; 18:19; Ps. 27:11; 119:32,33; Acts16:17; 9:2; 18:25; 19:9,23; 2 Pet. 2:2). This corruption of "the way" by the "sons of God" in Genesis 6 is commented on in Jude 11, where the apostate Christians of the first century are likened to those men who went "in the way of Cain" – not of the truth. Cain was the father of the seed of the serpent line

– The actions of the "sons of God" in Genesis 6:2, are described in v. 5 as "the wickedness of man", which "was great in the earth... every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually"

– Jesus said that the world in the last days would be similar to what it was at the time of Noah. He implied that in the same way as men had the wrong attitude to marriage in Noah's time, so men also would in the last days before His return (Lk. 17:26,27). The only reference to attitudes to marriage at Noah's time is in

Genesis 6:2, thus again implying that the "sons of God" who married wrongfully were men.

Apostate Jewish theology sought to minimize human sin and blame it on a Satan figure. It's significant that when the inspired New Testament writers refer to the flood, there is no suggestion by them that they accepted the idea that sinful Angels somehow led humanity into sin. Instead, they repeatedly underscore the fact that it was human sin which led God to punish humanity. The uninspired Book of Jubilees, written about 150 BC, claims that Noah complained to God about "the unclean demons" leading his grandchildren into sin and asked God to judge these demons, thus resulting in the flood (Jubilees 10:1–7). That is mere fantasy – and quite the opposite of what the Genesis record states – where clearly it is human wickedness which leads God to judge humans. What I find so highly significant is that the Lord Jesus and His apostles stress that it was indeed human sin which led to Divine judgment through the flood. Effectively, they're thus deconstructing these false ideas which were circulating and upholding the Biblical emphasis against the sophistry of the false theology about Satan / demons which was circulating. It's a tragedy that the same false understandings still circulate, and so many still refuse to face up to the clear teaching of Scripture – that human beings sin and must take responsibility and bear judgment for that sin.

This passage is actively deconstructing false Canaanite myths about sinful gods, giants, demons etc. it could be argued that this passage, along with much of early Genesis, is actually deconstructing the wrong ideas about Angels, demons, Satan etc. which Israel had encountered in Egypt and amongst the Canaanite tribes. It is teaching that the giants which Israel had noticed were in fact only human, and no more. They were "mighty *men*", "*men* of renown". Later Scripture does likewise

– the *Rephaim* had children like other human beings (2 Sam. 21:16,18; Dt. 3:11), inhabiting an area known as the valley of Rephaim (Josh. 15:8). Cassuto comments: "The intention of the section is actually to contradict certain folk–tales, and to erase, as far as possible, their mythological features" (Umberto Cassuto, *Biblical and Oriental Studies* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1975) Vol. 2 p. 108). Elsewhere, Cassuto draws attention to the significance of God's comment upon the sin of the 'sons of God' in Gen. 6:3: "My spirit shall not abide in [or, strive with] *man* forever". God comments upon the *human* condition, not upon anything out in the cosmos. He comments: "[this] implies: Do not believe the heathen tales about human beings of divine origin, who were rendered immortal; this is untrue, for in the end every man must die, "in as much as he, too, is flesh"... The Torah's intention is to counteract the pagan legends and to reduce to a minimum the content of the ancient traditions concerning the giants" (Umberto Cassuto, *Commentary on the Book of Genesis* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1998 ed.) Vol. 1 p. 300). The record of the flood which follows that of the mention of the 'giants' can be read as a further deconstruction of the myths about them. The Biblical record states that God opened the "windows of Heaven" (Gen. 7:11). The identical term in Ugaritic occurs in Tablet 2 AB, col. 7 line 17 of the Ras Shamra tablets. Cassuto explains that "The Canaanites used to tell of the god Baal that at one stage he built for himself a palace in the sky and opened therein windows... The Canaanites attributed to Baal the sending down of rain from heaven", but that the giants / offspring of the wicked gods "set down their feet and closed up the deep, and they placed their hands on the windows" (References in Umberto Cassuto, *Commentary on the Book of Genesis* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1992 ed.) Vol. 2 pp. 86,87).

6:5 *Yahweh saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually-* The enormous judgment of the flood was because of human thoughts. This is in radical contrast to the various flood myths of the ancient world. There is almost a juxtaposition between human thoughts- and the enormity of the punishment. But that was the point. How man thinks is so hugely significant to God. Noah's response was to prepare "an ark to the saving of his house... and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith" (Heb. 11:7). We know from Peter that the ark represents Christ. Noah's response was not to smugly reflect how that soon he would be vindicated for his separation from the world, i.e. for his own personal righteousness. Instead he took seriously God's warning that sinners were to soon be destroyed. Noah was, of course, a sinner as we all are. He therefore must have cried out to God in faith, asking for God to count him as if he were righteous, so that he would be saved from the coming judgments against sin. This is how he had righteousness imputed to him. He showed his faith that God really had justified him by doing something physical- his faith led to the 'works' of building the ark; as our faith likewise leads us to baptism into Christ. Through Christ, God "scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts" (Lk. 1:51). This is quoting from Gen. 6:5 LXX concerning the wicked imagination of man's heart at the flood; note it was their thoughts and imaginations which were so obnoxious to God. This is even more evidence that we can read the events of the flood as typical of two things; our salvation from the judgment upon sin, and also of the events of the last days, when that salvation will be physically manifested. We are in Noah's position; we can see clearly the judgments which must come upon sin. By our nature, we are part and parcel of that sin which has to be judged. Our response *cannot* be to trust in

our own righteousness, which we may feel we have as a result of our physical separation from the world. We must instead be motivated by imagining the reality of Christ's coming, to make sure that we are covered in the righteousness of Christ, so that the impending destruction of sin will not take us away with it. Perhaps at no time before has the body of Christ so needed to learn the lesson of Noah; to cease from our own works, "and become heir of the righteousness which is by *faith*".

6:6 *Yahweh was sorry that He had made man on the earth-* "Sorry" is AV *It repented-* "It repented The LORD that He had made man on the earth, and it grieved Him at His heart". To repent means to change around. God Himself can change; the one thing that doesn't is His unfailing love and grace for His people. Yet the language here could be applied to Angels, or to God's manifestation of His thoughts through them. It was the Angels who actually made man on earth, in the image of themselves, and we have shown that it was the Angels who actually brought the flood on the earth. So it could be argued that it was they who repented and therefore decided to bring the flood. Thus only Noah "found grace in the eyes of the LORD" (:8). The eyes of the LORD are the Angels- it was they who surveyed the earth and saw that it was wicked, except for Noah. The phrase in :13 "the end of all flesh is come before Me" implies that it was brought to God's attention- another example of language of limitation, which must refer to the Angels. Thus it was the Angels who repented, or changed their mind, about creation.

But sometimes words have two meanings, and that is intentional. The Hebrew for "sorry" is also translated 'comfort' and is in fact a form of the word 'Noah' (Gen. 5:29). The hint may be that in all the Divine grief, He was comforted by the existence of even one man, Noah, who loved Him. For Noah

really means 'source of comfort'. God's sensitivity is such that the response of one person, above all His Son, can totally affect His worldview and comfort Him in the grief of being the Father of a bad family. The account of Noah is repeated in essence in that of Lot and the destruction of Sodom. One man and his family was saved, having lived in a society of gross immorality, both were "shut in" miraculously (Gen. 7:16; 19:10 s.w.); yet even his salvation was followed by incest and drunkenness, and repopulation followed from that. And the same question is addressed: Will the righteous suffer along with the wicked? The answer is that God takes note of righteous individuals and will give them paths to escape to salvation. We have something similar in Ex. 32-34, where God was prepared to save Moses, and destroy the rest. But in all these records, there is the theme of God's openness to dialogue.

The theme of Divine regret is found in both Genesis and Gilgamesh; according to the Bible, Yahweh regretted the *creation* of man, whereas according to Gilgamesh, the gods regretted the *destruction* of man. This purposeful contrast is surely to indicate that whilst Yahweh has emotions, His judgment of man was just and was done without regret.

There has to be a connection between the fact that "Noah" was intended to bring "comfort" or "repentance" (Gen. 5:29), and the way the same word is now used of how God "repented" that He had made man. The hope of the faithful had been that Noah would bring about the re-thinking of the curse upon earth for Adam's sin; but God's re-thinking was to actually destroy all men upon the earth, apart from Noah.

Gilgamesh speaks of how there was a discussion amongst the gods as to what to do with humanity. Human sin is not given as the reason for their decision, but rather mere capriciousness of the gods. The Atrahasis epic gives the reason as the gods

becoming angry that the humans are not serving them enough. In Gilgamesh, the majority of gods wanted to destroy humanity, but some, led by the god Ea-Enki, wanted to save. What is totally unique about the Biblical record is that there is only *one* God involved. Within Him there is this tension between judging sin, and lovingly saving His wayward creation. And thus we read the incredible statement that God "repented" that He had created man (Gen. 6:5). In Gilgamesh, there is a tension amongst the gods; Ea-Enki becomes so passionate to save humanity that he rebels against the other gods. In the true, Biblical record, that tension between gods is expressed as a tension within the heart of the one true God. He created mankind; and then He wanted to destroy them for their sin; and yet He struggled with this. The record leads us to enter into the Divine pain, the struggle of God. This is totally and utterly unique; this is the truth, which all other religions and myths could never get hold of. Moses' record was paving the way for his own experience of this aspect of Israel's wonderful God. For he too had experienced God stating His judgment of His people, 'repenting' that He had created them as a nation, seeking to destroy them, and yet being sensitive to Moses' pleas. One sees the same Divine pain in later Scripture, especially in Hosea. There, God alternates between having no mercy on His people, and showing mercy; not being their God any longer; yet being their God. And like a wounded lover, God declares: "I will love them no more"; and yet in the final, tear-jerking outpouring of God in Hosea 14, we read the wonderful conclusion: "I will love them freely". This is such a hard thing to really come to terms with. For how can a God who is all powerful and who knows the end from the beginning, have such feelings? Yet those Divine feelings are legitimate, they really were felt, and they are felt by God Almighty about us at this very moment. It is so much easier to do as Gilgamesh did, and have a

judgmental god and a saviour god; or to have a 'good God' and a bad, evil satan, as in the theology of today's apostate Christianity. But the wonder of Yahweh is that this one and only true God has these two aspects within Him. To know something of this Divine struggle, this surpassing love of God, is something that flows out from a belief in there being only one God. The issues of grace and truth, love and judgment, mercy and justice, are all brought together in the awesome personality of this God with whom we have to do.

And it grieved Him- For "grieved", see on Gen. 8:10; Is. 63:10, where again the Spirit of God is grieved by the people in the *eretz*. Prov. 3:20 RV says that "By his knowledge the depths were broken up, and the skies dropped down the rain". The flood was brought about by God's wisdom, not because a deity lost his patience and temper with mankind. God destroyed mankind because of His *grief* (Gen. 6:6)- and He did so because He planned on saving the world through water (1 Pet. 3:20). Noah and the faithful were saved from corruption and the faith being lost by the world that threatened to destroy them (spiritually) being itself destroyed. There are many allusions to the flood in Job, notably in the descriptions of the waters being stored up by God, released by Him as He wishes, and having had bounds now placed upon them after the flood (Job 38:9-11,22,33; 26:8; there's specific mention of the flood in Job 22:16). The flood would've been relatively recent history in Job's time. It's therefore instructive to read in Job 37:11-13 that God sends His waters upon the earth partly for correction, partly in judgment, and also partly "for mercy". The flood was in a sense a Divine mercy, in ending the existence of impenitent sinners.

In His heart- The evil heart of mankind troubled the heart of God (Gen. 6:5,6). This "heart to heart" between God and man is amazing.

6:7 *Yahweh said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the surface of the ground; man, along with animals, creeping things, and birds of the sky; for I am sorry that I have made them-* Man, beast, creeping things, birds- a reversal of the creation order in Gen. 1:20-27. 6:7,8 *I will destroy man... but Noah* could imply that God's initial intention was to totally destroy humanity, but because Noah found grace [the idiom could imply God heard his prayer], God made a way of escape for Noah and intended to found a new humanity from him. I've elsewhere commented that much in the early Pentateuch is connectable with Israel's later history; Moses' account in Genesis was in order to explain to Israel in the wilderness the background to their situation. The situation here in 6:7,8 recalls how God wanted to destroy all Israel and make of Moses a new nation (Ex. 32:10); but Moses, like Noah, found grace in God's eyes (Ex. 33:13; 34:9). Moses describes himself as one who had found grace in God's eyes at the very time that God speaks of making a new nation from him- he saw the connection. God's expressed regret that He had made the animal creation can read strangely; it reads as if it is an emotional statement. And perhaps that is indeed how we are to read it; here in early Genesis we are being introduced to a God who has passion, whose anger flares up in His face (Ez. 38:18), and only subsides because of His grace.

It was when "Yahweh saw that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil all the day" that He decided: "I will blot out from the earth the Adam I have created" (Gen. 6:5-7). But comparing this with Gen. 8:21, we get the impression that God comes to accept the weakness of man, and to tolerate it without destroying it: "Yahweh said in His heart, "I will never again curse the soil because of the Adam, for the inclination of the Adam's heart is evil from youth". This same pattern is seen later; God is so angry with human sin in His

people that He decides to change His plans and destroy the sinners. But He later again changes, and decides to tolerate them. Thus in Ex. 33:3,5 God says that "I will not go up among you for you are a stiff-necked people, lest I would consume you on the way... You are a stiff-necked people; if for a single moment I should go up among you, I would consume you". But after Moses' intercession, God does go up among them even thought they are a stiff-necked people. He hears Moses' prayer of Ex. 34:9: "I pray, let Yahweh go among us for this is a stiff-necked people, pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for your inheritance". This is not to say that God will not judge sin and sinners. He definitely will. But we see here a growth in tolerance, akin to what many men experience as they pass through the fatherhood experience. We think of how God tells Abraham "Now I know that you fear God, in that you have not withheld your son... from Me" (Gen. 22:12). Being a father is not simply an act of procreation; fatherhood is a relationship, and it could be argued that it goes with the territory of fatherhood to change and be changed in response to your children. This may be one window onto how God in this sense can change or learn. It was a choice He made to go through that experience. God is not fickle, and yet He has emotions. Later He will say that He repents of certain relationships with His people, and rejects them; and then He changes His mind again, repenting of His repentance as it were. His repentings are "kindled together" at the time of Hosea. This is how deeply involved God is in the response of His children to Him. It inspires us to love and serve Him with all we have and are; in a way that a stone faced, unfeeling god would never inspire. God's omnipotence is such that the Master of the plot as it were gets emotionally caught up within the plot. As we go through life we are faced with the awesome reality that God responds passionately and emotionally to our every move.

For or against Him. This is the huge meaning of the crucifixion- so much response is elicited, and in turn responded to by God. Realizing this dimension of God is the ultimate answer to the scepticism and stone facedness of the postmodern world.

6:8 *But Noah found favour in Yahweh's eyes-* Or, "found grace"; see on Gen. 9:21. Noah was saved by grace and was likely not without his weaknesses. Finding grace may suggest that He sought it- that he recognized his weakness [alcoholism?] and asked for God's grace; and found it. 2 Pet. 2:5 speaks of how "the old world" was not "spared", but Noah was, in that he was saved. His salvation was by grace, it was a 'being spared' rather than a reward for his righteousness. In Gen. 7:1, God says that He considered Noah as 'seen righteous'. Here we have an Old Testament working model of justification by grace through faith. The statement of Gen. 7:1 is *after* Noah has built the ark; so his works have demonstrated his faith. But his justification is by grace not works; and in Gen. 8:21 God speaks of humanity including Noah as having the imagination of evil in his heart. But despite that, God counted or 'saw' him righteous. Perhaps the account of Noah's drunkenness [with no apparent repentance] is there to show us what being 'seen righteous by grace' means in practice. Heb. 11:7 cites Noah as an example of those to whom righteousness is imputed by faith; and in Romans, Paul explains that this is a parade example of *grace*. Clearly Paul has Noah in view as a worked example of a sinner being saved by grace through faith, by having righteousness imputed to him. Noah is not therefore presented as righteous, but as faithful; and thereby having righteousness imputed to him.

6:9 *This is the history of the generations of Noah-* a Hebraism for 'an account of the life' of Noah. Yet the Hebrew for "generations" means just that. We expect to now encounter a

list of children, grandchildren etc. Instead we read a summary of Noah's character. His children, his offspring, his memorial in this earth, was not his children, but rather his character. This is comfort for the childless. Our characters are our generation. This is what shall remain beyond the grave; for our spirit, the personality we develop, abides with God after our death and shall live eternally as 'us' at the Lord's return to earth. So often, individual character development becomes subsumed beneath the pressures of childrearing. But our ultimate "generation" is us, our personality and character.

Noah was a righteous man- The idea is, complete. All parts of his life were devoted to God, the lesson of the whole burnt offerings. But as noted on :8, his righteousness was imputed to him by faith, through grace.

Blameless among the people of his time- We must note the connection between God showing grace, undeserved favour, to Noah- and him being described here as a just or righteous man. Heb. 11:7 states that Noah's righteousness was that which comes from justification by faith. And he was the only one amongst the "people of his time" who had such faith. the idea is not that he was so much better than them. He was the forerunner of Abraham. Noah was counted righteous, because he believed- he believed God's words about the flood coming, he gave 120 years of his life to building an ark, and by his example witnessed to the world and pleaded with them to also believe. It wasn't that God as it were rewarded Noah for his good deeds by counting righteousness to him. Otherwise there'd be no meaning to the statement that Noah found grace from God (6:8). So we can see how it worked out- Noah's reasoning must've been something like: 'We're all sinners and quite rightly done for by this flood that will come, me as well as the rest of my world. But... wait up... God has given *me* a way out of this, by building an ark and

being saved from it. But... I'm a sinner and deserve to die in this judgment that's coming. So how can it be, that *I*, with all my weakness and dysfunction, can survive this judgment? It must be that although I am worthy of destruction in the flood, God's willing to count me as if I'm righteous and therefore not destroy me with the world of the ungodly. Wow. He counts *me* as if I am righteous... and I believe that. So I will go on building the ark and seek to persuade as many others to believe God is willing to count them as righteous and if they believe that, they'll jump on board the ark with me'.

Noah walked with God- Noah as one of the seed of the woman had the characteristic of Enoch, who was in the same line. Moment by moment in the day, we are to be "with" God, on a journey with Him. All life is movement, a journey. It's not a case of being on a journey whilst others are static, but moving with God.

Gen 6:10 *Noah became the father of three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth-*

Gen. 6:18 implies that Noah only had three sons, whereas for people with such long life spans we'd have expected him to have had far more than that. He only had three children- for he prepared the ark to save "his house" (Heb. 11:7) and Gen. 7:1 is quite clear: "Go into the ark, you and *all* your household"- his whole household was his wife, three sons and their wives. Period . I suggested on Gen. 5:29 that we get the picture of a man who was the underdog, the farm worker, the sidekick of the family, whose own family life was delayed and limited by this background. Perhaps he turned to alcohol for comfort (hence Gen. 9:21). But it was he whom God chose to save, he alone who was righteous in that generation which perished. It was the quiet, broken man who was saved.

The mention of three sons being born in one year (Gen. 5:32) might mean they were triplets. Perhaps there was a far higher incidence of multiple births in those days, just as lifespans were far longer. This would mean that there would have been a veritable population explosion going on in the lead up to the flood- another connection with our last days, which are "as the days of Noah".

6:11 *The earth was corrupt before God-* Note how this verse is quoted in Ez. 8:17 about the land (same word as "earth") of Israel being filled with violence. Similarly Gen. 6:13 is alluded to in Ez. 7:2,3,6. This opens up an understanding of Ezekiel along the lines that it is describing the events of AD70 as well as other periods. The flood being such a clear type of AD70, passages which allude to it must also have an AD70 context. "Before God" means 'in His presence'; the idea may be that His presence was still found at the cherubim which guarded the entrance to the garden of Eden. But 'before Him' there, the earth was found corrupt. And so the flood swept away Eden and the sanctuary. This would imply that up until the flood, God was willing to allow Eden to be restored and to grant entry to it- but no saviour figure arose in the line of the seed of the woman, despite some, such as Noah, Cain and Seth, who may have had the potential. And so the salvation program was set back, as has happened so often in salvation history.

The same Hebrew word is translated "corrupt" and "destroyed" (s.w. :13). The people destroyed themselves; their corruption was their own destruction. And this is how God works; it's not simply that judgment for sin is appropriate to the sin, but that sin is its own judgment and condemnation. Therefore to "bear sin" is to bear the [judgment for] sin. And God's judgment and destruction is simply a confirmation of man's choice to destroy himself and his world. In this we see how

God respects human freewill decisions, to the point that we are confirmed in those choices by Him. And that adds meaning to human decision and imparts a gravity and seriousness to human choice.

The Jewish apocryphal Book of Enoch was instrumental in forging the Jewish misunderstanding of Satan as a personal being. This book shifts the blame for sin from humanity to a Satan-figure called Azazel: "The whole earth has been corrupted through the works that were taught by Azazel: to him ascribe all sin" (1 Enoch 9:6; 10:8). There is a subtle but significant difference between this and the Biblical record in Gen. 6:11- which states that the earth became corrupt before God because of *human sin.* The Biblical record makes no attempt to pass the blame for this onto any other being- humanity was punished because *they* sinned. It would in any case be surely unethical for God to punish humanity because of what Azazel did.

And the earth was filled with violence- The world was characterized by *hamas-* "unrighteousness". 'Hamas' can mean "lawlessness perpetrated by force" (Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary On The Book Of Genesis* (Jerusalem: Magness Press, 1998) Vol. 2 p. 52). Perhaps we have here a suggestion that the 'land' promised to Abraham- the arena of the Biblical flood- is to be dominated by 'Hamas' or a like terrorist organization.

6:12 *God saw the earth, and saw that it was corrupt-* He sees or 'looks' all the time (Ps. 14:2; 53:2,3). 'Looking upon' is an idiom for answered prayer or God's response to human request (Gen. 6:12; 29:32; Ex. 2:25; Dt. 26:7; Jud. 6:14; Lk. 1:48). Perhaps [as often in early Genesis] we have the same events recorded in different words; in 6:8 we learn that Noah found grace in God's eyes; and perhaps in response to Noah's prayers for salvation from his evil world, God looked upon the earth and decided to destroy it in response to Noah's prayers.

Not that necessarily Noah prayed for earth's destruction; but this was the method God used to answer whatever Noah was asking for.

For all flesh had corrupted His way on the earth– The same word is translated 'destroy' when we read of God's resolve to 'destroy' humanity with the flood (Gen. 6:13,17). Humanity had destroyed themselves; Divine condemnation and judgment is only really a working out of what people have done to themselves. The same word occurs in Ex. 32:7, where we read that Israel had corrupted / destroyed themselves. This is an example of how within the Pentateuch, events in early Genesis set the scene for the later story of Israel. God's "way" in the *eretz* was surely the way to the tree of life, guarded by the cherubim. The flood swept all that away, including the garden of Eden and the possibility to come to eternity through the sanctuary and a saviour-seed of the woman. "All flesh" had corrupted or destroyed that way by their immorality. And God confirmed that by literally destroying it.

We note that the *eretz* was corrupt because the people upon it were corrupt. So often, the *eretz* and its people are seen as one. Hence the *eretz* was left desolate whilst the people of the *eretz* were desolated. In :13 we will likewise read that the people of the land had filled the land with violence; and this was why the land ["earth"] had to be destroyed.

6:13 *God said to Noah, The end of all flesh has come before me, for the earth is filled with violence through them. Behold, I will destroy them with the earth-* "Come before Me" rather suggests that God was sharing His feelings with Noah, explaining that the idea of destroying the earth and man upon it had come into His mind, before Him for consideration. But Noah had 120 years to change that outcome. We marvel at God sharing His inner

musings with mere man upon earth; and man's possibility to affect the outcome of God's thoughts.

Both Moses and Peter stress that God brought the flood upon "the world of the ungodly", i.e. the wicked *people*. The Jewish writings claimed that the purpose of the flood was to destroy sinful *Angels*, and that mankind suffered from the result of their destruction. Thus the *Testament of Naphtali* 3.5: "Likewise the Watchers departed from the order of nature; the Lord cursed them at the Flood". The Jewish writings repeatedly change the Biblical emphasis upon wicked people (especially Jews), claiming that the various Divine judgments were upon wicked Angels. Quite why people on earth should have to suffer the result of this remains a begged question. The Biblical record speaks repeatedly of the destruction of "all flesh". It was their 'corruption' which came 'before God' (:11); here, it is the end or destruction of "all flesh" which was before God. Again, people are put for their behaviour. This may sound obvious, but in reality, we so often consider that we ourselves in our core being are a spiritual person, and yet we allow ourselves to do things and say words which are [so we like to think] 'not really me'. But human words and actions are treated by God as the person. For that is who we are. The word is made flesh, whether that word is good or bad. Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks (Mt. 12:34).

It's significant that the various Mesopotamian legends about a flood all speak of there being conflict between the divinities before the decision to flood the earth was taken; and then quarrels and recriminations between them after it. The Biblical record has none of this- the one true God brought the flood upon the earth by His sovereign will, and He lifted the flood. In the legends, the hero of the flood [cp. Noah] is exalted to Divine status, whereas in the Biblical record Noah not only remains

human, but is described as going off and getting drunk. Throughout pagan legends, the Divine-human boundary is often blurred- gods get cast down to earth and become men, whilst men get exalted to 'Heaven' and godhood. This gave rise to the idea of 'angels that sinned' and were cast down to earth. But in the Biblical record, the Divine-human boundary is set very clearly- the one God of Israel is *so* far exalted above humanity, His ways are not ours etc. (Is. 55:8), that there can be no possibility of this happening. The exception of course was in the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ- but even He was born as a genuine human upon earth, and [contrary to Trinitarian theology] He was no Divine comet who landed upon earth for 33 years. The whole idea of the Divinity and personal pre-existence of Jesus Christ is simply not Biblical.

6:14 *Make a ship of gopher wood-* A commonly available tree in the Middle East. The ark is Christ. He was from common material, of our human nature. Building a boat on dry land, before anyone had experienced rain or flooding, was the kind of paradigm breaking challenge which in essence we experience in this age. For we are asked to bend all our powers to preparing for a future which we can only see by faith, leading to the mockery of those around us.

You shall make rooms in the ship- Heb. nests. There is a unique place for each of us prepared in God's eternal house- Jn. 14:1-3.

And shall seal it inside and outside with pitch- Cp. our being sealed in Christ with the Spirit in our hearts, as it were "inside", in a way which is visible to all, "outside" (Eph. 1:13; Eph. 4:30). The same idea is to be found in the Lord shutting in Noah (Gen. 7:16). The Hebrew for 'pitch' is related to the word for 'covering', as in the atonement covering for sin. Clearly, the ark and the

flood narrative are intended to be interpreted as a parable of redemption in Christ.

6:15 *This is how you shall make it. The length of the ship will be three hundred cubits, its breadth fifty cubits, and its height thirty cubits-* The ark was not designed for sailing, it had no means of self propulsion, nor self-steering. We likewise are led by the Spirit, and once we surrender to that, our path is not of our own device nor direction. The ark represents Christ, entering Him by baptism (1 Pet. 3:19-21). Once there, we're in God's hands. 300 x 50 x 30 is the same proportion as the human body- significant in that the ark is understood by Peter as being a type of the body of Christ, into which the believer enters by baptism.

The Biblical account of the flood gives details which are imaginable, earthly realities; there is nothing of the grossly exaggerated and other-worldly which there is in the pagan flood legends. Thus the Biblical dimensions for the ark are realistic, whereas the boat mentioned in the Babylonian legend recorded by Berossus was supposedly about one kilometer long and half a kilometer wide. Noah was 600 years old according to the Biblical record, whereas Ziusudra, the Mesopotamian equivalent of Noah, was supposedly 36,000 years old at the time of the flood.

6:16 *You shall make a roof in the ship, and you shall finish it leaving a cubit between the roof and the sides. You shall set the door of the ship in its side. You shall make it with lower, second, and third levels-* "Roof" is AV "*a window*"- Heb. a light (as RV, ASV), a glistering thing; the word comes from the word for pressed oil. The Rabbis suggest it was a precious stone. If so, it would look forward to the Lord Jesus as the light of our world as we live within the ark. This isn't the same Hebrew word as in Gen. 8:6, where Noah opened a window in the ark. "The door" likewise is a title of the Lord Jesus; the same Hebrew word is used multiple times of the tabernacle door (Ex. 29:11) and the temple

door, also of the door of the houses at Passover time in which salvation was to be found (Ex. 12:22,23). The three levels are hard to interpret; we think of Paul's reference to a "third heaven", and the three divisions of the tabernacle, into most holy, holy and the entrance area beyond the door of the tabernacle. The ark is presented as a kind of tabernacle, a sanctuary, with Noah building it obediently, as Moses did the tabernacle (Gen. 6:22).

6:17 *I, even I, do bring the flood of waters on this earth, to destroy all flesh having the breath of life from under the sky. Everything that is in the earth will die-* The condemned world of Noah's time [the flood was a clear type of the final judgment] were to 'pine away / languish' (Gen. 6:17; 7:21- AV "die"). The wicked will melt away from the Lord's presence (Ps. 68:2). Rejected Israel are described as being "ashamed away" (Joel 1:12)- the same idea. This is the idea behind Heb. 12:15 RVmg: "...man that falleth back from the grace of God". What they did in this life in slinking away from the reality of pure grace will be what is worked out in their condemnation experience. 1 Jn. 2:28 speaks of them as being "ashamed from before him at his coming", the Greek suggesting the idea of slinking away in shame.

6:18 *But I will establish my covenant-* The covenant wasn't established until Noah left the ark, Gen. 9:11. Noah lived by faith in this promise of a promise- which is what this was. Being in covenant relationship with God is presented as the opposite of dying. The covenant was of salvation, and outside of it, there was no salvation, only death. The same to this day. This encourages us to preach that covenant to others, and urge those who accept it to remain within it.

With you- "You" singular. God established His covenant with Noah personally, but Noah was able to save his family as well on account of his covenant relationship with God. Ez. 14:14,20

state that in Ezekiel's time, Israel were so wicked that Noah would've saved only himself and not his family. Yet Heb. 11:7 says that Noah saved his family by preparing the ark. The implication could be that Noah's spirituality 'covered' his weaker family, because they were not as unspiritual as the people of Ezekiel's time, although still in need of saving by another. This suggests that to some extent, we can affect the salvation of third parties, especially family members, by our own finding of grace before God. Noah is strangely described as "the eighth person" of the eight who were saved (2 Pet. 2:5). Perhaps this means that he put the salvation of the others first, and entered last of all into the ark. The covenant was with him, relating to his personal salvation; but he wasn't spiritually selfish, but rather worked to incorporate others within his own salvation. And God remembered this, calling him "the eighth" (RV "Noah with seven others").

You shall come into the ship, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you- Noah apparently had only one wife, even though it seems she wasn't very fruitful. Polygamy was likely popular amongst the wealthy- indicating Noah's faithfulness to his wife as well as possibly his poverty. Note the stress upon "you", Noah- he was the one God was in relationship with, and the salvation of the others was through him: "I will establish my covenant with *you* [singular]- *you* shall come into the ship, *you*, *your* sons, *your* wife, and *your* sons' wives *with you*". We perhaps need to jettison the kids' Bible pictures of Noah working on the ark with his three sons helping him, with their wives bringing them food as they laboured. Quite possibly Noah alone built the ark, and his family were saved by grace on account of him. It was "the ship which he had made" (Gen. 8:6). Heb. 11 says that Noah was the one who believed, and moved with fear, prepared an ark

in order to save his family. That said, they did freely enter the ark at the end of the 120 years.

6:19 *Of every living thing of all flesh, you shall bring two of every sort into the ship, to keep them alive with you. They shall be male and female-* The animals were gathered from all over the land. They cannot represent the saints- Noah's family represents them. They may therefore look forward to the people from all over the world who will survive the judgements on the world due to their association with us. Thus many of those to whom we witness but they do not respond may well survive the holocaust to come upon the world to live in the new age of peace, like that which followed the flood. This concept should give the ultimate fillip to our enthusiasm for preaching- no longer obsessed with numbers of baptisms but with the number of people being witnessed to. Far more clean animals than unclean were taken into the ark. Peter in Acts 10 saw a vision in which clean animals represented Jews and unclean were Gentiles. Does this indicate that more Jews will survive the judgments to come on the world than Gentiles? Given the many Jews that we know will die in the last day judgements, it follows that if this line of interpretation is correct very few Gentiles will survive at all.

This throws interesting light on the likely population in the Millennium, if indeed that understanding is literally correct. If each saint rules over some mortals, as Rev. 5:10 and the parable of ten and five cities indicates, then the population of the cities cannot be that great. For all the world to come and worship at Jerusalem to keep the feast of tabernacles (Zech. 14) could suggest small numbers relative to the present world population. Everything apart from what was in the ark was destroyed by the flood; the carnage was beyond description. Thus in the last days,

which will be an even fuller cataclysm than anything yet seen on the earth, such wholesale destruction is to be expected, in which only a handful survive.

"Shall you bring" contrasts with "shall come unto you" (6:20). Noah's ark is a well known type of the salvation which humanity can find in Christ; and yet close analysis of the Genesis record reveals that there were some animals whom Noah had to bring into the ark and take them with him (Gen. 6:19; Gen. 7:2); and others who came to Noah and entered into the ark of their own volition (Gen. 6:20; Gen. 7:9,15,16). The same Hebrew is found in Gen. 8:9, about how the dove came to Noah of its own volition, and Noah welcomed her and took her into the ark. Putting all this together, we are to compel men to come in (Lk. 14:23); and yet we are also to be there to welcome in the seekers who seek of their own volition. It's easier to do the latter; to put up a website, waiting there for some eager seeker to come and find. But we are also to compel people in, and to also bear in mind that there are some who will be attracted to the Gospel from selfish reasons, as the man who buys the field thinking that he can exploit it for his own benefit. These too we are to take on board and not turn away. Whilst people, with all their wonderful uniqueness, should never be pigeon-holed nor over-categorized... all the same, we need to consider the type of person we're dealing with as we plan out our approach. For if we seek them, we will consider who they are, and how appropriately we can engage them.

A week before the flood came, Noah was told to bring seven pairs of clean animals and one pair of unclean animals into the ark. This two stage gathering process may suggest that in the last days, immediately before judgment falls, there is a desperate final appeal to the world; and good and bad, clean and unclean, come in. Just as the parable of the marriage supper teaches.

"Of every sort" may not mean every single kind of animal, just as not literally "all men" shall be saved, but representatives of them. Semitic languages comfortably carry this kind of idea when they speak in absolute terms such as "every" or "all". It depends how we read the word "of". If it is only the *eretz* in view, then the logistical problems are far less. In the type, this speaks of all kinds of people preserved in Christ- but not literally all are saved. If Noah hadn't brought them in, much to the mockery of the surrounding world, they wouldn't have been saved. Few, i.e. 8 people, were saved in the ark (1 Pet. 3:20). The animals therefore don't represent the 'saved'. The point may simply be that through our salvation, there is also the salvation of the animal world; or perhaps the animals were representative of those who will be given the chance of redemption after the Lord has returned and established the Kingdom, both good and bad, clean and unclean. Note the use of clean and unclean animals to symbolize people hearing the Gospel in Acts 10:9-16.

6:20 *Of the birds after their kind, of the livestock after their kind, of every creeping thing of the ground after its kind, two of every sort shall come to you, to keep them alive-* "Come to you [Noah]"- cp. Jn. 6:37 "All that the Father gives me shall come to me". Noah was a type of Christ, saving His household. As "Come unto me" (Mt. 10:28). "To keep them alive" is an idea found later in Genesis, when we read that Joseph created as it were a sanctuary in Egypt and gathered food for others to eat, "To bring to pass, as it is this day, to save many people alive" (Gen. 50:20). There are many such interconnections within the Pentateuch, especially between the early chapters of Genesis and Israel's later recorded experiences.

6:21 *Take with you of all food that is eaten, and gather it to yourself; and it will be for food for you, and for them-* This would've involved Noah observing the animals carefully in order

to understand what food they required. If his gathering of the animals represents our gathering of people for the Kingdom, we can learn from this- to understand those whom we seek to bring in to Christ and care for in Him. Seeing they were in the ark for a year and 10 days (Gen. 7:11 600th year, 2nd month, 17th day of the month to 601st year, 2nd month, 27th day, Gen. 8:13,14), this involved a huge amount and variety of food; and also observing the animals to see what they each ate. People really would've thought Noah was crazy. All this preparation for others was part of the witness through which Noah was a "preacher of righteousness" (2 Pet. 2:5). And so it is with us; there is no record of Noah preaching, but his example and dedication to the salvation project was of itself the preaching.

6:22 *Thus Noah did. According to all that God commanded him, so he did-* As noted on Gen. 6:16, the ark was a kind of tabernacle. The comment upon Noah's obedient building is that made so often upon Moses' obedient building of the tabernacle, and the related commandments required to save Israel (Ex. 7:20; Ex. 12:50; Ex. 40:16).

During the preparation period, Noah was a "preacher of righteousness" (2 Pet. 2:5). But there's no hint in the Genesis record that he preached in any formal sense. 1 Pet. 1:11; 3:19-21 suggest that he made his witness through "the spirit of Christ". His very preparation for the coming of the day of the Lord was his witness. Noah must be one of the greatest examples of witness through silent example (cp. 1 Pet. 3:1), openly structuring his life around his faith in God's promised future rather than living just for today. 1 Pet. 3:20 says that God's patient grace "waited" whilst the ark was being prepared. But the Greek really means to "await", with the idea of expectation, looking for something. So as Noah preached, God's grace eagerly looked for and awaited a result. The result may appear tiny- 'just'

his wife, three sons and three young women whom they then married. But God's grace was eagerly awaiting and anticipating the success of his witness. And it's just the same with our witness and appeal for baptism into the Christ ark in these last days, which were typified by that period of Noah's life.

GENESIS CHAPTER 7

7:1 *Yahweh said to Noah, Come with all of your household into the ship- "*Come you [singular]... for you [you singular] have I seen righteous"- the focus is always upon God's individual relationship with Noah, as a result of which his family are saved. God saw Noah as righteous- but not his family? Noah and the seven had to leave behind their homes, land and families. They were promised just the bare necessities of life in the ark- just as we are assured of in Christ.

"Come you" is definitely alluded to in Is. 26:20,21: "Come, My people, enter into your rooms, and shut your doors behind you. Hide yourself for a little moment, until the indignation is past. For behold, Yahweh comes forth out of His place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity". The "rooms" clearly allude to the rooms or nests within the ark. There seems a principle that God somehow removes or safeguards His people whilst He judges the earth (Gen. 19:22; Ex. 8:22; Ex. 9:26; Rev. 7:3). The lifting up of the ark perhaps connects with the lifting up of God's people to save them from persecution.

"All of your household" suggests this was all he had. Or it could be that there were other children and grandchildren, but those who do not go God's way are effectively not our household. Only those in the ark are our true family. But perhaps his entire family consisted of his three sons. He therefore had no daughters and it would seem that his sons had no children. This tiny family size must be significant- for in those long lived ages, most women would have likely had over 50 children. Again, it was the small, broken and despised who were chosen of God. It seems that Noah's daughters in law only started bearing after the flood. Or it could be that he had other children and grandchildren, who were judged wicked. There would've been

a huge division within the family over whether to support the salvation project or not; of the kind that continues to this day.

For I have seen your righteousness before Me in this generation- Heb. "you have I seen righteous". God 'saw' Noah as righteous- not that he was in himself, but God imputed righteousness to him, for Noah was saved by grace not his own righteousness, Gen. 6:8. Righteousness was imputed to Noah on account of his faith (Heb. 11:7). He was "moved with fear" because he really believed God's word of judgment. And therefore he prepared the ark, the works which are part and parcel of faith, and was counted righteous on account of his faith. The others were saved because they were "with him" (Gen. 7:25) rather than because of their own righteousness; for Noah alone was seen righteous, not 'Noah and his family'. "You have I seen righteous" could mean God saw Noah alone as righteous, and his family were saved through him. It is stressed that "Noah only... and they that were with him" were saved (:23). Noah alone was saved- and those with him. Clearly their salvation is presented as dependent upon his, rather than the family being presented as believers on a similar level to Noah. There is an element to which the faith of the faithful can save third parties. In this sense, the New Testament says that Noah built an ark to the saving of his household. Just as the Lord Jesus saves us, we are to 'fill in the gap' for others in the spirit of Mk. 2:5. This enables us to reflect the Lord's work for us in what we do for others. And that is why in the life of every believer, there will be those whom we desperately wish would turn or return to the Lord's way. They are there in our lives so that we might be exercised in prayer and effort for them.

7:2 *You shall take seven pairs of every clean animal with you, the male and his female. Of the animals that are not clean, take two, the male and his female-* Three pairs and one for sacrifice?

Or, seven pairs, because the clean were to be for sacrifices on the ark during the year they were on board? There were more clean animals perhaps because they were to be sacrificed or eaten for food. But we note all the same God's desire to save the unclean as well. Initially, Noah had been told to just take pairs of all animals. Now, he is told to take seven pairs of the clean animals. People were vegetarian before the flood (Gen. 9:3), so the division of animals into clean and unclean was for the purpose of teaching the principles of acceptable sacrifice to God. This last minute push to obtain pairs of clean animals, just a week before the flood came (:4), would have involved frenetic activity on Noah's part. The parable of the marriage supper, along with other hints in Scripture, suggests a last minute desperate appeal to humanity on the eve of the Lord's return.

Noah was to "take" the animals, and yet they "came" to him (Gen. 6:19,20; 7:9 "went / came in unto Noah"). Perhaps some he had to 'take' whilst others 'came'; just as with those we save, some come to us, others we have to proactively go out and take. Or it could be that the animals of Gen. 6:19,20 'came' to Noah (the ones who were to keep seed alive on the earth); but these last ones were 'taken' by him (perhaps they were intended to provide food and sacrifices during the voyage). This would look forward to the last great appeal for the Gospel just before the Lord's return; the people in the streets are 'compelled to come in', whereas others were intended to 'come' of their own volition although clearly in response to God's stimulus through the Spirit.

7:3 *Also of the birds of the sky, seven and seven, male and female, to keep seed alive on the surface of all the earth*- Lit. the face of all the earth / land. The earth / land is often described as having this "face", or 'presence', as if it is somehow consciously alive and is "the presence" of God to us. Hence any defacement

of the planet is an act done upon the face or presence of God. The text here suggests that birds are preservers and distributors of seed; at least, that was how it was in the environment of the *eretz* of those times. We note there is apparently no conception at this point of there being clean and unclean birds (although the LXX does make the difference, stating "of fowl also of the air that are clean, seven and seven, male and female, and of fowl that are not clean, two and two, male and female"). This is perhaps stressed by Gen. 7:14 noting that birds "of every sort" entered the ark. If the Masoretic text is correct, then we are shown here how God only later classified some birds as unclean; which again proves Paul's later point, that there is nothing unclean of itself. It was a matter of designation, and was intended as a lesson to God's people about the constant need to divide the clean from the unclean in daily life and thinking.

7:4 *In seven days, I will cause it to rain on the earth for forty days and forty nights. Every living thing that I have made, I will destroy from the surface of the ground-* According to :10- seven days of waiting for the rain whilst "shut in", which we can compare with Is. 26:20. However, an alternative reading is possible. Gen. 7:4 "For yet seven days" could imply that Noah was asked to come into the ark seven days before the rain started coming. But Gen. 7:13 [along with Mt. 24:38; Lk. 17:27- quite an emphasis] says he entered only on the day that the rain came. Why did he hang around outside for those seven days? Was it from disobedience, just as Lot delayed in taking the way of escape from Divine judgment? Or because he was still desperately appealing for people to enter the ark? If so, this points forward to the intensity of our appeal to the world which there should be in the very last days, going into the byways and hedges and compelling [or trying to compel] people to "come in" (Lk. 14:23). If we think we're in the last days, our appeal should

have this intensity. These seven days could be read as a delay by God in bringing the judgment of the flood, and may be alluded to in 2 Pet. 3:9, where we read that God's patience waited in the days of Noah because He so urgently awaited / hoped for repentance and response.

The number forty is typically associated with testing. The test was of the faith of Noah and his family. Being within the ark, shut in whilst the deluge came, would have been a scary experience. We would be wrong to imagine them within the ark, breathing sighs of relief. Rather were they being tested; for even within the ark, there was the possibility they would lose their faith, as there is for us too.

"Rain" was unknown at the time. As the perfect Father and Teacher, God uses language in a manner which will intellectually stretch His children; stretch us to rise up to His way of perceiving things. Thus sometimes God appears to use language with no regard as to whether the people who first heard it could understand it. God spoke to Job about snow (Job 37:6), to Abraham about sand on the sea shore (Gen. 22:17), and here to Noah about rain– things which they had never seen. And the New Testament concepts of grace, *agape* love, humility etc. were outside the ability of first century Greek to properly express; new words had to enter the language in order to express these ideas. Yet God is also capable of speaking in the language of the day, bringing Himself right down to our human level of language use. It is vital to appreciate that God uses language in different ways in different parts of the Bible – otherwise our interpretation of it will be inconsistent and contradictory.

God sending His rain upon the just [Noah and the other seven 'just', Gen. 6:9] and unjust [the unrighteous world] may be an allusion to this verse (Mt. 5:45). The universe isn't just ticking away by clockwork with God somehow distant and uninvolved.

He is actively involved with us, and in that sense is not far from any one of us. Mt. 5:45 certainly sounds like a reference to the flood- and yet the context is of God's love towards both sinners and righteous alike. The destruction of "the old world" was therefore an act of love- although that's very hard for our human minds to accept. To curtail the lives of the wicked who refuse to repentant after extensive appeal to them, is, in fact, Divine grace.

7:5 *Noah did everything that Yahweh commanded him-* "Did all that was commanded by the Lord" is a phrase which in Hebrew occurs around 100 times in the Old Testament. The first occurrence of a phrase in the Bible is often instructive. In Gen. 6:22 and Gen. 7:5 we have the first occurrence of this, concerning Noah. He is therefore set up as a paradigm of faithful obedience to God which inspired many of later generations. As noted on Gen. 6:16, the ark was a kind of tabernacle. The comment upon Noah's obedient building is that made so often upon Moses' obedient building of the tabernacle, and the related commandments required to save Israel (Ex. 7:20; Ex. 12:50; Ex. 40:16). The ark is therefore presented as the prototype tabernacle; and it is there that we are located. For life "in Christ" is life within the ark, according to Peter.

7:6 *Noah was six hundred years old when the flood of waters came on the land-* Perhaps the flood began on his birthday. The Biblical account of the flood gives details which are imaginable, earthly realities; there is nothing of the grossly exaggerated and other-worldly which there is in the pagan flood legends. Thus the Biblical dimensions for the ark are realistic, whereas the boat mentioned in the Babylonian legend recorded by Berossus was supposedly about one kilometer long and half a kilometer wide. Noah was 600 years old according to the Biblical record, whereas Ziusudra, the Mesopotamian equivalent of Noah, was supposedly 36,000 years old at the time of the flood.

7:7 *Noah went into the ship with his sons, his wife, and his sons' wives, in the face of the floodwaters-* This could imply that like Lot facing the destruction of Sodom, they didn't enter as commanded them (see on Gen. 7:13), and waited until the floodwaters were right upon them before entering. When seven days before the flood came, they were told to enter the ark (:4); whereas :13 says it was "on the selfsame day" that the rain came that they entered the ark. This reflects a weakness, although an understandable weakness we may all have made- wanting to wait until the last minute rather than be obedient. Although Noah definitely had faith, demonstrated by his works in building the ark, he was weak at the last moment. That has a psychological credibility to it that matches our observed human experience; just as his getting dead drunk after the trauma of the flood also has an absolute credibility to it. Or perhaps the idea is that they saw those waters by faith, and entered the ark seeing the waters which were as yet invisible. Again we see that Noah was seen / counted righteous (:1); the record of his drunkeness is surely included to make the point that he was not of himself righteous.

A careful reading of Gen. 7:7,10,13,16 reveals that Noah entered the ark twice- once before the seven days, and then finally at the end, perhaps when he had finished loading the animals. At the second entry he was shut in. Peter reasons in 1 Pet. 3 that the ark represents two things- being in Christ by baptism, and being saved from the tribulations to come on the world of the last days. These are typified respectively by the first and second entries of Noah into the ark. If our baptism is like that first entering in, then Noah's tense, earnest waiting for the rain in the next 7 days should typify our feelings towards the second coming (cp. the rain). We should live our whole lives after baptism as if we know for certain that the second coming is but a week away.

For Noah and his family the reality of these things would have ebbed and flowed during that week- some days and hours more than others. But it would have remained with them in the back of their minds as an ever-present reality. Methuselah's death by the time they entered the ark would have heightened their awareness of the shortness of the time ('Methuselah' = 'when he dies, it shall come'). By being in the ark with them, that same intensity of feeling ought to be ours. Never before would they have felt so estranged from the world around them which they knew had such limited time left to satisfy its pleasures. And what scant interest they would have paid to their own possessions, homes, farms and all the other material things around them which they knew would so shortly be ended. In all this lies a powerful lesson to us. Instead their minds would have been obsessed with the ark, the symbol of their faith down through the past years. 'We need this for the ark... we must do that for it' would have been their way of thinking down through those years, as Noah in faith prepared the ark for the saving of himself (Heb. 11). And this lays the pattern for our dedication and consumption with the things of the truth, the ark, Christ our Lord and His ecclesia.

He entered "because of the waters". They'd not seen the waters, but faith sees those things which are not as though they are, following God's principle of thinking likewise (Rom. 4:17; Heb. 11:3). Noah was "moved with fear" because of what he believed would come (Heb. 11:7- just as we should be, for the same phrase is used in Hebrews about us at Heb. 4:1). The motive for Noah's entry into the ark was partly fear (Heb. 11:7). Knowing the "terror of the Lord" (a phrase used in the OT with reference to coming judgment), Paul persuaded men to accept His grace (2 Cor. 5:11). Noah went into the ark (cp. baptism) from fear of the coming flood, as Israel crossed the Red Sea

(again, baptism) from fear of the approaching Egyptians, as men fled to the city of refuge (again, Christ, Heb. 6:18) from fear of the avenger of blood, and as circumcision (cp. baptism) was performed with the threat of exclusion from the community (possibly by death) hanging over the child.

The sons were born to Noah when he was around 500, so by the time of the flood they were around 100 years old, as the flood came when he was 600 (Gen. 7:6). Lamech, Noah's father, had children at 182; most men of that epoch seem to have begun families by that age. Seeing there are no mentions of Noah's sons having any children, it could be surmised that they took wives immediately prior to entering the ark, so as to "keep seed alive upon the face of all the earth" (Gen. 7:3). Those women in their turn must have been motivated by faith to go into the ark; surely they'd have faced huge opposition and rejection from their families for marrying into that strange 'Ark' family. Their motive could only have been faith in Noah's preaching, backed up as it were by the spirit of Christ which was seen in him (1 Pet. 1:11; 1 Pet. 3:18-20; 2 Pet. 2:5). Indeed, 1 Pet. 3:18-20 speaks of some people at Noah's time who "once were disobedient" but who were converted by his preaching in the spirit of Christ. Who were those converts, if they weren't those three girls who then married his sons?

There is Biblical emphasis upon the fact that Noah entered the ark on the very day the flood came; but this phrase seems to imply that he waited until the very last minute. This may have been because of the urgency and desperation he felt in appealing to others to come into the ark with him. He truly was a remarkable “preacher of righteousness”. Our knowledge of this world’s future means that as we walk the streets and mix with men and women, our heart should cry out for them, no matter how they behave towards us, and there should be a deep

seated desire for at least some of them to come to repentance and thereby avoid the judgments to come.

7:8 *Clean animals, animals that are not clean, birds, and everything that creeps on the ground-* The emphasis is clearly that the ritually unclean could find salvation. The body of God's people have always struggled with this; their tendency has been to assume that those pronounced "unclean" cannot have any part within the system of salvation, however that was articulated over human history. And this has been the cause of so much sinful division amongst them.

7:9 *Went by pairs to Noah into the ship, male and female, as God commanded Noah-* "To Noah" makes us note again the emphasis upon Noah personally as the agent of salvation. Perhaps at no other point in salvation history apart from the cross, has so much depended upon one man. Noah's family, clean and unclean animals, were all saved because of one man's faith and subsequent works. The salvation of "male and female" of course points ahead to the salvation of all types of people, male and female, in Christ (Gal. 3:27-29). We note again that some Noah had to gather in; others came to him of their own volition, in response to God's working directly upon them. And so it is in our latter day Gospel work.

"To" and "into" are the same Hebrew words. The animals came to Noah, to the ark. The same words are found in Gen. 6:19,20. The animals would "come to" Noah, and he was to "bring [s.w. "come"] them to / into the ark". God brings men and women to us, but we have to bring them into His Son. We see here the huge significance of the command to baptize people into Christ, the ark. They are brought to us, through the Spirit, the hand of providence- if we pray each day for meetings with them. And we are to bring them into the ark. We are workers

together with Him. He brings people to us, we bring them into the ark.

7:10 *It happened after the seven days that the waters of the flood came on the earth-* "The seven days" suggests this was a significant period. Is. 26:20 and other passages teach that there will be a 'shut in' period in the very last days to preserve the faithful from the beginning of judgment upon the land, just as Israel in Egypt were preserved from the effect of the judgments upon Egypt.

7:11 *In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on the same day all the fountains of the great deep were burst open, and the sky's windows were opened-* The different state of things before the flood perhaps meant there was a huge amount of water underground which now came to the surface through earthquakes and volcanoes. The opening of the sky's windows has been interpretted as meaning that a water canopy which then covered the land came crashing down to earth. But the opening of heaven's windows is used elsewhere in the Bible in a more figurative sense. If the second month is according to Hebrew reckoning, then this was one month after Abib, i.e. in early May. This was the time associated with flooding, as the Tigris and Euphrates flooded at the time because of the snow meltwater coming to a peak then. This may mean that the latter day judgments, of which the flood was a type, are a result of natural processes being intensely magnified.

7:12 *The rain was on the earth forty days and forty nights-* Moses was in the cloud, which is also water, for the same period expressed with the same term (Ex. 24:18; Ex. 34:28). The idea is that a new creation emerged out of this experience. The Lord likewise in the wilderness (Mt. 4:2). Forty is clearly associated with testing, and the test was of Noah's faith rather than that of

the surrounding world. The test was as to whether they believed that the promised final salvation would come, or whether they too would perish in the cataclysm. It's the same for us, who are within the ark of Christ.

7:13 *In the same day Noah, and Shem, Ham, and Japheth, the sons of Noah, and Noah's wife, and the three wives of his sons with them, entered into the ship-* I suggested on Gen. 7:7 that perhaps they were intended to enter the ark seven days before the flood, but didn't do so until the very last moment. This could have been because of a delay in obedience which reflected a lack of faith, as Lot leaving Sodom; or a desperate desire to get out there and appeal to folks at the very last minute. Or maybe the wrench with unbelieving family was just too much. Noah's children took no children with them. Presumably they had children. Perhaps those children were old enough to respond, and refused. The pain of parting with them would've been intense. LXX has "with him", which supports the idea that Noah was faithful and due to this he saved his household. There is an element to which salvation depends upon third parties (see on Mk. 2:5).

7:14 *They, and every animal after its kind, all the livestock after their kind, every creeping thing that creeps on the earth after its kind, and every bird after its kind, every bird of every sort-* "After its kind" could refer to representatives of every genus rather than every species. But the more comfortable explanation is again that this refers to the animals known to *eretz* Israel. Apart from the size of the ark, the logistical issue of gathering literally all animals and birds and their appropriate food for a year... is considerable, if we insist upon a global flood. "Of every sort" [including all those birds later defined as clean or unclean] may support the note made on :3- that there was no distinction between clean and unclean birds. I will suggest on :16 that not literally samples of all the animals did actually enter the ark. The Hebrew *kol*

translated "every" is very flexible in meaning, and probably another Hebrew construction would have been used if the idea was that literally every species was gathered into the ark. *Kol* can mean just as much "any" or "whatever", and it is frequently translated like that. So "every" does not have to mean 'every species', but the idea could be just as we have it in the descriptions of "all men" being saved; not literally every man, but any, 'whosoever will', whoever and whatever, out of the wider whole of 'all men'.

7:15 *They went to Noah into the ship, by pairs of all flesh with the breath of life in them-* He gathered them, but they came unto him, as in our witness to the world. Animals are shy; did Noah work for many years to understand animals so that they came to him [cp. our understanding of the audience we preach to]? Or was it that animals only came to fear humans after the flood (Gen. 9:2) and therefore they came more naturally to Noah without their present shyness and nervousness of human beings? The record consistently defines the living creatures as those who had the breath of life in them, or as other verses say, within their nostrils. This may or may not be a point to remember in the abortion debate; for the unborn fetus is without the breath of life in its nostrils. That's why babies can be born underwater. The animals represent those who are called into the ark with Noah, the Comforter, the Lord Jesus. Some were moved by God to come to him, 'drawn' by the Father, as the Lord put it. The Spirit is the agency in that drawing, and that is why the otherwise obvious note is made that they were flesh, with the spirit of life in them.

"Of all flesh" is emphasized (:15,16; 8:17). The same term is used of how God intended to destroy and make an end "of all flesh" (Gen. 6:13,17); the tragedy being that He is "the God of all flesh" (Jer. 32:17). But "of all flesh" was to be saved. The

implication is, by grace. The ark speaks therefore of God's grace. We are in the same position; all flesh is as grass, to die for ever. But through God's grace in His Son, and our faith in that demonstrated by works, we like Noah can be saved; and can save others.

7:16 *Those who went in-* "Those who went in, went in..." may hint that not all the animals entered who potentially could have done. There is no actual specific statement that all the animals entered. Noah was intended to start entering the ark with the animals seven days before the flood began, but in reality, he and the animals only entered on the day the flood came. Logistically this creates a problem- a problem we are intended to perceive. For "all the animals" to enter in one day is surely asking for a lot to happen within 12 hours. In this case, Noah's disobedience, or delayed obedience, meant that not all animals were saved who could have been saved. We wonder whether the dinosaurs were an example of the lost species. And it is the same with our delayed obedience, or disobedience, to the call to go out and save all men. This provides another alternative to the global / local flood conundrum, and the question as to whether the ark was large enough to hold all the animals- be they of the *eretz* / earth promised to Abraham, or the entire planet. It could be that all the animals were invited; but not all responded, or they all came but Noah failed to get them all into the ark. Human dysfunction and lack of response likewise militates against God's ideal desire to save 'all men'.

Went in male and female of all flesh, as God commanded him; and Yahweh shut him in- For "shut him in", see on Gen. 6:14. Note again the emphasis upon Noah- the animals came to him personally, *he* was shut in, and thereby his family and the animals were shut in too. As Gen. 7:23. The entry of the animals is framed here as being on account of *Noah's* obedience. The

same Hebrew word for "shut in" occurs in Is. 26:20,21: "Come my people, enter into your chambers [cp. the rooms / nests in the ark] and shut your doors about you; hide yourself as for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast. For behold, the LORD is coming out from his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity, and the earth will disclose the blood shed on it, and will no more cover its slain". This passage in Isaiah seems to be applying the language of the flood to the preservation of God's people in the last days. The mention of the blood shed upon earth recalls Gen. 9:6. And inevitably we think of the significant New Testament teaching of how those who enter into Christ are "sealed" with the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:13; Eph. 4:30).

"All flesh" is of course used of the universal appeal of the Gospel; indeed, "all flesh" is used of all those who hear the Gospel message and have the opportunity of salvation (Is. 40:5; Is. 49:26; 66:23; Ps. 65:2; Joel 2:28). And unto Him shall "all flesh come".

In Mt. 25:10, the Lord clearly appears to allude to the closing of the ark's door. For in the last days too, the door shall be shut- and there will be people who desperately wish to enter and shall be unable. This was surely the situation when the ark door was shut. The Hebrew is equally translated "shut in" as "shut out", which might encourage us to see the desperate population shut out by the fact Noah was shut in. We note the same word is used of Lot being miraculously "shut in" (Gen. 19:10). As explained on Gen. 6:6, this is but one of several similarities between Noah and Lot. That Lot was 'within', behind the Divinely shut door, was by grace; and the same with Noah. It could be argued from :1,4 that the door of the ark was open for seven days before it was closed. As if there was a last minute appeal for people to enter. We think of other references to a door being opened or

closed, referring to opportunities to respond to the Gospel. If, as argued on :7,16, Noah himself was disobedient to enter the ark until the very last day- that would explain why nobody else did. We note that the door represented the Lord Jesus; and it must have been large, so that potentially at least, large animals like elephants could have entered.

7:17 *The flood was forty days on the earth-* The idea is that the flooding was for forty days; the waters were on the earth just over a year.

The waters increased, and lifted up the ship, and it was lifted up above the earth- This is the word for the lifting up of acceptable sacrifice to God, found throughout the Pentateuch. There may possibly here be a foretaste of the faithful being lifted up from the earth in the last days to save them from the judgments coming on the earth. "Lifted up" is twice stressed here. It's tempting to connect this with God's people being snatched away into the air (1 Thess. 4:16,17), one taken and another left, taken to judgment like a vulture rises up into the air and then comes down upon a carcass.

7:18 *The waters prevailed, and increased greatly on the earth; and the ship floated on the surface of the waters-* "The face [s.w. surface] of the waters" is the phrase used of how the Spirit of God fluttered upon the face of the waters to bring about creation (Gen. 1:2). The record is teaching that a new creation was to come about, despite human 'prevailing' against it. The idea of the waters prevailing may suggest that people tried their best to escape them by fleeing to higher ground, all to no avail. Again we see how judgment is in fact creativity, rather than a Divine being lashing out in wrath and anger.

7:19 *The waters prevailed exceedingly on the earth. All the high mountains that were under the whole sky were covered-* Perhaps a reference to the "high places" where idols were worshipped. For

this is how the "high hills" of the *eretz* are commonly mentioned later in the Bible.

7:20 *The waters prevailed fifteen cubits upward, and the mountains were covered-* The Hebrew idea is that the mountains were filled in, the whole *eretz* became even, the mountains brought down and the valleys lifted up by the water until an even surface was created, upon which Noah and the ark moved. The idea is very similar to the picture of the coming of the Lord Jesus over a similarly filled in, even area in Isaiah 40. Noah is definitely to be read as a type of the Lord Jesus. "The mountains" in view are those of the *eretz*, the land promised to Abraham. The text does not require that the waters were 15 cubits above the tops of the mountain. Perhaps the reference is to how the ark was 30 cubits high (Gen. 6:15), and the ark was submerged to half its depth- the waters prevailed 15 cubits upwards on the ark. For the ark to land on Ararat, the waters would have been 15 cubits above the point where the ark landed. "The mountains were covered" means literally 'had the hollows filled up'. The risen water made the surface of the earth smooth- and this is the very idea of the preparation for the Kingdom and the Lord's return in Is. 40. The mountains are brought down and the vallegs exalted to make a plain. Noah's emergence from the ark into a cleansed world looks forward to the Kingdom. The judgments are necessary, but they are creative in their intent- to lead towards the Kingdom.

7:21 *All flesh died that moved on the earth, including birds, livestock, animals, every creeping thing that creeps on the earth, and every man-* The judgment upon man had radical implications for the animal creation; this continues the theme of how the natural creation suffered as a result of Adam's sin. His sin was repeated in essence by the society of Noah's time.

7:22 *All in whose nostrils was the breath of the spirit of life-* This is the language of the creation of Adam; here we have a de-creation, in order that a new creation might come forth. As noted on :15, the record consistently defines the living creatures as those who had the breath of life in them, or as other verses say, within their nostrils. This may or may not be a point to remember in the abortion debate; for the unborn fetus is without the breath of life in its nostrils. That's why babies can be born underwater.

Of all that was on the dry land, died- The Hebrew implies a parched or waste land. This could suggest that the flood was local, of a waste land / wilderness forming a basin hemmed in by mountains. Or it could suggest that the busy, prosperous world of Noah was spiritually a waste land, a desert.

7:23 *Every living thing was destroyed that was on the surface of the land, including man, livestock, creeping things, and birds of the sky. They were destroyed from the land-* Perhaps the fowl of the heaven were destroyed by the heavy downpour of rain. As only a remnant of the human and natural creation survived, so only a remnant of the world around us will come through the future judgments on the earth. The fact an olive tree survived indicates that there was not total destruction. This kind of mass destruction is typical of that which will come upon Israel in the last days: "I will utterly consume all things from off the face of the land... I will consume man and beast; I will consume the fowls of the heaven... and I will cut off man from off the land... that day is a day... of clouds and thick darkness... and I will bring distress upon men, that they shall walk like blind men" (Zeph. 1). This is clearly flood language; the description of blind men may connect with Zech. 14:12 prophesying the loss of eyesight for the latter day invaders of the land (cp. how the men of Sodom were smitten with blindness in another type of the last days).

Is. 54:9,10 promise that although God will judge Israel with the 'flood' of the second coming judgments, yet He will never totally reject them on account of the remnant: "As I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth; so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke (reject) thee. For the mountains *shall* depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee". This is surely saying that the same order of physical catastrophe as came upon the earth at the flood will again come upon Israel in the last days; *but* we must not see this as God breaking His covenant of faithfulness to His true people. Heb. 11:1,7 stresses how much Noah really believed God's prophecy about the nature of the flood; he was "moved with fear" by these predictions. The physical world around us is going to be changed beyond recognition; this ought to make it easier for us to come to terms with the fact that *all* aspects of *our* surrounding world will likewise pass away.

Only Noah was left alive, and those who were with him in the ship- Yet again, Noah is the focus of salvation, but in him and with him his family were saved. The others were saved because they were "with him" rather than because of their own righteousness; for Noah alone was seen righteous (Gen. 7:1), not 'Noah and his family'. It all speaks of salvation in Christ, for His sake and by grace. "Left alive" is literally "remained", and the idea is of a remnant- another idea which is developed in later scripture. For we are the remnant, out of the destroyed Israel after the flesh.

7:24 *The waters prevailed on the earth one hundred and fifty days-* Five months, a pattern of the last days, Rev. 9:5,10. The final siege of Jerusalem in AD70 lasted for the same period, coming after 3 years of the Roman campaign against Israel which started in AD67. The three and a half year suffering of Israel

which culminated in AD70 may well point forward to a similar period in the last days; in which case the flood would typify the final months of that period, during which the judgments will be poured out most intensely. The five month tribulation of Rev. 9:10 may also have some relevance here. Thus the state of Israel in AD70 was typified by the world of Noah's time, which therefore looks forward also to the last days, in the light of the evident connections between that period and our last days which are made in 2 Pet. 3 and the Olivet prophecy.

GENESIS CHAPTER 8

8:1 *God remembered Noah-* Most references to God remembering are in the context of Him keeping covenant. The grace of all this is that God had not yet made a covenant with Noah. He will go on to do that soon; but even before that, He "remembered Noah".

Read literally, this would be implying that He has the capacity to forget or be oblivious; in which case, this 'language of limitation' may refer to the Angels rather than God personally. It would be worth speculating whether every time God is said to 'remember' something, this language of limitation refers to Angels, who have the capacity to have their memories limited, and to need to remember things. After God remembers, He often does an action which necessitates other Angelic action, as if one Angel- the one which 'remembers'- commands other Angels. One wonders whether this is the case when God "remembered" Noah in the ark and sent a "wind" to drive back the waters. He "Who makes His Angels Spirits (winds)" was therefore sending an Angel in control of a wind to execute His work. The idea of the Angels being in control of the winds and all elements of the natural world is a common one, seen most clearly in the book of Job. In support of this Angelic approah, it could be noted that this is an *elohim* statement, rather than of Yahweh Himself. The Hebrew for 'remembered' is elsewhere used in the sense of making mention of (Gen. 40:14; Ex. 23:13 etc.). Did the Angels make mention of Noah before the Council of Heaven, and God responded by sending out an Angel / wind to pass over the earth and drive back the waters? God makes His Angels spirits / winds (Ps. 104:4).

Or it could be that from Noah's perspective- and Genesis is at times written from the standpoint of human beings on earth,

e.g. the creation record- God had forgotten him, but now God remembered him. In this case we would have another indication of Noah's imperfect faith. Moses uses the same figure in Gen. 30:22 to describe how God 'remembered' Rachel in responding to her prayer. Likewise God 'remembered' the righteous in Sodom in response to Abraham's prayer (Gen. 19:29). Could this not imply that whilst Noah was spared from the world's judgment, he was earnestly praying for the days to be shortened, and to be allowed to emerge from the ark into the new world? This would point forward to the urgent prayer of the faithful in the last days.

But God's "remembering" of people doesn't have to imply He forgot before remembering. The language can mean simply that He was aware of them, and acted upon that awareness. Moses uses the same figure in Gen. 30:22 to describe how God 'remembered' Rachel in responding to her prayer. Likewise God 'remembered' the righteous in Sodom in response to Abraham's prayer (Gen. 19:29). Could this not imply that whilst Noah was spared from the world's judgment, he was earnestly praying for the days to be shortened, and to be allowed to emerge from the ark into the new world? This would point forward to the urgent prayer of the faithful in the last days.

All the animals, and all the livestock that were with him in the ship- Again the emphasis is upon salvation associated with Noah personally. The animals were "with him". But we also note God's pity for animals as for all His creation.

And God made a wind to pass over the earth. The waters subsided- The flood makes a good case study of Angelic control of the natural world; see on :3. Jude 14 quotes Enoch's prophecy of the flood as saying that it would be associated with the Lord coming with "ten thousands of His saints" (Angels- cp. Dan. 7). The fact that Angels were used to cause the flood is found

written between the lines of the Genesis account. The "windows of Heaven" being opened must refer to Angelic activity, as Job describes God calling for the wind and lightening to obey Him, and they come to Him and obey. This language must be about animate beings- i.e. the Angels responsible for these elements of nature. Gen. 8:1 says God remembered Noah- the language of limitation, as God Himself cannot forget or need to bring things to memory. We have suggested that this language of limitation be always applied to the Angels; thus it would seem they were in charge of the flood. "God (the Angel co-ordinating the flood?) made a wind (an Angel- "Who makes His Angels spirits"- 'spirit' is the same word as 'winds') to pass over the earth... and the waters returned from off the earth, in going and returning (A.V.mg.)". This last phrase is used elsewhere about the Angels as God's eyes roaming around the earth on His missions, and also there is the connection with the ideas already discussed of the Angels constantly going to and fro between God and the earth and around the earth.

8:2 *The deep's fountains and the sky's windows were also stopped, and the rain from the sky was restrained*- Gen. 6:4 stresses that the giants were mere men; and that it was God and not the giants who opened and closed the windows of Heaven and sent the rain of the flood. This would fit in with wider evidence that the flood record, like that of the sons of God and daughters of men, is also purposefully deconstructing pagan myths about the flood. Here, Gen. 8:2 states clearly that it was God who caused the flood rains to cease and the waters to subside – whereas the pagan myths claim that it was the sun god who appeared and caused the waters to evaporate. The Biblical record says nothing about the waters disappearing by solar evaporation, but claims they subsided as a result of the work of Israel's God. The restraint or opening of the heavens to provide rain is language used later

of the drought or blessing of rain which God can bring on the *eretz* (Hag. 1:10 s.w.).

8:3 *The waters receded from the earth in going and returning. After the end of one hundred and fifty days the waters decreased-* "In going and returning" is the language of the surges of huge tidal waves, caused by the underwater eruptions of the "fountains of the deep" being broken up (Gen. 7:11; 8:2). Being in the ark must've been a very rocky ride; the boat would've been tossed and thrown most of the time. And so it is with our ride in Christ. But "going and returning" is also the language of the cherubum (Ez. 1:14), forging another hint that the whole flood experience was in the hands of Angels. See on :1 *And God made a wind to pass over the earth.*

The 150 days, or five months, are a significant period in the series of latter day judgments which are to come upon the *eretz* (see on Rev. 9:5,10).

8:4 *The ship rested in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month-* For "rested" see on Gen. 5:29. This is the meaning of "Noah"; the ark and Noah are connected, just as the ark was a type of the Lord Jesus, according to Peter. Israel left Egypt on the 14th day of Abib, the seventh month which became the first month in their new calendar; they likely crossed the Red Sea on the 17th day of that month. So perhaps it was on the very same day that the ark rested. Israel's passage through the Red Sea typified baptism (1 Cor. 10:1,2), just as Noah's passing through the floopd waters did (1 Pet. 3:19-21). Note that this was the same day that the Lord Jesus was resurrected- He died at Passover, 14th Abib, and resurrected three days later, 17th Abib.

On Ararat's mountains- This could be an intensive plural, implying the one great mountain of Ararat. The word could mean "holy hill", and the great mountain of the *eretz* was mount Zion, not some arguable spot in present day Armenia. It would

of course be so appropriate in the typology of the whole event, speaking of final salvation upon Mount Zion and the redeemed going forth into a new world.

8:5 *The waters receded continually until the tenth month. In the tenth month, on the first day of the month, the tops of the mountains were seen-* This could imply that from their position on Ararat, or mount Zion, Noah and his family witnessed this receding of the waters and the emergence of mountain tops. For by whom were they "seen" if not by them? And whilst the record is Divinely inspired, we wonder if Noah kept some kind of diary which Moses is now presenting, under inspiration. For the references to dates and what was seen from the ark are very precise and specific.

8:6 *It happened at the end of forty days, that Noah opened the window of the ship-* This is not the same Hebrew word which some versions translate 'window' in Gen. 6:16 [see note there]. There had been no command to make this window. Does this suggest a lack of faith within Noah, wanting to see what was going on outside, when God had designed the ark as a structure which didn't give those within it the opportunity to see where they were going? The humanity and weakness of Noah is what makes him accessible to us as an example. It could be argued that the sending forth of the raven and dove were in themselves a lack of faith- for he had been commanded to preserve the animals, and letting one go like that was hardly responsible. But God conceded to Noah's humanity and worked with him in this. The window was perhaps more of a spy hole- Gen. 8:9 speaks of Noah putting his hand out of it and pulling in the dove. It's worth reflecting whether obsessions with prophecy are some kind of building a futile spy hole, when we are to trust our ultimate salvation to the Lord, in His good time. We have remarked elsewhere that events in early Genesis are to be

connected with similar things later in the Pentateuch. The sending out of the two animals to know the state of the land perhaps connects with Moses' sending out of the spies to know the state of the land- and this too wasn't an act of great faith, for Moses surely should've believed the Divine / Angelic information about the state of the land rather than having to rely upon human investigation.

Which he had made- Time and again, we read of how *Noah* made the ark, and of how the animals and his family were *with him*. The whole salvation project was clearly based around this one man, and as such it so clearly points forward to the Lord's work.

8:7 *And he sent out a raven. It went back and forth, until the waters were dried up from the earth-* The use of an unclean and then a clean bird indicates again that God's salvation plan has use for both. The same lesson was taught to Elijah, when ravens were used to feed him- in another situation typical of the latter day experiences of the remnant (1 Kings 17:4). The Lord singled out unclean ravens as an example of animals with whom the Father has some level of caring fellowship (Lk. 12:24). The waters were not dried up for some time; so we imagine the unclean bird coming back and forth to the ark; unless it lived on the floating bodies of animals. The coursing back and forth of the raven parallels how the waters went and returned (:5 Heb.) as they receded, with the unclean raven perhaps representing the wings of God's Spirit over the whole process.

8:8 *He sent out a dove from him, to see if the waters were abated from the surface of the ground-* The exact program of events wasn't clear to Noah, just as it will never be to us in the last days, within the ark of Christ. Therefore he tried these experiments with the birds "to see if" the time had come, and how the program was going. How long things shall continue for in our

last days is open ended, or at least, we don't know any precise program. But at the end of the experience, Noah would have realized that he had been within the ark for exactly a year, and that every stage had been carefully planned and allowed by God. We too shall see the same, and only then will all Biblical prophecies, types and shadows fall perfectly into place in our understanding. We noted on Gen. 7:17 that the flood came for 40 days- a period of testing. And God "remembered Noah", an idiom for answering prayer. Noah had no prior understanding of the time periods involved after the 40 days of flooding had ended (Gen. 7:4). He gathered enough food for the animals and his family to last over a year. We think of the wise virgins taking extra oil for their lamps, not knowing how long the bridegroom will delay.

8:9 *But the dove found no place to rest her foot-* She found no Noah. It was Israel who were to later find no rest for the sole of their feet as they tramped the Gentile world [same Hebrew words in Lam. 1:3]. Their returning to the Lord was prefigured by the dove's return to Noah. There seems some kind of allusion to all this in Is. 57:20,21, bearing in mind that the flood waters would have been troubled and dirty: "The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, says my God, to the wicked".

And she returned to him into the ship; for the waters were on the surface of the whole earth. He put out his hand, and took her, and brought her to him into the ship- There's a definite allusion to this in Ps. 116:6,7 [the surrounding verses there have several allusions to Noah and the flood]: "The LORD preserves the simple; when I was brought low, he saved me. Return, O my soul, to your rest [Heb. *Noakh-* Noah]; for the LORD has dealt bountifully with you". The Psalmist felt himself as that simple dove, flying over this shattered world looking for a place to land,

and finding none, only to return to the Lord- symbolized by Noah. Note how in Ps. 55:6 the Psalmist also wishes to be as a dove. This is surely the way to read and use Scripture- to take an image and see the relevance to ourselves. This is why the Bible writers make such allusions which may appear out of context when analyzed in literary, philological terms of exposition. But the Hebrew way of interpreting Scripture isn't always like this; the emphasis upon "context" can be taken too far, and it's more of a Western than an Eastern way of using literature.

Put forth his hand and pulled her- These are the very same Hebrew words as in Gen. 19:10, where the Angels put forth their hand and pull Lot into the house and shut the door, just as Noah had been Angelically 'shut in' the ark. The connection of thought may simply be to show that Noah rescued / saved the dove from endlessly flying over the wastage of the Gentile world, which connects with our thoughts above about how the dove represents God's wayward people returning to Him.

8:10 *He stayed yet another seven days; and again he sent the dove out of the ship-* The Hebrew word translated "grieved" (see on Jud. 10:15) occurs about Noah in Gen. 8:10: "And he stayed [s.w. to be grieved, hurt] yet other seven days; and again he sent forth the dove out of the ark". This word is found translated in other places like this: "Be in anguish" (Dt. 2:25); "wounded" (1 Sam. 31:3); "exceedingly grieved" (Es. 4:4); "travaileth" (Job 15:20); "wounded" (1 Chron. 10:3); "sore pained within me" (Ps. 55:4); "I am pained at my heart" (Jer. 4:19); it is several times used of a woman "in pain" , "travailing" in expectancy of the birth (Is. 26:17,18; 54:1; 66:7; Mic. 4:10). Why was Noah grieved and distressed, as he waited seven days before sending the dove out again? Surely for the plight of his world. He was hoping the dove would return with some sign of civilization, some hint of human survival. His grief was for the corpses floating, for the animals

lost... for the world that once was. He had preached to them for 120 years, and they hadn't listened. Yet he didn't think Well that's their problem, they didn't want to hear when they could, it serves them right. And neither does it seem he was looking out of the ark window thinking. I'm sure glad *we* were obedient. As the rain came down, it seems to me that the practical reality of the tragedy would have dawned upon Noah; as the waters rose, he would have pictured the folk he knew running to ever higher hills he would have seen the faces of local children, maybe those of the guys he bought wood from, faces of the women his wife had bartered with, memories of his own brothers and sisters, perhaps his other children. It seems to me that he spent all that time in the ark grieving, grieving, grieving for the tragedy of it all. He surely wasn't smugly thinking Ha, serves them right, and praise God, I'm saved, and there's a great future Kingdom for me in store!. I also muse- and no more than this- that perhaps he went on a bender on coming out of the ark because he just couldn't handle the tragedy of it all. Walking around an empty earth knowing he was saved and the others hadn't made it...

This all has vital, biting relevance to us. For Peter takes Noah in the ark as a symbol of us all in Christ. Yes, he was there thanking God for His gracious salvation, looking forward to the new world to come, but distraught at the tragedy of those masses who hadn't responded, and who had died the slow, desperate, struggling death of drowning. He sent out the dove to see if the waters were "abated" - but the Hebrew word is usually translated "curse"; he wanted to know if the curse was still evident; if the waters were cursed in the presence of the ground / earth. The same word is found in Gen. 8:21 "I will not again *curse* the ground". If our concern for this world is genuine, if our preaching is not just seeking to gain members, or prove ourselves right and others wrong, then we will grieve for this world; even though the

exclusion of some from Gods salvation is in some way their fault. Those who reject our message we will grieve and bleed for; not just shrug our shoulders over. Lack of response should concern us, worry us, *drive us* to think of how we could be the more persuasive of men.

The dove makes a nest from twigs on the ground. But it returned just with a leaf. Nothing thus figured that the ground wasn't yet dry. Clearly he had no message from God about when exactly the ark would rest and could be opened. And likewise it is futile to construct timelines for the latter days. Just as the wise virgins take oil not knowing how long the delay will be, so Noah took enough food because he didn't know how long he would be in the ark.

The rooms in the ark were "nests". But the dove eventually makes her own nest away from the ark, after nervously testing her ability to do so. The dove, like the Lord's sheep, came in and out of the ark freely. The raven went back and forth eating from carcasses, but was not allowed back into the ark. It "returned" to the ark like the rejected banging on the door but Noah didn't open to it. It roamed around ceaslessly with no purpose. We are told it flew back and forth until the waters were dried up, but this was at least 57 days after it was sent out, when the dove had already settled independently (Gen. 8:13-17). This is unnatural. The raven could have settled. It didn't. Ravens aren't long distance continuous fliers. We could infer the raven flew back and forth until he died. The pointless goong to and from fro the ark is a picture of the condemned. The dove achieved a purpose in its missions, but the raven didn't. The going and returning of the raven matches the movement of the waters, which represented condemnation. The raven is associated with them. Israel in yheir condemnation found no rest for the sole of their foot, like the raven. The dove specifically returned "to

Noah", like a personal relationship with the Lord, and was let in. Perhaps here we have the picture of the condemned and accepted leaving the ark, the body of Christ, which has served for their salvation from the world and now has no further function for them. Like the dove, we will experience the glorious liberty of God's dear children. Man says he wants freedom but is very nervous to take it. He feels safer in a nest next to others, within a structure, a denomination, a church. Just like the dove.

8:11 *The dove came back to him at evening, and, behold, in her mouth was an olive leaf plucked off. So Noah knew that the waters were abated from the earth-* Noah was a "herald of righteousness" (2 Pet. 2:5 Gk.). In the ancient world, heralds were associated with an olive branch or wand, e.g. Mercury the herald-god had an olive branch in his hand. Noah may therefore have understood from this that now he was indeed the herald of the new age of righteousness. But a herald worked to take messages between opposing parties and to reconcile them- the olive branch was thought to have power over warring snakes. Perhaps Noah was being reminded that his work wasn't over- it was for him to go forth from the ark and reconcile people to God. Instead he got drunk...

Israel being the land of olives (Dt. 8:8), this would be another indication that the flood was a local affair over the 'land' promised to Abraham. As olive trees don't grow near the present Ararat in Armenia, this lends support to the Jewish tradition that the olive came from the mount of Olives, and the 'ararat' / 'holy mount' upon which the ark landed was Mount Zion. Doves fly home. They are released at special events because they circle around and then fly off home. The dove flew off and remained away from the ark because it's home was now above water. Again suggesting the ark departed from the same place it settled.

"Leaf" is also translated branch. A broken off olive branch is exactly the figure Paul uses to describe Israel in Rom. 11:17-24. The whole story is a very detailed prefigurement of Israel's return from Gentile dispersion and Divine judgment, not simply to God, but into the Christ ark. Is. 54:9 encourages us to see things this way too, for the waters of the flood are there interpreted as God's wrath with Israel, and their cessation speaks of His eternal acceptance of them at their return to Him.

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8:12 *He stayed yet another seven days, and sent out the dove; and she didn't return to him any more-* "Stayed" is s.w. to be patient, wait, trust. It's a different Hebrew word from that in Gen. 8:10, although there many versions also read "stayed". There in 8:10 the Hebrew means to writhe, wriggle, twist in pain- rather indicating Noah's impatience and dented faith. But now his patient waiting returns. This patient waiting for Christ's Kingdom is of the essence (2 Thess. 3:5). Saul also tarried [s.w. Gen. 8:12] seven days, but he offered his sacrifice then rather than wait longer as Noah did to offer sacrifice (1 Sam. 13:8). Potentially encouragement had been set up for Saul, but he failed to take it. He was supposed to perceive the similarity in position between himself and Noah; but he failed to see it nor think himself into the situation.

8:13 *It happened in the six hundred and first year, in the first month, the first day of the month, the waters were dried up from the earth. Noah removed the covering of the ship, and looked-* If the "covering" refers to our covering in Christ, for the ark represents Him, then this may suggest that the whole idea of covering or

atonement will be removed when we emerge from the ark into our full salvation. Then like Adam we shall walk in Eden in the presence of God, see His face and be unashamed.

He saw that the surface of the ground was dried- "Dry" is s.w. waste, destroyed, desolate. It was this which maybe made Noah depressed and turn to alcohol- for he loved people and so cared for them, and had sought their salvation in vain for 120 years.

8:14 *In the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, the earth was dry-* The exact time references suggest Noah kept some kind of diary, or at least memorialized the exact sequence of events to be passed down the generations, until they came to Moses, who under inspiration turned them into inspired scripture. The period between Noah realizing the earth was "dry" and then God telling him to exit the ark (:15) may point forward to some time period required for the establishment of the Kingdom. And there are plenty of other scriptures which hint at such a period between the end of the latter day judgments, and our walking forth into paradise restored.

8:15 *God spoke to Noah, saying-* We are presented with God speaking to Noah, and his direct obedience to the word received (Gen. 6:3,13; 7:2). This theme continues here. He is presented as obedient, just as Moses is.

8:16 *Go out of the ship, you, and your wife, and your sons, and your sons' wives with you-* Obedience to such a command might seem obvious. Surely Noah wanted to leave the ark. But he had been there for a year; was there some reticence in going forth into what might have appeared a somewhat spooky new world? Maybe he didn't have the bravery for that new world, and typical of all humans, preferred to just stay where he was, where he felt safe. We see here a window onto the inertia which is a stronger part of human nature than we might wish to accept. We think of Joseph's brothers, nervous to accept his grace; and the

language of the faithful being *made* to sit down and be served at the Messianic banquet, and those who really couldn't remember their good deeds being told "Come, enter the Kingdom!".

8:17 *Bring out with you every living thing that is with you of all flesh, including birds, livestock, and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth, that they may breed abundantly in the earth, and be fruitful, and multiply on the earth-* "Bring out with you" is you singular. Again, Noah is seen as the Saviour, with all the others saved due to being with him. We can in a sense save others by our witness, even though the Lord is their Saviour in the ultimate sense. "Breed abundantly" is the same word as in Gen 1:20, "let the waters bring forth abundantly". Again we have the idea of a new start, with Noah as Adam given the chance to learn the lessons. But he gets dead drunk.

8:18 *Noah went out, with his sons, his wife, and his sons' wives with him-* As noted on :15, Noah is presented as obedient to words spoken from God. Perhaps we are to notice from the strict list of those who emerged that the sons and their wives produced no children during their year in the ark. Again we note the repetition of "with" in :16-18; Noah was the saviour, and those saved were only saved because of being "with" him.

8:19 *Every animal, every creeping thing, and every bird, whatever moves on the earth, after their families, went out of the ship-* The order in which the animals are listed is different from that in Gen. 6:20; 7:21. Perhaps because in the ark they mixed together; our experience in the Christ ark should lead to unity.

8:20 *Noah built an altar to Yahweh, and took of every clean animal, and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar-* This was on Noah's initiative. There had been no altars stipulated previously. God had asked Noah to build an ark, and now Noah of his own volition builds an altar. As we mature in Christ, we no longer simply follow commands but take our own

initiative in God's service. Noah's first reaction may have been to build a house for himself and his family; but he put God first and built an altar. If one of "every clean animal" was offered, this would've been a huge number of animals. The idea was perhaps that representatives of all flesh will be acceptable to God in the end. This huge outpouring of gratitude speaks of how we will feel as we walk away from the judgment seat into the Kingdom at the last day.

8:21 *Yahweh smelled the pleasant aroma-* The smell of huge numbers of burning animal carcasses isn't sweet to man. But what man finds foolish, pointless or abhorrent can touch the heart of God for its sweetness to Him. The Hebrew would be rendered "sweet savour". 'Sweet' translates *nychoah*, related to the word 'Noah'. Noah was his sacrifice. Our lives are sacrifices being offered up. Just as the Lord Jesus was an offering of a sweet-smelling savour (Eph. 5:2 uses the same language as the LXX here). Noah was his sacrifice, as we are ours, and as the Lord was His. We each have our unique smell to God. Just as God's heart was melted by sacrifice, so even more was His heart touched and even altered by the Lord's death. And our sacrifices no less touch His very heart. It's why sacrifice is such an important principle in spiritual life.

Again and again, Moses sought to refocus his people on the practical, the literal, the concrete, and away from the myths which surrounded them. And yet he does this by alluding to those myths, so as to alert Israel to the fact that the new, inspired record which he was writing was fully aware of the myths God's people were being assailed with. This would explain the similarity of expressions between some of the myths and the Genesis record- e.g. "The Lord smelled the pleasing odour" (Gen.

8:21) is very similar to the Gilgamesh Epic, 9.159-160: "The gods smelled the odour, the sweet odour". The Biblical record is one of hard human reality, undiluted with the fantastic or mythical: "The central figures of the Bible saga are not, as in so many hero-tales, merged in or amalgamated with persons belonging to mere mythology; the data regarding their lives have not been interwoven with stories of the gods. Here all the glorification is dedicated solely to the God who brings about the events. The human being... is portrayed in all his untransfigured humanity" (Martin Buber, *Moses* (Oxford: Phaidon Press, 1947) p. 17).

Yahweh said in His heart- We may never know in this life God's feelings in response to our sacrifices. We can touch the heart of God, we tiny mortals on earth... And God's word opens up to us the very inner thoughts of God Himself.

I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake, because the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I ever again strike everything living, as I have done- see on Gen. 8:10. "We could surely conclude that as a result of seeing the carnage, God downgraded His view of man and His hopes and expectations of him. Not again curse" is alluded to in Rev. 21:1, there will be no more curse in God's Kingdom. It seems Noah had the potential to enable the Kingdom there and then, as did so many- Solomon, the Jews returning from exile, Israel in the first century. Every time, human weakness and shortsightedness stopped it.

God saw that "the imagination of man's heart" was evil from his youth; not from his birth, showing that God is referring to the specific attitude of those times rather than to man's innate sinfulness. The implication is that God was especially saddened at the evil thinking of a reprobate, corrupted youth. And how

much more today? God as it were reduced His expectations, cut us yet more slack, made even bigger concessions to humanity.

The essential struggle of God is brought out by the account of God's 'repenting' that He had cursed the earth. According to one translation, Gen. 8:21 can read: "I will never again declare the earth to be cursed (as I have done hitherto) on account of humanity, because the imagination of the heart is evil from one's youth". The reference to cursing the earth surely alludes back to the curse of Gen. 3:17. Could it be that God is saying that He 'repented' not only of the flood, but of the cursing of the earth in response to Adam's sin? The final outworking of that repenting of course was through the work of the Lord Jesus, and the ultimate enablement of Paradise restored on this earth. It's as if God is as it were coming to terms with the evilness of man; although He perceives that man is bent on sinning from his youth, by grace, He promises never to destroy mankind. In wrath, He remembered mercy. God has emotion and it's hard to read this any other way than that He regretted how far He had punished humanity. This tension within God, between being immutable and yet being emotional, is impossible to ultimately explain.

It was when "Yahweh saw that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil all the day" that He decided: "I will blot out from the earth the Adam I have created" (Gen. 6:5-7). But comparing this with Gen. 8:21, we get the impression that God comes to accept the weakness of man, and to tolerate it without destroying it: "Yahweh said in His heart, "I will never again curse the soil because of the Adam, for the inclination of the Adam's heart is evil from youth". This same pattern is seen later; God is so angry with human sin in His people that He decides to change His plans and destroy the sinners. But He later again changes, and decides to tolerate them.

Thus in Ex. 33:3,5 God says that "I will not go up among you for you are a stiff-necked people, lest I would consume you on the way... You are a stiff-necked people; if for a single moment I should go up among you, I would consume you". But after Moses' intercession, God does go up among them even thought they are a stiff-necked people. He hears Moses' prayer of Ex. 34:9: "I pray, let Yahweh go among us for this is a stiff-necked people, pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for your inheritance". This is not to say that God will not judge sin and sinners. He definitely will. But we see here a growth in tolerance, akin to what many men experience as they pass through the fatherhood experience. We think of how God tells Abraham "Now I know that you fear God, in that you have not withheld your son... from Me" (Gen. 22:12). Being a father is not simply an act of procreation; fatherhood is a relationship, and it could be argued that it goes with the territory of fatherhood to change and be changed in response to your children. This may be one window onto how God in this sense can change or learn. It was a choice He made to go through that experience. God is not fickle, and yet He has emotions. Later He will say that He repents of certain relationships with His people, and rejects them; and then He changes His mind again, repenting of His repentance as it were. His repentings are "kindled together" at the time of Hosea. This is how deeply involved God is in the response of His children to Him. It inspires us to love and serve Him with all we have and are; in a way that a stone faced, unfeeling god would never inspire. God's omnipotence is such that the Master of the plot as it were gets emotionally caught up within the plot. As we go through life we are faced with the awesome reality that God responds passionately and emotionally to our every move. For or against Him. This is the huge meaning of the crucifixion-so much response is elicited, and in turn responded to by God.

Realizing this dimension of God is the ultimate answer to the scepticism and stone facedness of the postmodern world.

8:22 *While the earth remains, seed time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease*- The reference to the seasons, planting etc. suggest this is relevant to the earth / land of Israel and not world-wide [there is no Summer and Winter on the equator]. There are six different seasons mentioned here. This would indicate a different climate at the time- although some cultures such as the Copts likewise split the year into six seasons rather than the four seasons common today in European countries.

GENESIS CHAPTER 9

9:1 *God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them, Be fruitful-* Remember that Noah had only produced three children in 600 years, and his sons had not had any children.

And multiply- Clearly we are being invited to see this as a new creation, with the implication that they were to obey where Adam failed. The "earth" they were to multiply in was the *eretz* promised to Abraham, and so in chapter 10 we have a list of the nations within that area- as evidence of obedience to this commandment.

Most of the flood myths claim that human overpopulation led the gods to destroy man. But the Genesis record instead stresses the value of human life, even if that life must be surrendered in judgment for sin. The focus is upon human sin. But God's encouragement of man to multiply stands in stark contrast to the idea that the gods didn't like man multiplying, and for that reason alone- destroyed him or reduced the human population through a flood.

The invitation to be fruitful and multiply is exactly that given to Adam. Note the similarities with Adam in Eden- replenish the earth (9:1 = Gen. 1:28); have dominion over animals (9:2 = Gen. 1:28); commanded what to eat (9:3 = Gen. 1:29); prohibition of some things which they were not to eat (9:4 = Gen. 2:16,17). Adam's sin, resulting in cursing, is matched by Noah's sin and the pronouncing of cursings. Yet again, the great potential for the Kingdom of God was spoilt by human weakness. We have noted that the wind / Spirit upon the face of the waters is reminiscent of the Genesis creation. Here too, we have a new world emerging on the ruins of an old one. But like Adam, Noah goes out and soon fails [in that he gets drunk and has perverted sex with his own relative, rather than multiplying].

The tragedy of man's consistent failure stands writ large. And we marvel at God's amazing patience, His attempts to work with men; and it throws into relief the victory and perfection of the Lord Jesus, through whom we can in fact become the creation God wished for throughout human history. After all the false starts and wasted potentials, He finally was the One in whom all the potentials were fulfilled and became enabled for a new race of people in Him.

And replenish the earth- This is the same word as in Gen. 6:11,13, where the earth was "filled" with violence. Is the implication that Noah's family were to fill the world with righteousness in place of the evil that had filled it? In this case, the subsequent failure of the family with sexuality and alcohol is a sad response to such a fine calling.

9:2 *The fear of you and the dread of you will be on every animal of the earth, and on every bird of the sky-* This part of the promise seems only made to Noah and his sons in the context of the animals with whom they had contact in their work of replenishing the land / earth area which had been flooded. There are animals which don't fear people, and God brings this to our attention in the later chapters of Job. Thus the ostrich is "without fear... she scorns the horse and his rider" (Job 39:16,18); the horse "goes on to meet the armed men. He mocks at fear, neither is affrighted (Job 39:21-24); behemoth and leviathan [the hippopotamus and crocodile?] are portrayed as fearless of men, indeed it is men who fear them (Job 40,41). The "fear and dread" of humans which fell on the animals after the flood is clearly linkable with the "fear and dread" which was to come upon the inhabitants of Canaan due to the Israelites (Gen. 9:2 = Dt. 1:21; 3:8; 11:25).

Everything that the ground teems with, and all the fish of the sea, are delivered into your hand- This may not be a general

promise to all humanity. Rather it may mean that the effects of the curse in Eden were greatly reduced for Noah and his family when they left the ark. It is hardly so that all fish and animals are given into the hand of every man, worldwide. We can assume that Noah and his family failed to make good of the potential given them; and his drunkenness reflects that. The Hebrew phrase "delivered into your hand" will later be used of how the tribes of the *eretz* were all delivered into Israel's hand (Ex. 23:31; Num. 21:34; Dt. 2:24 etc.). And like Noah's family, Israel failed to make good use of that potential power. The worshipping of animals "that the ground teems with" (Dt. 4:18 s.w.) was therefore a refusal to accept that these things had been delivered into the hand of the faithful.

9:3 *Every moving thing that lives will be food for you-* There was no distinction between clean and unclean animals, which could be eaten and which couldn't. There are therefore no animals unclean of themselves; the Mosaic laws concerning them were therefore only to teach an object lesson, rather than being a reflection upon any intrinsic uncleanness of any specific animals.

As the green herb, I have given everything to you- This would imply that Noah's family didn't eat animals but only "the green herb" before the flood. The concept of clean and unclean animals which was known to them therefore referred only to sacrifice and not to diet.

It could be argued that it was God's original intention that man should not eat animals. But in line with His increased recognition of the moral weakness of man and promise to be more accommodating of it (see on Gen. 8:21), now God allows killing of animals by man. Possibly part of the corruption of all flesh recorded in Gen. 6:11,12 was that man had begun killing and eating animals anyway, when this was contrary to the intention at the time of the Genesis 1 creation. "All flesh" in Gen.

6:11,12 refers to the entire animal creation; it was 'corrupted' by man. Presumably in that man began killing, eating and perhaps having sex with the animals. How else was the "all flesh" corrupted by man? And now God makes some partial concessions to man (see on Gen. 8:21), in allowing him to kill and eat animals, although not to consume their blood. After the Lord's death, the prohibition of blood was relaxed. So we see God becoming increasingly accomodating to people, His grace increases, and yet culpability to judgment also increases.

9:4 *But flesh with its life, its blood, you shall not eat-* Much meat could never have totally been made free of blood. Here therefore we have an example of where a commandment was given, but 'best effort' was looked for rather than complete technical obedience. Likewise the stipulation that only unblemished animals be offered; for most animals have some blemish if scrutinized closely. But as noted on :5, the "flesh" in view may specifically refer to human flesh.

The whole logic of the command and principle behind it [that life is God's] requires that the forbidden blood was actually giving life to the body. So the reference is surely to blood whilst it is pulsating, and not to "blood" per se. And as in some remote parts today, to eat live animals was not uncommon especially in worship rituals. The eating of live locusts is quite common still in many areas. All the arguments about 'kosher' food are therefore misplaced. For "blood" doesn't keep a dead body alive and is not therefore "the life". Blood is not magic; blood poured on a dead body will not revive it, and bodies die with blood in them- having blood in your body doesn't mean you cannot die. It is a beating heart and *pulsating* blood that is a sign of life. And it is that life, that beating heart and pulsating blood, whilst we have it, that is to be given to God. And to not do so requires us to forfeit life (:5). It's a very powerful choice- to

totally give life to God because we have it, or lose it. We are driven thereby to recognize that our very life is God's exclusive property and not our own. The strict commands to pour out blood to God first in Lev. 17 are distinctively Israelite- no pagan system has this feature. Because God alone places this supreme meaning upon human life. So whilst God judges sin, as seen in the flood, this must be balanced against the huge importance God places upon human life. For it is actually *His* life. And this is why :5 will make the point that to take life is wrong, because it is actually taking life from God. And the Lord taught that to curse is to murder; and we should not curse man, because he is made in the image of God, and has God's life within him. Gen. 9:6 LXX makes the point: "He that sheds man's blood, instead of that blood shall his own be shed, for in the image of God I made man". 'Taking' extra life, another life, through murder... means that *your* life is to be taken from you and returned to God. Man does not have the right to dispose of his own blood or life; suicide is likewise ruled out here. If a man takes another man's life, the blood of the slain cries out for *deliverance* (Gen. 4:9; Job 16:18; Ez. 24:7), i.e. that that life is no longer with the murderer, but should be delivered back to God, through the death of the murderer. This is why God becomes the avenger of blood; for the shed blood cries out for vengeance, for the return of life to God through the death of the murderer (Is. 1:15; 59:3). This is why a murderer is a thief (Job 24:14). And animals who take human life are likewise to be slain, to have their lives returned to God (a principle repeated in Ex. 21:28,29 about the necessary death of an ox who gores a man). But the principle has far wider and more personal application, for the life we have been entrusted with is God's and must be lived *for Him* and given back to Him. 'Living for ourselves', in the chasing of careers, wealth and relationships in this life is therefore outlawed. It is a selfish taking of life, and

is logically on the same level as suicide. The law of Moses forbad the use of money as compensation for taking life. If you give your life to making yourself wealthy, then you have taken away your life from God; you have stolen life from Him, and that cannot be compensated for by your acquired wealth. Once we accept this absolute sovereignty of God over human life, including *my* life, then we find a kind of freedom- freedom from the perceived need to achieve, to make something out of 'our' life, to 'succeed', to 'make a living', to 'make it' in life. And freedom from the fear of losing life or having life constrained, by health or economic issues. Because as we see in this context of the flood, God has sovereign power to create and de-create, to give and take life and then multiply it again. And we are to acknowledge His absolute claim over human life. "It's my life!" is totally wrong. The important thing is that our lives are His and surrendered totally to His loving and eternal care.

9:5 *I will surely require your blood of your lives-* God was the ultimate avenger of blood (Gen. 9:5); in setting up a way of escape from the avenger of blood, He surely indicates how He recognizes the rightness of His own principles, and yet sought a way for humanity to not perish because of them. In this we see an exquisite prophecy of His provision in Christ, and of the tension between the justice and grace within God's character, the tension Hosea spoke of as God's internal struggle about whether to destroy or redeem Israel when they repeatedly sinned against Him. By all means compare the account of such a case in 2 Sam. 14:7, where it was recognized that God 'devises means' to preserve people from the avenger of blood- a reference to the cities of refuge. In all this we see the tension within God's person, as He so earnestly seeks to work through our failure to bring about His glory.

Their lives would be required of them if they presumed to take the symbol of life to themselves. It was to be critically important to recognize that all life is God's, and to assume that we can live life for and to ourselves is punishable by losing the life we have.

At the hand of every animal I will require it- Does this mean that animals which ate meat with blood were to be killed? That would be hard to operate in practice, and would have led to the distinction of all carnivores. Or is the "flesh" of :4 human flesh? In this case, any animal which ate human flesh was to be killed, just as murderers were to be put to death.

At the hand of man, even at the hand of every man's brother, I will require the life of man- This could mean that the duty of killing those who shed human blood fell upon the person's "brother", and if this were not done, then God would require it of the "brother". Or the idea may just be that the blood or life of our brother will be required from us if we slay him. In all this we see foreshadowed the idea that we are responsible for our brother, and cannot answer as Cain, that we are not our brother's keeper. If we take or hinder his life, as Cain did to Adam, then it will be required of us, as it was of Cain. This means that we must be especially careful not to make our brother lose eternal life by making him stumble.

God's judgment is ongoing, He has not as it were switched off and will only open the books at the last day. Ps. 9:10-12 says that when God makes "inquisition [s.w. 'require'] for blood, He remembers those who "seek" [s.w. 'require'] for Him. He seeks and searches us out, holding us accountable for actions; and yet we are to seek after Him. And thus we meet... The verse means that God requires life from us- the Lord Jesus alludes here when He spoke of how the soul of a man would be "required" at the day of his death (Lk. 12:20), and woe to us if we have only

'bigger barns', petty materialistic acquisition, to show for it. If we take another's life, that life will be required of us- because of the general principle, that God 'requires' human life from us. So the principle is that we should not merely avoid taking the life of another; we should give our lives back to God, knowing that life is required of us.

9:6 *Whoever sheds man's blood, his blood will be shed by man-* This is not a command to shed the blood of murderers. The Lord seems to allude to it when commenting that he who takes the sword shall perish with the sword (Mt. 26:52). It appears to be more of a warning, an observation as to what happens to those who shed blood, even if they consider they are doing it in justified vengeance for the shedding of blood. We must give full weight to the incident in 2 Samuel 14, where we learn that there is a higher principle than revenging blood- that of grace and forgiveness. God now continues to explain why man's blood shouldn't be shed- because we are made in God's image. That reasoning is such that any shedding of blood, even in vengeance, ought to be avoided.

We can also look at this commandment as a way of outlawing the murder / execution of others for minor matters. We see a contrast with how Lamech boasted of killing a young man for offending him. Tyrannical bullying and abuse of power is therefore clearly abhorrent to God. We must consider the fact that Cain and Lamech didn't die for their murders, committed before the flood. But it seems that now the death penalty for murder is being introduced. We see here how God's plan with man develops. He apparently more generously accepted the sinfulness of man after the flood (see on Gen. 8:21). But His judgment of sin actually increased at the same point, at least in this matter. And we can see a further extension of this in the Lord's work- which brought about even greater acceptance

of man, and forgiveness of human sin. But the judgment level increased, with even hateful thoughts now being judged as murder. This comes to its full term as we face the cross. There was and is "the judgment of this world", the comfort of total forgiveness and grace; and yet an associated higher level of judgment for those who refuse it. And that has a seamless logic to it; a love like that cannot just be refused without consequence.

For God made man in His own image- As James 3:9; the fact humans are made in God's image means we should perceive the value and meaning of persons, from not killing to holding the door open for people... Defacing God's image earns death. In what ways can we destroy the image of God in others apart from by killing them? Any form of dehumanizing surely does the same. Because we are made in God's image, we should therefore not *kill* other humans (Gen. 9:6). James says the same, in essence, in teaching that because we are in God's image, we shouldn't *curse* others. To curse a man is to kill him. That's the point of James' allusion to Genesis and to God as creator. Quite simply, respect for the person of others is inculcated by sustained reflection on the way that they too are created in God's image.

These statements at this point in Genesis 9 all reflect the extreme value and dignity God places upon human life. For man is made in the image of God. At first blush, this may seem to jar against the record we have just read of God's destruction of most human life in judgment for their sins. But the juxtaposition is intentional. We are being warned not to view the judgment of the flood as meaning that God doesn't value human life. He does, intensely so. Those who read the account of the flood but fail to reflect upon Genesis 9... will be left with a totally wrong impression of God. The gift of His Son for the salvation of man proves that for all time. The conclusion is therefore that the flood was absolutely necessary judgment for sin; and it was a judgment

that was made with full awareness of the value of human life. The reminder that man was made in God's image also serves to highlight God's pain and loss in judging man at the flood. It was as if He had cut off His own image, His own face; His personal loss was huge. But He 'had' to do this in order to preserve a line of believers who were willing to become in His moral image, and through whom His Son would come. For in Him we would see the image of God in human form.

The command not to murder has its basis in the fact that human life is not for us to use as we will (Ex. 20:13; Lev. 17:11; Gen. 9:6). It is God's life within those other people around us. Others, therefore, are not for us to use as we will. Gentleness and sensitivity to the life of others, in family life, the workplace, on the road... is therefore an outcome of our belief that the 'other' person likewise has been created by God and has life from Him. To drive in an unkind way, to act in a thoughtless way to others' detriment, is therefore the same basic error as taking human life in murder. It is worth reflecting that nearly all other usages of the word "image" or 'making something after an image...' have a literal sense to them. An image was made which was a literal, physical representation of something else. Idols were "images" of the gods thought to be elsewhere, e.g. "in heaven". If the god was believed to have three heads, then so did the "image" of it have three heads. The word is used in 2 Kings 16:10 of a "replica" being made of an altar. The literal, physical sense of "image and likeness" is shown by how the term is used in Gen. 5:3, where Adam "begot a son after his own form, and after his own image". The idea of man being in God's image would therefore have been understood in a literal sense; all men are representations, or images, of God. How we treat men is how we treat God. God exists in human form, far grander and greater than us; but we are in His image. And there is a clear connection with the

making of images of the gods, i.e. idols. If man is in God's image- then all idolatry is ruled out. The total focus of man is therefore upon his relationship with his God and creator. And the body, being in the image of God, is highly significant and important. This is a stark contrast with the Greek view, that the [supposed] "soul" was all important, and the body was a mere casing. The human body, and how it is used and related to in others, thus becomes of huge significance. Paul several times argued with the Corinthians against the idea that usage of the body was irrelevant.

9:7 *Be fruitful and multiply. Increase abundantly in the earth, and multiply in it-* As Adam and Eve were to "be fruitful and multiply" in the land / Garden of Eden (Gen. 1:28), so Noah and his sons were to do just the same in the same land after the flood (Gen. 9:7); and the children of Abraham were promised that they would do likewise in the very same land (Gen. 35:11). I suggested on Gen. 3 that perhaps the first sin was one of omission- Adam and Eve omitted to go forth and multiply as commanded. This would explain the emphasis upon this commandment, in this attempt to restore Eden. On the figurative level, it is the Lord Jesus who brings forth much fruit in us due to His resurrection out of the earth, as Noah came out of the ark (Jn. 12:24).

9:8 *God spoke to Noah and to his sons with him, saying-* Again, the family are addressed by God as being "with [Noah]"; just as salvation is predicated upon our being counted as together with Christ. The new covenant is likewise made primarily with the Lord Jesus, the singular "seed"; and thereby with us, insofar as we are in Him.

9:9 *As for Me, behold, I establish My covenant with you, and with your offspring after you-* Covenants were two way agreements, with conditions for both parties and a token of the

covenant. All the elements of a covenant are present- apart from the conditions for the other party, i.e. Noah. This is the force of the words "As for Me, behold...". It was unilateral. God's covenant is of grace- He binds Himself to certain things, without any corresponding demands upon Noah. See on :10. "With you" is repeated in 9:11. The covenant wasn't with humanity generally but to the children of Noah.

9:10 *And with every living creature that is with you: the birds, the livestock, and every animal of the earth with you, of all that go out of the ship, even every animal of the earth-* God is in covenant relationship with the animals. But such a covenant was obviously unilateral. Perhaps the information about the animals was added in order to underline how God's covenant with man was likewise unilateral; it was what God wanted to do for man, rather than a demand from man. This is grace. And although we have no contractual duty to respond, yet we do respond; we cannot be passive to such grace; see on :9.

Those within the ark represented those saved in Christ. It's difficult to work out the difference in symbology between the animals, and Noah and his family. But the animals also were finally included in the new covenant made after the ark had performed its saving purpose. So we are led to speculate that there is a class of people other than those secured "in Christ" who will somehow be finally saved, having been preserved from the latter day judgments which the flood waters represent. This same teaching is found in the way that the blood of the Passover lamb seems to have secured the salvation of the firstborn of both Israel and the animals who were brought [by others] within the blood covered houses (Ex. 11:8).

9:11 *I will establish My covenant with you: all flesh will not be cut off any more by the waters of the flood, neither will there ever again be a flood to destroy the earth-* "Ever again" or "any

more" (AV) sounds as if destruction of the earth by flooding had happened several times before. It's almost as if the God of all grace is showing Himself progressively gracious to earth's inhabitants: 'I've done it before several times, but now I promise you humans, you new race of inhabitants upon whom my special love is to be shown through My Son, that I'll never do it again'. 2 Peter 3 alludes to the flood, but says that the agent that will be used to destroy the *eretz* or land of the last days will be fire. A similar level of destruction is coming, but by fire and not water.

9:12 *God said, This is the token of the covenant which I make between Me and you and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations-* Covenants of those days had a token or material symbol associated with them. But they also featured requirements from both sides; as noted on :9, God's grace is such that the covenant He now made was simply a requirement on His side. The covenant was with the animals too- and clearly that too was a one-sided agreement. The token of the new covenant would be the blood of God's Son, just as the blood of the lamb was a "token" (Ex. 12:13), perhaps memorialized in the communion bread and wine, just as circumcision was the token of the covenant with Abraham (Gen. 17:11 s.w.).

9:13 *I set my rainbow in the cloud, and it will be for a sign of a covenant between Me and the earth-* The sign of the rainbow is described as God hanging up ['setting'] His bow. To hang up your bow was an idiom for ceasing from conflict (Hab. 3:9-11; Ps. 7:13). It was as if Yahweh the warrior was laying aside His bow, ending His conflict with mankind. The contemporary flood myths articulate all this in terms of there being a dispute amongst the gods; some wanted to destroy mankind, others wanted to show mercy; some regretted the earlier judgments against mankind, others didn't; some wanted to assure mankind that he wouldn't be destroyed; others argued that he must face

the consequences of his sin. Here the Biblical record is so amazingly different. All these emotions are portrayed as occurring within the one and only God. As humanly incomprehensible as it is, that an all powerful, all knowing Being could have such conflicting emotions, this is without doubt the God whom the Bible reveals to us.

The Babylonian Epic Of Creation (6.82) claims that after Marduk's victory, he set his bow in the sky and it became a constellation. He also supposedly used his bow to shoot arrows at the clouds which caused the deluge. "So, too, the pagan Arabs related of one of their gods that after discharging arrows from his bow, he set his bow in the cloud". These myths are alluded to and corrected by the statement that God's bow is simply the rainbow, a purely natural phenomenon which is merely an optical feature and certainly not a literal bow of any god. Yahweh's bow, the rainbow, is a symbol of His grace and love towards His creatures. The later Old Testament repeatedly uses the idea of the true God shooting His arrows as a figure of His judgment of His enemies and salvation of His people (Hab. 3:9,11; Zech. 9:14; Ps. 38:2; 64:8; 77:17; 144:6; Job 6:4; Lam. 2:4; 3:12). The whole mythical, pagan idea of a god having a literal bow and arrows is thereby deconstructed. The question arises, however, as to why Moses is alluding to Babylonian myths which were current only centuries after his time. My response is threefold. Firstly, God could have inspired Moses to speak in terms which would later take on relevance to the myths which God foresaw would arise. Secondly, the Babylonian myths may well have developed from myths which were current in Moses' time. A third possibility is that the Pentateuch was re-written under Divine inspiration whilst Judah were in captivity in Babylon, and the historical accounts presented in such a way as to have relevance to the

Marduk worship and other Babylonian mythology which surrounded God's people in Babylonian captivity.

Rainbows being experienced worldwide doesn't mean that the flood was therefore global. Moses under inspiration wrote for the Israelites, to enable them to make sense of their world, and he explained to them that they were to understand that the world wouldn't be destroyed by water again. However 2 Peter 3 seems to say that the heavens and earth of Peter's time would be destroyed not by water but by fire, after the pattern of what God did at Noah's time. This passage has some relevance to AD70- which was a destruction of the Jewish system in the land of Israel, not worldwide.

There's another way to read Gen. 9:13-17 which I offer not in any dogmatism but for reflection. It may not mean that God intends us to look at rainbows and remember His covenant; it may be that God sealed the covenant He made at that time by bringing a cloud over the earth and displaying in it a bow or arrow [the Heb. translated "bow" also means an arrow and is thus translated in places]. God set or "hung up" [the Hebrew is translated that way elsewhere] His bow- as if to say, 'My bow and arrows are now hung up. I'm through with judgment by this flood. It's over. I've hung up My bow / arrows'. YHWH shooting arrows is a figure for His judgment in later Scripture. So it's a bit of an assumption that God's talking about rainbows here. A Divine covenant was typically sealed by a one-time token, e.g. His covenant with Abraham by the token of passing between the animal pieces. The token of a covenant was therefore a one-time act, not something like rainbows which are ongoing. The covenant was between God and Noah and also all animal flesh on the earth at that time. The token of that covenant was therefore relevant to Noah not humanity generally. So it would make sense if there was some theophany to Noah involving

awesome clouds and a special display of God's now hung up bow / arrow over it. God set His bow in that cloud, the record states. But rainbows don't exist at any location in the clouds; they are an optical phenomenon in the eye of the observer.

God did this so as to "remember" His covenant; but "remember" carries the idea of God marking it, this is what He did to mark the covenant He had just made as a one time demonstration to Noah. Surely it can't mean that whenever God sends rain, He sees the rainbow and remembers in the sense of "Ah yes, now I remember, I'm not supposed to use rain to kill people". People still die by flooding today and I guess some of them drown within sight of rainbows... and the survivors likely watch rainbows as they mourn their dead. The literalistic readings of the rainbow seem to create more questions than they solve. They also depend upon the assumption that there were no rainbows before the flood, and this was a special creation; but rainbows are observed in mist [e.g. over waterfalls or wave spray] as well as rain clouds so I somewhat doubt there were no rainbows seen before the flood. It's also an assumption that there was no rain before the flood- Gen. 2:5 simply states that before the creation of Adam there was no rain, possibly implying that the created plants didn't grow until Adam was created to tend them.

9:14 *It will happen, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the rainbow will be seen in the cloud-* The Hebrew doesn't have to mean 'whenever'. As suggested on :13, this could have been a one time event. Perhaps it was some foreshadowing of the bringing of a cloud at the crucifixion?

The idea of the rainbow being a 'reminder' to God not to destroy the earth again with a flood is rather hard to understand when applied to God. But if this is a reminder to the Angels, who

brought the flood in the first place, this makes more sense (Gen. 9:16).

9:15 *And I will remember My covenant, which is between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh, and the waters will no more become a flood to destroy all flesh-* "To destroy" is Heb. 'to cut off'. Having crossed the Red Sea, God sealed His covenant with Israel at Sinai. After emerging from the ark, God made a covenant with Noah. And circumcision was the entry point of covenant relationship with God. The record of these Old Testament occurrences also brings out the converse- what happened to all those who were not in covenant with God, who had not received the typical 'baptism'. The unbaptized Egyptians were "cut off"" (Ex. 9:15); "all flesh" that was not baptized into the Christ-ark was "cut off" (Gen. 9:15 AV). "The uncircumcised man child... that soul shall be cut off" (Gen. 17:14). The New Testament matches this by the oft repeated teaching that outside of Christ, there can be no salvation.

9:16 *The rainbow will be in the cloud. I will look at it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth-* The rainbow is to remind men of the essential salvation and patience of God. And yet He describes it as reminding *Him* of His promise of salvation- as if He might forget. This is the kind of language of limitation which is so common in the Bible. It could be explicable by referring it to Angels; or it could be that God presents Himself in human terms, without strict attention to who He actually is. For by nature He does not "forget" or need reminding. This would mean that those who may misunderstand God in some theological areas can still have a legitimate relationship with Him; just as God presented Himself here as 'needing a reminder'.

God set the rainbow in the sky so that when *He* looks upon it, He will remember His covenant with Noah. The pronouns seem wrong; we would expect to read that the rainbow is so that when *Noah* looked upon it, he would remember... but no. God condescends to man to such an extent that He invites Noah to understand that when *he* remembered the covenant with Him, God does likewise.

9:17 *God said to Noah, This is the token of the covenant which I have established between Me and all flesh that is on the earth-* I have suggested above that the bow was displayed at just one time, or just in the experience of Noah and his sons, as a token of the covenant God had made with them. The covenant was between God and "all flesh that is on the earth / *eretz*", at that time. God is not in covenant relationship with literally all people upon the planet. This leads us to again conclude that the idea is not that whenever rainbows appear anywhere on earth, this is a reminder that God is in covenant relationship with all people on earth. Rather was the bow [which may not have been a rainbow as we now understand them] revealed in some kind of special theophany to assure Noah and his family that there would never again be a flood.

9:18 *The sons of Noah who went out from the ship were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Ham is the father of Canaan-* This may be in order to emphasize that Canaan was born after the exit from the ark; and therefore the incident involving him and Noah's drunkenness would have occurred quite some years afterwards.

9:19 *These three were the sons of Noah, and from these, the whole earth was populated-* This makes more sense when understood as referring to the *eretz* promised to Abraham. Genesis 10 provides the details; all the listed descendants of Noah refer to peoples dwelling within the *eretz* promised to Abraham.

9:20 *Noah began to be a farmer, and planted a vineyard-* It could be argued that Gen. 9:2 was commanding Noah to cease being a crop farmer and instead dominate and eat animals. One disobedience, or taking of a lower spiritual level, often leads to greater temptation in other areas. And this is what happened with Noah.

The Gilgamesh Epic specifically records that Utnapistim gave the workmen wine to drink whilst they built the ark (Tablet 9, lines 72-73). The Biblical account appears to consciously contradict this by stating that Noah was the first to make wine- and he did this *after* the flood.

9:21 *He drank of the wine and got drunk. He was uncovered within his tent-* Noah was a survivor, and all survivors struggle with "Why me?". In his case, he now had no competition. He was ruler of the world. There was no man to oppose him as king of the world. But he couldn't handle such great salvation. He got drunk. Lot likewise got drunk after his salvation by grave from Sodom. Man cannot handle well these ultimate realities, and often turns away from the good news of them and even the experience of them.

See on Gen. 8:10. There's a juxtaposition here between God's wonderful covenant being followed by Noah getting drunk in response to it. Despite having been given a wonderful, one sided covenant of Divine grace. We too find it hard to cope with the huge import of God's grace. It's not something we merely accept with a smile, thinking "Oh how sweet". The enormity of it is riveting and very demanding. And Noah couldn't handle it. Surely Noah knew all about alcohol, for his generation were partying right up until the flood came. If they had developed iron smelting technology by Gen. 5, they surely knew about alcohol. It is stressed that only Noah, his wife, his three sons and their wives entered and left the ark. By the time Noah gets

drunk, Canaan had been born to Ham and was at least a young adult. So we cannot think that Noah got drunk from ignorance as to the effect of wine, nor that it happened immediately after leaving the ark. Noah maybe had weaknesses which aren't recorded in the record of his earlier life. Peter reasons that God saved Noah by the flood (1 Pet. 3:20,21); God saved Lot by destroying Sodom and Noah by destroying his surrounding world, because He knows how to deliver the godly from temptations (2 Pet. 2:5-9). It could be that had God not done this, they too would've been caught up in the evil around them, so powerful was it. Hence Is. 54:9 speaks of the flood as "the waters of Noah". It was Noah's flood, the flood required for him, as well as to judge the world. HE was saved by grace rather than his good works (Gen. 6:8). The Mesopotamian myths speak of how the hero of the flood (cp. Noah in the Biblical account) was raised to divine, immortal status. Gen. 9:29 comments simply upon Noah: "And he died". In the myth of Utnapishtim, the one who survives the flood is turned into a hero and becomes a god. But of course Moses' inspired record is different. The flood story ends with Noah dying- not becoming a god. And Noah not only remains human, but he remains *very* human- because he goes out and gets blind drunk after he comes out of the ark. Moses' point is surely to show that real human lives really do intersect with Almighty God's work, words and actions.

9:22 *Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers outside-* The sin of Ham in relation to Noah's drunkenness included the fact that he told his brothers about Noah's shame (Gen. 9:22). This incident seems to be alluded to by Paul when he says that it is a shame to speak of what sinners do in secret (Eph. 5:12). A large amount of the communication which would be called 'gossip' includes the communication of sinful things which would be better not

entering the minds of saints in any case- one tends to gossip about a neighbour's adultery rather than his lost cat. The sin of Ham is presented as telling his brothers about their father's sin. The word "outside" gives the impression of seeing something in privacy, and then going outside and telling it to others.

9:23 *Shem and Japheth took a garment, and laid it on both their shoulders, went in backwards, and covered the nakedness of their father. Their faces were backwards, and they didn't see their father's nakedness-* "Covered" is a related word to the 'covering' of the ark (Gen. 8:13). As they had been covered by God and thus saved, so they sought to cover the sin of another. Our experience of covering in Christ should be similar, not gossiping of others' sin but seeking to cover it (s.w. Prov. 17:9; 10:12; 11:13). There is a direct allusion to this incident in Prov. 12:16: "A prudent man covers [s.w.] shame". What they did to Noah is what we should do in response to our covering / atonement in Christ. Covering others' sin isn't the same as turning a blind eye to it; it involves conscious forgiveness, but then the covering of it in the sense that God also covers sin and doesn't mention it against us ever again.

"Their faces were backward" uses the same word as in Ex. 33:23, where God hides His face from Moses and only His "back" is seen. The verbal similarities between the two incidents are pointed. Perhaps Moses in recording this incident is suggesting that he felt like drunken Noah, and God showed the same grace to him as Noah's sons showed to their drunken father by not looking upon his sin and nakedness.

Uncovering of nakedness was an idiom for incest. Possibly Ham slept with Noah's wife, Ham's own mother, whilst Noah was drunk. This would explain the otherwise strange cursing of Canaan for Ham's sin; although this requires us to understand this as uttered after the child was born. Of this was the outcome

of the incest, then all makes sense. This would then be the situation of Dt. 23:1 "A man shall not take his father's wife, and shall not uncover his father's skirt". To uncover your father's nakedness was to uncover your mother's nakedness: "You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father, which is the nakedness of your mother; she is your mother, you shall not uncover her nakedness. You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father's wife; it is the nakedness of your father" (Lev. 18:7,8). Such things are described as the practices of the Canaanites and Egyptians, the descendants of Ham. Hence Gen. 9:22 stresses how "Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father". Mem slept with their fathers' wives in order to usurp them. Think of Absalom with David's concubines (2 Sam. 15:20-23), Reuben's relations with Bilhah (Gen. 35:22; 49:3,4), David with Saul's concubines (2 Sam. 12:8), and Adonijah's attempt to acquire David's wife Abishag (2 Kings 2:13-25). This is also condemned in Ez. 22:10. So we can conclude Ham was trying to do this to Noah. He showed no gratitude for the great salvation his father had achieved. Surely the roots of this tension with his father would have been there whilst the ark was being built and during the time of living in the ark. And yet for all this, Ham was one of those reoresenting the faithful who will be finally saved, according to Heb. 11. The ungodly world was destroyed but Noah and his family saved, Peter argues. Ezekiel likewise implies that Noah saved his family. And so Ham will be saved, despite all this. Just as Noah himself after the flood was set up as a second Adam but failed like Adam. Yet he will be saved. It's all of grace.

9:24 *Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his youngest son had done to him-* There is a clear similarity with Lot, who got so blind drunk that he didn't realize what was happening whilst his daughters had sexually abused him. And yet Lot, like

Noah, is still presented as "righteous" overall. The similarities may suggest that there was some kind of sexual abuse of Noah by his grandson Canaan. To uncover or 'see [a relative's] nakedness' is an idiom used for sexual relations throughout Lev. 18. The fact Ham and Japheth *covered* his nakedness may mean that they did *not* 'uncover his nakedness' in the sense the idiom is used in Lev. 18; they didn't participate.

9:25 *He said, Canaan is cursed-* As suggested on :24, this could be because Canaan had sexually abused him. But another approach is possible. Noah thrice rails against Canaan (:26,27). Why, seeing that the shame had been done to him by Ham, Canaan's father? This seems a classic example of transference-people often focus their anger not against the one who has hurt them, but against that person's relative, family or cause. We should deal with persons directly, perceiving the value and meaning of the human person; and not deflect the relationship onto others as Noah appears to have done. The curses placed by Noah have no fulfilment [contrary to many racist and misguided attempts to force such a fulfilment]. The story ends with a huge spiritual anticlimax, although later reference to Noah shows that he was judged faithful overall.

He will be servant of servants to his brothers- If this is addressed to Canaan, then we can assume that Ham had had other children by this stage, placing the incident some time after the exit from the ark. But as noted above, Noah appears to be talking to Ham, when he is referring to Canaan; he was making the son guilty for the father's sin, and vice versa.

9:26 *He said, Blessed be Yahweh, the God of Shem. Let Canaan be his servant-* According to :25, Canaan was to be the servant of his brothers. But here he is to be servant to Shem. Again we see a confusion between Ham and his son Canaan. It could simply be because Noah was drunk and confused when

he uttered these words; or he could be practicing some kind of guilt by association, making the son suffer for the father's sins, or vice versa. The Hebrew could mean 'May Shem be blessed by Yahweh, his God'. We wonder why Shem is singled out for the highest and first blessing; for Japheth is to be enlarged, but to still dwell in the tents of Shem (:27). Perhaps Noah was elevating Shem to the status of firstborn which Ham had previously enjoyed. Or maybe Shem did some specific act of kindness in trying to shield Noah's shame.

9:27 *May God enlarge Japheth. Let him dwell in the tents of Shem. Let Canaan be his servant-* "Japheth" means 'enlarged', so there is a play on words here. Noah wishes that Japheth experiences what his name meant. But he is still to dwell in the tents of Shem, who was to be blessed above all. To 'dwell in the tent' of someone meant to be subservient to them (Ps. 120:5). So clearly Noah is establishing a hierarchy here amongst his sons. There is nothing in the record which suggests that Shem did more than Japheth for Noah. But he is given a great blessing here; and again, Canaan was to be servant to Japheth as well as to Shem. The descendants of Japheth and Shem are listed in chapter 10, and there is no particular evidence that these blessings and cursings were actually fulfilled. They were uttered as Noah awoke from his drunken stupour. Likewise not all the blessings uttered by Jacob came particularly true for all his sons.

9:28 *Noah lived three hundred fifty years after the flood-* This meant he died just around the time Abraham was born. We are invited to see an unbroken line of the faithful continuing.

9:29 *All the days of Noah were nine hundred and fifty years, then he died-* The Mesopotamian myths speak of how the hero of the flood (cp. Noah in the Biblical account) was raised to divine, immortal status. Gen. 9:29 comments simply upon Noah: "And he died".

GENESIS CHAPTER 10

10:1 *Now this is the history of the generations of the sons of Noah and of Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Sons were born to them after the flood-* Thoughtful readers of Genesis must have wondered at the rubric "Now these are the generations of...". This phrase, the *toledoth* [Hebrew for "generations"] formula, is used to introduce both genealogies and also narratives. Why not say "Now this is the story / account / history of Joseph"? Why describe a narrative as a genealogy? Why preface genealogies and narrative histories as if they are one and the same? I suggest that the inspired writer of the Bible's opening book wished to establish the point that history gives birth to the future, history is pregnant, and not dry, dead and finished. And God's history especially demonstrates that the "generations" somehow repeat themselves over history, in that situations and character types recur over time in a Divinely planned manner.

It has been observed that in none of the flood myths is there anything like the table of nations of Gen. 10, which seeks to explain how the area affected by the flood was subsequently repopulated. However, the 70 peoples mentioned in Gen. 10 are clearly meant to be understood as representative of the wholeness of peoples. The point is being made that all tribal groups have one common origin, either in Adam or in one of Noah's sons. Remember that Moses was writing against a background of tribalism, where groups were persuaded that their group alone was the master race, and all foreigners were to be despised. The value of persons inspired by the Genesis record rose far above this petty tribalism. And for all our apparent sophistication, it's evident that our world is just as much full of tribalism as it ever was.

The surrounding myths all emphasize how depleted humanity after the flood started to re-grow in size by miraculous means- the Atrahasis Epic claims that magic incantations of the god Ea over 14 lumps of clay gave birth to many new humans after the flood; the Greek flood tradition asserts that Deucalion threw stones which turned into men. The Biblical record states simply and realistically how the population re-grew through natural procreation.

Gen. 10 lists 70 nations- see on Ex. 24:9-11. Luke records that the Lord sent out 72 preachers (Lk. 10:1). The Jews understood that there were 72 nations in the world, based on the LXX of Gen. 10. Surely Luke's point is that they went only to the Jews, thus highlighting the gap between the disciples' understanding at the time, and the Lord's further reaching intention of a mission to the Gentiles.

After the flood, we come to the record of Babel. This is prefaced by some genealogies. The record speaks as if Shem, Ham and Japheth were the only people living on 'earth'. Once we take this to mean 'the land', things are much easier. These three men were ancestors of the Middle Eastern races [as provable within the pages of the Bible itself], but not of any others. The idea that the black peoples descended from Ham / Canaan and were to be servants is sadly a 19th century piece of racism, that has far too much acceptance in our community. The tension between the children of Shem and Canaan has been worked out between the Jews and Canaanites, not white and black. The Canaanites which we read of in the Bible as dwelling in the land were quite simply the descendants of Canaan / Ham. Interestingly, we read of men like Magog, Gomer, Meshech, Tarshish, Asshur, Elam, Aram... all of which occur in prophecies like Ezekiel 38, as the latter day enemies of Israel. The origin of these peoples is not in Eurasia; they are the 'people of the

land', the neighbours and relatives of Israel. The peoples of the land spoke one language in the sense that they all had the same intentions- to build a tower, and live together in one place, in Babylon / Babel. Previously we have been informed that the sons of Noah were divided "in their lands; every one after his tongue, after their families" (Gen. 10:5,31). So when in chapter 11 we are told that they had "one language" this must refer to their unity of intent rather than them all using the same lexical items. They were scattered from Babylon / Babel into all parts of the land [i.e. that promised to Abraham]. The descendants of Shem, Ham and Japheth weren't literally scattered into the whole planet. If the flood was local, then there would have been plenty of other people alive in other parts of the planet.

Gen. 12:1-3, the promises to Abraham, has a clear connection with the language repeatedly found in the table of nations in Gen. 10. "Country" (:1), "peoples" (:3), "nation" (:2) and "people/ race" (:1) are terms used throughout Gen. 10. The idea seems to be that all those nations are listed in Genesis 10 in order to help us understand what God promised Abraham. He was promised the inheritance of all the people, nations, countries and races of Gen. 10.

10:2 *The sons of Japheth: Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech, and Tiras-* These and other names here occur in the list of nations in Ez. 38 who will invade Israel in the latter days, and we see that they are therefore all within the territory of the *eretz* promised to Abraham. And that is precisely the situation we see developing there today. The idea that "Japheth" refers to western Europe is mere fancy; the context here clearly explains that these are the nations living in the *eretz*. "Madai" refers to the Medes. "Tiras" is Tyre; and clearly Meshech refers to an area within the *eretz* and not to Moscow; and likewise with Tubal.

We note that out of Noah's three sons, fewest descendants are listed for Japheth. And there is no suggestion in this genealogy that they lived "in the tents of Shem", as Noah had predicted in his half drunken cursing of Ham and blessing of Japheth. This would suggest that his cursings were just that, the cursings of a man awaking with a hangover... and are not to be taken as actual prophecies of the future relationships between the sons.

10:3 *The sons of Gomer: Ashkenaz, Riphath, and Togarmah-* Ashkenaz was one of the nations which overthrew Babylon (Jer. 51:27). Again, we're dealing with a people within the *eretz* and not outside of it. I would argue that the Bible has very little to specifically say about the peoples beyond the *eretz*.

10:4 *The sons of Javan: Elishah, Tarshish, Kittim, and Dodanim-* Tarshish is a relative of Togarmah (:3), Meshech and Tubal (:2). This confirms my suggestion on Ez. 38 that Tarshish is with the other invaders and not against them. Tarshish may be another name for Tyre. The Tel Amarna tablets mention some of these names as peoples in the *eretz* promised to Abraham.

10:5 *Of these were the islands of the nations divided in their lands, everyone after his language, after their families, in their nations-* The same idea of nations, languages and families is found in Rev. 5:9 and Rev. 7:9; the converts from them may refer therefore to latter day converts made within the *eretz* from all the nations and families found there. "The islands" is an idiom and not to be taken literally. Some interpret it as meaning a people who could be reached by sea, or "coastlands". But not all the nations listed inhabited coastlands, and so I don't find this satisfactory. "Islands" is literally "spots", we might better understand it as meaning simply "locations". The same Hebrew word is translated "country" in Jer. 47:4, and is parallel with "places" in Zeph. 2:11. Is. 11:11 lists a number of nations and

summarizes them as being "the isles". And Is. 20:6 apparently speaks of the inhabitants of Jerusalem as "the inhabitants of this isle", meaning 'this place'. "The isles" are "the ends of the land", the areas on the borders of the *eretz*, in Is. 41:5.

It's possible that :5 refers to all the descendants of Noah; that they were the sole origin of the nations in the *eretz*. But it could also be that :5 refers specifically to how Japheth was indeed "enlarged" and spread abroad as defined here.

10:6 *The sons of Ham: Cush, Mizraim, Put, and Canaan-* The Canaanites were therefore under Noah's curse to be subservient to Shem. But as discussed on Gen. 9, it's hard to know whether to take Noah's cursings as any more than the cursings of a man awaking from a drunken stupor.

Pan-Arabism will in the end come to its full term (however short-lived), in the final invasion of Israel. The Hebrew word translated “Libya” is also translated “Phut” or “Put”, which was another name for Libya in Bible times. “Mizraim” likewise is the Biblical name for Egypt. Significantly, Phut, Mizraim and Canaan were brothers (Gen. 10:6). There is therefore a strong and valid idea of Arab brotherhood between the Palestinian Arabs [i.e. the Arabs living in Canaan or the land of Israel] and the Arabs of Libya, Egypt and the other countries in the surrounding Arab world. The Babylonian invasion of Judah was a type of the invasion of Israel by latter day ‘Babylon’, which will bring on the return of Christ. But this invasion [as at the time of the Assyrian invasion of Israel] was really by a confederacy of nations- including the Ethiopians, Lydians, Egyptians and Libyans (Jer. 46:8,9 cp. Nahum 3:9). And history will repeat itself- in that these nations along with Babylon will invade Israel in the last days. But where history shall stop, the red line of human time come to a terminus, will be in the simple fact that

this time, the Lord Jesus shall return to earth to establish God's Kingdom here.

10:7 *The sons of Cush: Seba, Havilah, Sabtah, Raamah, and Sabteca. The sons of Raamah: Sheba and Dedan-* Sheba and Dedan are found in Ez. 38 as amongst the enemies of Israel in the last days; see on Ez. 38:13. The impression is given that all the nations surrounding Israel in the *eretz*, descendants of all three sons of Noah, will invade her in the last days.

10:8 *Cush became the father of Nimrod. He began to be a mighty one in the land-* Nimrod founded Babel or Babylon (:10). The "top" or *rosh* of the Babel tower was to reach to heaven; as in Ez. 38:2, the *rosh* refers to a person who was being elevated, and we assume this person was Nimrod. Ham and his descendants were not therefore black Africans, as proposed by 19th century racist theologians. The connection is clearly with the "mighty ones" of Gen. 6:4, for whose sake the earth was destroyed by the flood. Again, the potential for restoring Eden was messed up by human dysfunction. The term is used of the 'mighty ones' of Canaan who were to be subdued (Josh. 6:2; Jud. 5:13,23). Israel in the wilderness listening to Moses' teaching would have learnt that there had been 'mighty ones in the land', the very land they were now approaching, who likewise would ultimately come to nothing.

10:9 *He was a mighty hunter before Yahweh. Therefore it is said, Like Nimrod, a mighty hunter before Yahweh-* Nimrod "the mighty hunter against the Lord" (Heb.) uses a word related to 'Gibbor', the title of Christ used in Is. 9:6. Nimrod appears to be a prototype anti-God and anti-Christ, and for this he was well known even then. Gen. 10:10,11 shows his characteristic of building cities in the Babylon/Assyria area. Seeing that "the beginning of his kingdom was Babel" (Gen. 10:10), it is not unreasonable to assume that when "a man said to his neighbour,

Go to, let us make brick" to build the tower of Babel, this is in fact referring to Nimrod (Gen. 11:3 A.V. mg.).

10:10 *The beginning of his kingdom was Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar-* Nimrod was therefore the instigator of the Babel building we read of in chapter 11. Perhaps the allusion is to how God created "in the beginning" (s.w.), as if Nimrod tried to make a new creation of his own device. We can therefore assume that idea of Babel, of building a ziggurat to reach heaven, began with Nimrod. In Is. 14, another king of Babylon says the same: "Thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also in the mount of the congregation (i.e. the temple mount), in the sides of the north (Jerusalem, Ps. 48:2)... yet thou shalt be brought down... that (his children) do not possess the land, nor fill the face of the world with cities" (Is. 14:13,14,15,21). This last phrase is definitely alluding to the record of Nimrod's city building program as detailed in Gen. 10:9-11. This "king of Babylon" of Is. 14 can refer with equal relevance to either Nebuchadnezzar or Sennacherib,' both of whose invasions of Israel are typical of that which is to occur in the last days.

Again we note that all these places were within the *eretz* promised to Abraham (e.g. Calneh is a place in Assyria, see Is. 10:9; Am. 6:2).

10:11 *Out of that land he went into Assyria, and built Nineveh, Rehoboth Ir, Calah-* The going out of the land of Shinar (:10) presumably refers to how Nimrod's intention to build Babel was thwarted, and from there he went away from the area (he was scattered away from it, Gen. 11:8) and built Nineveh, as a kind of replacement Babel. The AV reads "Out of that land went forth Asshur". The reference could therefore be to the son of Shem who had this same name (:22). In this case the point

would be that the descendants of Shem and Ham committed apostacy together, lending weight to my suggestion on chapter 9 that Noah's cursing of Ham was but the ravings of an angry man awaking with a hangover.

10:12 *And Resen between Nineveh and Calah (the same is the great city)-* There is nothing much known about Resen or Calah; yet one or both of them merits the title "the great city". Perhaps this title was because, as noted on :11, Nimrod had been seeking to rebuild Babel there. The same Hebrew term "great city" is used of the cities of Canaan which the Israelites who first heard this Mosaic history were intended to conquer (Num. 13:28).

10:13 *Mizraim-* This is the usual word for "Egypt". The *eretz* extended to the river of Egypt, and so we can assume that this person lived in Egypt east of the Nile, rather than referring to "Egypt" as it is now defined.

Became the father of Ludim, Anamim, Lehabim, Naphtuhim- Anamim may be related to the "anakim", the giant people who inhabited Canaan. Again we can discern how Moses was producing this material with the primary intention of explaining to Israel the origin of the peoples they were to encounter in Canaan. These people were mere men, descendants from the same Noah whom they too were descended from; and whatever their size or physical features, they were not to be unduly feared. We note the absence of Divine names in nearly all the descendants of Noah here listed; in contrast to the way that they feature in the names of those before the flood. The impression we get is that Noah's descendants failed to keep the faith, until it had totally died out and God called Abram and revealed Himself to him.

10:14 *Pathrusim, Casluhim (which the Philistines descended from), and Caphtorim-* As noted on :13, one primary intention of this genealogy was to assure Israel that the enemies they were

encountering in the *eretz*, such as the Philistines, were mere men; there was nothing superhuman about them.

10:15 *Canaan became the father of Sidon (his firstborn), Heth-* Sidon is known as a town in northern Palestine. Constantly, we encounter evidence that this genealogy describes the peoples of the *eretz* promised to Abraham. Heth likewise lived in the land of Canaan (Gen. 25:3).

10:16 *The Jebusite, the Amorite, the Girgashite-* The Jebusites inhabited Jerusalem (2 Sam. 24:18), and so often the Hivites, Jebusites and Amorites are spoken of as the inhabitants of the land of Canaan. There is no way that Canaan therefore refers to Africa and negroid peoples.

10:17 *The Hivite, the Arkite, the Sinite-* These were the tribes through whom the Israelites would've travelled on their wilderness journeys; the Sinites lives around mount Sinai. Moses is providing historical and geographical context for the Israelites.

10:18 *The Arvadite, the Zemarite, and the Hamathite. Afterward the families of the Canaanites were spread abroad-* The same word is used for how the builders of Babel feared being "spread abroad" (Gen. 11:8), and yet they were "spread abroad" after the confusion of languages (Gen. 11:9). Again this is evidence that the genealogy of chapter 10 is descriptive of what came to pass after the Babel incident in chapter 11. We read there of how the situation in chapter 10 came about; see on :20. The same word is frequently translated "scattered", and usually refers to Divine judgment. So we could read this as meaning that the Canaanites were scattered, spread abroad, after Babel, in judgment for wanting to resist that judgment; and for wanting to build the blasphemous ziggurat, a massive temple system intending to place themselves as God Himself. There is reason to think that in the last days a similar structure will be built by the same ethnic groups in the same land... and likewise judged.

If we include Canaan himself, we have from :15-18 a description of 12 tribes of Canaan. They were a fake, imitation Israel; and were to be superseded by the 12 tribes of Israel.

10:19 *The border of the Canaanites was from Sidon, as you go toward Gerar, to Gaza; as you go toward Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboiim, to Lasha-* This note is included to demonstrate how 'their' land was to be later promised to Abraham.

10:20 *These are the sons of Ham, after their families, after their languages, in their lands, in their nations-* As noted on :18, we are reading here of a situation which came about as a result of the judgment on Babel. For here we read of division according to their languages; and this was achieved through the judgment upon the Babel builders in chapter 11. We can conclude that the builders of Babel were all the peoples listed in chapter 10, who as a result of Babel were divided according to different languages.

10:21 *To Shem, the father of all the children of Eber-* "Eber" is understood as the root of the word "Hebrew". The idea can be 'one who crosses over', which is one of the basic characteristics of all God's people.

The elder brother of Japheth, to him also were children born- Shem, Ham and Japheth are described as all being born in the same year; perhaps Shem was the eldest because he came out first. Or maybe the curse of Noah upon Ham and Canaan was a way of giving the right of the firstborn to Shem, although he may not have been the firstborn at birth.

10:22 *The sons of Shem: Elam, Asshur, Arpachshad, Lud, and Aram-* Wherever these peoples later lived, they were at this time all within the *eretz* promised to Abraham.

10:23 *The sons of Aram: Uz, Hul, Gether, and Mash-* "Aram" is the word usually translated "Syria". Job lived in the land of Uz. "Mash" is "Meshech" in 1 Chron. 1:17; the Meshech of Ez. 38 is

to be interpretted as some people within the *eretz* promised to Abraham.

10:24 *Arpachshad became the father of Shelah. Shelah became the father of Eber-* "Shelah" like most of the names in this genealogy has a rather negative spiritual meaning; in this case, "missile". The impression given is that spirituality died out over these generations, until God started again with the call of Abram.

10:25 *To Eber were born two sons. The name of the one was Peleg, for in his days the earth was divided. His brother's name was Joktan-* This "division" refers not to plate tectonics, but to the division of the earth according to language which we will read of in chapter 11. Several times here in chapter 10, we find reference to the division which is described in chapter 11. The division of the *eretz* at Babel is therefore presented here as occurring four generations after the flood; although the Biblical genealogies frequently skip generations, and in this case, they must be compared with the information provided in 1 Chronicles.

10:26 *Joktan became the father of Almodad, Sheleph, Hazarmaveth, Jerah-* More sons of Joktan are recorded than for any other in this genealogy. Yet his name means "made little"; perhaps we are to understand that the one who was somehow made little was the one who became great, in terms of descendants.

10:27 *Hadoram, Uzal, Diklah-* "Hadoram" meaning "high place", we again get the impression of unspirituality amongst these peoples. I have mentioned that this genealogy is explaining how indeed the descendants of Noah were scattered throughout the *eretz* promised to Abraham after Babel; where they later may have migrated to isn't in view here. But it is also noteworthy that the children of Joktan would appear to be located in the Arabian peninsular and what is now Yemen. The southern borders of the

eretz are hard to define; perhaps we are to include these areas within it.

10:28 *Obal, Abimael, Sheba-* Most commentaries focus upon where these tribes ended up living later. But let's remember that we are here reading of how the descendants of Noah were scattered throughout the *eretz* promised to Abraham after the events of Babel. Where they may have migrated to afterwards is not what is in view here.

10:29 *Ophir, Havilah, and Jobab. All these were the sons of Joktan-* There is a "Havilah" in :7, which may suggest that the lines of Ham and Joktan intermarried. This again would be evidence that the curses of Noah didn't come into effect; for he presupposed that the lines of descent from his sons would be distinct, especially between Ham and the others. According to LXX notes, this "Jobab" is the Job of the book of Job.

10:30 *Their dwelling was from Mesha, as you go toward Sephar, the mountain of the east-* This could as well be translated "the mountain of ancient time". Perhaps the contrast is with Mount Zion; this was perhaps a centre of idolatry.

10:31 *These are the sons of Shem, after their families, after their languages, in their lands, after their nations-* As noted on :18, the point is being made that the splitting up of the families was on the basis of language; and chapter 11 will explain how that came about. Chapter 11 is not therefore strictly chronological, but as often in the Hebrew Bible, a step backwards to explain how a situation just described has come about. The way that language differences were eclipsed within the true Israel by the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost is another case of where the Genesis curses for disobedience are mitigated for God's people.

10:32 *These are the families of the sons of Noah, after their generations, in their nations. Of these were the nations divided in the earth after the flood-* As noted on :18, we have here a

description of the scattered abroad ["divided"] descendants of Noah in the *eretz*, but now in chapter 11 we will read how that division or scattering abroad came about- through the division of languages at Babel.

GENESIS CHAPTER 11

11:1 *The whole earth was of one language and of one speech-* "Language" could possibly refer to one language root. I have suggested that the Genesis history concerns the *eretz* promised to Abraham, and the peoples living upon it. This is not to say that there were not other peoples living elsewhere on the globe, with their languages. But those in the *eretz* had one language root; and this was miraculously broken up into various dialects to the point of being confusing. The Hebrew for "speech" here is not the same word used for "speech" later on in this record - this word can more suggests a purpose/desire, often a wrong one. The implication is that this one desire was to build the tower of Babel; the confounding of languages affecting all inhabitants of the earth shows that all the families of the earth were either in the Babel region or represented there. Truly it was a tower "which the children of men builded" (Gen. 11:5), bound together in unity by a common allegiance to this renowned king of Babylon.

If we take *eretz* as referring specifically to the land promised to Abraham, the idea could be that there were other languages on the earth; chapters 9 and 10 have explained there were already nations divided according to languages. But within the *eretz* there arose a policy of "one language" in order to unite the people who came to Shinar. Rather like Russian became the "one language" of the disparate peoples bound together within the Soviet Union. Thus we read that "it came to be" (:1) that they had one language. This was part of their intention to create "one name", one set of characteristics and values. Which were the antithesis of the YHWH Name. This was the essence of their sin- the making of an alternative Name, rather than the act of building a city and tower. The idea of a ziggurat was not to

challenge the gods. Rather was the idea that at the top of it, there was an altar or some symbol intended to reach out to the god in heaven. This was seen as a 'gate' for the gods to come down to men upon. Akkadian *babilu* means 'gate of the gods'; but this was it seems turned into 'Babel', 'confusion'. And Yahweh alludes to this by saying that He will indeed come down- in judgment. They created their own system, their Name, their city, and their tower reached out to their god. They built the city from fear, "lest we be scattered abroad on the surface of the whole earth". The Hebrew has been rendered “so that we will not be captured and carried away to other lands”. They clearly feared invasion and scattering into exile. The connection of course is with how Israel were to later do this, reaching out to other gods, rather than to Yahweh; making their own Name, rather than accepting His Name. Babel would have required many slaves to build; and we see from Gen. 10:8-10 that this was one of a series of cities founded by Nimrod, who was a warrior and "hunter", possibly of men. So we have the impression of an entire system and "name" developing, based upon aggression and conquest, seeking to solidify and defend itself through building a city and reaching out to their god through the ziggurat tower. We note that Nimrod was from Ham, who was cursed as a slave (Gen. 9:25; 10:6-8). It was as if he wished to uproot his Divine destiny by hunting and forcing others into slavery. So we can understand the reasons why Yahweh was to judge his system. They all had the same language, but they were cursed with division- which is typical of how God curses those who displease Him. "Babel" means 'confusion'. The divisions between them were so legendary that it was the name folks gave to the ruined city. Division and destruction are connected throughout the Bible. A house divided falls. And it is why any divided community is in fact experiencing God's displeasure. Having destroyed those who

were attempting to make *their* name great, Yahweh will go on to choose Abram and make his name great (Gen. 12:3) through inserting the central part of the Yahweh Name into 'Abram', making him 'Abraham'. This is one of the connections between the Babel account and the story of Abraham which begins straight afterwards. The Babel builders wanted to make their name great, as do all unbelievers in some way. Whereas God's people ant to make *His* Name great, and to subsume themselves within that Name. The record of Babel leaves the earth's peoples divided and judged. But the purpose of God through Israel was to reunite them. Sadly Israel forsook the Name of their God, and became elitist and xenophobic, rather than including the Gentiles within the Yahweh Name. And so "Israel" was redefined to refer to all baptized into the seed of Abraham, the Lord Jesus. And that is why the table of nations in Gen. 10 is alluded to in the record of representatives of "all nations" who were baptized in Acts 2. All three branches [Shem, Ham and Japheth] are represented in the Acts 2 list. The point of Acts 2 is that the people of different *languages* were united in Christ by baptism into the Name. Babel was undone- for those within the Israel of God. But yet again, the "Israel" of God divided and became exclusive and divisive. All who uphold that division amongst the seed of Abraham have therefore not grasped the intention of God in actually uniting people. Israel were a nation taken out of another nation (Dt. 4:34). The nations were to come in to them- not them to the world. The fulfilment of the promises to Abraham will therefore only be when representatives of "all nations" have entered into "Israel" and are united therein. And the Lord Himself predicates the time of His return upon the Gospel going into "all the world... to all nations" (Mt. 24:14), to all those in the table of nations of Gen. 10. Paul therefore states that the 'coming in' of "the full number of the Gentiles" will lead

to the Deliverer coming to Zion; "and in this way all Israel shall be saved" (Rom. 11:25-27). The coming "in" of the Gentiles, into the Hope of Israel, thereby creates the true Israel, which shall thereby be saved.

11:2 *It happened, as they travelled east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they lived there-* Moses' words in Genesis deconstruct later Babylonian myths. Perhaps the clearest case of this is in the record of Babel. The Babylonian myths boasted of the building of the city of Babylon and its tower / ziggurat. The tower of Babel was built in a plain (Gen. 11:2); and both Strabo and Herodotus mention that Babylon was built in a wide plain. The record of the tower being built with bricks is so similar to the Babylonian *Epic Of Creation*, Tablet 6, lines 58-61, which held that "For a year [the gods] made bricks" to build the ziggurat of Babylon. Their myths claimed that after the deluge, humanity came to Babylon and the Anunnaki deities, who had supported Marduk in his battle, built the city. But Gen. 11:5 labours that it was "the sons of men" who built Babel. Cassuto describes the Genesis record as "a kind of satire on what appeared to be a thing of beauty and glory in the eyes of the Babylonians" (Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary On The Book Of Genesis* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1992) Vol. 2 p. 227).

The 'coming down' of Yahweh to destroy man's evil intentions at Babel, points forward to His future intervention to judge the wickedness of men. The record of this in Gen. 11 is set against the background of Gen. 10. "As *they* journeyed from the east...*they* found a plain..." (Gen. 11:2) is in the context of the record of the growth and rapid expansion of the tribes of the *eretz* in Gen. 10. We recall that Adam was banished eastwards from Eden; this impression of eastward movement may suggest they were getting further and further from the sanctuary in Eden, and also moving eastward from Ararat ['holy mount'].

I have suggested that the ark rested on mount Zion; eastward from there would lead to Babylon, or Babel.

"Travelled" means specifically to take up tent pegs, and the word is used multiple times later in the Pentateuch for the travellings of the Israelites in the wilderness. And it was at exactly that period when Moses was composing the Pentateuch, with the nomadic Israelites as the primary audience. The warning was not to commit idolatry as these earlier rebels had done; and to accept that keeping on a journey was part of God's plan, rather than seeking to remain in one place. And in essence, that lesson needs to be learned by us today.

They halted their migration in a plain, the Hebrew suggesting a flat area bounded by rivers- which would fit Babylon. They had been commanded to spread over the land and subdue it; but like Adam with the same commandment, they decided not to. The descendants of Noah, which after a few generations would have numbered maybe 30,000 people, wanted to resist this; just as the early Christians resisted the command to take the Gospel into all the earth, despite the gift of languages giving them the opportunity to overcome language barriers. We see in these observations the power of conservatism within human nature; the desire for stability, the old and familiar, rather than the new. The Lord commented upon this (Lk. 5:39). No matter how liberal and open minded we may consider ourselves to be, there is an almost overpowering inertia within us.

11:3 *A man said to his neighbour-* The origin of the sin punished at Babel was a man suggesting something to his neighbour. The record of the lies of Cain and the sins of the people at the time of the flood and later at Babel all clearly locate human beings as responsible for the very sins which the pagan myths blamed upon the gods, with the implication in the

Gilgamesh Epic that man was created an inevitable sinner by nature and therefore not fully culpable for his sin. Such ideas have in their essence re-appeared in mistaken Christian theologies of later millennia. Sin and death were blamed upon the gods. Thus Gilgamesh was told by Siduri: "When the gods created mankind, they allotted death to mankind, but life they retained in their keeping" (Tablet 10, col. 3, 3-5). In these kinds of pagan ideas we see the essence of common ideas about Satan; the blame for sin and the human condition that arises from it is blamed upon some superhuman being.

Come- Three times in this record (Gen. 11:3,4 and 7) we read the phrase "Come" or "Go to" (AV) in the contexts of the men 'going to' in the building, and of God 'going to' in His dramatic intervention. It cannot be coincidence that this rare idiom occurs twice close together in James 4:13; 5:1. The context there is of warning believers not to build their own 'Babels' of wealth and monuments to human achievement, seeing that they would be suddenly destroyed by the Lord's coming. This in itself points to a latter-day application of this Genesis record- indicating that weak believers will get caught up in the latter day Nimrod's unity movement, and will benefit from it materially?

Let's make bricks, and burn them thoroughly. They had brick for stone, and they used tar for mortar- The record of the tower being built with bricks is so similar to the Babylonian *Epic Of Creation*, Tablet 6, lines 58-61, which held that "For a year [the gods] made bricks" to build the ziggurat of Babylon. Their myths claimed that after the deluge, humanity came to Babylon and the Anunnaki deities, who had supported Marduk in his battle, built the city. But Gen. 11:5 labours that it was "the sons of men" who built Babel. Cassuto describes the Genesis record as "a kind of satire on what appeared to be a thing of beauty and glory in the eyes of the Babylonians".

The building materials here listed are appropriate to Babylon. I suggested on Gen. 10:9,10 that it was Nimrod who began the building project, and who was the *rosh* or head of the tower which was to be exalted to heaven. There is in the Babylon area a ruined tower which the Arabs call 'the tower of Nimrod'.

"Let us make brick" is literally 'let us make ourselves Laban'. 'Laban' meaning 'white' came to be associated with 'brick' because the bricks were presumably made from white clay. This created the picture of a dazzling white tower, gloriously reflecting the desert sun - which suggests that the tower was a piece of religious symbolism, perhaps a mock temple. This impression receives Biblical confirmation in Zech. 5. This chapter describes the corruptions of the Jewish and Christian apostasies; chapter 4 speaks of the building of the true temple in Jerusalem, whilst chapter 5 matches this with a description of a false temple being built "in the land of Shinar" (Zech.5:11). 'Shinar' being used rather than 'Babylon' must be in order to take us back to the tower/temple which men built "in the land of Shinar" in Gen. 11:2.

The religious associations of the tower are strengthened by the similarity of this tower built by the first king of Babylon on a plain and the statue built by Nebuchadnezzar on the plain of Dura, also in Babylon. It may be that the locations are identical. And there is a continuity of theme to be found in Arab leaders (kings of Babylon) showing a distinct liking for large monuments and religious imagery expressed in big building projects. Saddam Hussein, claiming to be the latter day Nebuchadnezzar, tried to rebuild Babylon and fill the area with quasi-religious towers and obelisks glorifying himself. "Let us make ourselves Laban" (v. 3) continues the Arab connections, seeing that Laban's persecution of Jacob typifies that of Israel by the Arabs, especially in the last days.

There are other references to the persecution of Israel in the Babel record - the using of bricks and mortar to build a huge piece of religious symbolism recalls the work of Israel in Egypt (the same Hebrew word for 'bricks' occurs in the Exodus record). "Slime had they for mortar" (Gen. 11:3) also contains echoes of Israel in Egypt. "Slime" is the same word as "mortar" in Ex. 1:14, and "mortar" in Gen. 11:3 is the word translated "pitch" concerning how Moses' bulrush basket was made (Ex. 2:3). This conjures up the picture of Amram bringing home some mortar from the building site in order to make that ark. These echoes of Israel under persecution are hard to make sense of until it is recognized that the context of this Babel passage is the account of Arab growth in Gen. 10, and that Babel was built under Arab auspices. Bearing in mind the certain Arab domination of Israel in the last days, it is surely justifiable to see in this record a hint of a latter day Arab-led coalition, which will perhaps express its grandeur in physical terms by the building of a structure.

This colossus being built of baked clay and mortar and being effectively destroyed by the Lord's 'coming down' inevitably connects with the feet of the statue which Daniel interpreted, also seen in Babylon. The feet were made of "miry clay", "mixed" (Heb. 'Arab'). Is. 41:25 also springs to mind, speaking of the second coming, "He shall come... he shall come upon princes as upon mortar, and as the potter treadeth clay". It has been suggested that the image of Daniel 2 can be interpreted in a primarily Arab context, and we have shown that the Babel-builders are also primarily Arab. "*They* journeyed from the east... *they* said... *they* builded" in Gen. 11 refers to the people of the *eretz* listed in Gen. 10.

11:4 *They said, Come, let's build ourselves a city, and a tower*- The phrase "city and tower" is so often found in Babylonian writings with reference to Babylon; but the phrase is used of

Babel in Gen. 11:4. The temple of Marduk in Babylon had a sanctuary, the Esagila- "the house whose head is in heaven" and a tower called Etemenanki, "the house of the foundation of heaven and earth". Marduk supposedly lived on the seventh storey. The Babylonian inscriptions speak of the ziggurat tower as having its top in Heaven. The Genesis record deconstructs all this. The tower of Babel was built by sinful *men* and not gods; the one true God came *down* to view the tower- its top did *not* reach to Heaven, and there is a powerful word play on the word Babylon, meaning 'the gate of Heaven' in their language, and yet 'Babel', the equivalent Hebrew word, means 'confusion'. What the Babylonians thought was so great was in God's eyes and those of His people the Hebrews simply confusion and failure. The Genesis record goes on to show how that it was Abraham who had a great name made for himself (Gen. 12:2), whereas the Babel builders failed in their desire to make a permanent name for themselves. God's intention that mankind should spread out and fill the earth after the flood did eventually triumph over the builders of Babel-Babylon who tried to thwart it. Zeph. 3:9-11 allude to the Babel record- at the time of Judah's restoration from Babylon, it was God's intention to undo the effects of Babel and "change the speech of the peoples to a pure [united] speech, that all of them may call on the name of the Lord and serve Him with one accord. From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia my suppliants, the daughter of my dispersed ones, shall bring my offering". Those dispersed would then gather as one, i.e. Babel would be reversed.

Our Lord appears to refer to the temple as "a tower" in Mt. 21:33, supporting the previous suggestion that there was a religious aspect to this tower. It is hard to avoid emphasizing that in our last days Arab leaders are eager to rebuild Babylon and other historic cities, seeing them as a token of their unity

and common connection with a glorious Babylon of old which subdued Israel. The original Babel was built with "slime" (Gen. 11:3); the Hebrew seems to refer to bitumen, literally meaning 'that which is brought up,' and today it is Arab oil money which is financing such building schemes.

There is good internal reason to think that the Pentateuch likewise was re-written in places to bring out the relevance of Israel's past to those in captivity. Consider the use of the word *pus*, 'scatter'. It was God's intention that mankind should scatter abroad in the earth and subdue it (Gen. 1:28); but it required the judgment of the tower of Babel to actually make them 'scatter' (Gen. 11:4). Thus even in judgment, God worked out His positive ultimate intentions with humanity. And this word *pus* is the same word used with reference to Judah's 'scattering' from the land into Babylonian captivity (Ez. 11:17; 20:34,41; 28:25). The intention, surely, was to show the captives that they had been scattered as the people had at the judgment of Babel / Babylon, but even in this, God was working out His purpose with His people and giving them the opportunity to fulfil His original intentions for them.

Whose top reaches to the sky- This is a poor translation - the A.V. putting "may reach" in italics indicates that these words are not in the original. The Hebrew for "top" is *rosh*, familiar to students of Ez. 38:2, which correctly translates it as "chief prince". The chief leader of this tower was to reach unto and into heaven, and I suggested on Gen. 10:9,10 that Nimrod was this individual. Every Bible-minded student will race to Is. 14, where another king of Babylon says the same: "Thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also in the mount of the congregation (i.e. the temple mount), in the sides of the north (Jerusalem, Ps. 48:2)... yet thou shalt be brought down... that (his children) do

not possess the land, nor fill the face of the world with cities", as Nimrod had done (Is. 14:13,14,15,21). The connection with Is. 14 confirms that this tower had religious symbolism, and that with the image of Dan. 2 suggests that the chief prince (*rosh*) of the image is based on Nimrod, the first king of Babylon. Daniel, of course, also made it clear that the head of the image was the king of Babylon, who was then Nebuchadnezzar.

When we read that the summit of Babel was to touch the heavens (Gen. 11:4), we find that the Hebrew phrase refers usually to persons, elevating their head. There are many uninspired parallel accounts of the building of Babel in contemporary literature- the Enuma Elish speaks of how the builders "raised high the head of Esagila toward the Heaven". Clearly the tower was seen as headed up by a person, just as was the image of Dan. 2 and also that built by Nebuchadnezzar. These all indicate that the Lord Jesus will return to destroy a human system headed up by a specific, antiChrist individual. The Canaanite tribes were noted for the very high walls of their cities - "unto heaven" (Gen. 11:4 cp. Dt. 1:28). This shows a continuity of theme between Babel and the tribes of Canaan. Significantly, God decided that nothing would be "restrained" from these people if their tower were completed - using the same Hebrew word translated "walled up" in Dt. 1:28 concerning the cities of Canaan.

The whole prophetic meta narrative of the Bible is in many ways a tale of two cities- Babylon and Jerusalem. There are times when Babylon masquerades as Zion- a false city of God with a false Messiah leading her. Babylon / Babel was a city built to reach unto Heaven, in contrast to the true city of God which comes down from Heaven (Gen. 11:4 cp. Rev. 21:2). And there are times when Zion in her apostacy has appeared as Babylon. But in the final conflict of the last days, these two cities will

be literally pitted against each other. Zion will briefly succumb under the might and pride of Babylon, to rise again in eternal glory. It was in Babylon where Nimrod first built the tower of Babel, the first organized rebellion against God; and it was there that God first entered into open judgment of flesh and humanity *en masse*. And it is here likewise that His purpose with sin and His true people will likewise be fulfilled.

And let's make ourselves a name- The new religious system was to replace God's Name with their own. The image of Dan. 2 is fundamentally concerning the domination of Israel (the earth / land), and we have connected that image with the tower of Babel. The building of the tower is also linked to the persecution of Israel through various allusions to Exodus. The motive for building Babel (i.e. dominating Israel in the typology), is to stop the builders being scattered and to make them a common name (Gen. 11:4). Prophecies like Ps. 83, as well as an awareness of current Arab politics, indicate that the motive for the final Arab invasion of Israel will be in order to unite the naturally disparate Arab peoples. But it is twice emphasized that the Lord's 'coming down' resulted in their being "scattered abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth" (Gen. 11:8,9), using the very language which they used in v. 4 - "lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth." This clearly connects with the little stone destroying the desolating image and scattering the remains of it worldwide.

Lest we be scattered abroad on the surface of the whole earth- Their conscious intention was to disobey the command to Noah's descendants to spread throughout the *eretz* and subdue it. The memory of the Flood would still have been reasonably fresh with the generation of Babel. After the Flood the nations were "divided in the earth" (Gen. 10:25,32); so perhaps the Canaanites building the city and tower so that they would not

"be scattered abroad upon the earth" was a conscious effort to resist the judgments brought about by the Flood and its effects. We have shown that the Flood particularly represents the judgments of the last days, and in the typology of Gen. 11 it is these which the builders of Babel consciously try to avoid. This raises the question of how they will be so convinced that these judgments really are imminent. A display of the cherubim over Jerusalem (or a similar "sign of the son of man in heaven"), or, of course, the actual second coming of the Lord, seem the only feasible explanations of their convictions.

11:5 *Yahweh came down to see the city and the tower-* As if He had to search and come to have a closer look; this 'language of limitation' may refer to the Angels rather than God personally. "The Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the children of men builded" – surely this language of limitation must be concerning the Angels, seeing that God is aware of all things. The Angelic response was "Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language" (Gen. 11:5,7). This recalls the Angels' words of Gen. 1:26 "Let us make man in our image"- see notes there.

Which the children of men built- See on Gen. 11:2 above.

11:6 *Yahweh said, Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is what they begin to do. Now nothing will be withheld from them, which they intend to do-* The intentions of the people were clearly far more than simply building a tower. That was but a beginning- towards a fake kingdom of God on earth. The Hebrew for "begin" here is also translated "to profane", again showing the distinctly religious aspect of their actions in building the tower. But God wants to save; and so He didn't allow such a system to fully develop. But it

was not that God was as it were on the back foot; He didn't want to allow the earth to reach a point where He would have to mass destroy as He had done at the flood. As ever, His judgments were to save, ultimately, rather than to punish for its own sake.

With the world supporting them, and with a unity of mind never before experienced, the latter day Babel-builders will be able to gleefully relish the prospect of completely destroying the Jews and building their own religious system. Dan. 12:1 describes this period as "a time of trouble (for Israel) such as never was since there was a nation". "Since there was a nation" may well refer to the time of Babel, when the nations became more clearly defined. If this is indeed a Babel allusion, then the suggested connection between the building of Babel and the persecution of Israel is indeed confirmed. Yet Babel appears to be a symbol of apostate Israel in Is. 24:1: "The Lord maketh the earth (land) empty, and maketh it waste... and scattereth abroad the inhabitants thereof". The judgments to come upon the Babel builders will also come upon the faithless Israel of the last days.

11:7 *Come, let us go down-* The same kind of language found in Gen. 1:26; see notes there.

And there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech- The languages of the peoples in the *eretz* were and are confused, words from one language are found in the others, but with different meanings. Arabic and Hebrew would be the classic example. And it was this closeness yet distance which created the interpersonal problems with which we are now familiar, and which led to the dispersal of the peoples from Babel. But comparing, say, Chinese with an Amazonian language doesn't yield that same sense. Again, it is the situation within the *eretz* which is always in view here. In God's bigger purpose, the misunderstandings and divisions

between persons were used to set the scene for Abraham's calling. And He works similarly today.

There is a definite similarity between the account of God's intervention at Babel and that of His 'coming down' to Sodom. "The Lord came down to see the city and the tower (and 'noticed' how evil their aims were)... Let us go down..." (Gen. 11:5-7). This is matched by "I will go down now, and see whether they (Sodom) have done altogether according to the cry of it... and there came two angels to Sodom" (Gen. 18:21; 19:1). We have our Lord's authority for seeing this 'coming down' of the Lord to Sodom as typical of the second coming; the designed similarity with His 'coming down' to Babel indicates that we can read that incident likewise.

11:8 *So Yahweh scattered them abroad from there on the surface of all the earth. They stopped building the city-* As noted on ::4, the scattering abroad was God's intention, so that the *eretz* would be subdued. They had built Babel specifically so that they would not be scattered. So here we see God using judgment and division between persons in order to achieve His purpose. And likewise the endless divisions amongst God's children, with each making their own missionary efforts, has in a strange way resulted in the wider spread of the Gospel.

How God 'came down' to destroy their plans is revealing as to His methods in the last days. There is no indication in Gen. 11 that the tower was actually destroyed, indeed, "Therefore *is* the name of it called Babel" (Gen. 11:9) implies that at least part of the building was still standing when the record was written. It was the very action of confounding their language that resulted in their scattering, "*so* (i.e. because of the confounding of their language) the Lord scattered them abroad" (Gen. 11:7,8). "They left off" building (Gen. 11:8) uses a Hebrew word meaning strictly 'to grow flabby', implying a gradual cessation rather than

a momentous destruction. Likewise the persecutors of angel-protected Lot in Sodom (a certain type of the last days) "wearied themselves" in their efforts as a result of the Lord's 'coming down'. One of the 'plagues' that God threatens the Arab invaders of Israel with is that "a great tumult from the Lord shall be among them; and they shall lay hold every one on the hand of his neighbour, and his hand shall rise up against the hand of his neighbour" (Zech. 14:12,13). This is how previous invasions had been overcome (Jud. 7:22; 2 Chron. 20:23). Ps. 83 perfectly describes the Arab unity as they attack Jerusalem in the last days (vs. 3-5, 12), but concludes with the Psalmist praying that God would destroy them as He did Oreb and Zeeb (v. 11) - who were defeated as a result of God making their troops turn on each other (Jud. 7:22-25). It will largely be through this means that the image will be broken up and scattered worldwide, as the Babel builders were. In its continuous historic fulfilment, the different parts of the image subdued each other; for them to stand together in the last days shows that a unity must be placed upon them by their head and also the feet upon which they stand; only for this unity to be destroyed by the Lord's coming.

11:9 *Therefore its name was called Babel, because there Yahweh confused the language of all the earth. From there, Yahweh scattered them abroad on the surface of all the earth*- The stress that "there" the confusion occurred makes us wonder how exactly it occurred. The act of confusion occurred at a specific point in space and time, and yet affected all the descendants of Noah; who by that time might have been around 30,000. Perhaps all of them listed in Genesis 10 were present at Babel, which would mean that a fair "city" already existed there. They would have scattered from each other due to their misunderstandings and arguments- and yet this was God's scattering of them. His judgments work in accord with human freewill. Thus God threw

Pharaoh into the Red Sea; but he himself charged in there of his own free volition.

11:10 *This is the history of the generations of Shem. Shem was one hundred years old and became the father of Arpachshad two years after the flood-* The genealogies of Genesis 11 reveal how some human lives repeat according to the same outline schema. See on :13,14. Abraham and Shem both had sons at 100 years old. And it is the very nature of Christian fellowship that God has arranged that our human lives likewise have elements of amazing similarity of pattern.

11:11 *Shem lived five hundred years after he became the father of Arpachshad, and became the father of sons and daughters-* It should be noted that the Septuagint gives different ages and inserts other generations in genealogies such as this one. Yet the Septuagint is usually the version quoted by the inspired New Testament writers, including for passages where the Masoretic Text reads quite differently. This has large implications for the theory that Adam was created 4000 BC, and the six thousand year plan theory.

11:12 *Arpachshad lived thirty-five years and became the father of Shelah-* As noted on :11, the LXX differs here, adding in a generation, of Cainan. And this version is quoted in Lk. 3:36. And according to the LXX genealogies, Adam was not born 4000 years BC.

11:13 *Arpachshad lived four hundred and three years after he became the father of Shelah, and became the father of sons and daughters-* The genealogies of Genesis 11 reveal how some human lives repeat according to the same outline schema. See on :10,14. Both Arphachsad and Shelah each lived 403 years after the births of the eldest sons.

11:14 *Shelah lived thirty years, and became the father of Eber-* Shelah, Peleg and Serug were each 30 when their first sons were born. See on :13.

11:15 *And Shelah lived four hundred and three years after he became the father of Eber, and became the father of sons and daughters-* We note the decreasing lifespans as the generations proceed after the flood. We are left with the impression of everything going downhill, morally and physically- until the Lord starts again with humanity, through calling Abram.

11:16 *Eber lived thirty-four years, and became the father of Peleg-* Eber is mentioned four times here in :14-17, matching the special emphasis given to him in the genealogy of chapter 10. This was surely because he was the one whose name carried over as "Hebrew". The genealogies provided here are not mere background information. When connected with those in Genesis 10, we are left with the impression that God chose one brother over another in the development of His purpose. Thus Peleg and not Joktan was to be the chosen brother. Just as the line of Shem was chosen over that of his brothers. We get no more information about the 'not chosen' line. No intrinsic moral reason is given for this. We are left with the impression of God's sovereign choice. And this sets the path towards God's choice of Abraham, of Jacob over Esau etc. The calling was ultimately of God's sovereign choice. And Paul will later cite this way of 'calling' as the parade example of God's grace. We cannot deny our calling; we have been called, whereas others have not been. And it is for us to respond, as well as never forgetting that responsibility.

11:17 *Eber lived four hundred and thirty years after he became the father of Peleg, and became the father of sons and daughters-* Peleg was so named because around his birth, the *eretz* was divided; a reference to the division at Babel. See on Gen. 10:25.

11:18 *Peleg lived thirty years, and became the father of Reu-* As noted on :10,13, the genealogies of Genesis 11 reveal how some human lives repeat according to the same outline schema. Peleg, Serug (:22) and Shelah (:14) were each 30 when their first sons were born. We too can find uncanny similarities between our lives and those of others in the faith; or between our lives and Biblical characters. The same Divine hand is at work.

11:19 *Peleg lived two hundred and nine years after he became the father of Reu, and became the father of sons and daughters-* The mention of "daughters" here, when this isn't always noted in the genealogy, perhaps suggests that they were significant to the early audience of the Pentateuch. But seeing that significance is now lost, we have no more details.

11:20 *Reu lived thirty-two years, and became the father of Serug-* The common approach of seeking to extract meaning from the Hebrew names is in my judgment mistaken. They yield nothing- "Reu" means "friend" and "Serug" means "tendril"- apparently. And who knows what the names originally meant.

11:21 *Reu lived two hundred and seven years after he became the father of Serug, and became the father of sons and daughters-* The exact periods given suggest that Moses had access to some oral tradition, which under inspiration he now sets in stone, as it were.

11:22 *Serug lived thirty years, and became the father of Nahor-* For the significance of having a child at 30, see on :18.

11:23 *Serug lived two hundred years after he became the father of Nahor, and became the father of sons and daughters-* As noted on :20, there is generally no significance in the meaning of the names. But as we get closer to Abraham, we note that "Nahor", "Terah" and "Haran" all have associations with idolatry.

11:24 *Nahor lived twenty-nine years, and became the father of Terah-* As noted on :23, the meanings of Abraham's immediate

ancestors all have associations with idolatry, confirming the note in Josh. 24:2 that Abram and his ancestors were idolaters. Out of that background, God chose a man who had the potential to be different. Another reading of "Terah" is that it means "One who tarries / remains", which would fit with his remaining in Haran and not going further towards Canaan.

11:25 *Nahor lived one hundred and nineteen years after he became the father of Terah, and became the father of sons and daughters-* Nahor therefore died at 148, the shortest liver among the post-flood patriarchs. We wonder why exactly that was... seeing that his grandson Abram was to be the one chosen. It perhaps made Abram reflect upon the brevity of life and the failure of idolatry to offer real salvation.

11:26 *Terah lived seventy years, and became the father of Abram, Nahor, and Haran-* Abram is mentioned first, although Haran was the firstborn (:29). This is a common theme in Genesis- that the younger and weaker is elevated by God's grace to the place of the firstborn.

11:27 *Now this is the history of the generations of Terah. Terah became the father of Abram, Nahor, and Haran. Haran became the father of Lot-* This information is given twice (:26), to set the scene for the momentous event that was to happen- just one man was going to be chosen out of this family, and through his agreement in faith, God was to set up a line leading to salvation of all peoples. We note that there is no hint of an unbroken line of spirituality extending down the generations from Noah to Abram. Quite the opposite. We get the impression of a slide into disbelief and apostacy; and instead of destroying the *eretz* again, God by grace chooses a singular individual and invites him to be the father of a faithful tribe, which shall expand to fill there *eretz* and indeed the whole planet, on account of Abram and his seed.

11:28 *Haran died before his father Terah in the land of his birth, in Ur of the Chaldees-* As noted on :25, these early deaths in Abram's family experience may have all been part of the scene setting required to make Abram open to the idea of new life and realistic salvation. "Ur of the Chaldees" has been excavated, and archaeologists present it as perhaps the most developed and sophisticated city on the globe, and certainly in the area. Every indication is that Abram was from a wealthy family, living in luxury. But that was no barrier in itself to receiving the call.

The note is made that Haran died earlier than his father, leaving us to understand Lot (Haran's son) as the one without a father who took to Abram as his father. Abram could not have children by Sarai. And so it was natural to adopt Lot. The nephew, Lot, who lacked a father, became the effective son of Abram, the man who lacked children. But the command to separate from all family required this to be broken; and Abram would be given his own actual children. But Abram remained with Lot until Lot took the initiative to separate from Abram. We see in these things how the call of the Gospel is a deep and totally fundamental call to separation, even from some of the closest ties that bind, and from those things which we consider our necessary compensation for that which we lacked. Lot was not Abram's real son, just as Eliezer wasn't, nor was Ishmael. Abram, like us, was tempted to imagine that he had something to fill the voids in his life. But God's true blessings are the real thing, and no secular attempts can ever equal them. Thus the unfilfilled of our age may imagine that they have found some compensation, some filling of the void, in a hobby or career. But the blessings of the Gospel are the only and ultimate fulfilment and filling of the voids.

11:29 *Abram and Nahor took wives; the name of Abram's wife was Sarai, and the name of Nahor's wife, Milcah, the daughter*

of Haran, who was also the father of Iscah- Polygamy was widespread, especially amongst the wealthy. That Abram had apparently only one wife would have been noteworthy. This is not to say that he didn't have others; the record zooms in upon Abram and Sarai. Likewise Isaac is presented as Abraham's only child, when we know from Gen. 25 that Abraham had a number of children by concubines; and Ishmael had already been born to him. "Iscah" is understood by some as another name for Sarah, seeing that she and Abram had the same fathers (Gen. 20:12). The question remains as to why she is given a different name here; and yet if she isn't Sarah, then we wonder why one woman should be singled out for mention, when hardly any other women apart from Sarah are mentioned in the genealogies. Such behaviour was condemned under the law of Moses; but we are presented with a man who was in an ongoing situation which broke the law, who attained a righteousness greater than the law. Never was there any hint that Abram should have ended his marriage to Sarah because she was his half sister; and this may have significance for those who consider that marital failure must be put right by separation from current partners.

11:30 *Sarai was barren; she had no child-* This must have been another factor in Abram's background which prepared him for the call he was to receive. His hopes would have been dashed; but in the promises he received, there was to be hope of a huge family and a "seed". But as with us, the promises of God in the Gospel are only attractive if firstly we have been through experiences which make them attractive. Seeing he married his half sister (Gen. 20:12), the lack of a child is not surprising. But through all the miscarriages and broken hopes, they were being prepared as fertile ground upon which the seed of the Divine calling would fall. "Sarai" means 'princess'; but she had no child. It was the perceived role of a princess of a nation to bear children,

who would become the kings of the nation. But she had none. She was surely suffering from the 'king who was never crowned' syndrome. And yet through her, a huge seed was to come. She was to become 'Sarah', the mother not only of many children within her nation, but of many nations. And this is how God works; for so many feel they are the kings or queens who were never crowned. Life didn't go as expected. But this was used by God, as it has been in countless members of her seed. So many sense they were born and intended to something far better and more significant than they end up getting in life. They will not get that in this life; but they will, if they are Abraham's seed.

11:31 *Terah took Abram his son-* That Terah "took" Abram shows that the call of the Gospel of the Kingdom did not make him free from the ties that bind. The same word is in :29 for Abram 'taking' a wife. But the Gospel is a freedom from those ties; we are not to be taken, but to move freely in response to God's call.

Lot the son of Haran, his son's son, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife- The Samaritan Pentateuch adds here that Nahor and Milcah also went with them. This would highlight the disobedience of Abram to the call to leave his family. That Nahor did emigrate to Haran is confirmed in Gen. 24:10; Haran is called "the city of Nahor". The fact has to be faced that Abram was called to leave his country and kindred (his fellow countrymen), but when he left Ur his countrymen came with him. And additionally, "*Terah took* Abram... to go into the land of Canaan". Abram did not respond *immediately* and *completely* to God's command. The call of Abram is an essay in partial response. Yet we know he had faith. Terah was an idolater (Josh. 24:2); the command to leave was given to Abram, not Terah. Because God was going to promise Abram a massive new family stemming from *him*, he therefore had to come out

from his own natural family. He was going to be promised many descendants- therefore he had to separate himself from his "father's house" or posterity. He was to be promised a land for eternal inheritance- therefore he had to leave his own native land. And in this life, Abram's seed must separate themselves from their present, worldly inheritance if they are to receive the promised blessings. It was therefore imperative that to receive the promises, Abram must separate from his natural family and land inheritance. There seems little doubt, in the light of this, that it was God's intention for Abram to leave Ur *and* his natural family, just taking his wife and their children with them. Yet Abram did not do this. And yet he had faith!

Heb. 11:8 (Gk.) implies that *as soon as* God called Abram, he got up and left Ur. But a closer examination of the record indicates that this wasn't absolutely the case. It is stressed that both Abram and Sarai left Ur because "Terah *took* Abram his son... and Sarai his daughter in law" (Gen. 11:31). Abram had been called to leave Ur and go into Canaan. But instead he followed his father to Haran, and lived there (for some years, it seems) until his father died, and then he responded to his earlier call to journey towards Canaan. The Genesis record certainly reads as if Abram was dominated by his father and family, and this militated against an immediate response to the call he received to leave Ur and journey to Canaan. At best his father's decision enabled him to obey the command to leave Ur without having to break with his family. And yet, according to Heb. 11:8, Abram immediately responded, as an act of faith.

Abraham believed God, and "when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed" (Heb. 11:8). Therefore when his father announced that they were emigrating to Canaan, Abram would have realized that this was the call from God to get up and leave. Unlike

the rest of Terah's unrecorded family, who would have mocked such a crazy plan, Abram willingly submitted. But how was he to leave his kindred and father's house? For they were coming with him! Indeed, Terah "took Abram". Thus Abram had faith in God's promise, yet may have balked at the command to leave his country and family. Providentially arranged circumstances then resulted in his aging father taking him, implying some degree of compulsion, and leading him out of his native country. Whilst not fully understanding how he could leave his father's household whilst they looked set to be accompanying him on this journey to a strange land, he went ahead in faith. It is emphasized that *God* " brought out" (s.w. to lead, pluck or pull out) Abram from Ur (Neh. 9:7; Gen. 15:6,7). The calling came through Abram's hearing of the word of promise, and providentially arranged circumstances encouraging his faithful response to it.

Abraham's attachment to his father and father's house is even indicated in his name, Ab-ram- meaning "my father is exalted" (Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis* (London: S.C.M., 1963) p. 152). In that family, Abram's father named his son like this because he wanted his son to exalt him- not break away from him, as God required of Abram. Abraham's connection with his father is shown in the various possible meanings of the name Abram. If 'Abram' were used as a Western Semitic word, it would mean "he is exalted through his relationship to his father"; 'Abram' in Akkadian would mean "he loved the father" (Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary On The Book Of Genesis* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1992) Vol. 2 p. 267). Yet Abraham gave up all this for the sake of God's promises to him; he lost it all in order to gain the new family which God offered him in return, just as all his seed must do. And later Scripture seems to refer to these meanings of the word 'Abram'- for Is. 41:8 and 2 Chron. 20:7 speak of him as

"the friend [lover] of God". He had once 'loved' his father's house, but in response to the promises he left them, and loved God; and thus God loved him, and Abram became Abraham, the 'exalted father'.

There are marked similarities between the record of the exodus from Ur, and that of the call of Abram to leave Haran:

Gen. 11:31	Gen. 12:5
Terah took	Abram took
Sarai...Abram's wife	Sarai his wife
Lot the son of Haran	Lot his brother's son
They went forth from Ur	They went forth (from Haran)
To go into the land of Canaan	To go into the land of Canaan
They came unto Haran	Into the land of Canaan they came.

These similarities may mean that the same processes occurred in each move- a word of promise made, Abram struggling to show his abundant faith in that promise and call, and the providence of God acting to make his expression of faith possible. There may also be the hint that when Abram left Haran, he still had the same fundamental problem as when leaving Ur- he had still not fully left his kindred and father's house. It has been pointed out that around the time Terah and Abraham left Ur, the city was threatened by and then destroyed by the Elamites. It could well be that the motive for leaving Ur in the first place was therefore mixed- it was fleeing from a material threat more than plain obedience to a Divine command. This would explain why the family settled in relatively nearby Haran, and remained there for so long. See on Gen. 20:13. It's a very strange 'co-incidence' (if that's indeed what it is) that Noah, Peleg and Nahor all died in the same year- when Abraham was

about 50 years old, living in Ur. Whilst we have no evidence that these men were all living together, it's not impossible that they were. Perhaps they died in some calamity in Ur. So it could well be that the motive for leaving Ur in the first place was therefore mixed- it was fleeing from a material threat more than plain obedience to a Divine command. This would explain why the family settled in relatively nearby Haran, and remained there for so long.

They went from Ur of the Chaldees- NIV "Together they set out" shows the failure to separate from family as required. This failure is stressed, really insistently. Some versions get it right when they render "he [Terah] took them out"; LXX has "and (Terah) brought them out". Despite Abram's failure, he later perceives that *"God* took me... out", and Stephen in Acts 7:4 repeats this. And Gen. 15:7 (and Neh. 9:7)has God recognizing this: "I brought you out of Ur...". The message is clearly that God had a number on Abram, and took him out when Abram himself failed to come out.

To go into the land of Canaan. They came to Haran and lived there- Terah and his family departed "to go into the land of Canaan" (Gen. 11:31 AV). These are the same Hebrew words as in the command to Abram: "Get thee out of thy country" (Gen. 12:1). We can therefore conclude that Abram received this call to quit his country, but didn't obey it, until some unrecorded situation led his father to announce the family's emigration to Canaan. Abram was therefore very slow to obey the call. Note too that the command to Abram had been to leave his land and also his "kindred and... father's house". This he didn't do- for he left Ur with his father and brothers, i.e. his kindred. His brother Haran died, and his father then died in Haran, where they temporarily lived on the way to Canaan. We see here how God seeks to almost make us obedient. And Gen. 15:7 records

that it was God who brought Abram out of Ur- even though Abraham failed to rise up and be obedient in his own strength, God manipulated family circumstances to make him obedient to the call; and in essence He does this for us too. "Lived there", really "settled there", uses a Hebrew term which definitely means to permanently reside for a long period (s.w. Gen. 26:17; Ruth 1:4; 2 Sam. 15:29; 2 Chron. 28:18). But it is the same term used for how the people of Shinar, mentioned earlier in the chapter, refused to obey the command to go out and fill the earth, but rather settled in Shinar (compare Gen. 1:28; 9:1; 11:2,8,9). And Abraham's disobedience is presented as similar- all building up the impression of his salvation by grace rather than obedience. This is the connection between the account of Babel, and that of Abraham.

11:32 *The days of Terah were two hundred five years. Terah died in Haran-* Abram evidently found it so hard to sever the family ties, and move straight on from Haran. The call of Abram required breaking with family. Perhaps Terah was too old and ill to move on further (he died at 205, a great age by post-flood standards), and Abram found it hard to leave his old and ill father in a strange city. Or perhaps Terah's strong influence on Abram meant that he found it just too hard to go against him. How he must have wrestled with the pain of leaving his family and father! Yet he believed God's promises, and he knew that these things were necessary if he was to attain the promised land. Many a convert to Abraham's seed in these last days has been through the same process. The call to "come out" of mystical Babylon is surely rooted in the call for Abram to "come out" from Ur and Haran. Whilst this evidently occurs at the time of baptism, when these same Abrahamic promises are made to us personally, our whole lives are a process of 'coming out' from

the world. As we do so, our appreciation of God's promises is progressively expanded, as God works with our faith.

GENESIS CHAPTER 12

12:1 *Now Yahweh had said to Abram, Get you out of your country, and from your relatives, and from your father's house-* Abram was told "Get out..." of Ur; and obediently "they *went forth* to go *into* the land of Canaan: and *into* the land of Canaan they came" (Gen. 12:1,5 AV). Holiness means a separation *from* and also *unto*. This must be the pattern of our lives, until finally at the Lord's return we are again called to *go out* to meet the bridegroom; and we will *go in* with Him to the marriage (Mt. 25:6,10). The New Testament preachers urged men to turn "*from* darkness *to* light, and *from* the power of satan *to* God" (Acts 26:18); *from* wickedness *to* God, *to* the Lord (Acts 3:26; 15:19; 26:20; 9:35; 11:21).

The impression can be given that Abraham was a giant of faith, and as "father of the faithful", thereby requires colossal responses of faith from us who are his seed. But the reality was that Abraham didn't respond as he might have done, just as we don't; and God by His grace led Abraham to respond simply because He wished to save Him. God told Abram to leave Ur, his family and relatives (Gen. 12:1). The requirements were to leave Ur and to leave his relatives- and neither of these requirements were fulfilled much by Abraham, but rather by God working to enable them to be met. That this call refers to Ur not Haran is made clear in Acts 7:2-4: "The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran, and said unto him, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall shew thee. Then came he out of the land of the Chaldeans, and dwelt in Charran: and from thence, when his father was dead, he removed him into this land". The impression is given of immediate, obedient response. But in fact it was his own father

Terah who took him and the rest of the family out of Ur. He didn't break with his family- he went with them. Presumably he didn't obey the call to leave them as an individual; so God arranged that Abraham at least obeyed the requirement to leave Ur, and later worked to ensure he left his family. It was God who caused him to wander from his father's house (Gen. 20:13)- not his own strength of obedience to the call to individuate before God.

Immediately Terah died, Abram may have felt he had truly left his "kindred" and eagerly moved on towards the promised land of Canaan (so Gen. 11:32-12:4 implies). It is likely that many of Abram's "kindred" would have come along with Terah, responding themselves to the call of Abram. Presumably they settled in Haran after Terah's death. It is even possible that the family were from this city originally, seeing that Abraham's brother was called Haran. We saw earlier that just before leaving Haran, Abram was further told to separate from his "father's house" too, i.e. *all* of his father's household. This must have included Lot. Abram could understand separation from his idolatrous father and the rest of the family retinue; yet Lot was "a righteous man" ; Abram evidently rated Lot's spirituality (Gen. 18:23,32). Again, Abram was in a quandary. He had left all but one of his father's house in Haran. Was he really intended to separate from his father's house to the extent of leaving Lot too? It is likely that Abram often agonized about Lot. There he was in Canaan, knowing that his seed would inherit this land, which was then full of Canaanites (the record twice emphasizes, in Gen. 12:6 and 13:7). But Lot, part of his kindred and father's house, was still with him. We saw that the Hebrew for "kindred" implies one born in ones own country. A closely related word is found in Gen.11:28, describing how Haran, Lot's father, "died in the *land of his nativity*, in Ur". If Lot's father lived and died in

Ur, it is fair to assume that Lot was born in Ur. So Abram knew he must separate from Lot, his "kindred"- but how? What reason could he give Lot? Yet he had faith in what God had told him; therefore he *wanted* to leave Lot, but just found it hard to do. And so God made a way.

In the near East, each family had their own gods. When a man became head of the family, he had the right to choose his own god; there was no requirement that he maintained the same god as the previous head of the family. The choice of a god was confirmed by a covenant; the Amorites and Arameans therefore called their family god "The Lord of the house", and the sons of the family often were named with "theophoric names", reflecting the name of the family's god (W.F. Albright, *From the Stone Age to Christianity* (New York: 1957), p. 246; Angel Gonzales, *Abraham: Father of Believers* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967) p. 19). Against this background, therefore, it was a radical thing for Yahweh to appear to Abraham and order him to do something as radical as break from his family (Gen. 12:1). It was God who chose Abraham, not Abraham who chose Yahweh, contrary to the accepted norm of the man choosing a family god when his father or previous head of the family died. The surrounding nations or tribes were comprised of various families each with their own god; nations had no one fixed god. When we repeatedly read of how Yahweh was the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and that Yahweh is the God of all the families and tribes of Israel, we are therefore encountering a new paradigm. There were to be no other gods in Israel apart from Yahweh. He was to be the sole national God; the unity of Yahweh, and His being the sole national God of Israel, was therefore a new concept in the near East. And we can better understand the way that both the Lord Jesus and Paul saw in the unity of God a call to unity amongst His people; for this had

been the intention from the start. The unity of God isn't so much a numerical statement as a call to profound unity. But it could only become real for Abraham, as it can for us today, if we leave, come out from, the culture and worldviews which surround us.

Yahweh's call of Abraham to be His, taking the initiative which Divine grace does when calling someone, was therefore radical. The Biblical record states simply that Yahweh spoke and Abraham believed with no proof or prior relationship. The rabbinic midrash and the Koran embellish upon this silence with various tales of Yahweh's prior relationship with Abraham- perhaps psychologically motivated in the desire to make Abraham's faith and obedience the more understandable and normal. Whether or not there was any previous encounter between Yahweh and Abraham is beside the point- the Biblical record invites us to see God as taking the initiative, and Abraham faithfully responding. This is characteristic of God's call; Saul out looking for lost cattle, the disciples mending their nets- are suddenly called, and some respond well and others like Saul for ever try to slip out of it.

All this would've made life difficult for Abraham, as it does for us. The Midrash at Bereshit Rabbah 38:13 tells tales of Terah accusing his son Abraham before the gods for having destroyed idols, and Abraham being thrown into a fiery furnace for rejection of his father and his father's gods.

To the land that I will show you- Abraham was progressively set up by God so that his spiritual growth would be an upward spiral. Initially, he was told to walk / go to a land which God would shew him (Gen. 12:1); when he got there, he was told to "arise", and "walk" through that land of Canaan (Gen. 13:17). And Abraham, albeit in a faltering kind of way, did just this. But this was to prepare him for the test of Gen. 22:3 in the command to offer Isaac. His obedience this time isn't at all faltering. He

"arises" and 'goes' [s.w. "walk"] "unto the place of which God had told him" to offer Isaac (Gen. 22:3). This is exactly what he had been called to do right back in Ur- to arise and walk / go to a land / place which God would show him (Gen. 12:1). And so our obedience in one challenge of God leads us to obedience in others. One experience is designed to lead us to another. Nothing- absolutely nothing- in our lives is senseless chance. All- and this takes some believing- is part of a higher plan for our spiritual good, in our latter end. Time and again we see this in Abraham's life. He was taught that he really could be a blessing to others by the circumstances which God arranged relating to Lot being blessed / saved for his sake.

12:2 *I will make of you a great nation-* The first promise to Abraham was actually conditional- if he did these things, then "I will make of you a great nation". If he left his natural kindred, then God would give him a huge new family. But he hardly fulfilled those conditions, and yet still the promises were ultimately fulfilled to him. And he is set up as the "father of the faithful". We all know that really our faith is pathetically weak, and this recognition can cause some to stumble altogether. Although Abram is here promised to become "a great [singular] nation", he was also promised to become a father of many [plural] nations, and his name was changed to Abraham in reflection of this (Gen. 17:5). The vision was indeed of 'one nation under God' which would unite the nations. The Abraham history is introduced by an account of the nations, who just before his time were "divided" (Gen. 10:25) and "confused" even further at Babel. Part of the blessing promised to Abraham was that through his seed, and through God's purpose with Him, the divided peoples of the earth would be reunited into one, great nation. God chose Abraham's seed in order to restore His

relationship with all nations, and thus through "Israel" to unite them again.

We may note that in :2,3 there are seven distinct blessings:

- I will make you a great nation
- I will bless you
- I will make your name great
- You will be a blessing
- I will bless those who bless you
- I will curse whoever curses you
- All peoples on earth will be blessed through you.

"I will..." is an allusion to the YHWH Name, "I will be who I will be". And He will bless who He promises to bless. Seven being the number of totality and completeness, we have here a picture of the entire Name, essence and being of God being completely behind His determination to fulfil His promises to Abraham and his seed. No wonder Paul perceived that we have the Gospel in the promises to Abraham. For that determination to bless, to give and fulfil promises, was to require the death of His only begotten Son.

I will bless you and make your name great- The making of his name great was initially fulfilled in the change to Abraham, meaning 'father of a multitude'. But the only ultimately great name is that of Yahweh; the same words are used about His Name being made great (2 Sam. 7:26; 1 Chron. 17:24; Ps. 34:3; 69:30). Abram's name was to be made great on account of his identification with his seed who would carry Yahweh Name. The greatness of Abram's name was only because Yahweh's Name was put within it, making it Abraham. This contrasts with how the people of Babel had wanted to make themselves a name, and were judged for doing so. "Great", *gdl*, alludes to the "tower" of Babel, Heb. *mgdl*. The things of God's Name manifest in His people, Abraham's seed, were to be the eternal things- rather

than the city and tower of Babel which was destroyed. The "all nations" who had united to build Babel were divided and scattered- but they were to be reunited in that the "all nations" would become one eternal nation within 'Israel'.

You will be a blessing- Whoever drinks of the water of life will have *within* them a spring that also gives eternal life (Jn. 4:15). The purpose of a spring is to give water to men. Experiencing the Lord's words and salvation *inevitably* leads to us doing likewise to others, springing from somewhere deep within. This was in fact one of the first things God promised Abraham when He first instituted the new covenant: "I will bless thee (i.e. with forgiveness and salvation in the Kingdom)... and *thou* shalt be a blessing" , in that we his seed in Christ would bring this same blessing to men of all nations by our witness (Gen. 12:2,3 AV).

There is no record of God authenticating His claims to Abram through miracles, fulfilled prophecies etc. Rather Abram is presented as a random Middle Eastern guy who heard the essence of the Gospel and believed it, and then acted upon that faith. Simple as that. Later, Abraham is commended for believing "against hope", when there was no visible reason to hope (Rom. 4:18). Faith is not therefore based upon empirical evidence, as Heb. 11:1-3 clearly state. This is the mystery of faith, and an essay in the power of the Gospel of itself to elicit faith in its own message. That may at first blush sound circular reasoning; but the fact so many have believed a message which had no external authentication is proof enough- that "faith comes by hearing, and hearing on account of the word of God" (Rom. 10:17).

12:3 *I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you-*

There are five mentions of "blessing" in Gen. 12:1-3, undoing the five mentions of "curse" in Gen. 1-11 (Gen. 3:14;

3:17; 4:11; 5:29; 9:25). People from all families would be blessed in Abraham- because they 'blessed' Abraham. God's salvation program began with 'blessing' Adam (Gen. 1:22; 5:2); when that intention didn't work because of human sin, Noah was then chosen, saved and blessed (Gen. 9:1). That pathway too had come to a dead end with the apostacy of his descendants. And now God seeks to bless Abram, and all those who identified with him. In the first instance, the "families of the *eretz*" were those listed in Genesis 10. Whoever blessed Abram as he travelled around that territory would be blessed, and any who cursed him would be cursed. He need not fear that the inhabitants of that land would persecute him as a foreigner. And yet he and his descendants did so often fear that this would happen at the hands of the local inhabitants, and chapter 12 goes on to give an example of where he failed to believe this simple promise. He is hardly portrayed as brimming with faith and obedience, but rather one who clung on to God's clinging on of him. And this is really the lead characteristic of all who would later be his spiritual descendants.

The Abraham family should have focused upon the wonder of being blessed by God. But as we see in Gen. 27 and elsewhere, they placed too great a value upon human blessings. And this speaks directly to us too. To be humanly blessed appears of critical importance; but if we believe we have the Divine, Abrahamic blessing, then such blessings ought to be irrelevant.

There are examples of those who blessed the Abraham family being blessed; thus Laban blessed them (Gen. 24:31), and was in turn blessed (Gen. 30:27). But there are hardly any specific examples of those who cursed them being cursed. As ever, God's focus was upon the positive rather than the negative. "Blessing" in the Old Testament context largely referred to material blessings; but the language is taken over in the New Testament

and applied to all the spiritual blessings we have in Abraham's seed, the Lord Jesus.

All of the families of the earth will be blessed in you- This is an evident allusion back to the cursing of the *adamah* / earth in Eden (Gen. 3:17). The implication was that the promised seed of the woman, who was to be the way of escape from that curse, was to somehow be "in Abraham". Although there's no mention yet of a specific son or seed, it seems to me that God was setting Abraham up to meditate upon the promise of the earth being blessed "in him", and figure out that this must mean that he was to have a descendant or son who would be the Saviour. Perhaps the subsequent specific promises about this were as it were God's reward for Abraham following through with where God was leading him. Gen. 28:14 makes explicit that the blessing of the *adamah* was to be "in your seed". I firmly believe, indeed have experienced, the way in which God prompts our minds to think of something, to work something through, and then reveals this specifically, or confirms our understanding, directly from His word. In our day and context, it would seem that daily reading of God's word is what's required in order to 'allow' as it were this process to happen. This, surely, is how God seeks to work out the same process with us as He did with Abraham. Even if at the time of reading we feel we 'get nothing out of that chapter', there will be prompts to thought and later reflection which are all in God's longer term educational purpose with us. Heb. 11:33 says that the likes of Abraham obtained promises by their faith. Yet the Old Testament record clearly enough states that the promises were just given to them by God; they weren't requested by the patriarchs. Indeed, David was surprised at the promises God chose to make to him. Conclusion? God read their unspoken, unprayed for desires for Messiah and His Kingdom as requests for the promises- and responded.

Abraham was only explicitly promised the land of Canaan, not the entire planet. Perhaps in speaking of Abraham as "heir of the world" (Rom. 4:13) Paul is interpreting the promises that his seed would comprise "many nations" and that he would bring blessing on "all the peoples of the earth" (Gen. 12:2,3 etc.). In this sense, they would become his, and he would thereby inherit them. Thus Is. 55:3-5 likewise implies that Abraham's promised inheritance was therefore not only the land of Canaan but by implication, the whole planet.

Grammatically, Gen. 12:3 can be read as passive ("be blessed", as AV, RV) or reflexive "bless themselves" (as RSV), i.e. implying those blessed have to do something to appropriate the blessing. In this we see how God will play His part, but we must play our part. And yet the covenant in Gen. 15 was one way, unconditional, from God to us. It's as if *His* part in our salvation is so much greater than our response. Yet there is still an obvious element of choice which we have to make. The way Gen. 12:1-3 is structured implies that Abraham receives an unconditional blessing, yet he therefore is to go forth and "be a blessing". And it's the same for us- and note how the "blessing" is interpreted as forgiveness in Acts 3:27-29. We are to forgive and generally bless others, in all forms of gracious generosity, as God has blessed us.

God promises to bless *them* (plural) who bless Abraham, and curse *him* (singular) who curse Abraham (Gen. 12:3). In other words, the blessings are to come specifically and individually to many people; whereas those who curse Abraham and his seed are just treated as one homogenous mass.

Gen. 12:3 LXX speaks of how all the tribes of the land of Israel will be blessed (i.e. forgiven) due to Abraham's seed, the Lord Jesus. This has yet to be fulfilled- but it will be if the tribes of the land (i.e. the native Arab peoples living between the Nile and Euphrates) repent and accept Messiah's forgiveness. The

picture of Christ's Millennial rule in Ps. 72:8,9 is similar: " He shall have dominion from sea (the Mediterranean?) to sea (the Persian Gulf?) from the river unto the ends of the earth (land). They that dwell in the wilderness (the Arab peoples) shall bow before him" .

All nations of the land were to be blessed because of Abraham and his seed, his one special seed [Jesus] and also his natural descendants. His children were intended to be a blessing to the other nations who lived around them, especially in that they were intended to bring them to Abraham's God and Abraham's faith. Now this is not to say that ultimately, Abraham and his seed will not bring blessing on literally the whole planet. Rom. 4:13 interprets the promise of the land of Canaan as meaning 'the whole world'. But this was by later development, and on account of the universal blessing achieved by the sacrifice of Abraham's greatest seed, the Lord Jesus. In the first instance, the blessing was to be upon all the families who lived on the 'earth' / land (12:3). There is a paradox here. For those already living in the land promised to Abraham, their land would be taken from them but they would be blessed. God was telling Abraham: 'You will possess the land and all nations of that land will be blessed'. They were to give up their physical inheritance to receive a spiritual one- this was the ideal. Paul applies this idea to us when he says that if Gentiles have received the spiritual blessings of Abraham's seed, ought they not to give their physical blessings to that same physical seed of Abraham? This is how and why he tells Gentile converts in Rome to send donations to the poor Jewish brethren in Jerusalem: "For if the Gentiles have been made partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister unto them in carnal things...I shall come in the fullness of the *blessing* of the gospel of Christ" (Rom. 15:27-29).

Gen. 12:1-3, the promises to Abraham, has a clear connection with the language repeatedly found in the table of nations in Gen. 10. "Country" (:1), "peoples" (:3), "nation" (:2) and "people/ race" (:1) are terms used throughout Gen. 10. The idea seems to be that all those nations are listed in Genesis 10 in order to help us understand what God promised Abraham. He was promised the inheritance of all the people, nations, countries and races of Gen. 10.

12:4 *So Abram went, as Yahweh had spoken to him. Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed out of Haran-* The comment "So Abram departed [Heb. 'went'- s.w. Gen. 11:31; 12:1], as the Lord had spoken unto him" (Gen. 12:4 AV) is surely the beginning of the wonderful theme of righteousness being imputed to Abraham! For he did not break with his relatives as asked, and he "went" from Ur because his father decided to emigrate. Heb. 11:8 records things from a positive perspective too, as if there was instant obedience from Abraham: "By faith Abraham when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went". Truly, the Biblical record imputes righteousness to Abraham, and thus sets a pattern for all of us, the equally faltering and stumbling children of Abraham.

The promises to Abram in Gen. 12:1,2 were conditional upon his obedience- he would receive the new land and family if he separated from his natural family and land. But he was induced to do even this by God. So grace truly abounded. Likewise in Gen. 17:1,2 "Walk before Me and be blameless *so that I may establish My covenant* between Me and you and increase you greatly". Abram was not "blameless"; he was only *counted* righteous because of his faith. So the condition was set, but even the condition was not totally met by Abram unaided.

And the covenant of Gen. 15 was without even these conditions. Although Abram did have faith, as Heb. 11 states, it was clearly weak and God imputed a lot of righteousness on the basis of a very small faith.

12:5 *Abram took Sarai his wife, Lot his brother's son-* Abram and Sarai would have effectively adopted the orphaned Lot. The experience of adopting would have been part of God's preparation of the psychological background, so that they would have appreciated all the more the idea of a son, seed and dynasty of their very own.

All their substance that they had gathered, and the souls whom they had gotten in Haran, and they went to go into the land of Canaan. Into the land of Canaan they came- Abram's leaving of Haran was still a great act of faith; he had "gathered" much in the years of staying in Haran. According to Jewish tradition, Abraham stayed 23 years in Haran. All he had to go on was a word from the Lord which he'd received some years ago whilst living in Ur. There's no reason to think that Angels regularly appeared to him and kept urging him to leave, or that he could read the Lord's word in written form as we can. Presumably that one word which he received worked in his conscience, until he said to the family "Right, we're quitting this nice life for a wilderness journey to some place I don't know". We can underestimate the power of "just" one word from the Lord. We're so familiar with possessing His entire word in written form that we can forget the need to be obedient to just one of those words, to the extent of losing all we once held dear... In this I find Abraham a wonderful example. He must, presumably, have wondered whether he really had heard right, whether the whole thing wasn't just a weird dream- just as we may wonder whether really we are supposed to take God's word as it is and allow it to radically upset our settled, mediocre lives.

We read of all the substance that Abram had *gathered* in Haran; the Hebrew for "gathered" implies an element of hoarding and materialism. It only occurs in passages concerning the patriarchs, as if to show that this was one of their characteristics. Gen. 31:18 comments on Jacob using his own wit and cunning to accumulate material wealth: "He carried away all his cattle, and all his goods which he had *gotten*, the cattle of his getting, which he had *gotten*". The humanness of all this is strongly hinted at in Gen. 30:43: "The *man* increased exceedingly, and had much cattle, and maidservants, and menservants, and camels and asses". This list is identical to that in Gen. 24:35 concerning Abraham. Jacob and Sons left Canaan with "their cattle, and their goods, which they had *gotten*" (Gen. 46:6). Esau too piled up his possessions; Gen. 36:6 speaks of his sons, daughters, servants, cattle, beasts, "and all his substance which he had *got* in the land of Canaan". The way this Hebrew word for materialistic accumulation is used only about the Abraham family ought to be seen by us as a flashing light, pointing us to a definite characteristic in all of them. Against this background we can better appreciate Abraham's faith that he did now possess the land.

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12:6 *Abram passed through the land to the place of Shechem, to the oak of Moreh-* God's promise to Abraham was made more specifically at "the oak of Moreh" (Gen. 12:6)- evidently a Canaanite shrine; and it's emphasized that "the Canaanite was then in the land". It's as if God's invitation to Abraham to have a unique relationship with Him was made amidst the calls and presence of many other gods, and in the thick of the Gentile world. Providence arranged that Abram travelled throughout the *eretz*; just as our experiences in this life give us peeks into the various aspects of our eternal inheritance. See on :9.

The Canaanite was then in the land- Moses' books were helping the wilderness generation to see where they were coming from historically. Passages like Gen. 12:6 now take on special relevance: "The Canaanites were then in the land". Moses was saying this as his people were about to enter a Canaan likewise occupied by Canaanites; the idea would have been *'Then* the Canaanites were there, just as they are *now*, and God shall be with us Abram's seed likewise'. He was bidding the people see their connection with their father Abraham, who then lived with Canaanites also in the same land. See on Gen. 13:3.

12:7 *Yahweh appeared to Abram and said, I will give this land to your seed-* Abraham was told to leave Ur and all he had there, and journey to a land he would be shown. Trying to keep up a sense of eagerness and hope for the new life, he made tremendous sacrifices, and journeyed to Canaan. When he finally got there, he didn't realize he'd arrived. Then the Lord

appeared to him and said that to *his seed* He would give this land (Gen. 12:1,7). To the human mind, this would have been a huge blow. He had given up all in the hope of a new life and inheritance, and now he is told that someone called his "seed" would inherit it. His response was to build an altar and worship, realizing he had served for nothing personally in this life, but with his mind filled with the glory and Kingdom of Christ, his future seed. God was so delighted with this attitude that later promises included Abraham personally, showing that because of his part in Christ, the seed, he would in fact personally have an inheritance too.

He built an altar there to Yahweh, who appeared to him- There may be an intended contrast between Abraham *building* an altar in recognition of the promises, at the same time as he *pitched* his tent (12:8)- as if to highlight the temporal nature of our present material situation in contrast to the permanence of the things we stand related to in God's promises. The building of altars was perhaps a public confession of faith; the surrounding peoples had their altars, but Abram and his family built altars to Yahweh, and left them behind them as a witness to their faith in the promises received and the relationship offered. Baptism would be one equivalent of this in our days- a public confession of faith in the same promises.

Commonly enough, the New Testament speaks of baptism as a calling upon the Name of the Lord. This must be understood against its Hebrew background- *qara' beshem Yahweh*, which originally referred to approaching God in sacrifice (Gen. 12:7,8; Ps. 116:4,17). God placed His Name upon places in order to make them suitable places for sacrifice to be offered to Him (Dt. 12:4-7,21; Jer. 7:12). Baptism was thus seen as a sacrificial commitment to Yahweh in solemn covenant.

Abraham only left Haran after his father died, suggesting Terah didn't want to travel further, and so Abraham didn't do so. He simply didn't leave his father's house / family. And when he does leave, he takes his family with him- Lot, Lot's family and Sarah, his half sister (Gen. 12:5). And yet God continues working with Abraham; after he leaves Haran, God appears and tells him that He wishes to give "thee", 'you' singular, the land (Gen. 12:7). In other words, the fulfilment of the promises was to Abraham personally, and that is why he was required to individuate from his unbelieving family in order to receive them. And because God simply wanted to fulfil the promises to Abraham, He arranged Abraham's separation from his family in order to fulfil those preconditions.

12:8 *He left from there to the mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, having Bethel on the west, and Ai on the east. There he built an altar to Yahweh and called on the name of Yahweh-* The weaknesses of the patriarchs provides great inspiration to our feeble faith when we consider how they are held up in such exalted terms. The geographical record of Abraham's entry to Canaan describes him as appearing at certain key points in the land. Those same areas became the key points in the conquest of the land in Joshua's time- it was as if Abraham was seen as the example for all Israel. Thus the people in their weakness pitched "between Bethel and Ai, to the west of Ai" (Josh. 8:9,14)- the very expressions found about Abraham in Gen. 12:8. The contrast between tent and altar is purposeful; the things of the Kingdom are permanent and set in stone, whereas our present life is temporary.

12:9 *Abram travelled, going on further toward the south-* As noted on :6, this was all part of God's purpose, of getting Abram to travel around in the *eretz* which he should eternally inherit, to perceive the length and breadth of what God had promised

him. And the famine meant that Abram would have had to keep moving his flocks.

12:10 *There was a famine in the land. Abram went down into Egypt to live as a foreigner there, for the famine was severe in the land-* "Severe" is Heb. 'heavy'. God's grace shines through again and again. Abraham went down into Egypt because of how "grievous" or 'heavy' the famine was; and comes up out of Egypt, thanks to betraying his wife, "heavy" [same Hebrew word] with riches (Gen. 12:10; 13:2). Everything he did was blessed, despite his weakness. The land he had been promised was not immediately flowing with milk and honey- on first arrival, it was parched. We likewise don't experience the full Kingdom blessings now. The Abram family several times went down into Egypt because of famine; and the more spiritually perceptive realized that they would always come up out of it, after hard experiences there. "To live as a foreigner there" may imply that he lived as a foreigner in Canaan, and now in Egypt, there too he was a foreigner. The constant insecurity in Abram's life (despite his wealth) was to make him yearn the more for the eternal permanence of possession which was intrinsic to the gospel preached to him (Gal. 3:8). And it's the same for us.

Abraham went down into Egypt because of famine, and "went up from Egypt" (Gen. 13:1). Whilst there, Abraham's life and existence were under threat. Sarah, the female Hebrew, was spared [as were the baby girls of the Hebrews]. Egypt and Pharaoh's house were plagued, and then Pharaoh 'releases' or 'sends away' Abraham and his people (Gen. 12:20). This is the same word used for Pharaoh doing this to the Hebrews; and all the other details and language fits. We could therefore reason back and assume that Jacob and his family were wrong to have migrated to Egypt, as Abraham was apparently wrong to have gone there. At least they were wrong to have remained there

after the famine. But we also see how the perceptive amongst Abraham's seed would have realized that their experience in Egypt, even in weakness, was connecting them to Abraham and confirming them as his seed. Abraham was chosen as the representative of his seed exactly at a point of weakness, at perhaps the lowest recorded point of his entire spiritual journey. Abraham's weaknesses are therefore to encourage us as his seed to identify with him- and realize that his greatness was in his faith, and specifically his faith in righteousness being imputed to him. It is facile and fruitless, therefore, to simply present Abraham as an icon of faith and urge us to rise up to his level. Rather are we to see him in weakness as every man, and to follow his example of faith *in the face of personal spiritual weakness and failure*. He is indeed a stellar example of faith, but that faith is in God's grace to us despite our weakness- just as Abraham's was. Truly did the Angel at the burning bush tell Israel "I am the God of Abraham...". The same God would work with them in the same way. We also see how in the lives of God's people, there is an overruling, guiding hand in our history. Our history is not random, nor is it totally unique in its outline form. History, even of our weaknesses, somehow has the Higher Hand guiding it; just as that same Hand guided the histories of others. For us history is not "one damned thing after another" (Henry Ford), nor is personal life like that either. But that is indeed the perception of those who reject that higher hand, both in their own lives and in human history.

12:11 *It happened, when he had come near to enter Egypt, that he said to Sarai his wife, See now, I know that you are a beautiful woman to look at-* "His wife" emphasizes that this is how God saw their relationship; even though He considered that marriage to a half sister was an abomination. But He accepted people where they were at, as we should. Abram's fear may have been because

the middle aged Sarah was not only beautiful, but had lighter skin than the Egyptians, and was thereby attractive to them.

12:12 *It will happen, when the Egyptians will see you, that they will say, 'This is his wife'; they will kill me, but they will save you alive-* The fear of premature death was a reflection of his lack of deep faith in the promise just earlier recorded; that those who cursed him would be cursed, and he would be blessed, and ultimately given the land. At every turn, Abram is presented as of generally weak faith, although he did believe the overall representation of God to him, and that faith rose to a pinnacle in his willingness to offer Isaac, and his simple belief that really, his seed would become as many as the stars. But at this stage, his faith was weak when tested. And yet God still worked with him, as He does with us, and as we should with those whose faith is yet weak.

12:13 *Please say that you are my sister-* Throughout the records of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and his children there is continual repetition in the manner in which the record is written. This repetition is of both experiences (e.g. lying concerning their wives: Gen. 20:3,13; 26:7) and of the language used to describe those experiences. The impression is that they didn't learn from history, just as we often do not- despite the wealth of Biblical history which we now have behind us.

That it may be well with me for your sake, and that my soul may live because of you- Straight after receiving the promises, Abraham goes down to Egypt [an act with spiritually negative overtones], and lies about his wife. Not only does he show a strange lack of protection for her, but his actions reflect a weakened faith in God's promises to him. For if Abraham was to have died at the hands of jealous Egyptians at that stage, how would the promises to him be fulfilled? In urging Sarah to deny she was his wife, Abraham comments to her in Gen. 12:13: "My

soul shall live because of you". Ps. 33:18,19 appears to comment upon this: "Behold, the eye of Jehovah (Angelic language- and Abraham dealt with Angels] is upon them that fear him, Upon them that hope in his lovingkindness; to deliver their soul from death, And to keep them alive in famine (Abraham told the lie he did about Sarah because he trusted in Egypt to keep him alive in famine). Our soul hath waited for Jehovah: He is our help and our shield"- and it is God, not Sarah, who is described as Abraham's shield (same Hebrew word) in Gen. 15:1. Again, his faith is presented as weak; and yet he is set up as our example of faith.

12:14 *It happened that when Abram had come into Egypt, the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful-* Fears about possible futures are the very essence of lack of faith. In Abram's case, his fears were not baseless. But he went ahead, because he was not sure that he could remain in Canaan in time of famine. He probably could have personally survived, but his flocks wouldn't have done; and he couldn't bear to think of parting with all that wealth.

12:15 *The princes of Pharaoh saw her, and praised her to Pharaoh; and the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house-* As so often in the record of Abraham's family, the surrounding world are presented as having more integrity than they did. Pharaoh's princes didn't rape her, they just commended her to their master. And she was taken into his house, but Pharaoh didn't sleep with her- presumably, new wives had to undergo a period of purification first, as the Mosaic law would also stipulate in some cases.

12:16 *He dealt well with Abram for her sake. He had sheep, cattle, male donkeys, male servants, female servants, female donkeys, and camels-* See on Gen. 14:22. As noted on :15, the Pharaoh appears of absolute integrity. He gave what was

effectively a bride price to Abram, without having actually slept with Sarai. It would appear from :20 that Abram was allowed to keep all this. He apparently didn't suffer any consequences nor punishment for his undoubted sins and failures at this point. And sometimes, we don't. In this case, it seems Abram did well out of the whole experience. As if the experience of God's grace in blessing instead of punishing was intended to elicit in him a deeper understanding of God's grace.

12:17 *Yahweh plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife-* As noted on :13, situations and circumstances repeat over the course of Divine history. It is the same heavenly hand at work, and the intention is that we should learn from the history. For a later Pharaoh was also to be plagued because of the presence of the Abraham family amongst them; but the lesson was not learnt.

12:18 *Pharaoh called Abram and said, What is this that you have done to me?-* The very words of God to Adam (Gen. 3:13). It was really God speaking through Pharaoh to Abram, just as He speaks to us through circumstances and unbelievers. The very same words are repeated to Abram later, by Abimelech, in the same context of lying about Sarah (Gen. 26:10). As noted on :17, circumstances and phrases recur in our lives, as the same Divine hand is at work to educate us.

Why didn't you tell me that she was your wife?- Both Pharaoh and Abram knew the answer: 'Because I was afraid'. And they are the very words on the lips of the condemned man in Mt. 25:25, just as they were on the lips of Adam in his condemnation (Gen. 3:10). But despite still not learning from the situation, Abram is still set up as our example of faith.

12:19 *Why did you say, 'She is my sister', so that I took her to be my wife? Now therefore, see your wife, take her, and go your way-* Again we see the integrity of the Pharaoh, in that he had

apparently taken her to be his wife, but had not slept with her. "See your wife" implies 'perceive, recognize her as being your wife'. It was a stinging rebuke. Abram is not presented as a good husband in this respect. "Take her" may well refer to taking a woman as a wife; Abram is being told to go on his way openly committed to his wife. And yet he fails in this again, as does his son Isaac. I noted on :18 that the Pharaoh is effectively speaking on God's behalf here; but Abram didn't hearken to that voice.

12:20 *Pharaoh commanded men concerning him, and they brought him on the way with his wife and all that he had-* To bring someone on their way meant being generous to them and providing them with what they needed for their journey. This was again repeated (see on :17) by Abimelech (Gen. 20:14). To be generous to those who have wronged us leaves us with the upper hand; it is the intention behind the Lord's teaching that if a man takes your jacket, then offer him your undergarment. The spirit of demanding restitution and prosecution to that end is the very opposite of this.

GENESIS CHAPTER 13

13:1 *Abram went up out of Egypt: he, his wife, all that he had, and Lot with him, into the South-* As noted on chapter 12, the record stresses that Sarah was "his wife", despite the fact God viewed marriage to a half sister as "abomination". We note that Abram left Egypt not because the famine had finished, but because the Pharaoh had rebuked him. This confirms our suggestion on chapter 12, that Abram didn't need to go into Egypt; he went because the famine would've meant a diminution of his wealth if his cattle died. He placed himself in the way of temptation because of a desire to cling on to the material "blessings" of wealth. He was "very rich" (:2), but the desire to maintain wealth levels is as tempting as the desire to attain them in the first place.

13:2 *Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold-* Abraham tells Sarah to say she is his sister, not his wife, and (by implication) let the Egyptians sleep with her rather than kill him. And straight after this, God blesses Abraham with riches (Gen. 12:11 - 13:2). This happened also with Isaac; God's blessing materially isn't always related to our righteousness. By contrast, Pharaoh was attracted to her, and took her into his house. But he didn't sleep with her, and was willing to allow a period of time to elapse before marrying her, in order not to insult her dignity (cp. Dt. 21:13). God's grace shines through again and again. Abraham went down into Egypt because of how "grievous" or 'heavy' the famine was; and comes up out of Egypt, thanks to betraying his wife, "heavy" [same Hebrew word] with riches (Gen. 12:10; 13:2). Everything he did was blessed, despite his weakness. Perhaps this was to elicit within him the understanding that "blessing" was not commensurate to spirituality, whilst we understand "blessing" in material terms. The "blessing" he really needed was something else... "Very rich"

is literally 'very heavy'. The abundance of his blessing is laboured. But it was all by grace. The same term is used of how Israel went up out of Egypt at Passover, blessed by grace with "very much" (Ex. 12:38). As noted on chapter 12, Abraham at his weakest is presented as a type of Israel at the time of their deliverance. It is in his experience of grace that he becomes a pattern and example to his seed; and not in his obedience. Abraham would've reflected on how bad his behaviour had been, and yet how God had not only saved him but materially blessed him. He would have bowed his knees before God's grace. If God merely rewarded righteousness with material blessing, this appreciation of grace would never be. This is the error of the prosperity Gospel.

13:3 *He went on his journeys from the South even to Bethel, to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai-* The reference to Abram pitching his tent between Bethel ['the house of God'] and Hai ['the house of ruin'] could imply that he was caught between the two- his faith was not firmly decided (Gen. 13:3).

The repeated references to the "journeys" of the people in the wilderness had as their basis the description of Abraham taking his journey through the desert to the promised land (Gen. 13:3); the very same two Hebrew words recur in the command to Israel to now 'take their journey' (Dt. 10:11), following in the steps of their father Abraham. See on Gen. 17:1.

13:4 *To the place of the altar, which he had made there at the first. There Abram called on the name of Yahweh-* This is the first we hear of Abram relating to God as Yahweh. Whatever his 'calling on the name' involved beyond sacrifice, he clearly made a special commitment to Yahweh at that time and place. And it was in response to grace; for he realized he had done wrong in going into Egypt to preserve his wealth, in lying about his

wife... and out of it all, he had not been punished, rather both God and Pharaoh had blessed him with wealth. And it was that which led him now to offer his animal wealth to God, and to devote himself further to Him. If God had punished him, the same response would not have been forthcoming.

13:5 *Lot also, who went with Abram, had flocks, and herds, and tents*- It is stressed in the record that "Lot went with him" out of Haran (Gen. 12:4), and that in Abram's subsequent passing through the land of Canaan, "Lot... went with Abram" (Gen.13:5; 13:1). But Abram had been asked to leave his relatives. Abraham didn't separate from Lot of his own volition- he invites Lot to separate himself from him, rather than Abraham telling Lot that he was separating from him (Gen. 13:9). Abraham's subsequent concern for Lot, rescuing him from captivity and then begging God to save Lot from Sodom, show how Abraham certainly considered Lot his beloved family member. "We be brethren" was his position. "Lot separated from him" (Gen. 13:14) rather than Abraham separating from Lot, as was required by God's command to Abraham. As soon as Lot separates from Abraham, God repeats the promise to Abraham- that "thy seed", you singular, will inherit the land. To receive a new land and a new family, Abraham had to separate from his natural, earthly land and family. The fulfilment of the promises was conditional upon Abraham's individuation from his family, his separation from them and unto God- and God worked to enable this precondition to be fulfilled despite Abraham's weakness in separating from his own land and family. It was God who brought Abraham out of Ur (Gen. 15:7; Neh. 9:7)- not Abraham's obedience to the call to leave Ur. We see a similar grace in how Lot was told to leave Sodom, but he dithered in doing so; God "sent Lot out of Sodom" (Gen. 19:29), and

eventually took his hand and dragged him out of the city, "the Lord being merciful to him" (Gen. 19:16).

13:6 *The land was not able to bear them, that they might live together: for their substance was great, so that they could not live together-* Wealth nearly always leads to division. The same words and situation recur when we read that Jacob and Esau could not live together because of their wealth (Gen. 36:7). The ideal is that brethren dwell together [same Hebrew words] in unity (Ps. 133:1). But that is only possible with the presence of the Spirit. The extent of their wealth is emphasized. The multiplication of their flocks is the more remarkable when we realize that there had been a major famine in the land (Gen. 12:10). And the more they needed pastureland, the more conflict there would be with the local inhabitants.

13:7 *There was a strife between the herdsmen of Abram's livestock and the herdsmen of Lot's livestock-* Immediately Terah died, Abram may have felt he had truly left his "kindred" and eagerly moved on towards the promised land of Canaan (so Gen. 11:32-12:4 implies). It is likely that many of Abram's "kindred" would have come along with Terah, responding themselves to the call of Abram. Presumably they settled in Haran after Terah's death. It is even possible that the family were from this city originally, seeing that Abraham's brother was called Haran. We saw on Gen. 12:1 that just before leaving Haran, Abram was further told to separate from his "father's house" too, i.e. *all* of his father's household. This must have included Lot. Abram could understand separation from his idolatrous father and the rest of the family retinue; yet Lot was "a righteous man"; Abram evidently rated Lot's spirituality (Gen. 18:23,32). Again, Abram was in a quandary. He had left all but one of his father's house in Haran. Was he really intended to separate from his father's house to the extent of leaving Lot too? It is likely that Abram often

agonized about Lot. There he was in Canaan, knowing that his seed would inherit this land, which was then full of Canaanites (the record twice emphasizes, in Gen. 12:6 and 13:7). But Lot, part of his kindred and father's house, was still with him. We saw that the Hebrew for "kindred" implies one born in ones' own country. A closely related word is found in Gen. 11:28, describing how Haran, Lot's father, "died in the *land of his nativity*, in Ur". If Lot's father lived and died in Ur, it is fair to assume that Lot was born in Ur. So Abram knew he must separate from Lot, his "kindred" - but how? What reason could he give Lot? Yet he had faith in what God had told him; therefore he *wanted* to leave Lot, but just found it hard to do. And so God made a way.

Because the promises were to be made to Abram and not Lot, this separation was indeed necessary (although nothing should be inferred from this regarding Lot's spirituality or standing with God). It is stressed in the record that "Lot went with him" out of Haran (Gen. 12:4), and that in Abram's subsequent passing through the land of Canaan, "Lot... went with Abram" (Gen. 13:5; 13:1). Having been through so much together (they were together in the Egypt crisis, Gen. 13:1), it is unlikely that they would suffer from a personality clash. Yet the great wealth of them both resulted in "strife between the herdmen of Abram's cattle, and the herdmen of Lot's cattle" (Gen. 13:7). Abram reasoned that it would be a shame to let this incident between their employees drive a wedge between them personally; "for we be brethren" (note Abram's intense awareness that they were of the same household), and close spiritual friends too, it may be inferred (Gen. 19:8). Abram's subsequent concern for Lot indicates that they did not fall out personally over the problem.

And the Canaanite and the Perizzite lived in the land at that time- Moses' books were helping the wilderness generation to see where they were coming from historically. Passages like this and Gen. 12:6 now take on special relevance: "The Canaanites were then in the land". Moses was saying this as his people were about to enter a Canaan likewise occupied by Canaanites; the idea would have been *'Then* the Canaanites were there, just as they are *now*, and God shall be with us Abram's seed likewise'. He was bidding the people see their connection with their father Abraham, who then lived with Canaanites also in the same land. See on Gen. 13:3. We wonder why the Perizzites are mentioned specifically. It could be that they lived in the highlands and the "Canaanites" in the lowlands; or perhaps there were Perizzites in the particular locality where Abram was, and "Canaanite" was a more generic term.

13:8 *Abram said to Lot, Please, let there be no strife between me and you, and between my herdsmen and your herdsmen; for we are relatives-* Abram must surely have recalled how he had been called to separate from his relatives, and had not done so. God had seen Abram's devotion to Him at the time of :4, and responded by empowering him to be the more obedient- by making Lot separate from him. "For we are relatives" or "brethren" (AV) is a fundamental truth- brethren should not have "strife" between them, because of their relationship within the family of God. There may have to be separation, of a kind, between them. But their essential brotherhood should never lead to strife. In Gen. 26:20-22 we read of how there was "strife" between Isaac and the local Canaanites; and each time, Isaac moved on, rather than engage in strife. When Jacob entered into "strife" with Laban regarding the stolen idols, he was only saved from it by Divine grace (Gen. 31:36 s.w.).

13:9 *Isn't the whole land before you? Please separate yourself from me-* Abram would have noticed Lot's desire to settle down in the cities of the plain. Now he saw that providence was giving him the means he needed to separate from his father's house completely. He knew that if Lot chose, of his own volition, to separate from him, then there would no longer be the emotional agony of him separating from Lot. Yet a third time the record emphasizes their separation, and implies that as soon as this occurred, the full Abrahamic land covenant was made, featuring Abram's eternal inheritance of the land: "The Lord said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him... all the land which thou seest, to *thee* will I give it, and to *thy* seed for ever" (Gen. 13:14,15 AV). Again we see God's patience in the development of Abram's faith, and God's incremental response at each point of that development.

Abraham gives Lot the choice as to what land he would like to live in. Lot was the orphaned nephew of Abraham- such magnanimity would've been unheard of in those societies, for the elder to give the junior dependent such a choice. The elder in the relationship would've chosen the best for himself, and that was that. It seems to me that Abraham's unusual attitude in this matter was a direct outcome of his faith in the promise that the whole land really would one day be given to *him*. If we have the faith of Abraham... we won't fight for our corner in this world. It'll be *so* much easier to 'let go' as Abraham did, and take an attitude to material wealth and possessions which is radically counter-cultural in *our* societies. The way that Lot lifted up his eyes and looked around the land is matched by the way in which God then bids Abraham to likewise lift up his eyes and view the very same territory which Lot had just chosen (Gen. 13:10,14)- and was told that the land which Lot had chosen, along with all other land, would be Abraham's eternally.

If you go to the left hand, then I will go to the right. Or if you go to the right hand, then I will go to the left- We think of the Lord's depiction of the final judgment as a separation between right and left. It was as if Lot had the choice to decide, through his decisions about material things in this life. Although he failed, placing himself on the left hand side, as it were; he still repented and will be saved. Just as Peter denied the Lord and was condemned, in a preview of judgment day; and yet repented and was saved.

Abraham was effectively offering land for peace. He was willing to allow Lot to have the best of the land, because he was persuaded that he was going to inherit that land for ever. But by offering it to Lot in this life, he showed that he believed it would be his at some future point beyond this life. It is the seeking of immediate material blessing which leads to so much strife between brethren. The way out of this is to believe that we actually have all blessings- and will receive them materially in the Kingdom. This means that for now, we are willing to sacrifice material advantage for the sake of peace with others. Living a quiet life, at peace with all men as far as we can, in certain hope of the Kingdom to come. It was exactly because Lot wanted the land right now that the promise of eternally inheriting it was given to Abraham- and not to him. Abraham would have looked out over the land Lot had chosen- and heard that this land was to be eternally his. Whilst Lot had it now- with many associated worries and difficulties.

Abraham's invitation to Lot is specifically to separate himself from Abraham. Yet Abraham had been commanded to separate from Lot. He clearly felt this was beyond him to do, and he leaves the initiative with Lot. He says that there should not be any strife between them because they were relatives- the very "kindred" he had been asked to separate from. Lot's initiative

in the separation is recognized in :14: "Yahweh said to Abram, after Lot was separated from him". The wonder was that despite Abraham not himself separating from all his kindred, he was then given the promise of a seed and all the land- as if he had now met the precondition for receiving that promise. We again see how God fills up the gap of the preconditions required- in order to bless us. This was all in response to how Abraham did have at least some genuine faith, as Hebrews 11 notes. We marvel at how God set this up. Lot's decision to separate from Abraham was because of the colossal material blessing Abraham received on leaving Egypt (:2)- and all that was blessing given by grace alone, because he had badly sinned there, had not repented, and exited the situation with massive material blessings. By God's grace alone. And in the longer picture of his life, these blessings were used to bring about the situation whereby he could fulfil the preconditions required for yet greater blessing.

13:10 *Lot lifted up his eyes-* The Hebrew phrase "to lift up the eyes" is used very extensively about the Abraham family. Most Bible characters have the term used at most once or twice about them; but the Genesis record emphasizes this characteristic of this family. It's as if we're being bidden to really visualize them as a family, and to enable this we're even given an insight into their body language. Consider the emphasis on the way this family had of lifting up their eyes:

Lot lifted up his eyes (Gen. 13:10)

Abraham lifted up his eyes (Gen. 13:14)

Abraham lifted up his eyes and noticed the Angels (Gen. 18:2)

Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place of sacrifice (Gen. 22:4)

Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the ram caught (Gen. 22:13)

Isaac lifted up his eyes and saw camels coming on which Rebekah was riding (Gen. 24:63)

Rebekah, as part of a marriage made in Heaven, lifted up *her* eyes and saw Isaac at the same moment (Gen. 24:64)

Jacob lifted up his eyes and saw the vision of the speckled cattle (twice recorded- Gen. 31:10,12)

Jacob lifted up his eyes and saw Esau coming (Gen. 33:1)

Esau lifted up his eyes and saw Jacob's family (Gen. 33:5)

Jacob's sons lifted up their eyes and saw the traders coming (Gen. 37:25)

Joseph lifted up his eyes and saw Benjamin (Gen. 43:29)

Of course the classic epitome of this feature is when Abraham lifts up his eyes to Heaven and is asked to count the stars, and there and then believes God's word of promise that "so shall thy seed be". Yet *we* , as Abraham's family, his children by faith, are likewise asked [with the same Hebrew words] to lift up *our* eyes to Heaven and consider the stars, and take strength from the fact that their creator is our God (Is. 40:26; 51:6; 60:4).

And saw all the plain of the Jordan, that it was well-watered everywhere- During the famine, when the land was not well-watered, Abram and Lot had made the mistake of going down into Egypt (Gen. 12:11). They returned from Egypt not because the famine lifted, but because they repented for Abram's materialism and dishonesty. But Lot had failed to learn the lesson; well-watered areas attracted him, and he noted that the land looked like Egypt.

Before Yahweh destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, like the garden of Yahweh- Sarah murmured that it was impossible for her to have "pleasure" in childbearing (Gen. 18:12). She uses the word *ednah*, related to the word *Eden*. Yet in the events of Gen. 19, she sees how the land around Sodom that was once "like the garden of Eden" (Gen. 13:10) is made barren and sowed with salt

so that nothing could grow there (Gen. 19:25; Dt. 29:23). She was being taught that God can give and take away fertility on a huge scale, just as that land had only recently been dry in the famine (Gen. 12:11), but was at this time well watered.

Like the land of Egypt, as you go to Zoar- We suffer from the 'little of both' syndrome. Like Lot, we perceive that what we want is both like the garden of God (Eden) and also like Egypt; there is a tremendous dualism in our spiritual vision. Perhaps we are to understand that the area around Sodom was like Egypt. Abraham learns from his failure in Gen. 12- of going down into Egypt from lack of faith in the promises. Now, faced with the choice of 'Egypt' [or something which resembles it], he chooses rightly. We see the growth of Abraham's faith; from a very faultering faith in Gen. 11 and 12, to the peak of faith in being willing to offer Isaac in Gen. 22. And yet the growth in faith was no smooth upward curve. For in seeking fulfilment of the promise of the seed through Hagar *the Egyptian* , Abraham was again going back to Egypt rather than trusting in the fulfilment of the promises to him in due course.

13:11 *So Lot chose the Plain of the Jordan for himself. Lot travelled east, and they separated themselves the one from the other-* "For himself" surely hints at selfishness. The Hebrew is literally 'chose him'. He chose his inheritance; whereas God chose the inheritance for Abraham, and gave it to him. The construction is only found elsewhere about men chosing for themselves unbelieving wives in Gen. 6:2. His travelling east connects with the descendants of Noah travelling east from Ararat and building Babel (Gen. 11:2), as well as the rejected Cain and Adam travelling east away from the sanctuary in Eden (Gen. 3:24; 4:16). As with Abram, we find the record emphasizing his weakness; but he is declared "righteous" ultimately (2 Pet. 2:7).

That surely was an example of righteousness being imputed, just as it was to Abraham.

13:12 *Abram lived in the land of Canaan, and Lot lived in the cities of the plain, and moved his tent as far as Sodom-* We can trace Lot's slide towards the world. He began seeking better pastureland in the valley; he then "lived in the cities of the plain", then camped in his tent near Sodom; and finally moved into Sodom, put his tent in the loft, and became a judge within the city (Gen. 19:9). Whereas our pattern is to be Abram, who remained on the less fertile areas, and received the promise of eternal inheritance. Abram now lived in Canaan but Lot didn't. This shows that effectively Lot rejected Canaan for the world. And yet, despite his continual weaknesses, he is seen as a righteous man by the New Testament.

13:13 *Now the men of Sodom were exceedingly wicked and sinners against Yahweh-* Sodom being a type of latter day events, it is not surprising that Scripture provides a wealth of detail concerning Sodom. "Before the Lord" (AV) recalls the earth being "corrupt before God" prior to the flood (Gen. 6:11), another clear type of the last days. Indeed their sin being "before the Lord" may hint that Lot (or Abraham?) had preached God's requirements to them, and therefore they were consciously disobeying Him. Thus Rom. 3:19 speaks of the world becoming "guilty before God" by reason of their having the opportunity to know God's word (cp. Rom. 2:12,13). And yet sin is still sin, whether or not there is knowledge of God's word.

13:14 *Yahweh said to Abram, after Lot was separated from him-* This separation had been required when God first entered relationship with Abram. Now Abram had been led to obedience to it, the promises were enlarged. This suggests that there are certain waymarks of spiritual attainment which the

Father sets, and then increments His relationship with us once we reach them.

Now, lift up your eyes- See on :10.

And look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward- He would have looked out over the areas just chosen by Lot; not only those areas, but wherever he surveyed, was to be given to him eternally. "The place" where Abram was could refer to an altar built there; it was in response to his devotion to Yahweh that he was given the promise.

13:15 *For all the land which you see, I will give to you, and to your offspring forever-* This was alluding to what He had initially told Abram back in Ur: "Get thee out... unto a land that I will *shew* (s.w. "see" in 13:15) you" (Gen. 12:1). It was as if God was saying: 'Well Abraham, this is it. This is the land I told you about'- and yet the best of it has now been given to Lot! The whole thing could have seemed some kind of cruel, just as many of our life experiences do. Abraham had given up all, made a long and dangerous journey, to receive a land from God- and when he arrives there, the best of it is given to his younger relative. But God's purpose was to focus Abraham's faith upon the fact that he would *eternally* inherit this land. And so it is with many of the twists and turns of our lives which can appear nothing but cruel fate to the unbelieving observer.

The "offspring" or "seed" (AV) was singular (Gal. 3:16). Sarah was still barren, and so this would have been enigmatic for Abram; it was perhaps through the enigmatic nature of the promise that Abram was led toward some conception of the Messiah, the same individual promised to Eve. Abram had children by concubines, according to Gen. 25; and Lot may have been counted as his adopted son. He would have wondered whether the promise referred to any of those options.

"Forever" introduces the idea of personal immortality. But it was promised here to only two persons- Abram and his "seed". This is how Gal. 3:16 reasons; and it is only by association with that "seed" through baptism into Him that these promises become true for us (Gal. 3:27-29).

13:16 *I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth, so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then your seed may also be numbered-* This had an initial fulfilment in Solomon being "King over a people like the dust of the earth" (2 Chron.1:9; 1 Kings 4:20). But the "offspring" was singular and not plural (Gal. 3:16). That individual was to be "made" innumerable. And that 'making' is through God's calling of individuals worldwide to be part of the offspring, who is Christ. The innumerable seed must be compared with the other strand of Biblical evidence that "few are chosen". Relative to the wonder of salvation, and Abram standing there as just one man, indeed they are "many", but "few" compared to the global population.

13:17 *Arise, walk through the land in its length and in its breadth; for I will give it to you-* God never let go of Abraham, even when Abraham didn't readily obey what God required of him. But Abraham didn't willingly "walk through the land"- because perhaps he doubted that he would be given it, or feared the local tribes. It's like saying to a child: 'Come and look at this! I am going to give it to you!', and the child doesn't even want to look. In this context we read of how Abraham "*dwelt* in the plain of Mamre"- that's stressed twice (Gen. 13:18; 14:13). Instead of travelling around in his land to see it, he tried to settle down. But God brought circumstances into his life which made him travel around the length and breadth of Canaan- thus Abraham had to pursue Lot's captors "unto Hobah, which is on the left hand of Damascus" before he recovered Lot (Gen. 14:15). Hobah is in the far north east of Canaan- Abraham had

to go all the way there from Mamre in the centre of Canaan. For unknown reasons, Abraham also lived in Beersheba for a while (Gen. 22:19); he had a meeting with the local rulers at Shaveh, near Jerusalem (Gen. 14:17); and at the time of Gen. 16:14 Abraham was near Kadesh Barnea, in the very South of Canaan on the Egyptian border. One wonders whether the attraction of Egypt had led him there once more- in which case it was his own weakness which was used by God to ensure that he travelled to the very south of Canaan. Maybe the record includes all these geographical markers in order to demonstrate how Abraham did indeed travel around Canaan through providentially arranged circumstances, although not it seems as an act of direct obedience to the Divine command to do so.

The hope of a literal bodily reward has been understood by God's people from earliest times. Abraham was promised that he, personally, would inherit the land of Canaan forever, as surely as he had walked up and down in it. His faith in those promises would have necessitated his belief that his body would somehow, at a future date, be revived and made immortal, so that this would be possible.

Abraham was progressively set up by God so that his spiritual growth would be an upward spiral. Initially, he was told to walk / go to a land which God would shew him (Gen. 12:1); when he got there, he was told to "arise", and "walk" through that land of Canaan (Gen. 13:17). And Abraham, albeit in a faltering kind of way, did just this. But this was to prepare him for the test of Gen. 22:3 in the command to offer Isaac. His obedience this time isn't at all faltering. He "arises" and 'goes' [s.w. "walk"] "unto the place of which God had told him" to offer Isaac (Gen. 22:3). This is exactly what he had been called to do right back in Ur- to arise and walk / go to a land / place which God would show him (Gen. 12:1). And so our obedience in one challenge of God

leads us to obedience in others. One experience is designed to lead us to another. Nothing- absolutely nothing- in our lives is senseless chance. All- and this takes some believing- is part of a higher plan for our spiritual good, in our latter end. Time and again we see this in Abraham's life.

13:18 *Abram moved his tent, and came and lived by the oaks of Mamre, which are in Hebron, and built an altar there to Yahweh-* This was Abram's response to the command to walk up and down in the land. And it was negative. He tried to set up camp in one place, in fact in a centre of pagan worship ("the oaks"). But more positively, he built an altar to Yahweh there, a public statement of his faith. And that altar and his own "tent" are well contrasted. Just as the early church resisted the command to go out and spread the Gospel, and the descendants of Noah wanted to build Babel lest they have to obey the command to go out into the *eretz* and subdue it... so Abram tried to remain sedentary. And this is human nature; to prefer the fixed, the old and familiar, rather than the leadership of the Spirit.

GENESIS CHAPTER 14

14:1 *It happened in the days of Amraphel, king of Shinar, Arioch, king of Ellasar, Chedorlaomer, king of Elam, and Tidal, king of Goiim-* This chapter gives the impression that the local tribes within the *eretz* were divided into two groups which battled each other. The salvation of Lot out of this could look forward to a latter day deliverance of a weak but counted-righteous remnant in the last days, symbolized by Lot. For his final exit from Sodom is a type of the deliverance of the faithful remnant in the *eretz* of the last days (Lk. 17:32). Perhaps we are to see the *eretz* divided into two such groups of its non-Jewish inhabitants, perhaps split between shia and Sunni Islam. See on :7. "Tidal king of Goiim" refers to the Kurds, who may well have a major part to play in the latter day outworking of these things. "Ellasar" was not far from Ur of the Chaldees, and he may well have known Abram and Lot.

14:2 *That they made war with Bera, king of Sodom, and with Birsha, king of Gomorrah, Shinab, king of Admah, and Shemeber, king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (the same is Zoar)-* The tribes in Palestine / Canaan, which was the area intended for initial Israelite settlement, are presented here as not invincible, and easily dominated by others. And even their dominators could be overcome by just one man, Abraham, with God behind him. This was all encouragement for the Israelites as they approached Canaan.

14:3 *All these joined together in the valley of Siddim (the same is the Salt Sea)-* The various clarifications that "the same is..." were for the benefit of the Israelites as they journeyed through these areas. The encouragement was that they too could easily be granted victory, and nothing between them and the promised Kingdom of God was really as invincible as it seemed.

14:4 *Twelve years they served Chedorlaomer, and in the thirteenth year, they rebelled-* Chedorlaomer was the leader of the group; as "king of Elam" he might point forward to some leader arising from latter day Elam, which is Iran. And yet the apparent leader of the group was the king of Shinar or Babylon, who is mentioned at the head of the list in :1.

14:5 *In the fourteenth year Chedorlaomer came, and the kings who were with him, and struck the Rephaim in Ashteroth Karnaim, and the Zuzim in Ham, and the Emim in Shaveh Kiriathaim-* Moses was writing for the Israelites about to enter Canaan; and they were afraid of the Rephaim [giants] in Canaan. They are here being encouraged that those peoples had been dominated by others in time past- even without the help and promise of Yahweh behind them.

14:6 *And the Horites in their Mount Seir, to Elparan, which is by the wilderness-* The very peoples through whom the Israelites were passing as they heard Genesis presented to them- had been overcome. They were not as invincible as they might appear. "Their Mount Seir" could suggest that the descendants of Esau received their inheritance; as Israel would if they remained faithful.

14:7 *They returned, and came to En Mishpat (the same is Kadesh), and struck all the country of the Amalekites, and also the Amorites, that lived in Hazazon Tamar-* Kadesh was well known to the primary audience of Genesis, i.e. Israel in the wilderness. All up, the northern confederacy of four kings [for they came upon Sodom from the north] dominated seven other tribes. This is the kind of situation depicted in the various descriptions of the latter day beast dominating the *eretz* with various numbers of horns and heads subsumed beneath it.

14:8 *The king of Sodom, and the king of Gomorrah, and the king of Admah, and the king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (the*

same is Zoar) went out; and they set the battle in array against them in the valley of Siddim- The four king confederacy names the kings; the Canaanite kings are not named. Perhaps this was to encourage the Israelites who first heard this history to see that "the king of" whatever Canaanite town was in their path was likewise able to be overcome. If specific names had been given, they may have been tempted to think that this was a historical victory against a particular individual; whereas the principle God wished to explain was of a more generic nature.

14:9 *Against Chedorlaomer king of Elam, and Tidal king of Goiim, and Amraphel king of Shinar, and Arioch king of Ellasar; four kings against the five-* The five kings and their armies could not repel the four king confederacy who overthrew Sodom. But Abraham, just one man with Yahweh behind him, could do so- and even take their prey out of their hands. This was to encourage the later seed of Abraham, who were the primary audience for the book of Genesis, that they too could easily achieve victory against these very same peoples and in the very same areas.

14:10 *Now the valley of Siddim was full of tar pits; and the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, and they fell there-* These pits for bitumen they had dug themselves, and now they fell into them and died there, exactly as stated in Ps. 9:15.

And those who remained fled to the hills- Lot later fled to those same hills (Gen. 19:17,30). Perhaps he was amongst those who even now fled to the hills. He ought to have learned the lesson, rather than let history repeat itself.

Surely Abraham is our real example; who in the years of his pilgrimage chose the barren uplands, despising worldly advantage, and who could look at Sodom's burning with no feeling of desire or sense of loss. Abraham dwelt on the mountains, from where he could look down upon Sodom; if Lot

had been in these mountains, he would not have suffered when Sodom was invaded this first time; it took the final coming of the Lord to make him flee to the mountains (Gen.19:10), i.e. to the area which Abraham had chosen at the first. If we can only see the world for what it is, then the equivalent of Lot's experiences will be unnecessary for us.

14:11 *They took all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all their food, and went their way-* Lot had gone to Sodom for materialistic reasons; and now he lost all that he had, even his own food, to teach him the wrongness of his decision that day when he looked toward Sodom and chose the well-watered lands in that direction. But still Lot remained in Sodom, and nearly lost his life and his salvation in its final destruction; he failed to learn the lesson. Just as so many believers are taught powerful lessons about the idiocy of being materialistic; and yet return to the same bondage.

14:12 *They took Lot, Abram's brother's son, who lived in Sodom, and his goods, and departed-* Lot suffered in the condemnation of Sodom when the neighbouring kings invaded- he was in the same situation as those who were warned to come out of Babylon lest they be consumed in her plagues. So he went through a condemnation process in this life- but later learnt his lesson and will be saved in the end. "Who lived in Sodom" could be read as a critical note; for Lot should not have ideally been there. We wonder why they bothered taking Lot with them, rather than killing him. I suggested on :2 that "Ellasar" was not far from Ur of the Chaldees, and that king may well have known Abram and Lot. Perhaps Lot agreed to join them, or mercy was shown to him because he was from their tribal area to the East, and he wasn't a local. But the fact he was taken with them rather than just ignored would suggest that he may have agreed to join in with them in confederacy. Again, we would see here a

weakness in Lot. "And his goods" shows that although Lot had chosen the wealth of this world rather than Canaan (see on Gen. 13:12), he lost even that wealth. It brought nothing but trouble. It's not as if we receive a few years of pleasure now in return for rejecting the things of the Kingdom. Those years and that life is full of trouble and loss.

14:13 *One who had escaped came and told Abram, the Hebrew. Now he lived by the oaks of Mamre, the Amorite, brother of Eshcol, and brother of Aner; and these were allies of Abram-* One can't help but notice that God stressed to the later children of Abraham that since they had a covenant with Him, they were not to make covenants with the people who lived around them in the land- time and again God references His covenant with His people, and in that context tells them not to make covenants with the peoples of the land (Ex. 34:10-12,15,27; Dt. 7:29; Jud. 2:1,2,20). Yet Abraham made covenants with those very people (Gen. 21:27,32)- perhaps indicating his lack of appreciation of his covenant relationship with Yahweh? However, "allies of Abram", *baalim beriyth*, can be translated 'lords of covenant', i.e. masters or possessors of a covenant with Abram; "literally: They being possessors of the covenant of Abram". This could mean that already, Abram had begun to share his covenant with God with others.

14:14 *When Abram heard that his relative was taken captive-* Even though Abram had been told to separate from his relatives, including Lot, and despite Lots' evident spiritual weakness, having made the wrong decision to move into Sodom... Abram still came to his help, and remembered his brotherly connection with him.

He led out his trained men, born in his house, three hundred and eighteen, and pursued as far as Dan- The significance of 318 is unclear. But if read literally, it's clear that Abram was a not

insignificant chieftain, having such a personal army comprised of those born within his family encampment. His encampment would therefore likely have numbered at least 2000, if there were 318 "trained men" born within the household. According to Gen. 25, he had concubines, and we wonder as to how many of these were therefore his blood relatives. However, he also describes Eliezer his manager as the "one born in my house" (Gen. 15:3), with some translations suggesting "the *only* one born in my household"; and the numerical value of Eliezer is 318. In this case "men" here in :14 and "servants" in :15 would be intensive plurals referring to the great man and servant in Abraham's household, Eliezer. He was accompanied by Aner, Eshcol and Mamre, his immediate neighbours, and their men (:24), but a case could be made that Abraham and Eliezer alone were capable of putting thousands to flight. This interpretation would explain why Eliezer is called "Eliezer of Damascus" and yet also one born within Abram's household (Gen. 15:2,3). He was perhaps called "of Damascus" in memory of his heroic almost singlehanded victory at Damascus (:15). Abram's virtually singlehanded victory is alluded to in the covenant which he now receives; for during the covenant making process, Abram singlehandedly drove away the birds of prey, representing the Canaanite tribes he feared would now take vengeance upon him for his victory at Damascus (Gen. 15:11). The Hebrew there implies that Abram alone drove them away.

The uninspired first century *Epistle of Barnabas* 9.8 claims: "[The Scripture] saith, "And Abraham circumcised ten, and eight, and three hundred men of his household." What, then, was the knowledge given to him in this? Learn the eighteen first, and then the three hundred. The ten and the eight are thus denoted - Ten by I, and Eight by H. You have [the initials of the, name of] Jesus. And because the cross was to express the grace [of our

redemption] by the letter T, he says also, "Three Hundred." He signifies, therefore, Jesus by two letters, and the cross by one".

14:15 *He divided himself against them by night, he and his servants, and struck them, and pursued them to Hobah, which is on the left hand of Damascus-* As suggested on :14, "servants" could be an intensive plural. This incident led to Abram travelling the length of the *eretz* promised to him. His love for wayward Lot was used by God in order to help Abram be obedient to the command to go up and down in the land. This is how God works; working along with our weaknesses and strengths, and the weaknesses of others, in order to help us in the path of obedience and development He intends.

14:16 *He brought back all the goods, and also brought back his relative, Lot, and his goods, and the women also, and the people-* Abraham's focus on material issues can be discerned from the double description of how he pursued after his captured nephew Lot, "and he brought back all the goods, and his brother Lot, and his goods" (Gen. 14:16 AV). Abraham's concern about the "goods" is perhaps significant. And yet given this mindset, it is to Abraham's credit that he utterly refuses to take even a "shoe latchet" of the spoil lest it be said that any man had made him rich- he knew that it was *God* who had made him rich (Gen. 14:23), and Abraham wanted the world to know that. See on :22.

14:17 *The king of Sodom went out to meet him, after his return from the slaughter of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, at the valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley)-* This was where Absalom erected his pillar (2 Sam. 18:18), and Josephus locates it near Jerusalem. This would accord with Melchizedek king of Jerusalem attending the meeting (:18). Such a victory celebration in Jerusalem would fit well with the latter day things which these incidents point forward to.

14:18 *Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine: and he was priest of God Most High-* Melchizedek is presented in Hebrews as a type of the Lord Jesus; a king-priest, who was not a Levitical priest, nor was his priesthood dependent upon his genealogy. The record is framed so that he abruptly appears on the scene; "without father [and] mother" alludes to this, as no genealogy is provided. Hebrews uses this to counter objections that the Lord was from the tribe of Judah, not Levi, and therefore could not be a priest. Likewise there is no reference to his birth or death, but that doesn't mean he was superhuman. He is framed by the record in this way. Likewise Abraham is presented as having an "only son", Isaac; when in fact he had other children by his concubines (Gen. 25), not least Ishmael.

Umberto Cassuto was one of 20th century Judaism's most erudite and painstakingly detailed Bible students. He demonstrated at length that the Canaanites believed there were various gods and demons responsible for the various events on earth, and that the Torah picks up these terms and applies them to God and His [all righteous] Angels. The examples he cites include the term "the most high God" (Gen. 14:18-20), "creator of heaven and earth" (Gen. 14:19,22), and the idea of supernatural demons coming to earth and wrestling with men (Gen. 32:29,31). These ideas and terms are used in the Torah and applied by Moses to God's Angels, and to God Himself. Cassuto went on to show that this kind of deconstruction of pagan myths about demons and 'Satan' is common throughout the Bible- e.g. the references to Israel's God Yahweh 'riding on the clouds' (Ps. 104:3; 147:8; Is. 5:6; Joel 2:2) are an allusion to how the surrounding peoples thought that Baal rode upon the clouds; the "morning stars" were understood as independent deities, but Job 38:7 stresses that they are in fact Yahweh's ministers.

The gift of bread and wine [which foreshadowed our present memorial meetings] was a sign of God blessing us. Hence it was "the cup of blessing", which Paul says we also bless. There is a mutuality about it- we bless God, He blesses us. No part of this wonderful and comforting arrangement depends upon us not passing that cup to our brethren.

Melchizedek was apparently a believer in the true God, presumably a priest of a community of believers in Jerusalem. But there is no evidence that Abram had much contact with him before or after this incident. The almost manic insistence that believers *must* fellowship together at all costs rather falls apart before this consideration. Likewise I have argued that it was God's intention that Abram separate from all his relatives, including Lot. And God brought about the final division between them. Yet Abram refers to Lot as his "brother". They did not it seems "fellowship together" and yet were believers who shall share eternity together. This opens another window upon the divided state of the body of Christ today.

14:19 *He blessed him-* This is associated with the bread and wine of :18. The gift of bread and wine [which foreshadowed our present memorial meetings] was a sign of God blessing us. Hence it was "the cup of blessing", which Paul says we also bless. There is a mutuality about it- we bless God, He blesses us. No part of this wonderful and comforting arrangement depends upon us not passing that cup to our brethren. Note how Paul speaks of the breaking of bread in 1 Cor. 10:16-21. He sees the bread and wine as gifts from God to us. It's all about receiving the cup of the Lord, the cup which comes from Him. We should take it with both hands. It seems so inappropriate, given this emphasis, if our focus is rather on worrying about forbidding others in His body from reaching their hands out to partake that same cup and bread.

And said, Blessed be Abram of God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth- This same title for God is used also by Abram in :22; perhaps God had taught them both the same thing in different ways and at different times. Or maybe Abram liked the phrase used by Melchizedek and used it himself, just as our language and phraseology is influenced by that of those whom we listen to.

The way Melchizedek blesses Abraham, as if Abraham is his inferior, is dwelt on in Hebrews 7. Abraham was inferior to Melchizedek- "consider how great this man was". But the focus of the Genesis record is clearly upon Abraham, with Melchizedek briefly mentioned in passing. I suggest this shows that Abraham in his weakness is our example. The one who was not in fact the senior believer of his times is showcased as our pattern- because the significance of his example is in the fact that out of weakness he was made strong. Clearly God was in relationship with others at the time of Abram. But Abram, who had a very shaky start and was dragged kicking and resisting into God's purpose, was the one whose seed remained faithful. Whereas Melchizedek's spiritual descent is unrecorded, and presumably died out. It is a story of the spiritually weaker ending up the stronger, by grace.

14:20 *And blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand-* "God most high" is a title Melchizedek uses three times; E.A. Speiser in *The Anchor Bible* commentary claims that this was a common title for a deity amongst the Canaanites. But the term is used about the one true God elsewhere (e.g. Num. 24:26). It could be that he accepted Yahweh as the highest God, but recognized the existence of others. This would explain why in :22, Abram defines this most high God as Yahweh. Abram uses the term which Melchizedek uses, thereby seeking to bridge build toward him, but defines the term accurately.

Abraham's military and political strength was now so established by this victory that he probably could have held a reasonable chance of subduing Canaan beneath his own political power. And Melchizedek seems to recognize this, when he observes that the God who possesses both sky [heaven] and the land [earth] has blessed Abraham with victory. But Abraham refuses to take any spoil, chooses to give a tenth to Melchizedek and goes back into obscurity. I suggest he did that because he believed that he would inherit the land due to Yahweh's promise, and not through taking it in his own secular strength. He could have been greater than Melchizedek, indeed he was so in military and secular terms after his victory; but Abraham shows humility in tithing to Melchizedek to emphasize that he is not seeking to dominate the land nor create himself as possessor of the land in this life.

"Delivered" is a form of the word "shield" which God goes on to use in Gen. 15:1. The promise of Gen. 15:1 is therefore a comment upon Abraham's attitude in Gen. 14. Indeed God has been Abraham's shield / deliverer: "And your reward will be exceedingly great". The 'reward' was therefore for Abraham's refusal of secular wealth and possession of the land. This would be the same lesson as taught in Gen. 13- that refusal of inheriting the land in this life was rewarded by the promise of eternally inheriting it.

Abram gave him a tenth of all- Hebrews interprets this as meaning that Abram as the ancestor of Levi was somehow inferior to Melchizedek, who is presented as being of a higher order of priesthood than Levi. But in reality, Abram was not giving to Melchizedek personally. He was a priest of the most High God, whom Abram understood as Yahweh. And so Abram is tithing to Yahweh, from his side. Tithes given to priests were effectively gifts to the God whom the priest represented.

Melchizedek, in the name of the Most High [Yahweh], three times pronounces a "blessing" upon Abram in :19,20. This was a reminder to Abram that the promised 'blessings' were yet future. And therefore Abram takes the cue, and rejects any immediate blessing- of land, people and goods. That was yet to come for him. The simple implication of the promises to Abraham is that we are not to seek blessing for ourselves now. We may have some foretastes of the future blessings, as Abraham had. But our blessing is ahead, and not now. And those blessings are given to us "by God Most High", and not by our blessing ourselves.

14:21 *The king of Sodom said to Abram, Give me the people, and take the goods to yourself-* The king of Sodom considered that Lot and his family belonged to him, and should be given to him. This indicates further the degree to which Lot had sold his soul to Sodom. Now he had the opportunity to go his own way, to start life afresh; but he turned it down.

14:22 *Abram said to the king of Sodom, I have lifted up my hand to Yahweh, God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth-* See on :20. This idea of owning nothing, not even ourselves, is only true of this life; the day of release from slavery will dawn, we will receive that true freedom and that true concept of personal possession- if *now* we resign it. Abraham really grasped this idea that we now can own nothing. He swore to Yahweh as "the possessor of heaven and earth, that I will not take from a thread even to a shoelatchet, and that I will not take anything that is thine..." (Gen. 14:22,23 AV). He knew that Yahweh is the owner of all, and *therefore* he was not going to yield to the temptation to increase what appeared to be 'his' possessions. Solomon likewise had the theory straight at least: "Labour not to be rich...wilt thou set thine eyes on that which is not? for riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven" (Prov.

23:4,5). The riches men seek don't exist, material possession is a pure fantasy.

Abraham speaks of how he is the servant of the God who is the *purchaser* of Heaven and earth, i.e. the land which God had potentially given Abraham (Gen. 14:22- the Hebrew translated "possessor" in the AV is usually translated 'buyer' elsewhere). Ps. 74:2 and Ps. 78:54 use the same word to describe how the land God gave Israel had been "purchased" by Him. Perhaps there is here a recognition by Abraham that God's gifts to us cost Him something. He had meditated upon the promise of the land, and concluded that God was giving him something which had cost Him. Perhaps this may even indicate that Abraham had reflected that the promise of the land was on account of God's willingness to purchase it through the death of the "seed of the woman" promised in Genesis 3... At the very least, we need to ask ourselves how much *we* have meditated upon the implications of the same Abrahamic promises which have been made to us. And we likewise must avoid the assumption that because God owns all things, therefore it's painless for Him to give them to us. Poor people often assume that it's painless and effortless for a rich person to give them something- but actually it isn't. And we need to perceive the same about our wonderfully generous Father in Heaven. We are slaves now, owning nothing, but then we will be gloriously free (Rom. 8:21). So this idea of owning nothing, not even ourselves, is only true of this life; the day of release from slavery will dawn, we will receive that true freedom and that true concept of personal possession- if *now* we resign it. Abraham really grasped this idea that we now can own nothing. He swore to Yahweh as "the possessor of heaven and earth, that I will not take from a thread even to a shoelatchet, and that I will not take anything that is thine..." (Gen. 14:22,23). He knew that Yahweh is the owner of all, and *therefore* he was not going

to yield to the temptation to increase what appeared to be 'his' possessions.

14:23 *That I will not take a thread nor a sandal strap nor anything that is yours, lest you should say, 'I have made Abram rich'-* Abraham's belief in *God's* blessing of him is reflected in the way he is insistent to the King of Sodom that he will not take any of the spoil, lest anyone should think that man rather than God had blessed Abraham. It could be pointed out that this rather contrasts with his not returning to Pharaoh the things he gave him in return for Sarah becoming his wife (Gen. 12:16). Perhaps Abraham later reflected upon his failure in this incident, realizing he'd not displayed faith in *God's* blessing of him... and learnt his lesson when the same temptation occurred in Gen. 14 to be made rich by the men of this world. Our stumbling response to the same Abrahamic promises often develops in the same way. "Made rich" is the term used in Proverbs for how "the blessing of Yahweh makes rich". And this was exactly the point. The true wealth is in the Kingdom to come.

If Jesus is Lord, He owns all. Nothing that we have is our own. The Old Testament stressed that God's ownership of all precludes our own petty materialism, our manic desire to 'own'. Abraham refused to take "from a thread even to a shoelatchet" of what he could justifiable have had for himself; because Yahweh "the most high God [is] possessor of heaven and earth" (Gen. 14:22,23). But now, all that power has been bestowed by the Father upon the Son. Our allegiance to the Lord Jesus demands the same resignation of worldly acquisition as Abraham showed.

14:24 *I will accept nothing from you except that which the young men have eaten, and the portion of the men who went with me: Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre. Let them take their portion-* Abram recognized that people live on different levels. For him, if God was possessor of all, then he did not wish to try to acquire

possessions for himself. But he recognized that others in covenant relationship with him (see on :13) saw things on a lower level; that the spoil of your enemies was legitimate possession. As noted earlier, this was a major step forward for Abram, who had strong tendencies toward materialism.

GENESIS CHAPTER 15

15:1 *After these things the word of Yahweh came to Abram in a vision, saying, Don't be afraid, Abram-* The fear was initially of the retribution by other tribes of Canaan after the dramatic victory of Abraham at Damascus (see on Gen. 14:14). But there was also the fear of every believer- that the great promises of the Gospel appeared so far from fulfilment in man's daily reality. Remember that God only appeared to Abraham a few times in the course of a long life. Abram had been promised a unique function and role in the world, amongst humanity- but he didn't even have a child by his barren wife. This distance between daily reality and God's stated purpose for us can likewise induce some element of 'fear' in us. And the answer is in the covenant now being made more sure, which is what God has done for us too in Christ.

One of the strongest of the Abraham family's characteristics was fear, almost to the extent of psychiatric paranoia. Abraham (Gen. 15:1; 20:11), Hagar (Gen. 21:17), Lot (Gen. 19:30), Sarah (Gen. 18:15), Isaac (Gen. 26:7,24; 31:42, 53, Jacob (Gen. 32:7,11; 46:3; 28:17; 31:31), his sons (Gen. 42:35; 43:18,23; 50:21), Joseph (Gen. 42:18). This is really some emphasis. Fear and lack of faith are often associated (Dt. 20:8; Jud. 7:3; Mt. 25:25; Mk. 4:40; Lk. 12:32; Rom. 8:15; Heb. 13:6; 1 Jn. 4:18; 2 Tim. 1:7; Rev. 21:8). Again, this list is impressive. Yet despite their fear, their lack of total certainty *at times* that God would keep His promises , the patriarchs are held up as examples of faith. If their fear had not been recorded, would the record of their faith mean much to us? Unlikely. They had so much which militated against a life of faith: by way of hereditary characteristic, surroundings, past experience of life etc. Both Isaac and Jacob feared they would die well before they did (Gen.

47:9; 27:2); they feared death in that their future was ever on their mind. Yet evidently their fear was mixed with faith.

I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward- Abram was fearful that after his dramatic victory at Damascus (see on Gen. 14:14), the other tribes would attack him. But he is therefore promised that he would be shielded. And his refusal to enrich himself from the spoil was responded to by God promising "great reward" in compensation. Abram's refusal to enrich himself and focus simply on saving his brother was evidently very pleasing to God. "Reward" carries the idea of wages. God does pay back for devotion to His people, but not necessarily in material terms.

"And your reward will be exceedingly great" could however be God's response to Abraham's refusal of secular wealth and possession of the land in Gen. 14; see on Gen. 14:20. "Shield" is a form of the word "delivered" in Gen. 14:20. This would be the same lesson as taught in Gen. 13- that refusal of inheriting the land in this life was rewarded by the promise of eternally inheriting it.

The promises to Abraham were extended in Genesis 15, with more specifics added about the "seed". But the context of the giving of those promises is again Abraham's weakness. After the conflict with the surrounding kings recorded in Genesis 14, Abraham is comforted: "Fear not, Abram: I am your shield" (Gen. 15:1)- as if Abram was starting to doubt in God's continued ability to protect him. God's assurances continued: "I am your exceedingly great reward" (Gen. 15:1). The Hebrew mind would've understood "reward" in this context to refer to children- Ps. 127:3 is explicit: "Children are the inheritance given by the Lord, and the fruit of the womb is his reward" (s.w.). The "reward" is paralleled with the inheritance of children given by God. Jer. 31:16 likewise speaks of a woman bereft of her children being "rewarded" with more children.

15:2 *Abram said, Lord Yahweh, what will you give me, since I go childless, and he who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?-* It could be that this verse and :3 is a parenthesis. This is what Abram had been saying; and 15:1 is God's response to it. This kind of struture is common in Biblical Hebrew. But Abraham's words are the classic response of someone who wants children more than anything else. No promise of reward and material blessing will compensate for that hunger and gaping hole. The response is absolutely psychologically credible. But we must bear in mind that a chieftain like Abram may well have had children by concubines, and Gen. 25 lists some of them. But he genuinely felt childless. This is a window into how closely connected he felt to Sarai, and how he had accepted her barrenness and yet remained committed to her. We recall how unfaithful he had been to her when he first visited Egypt, and I commented there that neither God nor Abimelech punished him, but rather blessed him. That lack of a punitive discipline actually resulted in his becoming more committed to Sarah in the long term. And indeed it is clear from both Scripture and human observation that God often doesn't punish in this life on a measure for measure basis. Rather the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer- because all such shall be recompensed at the day of judgment. This provides a window onto how we ought to use or not use punitive response, especially in domestic and church life.

We wonder why Eliezer is called "Eliezer of Damascus" and yet also one born within Abram's household (:3). He was perhaps called "of Damascus" in memory of his heroic almost singlehanded victory at Damascus (see on Gen. 14:14,15).

Abraham doesn't just accept on faith God's assurances of :1. He speaks as if he somehow didn't believe that those promises meant that he personally would have a child; it's as if Abram

were saying 'OK, I hear You, but whatever these promises of Yours mean, reality is, I am old and childless... can't You find a way to give me children?'. "Since I *continue* [Heb.] childless" indicates his frustration. God had already promised to "give" the land to Abraham and his seed (Gen. 12:7; 13:15); and now Abraham complains that God hasn't 'given' [s.w.] him a seed. One can possibly detect an anger with God, at best a frustration, when he comments that all he has is his steward Eliezer ("this Eliezer of Damascus") as "the son of my house / family" (Gen. 15:2, Heb. *ben bayith*, son of my family)- as if to say 'All this You've promised me- is to go to *him*, is *this* guy to be this wonderful promised seed, and I for now get nothing? Was that the whole purpose of calling me out of Ur?'.

Indeed, Keil and Delitsczh suggest the correct interpretation and translation here as being: "Of what avail are all my possessions, wealth, and power, since I have no child, and the heir of my house is Eliezer the Damascene?". The Hebrew for "heir" can suggest the seizure of possession; thus Abraham could even be viewing Eliezer as effectively grabbing what he thought should be his personally.

In my opinion, Abraham's comment "this Eliezer of Damascus..." is another indicator of weakness in this undoubtedly great man. Eliezer is presented as a man of faith, of extreme loyalty to Abraham, with a wonderful humility in seeking the good of Isaac, the man who displaced him as heir of so much. His comment that God "led me- even me- straight to the house" (Translation of E.A. Speiser, *Genesis* (New York: Doubleday, 1964) and Derek Kidner, *Genesis* (London: Tyndale Press, 1967) p. 148) further indicates a commendable humility. Indeed, the way Eliezer refuses the greetings of polite custom in order to get on with God's work (Gen. 24:33) appears to be used by the Lord as a model for His preachers (Lk. 10:4). A window

into Eliezer's faithfulness is provided by considering how Laban calls him "O blessed of the Lord", but Eliezer replies that in fact "the Lord has greatly blessed *my master*" (Gen. 24:31,35). His focus was not at all upon himself but rather upon Abraham his master. Yet Abraham appears to almost despise Eliezer, his bitterness at not having a seed by Sarah got the better of him at that moment- so it seems to me. There seems a designed contrast between Eliezer and Jacob. Eliezer with utter integrity says that God has given him "success" (Gen. 24:12) in seeking a wife for Isaac; whereas Jacob uses the same word in lying to his blind father about why he had so quickly brought venison: "Because God granted me success" (Gen. 27:20).

So Abraham was hardly at his spiritual best when God gave him the promises of Genesis 15. The first use of a word in the Bible is often significant- and the first time we meet the Hebrew word *nathan*, to give, is in Gen. 1:17, where we learn that God 'gave' the stars to humanity on earth. It's as if God is now testing whether Abraham will make the connection or not- for He takes Abraham out to see the stars, shining up there in the sky as proof that God really can give stars, has already done so and continues to do so... and challenges Abraham as to whether or not he can believe that truly, his seed *will* be given to him likewise, as many as those stars (Gen. 15:5). And Abraham made it through the hoop. His awareness of the word of Gen. 1:17, that God really had given us the stars, his faith in the word, worked within him to bring forth the yet greater leap of faith- that really, so would his seed be. And God was thrilled. That man, standing there in the Middle Eastern night and beholding the stars, touched the heart of God by his internal attitudes... the sense within his heart that yes, OK, yes, somehow, yes, so will my seed be, somehow I *will* have my own child... And it was counted to him for righteousness. The same desperate struggle for faith was seen

in the Lord in His final moments upon the cross- for He there reflected, according to Ps. 22:30, that a seed would indeed serve God, and it shall be accounted [s.w. "numbered" as in 'a seed which cannot be numbered'] for a generation. The childless Lord Jesus, with all against Him, facing His death with His lifework apparently a failure, His spiritual children [the disciples] having fled... was in the position of Abraham. And Abraham's faith surely inspired Him. And so it will each of us, when it seems that really life has failed, our efforts have got nowhere, family has broken up, children hate us, our best aspirations just never worked out... in those moments, in whatever form they come, we are to be inspired by Abraham. And we too can go out and view the stars which God has given, and keeps on giving, and believe again that ultimately He will give us the land, and in some form our seed will eternally endure.

Moses was bidding the people see their connection with their father Abraham, who then lived with Canaanites also in the same land. Gen. 15:1 introduces us to Abraham as a man who had God as his "shield"; and Dt. 33:29 concludes the Pentateuch by saying that Israel as a nation should be happy because *they* have Yahweh as their "shield". See on Gen. 13:3; Gen. 17:1.

15:3 *Abram said, Behold, to me you have given no seed: and, behold, one born in my house is my heir-* Abraham's faith in the promises is repeatedly held up as our example (Heb. 11:8,12,13 and elsewhere). Abraham "believed in the Lord, and he counted it to him for righteousness" (Gen. 15:6) is quoted three times in the New Testament. But how *deep* was Abraham's faith? Immediately before Abraham's oft quoted profession of faith, he had said: "Lord God, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless... behold, to me thou hast given no seed, and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir" (Gen. 15:2,3 AV). His faith in

the promise of a seed was surely shaky at this time. Did he not have something of our Christian hypocrisy? Yet, sandwiched in between these two expressions of his partial faith, Abraham rises within his heart to a level of faith which so pleased God. "He believed in the Lord" seems to refer to an attitude deep within Abraham's heart, as he gazed up at the stars and reflected in God's promise: "So shall your seed be". God saw that, even if it was only a temporary peak, and was pleased with it; even though at the time, Abraham was weak in faith and even in a sense "ungodly", as Paul observes.

It may be that Abraham realized his own spiritual weakness at this time, if we follow Paul's argument in Rom. 4:3,5: "If Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory...(but) Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness... to him (alluding to Abraham) that worketh not, but believeth (as did Abraham) on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith (like Abraham's) is counted for righteousness". Surely this suggests that Abraham felt *ungodly* at the time, unworthy of this great promise, recognizing he only had moments of faith, and yet he believed that although he was ungodly, God would justify him and give him the promise, and therefore he was counted as righteous and worthy of the promise. There is certainly the implication of some kind of forgiveness being granted Abraham at the time of his belief in Gen. 15:6; righteousness was imputed to him, which is tantamount to saying that his ungodliness was covered. In this context, Paul goes straight on to say that the same principles operated in the forgiveness of David for his sin with Bathsheba. It would actually appear that Paul is writing here, as he often does, with his eye on deconstructing popular Jewish views at the time. Their view of Abraham was that he was perfect, "Godly" in the extreme- and Paul's point is that actually he was not, he

was "ungodly", but counted righteous not by his acts but by his faith. For documentation of Jewish sources, see S.K. Stowers, *A Rereading Of Romans* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994); A.J.M. Wedderburn, *The Reasons For Romans* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988).

15:4 *Behold, the word of Yahweh came to him, saying, This man will not be your heir, but he who will come out of your own body will be your heir-* Abraham had been promised a son in Genesis 15; and yet there was no specific mention that this would be by Sarah. God had promised that "one born of your own bowels" would be his son (Gen. 15:4 AV). Yet according to Rom. 4:19, Abraham at that time did not consider the "deadness of Sarah's womb" to be a barrier. That indicates to me that he considered Sarah as his "own bowels". Note how in Semitic thought, Paul used the same idea when he asked Philemon to receive Onesiphorus as "mine own bowels" (Philemon 12). Another person could be considered "mine own bowels" if they were that close. When God promised Abraham that "of [his] own bowels" he would have a son, Abraham didn't selfishly think that this just meant that *he* would have a child. He considered his wife Sarah as his "own bowels", and so he assumed this meant that she would bear the child. In this we see a commendable unity of Abraham and Sarah; he thought of her as he thought of himself. In an age of polygamy and concubines, this was unusually wonderful. He could so easily have just gone off and slept with a woman to test out God's promise and have a child. And yet, as often in Abraham's life, he didn't maintain that level of spirituality. For he gave in to Sarah's badgering him to sleep with her slave girl Hagar, and the whole incident has been recorded with allusion to Adam wrongly hearkening to his wife. It has been pointed out that in case of a wife being infertile, the man

usually took another wife and didn't just sleep with his slave girl. See on Gen. 16:2.

Progressive appreciation of the Lord Jesus can be seen in the lives of Paul, Peter and many others. Abraham's appreciation of the promises relating to the Christ-seed also grew over time. When the promise was first given, he seems to have assumed it referred to his adopted son, Lot. Thus Abraham offered Lot the land which had been promised to Abraham's seed (Gen. 12:7 cp. chapter 13). But after Lot returned to Sodom, Abraham looked to his servant Eliezer as his heir / seed (Gen. 15:2,3). Thus God corrected him, in pointing out that the seed would be from Abraham's own body (15:4). And so Abraham thought of Ishmael, who was a son from his own body (although Yahweh didn't specify who the mother would be). When Abraham's body became dead, i.e. impotent, he must have surely concluded that Ishmael was the son promised. But again, Abraham was told that no, Ishmael was not to be the seed; and finally God told Abraham that Sarah would have a child. Their faith was encouraged by the incidents in Egypt which occurred straight after this, whereby Abraham prayed for Abimelech's wives and slaves so that they might have children- and he was heard. Finally, Isaac was born. It was clear that this was to be the seed. But that wasn't all. Abraham in his final and finest spiritual maturity came to the understanding that the seed was ultimately the Lord Jesus Christ. He died in wondrous appreciation of the Saviour seed and the way of forgiveness enabled through Him. Note the huge paradox in the promises- a paradox of grace which comes true in some form for all those who receive them.

15:5 *Yahweh brought him outside, and said-* It must have been an Angel that led Abraham out of his tent to a suitable spot and made those promises.

Look now toward the sky, and count the stars, if you are able to count them. He said to Abram, So shall your seed be- According to Jewish midrash, Abram and his father Terah were leading diviners of the stars in Ur (See M.E. Stone and T. Bergren, eds., *Biblical Figures Outside The Bible* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998) pp. 151-175 for references). 'Terah' can mean 'brother of the moon', and Ur and Haran were noted centers of moon worship (M.W. Chavalas, 'Terah' in T.D. Alexander and D.W. Baker, eds., *Dictionary Of The Old Testament: Pentateuch* (Leicester: IVP, 2003) p. 829; V.P. Hamilton, *The Book Of Genesis: Chapters 1-17* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990). In this case, the invitation to Abram to count the stars and discern there his future seed was a calling to reject his entire former world-view, to admit his helplessness in counting the stars, to throw himself upon God's grace rather than the strength of his own former education, wisdom, and inherited ability to discern the stars.

In Hebrew, to say something is multipled is to say that it is very great. Remember Paul's insistence in Gal. 3:16 that the "seed" here is singular, and refers to the Lord Jesus. He would be more numerous or multiplied than man could ever count. The same word is used in Ps. 71:15 where David says that he cannot tell / count up the greatness of God's salvation [which is Yahoshua, Jesus]; because it cannot be numbered. So the idea here and in Gen. 16:10 may not simply be that many people would become in the singular seed; but that that seed would be multiplied greater than man could ever comprehend.

15:6 *He believed in Yahweh-* When we read that Abraham "put his trust" in God (Gen. 15:6 Heb.) we are to understand that he 'said amen' to God's promises. "Amen" comes from the same Hebrew root as *he'min*, to believe, or, more strictly, "to affirm, recognize as valid". He got to a specific point where he

said "Amen" to God's word; and I wonder whether he said "Amen" out loud, as the crowning pinnacle of the belief in God which was going on within him. For this reason I suggest we say "Amen" at the end of a prayer, out loud. Maybe we need to reflect for a moment on what we have asked for from God, which promises of His we have pleaded in our prayer- and then 'Amen' it. We note that 'belief in Yahweh' is not mere theism, acceptance that 'there is a God'. Faith in God as defined here means faith that His promises of salvation to me- are true. They shall come true. Too often in the lives of believers, there is a failure to appreciate this basic definition of what 'belief in God' means. It does not simply mean acceptance of God's existence. It means belief that He will save. Which is why ultimately, there can be no real faith in God if we do not believe in Jehoshua, Yah's salvation, Jesus. In this sense "we through Him [Jesus] believe in God": "Who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God" (1 Pet. 1:21). Baptism is predicated upon such belief- not merely 'belief that there is a God'. Too often it happens that those who think they made a commitment of faith actually didn't fully do so- they were merely stating their belief in God's existence. Many people accept God's existence; but this is not the same as 'belief in Yahweh' as here defined.

Abraham's faith was clearly 'trust'. For that is what the original words for 'faith' really mean. "For what does the scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.' Now to one who works, wages are not reckoned as a gift but as something due. But to one who without works trusts him who justifies the ungodly, such faith is reckoned as righteousness. (Rom 4: 1-5)". Abraham had "no works" at this point. He trusted that somehow, it would happen. And in our age of reason and rationalism, trust is seen as

primitive and 'evidence' is always demanded. But faith means trust. It's as simple as that. We are like Mrs. Einstein, when asked if she understood her husband's [Albert Einstein's] theory of relativity: "Oh no. But I trust Bert ['Albert']".

Yet this peak of faith in Abraham is found between evidence of his weakness of faith. We've seen this in the early verses of Gen. 15. And now, having risen up to this peak of faith, we soon find him doubting again: "How shall I know that I shall inherit [the land]?" (Gen. 15:8). And again, this makes Abraham yet the more real to us, who likewise find it so hard to maintain peaks of faith. And yet Abraham's failure of faith in having Ishmael is evidence enough that his "faith" which is so focused upon in the NT was, in fact, incomplete and not total. Perhaps this is exactly why his 'faith', such as it was, is held up as our pattern. For our faith is likewise incomplete. Abraham is "father of the faithful" in that we have his kind of faith- and it was incomplete and wavered at times. James 2:22 recognizes that Abraham's faith at this point was immature because he quotes Gen. 15:6 and then says that this faith was perfected / matured by the 'work' of offering Isaac.

Abraham believed God in Gen. 15, but the works of Gen. 22 [offering Isaac] made that faith "perfect". Through his correct response to the early promises given him, Abraham was imputed "the righteousness of faith". But *on account of* that faith inspired by the earlier promises, he was given "the promises that he should be heir of the world" (Rom. 4:13). That promise in turn inspired yet more faith. In this same context, Paul had spoken of how the Gospel preached to Abraham in the promises leads men "from faith to faith", up the upward spiral (Rom. 1:17). James 2 is clear that when Abraham offered Isaac, "the scripture was fulfilled that says, 'Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness'". So Abraham's faith was connected with works. Those works flowed out from his belief at this point

in Gen. 15. A confession of faith / trust, e.g. at baptism, may take years to actually be tested in practice, and to be revealed in practice. But we shouldn't think that Abraham's justification with God was on account of his legalistic obedience. People like legalism, and want to keep laws, because that leads them to avoid personal relationship. We keep the taxation laws because we don't want a 'personal encounter' with a tax inspector, and likewise with road traffic laws. We are happier keeping "them" as a faceless, anonymous organization with whom we do not need to personally engage. And it can be the same spiritually. Personal encounter with God is all demanding. And people shy away from that behind the walls of legalistic obedience, just as Israel didn't actually want to see Yahweh on the mountain, but preferred Moses to go up to Him and return with some laws to keep. But in Abraham's case, and thereby our case, we enter the relationship first, by grace through faith, and are fully accepted by God at that point. And the obedience comes as a natural outflow from that relationship position.

The huge importance attached to faith in Gen. 15:6 would be pointless if obedience to the Law was what guaranteed the promise of inheritance the world- as Jewish theology taught about Abraham. The promise of the Kingdom would become irrelevant because Paul has demonstrated in Romans 1-3 that all men, Abraham included, are sinners, law breakers, and condemned before the judgment seat of God. Nobody would therefore inherit the promised Kingdom, and so the promise of it would have been pointless.

There is another option. It could be that in fact Abraham had not believed in Yahweh until this point. He had left Ur and Haran because of other influences upon him; he had allowed Lot to choose the better land because he didn't like family strife; he had gone up and down in Canaan because of circumstance and

not because of obedience to the command to do so; he had gone into Egypt in disbelief of the promises. And yet God worked through and with him, because He foresaw that now at this point, Abraham would believe. Rom. 4:5 interprets this incident as an example of how God justifies the "unGodly". "UnGodly" is how Abraham was viewed at this time. The argument in Romans 4 parallels Abraham at this point with David after his sin with Bathsheba, also being justified by grace through faith.

And He reckoned it to him for righteousness- The same word is used of how Rachel and Leah were "reckoned" strangers by their father, although they were in fact his daughters (Gen. 31:15). The idea is clearly that someone is counted as something they aren't. Likewise Lev. 7:18 uses the word of how a sacrifice, properly eaten and offered, was "reckoned" to the benefit of the sinner being atoned for. It may be that Abraham realized his own spiritual weakness at this time, if we follow Paul's argument in Rom. 4:3,5: "If Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory...(but) Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness...to him (alluding to Abraham) that worketh not, but believeth (as did Abraham) on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith (like Abraham's) is counted for righteousness" . Surely this suggests that Abraham felt *ungodly* at the time, unworthy of this great promise, and yet he believed that although he was ungodly, God would justify him and give him the promise, and therefore he was counted as righteous and worthy of the promise. There is certainly the implication of some kind of forgiveness being granted Abraham at the time of his belief in Gen. 15:6; righteousness was imputed to him, which is tantamount to saying that his ungodliness was covered. In this context, Paul goes straight on to say that the same principles operated in the forgiveness of David for his sin with Bathsheba.

Paul says in Rom. 4:23 that this was "not written for his sake alone". Where was it written? In some unrecorded Scripture? In God's heavenly record book? Or is the allusion to the finality of the legal case now concluded, that 'it was written' in the sense of legally concluded, under the hammer, so to speak? The suggestion is that right now in this life, if we really believe God's offered salvation, or perhaps, *for so long* as we believe it- we are written down as declared right before His judgment. In this case, Paul is interpreting the comment in Gen. 15:6 "And it was imputed unto him for righteousness" as a writing in Heaven, the court secretary writing down the outcome of the case. The Jews taught that justification would only be at the future day of judgment (see D. Moo *Romans* 1-8, Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary (Chicago: Moody, 1991) p. 293). Paul is teaching that in fact we can be justified, declared right with God, here and now; and we ought to be able to know and feel that.

Paul's whole 'Abraham' section in Romans 4 is written in the style of Rabbinic Midrash, with Gen. 15:6 as the verse being expounded. Paul's point is that Jewish and Gentile believers can trace themselves back to Abraham because the family likeness is in faith not circumcision. Jewish proselytes were forbidden to call Abraham "our father" (C.K. Barrett, *From First Adam to Last* (New York: Scribner's, 1962) p. 31).

There are some implied gaps within the record in Gen. 15:5,6: God brings Abraham outside, and asks him to number the stars [gap]; then He tells Abraham "So shall thy seed be" [gap]; and then, maybe 10 seconds or 10 hours afterwards, "Abraham believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness". Those 10 seconds or 10 hours or whatever the period was, are summarized by Paul as how Abraham "in hope believed against hope" (|Rom. 4:18). His no-hope struggled against his hope / faith, but in the end his faith in God's word

of promise won out. "According to that which had been spoken, So shall thy seed be" implies to me that he kept reflecting on those words: "So shall thy seed be" (three words in Hebrew, *ko zehrah hawya*). And we too can too easily say that we believe the Bible is God's word, without realizing that to just believe three inspired words can be enough to radically change our lives and lead us to eternity. I'm not sure that Abraham's ultimate belief of those three words *ko zehrah hawya* just took a few seconds. According to Paul, he "considered... his body"- he reflected on the fact he was impotent (see Gk. and RV). *Katanoeo*, "consider", means to "observe fully" (Rom. 4:19). He took full account of his impotent state, knowing it as only a man can know it about himself. And he likewise considered fully the deadness of his elderly wife's womb, recalling how her menstruation had stopped years ago... but all that deeply personal self-knowledge didn't weaken his faith; he didn't "waver", but in fact- the very opposite occurred. He "waxed strong through faith... being fully assured that what [God] had promised, He was able also to perform". As he considered his own physical weakness, and that of his wife, his faith "waxed" stronger (RV), he went through a process of becoming "fully assured", his faith was progressively built up ("waxed strong" is in the passive voice)... leading up to the moment of total faith that so thrilled the heart of God. And so it can happen with us- the very obstacles to faith, impotence in Abraham's case, are what actually leads to faith getting into that upward spiral that leads towards total certainty. Abraham's physical impotence did not make him "weak" [s.w. translated "impotent" in Jn. 5:3,7] in faith- it all worked out the opposite. For his physical impotence made him not-impotent in faith; the very height of the challenge led him to conclude that God would be true to His word, and he would indeed have a child. For when we are "weak" [s.w. "impotent"], then we are strong (2

Cor. 12:10). Thus the internal struggle of Abraham's mind led his faith to develop in those seconds or minutes or hours as he reflected upon the words "So shall your seed be". He "staggered not at the promise" (Rom. 4:20), he didn't separate himself away from (Gk.) those three Hebrew words translated "So shall your seed be", he didn't let his mind balk at them... and therefore and thereby he was made strong in faith ("waxed strong in faith" Rom. 4:20 RV). This process of his faith strengthening is picked up in the next verse: Abraham was "fully persuaded that what [God] had promised, he was able also to perform" (Rom. 4:21). There was a process of internal persuasion going on- leading to the moment of faith, which so thrilled God and was imputed to Abraham for righteousness. And of course Paul drives the point home- that we are to have the faith of Abraham. As he believed that life could come out of his dead body ("dead" in Rom. 4:19, with a passive participle, implies 'slain'), so *we* are to believe in the resurrection of the slain body of the Lord Jesus, and the real power of His new life to transform our dead lives (Rom. 4:23,24). Gal. 3:5,14 puts it another way in saying that if we share the faith of Abraham at that time, we will receive "the promise of the spirit through faith", the enlivening of our sterile lives. And this takes quite some faith for us to take seriously on board; for as Abraham carefully considered the impotence of his physical body, so we can get a grim picture of the deadness of our fleshly lives.

It was radical for Abraham to be told that God would impute righteousness to him. For in those times, righteousness was a concept associated with a person remaining within their existing communal relationships. Von Rad quotes contemporary documentation to this effect: "A man is called righteous who conducts himself properly with reference to an existing communal relationship... just [justified] is the man who stands

with his community" (Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis* (London: S.C.M., 1963) p. 180). The whole message to Abraham of justification by faith and imputed righteousness must be seen against this backdrop. The same radical call to break away from our surrounding society and its worldviews and concepts of righteousness is required by all who have received the same promises made to Abraham.

Abraham's weakness at the time of the Genesis 15 promises is perhaps behind how Paul interprets the star-gazing incident in Rom. 4:3-5. He is answering the Jewish idea that Abraham never sinned (see on Rom. 4:2). He quotes the incident, and God's counting of righteousness to Abraham, as proof that a man with no "works", nothing to glory before God with, can believe in God to "justify the ungodly", and thereby be counted righteous. Understanding Abraham's mood as revealed in Gen. 15:1-4 certainly helps us see the relevance of all this to Abraham. And it helps us see Abraham more realistically as the father of us all... and not some Sunday School hero, well beyond our realistic emulation. No longer need we think "Abraham? Oh, yeah, Abraham... faith... wow. But me... nah. I'm not Abraham...". He's for real, truly our example, a realistic hero whom we can cheer and pledge to follow. For Abraham is an example to us of God's grace to man, and a man in all his weakness and struggle with God accepting it and believing it, even when he is "*un*godly", rather than a picture of a white-faced placid saint with unswerving faith:

"What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, hath found according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not toward God. For what saith the scripture? And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned unto him for righteousness. Now to him that worketh, the reward is not reckoned as of grace, but as of debt. But to

him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is reckoned for righteousness" (Rom. 4:1-5).

It is in the very struggle for faith that we have that we show ourselves to have the family characteristic of Abraham. That moment when the "ungodly", doubting, bitter Abraham believed God's promise is to be as it were our icon, the picture we rise up to: "Even as Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned unto him for righteousness. Know therefore that they that are of faith, the same are sons of Abraham" (Gal. 3:6,7).

The struggle within Abraham at the time is brought out by Paul in Rom. 4:18-24, which seems to be a kind of psychological commentary upon the state of Abraham's mind as he stood there looking at the stars in the presence of God / an Angel ("before him [God] whom he believed", Rom. 4:17): "Who in hope believed against hope, to the end that he might become a father of many nations, according to that which had been spoken, So shall thy seed be. And without being weakened in faith he considered his own body now as good as dead (he being about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb; yet, looking unto the promise of God, he wavered not through unbelief, but waxed strong through faith, giving glory to God, and being fully assured that what he had promised, he was able also to perform. Wherefore also it was reckoned unto him for righteousness. Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was reckoned unto him; but for our sake also, unto whom it shall be reckoned, who believe on him that raised Jesus our Lord from the dead".

It may be that Abraham realized his own spiritual weakness at this time, if we follow Paul's argument in Rom. 4:3,5: "If Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory... (but) Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness... to him (alluding to Abraham) that worketh not,

but believeth (as did Abraham) on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith (like Abraham's) is counted for righteousness". Surely this suggests that Abraham felt *ungodly* at the time, unworthy of this great promise, recognizing he only had moments of faith, and yet he believed that although he was ungodly, God would justify him and give him the promise, and therefore he was counted as righteous and worthy of the promise. There is certainly the implication of some kind of forgiveness being granted Abraham at the time of his belief in Gen. 15:6; righteousness was imputed to him, which is tantamount to saying that his ungodliness was covered. In this context, Paul goes straight on to say that the same principles operated in the forgiveness of David for his sin with Bathsheba. It would actually appear that Paul is writing here, as he often does, with his eye on deconstructing popular Jewish views at the time. Their view of Abraham was that he was perfect, "Godly" in the extreme- and Paul's point is that actually he was not, he was "ungodly", but counted righteous not by his acts but by his faith.

15:7 *He said to him, I am Yahweh who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give you this land to inherit it-* As demonstrated in my notes on Gen. 11:31-12:4, Abram didn't respond very fully to the command to separate from his relatives and leave Ur. Gen. 11:31 is clear that his father took him out of Ur. Abram admits himself that it was God who caused him to wander from Ur (Gen. 20:13, see note there). Here again we see God's grace. Abram was called, but didn't want to respond, and God "brought" him out, almost making him obedient. The inheriting was to be in the Kingdom age, according to the New Testament; it was to be an eternal inheritance, requiring Abraham to be immortalized. Yet to receive that promise, Abram had to leave Ur and enter the land in his life. And so it is with us- we enter the

Kingdom in a limited sense in this life, and that is the guarantee that we shall receive the eternal inheritance.

15:8 *He said, Lord Yahweh, how will I know that I will inherit it?-* This is hardly the language of full faith. Without the New Testament commentary upon Abraham, we would not perhaps consider that Abraham displayed great faith in the majority of Divine interactions with him which are recorded in the Genesis record. The faith which was counted to him for righteousness was a weak faith, and as such, he becomes an example of faith which we can relate to.

15:9 *He said to him, Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon-* As noted on :10, the entire procedure here was contrary to how mutual covenants or religious sacrifices were made at the time. There was no priest or altar. These were not required- because this was a one-sided, unilateral covenant of grace from God directly to Abram, and it didn't require such instruments of mediation. The "three years old" feature may perhaps point forward to the Lord's three year ministry, as it was through His life and death that the new covenant [which is the promises to Abraham] was confirmed. The dove and pigeon were the offerings of the poor in later Mosaic legislation. Rich and poor, male and female, were all represented within the Lord's future sacrifice, which was clearly in the Father's mind at this point.

15:10 *He brought him all of these, and divided them in the middle, and laid each half opposite the other; but he didn't divide the birds-* The idea of the dead animals in the ceremony of Gen. 15 was to teach that 'So may I be dismembered and die if I fail to keep my promise'. Jer. 34:18 speaks of how Israelites must die, because they passed between the pieces of the dead animal sacrifices in making a covenant. But here in Gen. 15, it is none

less than the God who cannot die who is offering to do this, subjecting Himself to this potential curse! And He showed Himself for real in the death of His Son. That was His way of confirming the utter certainty of the promises to Abraham which are the basis of the new covenant which He has cut with us (Rom. 15:8; Gal. 3:17). The "blood of the covenant" doesn't mean that the blood of Jesus *is* or was the covenant; the covenant is a set of promises to us, namely the promises to Abraham and his seed. The blood of Jesus is the token of that covenant, the sign that this is all so utterly and totally true for each one of us. The Lord died, in the way that He did, to get through to us how true this all is- that God Almighty cut a sober, unilateral covenant with us personally, to give us the Kingdom. It's as challenging for us to believe as it was for Abraham and his earlier seed: "This divine-human bond gave to Israel its most distinctive religious belief, and provided the basis of its unique social interest and concern. Outside the Old Testament we have no clear evidence of a treaty between a god and his people". What the theologian calls a unique basis for "social interest and concern" we can re-phrase more bluntly: We simply can't be passive to such grace, we have no option but to reach out with grace to others in care and concern- and we have a unique motivation in doing this, which this unbelieving world can never equal. Yet if unbelievers can show the huge care and self-sacrifice which they do- we ought to be doing *far* more, seeing we have an infinitely stronger motivation.

15:11 *The birds of prey came down on the carcasses, and Abram drove them away-* These birds represented the pagan nations which Abram so feared would take vengeance upon him for his dramatic victory at Damascus described in chapter 14, which is the background to this covenant. Abram singlehandedly drove them away, one man made thousands flee

(see on Gen. 14:14). The Hebrew here implies that Abram alone drove them away.

15:12 *When the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram. Now terror and great darkness fell on him-* It's perhaps significant that Abraham laid out the required animals, and drove away the birds that kept trying to feed on the carcasses- but then, Abraham falls asleep, and can't do this any more. And the birds are warded off instead by the burning torch- the same Hebrew words are used about the cherubim (Ez. 1:13; Ex. 20:18), and the idea of a burning torch is used to describe the Lord Jesus on the cross (Jn. 3:14-19 Gk.). It's as if again Abraham had to be taught that all these promises and the covenant ensuring them were all of grace and not his own strength. For he would lay down in the sleep of death, the horror of great darkness, and it will be the grace and glory of God which fulfils the covenant and preserves Abraham's seed from the birds of prey- and not Abraham's own efforts.

The "horror" that Abram experiences is a lack of faith in Yahweh's opening encouragement to him, to "fear not" (:1). All the way through, we see his weak faith, and God's grace. It could even be that Abram here has a nightmare, in which all his faithless fears come true; the pendulum swings from faith (:6) to unbelief. But in that low swing, God makes a unilateral covenant of grace with him, just as many of the Kingdom prophecies were given to Israel at low points on their spiritual graph.

The Lord, it seems to me, *feared death more than any other man*. He knew that death was separation from God, the wages of sin. Different people have varying degrees of fear of death (e.g. the unrepentant thief was totally resigned to it). It would seem that the Lord had the highest conceivable level of unresignation to death, to the point of being almost paranoid about it- even though He knew He must die. Two prototypes of the Lord

had similar experiences. Abraham suffered "an horror of great darkness" (Gen. 15:12), in an event rich in reference to the crucifixion. And Job's sufferings were the very things which he "greatly feared" (Job 3:25). The Lord stood as a lamb dumb before His shearers; and the lamb is struck dumb with fear. This all makes the Lord's death *for us* so much the more awesome.

15:13 *He said to Abram, Know for sure that your seed will live as foreigners in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them-* The contrast was with Canaan, which was to be "their" land.

They will afflict them four hundred years- Ex. 12:40,41 says that they were in Egypt for 430 years. God is not as it were watching His back, always seeking to forestall possible criticism by petty men; the 400 figure is approximate. Or perhaps we have here an example of where a time period is amended; in this case, because Israel needed another 30 years to come towards the maturity God sought in them before the exodus. The period is described as four generations in :16, so perhaps a generation then was about 100 years.

15:14 *I will also judge that nation, whom they will serve. Afterward they will come out with great wealth-* Note how it was the Egyptian people who were judged (Gen. 15:14), but elsewhere we read that it was their gods which were judged; their idols ("gods") are used by metonymy to stand for those who believed in them. The "gods" are spoken of for a moment as real and existing, in order to show Yahweh's total superiority over them to the point that they didn't exist. Likewise "demons" is sometimes put by metonymy for those who believed in them (e.g. Mk. 2:32,34). The promise of material wealth was likewise a concession to the weakness of how Abram perceived things at that time.

15:15 *But you will go to your fathers in peace. You will be buried in a good old age-* His fathers were idolaters (Josh. 24:2),

so to 'go to your fathers' is simply an idiom meaning that as they returned to dust, so would Abram. But he would have the blessing of long life, seeing that the blessings had a primary application; but his long life was but a dim reflection of the eternal life promised to him. Our present experience of the Kingdom of God is likewise but a fraction of that which awaits us at the Lord's return.

15:16 *In the fourth generation they will come here again-* See on :13. A generation at the time was judged as 100 years.

For the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet full- God is not passive and overlooking of unrepented sin, even though His patience and the high threshold level He sets before releasing judgment may make it look like this. Even with very sinful men, their continual sins still register in the feelings of God. The way God progressively senses the weight of accumulated sin is reflected in His description of the Amorites' iniquity filling up; or Israel marrying Gentiles "to increase the trespass of Israel" (Ezra 10:10). God sees some wicked men as more wicked than others; for He is sensitive to every one of their sins (e.g. 2 Kings 17:2). "For three transgressions and for four" of Israel or the Gentiles, God would still punish Jew and Gentile alike (Am. 1,2)- i.e. He still feels the fourth sin, He doesn't become insensitive after the third sin. And this doesn't only apply to His people; but to all sin, committed by anyone, anywhere. Thus Herod "added yet this above all" when he imprisoned John after also sinning with another man's wife (Lk. 3:20). We have an uncanny ability to become numb to sin the more we see or do it. But not so Almighty, all righteous God. This is a feature of His nature that needs meditation. "The Lord hath sworn by the excellency of Jacob [i.e. Himself, so important is this], Surely I will never forget any of their works" (Am. 8:7). "They consider

not in their hearts that I remember all their wickedness" (Hos. 7:2). Sin is serious.

God's anger will come up in His face against this world (Joel 3:2,13,16; Ez. 38:18-22; 39:17,20); and the world will be angry with God and His people in an unsurpassed way. The nations will be angry, and the wrath of God also will rise (Rev. 11:18). When their iniquity has reached a certain level, then judgment will fall (cp. Sodom and the Amorites, Gen. 15:16).

Apostate Israel are described in the very language of the adversaries / Satans of God's people. Because they acted like the world around them, from which they had been called out, they were ultimately judged by God as part of that world. The Jews forbad or hindered the apostles from preaching to the Gentiles "to fill up their sins... for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost" (1 Thess. 2:16). This is quoting from the LXX of Gen. 15:16 about the Amorites.

15:17 *It came to pass that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold, a smoking furnace, and a flaming torch passed between these pieces-* The way God confirmed the covenant here was an example of grace. The covenant God made with Abraham was similar in style to covenants made between men at that time; and yet there was a glaring difference. Abraham was not required to do anything or take upon himself any obligations- only God passed between the pieces, not Abraham. Circumcision [cp. baptism] was to remember that this covenant of grace had been made. It isn't part of the covenant [thus we are under this same new, Abrahamic covenant, but don't require circumcision]. The promises to Abraham are pure, pure grace. Yahweh alone passed between the pieces of the animals, represented by the flaming torch- presumably in the form of an Angel as a pillar of fire. There's no record of Abraham being asked to pass through them as was usual custom. The promise of God was therefore

unilateral- pure grace. And yet by its very nature, such unilateral grace from God cannot be received passively. Although there was no specified response from Abraham, clearly enough he simply *had* to respond to such grace. It's been pointed out that Abraham was blessed by God, and yet the Hebrew form of the promise implies that he was commanded to therefore go forth and "be a blessing"- and his intercession for Lot and Sodom, his rescue of Lot in Gen. 14, were providentially arranged for him to practice that. A similar construction (an imperative verb string *hyh* + a noun) occurs in Gen. 17:1, "be blameless / perfect".

God's covenant commitment to us is amazing. Here, He made a one-sided commitment to Abraham. The idea of the dead animals in the ceremony was to teach that 'So may I be dismembered and die if I fail to keep my promise'. Jer. 34:18 speaks of how Israelites must die, because they passed between the pieces of the dead animal sacrifices in making a covenant. But here in Gen. 15, it is none less than the God who cannot die who is offering to do this, subjecting Himself to this potential curse! And He showed Himself for real in the death of His Son. That was His way of confirming the utter certainty of the promises to Abraham which are the basis of the new covenant which He has cut with us (Rom. 15:8; Gal. 3:17). Usually both parties passed between the dead animals- but only Yahweh does. It was a one-sided covenant from God to man, exemplifying His one-way grace. The Lord died, in the way that He did, to get through to us how true this all is- that God Almighty cut a sober, unilateral covenant with us personally, to give us the Kingdom. We simply can't be passive to such grace, we have no option but to reach out with grace to others in care and concern- and we have a unique motivation in doing this, which this unbelieving world can never equal. From one viewpoint, the only way we can not be saved is to wilfully refuse to participate in this covenant.

According to the research of E.A. Speiser, it was the *weaker* of the two contracting parties that passed between the dead animals, in order to show that they wished to die as those animals had done if they broke the covenant (E.A. Speiser, *Genesis* [The Anchor Bible] (New York: Doubleday, 1964), p. 112). By entering into covenant relationship, God was allowing Himself to be weak; although He cannot die by nature, He was willing to envisage Himself dying, such was His desire to demonstrate to us [for we too have had the Abrahamic promise made to us] how sure and certain His covenant is.

15:18 *In that day Yahweh made a covenant with Abram, saying, To your seed I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates-* The northern and southern borders are never clearly defined, perhaps because the extent of inheritance was to some extent open. The more they believed and responded, the more they would inherit. And it's the same with us.

15:19 *The Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites-* The ten tribes listed here in 15:19-21 as possessing the *eretz* may connect with the ten horns of the beasts of Daniel and Revelation, the ten latter day invading nations of Ps. 83 and Ez. 38, and the ten toes of the image of Daniel 2. All these speak of a latter day confederacy dominating the *eretz*, which is to be overcome by God's true Israel and their Messiah.

15:20 *The Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim-* The rephaim or giants were the ones which Israel feared the most. But they are listed here as just one of a number of equally powerless tribes.

15:21 *The Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites-* "The Canaanites" indicates that the ten tribes presented as inhabiting the *eretz* promised to Abram were in areas other than Canaan. Canaan was only part of the *eretz* promised, and we can conclude that if Israel had possessed Canaan, they would

have been empowered to possess the entire area. God's scale of operation is therefore on a sliding scale, controlled, as it were, by our vision, faith and obedience.

GENESIS CHAPTER 16

16:1 *Now Sarai, Abram's wife, bore him no children. She had a handmaid, an Egyptian, whose name was Hagar-* Perhaps given to her whilst in Egypt, one of the "female servants" of Gen. 12:16, where Abram had wrongfully denied his marriage to Sarah. Hagar likely didn't have too high an impression of Abram because of that.

We note that Hagar was from Egypt. In Gen. 12, Abram had chosen Egypt over the promises of God, and had gone down there and acted faithlessly. But in Gen. 13 he refuses Sodom, which appeared fertile "like the land of Egypt" (Gen. 13:10), believing instead that the promise of all the land would come true for him at some future point. But now he slips back, again, to trust in the fertility of Egypt, or in this case, an Egyptian. The barrenness of Canaan during famine therefore matches the barrenness of Sarai. But trusting Egypt was not the answer. We see the growth of Abraham's faith; from a very faultering faith in Gen. 11 and 12, to the peak of faith in being willing to offer Isaac in Gen. 22. And yet the growth in faith was no smooth upward curve. For in seeking fulfilment of the promise of the seed through Hagar *the Egyptian* , Abraham was again going back to Egypt rather than trusting in the fulfilment of the promises to him in due course. Our trust in the world and secular strength likewise goes up and down as our faith grows. It's a jagged graph. We can well speculate that Hagar was given to Abram by the Pharaoh during the shameful incident in Gen. 12. For the note is made that Abram was given "female servants" by Pharaoh, and he took those gifts with him when he left Egypt (Gen. 12:16). So the point is made that if Abram had not gone down into Egypt, he would not have acquired Hagar, and this particular source of temptation would have been absent. Any

concession to the flesh makes obedience harder in the longer term.

16:2 *Sarai said to Abram, See now, Yahweh has restrained me from bearing. Please go in to my handmaid. It may be that I will obtain children by her-* A recurrent weakness of the patriarchs is their attempts to as it were force God's hand when it came to which of their children should continue with the covenant blessings. As Abraham used his handmaid to try to produce the promised seed, so Jacob, Rachel and Leah did. God had told Abraham clearly that the covenant would continue through Isaac rather than Ishmael, and that circumcision was the sign of that covenant; and yet Abraham remonstrates with God: "Oh that Ishmael might live before you!" (Gen. 17:18), employing the idea of 'living before God' in a covenantal sense. When God again repeats His purpose with Isaac, Abraham goes and circumcises Ishmael, as if he was to still participate in the covenant God wished to continue through Isaac (Gen. 17:23). The fact that Abraham's circumcision of Ishmael is specifically recorded highlights his insistence on trying to make God's promises fulfil as *he* would like them to. Isaac did the same, insistent upon giving the covenant blessing to Esau rather than Jacob; Jacob likewise did something similar when he tried to reverse the blessing upon Ephraim and Manasseh (Gen. 48:18).

The 300 or so Nuzi tablets record history, legal codes and case history of situations contemporary with Abraham; and the comment has been made that deciding to sleep with your wife's slave girl was almost unheard of. So it seems to me that Abraham again gave in, in a moment of weakness; but didn't take another wife, because he really clung on to his faith that he would have a child by Sarah. The whole incident with Abraham and Hagar seems to me to reflect weakness in both Abraham and Sarah. Neither of them ever refer to her by her name, but rather by

her title, "handmaid", as if she were just an object. Yet God and the inspired narrator refer to her by her name, Hagar, as if recognizing the value of her person in a way that Abraham and Sarah didn't. It seems to me that Israel's later experience re-lived that of Hagar- flight into the wilderness of Sinai, miraculously provided with water, found and preserved by an Angel. God heard the cry of Israel's affliction at the hands of the Egyptians, just as He heard the cry of the mother and child whom Sarah had afflicted. This deliberate coincidence was perhaps to make Israel realize on a national scale how wrongly their forefather had treated Hagar- and it has some relevance to modern Israel's treatment of the Arabs. For Israel suffer and will yet suffer what they have put Hagar's descendants through.

Abram listened to the voice of Sarai- "Through faith even Sarah herself received strength to conceive seed" (Heb. 11:11 RV). At this time she apparently lacked that faith. "Even Sarah herself" is clearly making a point, holding up a flashing light over this particular example. There is every reason to think, from the Genesis record, that Sarah not only lacked faith in the promises, but also had a bitter, unspiritual mind. The account alludes back to Eve's beguiling of Adam when it records how "Abram listened to the voice of Sarai" in acquiescing to her plan to give her a seed through Abram sleeping with his slave girl. The whole thing between Sarah and Abraham seems wrong on at least two counts: firstly it reflects a lack of faith in the promise; and secondly it flouts God's ideal standards of marriage. Sarai seems to have recognized the error when she bitterly comments to Abram: "My wrong be upon you" (16:5). Her comment that "the Lord has restrained me from bearing" would suggest that she thought she hadn't been chosen to bear the promised seed. Yet because of her faith, says Heb. 11:11, she received strength to

bear that seed. Although it could be there that it is Abram's faith that is in view.

The theme of Abraham's weakness encountered in chapter 15 continues over into chapter 16- where Sarah asks Abraham to sleep with her servant girl in order to have a child. Why did Sarah ask Abraham to do this, at this stage in their lives? Why not earlier? Surely the promise of a seed had restimulated her pain regarding her barren state. Yet Abraham had previously worked through with the Lord the possibility of Eliezer, one born in his household, being the promised seed. And God had clarified that no, Abraham's own child would be the heir. It's as if Sarah could believe that Abraham's impotence could be cured, but not her barrenness. I can only take this incident- and the less than honourable treatment of Hagar afterwards- to be another trough in Abraham's faith graph. It's been pointed out that all historical and cultural evidence from the time points to Abraham's action as being most unusual. In the case of a barren wife, the man chose himself a second wife. It's almost unheard of in contemporary records for a man to have his wife chose him a woman to have a child by- let alone for it to be one of her slave girls. This historical background provides a window into Abraham's faithful commitment to Sarah- for it's significant that he's not recorded as taking another wife. Instead, his fine faith and character slips up in a moment of weakness by giving in to Sarah for a moment.

16:3 *Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her handmaid, after Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, and gave her to Abram her husband to be his wife-* The idea may be that Hagar was not a casually chosen woman. The ten year period may have begun after the family re-entered Canaan from Egypt, where Hagar was presumably added to the household. Sarai had not previously suggested Abram sleep with her. The

receipt of the promises about the seed in chapter 15 would have restimulated Sarai's awareness that she was barren, and so she came up with this idea. The whole story, as ever in Biblical history, is so psychologically credible that it adds yet another strand of internal evidence in the momentous proposition that the Bible is indeed the inspired word of God.

We note that 'becoming his wife' meant 'having and raising a child together', which is and has been effectively the practical definition of marriage in many cultures. The legalistic obsession with on paper documentation is something which was popular in the Western world in the 20th century, but isn't and hasn't had the same meaning for most of the world's population over time. See on :8.

16:4 *He went in to Hagar, and she conceived. When she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her eyes-* This again is psychologically credible; see on :3. Clearly God was working through the plan, because it is statistically unlikely that a woman conceives after one act of intercourse. The idea seems to be that she conceived immediately. God had a purpose with Ishmael and his descendants. Although what Sarai suggested was wrong, and Abram was wrong to obey her voice, God still worked through it by granting immediate conception. And we too experience His unending activity with us; and we likewise are to continue trying with others. The Hebrew for "despise" is often translated "curse". It was far more than rolling her eyes. It was the ancient superstition that a woman was barren because she was cursed by God.

16:5 *Sarai said to Abram, This wrong is your fault-* This could mean that the cursing of Sarai by Hagar was Abram's fault for obeying Sarai's suggestion. This is psychologically credible. Or it could be that Sarai is accusing Abram of impotence (supported by Rom. 4:19 "his own body now dead"), and on that basis

blaming Abram for the whole saga. This passing of blame, including blaming others for doing what we have told them to do, is absolutely imaginable and has the hallmark of psychological veracity.

The "wrong" in view is *hamas*, violence; this is the extent of the persecution Sarai claimed from Hagar. The Hebrew word *hamas* [basically meaning 'physical violence arising from wicked plans'] is quite common in Scripture, and the usages speak of how God is provoked by *hamas* to bring judgment upon the enemies of His people (Gen. 6:11-13; Mic. 6:12; Zeph. 1:9) and also to intervene in order to save His people (Ps. 18:49; Ps. 72:14). How amazingly appropriate that an organization actually called *hamas* has arisen in these last days to do violence to Israel! If Biblical history means anything to us, clearly enough God's intervention in appropriate judgment and salvation cannot be far off. Hagar's persecution of Sarah- typical of the Arab-Jew conflict- is described here as her *hamas*.

I gave my handmaid into your bosom, and when she saw that she had conceived, I was despised in her eyes. Yahweh judge between me and you- Once again, this is so true to psychological reality. It's a classic case of transference, transferring our sins and the guilt for them onto others. It's why people condemn others for the very things they themselves do. The church leader who harangues a member for adultery may well do so because he himself is having an affair. It is beyond hypocrisy; it's transference of guilt onto another and vicariously punishing personal guilt by punishing another for that same thing. Or it can be that someone falsely accuses another person of the very thing they are themselves doing, and then seeks to punish them for it. This again is transference, and Sarai blaming Abram in this matter is just a classic example. She wants Yahweh to judge him,

transferring her guilt and subconscious recognition of the need for judgment onto him.

16:6 *But Abram said to Sarai, Behold, your maid is in your hand. Do to her whatever is good in your eyes-* As noted on :5, Sarai had transferred her guilt onto Abram. But Abram is wisely asking her to take it back and deal with it.

Sarai dealt harshly with her, and she fled from her face- Hagar was so persecuted by Sarah that she "fled from her face". "Harshly" translates the same Hebrew word, *hamas*, that has just been used of how Egypt would abuse the Israelites in hard bondage (Gen. 15:13; Ex. 1:11,12), and it is elsewhere used about rape and torture. Such behaviour, condoned and allowed by Abram, would warrant a prison sentence in our days. God's attitude to Hagar seems to reflect a certain amount of sympathy for the harsh way in which Sarah had dealt with her. These years of bitterness and lack of faith came to the surface when Sarah overheard the Angel assuring Abraham that Sarah really would have a son. She mockingly laughed at the promise, deep within herself (Gen. 18:15). Yet according to Heb. 11:11, she rallied her faith and believed. But as soon as Isaac was born, her bitterness flew to the surface again when she was Ishmael mocking. In what can only be described as unrestrained anger, she ordered Hagar and Ishmael out into the scorching desert, to a certain death (humanly speaking). Again, one can sense the sympathy of God for Hagar at this time. And so wedged in between incidents which belied a deep bitterness, lack of faith and pride (after Isaac was born), the Spirit in Heb. 11:11 discerns her faith; on account of which, Heb. 11:12 implies ("therefore"), the whole purpose of God in Christ could go forward.

The law of Moses often seems to allude back to the weaknesses of the patriarchs. Lev. 19:34 warns about mistreating the *hagger* living amongst God's people- the stranger, refugee,

foreigner. This is a related word to 'Hagar'- it has the same consonants. Clearly the message to Israel was to not treat foreigners as Sarah had treated Hagar. Again we see Sarah presented in a very negative light. She comes over as wanting Abraham to have the child Ishmael for herself, and then blames Abraham for the domestic tensions that arise. Hagar is brought to Abraham by Sarah; and the record clearly presents Hagar as being used by Sarah and Abraham as if she were not a person but a thing. And yet Hagar is repeatedly described as 'seeing' things. "She saw that she had conceived... her mistress was despised in her eyes...". And she 'sees' the Angel in the wilderness. She has eyes to perceive that she has looked upon God with her eyes and lived, God has seen her as she saw Him. She was not a thing, but a perceptive person with eyes and feelings. Sarah is portrayed as the abusive slaveowner.

Abraham and Sarah doubt God's promise of a seed, and so Sarah pushes Abraham to have an affair with Hagar her servant. When Hagar gets (understandably) full of womanly pride at her conception, Sarah persecutes her and drives her out to certain death in the wilderness. True believers aren't good or nice people! God seems to take Hagar's side, He hears her affliction, He looks upon her, and makes a covenant with her (Gen. 16). Hagar believes God's promise to her, and praises Him for it. Sarah laughs at God's promise to her as being a joke (Gen. 18:12-15). And even worse, when she is reprimanded for doing this, she flatly denies she ever laughed.

I labour these weaknesses of Sarah because she is all the same set up as the mother of the faithful. But her faith was not in that she was a stellar example of spirituality. Rather that she as a weak, not very nice, bitter person- kept in with God's program for her and was used. In fact there is no particular example of her faith in the record. Abraham offered Isaac and believed the

promises, but there is no corresponding account for Sarah. So her faith was in that she in her heart kept with God despite this surface level indifference, and despite serious misbehaviour. She is another example of someone with whom God almost forced through His purpose.

16:7 *The angel of Yahweh found her by a fountain of water in the wilderness, by the fountain in the way to Shur-* See on :13. The same word translated "harsh" concerning Sarai's abuse of Hagar (:6) is later used in the Pentateuch of how in the case of such "harsh" domestic abuse, God would hear the cry of the abused (Ex. 22:22,23), just as He did with Hagar both now and at the later incident (Gen. 21:16,17). God comes over as very much on Hagar's side, and paints Sarai as a domestic abuser whose husband fully allowed her to behave in this way.

What Sarah did was wrong. Because it is descibed in terms of what Egypt did to Israel later. A Hebrew here oppresses an Egyptian, so that she flees into the wilderness"on the way to Shur"- the route from Egypt to Canaan. And Hagar finds grace in the wilderness, as did Israel. Israel also went into the wilderness of Shur and needed water (Ex. 15:22 "Then Moses ordered Israel to set out from the Red Sea, and they went into the wilderness of Shur. They went three days in the wilderness and found no water"), and they too are described as having been found by God, through an Angel, in the same wilderness (Dt. 32:10; Hos. 9:10); Israel too found grace in the wilderness (Jer. 31:2). The parallels indicate that God had a purpose with Hagar and Ishmael, and He blesses Ishmael in terms which are clearly based upon the blessing of Abraham's seed. The message is perhaps that anyone who is the seed of Abraham, despite their Gentile connections and broken relationship with the Hebrews, can still inherit the Abrahamic blessing. There is not simply Divine fondness for those who would later become the Arab

peoples; it indicated even in Old Testament times that although Israel were His chosen people [by grace alone], He was even then open to working with others. And the similarities with Israel also being "found" in the same wilderness were to demonstrate that Israel had been chosen by grace alone, and were not at all superior to Hagar's seed. The allegory of Gal. 4:25 presents Israel after the flesh as Ishmael, as if to cement the point being made; that natural Israel were not in fact any better than Ishmael.

16:8 *He said, Hagar, Sarai's handmaid-* Hagar is repeatedly seen as Sarai's maid ("my maid", :5, "your maid", :6), rather than Abram's wife. And yet as noted on :3, she was also seen on another level as Abram's wife. It was an anomalous situation, just as many marital situations today are. But God's sympathy is with her and He works through that situation, rather than turning away from it. God addresses Hagar by name. This is about the only example in the Bible, and indeed [so it has been observed] in all the contemporary literature, where any God directly addresses a woman by name. We get the strong impression that God feels sorry for Hagar and takes her side, recognizing she is indeed a 'hagar', a foreigner, a stranger. This in turn highlights His grace towards Sarah. He is the God who is gracious towards both the abused *and also the abuser*. In our age, the abuser is shown no grace at all.

Where did you come from? Where are you going? She said, I am fleeing from the face of my mistress Sarai- The questions begged the answers: 'From Egypt, and back to Egypt', for she was apparently making for the southern highway back home. Hagar doesn't engage with those questions at the time; she only saw the present reality. But perhaps God is suggesting to her that He has a higher purpose for her than merely being an Egyptian servant girl who was to return there. He wanted to make her, some random slave girl from Egypt, used as a pawn in a game...

into something very special. It's just His way, His grace, His sensitivity to the little ones. Whether or not she will be saved isn't the issue; God was still sensitive to the loser and the abused.

16:9 *The angel of Yahweh said to her, Return to your mistress, and submit yourself under her hands-* "Submit" translates the same Hebrew word translated "harshly" in :6. Hagar was asked to submit to the abuse, just as the same word is used of the harsh bondage and abuse which God required Israel to be subject to in Egypt (s.w. Gen. 15:13). Revolt and exodus from abuse is not always God's immediate plan. But He didn't want her to return to Egypt, and fade away into Egyptian society as an anonymous single mother; He wanted to make of her seed a great nation; see on :8. This is His way, His grace. But just as Israel had to be afflicted in Egypt for this to happen, so Hagar had to be afflicted by Sarai. But she was to understand that God had given her the power of choice- her submission was to be of her choice, not because of Sarah's power over her. Had she refused that, she would not have received the promises to Abraham repeated to her (:10). And the promise to Ishmael went on to say that through submission to Sarah, there would come freedom for Ishmael. He would break free from the oppressive Sarah, and become a strong nation independent of her. This was God's way of bringing the oppressed, nobody of a refugee, fleeing, single mother, pregnant slave girl- to power and freedom. She perceived the wonder of all this when she marvels that 'You God, see [pay attention] to *me*'. But the path lay through submission in faith and hope. It seems Hagar and Ishmael didn't really choose to continue covenant relationship with Yahweh, because they failed to control their anger with Sarah and her line through Isaac. That anger consumed them, and obscured their relationship with the God of Abraham. This so often happens with the abused. Their understandable anger with their abusers

stunts their spiritual development. And the fact their abusers have some relationship with God is hard for them to accept. To the point many refuse any relationship with the same God. They fail to separate God from His people.

16:10 *The angel of Yahweh said to her, I will greatly multiply your seed, that they will not be numbered for multitude-* The same language as the promises to Abraham which were only later given in Gen. 22:17. This promise wasn't given immediately to Abram perhaps because God wanted to humble him and Sarai with the thought that the slave girl Hagar was to have a mighty seed. Maybe once they were humbled to accept that, the similar promise was given to their seed.

16:11 *The angel of Yahweh said to her, Behold, you are with child, and will bear a son. You shall call his name Ishmael, because Yahweh has heard your affliction-* Ishmael means 'Whom El hears'. God was open to Hagar and Ishmael, He heard and saw them- He was open to relationship even with those not in the chosen seed. God tells Hagar that He "heard thy affliction" (Gen. 16:11 AV; LXX "humiliation"), as if her situation and cry of desperation was received by Him as a prayer. The fact the Lord is mediating our prayers before the Father's throne ought to influence us as to what type of people we are. For who we are, not only our prayers, is reflected before Him in Christ. Our lives are in that sense our prayers. It was usual for the father to name the child, but Hagar, the abused, sexually used slave girl names her child. And Abraham goes along with it- Abram named the child Ishmael (:15). So Hagar is sent back into the abusive situation with an elevated status, with God's word behind her.

16:12 *He will be like a wild donkey among men. His hand will be against every man, and every man's hand against him-* Jeremiah describes wayward Israel as a wild ass (Jer. 2:24), perhaps inviting comparison with Ishmael, the wild ass man (Gen. 16:12). I have

elsewhere given many other Biblical examples of how God's apostate people are described in terms of those who are *not* God's people. And Gal. 4:25 is clear that the natural seed of Israel were paralleled in God's mind with Ishmael, which is why the promises of material blessing were spoken to both seeds in the same terms (Gen. 22:17; Gen. 16:10).

He will live opposite all of his brothers- Literally, 'to the east of', which would mean that Israel's warring half brothers would be located exactly where they are today, to the east of Palestine.

16:13 *She called the name of Yahweh who spoke to her, You, God, see me, for she said, Have I even stayed alive after seeing Him?-* The Hebrew word for "fountain" in :7 is literally "eye", and is the same word translated "eyes" in :5. It was as if that fountain of water was really God's eye, and Hagar perceives that by saying that God saw her, as if that fountain of water was God's eye.

The Hebrew language reflects certain realities about the nature of God's ways. The common Hebrew word for 'to see', especially when used about God's 'seeing', means also 'to provide'. Abraham comforted Isaac that "God will see for himself [AV 'provide'] the lamb" (Gen. 22:8 RVmg.); and thus the RVmg. interprets 'Jehovah Jireh' as meaning 'the Lord will see, or provide' (Gen. 22:14). The same word is used when Saul asks his servants to "provide" him a man (1 Sam. 16:17). When Hagar said "Thou God seest me" (Gen. 16:13) she was expressing her gratitude for His *provision* for her. What this means in practice is that the fact God sees and knows all things means that He can and will therefore and thereby provide for us in the circumstances of life; for He sees and knows all things.

There is reason to think that Abraham was humble enough to learn from Hagar's observation, that God had seen her and she had seen Him. For at the pinnacle of his faith when he offered Isaac, he in turn names the place 'Yahweh Yireh', Yahweh

has seen / will see, and will provide. The idea is identical to that spoken by Hagar, that God had seen / provided for her, and she had seen God. And we note that Isaac himself chose to settle at Hagar's well, 'the well of the living one who sees me' (Gen. 24:62 "the well Lahairoi"; Gen. 25:11). In all this we see a tacit recognition that they had learnt something from Hagar, the slavegirl whom the family had used and abused.

16:14 *Therefore the well was called Beer Lahai Roi. Behold, it is between Kadesh and Bered-* "It is" again indicates that Moses was writing primarily for the wilderness generation, who would have 'beheld' that well on their journeys.

16:15 *Hagar bore a son for Abram. Abram called the name of his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael-* The language twice stresses that "Hagar bore", and yet the son was Abram's. There was to be no question that this child was in a sense the legitimate son of Abram. As noted on :11, Ishmael means 'Whom El hears'. God was open to Hagar and Ishmael, He heard and saw them- He was open to relationship even with those not in the chosen seed. The fact Abram named the child was a statement that he considered the child his very own. That was standard procedure in the society of those days. This is the extent to which he went to try to find a surrogate, secular form of fulfilling God's promises. God has set eternity in the human heart, but man seeks to fulfil it in ways which are secular and pathetic, compared to the real thing. Which is His absolute gift of the real thing, in this case, a child by his legitimate wife Sarah.

16:16 *Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram-* According to Rom. 4:19, Abram's body was "dead", he was impotent, by the time of the promise of Isaac 13 year later. And yet Gen. 25 lists other sons of Abram, by Keturah and other concubines. Perhaps he had slept with other slave girls before that; or maybe the failure with Hagar led him to fail

likewise with other such women, in a desperate attempt to force through God's promised purpose on Abram's own terms and in his own strength. Just as one case of taking a lower level leads us so easily into others.

GENESIS CHAPTER 17

17:1 *When Abram was ninety-nine years old, Yahweh appeared to Abram, and said to him, I am God Almighty-* The Hebrew word *shaddai* (Almighty) is often linked in the Pentateuch with the idea of fruitfulness and provision of good things (Gen. 17:1; 28:3; 35:11; 43:14; 49:25). The Hebrew root *shad* is the word for 'breast'. The references in Genesis speak of the Almighty making the promises; elsewhere we see that the promises were made by the Angels. Thus the Angels were perceived as providers of all good things, which would explain why the book of Job so frequently uses 'shaddai' as the word for God; and why one of the purposes of the book is to correct the wrong idea of *shaddai* as a giver of only good things, perhaps through the desire to contrast the true God with other contemporary fertility gods who were thought to provide all good things.

The promises to Abraham promised "blessing", and this is interpretted in the New Testament as the blessing of forgiveness of sins and salvation. The Divine title "El Shaddai", God Almighty, is often associated with the blessings promised to Abraham and his seed (Gen. 17:1; 28:3; 35:11; 48:3; 49:25). But a case can be made that "shaddai" is related to the Egyptian and other Semitic verb *shadi* , to save, or as a noun, *shady*, Saviour (1). It has been observed that the Egyptians and other Semites connected their personal name to that of their god by this idea of *shad-* [name of god]-*shad*-[personal name], i.e., 'God so and so saves me' (2). El Shaddai, God the Saviour, is revealed as such through the promises of spiritual blessing, i.e. salvation, which were made to the fathers.

Walk before me, and be blameless- It could be that :1,2 are an appeal to Abraham to dedicate himself more fully to God, an to accept that He is indeed "almighty". The last we have heard

of Abraham is 13 years previously, when Ishmael was born as a result of Abraham's lack of faith in the fulfilment of the Divine promises (Gen. 16:16). Perhaps he backslid during those years. The idea of walking before God is understood by Abraham in :18 as meaning being in covenant relationship. We enter that covenant by baptism now, or in those days, by circumcision. But to abide in the covenant meant living in daily life as if in God's presence, before Him, in the light of His face.

Mt. 5:48 alludes here: "Be perfect...". But the command "Be perfect" (AV) can be translated "Be perfected" (Gen. 17:1). There's some support for this when we consider the inspired commentary upon the promises to Abraham in Heb. 11:39,40: "[He] received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be perfected". "The promise" and being "perfected" are thus paralleled. In this we may have in Gen. 17:1 another promise to Abraham- to 'be perfected', and this could only come true through God's perfect righteousness being imputed to him. The New Testament informs us quite simply that Abraham believed the promise of being in the Kingdom, and he was therefore 'justified', or counted righteous (Gen. 15:6). But God led him in appreciating what those promises really implied. If he was going to live eternally in God's Kingdom, then he would only be there because God counted him righteous. And so it seems to me that God developed Abraham's mind further by promising him in Gen. 17:1 that he would indeed "be perfected", which could only have come about through God imputing righteousness to him. It could be that when Abraham "believed" the promise of the Kingdom in Gen. 15:6, he didn't realize that in Heaven, God was so thrilled with his faith that He counted Abraham as righteous, in order to fulfill the promise of giving him eternal life. And then in Gen. 17:1, God communicated this to Abraham in the

promise that He would 'perfect' him. And God patiently works with us likewise, as we struggle to really, really believe that we will live eternally in His Kingdom; and as we progressively realize throughout life that this can only be possible by the Lord's perfection being counted to us.

The Hebrew certainly reads as if Abraham had to be "perfect" and walk before God, and then, God would make a covenant with him and multiply him. Abraham falls to his face; and then God announces that actually, He will make the covenant anyway, and the promises which are part of that covenant, Abraham should consider as having been fulfilled already, they were so certain of fulfilment. The promises to Abram in Gen. 12:1,2 were conditional upon his obedience- he would receive the new land and family if he separated from his natural family and land. But he was induced to do even this by God. So grace truly abounded. Likewise in Gen. 17:1,2 "Walk before Me and be blameless *so that I may establish My covenant* between Me and you and increase you greatly". Abram was not "blameless"; he was only *counted* righteous because of his faith. So the condition was set, but even the condition was not totally met by Abram unaided. And the covenant of Gen. 15 was without even these conditions. Although Abram did have faith, as Heb. 11 states, it was clearly weak and God imputed a lot of righteousness on the basis of a very small faith.

As Abraham was commanded to "be perfect", so Israel were told: "*You* [after the pattern of father Abraham] shall be perfect with the Lord" (Dt. 19:13). Moses' books were helping the wilderness generation to see where they were coming from historically. Abraham was to be their personal example, as he is for the new Israel. See on Gen. 13:3.

17:2 *I will make my covenant between me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly-* What began as promises from God to

Abram now become a covenant between God and Abraham. Abraham perceived the wonder of it all- that the God of the cosmos should chose to make a covenant with him personally, as in Gen. 15. Nothing specifically is asked of Abraham apart from, axiomatically, believing it. He was to walk before God (:1), in His presence, and allow himself to be perfected (see on :1), to keep in the Divine program and not resign from it.

17:3 *Abram fell on his face. God talked with him, saying-* The Hebrew translated "fell on his face" is exactly the same as that translated "his countenance fell" in Gen. 4:5,6 (see too Job 29:24). Another reading of this incident could therefore be that Abraham's face fell on hearing that the covenant would be conditional upon his walking perfectly- but then God made the covenant anyway with him, and therefore in verse 17 he falls on his face and laughs with joy. This, perhaps, is the more likely, realistic reading; and it also avoids the problem of Abraham falling to his face twice with no record of him standing up again.

17:4 *As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you. You will be the father of a multitude of nations-* Consider the wording: "Behold, my covenant *is* [present tense- right now, i.e. Abraham didn't have to prove himself "perfect"] with thee, and you shall be [future] a father of many nations... your name shall be Abraham, for a father of many nations *have I made thee*" (Gen. 17:4,5 AV). The Abrahamic promises, which we too have received, are a reflection of unconditional love and grace on God's part, just as we observed in Gen. 15. At the end of all the Divine announcements, we read that Abraham again falls on his face and laughs for joy (Gen. 17:17).

Perhaps by Angelic invitation (as with Daniel), Abraham had stood up from the floor to hear God's promises from the mouth of the Angel- and now he collapses again. The sheer *wonder* of God's grace in these promises is simply *so* great. What

is conditional upon our walking 'perfectly' has been given to us anyway, by grace- for righteousness has been imputed to us as it was to Abraham. As a side comment, it seems to me that surprised laughter occurs when we encounter a difference between the expected, and an unexpected reality that takes us pleasantly by surprise. That observation would indicate Abraham's seeing by faith the reality of what God had promised; and yet it would also suggest that prior to this, Abraham was not really expecting God to completely fulfil the implication of the promises.

17:5 *Neither will your name any more be called Abram, but your name will be Abraham-* Abram means 'high / exalted father', and can mean "he is of exalted i.e. good ancestry". Yet Abram's name was changed. He had been commanded to break with his family when he was first called, and as we noted on Gen. 11:31-12:4, he didn't do that. He left Ur not in obedience to the calling to leave Ur and his family, but rather because his father took Abram with him. He likewise didn't separate from Lot until God arranged circumstances which meant that Lot separated from *him*. Now the Divine program went further, in changing Abram's name, away from the exaltation of his own father. He was to grow up, at 99 years old, to come of age, to no longer be living out parental expectation. He was to be the father of a new family, as 'Abraham' implied, and to sever all connection with his human ancestry and family. The way 'Abram' was changed to 'AbraHAm' and 'Sarah' to 'SarAH' shows how God wishes to mix syllables of His Name with that of men. Jacob was changed to Isra-el, mixing God's name with that of his father. This is indeed mutuality between God and man- and it demands so much. No longer was Abram all about exalting his own father; he was himself to be a father. We too as Abraham's children pass through this sense of redefinition; we are new creations, no

longer just defined by our place in a line of genetics or ancestors, but making a radically new start, producing spiritual children who in that sense shall continue the line which we begin by the sowing of the Gospel seed.

It has been pointed out that Abram or Abiram was one of the most common names in the near East- it was common in Babylon as Abirami, and in Egypt as Abu-reheni or Abram (J.B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (Oxford: O.U.P., 1950) p. 242, p. 329 note 9). Into this very common name- as normal and common as the names we bear in our societies- was added the Name of Yahweh. Abram became Abraham. The central letter of Yahweh's Name became the central letter of Abraham's. But Abram means 'my father is exalted', or more strictly as W.F. Albright suggests 'I am exalted with regard to / because of my father'. To jettison this name was to trash all Abraham and his culture held so dear- definition in terms of their father, where they came from. The call of the Lord Jesus in our age is in essence no different- to reject father and mother and instead follow Him, to be His. Not in the sense of hating them, but in being new persons, carved out as a totally new family. The 'h' in the middle of Yahweh's Name was now inserted into the middle of Abraham's name; Abram became Abraham, father of a multitude, a new family. Some miserable philological critics have claimed that 'h' was an unknown sound in the near East of Abraham's time (Angel Gonzales, *Abraham: Father of Believers* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967) p. 26). And maybe they're right, in which case 'h' would've been a new sound. It would be rather like importing the single Russian letter pronounced 'shch' into the English alphabet. The answer to the question 'What's your name?' would've been arresting and challenging to Abraham's contemporaries: 'Abraham' would've sounded strange and new to them. There will be something

equally challenging and arresting to the world surrounding Abraham's seed as people come to know our name, to perceive who we really are.

By doing this, forcing Abram to move away from his father, God was again coaxing Abraham to fulfil the preconditions which God has set for fulfilling His promises of a seed. Abraham was asked to leave his homeland to receive another, eternal land; and to break with his natural family to receive another seed, far more glorious. But like Abraham's natural seed, the Jews, Abraham was more interested in the promise of the land than in the promise of a seed. Jewish theology has a lot to say about the land being 'theirs'; but little interest in the promises of the seed. And strong resistance to any idea that it refers to the Lord Jesus. Abram was called alone. And asked to quit with his natural family. But he didn't. It was his father who took Abram with him to leave Ur; and only when his father died in Haran, did Abram leave Haran and go to Canaan. And he didn't separate from Lot his nephew- until Lot separated from him. He didn't change his name of his own accord. 'My father is exalted' was how he still chose to be known, until God changed that name. And God only speaks of "Abraham" afterwards, whereas in the change of Jacob to "Israel", we find both "Jacob" and "Israel" are used later. It could be argued that he ought to have split from his half sister Sarai; but he didn't. Her barreness went with the territory of trying to get your half sister pregnant. God's later extensions of the covenant were all specifically to Abraham- and not to Sarah. Abraham's behaviour with Hagar reflects a lack of faith in the promise of the seed. And in seeking a wife for Isaac, Abraham wants Isaac to *not* return to the land beyond Euphrates. Abraham wants Isaac to cash in on God's land promise. But he desperately wants Isaac to marry into his own natural family who were in that land of his origin. It is pointless

to try to argue that Abraham was seeking a spiritual seed for his son from amongst the people of God. Abram's family were idolaters- this is clearly stated in Josh. 24:2,14,15: "Your fathers lived of old time beyond the River, even Terah the father of Abraham, and the father of Nahor: and they served other gods... Put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve Yahweh... choose this day whom you will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell". Laban and his daughters were idolaters, as the record makes clear. Laban was clearly not a spiritual man. But Abraham was eager that his son married into that family. Clearly not for spiritual reasons, but as a means of somehow retaining his connection with his family of origin- whom God had called him to separate from. But God tried to break Abraham away from them by changing his name- in order to fulfil His wonderful promises about the seed.

For I have made you the father of a multitude of nations- The promise was that Abram would become one great nation (Gen. 12:2). The plural here could therefore simply be an intensive plural, meaning 'one great nation'. Paul notes the past tense, the "prophetic perfect" in Hebrew, and comments that God speaks of things which are not as if they are, so certain is His word of fulfilment (Rom. 4:17). This is why there is a sense in which we are already saved, the now but not yet.

Although Abram is promised to become "a great [singular] nation" in Gen. 12:2, but here he was also promised to become a father of many [plural] nations, and his name was changed to Abraham in reflection of this (Gen. 17:5). The vision was indeed of 'one nation under God' which would unite the nations. The Abraham history is introduced by an account of the nations, who just before his time were "divided" (Gen. 10:25) and

"confused" even further at Babel. Part of the blessing promised to Abraham was that through his seed, and through God's purpose with Him, the divided peoples of the earth would be reunited into one, great nation.

It has been observed that the name "Abraham" was unused by anyone until after the time of Christ; although 'Abram' was a very common name, according to the inscriptions. People wished to be the father of their own personal nation; but the idea of being a father of many nations was unknown. The desire to unite all nations within one nation was known only on the basis of domination and subjugation. The message of the promises to Abraham was radically and uniquely different. It was not about one man having a personal dynasty; it was about the creation of new nations united in one man, Abraham's seed.

17:6 *I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of you. Kings will come out of you-* The extreme fruitfulness contrasts with Sarai's barreness and Abram's impotence; just as the promises of the Kingdom are in such contrast to our present experience. So far, not many literal kings of nations came from Abraham- just kings of Israel and perhaps some Edomite kings. This stands out very clearly to the thoughtful reader. Who, then, are the kings? The conclusion is that the entire seed shall be kings. And this will come true in the Kingdom of God on earth when we shall be kings and reign on earth (Rev. 5:10).

Blessings of many children, a specific seed / son who would bring glory and blessing, and a name change... are all frequently found in records of wedding blessings (Claus Westermann, "Promises to the Patriarchs," in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. Keith Crinn et al. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1976), p. 692). In making those promises to Abraham, in mixing the letters of His Name with that of Abram... Yahweh was entering

a marriage covenant with Abraham the impotent, the childless, the humanly hopeless. And He does the very same for each of us who are baptized into that same Name and become recipients of the very same promises. What was weird and *so* counter-instinctive in this wedding- was the token of the marriage covenant. Abraham was to mutilate his male generative organ as a sign that God would generate him a great seed and family. Academics are divided as to whether such circumcision was in fact a common practice at the time [in which case it would fail to be a very unique token], or whether this was actually a radical and unusually intimate and shocking requirement from God (This is the view documented by J.G. Janzen, *Abraham And All The Families Of The Earth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993) pp. 50,51). The unique nature of God's covenant with Abraham, that he *alone* had God known of all families of the earth, suggests to me that the latter view is likely to be correct. And remember time and again, that these same promises, this same covenant, is made to us in Christ (Gal. 3:27-29). Our response to what God has promised us requires us to likewise respond in a counter-cultural and counter-instinctive way. To give up this world in order to gain it, to lose now in order to win ultimately and eternally.

17:7 *I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your seed after you throughout their generations-* There is the sustained implication that the personal relationship between Jesus and each of His followers is totally personal and unique. The Abrahamic covenant is made personally with every member of the seed "in their generations" (Gen. 17:7). The records of the renewing of the covenant to Isaac and Jacob are but indicators that this is the experience of each one of the seed. This means that the covenant love of God and the promise of personal inheritance of the land is made personally, and confirmed by the

shedding of Christ's blood, to each of us. Paul appreciated this when he spoke of how the Son of God had loved him and died for him personally, even though that act of death was performed for many others (Gal. 2:20).

For an everlasting covenant, to be a God to you and to your seed after you- God promised Abraham that through Christ, His seed, blessing would come on people from all nations, with the result that God would be the God of Abraham's multitudinous seed: "To be a God unto... thy seed... I will be their God" (Gen. 17:7,8 AV). The seed is Christ, and the "God" is Yahweh. Let's not confuse them. In Revelation 21:3 this fundamental promise is alluded to; God Himself will be our God then; we will see Him and have a personal relationship with Him. This would mean that this idea of personally being with God is a fundamental part of the Gospel preached to Abraham.

"A covenant is of force over dead [victims or sacrifices]... it is never held to be of force while he who is the appointed [sacrifice] is alive" (Heb. 10:17 Bullinger). Over that dead body of the Lord Jesus, the personal covenant to each of us (Gen. 17:7) came into real, living operation.

Paul spoke of how those who join themselves with unbelievers (and marriage must surely have been in his mind) had to retract or repent of that relationship, and *then* God would receive them and *be their God* (2 Cor. 6:14-17). He was referring back to the Abrahamic promise of Gen. 17:7, that God would be the God of Abraham's seed. Is not the suggestion that those who unrepentantly make covenant with the world have broken their covenant with God?

17:8 *I will give to you, and to your seed after you, the land in which you are travelling, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession. I will be their God-* God promised Abraham that through Christ, His seed, blessing would come on people from

all nations, with the result that God would be the God of Abraham's multitudinous seed. The seed is Christ, and the "God" is Yahweh. Let's not confuse them. In Rev. 21:3 this fundamental promise is alluded to; God Himself will be our God then; we will see Him and have a personal relationship with Him. This would mean that this idea of personally being with God is a fundamental part of the Gospel preached to Abraham.

David could praise God simply because He was "my God" (Ps. 118:28)- an allusion back to the Abrahamic promise. Of course, the *main* fulfillment of this promise will be in the Kingdom; but in principle, the promise has *already* been fulfilled to Abraham's seed- i.e., us! *This earth on which we live is ours!* We are rulers of all we survey. All things *are* ours (1 Cor. 3:21). We are just strangers here, waiting for the call to rise up and take what *is now* ours. This is fundamental. We are brainwashed by capitalist materialism to think that we must work our hearts out to achieve *ownership* of things and land now; so we can put a fence round it and say it's ours, buy a security system or rent a guard to make sure it stays ours, buy insurance to make sure no 'act of God' will take it from us... all this is quite contrary to the most essential teaching of the promises to Abraham. Personal 'ownership' of property and possessions may well be something which is inescapable for us; but let's never forget that actually all things are ours, and we buy these things with the same feeling Abraham must have had when he had to buy *part of his own land* in which to bury his wife. It was *his* land, but he hadn't at that time received it. And so with us, with the whole world and all that is in it.

The most oft repeated feature of the promises to Abraham can for that very reason be easily overlooked. Notice how the personal pronouns are the key words: "I will establish *my* covenant...between *me* and *you* and *your* descendants... to be

your God... I will be *their* God" (Gen. 17:6-8). God Almighty is committing Himself to Abraham and Abraham's seed in a way so insistent and so awesome that only contemplation of it can elicit the true sense of wonder which we ought to have at being in covenant relationship with God Almighty. The fact that the basis of our relationship with God is an eternal covenant means that we do not drift in and out of fellowship with God according to our awareness of Him. We are His people. Every hour of every day.

"I will be their God" doesn't only speak of God's unique personal relationship with each of the seed. It also reflects God's self resolve ["I *will be*"] and determination to almost force through His purpose with the seed; as we see demonstrated in how He did this with Abraham.

The definitions of the promised territory vary. The *eretz* promised was originally the land between the Nile and Euphrates; but the northern and southern borders were never well defined. Now, it is specifically Canaan, a small part of that territory. The tribal allotments found in Joshua are also not precisely Canaan but somewhat more in some areas, and they do not extend to the Nile nor Euphrates. The tribal cantons as described in the later chapters of Ezekiel are also hard to specifically define. And Rom. 4:13 says that God promised Abraham "the world". The exact material definition of our future inheritance is therefore not so important, the essence is the promised blessing of forgiveness (Acts 3:25,26) and relationship with God, now and for ever. It could of course be that God amended His descriptions and definitions of the promised land in accordance with what He thought His people at the time could realistically rise up to and relate to. And we must consider what this may imply for us.

17:9 *God said to Abraham, As for you, you will keep My covenant, you and your seed after you throughout their generations-* The eternity of God's covenant was on account of the fact that He foresaw generations of individuals wishing to enter the covenant and accept it. This is why we will often meet in future Biblical history the idea of the covenant being renewed with individuals. God gave the covenant, but men choose to "keep" it, or, as Israel often did, to break it; or, as Ishmael did, to just reject it as unimportant to them.

"You will keep my covenant" was a prediction rather than a command, in line with the words we shall soon read in Gen. 18:19 AV: "For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment". And likewise when in 17:21 we read that "My covenant will I establish with Isaac"; this was a prediction, rather than a statement that He would establish the covenant with Isaac rather than with Ishmael (see note there).

17:10 *This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between Me and you and your seed after you-* "The blood of the covenant" in later Judaism came to refer to the blood of circumcision and it could be that the Lord was seeking to draw a comparison between circumcision and the breaking of bread; for the token of the new covenant is to take the cup of the covenant. For this is how His words would have sounded in the ears of His initial hearers (See A.J.B. Higgins, *The Lord's Supper In The New Testament* (London: S.C.M., 1952) p. 33). This is how vital and defining it is to partake of it. These very words were used by the Lord in introducing the emblems of the breaking of bread (Mk. 14:24). This is how important it is. We are showing that we are the covenant, special Israel of God amidst a Gentile world.

Every male among you shall be circumcised- As explained on :12, we are missing the point if we consider that only males could

be circumcised and thereby be in covenant. The fact women could be in covenant without circumcision was glaringly obvious- and it highlighted the point, that circumcision of itself was nothing, it was what it represented which was so critical. Paul makes this point in Romans 2- circumcision is nothing of itself, it was what it represented which was and is critical to covenant relationship with God, namely, the cutting off of "the flesh" and a transformed mind. This is why the circumcised Israelites were asked to circumcise their hearts (Dt. 30:6; Jer. 4:4). The surrounding tribes practiced various cuttings of the flesh, on both male and female, to identify themselves. God's people were different; there was to be a highly intimate and deeply personal cutting on the males, hidden from the view of anyone else. The question 'And what about the women?' was purposefully built into this. The physical sign of circumcision did not publically define membership of God's people, because it was so concealed. The conclusion was therefore that literal circumcision was not the sign of identity; it was a circumcised heart which was the sign. And so the New Testament likewise insists that if we have not the spirit of Christ, the mind of the Spirit, the possession of the Spirit and God's operation upon our hearts- then we too are not part of His people. Spiritual mindedness, the presence of the Spirit in our hearts, is therefore the crucial defining feature of God's people. And this at times cuts across the boundaries caused by differing interpretations of this or that passage of scripture, or issues of theology. To cite this verse as evidence that God or His word is somehow anti-women is to miss His subtlety. God is not so primitive.

17:11 *You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin. It will be a token of the covenant between Me and you-* Col. 2:12 presents baptism as the equivalent in our day if we wish to enter the new covenant, which is based upon the same promises to

Abraham. But there is more to new covenant relationship than simply the ritual of baptism. Circumcision spoke of a cutting off of the flesh in the most private and intimate place. We always read of circumcision as being done to a person. Water baptism enables us to receive the birth of the Spirit, whereby the Lord will work through the Spirit to change our hearts, to cut off our flesh in the most private and personal recesses of human hearts.

17:12 *He who is eight days old will be circumcised among you, every male throughout your generations, he who is born in the house, or bought with money from any foreigner who is not of your seed-* Cuttings of the flesh as a sign of tribal affiliation were common amongst the surrounding tribes, as they are to this day in less developed tribal areas of the world. The signs are always public and immediately evident- you can tell instantly that a person belongs to this or that tribe by a cut in the ear or nose or cheek, or the removal of certain teeth, or the painting of a certain symbol on a visible part of the body. But circumcision was not at all outwardly evident. It was not mere tribalism; it taught that God's demands were upon the most private part of human life. Women also could be in covenant, and they must have wondered what was required for them. They would've quickly figured that lack of physical cutting was not to say they weren't in covenant, and that therefore, the real token of the covenant was not circumcision in itself, but what circumcision represented- the cutting off of the flesh in our most personal areas.

17:13 *He who is born in your house, and he who is bought with your money, must be circumcised. My covenant will be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant-* Circumcision was the token of covenant relationship (:11), just as baptism is today. And yet just as there were household baptisms in Acts, when the head of the household decided to enter the same new covenant, so here it appears that there was no volition exercised by those who

received circumcision. This at first blush strikes us as strange. Perhaps the idea of "must be circumcised" was that Abraham's family life was to be based around covenant relationship with God, and those who didn't want to participate would have to leave the household.

We wonder why circumcision was chosen. Perhaps the idea was that the identification sign of God's people was going to be invisible, known only by the circumcised male and his wife. We likewise are externally indistinguishable from secular society; it is our circumcision of the heart which indicates everything to God. And it was a sign at the most intimate point on a man's body. Possibly the idea also was that God's covenant was to be reflected more than anything in sexual matters and intimate behaviour. Passages like Lev. 18 stress the need for Israel to have radically different sexual behaviour from that of the surrounding world. Those passages taught that this area of life was to be controlled by covenant relationship with Yahweh; and circumcision was the sign of that covenant.

17:14 *The uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that soul shall be cut off from his people. He has broken My covenant-* Col. 2:11 speaks of circumcision as another type of baptism, in that only the circumcised were in covenant with God. We either "cut off" the flesh, or God will cut us off. "The uncircumcised [un-cut off] man... shall be cut off". He who would not accept Jesus as Messiah in Messiah were to be "destroyed from among the people" (Acts 3:25), using a very similar phrase to the LXX of Gen. 17:14, where the uncircumcised man was to be "cut off from his people". Circumcision was the entry point of covenant relationship with God. The record of these Old Testament occurrences also brings out the converse- what happened to all those who were not in covenant with God, who had not received the typical 'baptism'.

The unbaptized Egyptians were "cut off" (Ex. 9:15); "all flesh" that was not baptized into the Christ-ark was "cut off" (Gen. 9:15). The New Testament matches this by the oft repeated teaching that outside of Christ, there can be no salvation. The language is very similar to that of the punishment for those who refused to keep Passover, or did so with leavened bread (Ex. 12:15). Positively, the only ones to be cut off are those who wilfully refuse to accept and proclaim their covenant relationship with God in Christ. We can limit God's plans to save others in the ecclesia by our attitude to them. We can make others stumble from the path to His salvation. If parents didn't circumcise their children, then they made their sons break covenant with God- they made others excluded from the covenant by their decisions and laziness.

17:15 *God said to Abraham, As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but her name will be Sarah-* As with "Abraham", the middle letter of the YHWH Name became part of her name. We are baptized into the Name, by which we accept our part in the Abrahamic promises. And thereby in spiritual terms and in heaven's book, the Name is mixed with our name. Our name, as that of Sarai, is not obliterated beneath the dominance of 'God manifestation'. We as persons shall be saved; but with God's Name and ways intimately linked to our own. We are to be given a unique name for eternity (Rev. 2:17), it's not that we simply bear the Lord's Name and we thereby are subsumed beneath it into some kind of nirvana.

It could be argued that the command to Abram to leave his family was disobeyed by his continued relationship with his half sister, Sarai. Likewise he refused to break with Lot his nephew, until God's hand removed Lot from him. And yet despite this disobedience regarding Sarai, God as it were made a concession

to him. And worked her too into His purpose. Despite Abraham suffering so much because of being married to her.

17:16 *I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her. Yes, I will bless her, and she will be a mother of nations. Kings of peoples will come from her-* This same promise is repeated concerning Hagar and her son Ishmael (:20). There was to be no reason for jealousy between Hagar and Sarah. But potentially at least, the son of the slave girl was being put on the same level as the son of the free. The paradox is, as Paul brings out in Gal. 4:24,25, that the physical descendants of Sarah ended up in the same category as those of Hagar, in that they refused the new covenant promises to Abraham.

The promise that kings of peoples would be in Sarah's line never really came true on the level of natural descent. For Israel never had an empire, nor did they rule over Gentiles. The total lack of fulfilment encourages us to see that the promise came true but in a spiritual sense, in that those in Christ, the seed, shall be king-priests reigning on earth (Rev. 5:10), some over five cities and others over two (Lk. 19:19).

17:17 *Then Abraham fell on his face, and laughed, and said in his heart, A child shall be born to him who is one hundred years old! Sarah, who is ninety years old, shall give birth!-* Jn. 8:56 says that "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it, and was glad". The only time Abraham is recorded to have laughed and been glad was when he was given the promise that he would have a seed; he understood that ultimately that promise had reference to Jesus (Gen. 17:17). Abraham "saw" ahead to Christ through the promises made to him concerning Jesus. He cryptically commented about the future sacrifice of Jesus: "In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen" (Gen. 22:14). It was in this sense that Jesus speaks of Abraham as having seen him. It is in this context of speaking about the promises that

Jesus could say "Before Abraham was, I am". He appreciated that God's promises to Abraham were revealing the plan about Jesus which God had known from the beginning of the world. That purpose, which had been "before Abraham was", had been revealed to Abraham in the promises to him, and was now being fulfilled in the eyes of the Jews of the first century, as they stood in a ring around Jesus, "the word (of promise) made flesh".

But this view apparently runs into difficulty in the next verse, where Abraham asks God to work through Ishmael and not to as it were both to make Sarah pregnant with Isaac. I am therefore inclined to see this as the Lord in Jn. 8:56 putting a very positive take on a very negative attitude of Abraham. The New Testament does the same with Sarah's mocking comment "... my lord [Abraham] being old also". The positive is focused upon- she called her husband her "lord", and this is held up in the New Testament as a laudable example. Quite simply, God is very eager to read Abraham and Sarah positively. For He counted Abraham righteous because of the bit of faith he did have. And we ought to take away that same positive spirit in how we view God's stumbling people. God is quite clear that the covenant would be through Ishmael and not Isaac; and that circumcision was to be the sign of that covenant. And having heard that, Abraham goes and circumcises Ishmael. As if to try to force God to all the same extend His covenant through Ishmael. This is a quite startling refusal to humble himself before God's intended promise of the seed through Isaac. And it is likewise the "seed" aspect of the promise, rather than the "land" aspect, which is so hard to accept for Abraham's seed. "The things of the Kingdom" are often so emphasized to the exclusion or de-emphasis of the things of the Lord Jesus and His cross. We think of the terrible passage in John Thomas' diary of a train journey across America where he shared a carriage with a pastor who wished to enthuse about the cross

of Christ, and John Thomas dismisses this as 'rubbish' compared to his own emphasis upon "the politics of the Kingdom of God". The New Testament unambiguously places the emphasis upon the things of the Lord Jesus, rather than upon those of a physical, political Kingdom of God.

17:18 *Abraham said to God, Oh that Ishmael might live before you!*- As Abraham used his handmaid to try to produce the promised seed (Gen. 16:2), so Jacob, Rachel and Leah did. God had told Abraham clearly that the covenant would continue through Isaac rather than Ishmael, and that circumcision was the sign of that covenant; and yet Abraham remonstrates with God: "Oh that Ishmael might live before you!", employing the idea of 'living before God' in a covenantal sense. That is how God has just used the term, in asking Abraham to walk or live daily life before Him (:1). When God again repeats His purpose with Isaac, Abraham goes and circumcises Ishmael, as if he was to still participate in the covenant God wished to continue through Isaac (Gen. 17:23). The fact that Abraham's circumcision of Ishmael is specifically recorded highlights his insistence on trying to make God's promises fulfil as *he* would like them to. Isaac did the same, insistent upon giving the covenant blessing to Esau rather than Jacob; Jacob likewise did something similar when he tried to reverse the blessing upon Ephraim and Manasseh (Gen. 48:18).

As noted on :5, Abraham believed in the land promise, and was enthusiastic for it, far more than he was for the "seed" promise. He was willing to see it fulfilled through Ishmael. Anything, it seems, to avoid having to have faith that 90 year old Sarah would conceive. And yet, as Romans 4 says, he had faith. Although unbelief can coexist with faith. But the fact he had faith was focused upon and accepted by God. Just as with

Lot and so many others in our experience; an undoubted germ of faith is present, despite a general lack of faith otherwise.

But we can read this another way. Abraham didn't want there to arise a situation whereby Isaac was the chosen covenant seed, and Ishmael was not. And God, ever so sensitive to human prayer and feeling, agreed to modify His plan accordingly. Ishmael was circumcised, receiving the token of the covenant, and thus lived before God, i.e. in covenant relationship with Him. He was given the same promises as Isaac, and from him also arose a great nation based around his 12 sons. The difference was simply that Ishmael chose not to abide within the covenant, and therefore it happened that God's covenant was established with Isaac, because Ishmael didn't want it. And Isaac's natural seed didn't want the new covenant, which was and is based upon the promises made to him.

17:19 *God said, No, but Sarah, your wife, will bear you a son. You shall call his name Isaac. I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant for his seed after him-* The insertion of "No" is most unfortunate. There is no corresponding word in the Hebrew. And as explained on :19,20 and :21, God heard Abraham's request, and did give Ishmael the covenant; he was circumcised, the token of the covenant, and received the same promises. The covenant would be established with Isaac (see on :21) because Isaac was open to that relationship; it was made with Ishmael but not established with him because he was closed to it and wished to go his own way.

17:20 *As for Ishmael, I have heard you. Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly. He will become the father of twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation-* The blessings upon Ishmael were exactly those upon Isaac, and he too was to become a great nation of 12 tribes, just as Jacob did. As explained on :21 and

elsewhere, Ishmael could have remained within the covenant; for he was circumcised into it, and God heard Abraham's request that Ishmael might live "before God", in His covenant presence (:18). But he chose not to remain in the covenant, and became a nation with the material blessings, but without the spiritual blessing. And thus he became as Israel after the flesh, who were just the same as the seed of Ishmael (Gal. 4:24,25).

17:21 *But My covenant I establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you at this set time next year-* This is a prediction of how things were to develop, rather than an arbitrary decision by God against Ishmael and for Isaac. See on :9, where God makes a similar prediction about Abraham. It is not that fate and predestiny are somehow against the seed of Ishmael. Any individual could and can enter the new covenant, based upon the Abrahamic promises. That God's covenant was established with Isaac doesn't mean that it would not be established with Ishmael; the fact Ishmael was circumcised, receiving the token of the covenant, is proof enough. But Isaac was open to the further establishment of the covenant with him and his seed, whereas Ishmael was not. Ishmael was given the same promises as Isaac. It is emphasized that circumcision was the sign of the covenant- and Ishmael was circumcised. But Ishmael chose not to remain within that covenant, and became representative of Israel after the flesh (Gal. 4:24), who likewise refused the new covenant, based as it was on the Abrahamic promises. We have to choose to accept the establishment of covenant relationship with us, and Ishmael's seed didn't do so. The covenant is established with individuals who believe it and therefore it is established afresh with each believer (Lev. 26:9; Dt. 8:18). It was not as if God's establishment of a covenant with Isaac meant that all his descendants were automatically within it. We have many examples of where this didn't happen- thus his own grandson

Esau was presumably circumcised, but chose not to remain within the covenant, and his descendants were not within the covenant people. And Israel, Isaac's seed, broke the covenant bond (Dt. 31:16). Being in covenant with God, for those in Abraham's seed, was as simple as it is today- a willingness to say "Yes" to it, and to demonstrate the token of the covenant- which in our time is baptism, and possibly the taking of the cup of the covenant in the breaking of bread. I say "possibly" because now is not so particularly the age of ritual, but of faith in the heart.

17:22 *When He finished talking with him, God went up from Abraham-* 'Went up' matches 'coming down', which is an idiom for a Divine manifestation. It could simply mean that the manifestation ended; although it could describe a literal ascent of the Angel to heaven, as experienced by Samson's parents.

17:23 *Abraham took Ishmael his son, all who were born in his house, and all who were bought with his money; every male among the men of Abraham's house, and circumcised the flesh of their foreskin in the same day, as God had said to him-* The way Abraham personally circumcised all the males, having done so to himself, indicates his desire for intimate connection with them all. It was a delicate operation, requiring the men to trust Abraham, and to be revealed before him completely. This is a profound statement about the closeness of fellowship which arises between those who are all in covenant relationship. We wonder whether the men voluntarily submitted to circumcision, or whether they simply followed the pack, or did so at the insistence of Abraham as head of the household. The equivalent of circumcision under the new covenant is baptism, and we likewise have the same questions when we read of household baptisms in the New Testament.

17:24 *Abraham was ninety-nine years old, when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin-* He was impotent at the

time (Rom. 4:19), so this would have been perceived as a cutting off of that wherein he already had no hope. This is how God works- He brings us to a position whereby we cannot rely upon the flesh, but must throw ourselves completely upon faith in Him.

17:25 *Ishmael, his son, was thirteen years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin-* Circumcision was the sign of the covenant- and it is emphasized that Ishmael was circumcised. He therefore had the opportunity of covenant relationship with God, and was given almost identical promises to those given to Isaac. Perhaps we are to perceive that God's saving purpose could have flanged out to cover both lines, through Ishmael and Isaac; but Ishmael chose not to go further with it. Such potentials are often to be found in the Divine plan, but are so often not realized due to human dysfunction and allowing the immediate and concrete to blot out the implications of the long term, eternal and spiritual.

17:26 *In the same day both Abraham and Ishmael, his son, were circumcised-* This again serves to reflect the unity between them. As noted on :25 and elsewhere, Ishmael was indeed Abraham's son and was within the bonds of the covenant. But he later chose to not go further with the potential set up.

17:27 *All the men of his house, those born in the house, and those bought with money of a foreigner, were circumcised with him-* This is similar to the language later to be used about how the Gentiles living with the Israelites were to obey the Passover legislation. "With him" suggests that they entered covenant relationship on account of this one man Abraham, just as the record of the flood stresses that the other seven and the animals were saved with Noah, on account of their connection with him. This is the power of one in the salvation of others. And it points up the crucial importance of the things encompassed in the

promises made to Abraham, the new covenant, the things of Jesus and His Kingdom.

GENESIS CHAPTER 18

18:1 *Yahweh appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day-* The surrounding religions understood oaks as religious places, where such Divine appearances might well occur. They were associated with idolatry (Ez. 6:13). We see therefore how God presents His truth in ways which can be understood by men and in terms which they can relate to, even if their worldviews are erroneous. This is not to say that the Bible doesn't challenge paganism and wrong beliefs- it does. But God also realizes, if you like, that flatly presenting His truth with no regard to the pre-existing religious beliefs and psychological associations within people is not going to help them. And we can learn a lesson from that. We may also pick up yet another hint here that the 'holy family' of the times were not so holy; Jacob, Rachel and his sons were all involved with paganism and idolatry at times, and Abraham's association with "the oaks" doesn't sit completely well.

The Hebrew for 'appeared' is literally 'to see', and the same word is used of how man cannot see God (Ex. 33:20). But through manifestation of Himself to men, God allows Himself to be seen. Once this is appreciated, it becomes utterly facile to assume that the three Angels were the Trinity, God Himself. For God cannot be seen. And more practically, it provides comfort in our almost childish complaint that we cannot see God. We cannot directly, but He appears / is seen to us so that effectively we do see Him. This idea is behind the Lord's teaching that through possession of the Comforter, it is as if we see Him personally, even though the disciples were to "see Him no more" in the flesh. This is at the root of our sense of God's presence. We are not in heaven, not literally in His personal presence; but His presence can be experienced and lived in just as much as if we

were actually in heaven. In this sense, God's seeing of us becomes our experience of having seen Him- once we perceive it. Hagar grasped something of this: "She called the name of Yahweh who spoke to her, You, God, see me, for she said, Have I even stayed alive after seeing Him?" (Gen. 16:13). The same is recorded here with Abraham; God "appeared" or 'saw Himself' to Abraham, and then Gen. 18:2 twice emphasizes that Abraham "saw ["looked"]... and saw" the Angels. He saw God as God saw Him. To see is to perceive, to know; and thus Paul writes of how we are known by God and thereby know Him (1 Cor. 8:3; Gal. 4:9).

"Mamre" is to be understood as Hebron (Gen. 23:19; 35:27), and Gen. 35:27 notes that Abraham lived there as a stranger. Despite his great wealth, he still lived in his tent, just outside the city. It was whilst he was not working, "in the heat of the day" (2 Sam. 4:5), that the Lord appeared to him. Perhaps he was using the rest time for prayer and meditation, and his spirituality was rewarded by the Lord's appearance to him- just as we can experience in essence. Or perhaps on the contrary he was doubting the promise of chapter 17, and the Angels appeared in order to strengthen his faith.

18:2 *He lifted up his eyes and looked, and saw that three men stood opposite him. When he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door, and bowed himself to the earth-* The three Angels may each have had distinct roles. Perhaps one was concerned with giving the promise to Abraham about Isaac; another was dedicated to the destruction of Sodom, as "the destroyer" Angel of the Passover night which slew the firstborn in Egypt; and the other Angel may have been concerned with the salvation of Lot. Even if we are simply being shown Abraham's generosity and respect toward strangers (Heb. 13:2), his bowing reflects a humility. For in any primitive society, there is a pecking order; you don't bow to strangers in case they are beneath you in the

social hierarchy. But Abraham did; he who was both wealthy in this world, and had been promised the eternal inheritance of the land. And this humility was doubtless part of his psychological response, the change of personality elicited, from having received the very same promises which we too have received in the Gospel of the Kingdom (Gal. 3:8). He is twice recorded as having bowed to God in chapter 17; his humility before God led to a humility before men. We note too his energy at 99 years old. "He ran... and bowed himself". We have an impression of energy and speed in this incident, characteristic of the Abraham family.

18:3 *And said, My lord, if now I have found favour in your sight, please don't go away from your servant-* The desire for them to stay and not leave recalls the attitude of Manoah's wife to the Angelic 'stranger' who visited her. Although Abraham is presented as having entertained Angels unaware (Heb. 13:2 surely alludes here), it seems he subconsciously sensed they were Angels. For he bows to them (:2) as he does to God / an Angel in chapter 17; and the way he speaks to them here would suggest that he considers them his superiors; and see on :7. I think we have here far more than the exaggerated courtesy culture of the east. And the whole picture is [yet again, as with all the Biblical record] so psychologically credible. On one level he is "unaware" they are Angels; but he senses they are on a subconscious level. We will read the same kind of thing in the Joseph story, where on one level the brothers don't recognize Joseph when they meet him; and yet subconsciously they do, clearly enough.

18:4 *Now let a little water be fetched, wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree-* The Angels had an appearance of needing to rest. We see there God's willingness to engage with us in human terms. And this is going to set the scene for Abraham's bargaining with God which we encounter later.

18:5 *I will get a morsel of bread so you can refresh your heart. After that you may go your way, for this is why you have come to your servant. They said, Very well, do as you have said-* There are similarities with how the same Angels come to visit Lot, who likewise sees them and then urges hospitality upon them. Just as Abraham persuades the Angels to eat a large meal, so Lot urges them [against their initial will] to stay in his home. This is all part of the theme to be showcased in the dialogue between God and Abraham over Sodom- of how God is open to persuasion by men.

18:6 *Abraham ran into the tent to Sarah, and said, Quickly prepare three measures of fine meal, knead it, and make cakes-* The emphasis on running, receiving into the home and rejoicing at the good news of the promised salvation in Isaac is all strangely alluded to in the record of Zacchaeus (Lk. 19:4-9). This would explain the Lord's otherwise strange comment that Zacchaeus was a "son of Abraham" (Lk. 19:9), meaning that he was similar to Abraham, bearing his characteristics. The amount of meal used here was huge, enough to make many kilograms of bread. The picture may simply be of the hospitality culture of that time, whereby vast amounts of food were prepared in order to demonstrate how welcome the guest was. Such hospitality is common in primitive societies. When the Czar visited rural Russia, there are stories of farmers slaying every animal they owned in order to provide just one meat meal for the revered visitor. But it may be that although Abraham did this 'entertaining Angels unawares', thinking they were merely "strangers", according to Heb. 13:2, it may be that he sensed something of the Divine in them. For they just appeared in front of him; and he lived as a foreigner in the area. Clearly they had come specifically to him.

18:7 *Abraham ran to the herd, and fetched a tender and good calf, and gave it to the servant. He hurried to dress it-* The impression is given that Abraham and Sarah personally did all these things. And yet Abraham was a chieftain ruling over a group which must have numbered a few thousand people (see on Gen. 14:14). I suggested on :3 that although Abraham was "unaware" these men were Angels, he sensed they were subconsciously. This would explain his desire to personally serve them.

18:8 *He took butter, milk, and the calf which he had dressed, and set it before them. He stood by them under the tree, and they ate-* As a chieftain over thousands of people (Gen. 14:14), we must note the more this extremely humble attitude, standing as a waiter to the visitors whom he assumes are far superior to him and demand his personal attention. As noted on :3 and :7, on one hand he was "unaware" they were Angels, but subconsciously he recognized them as Angels. This is a feature of being human; to know or recognize something on one level, but not on another. That may be a simple explanation as to how the Lord knew Judas was the betrayer, from the beginning; and yet He acted and felt the shock of being betrayed by his "own familiar friend in whom I trusted". And we think of the attitude of Samson to Delilah in the dramas with his hair. The psychological reality of the Biblical record gives it huge credibility as quite simply "true".

18:9 *They asked him, Where is Sarah, your wife? He said, See, in the tent-* The "visitors" used Sarah's new name, and clearly knew the name of his wife. This was surely done to encourage Abraham to join the dots and perceive that they were Angels. The Genesis record opens with God asking Adam where he is, and we noted there that the idea is really 'What are you doing?' or 'Why are you there?'. It was obvious that Sarah was in the tent,

for she was not in sight, it was midday, and she was not standing by them under the tree as Abraham was. So the question was probing far further. Was she really just an elderly childless woman preparing for the final stage of her life? Was that how Abraham and Sarah were to perceive her? There may even be an implicit rebuke. They were not to consider her just shut up in the family tent / home, facing the inevitable end. This old lady was to have a significant baby.

18:10 *He said, I will certainly return to you when the season comes round-* The "certainly" and "I will" may hint that they had somewhat lost faith in the promise of a seed. It seems that great stress is placed in Scripture on the Angels physically moving through space, both on the earth and between Heaven and earth, in order to fulfill their tasks, rather than being static in Heaven or earth and bringing things about by just willing them to happen. Gen. 18:10 describes the Angel saying to Abraham "I will certainly return unto thee according to the time of life; and, lo, Sarah thy wife shall have a son". On that first visit, the Angel must have enabled Sarah to conceive, and then He physically returned nine months later. See on Gen. 24:40; 28:12,13-15; Ex. 3:8; 9:14; Mt. 2:13; 2 Kings 13:23; 1 Chron. 14:15; Mt. 22:30; Dt. 4:7; Ps. 57:3; 78:49; 144:7; Lk. 4:11; Dan. 3:28; 9:21; 10:13; Acts 10:5; Rev. 9:1; 1 Sam. 2:21; Is. 31:4; 1 Cor. 11:10.

Behold, Sarah your wife will have a son. Sarah heard in the tent door, which was behind him- The "*will* have a son", stressing the "will", speaks to their disbelief in the implications of the promises so far received, especially in chapter 17. It seems that Abraham, father of the faithful, was not that faithful. He had flashes of faith and spiritual brilliance, but the record seems to be full of his weakness. What faith he had was counted as righteousness to him; and he was saved because he held on to being in God's program, and because God by pure grace just

wanted to save this man. And so it is with all his seed, who bear these same characteristics.

18:11 *Now Abraham and Sarah were old, well advanced in age. Sarah had passed the age of childbearing*- Rom. 4:19 says that additionally, Abraham was impotent by this time.

18:12 *Sarah laughed within herself, saying, After I have grown old will I have pleasure, my lord being old also?*- For "pleasure" she uses the word *ednah*, related to the word *Eden*. Yet in the events of Gen. 19, she sees how the land around Sodom that was once "like the garden of Eden" (Gen. 13:10) is made barren and sowed with salt so that nothing could grow there (Gen. 19:25; Dt. 29:23). She was being taught that God can give and take away fertility on a huge scale.

Sarah is commended for calling Abraham her "Lord" (1 Pet. 3:6). She is recorded as doing this in one place only, and it's here. She doubted God's promise by laughing; she is rebuked for this by the Angel. Yet in doing so, when she came to think of Abraham, in her heart she called him "my lord". So in the midst of her lack of faith in one respect, she also had a commendable attitude to Abraham. And yet she seems to be employing sarcasm; Abraham was impotent (Rom. 4:19), and had additionally just cut off part of his reproductive organ. "My lord being old also" sounds as if she was mocking him as well as the promise. But the Spirit focuses upon the positive; she referred to him as "my Lord", however sarcastically. All this, don't forget, was going on "within herself". God searched her thoughts, He saw her wrong attitudes there deep in her heart, and He saw what was commendable there too; and through Peter He drags this out and reveals it to us all as an inspiration.

All this opens up a wider issue. There are many Bible characters who appear to behave wrongly, but are spoken of in later revelation as if they were righteous. Lot is a classic example.

Why is this? Why, for example, is the Genesis record about Sarah so open about her weakness, but the New Testament commentary sifts through this and reveals the righteous aspect of her motives? Lot would be another example. Surely it's to show that God sees us very differently to how we appear on the surface, both to our brethren and even to ourselves. He knows every motive, He alone untangles our motives and thoughts; He sees what is truly behind our actions. It is not just that He has the power to do this if He wishes; He does it all the time. God is thinking of us and our inner thoughts and motives every moment. Every piece of body language reveals something, every thought. And yet as with Sarah, God imputes righteousness to His people.

It is easy to assume that people like Lot and Sarah repented of their weaknesses and came to stronger faith; although this is not recorded. So another angle on this is that indeed, the Old Testament record is negative about such people, whilst the New Testament praises their faith. But this is because God recognizes that faith is never total nor absolute. It is always a case of "I believe, but...". Our "unbelief" coexists with our faith; spirituality with unspirituality. This of course should not be the case, but the reality is, that this is how it is with all men apart from the Lord Jesus. But God sifts through it all, and focuses upon the faith, the spirituality, and accepts that. This is a huge inspiration to us, to do likewise with others; recognizing that this is how God analyzes and treats us. This is no mere naievity, no turning a blind eye to sin.

18:13 *Yahweh said to Abraham, Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Will I really bear a child, seeing I am old?'*- She laughed in her heart (:12). But Abraham is apparently held responsible for his wife's inner thoughts. Perhaps she had scoffed at the reported word of promise which Abraham had told her about three

months previously (see on :14), and Abraham had not rebuked her as he ought to have done. The way Abraham is rebuked for Sarah's mocking disbelief is perhaps because he too had something of this, although at the time of the promise three months previously he had joyfully believed it.

18:14 *Is anything too hard for Yahweh?-* The Hebrew word translated "hard" is that usually translated "wonder". In our moments of wonder, and as the afterglow of them permeates our lives, it becomes easier to believe that nothing is too wonderful for our God of wonders to do for us. For He *is* the God who does wonders, He *is* wonderful and awesome. Jeremiah theoretically learnt the lesson from God's words to Abraham and Sarah; for he alludes to it in Jer. 32:17: "Ah Lord God! Behold, you have made the heaven and the earth by your great power and by your stretched out arm; there is nothing too hard [wonderful] for you". But God has to remind him soon afterwards in Jer. 32:26,27: "Then came the word of the Lord unto Jeremiah, saying, Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh: *is* there any thing too hard [wonderful] for me?". We think we know all about wonder, when actually we don't. Our lack of total faith shows that we do indeed think God's wonder is limited. Because something is hard / marvellous in our eyes doesn't mean it is in God's eyes (Zech. 8:6). Again we are surely to realize that Abraham and Sarah considered the promise of a child too wonderful or "hard" of literal fulfilment.

At the set time I will return to you, when the season comes round, and Sarah will have a son- "The season" appears to refer to the nine month gestation period. Gen. 17:21 had stated that after a year, Sarah would have a child. So it seems that a three month period had elapsed. Things were structured like this so that they would have the chance to exhibit faith in the promise. Having been circumcised at 99 (Gen. 17:24), Abraham would

not have been able to immediately have intercourse. But now after three months he was able to. Perhaps the question about Sarah being in the tent (:9) was a way of telling Abraham that he should now be attempting to get her pregnant.

18:15 *Then Sarah denied, saying, I didn't laugh, for she was afraid-* Her fear was because she realized that these visitors were Angels. And yet she lies to them. Perhaps her lie was because she considered that she had only laughed in her heart (:12), and not out loud. The Angelic insistence that "You did laugh" was therefore teaching that the inner, concealed thought is indeed judged as the external action, just as the Lord was to later teach. This has huge implications.

He said, No, but you did laugh- It's been observed that Biblical Hebrew has no word for 'yes'; instead, in order to show agreement, the preceding actions or words of the speaker are repeated. Another example is in Esther 5:7 Heb.. Seeing that Biblical Hebrew reflects to us something of the mind of God, it seems to me that we're being taught by this to believe that what we ask for from God, we will receive; our request is the nature of the answer. Hence the need for care in formulating *what* we ask for, believing that God's 'yes' will be effectively a repeating back of our words to us.

Heb. 11:11 says that at this time, Sarah had faith: "By faith even Sarah herself received power to conceive seed when she was past age, since she counted Him faithful who had made the promise". We would not perceive this from the Genesis narrative. That faith was not immediate; it was only after her desperate repentance at having lied to and laughed at the Angel who made the promise. Her failure and unrecorded begging for forgiveness were therefore used to deepen her faith. The destruction of Sodom was surely to further teach her that the prophetic word of Angels does come powerfully true. We marvel at God's positive

attitude to Sarah, commending her for calling Abraham "lord" and discerning faith in her at this time. We too are to be positive about each other, and to believe how positively God looked at us, reflecting His pure love for us on account of His grace.

18:16 *The men rose up from there, and looked toward Sodom. Abraham went with them to see them on their way-* If Abraham had not personally escorted the guests further, up the ridge to where they could look toward Sodom, he would not have had the opportunity to plead with God for Lot's salvation. This is how spiritual life goes; effort to go with God in the way leads to more meetings and opportunities.

18:17 *Yahweh said, Will I hide from Abraham what I do-* When we read that "Surely the Lord does nothing without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets" (Am. 3:7), we might tend to take that as a statement of absolute principle that is obvious to all the Angels. But we find an Angel discussing with others: "Shall I hide from Abraham [who was a prophet] what I am about to do?" (Gen. 18:17). My point quite simply is that the Angels have more debate, expend more mental and physical energy than we surely realize, in order to operationalize things which we might consider to be standard and automatic in God's work with men. In our context, what this means is that when men reject the machinations and schemings of God's love, they reject an awful lot; and it grieves and disappoints Him, and appears tragic to those like the prophets who see things from His viewpoint. We make know our secrets and our plans to our friends (Jn. 15:15; Am. 3:7); and indeed, Abraham was the friend of God (Is. 41:8; James 2:23). The 'gap' between God stating His plan and its actual fulfillment is the opportunity for men and women to plead with Him, as Moses did, as Abraham did regarding Sodom (Gen. 18:17-22), as so many have done... and He is most definitely open to human persuasion.

The lack of ultimate Angelic knowledge results in the Angels taking time to think things out and discuss their action with each other, which may result in an apparent delay to we humans. However, this same incident shows that there are varying degrees of knowledge amongst Angels or in the same Angel over time. The Angel who destroyed Sodom reasoned: "I know him (Abraham), that he will command his children and his household after him" (Gen. 18:19). Yet perhaps the same Angel, or the mighty Angel of Israel which made the promises to the patriarchs said to Abraham a few months later after his offering up of Isaac: "Now I know that thou fearest God" (Gen. 22:12), implying that he did not know whether Abraham's faith was genuine before that incident, and that the knowledge of Gen. 18:19 was merely that Abraham would 'teach his children the truth' and did not reflect any knowledge of Abraham's personal faith. In this case, Sodom might have been preserved by reason of Abraham's known willingness to teach others 'the truth' rather than because of any personal faith in God he may have had. Thus the lesson comes home that a man's zeal or success in preaching can be unrelated to his personal faith or spirituality. The elohim "found" Abraham's heart to be faithful (Neh. 9:8). This was by a process of research and drawing of conclusions. And our Angels are in the process of doing the same with us this very day.

18:18 *Since Abraham will surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth will be blessed in him-* We have a unique insight here into the internal discussion of God through the Angels concerning us.

The Lord's later command to preach to "all nations" would ring bells in Jewish minds with the promises to Abraham, concerning the blessing of forgiveness to come upon "all nations" through Messiah (Gen. 18:18; 22:18; 26:4). Therefore God's people are to preach the Gospel of forgiveness in Christ to "all

nations". The offer of sharing in that blessing did not close at the end of the first century. Putting the "all nations" of the Abrahamic promises together with the Lord's preaching commission leads to a simple conclusion: The Hope of Israel now applies to all nations; so go and tell this good news to all nations. Perhaps this is why there appears to be an intended grammatical ambiguity in the 'promise' that Abraham and his seed would be a blessing for all nations. It's unclear, as we've commented elsewhere, whether "be a blessing" is purely a prophetic prediction or a command. The commentary upon the promises to David in Ps. 72:17 is similar: "May his name resound for ever... may men bless themselves by him, may all nations pronounce him blessed". It is for us to go forth and be a blessing, and to make His Name great to the ends of the earth.

18:19 *For I have known him, to the end that he may command his children and his household after him, that they may keep the way of Yahweh, to do righteousness and justice; to the end that Yahweh may bring on Abraham that which He has spoken of him-* At present it is the Angel-cherubim's job to "keep the way of the tree of life". They have been given this charge, and yet they chose men to fulfil it who will keep the way pure- thus the Angels decided concerning Abraham, "I know him, that he will command his children... and they shall keep the way of the Lord" (Gen. 18:19 AV). It will be our duty to take over as the way keepers from the Angels, although we should have had good practice in this life. Thus we will say to the mortal population "This is the way, walk ye in it" (Is. 30:21). There is an intended ambiguity as to whether we are to read as AV "I know him" or as NEV "I have known him, to the end that...". God's knowing of us, using the Hebraism whereby 'to know' means 'to have a relationship with', is so that we might share that relationship or knowledge with others, particularly our family. The knowledge

of God was not so that he could enjoy it alone; it was given to him as it is given to us *to the end that* we might share it with others. God has trusted us with the job of preaching His Gospel. That He trusts us, believes in us, is a surpassing thought. If you trust someone completely with a task, to the point it is clear that now if they don't do it, it won't be done, they often respond with a maturity and zest which wouldn't be seen if they merely were given partial responsibility [children are a good example of this]. And so God has done with us.

We perceive here a conditional aspect to the Abrahamic promises. What God had promised Abraham and his seed would come true because they would respond to it by doing righteousness. Abraham had been "counted righteous" in Gen. 15:8, but we must try to live out in practice what we are counted as by status. Because of Sarah's faith, "therefore sprang there... so many as the stars of the sky in multitude" (Heb. 11:11,12). Those promises to Abraham had their fulfillment, but conditional on Abraham and Sarah's faith. Those promises / prophesies were "sure" in the sense that God's side of it was. Rom. 4:18 likewise comments that Abraham became "the father of many nations" precisely because he *believed* in this hope. Yet the promise / prophecy that he would be a father of many nations could sound as if it would have happened anyway, whatever. But it was actually conditional upon Abraham's faith. And he is our great example exactly because he had the possibility and option of *not* believing in the hope he had been offered.

According to Gen. 18:17-19, the reason God told Abraham what He would do with Sodom was because Abraham would teach others, and his descendants would teach others. This implies that Sodom's destruction was to be a special lesson for all generations. And 2 Pet. 2:6 says the same- Sodom was to be a perpetual "example unto those that after should live ungodly";

in this sense Sodom was "set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire" (Jude 7). The fire was "eternal" in the sense that the example of destruction was to be to all generations. This paves the way for Sodom's destruction to be understood as a particularly significant type of the last days. Our Lord clearly understood the destruction of Sodom as being typical of the events of the second coming: "As it was in the days of Lot... the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven... even thus shall it be in the day when the son of man is revealed. In that day, he which shall be upon the housetop, and his stuff in the house, let him not come down to take it away... remember Lot's wife... in that night there shall be two men in one bed; the one shall be taken, and the other left" (Lk.17:28-34). Not only is the city of Sodom representative of the world of the last days, but Lot's calling out of Sodom by the Angels is typical of our being 'taken' by Angels to meet the Lord.

18:20 *Yahweh said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous-* A close study of the record of Sodom's destruction will reveal that the 'Lord' spoken of there was one of the Angels who arranged the judgements on Sodom. "The Lord said, Because the cry (NIV 'Outcry') of Sodom... is great... I will go down now" (Gen. 18:20,21). Perhaps this outcry of Sodom was from the Angels who were shocked at its sinfulness, whose concern prompted the senior Angel into 'coming down' in judgement.

"Grievous" translates a Hebrew word meaning 'hardened' [it is the word used of Pharaoh's hardened heart] or 'honoured / glorified'. What was wrong with the Sodomites was that they were hardened in their sins, both sexual sins and the sins of pride and fullness of bread (Ez. 16:49), to the point that they glorified sin.

18:21 *I will go down now, and see whether their deeds are as bad as the reports which have come to me-* The Angel seems to recognize His own limited perceptions: “I will therefore go down and see, if they completely correspond with the cry which comes to me, and if not, that I may know” (LXX). And we shall be made like the Angels (Lk. 20:35,36).

If not, I will know- God's way of using the Angels to punish Sodom gives insight into the relationship between them and God. God Himself knew exactly what He would do because of the wickedness He knew was in the city. The Angel who debated whether to reveal to Abraham His purpose with Sodom says "Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great... I will go down now and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto Me". The Angels responsible for Sodom had brought the "cry" or news of Sodom's sins to the attention of this senior Angel, who then investigates it further to see whether or not their news was correct. "And if not, I will know"- the emphasis being on the "I"- i. e. 'whether their news was correct or incorrect, I will know because I am blessed with greater powers than they'. This senior Angel seems to manifest God to a very great degree, as Gen. 19:13 describes the other two "men" (Angels) saying to Lot "we will destroy this place, because the cry of them is waxen great before the face of the Lord (the third "man"- the senior Angel); and the Lord (senior Angel) hath sent us to destroy it". These two Angels sent to execute the judgments were under specific guidelines- v. 22 "I cannot do anything till thou be come thither". Thus these Angels were given power conditional on certain things happening. Perhaps this was part of the work of Palmoni, the "wonderful numberer" of Daniel, who is the Angel responsible for all timing; maybe He decreed that they could only have power once the condition of Lot leaving the city was fulfilled. Maybe this Angel co-ordinates

all the huge number of timings which go to make up God's purpose? This would explain the passages which imply that a set time is allowed to some human beings to bring about repentance and response to God's offers. Thus Pharaoh was condemned because he "let the appointed time pass by" (Jer. 46:17).

18:22 *The men turned from there, and went toward Sodom, but Abraham stood yet before Yahweh-* There are several examples where there is an ambiguity in the Hebrew text which reflects the suggestion of mutuality. "Abraham stood yet before Yahweh". And yet, as witnessed by several translations, the text here can be read "The Lord stood yet before Abraham", as if Abraham was being given the right to dominate God. See on :33.

The record of Abraham reasoning with God about how many righteous people could save Sodom's destruction is a lesson powerful enough. But it becomes the more powerful when we realize that Gen. 18:22 originally read: "Yahweh stood before Abraham". Walter Brueggemann speaks of the image of "Abraham as Yahweh's theological instructor. It is as though Abraham were presiding over the meeting. But that bold image of Yahweh being accountable to Abraham... was judged by the early scribes as irreverent and unacceptable. Therefore, the text was changed to read as we have it" (Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982) p. 168). If this is so, and there is good textual reason to accept it, then we are left saying 'Wow!' not only to God's humility, but to the extreme willingness which He has to hear and go along with the prayers of men. And further; Ez. 14:12-20; 18:5 teach that there can be no 'acquittal by association'; if a righteous man stands before God and pleads for others, he can save only himself. Yet Abraham had the spiritual vision, driven by a pure love of others and God's glorification, which led him to go beyond this basic principle, and stand before God, or have God stand before Him,

and plead for others- and be heard! God clearly is willing to change even the application of His basic principles in the light of intense prayers for others. It's all a *huge* challenge to us in our prayers for others. Indeed, Abraham's prayer seems to show that God can be 'persuaded' to see things from quite another perspective; see on :25.

18:23 *Abraham drew near, and said, Will You consume the righteous with the wicked?-* The drawing near could mean that Abraham literally came near to the Angel. But to draw near to God means to come close in relationship, in prayer or sacrifice (1 Sam. 14:36; Ps. 73:28; Is. 29:13; Heb. 10:22) and specifically in intercession (Jer. 30:21). It is used repeatedly of how Moses drew near to God in intercession for Israel (Ex. 24:2 etc.). In all this intercession, clearly Abraham has in view his relative Lot, "that righteous man" (2 Pet. 2:8). God will not destroy the righteous with the wicked, and so Lot was urged to flee Sodom lest he be consumed or destroyed in the destruction of the wicked (s.w. Gen. 19:15,17). In this sense, the essence of Abraham's prayer was heard. For Lot was saved from Sodom as a result of Abraham's prayer (Gen. 19:29). He didn't pray for it specifically, at least, not as recorded here. But the essential spirit of his requests was heard and understood. This is how God responds to our prayers. It is not the case that the person who can verbalize the best or the most accurately will have a better prayer experience than the one who is less gifted with verbalization. The essential spirit of our prayers is interpreted by the Lord the Spirit, and responded to- according to Rom. 8.

18:24 *What if there are fifty righteous within the city? Will You consume and not spare the place for the fifty righteous who are in it?-* Circumstances were overruled by God to teach Abraham that he really would be a blessing to others, as He had promised. Twice he intercedes for blessing upon Sodom (Gen. 14:14;

18:23-33); just as e.g. we may be called to care for a sick person, in order to teach us about how we really are to be a blessing to others. Perhaps the most telling example of the limitation of God's potential by men is in Abraham's request that God would spare Sodom for the sake of fifty righteous men there. He then lowers the number to 40, and then finally to ten, assuming that surely Lot's family were righteous and would comprise ten righteous. If Abraham had left off praying at, say, forty...then this would have been the limit God set. If there were ten righteous there, the city wouldn't have been saved. But Abraham went on to set the limit at ten. But we wonder, what would have happened if he had gone further and asked God to save Sodom for the sake of one righteous man, i.e. Lot? My sense is that the Father would have agreed. But the city wasn't saved for the sake of the one man Lot, because Abraham limited God's desire to save by the smallness of his vision. This principle can possibly be extended even wider. David asks: "Let thy mercy, O Lord, be upon us, according as we hope in thee" (Ps. 33:22). And whoever prayed Ps. 132:10 asked to be heard "for thy servant David's sake" - he or she believed that God would remember David and for *his* sake respond favourably [and how much more powerful is prayer uttered for the sake of the Son of God!].

18:25 *Be it far from You to do things like that, to kill the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous should be like the wicked. May that be far from You-* Abraham reasons that God's Name will be profaned if the righteous perish with the wicked. "Be it far...." is the same Hebrew translated "profaned" in Ez. 20:9. Abraham is saying that God's Name will be profaned if his prayer isn't heard... and that prayer required God to abrogate, at least temporarily, the principle that a righteous man can only ultimately save himself. The whole record of the Yahweh-Abraham encounter in Gen. 18 is perhaps intentionally

intended to echo the language of barter in a Middle Eastern bazaar- the 'price' moves from 50 down to ten. But in Middle Eastern culture, the buyer has more 'power' than the seller... and again, we see the almost disturbing message that we in our prayers for others can have some sort of 'power' over God when praying for others. It's like Jacob wrestling the Angel to a draw; through his prayers that night, he had power [Heb. 'power as a prince'] over the Angel and prevailed (Hos. 12:4). I say all this is "disturbing" because it demands such a huge amount of us in prayer, if these indeed are the possibilities. But shining through it all is God's grace. For the required ten righteous people weren't found; yet all the same, for Abraham's sake, Lot and his immediate family were not destroyed in Sodom (Gen. 19:29). And it could be argued that the whole theme of Isaiah 53, the innocent *one* saving the many, is somehow an allusion to Abraham's saving of Lot by intercession.

Shouldn't the Judge of all the earth do right?- This could be seen as manipulative reasoning. But God goes along with it, leaving us for all time with an amazing example of how intimate a believer can get with God. "Right" or justice would be done, Abraham reasoned, by saving the sinners for the sake of the righteous. We would be inclined to reason that justice would be done by saving the righteous and destroying the sinners, i.e. making a distinction between them. But Abraham had learnt from his own personal experience that he a sinner had been counted right with God, by grace. And he considered that a righteous remnant could allow this to legitimately happen, according to God's principles. His problem was that he over-estimated the righteousness of Lot's family, and failed to rise up to the fact that he alone by his prayer could save the entire city. He failed to imagine the power of just *one* righteous person.

18:26 *Yahweh said, If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sake-* "Spare" is the same word translated "accepted" when we read that God "accepted" Lot's desire for Zoar to be spared when otherwise it would have been destroyed (Gen. 19:21). Perhaps we are intended to join the dots and conclude that Sodom could have been spared or even "accepted" if Abraham or Lot had simply asked for it. The faith of one righteous is enough, as we have learnt in our experience of the work of the Lord Jesus for us. The word is even translated "forgive" in Ex. 10:21. Acceptance, sparing and even forgiveness of sinners for the sake of a righteous one or minority is one of the most striking features of the Biblical record. We think of the emphasis upon how Noah saved those who were "with him", both people and animals. All this sets up the New Testament teaching of salvation on account of association with Abraham's seed, the Lord Jesus.

18:27 *Abraham answered, See now, I have taken it on myself to speak to the Lord, who am but dust and ashes-* Living broadly contemporary with Abraham, Job would have been aware of his description of himself as merely dust and ashes. Yet Job was brought to realize that “I am become like dust and ashes” (Job 30:19). He always had been; but now he realized the desperation inherent in his nature. He clothes himself in ashes to mourn his material losses at the beginning of the book; but at the end, he does this again, as a sign of his repentance for his general sinfulness and weakness (Job 42:6). Abraham's reference to "dust and ashes" may likewise indicate a sense of moral weakness, as well as referring to his mortality.

18:28 *What if there will lack five of the fifty righteous? Will You destroy all the city for lack of five? He said, I will not destroy it, if I find forty-five there-* If a person had been found who would have powerfully interceded for Jerusalem, 'stood in the gap' (Ez.

22:30), God wouldn't have destroyed Jerusalem - "that I should not destroy it" is an allusion to Abraham interceding for Sodom here in Gen. 18:28. There were simply so many possible scenarios! And this is what we must expect if even time periods can be shortened or extended in response to human behaviour. But if Sodom could have been saved for the sake of one man, the reason it wasn't was because Abraham lacked the faith and vision about it; he thought ten would be a respectable number. He over estimated the faith of Lot's family.

18:29 *He spoke to Him yet again, and said, What if there are forty found there? He said, I will not do it for the forty's sake-* Perhaps the most telling example of the limitation of prayer is in Abraham's request that God would spare Sodom for the sake of fifty righteous men there. He then lowers the number to 40, and then finally to ten, assuming that surely Lot's family were righteous and would comprise ten righteous. If Abraham had left off praying at, say, forty...then this would have been the limit God set. If there were ten righteous there, the city wouldn't have been saved. But Abraham went on to set the limit at ten. But we wonder, what would have happened if he had gone further and asked God to save Sodom for the sake of one righteous man, i.e. Lot? Or even just asked for the salvation of the city for his own sake? My sense is that the Father would have agreed. But the city wasn't saved for the sake of the one man Lot, because Abraham limited God's desire to save by the smallness of his vision. This principle can possibly be extended even wider. David asks: "Let thy mercy, O Lord, be upon us, according as we hope in thee" (Ps. 33:22).

18:30 *He said, Oh don't let the Lord be angry, and I will speak. What if there are thirty found there? He said, I will not do it, if I find thirty there-* Abraham becomes more confident in his vision of Divine possibilities, reducing by an increment of five and then

by ten. But he didn't go down to where he was being led- to one. He stuck at ten.

18:31 *He said, See now, I have taken it on myself to speak to the Lord. What if there are twenty found there? He said, I will not destroy it for the twenty's sake-* Abraham felt his own responsibility ever more intensely; he had taken it upon himself to speak to God for the sake of Lot and Sodom. The way God operates elicits from us the maximum initiative. He will work for others for our sakes; just as the paralyzed man was healed and forgiven for the sake of the faith of his friends (Mk. 2:5). This means that our lives are totally taken up with the possibilities of service.

Commentators have pointed out that the entire 'Dialogue with God' passage reads almost identically to descriptions of Middle Eastern market haggling; the price typically starts five times higher than the price that will be accepted. Phrases like "since I have undertaken to speak to my lord" and twice, "do not be angry [at my suggestion]" were stock phrases from the bazar. It is something of a formality to apparently 'knock down' the seller. And this is what we have here. 50 is knocked down to 10. As if God is that open to dialogue. And as if Abraham naively misperceives that this seller will in fact let him have what he wants just for the asking; not even for the sake of one, but for the sake of asking. The image of human haggling, when analyzed, gives way to the image of God's amazing grace, His willingness to give- but limited by man's failure to perceive it. Indeed, if Abraham was treating God as if in the market, then his reducing of the numbers is not to be seen as timorously begging Yahweh to be yet more merciful each time. Rather, Abraham has settled on the figure of "10", but he starts at 50 and reduces to 10 because that was the accepted way of doing things. In this, we see his failure to fully appreciate and perceive the God whom without

doubt he did believe. Again, we see Abraham's weakness, coexisting with his faith. God agrees to every request of Abraham. That is the overall impression. That God is saying 'Yes' to whatever Abraham asks; saying 'yes' immediately and without condition. And surely He would have continued to do so. There is no haggling on God's side, no resistance, no attempt to claim that Abraham is getting something too cheap. He just agrees. The analogy with the market place haggling breaks down at this point- the element of unreality highlights God's eagerness to agree to intercession. He wants to save. It is God who has chosen to tell Abraham what He intends to do to Sodom; as if He actually wants to be talked down and out of it. But that doesn't happen, although it almost does.

Haggling in this way is done when there is a social distance between the buyer and seller; it was not done like this between close friends. If I want 1000 for my old car I will not tell you, as my friend, that I want 5000 and make you knock me down to 1000. I will tell you straight what I want for it and you will give that to me. And so it was then. Yet God has expressed His desire for intimacy and close family friendship with Abraham, as noted on Gen. 17. But still, Abraham doesn't get quite how intimate God wants to be with him; just as we don't. But we can compare this incident with Ex. 32, where Moses also intercedes with God not to destroy Israel as planned. Moses learnt from Abraham's mistake, or, lack of vision. Amos did likewise in Am. 7:1-6. We are likewise to learn. But although Abraham failed to avert the destruction of Sodom, God saw to the essence of his request- which was to save Lot. And so Gen. 19:29 says that his intercession was heard: "when God destroyed the cities of the plain, God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, when he overthrew the cities where Lot

lived". Despite our lack of perception, God graciously sees the essence of our prayers, although unexpressed, and responds. This is grace upon grace. And it is the teaching of Romans 8, that our unexpressed, unarticulated, non verbalized "spirit" is what is presented to God by the intercession of the Lord Jesus.

18:32 *He said, Oh don't let the Lord be angry, and I will speak just once more. What if ten are found there? He said, I will not destroy it for the ten's sake-* We enquire why Abraham feared God's anger with him for asking for mercy. There is no reason God should as it were get mad at a man seeking to save sinners. We can take this as a window onto Abraham's spiritual immaturity. Or we can read the Lord's anger as being against Sodom, and Abraham is asking for it to subside. "Angry" is literally "to become hot", and is used of how God's anger "waxed hot" with Israel, and they were saved from it my the mediation of just one man, Moses (Ex. 32:10,11 s.w.). Moses learnt the lesson from Abraham's limited vision here. He realized that the Lord's hot anger with Sodom could have been ameliorated by the intercession of Abraham alone, or by the righteousness of just one man in Sodom, i.e. Lot. And so Moses alone was inspired to alone intercede for Israel, so that His anger no longer "waxed hot". We too are to be directly inspired by such Biblical examples and implications. The connection with Moses supports the idea that if Abraham had gone even lower, from ten down to one, his intercession would've been successful.

If 40 righteous had been found there....it wouldn't have been destroyed, thanks to Abraham's prayer. And he reasons with God, down to 10 righteous. Now I ask...if Abraham had asked: " If...*one* righteous man be found there...??" . Would God have said 'No'? We don't know, but the impression I have is He would have agreed. The salvation of Sodom depended upon Abraham's breadth of vision. God's mercy is upon us, and upon others,

according as we hope in Him. Abraham's amazing spiritual ambition in changing the mind of God and reasoning with Him is really intended to be our example. Gideon picked up almost the very words of Abraham in Gen. 18:32 when he asks God "Do not let your wrath blaze...let me speak just once more" (Jud. 6:39). And if Abraham's spirit in prayer could influence Gideon... it can echo down through a few more centuries to influence us too. We will now read in Gen. 19:21 that the intercession of one man saved Zoar; and this feeds back into this theme developed in commentary here on chapter 18, that the intercession of one man, Abraham, and the righteousness of one man, Lot, could have saved a whole city- but Abraham lacked the vision and faith to actualize it.

The calling of Lot out of Sodom is a type, on the Lord's authority, of our calling away to judgment. His position immediately prior to the Angels' coming must therefore connect with our situation now. We will see as this study continues that Lot was in no way as spiritually strong as he ought to have been, nor as enthusiastic for the Lord's coming as his complaining about the evils of the city recorded in 2 Pet. 2:7,8 might lead us to think. The very fact that he chose to live in the area whilst Abraham steered well clear of it is testimony enough to his worldliness (Gen. 13:10,11). The offering of his two daughters to the Sodomites also betrays a certain unspirituality (Gen. 19:8). The fact that Sodom's fate was revealed to Abraham rather than Lot may also be significant. Despite this, Abraham evidently rated Lot's spirituality- his conviction that Lot and his family must comprise at least 10 righteous people must have been the basis of his prayer for Sodom's destruction to be nullified (Gen. 18:32). And so in the sight of the ecclesia, the high spiritual status of latter day believers may not be questioned- and yet the Lord's coming may find us seriously

unprepared, as it did for Lot. It seems Jeremiah and Ezekiel likewise, on the eve of the coming of the Lord's day in their times, had to be taught that they had a far too exalted view of the state of the ecclesia. What latter day similarities with how the faithful remnant of today perceive things? It is significant that a ten-man remnant would have saved Sodom, representative of Jerusalem in the last days? (Is. 1:10).

Abraham saved Lot out of Sodom by his earnest prayer for him; and there is ample reason to think from the Genesis record and his subsequent reaction to the Angel's invitation to leave that Lot of himself was simply not strong enough. Without those prayers and the concern of Abraham read by God as prayer, Lot may well have been left to suffer the condemnation of the world he preferred to live in. And yet Lot fleeing from Sodom is used in the NT as a type of our latter day exit from the world at the Lord's coming. Is this not to suggest that the latter day believers will be saved only by grace, they will not be strong and ready to leave; and their salvation will only be on account of the prayers of the faithful? Lot was not without spirituality; but he was simply swamped by the pull of the world in which he had become entangled, not to mention his unspiritual wife. He was the type on which one could have compassion, making a difference, and pull out of the fire. Indeed, it could even be that Jude's words about pulling a brother out of the fire may be a reference back to Lot being pulled out of the fire that came upon Sodom. Those in his position sin a sin which is not unto death only in the sense that we can pray for them, so that their sin will not lead them to condemnation. But only in this sense is sin not unto death; for the wages of sin, any sin, is death (Rom. 6:23). But in some cases this sentence can ultimately be changed on account of our effort for our brother.

18:33 *Yahweh went His way, as soon as He had finished communing with Abraham, and Abraham returned to his place*- Again we see mutuality between God and man (see on :22). God goes His way to His place, and Abraham goes his way, to his place. "As soon as He had finished" gives the impression that Abraham was as it were delaying the Angel, just as in chapter 19 we will read of the Angels being delayed in the destruction of Sodom by their dialogue and plea-bargaining with Lot. This explains some of the delays in the outworking of God's purpose, why time periods don't always fulfil exactly, and why it's impossible to compose a set in stone chronology of latter day events. God is so very sensitive to human prayer, positioning and repentance [or lack thereof] that His purpose can expand or contract in response.

GENESIS CHAPTER 19

19:1 *The two angels came to Sodom at evening-* The third Angel was the one who dialogued alone with Abraham in Gen. 18:22.

Lot sat in the gate of Sodom. Lot saw them, and rose up to meet them. He bowed himself with his face to the earth- Lot sitting "in the gate of Sodom" (Gen. 19:1) has been seen as an indication that he held some prominent public office in the city's administration. Yet despite this, he evidently maintained his separation- although this seems to have created suppressed bitterness amongst his colleagues, which they gave vent to in their sudden persecution of him just before the Angel came. They complained that he was "a judge" (:9). Note how initially Lot lived in the smaller "cities of the plain", and then "pitched his tent toward Sodom", resulting in him eventually settling within the city (Gen. 13:12). One wonders if he kept his tent in the loft. Ps. 1:1 seems to allude to Lot's progressive apostacy, speaking of the righteous man *not walking, standing* or *sitting* with the wicked- in other words, the righteous man will learn from Lot's mistakes. The way Lot progressively moved Eastwards has to be connected with a strange theme in Genesis of all the apostates moving ever further East (Gen. 4:6; 11:2 RV; 13:11; 16:12 RVmg; 28:9). This is not the only indication in Scripture that many latter day saints, whom Lot represents, will not be spiritually fit when their Lord returns. This gradual slump into worldliness to the spiritual detriment of his family (the wife, sons and possibly other daughters refused to truly leave Sodom) is not difficult to see matched in the present ecclesia. The material prosperity of Lot just before his short, sharp persecution period at the Lord's 'coming', matches Israel's prosperity in Egypt just before their holocaust started (Gen. 47:11). The wealth of the

latter day ecclesia may well be proof in itself, in the light of these types, that we are heading for a like tribulation period.

Yet 2 Pet. 2:7,8 reveals how Lot "vexed (Gk. 'tortured') his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds". Seeing that he failed to influence his family to properly appreciate the sins of that city, and that he was so attached to it that he was unwilling to leave, this must be interpreted as little more than the sort of middle class, respectable 'tut-tutting' that present day Christianity abounds with. After all, he had chosen to live there, he did not have to stay, and the record of his choice of Sodom in Gen. 13 spotlights his unspiritual, worldly thinking in this regard when compared to Abraham, the stranger and sojourner. Whether this assessment of Lot's character is felt to be correct or not, it must surely be accepted that there was a serious dualism in his position which has strong similarities with ours today- vexing his soul about the sins of the surrounding world, and yet increasingly involved in it and greatly benefiting from it materially, at spiritual cost to himself and his family. Lot was effectively willing to betray his daughters to the men of Sodom, pointing forward to the Lord's prophecy of how in the holocaust to come, many will betray each other (Mt. 10:36), family life within the ecclesia will break up; a spirit of dissension will fall upon natural and spiritual families. The reason for this will be rooted in a lack of true spiritual concern for the family in the easier years of this present life. Not for nothing does Paul warn against marriage in the last days (1 Cor. 7:28).

19:2 *And he said, See now, my lords, please turn aside into your servant's house, stay all night, wash your feet, and you can rise up early, and go on your way. They said, No, but we will stay in the street all night-* There are such distinct similarities between the record of Abraham meeting and entertaining the Angels and how Lot does likewise. They both bow to the visitors (:1) and

personally entertain them, and are solicitous for their welfare. Both of them entertained Angels unaware (Heb. 13:2). As noted with Abraham, Lot was on one level "unaware" they were Angels, but on another level he surely was.

19:3 *He urged them greatly, and they came in with him, and entered into his house. He made them a feast, and baked unleavened bread, and they ate-* The Angels who visited Lot in Sodom wanted initially to lodge in the street, but they were persuaded by Lot to change their plans. And who is to say that to some extent this isn't possible today, too? This connects with the theme encountered in chapter 18, of God being open to dialogue with men. The reason they wanted to stay in the street was perhaps to protect Lot, but they went to a plan B in the face of his insistence. The "feast" with unleavened bread was a sign of fellowship. To break bread together was from earliest times a sign of fellowship, and had religious significance. Always the Lord's people had an open table, as exemplified supremely by the Lord Jesus. There was no test of the worthiness of those who presented themselves.

One difference with the entertainment of Angels by Abraham is that Lot's wife plays no role in it, unlike Sarah. We are left to conclude that she was not of one mind with him about the matter. The way she longed for Sodom even after leaving it, despite the attempted rape of their visitors, indicates that she was very much in line with the local thinking rather than spiritual thinking.

19:4 *But before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, surrounded the house, both young and old, all the people from every quarter-* The double emphasis upon "the men" is in the context of their demand for sex with the attractive male visitors. As the Angels had entered at "the gate" (:1), the whole town knew of their arrival. But their desire to rape them was not

pure lust, it was also xenophobia. The whole city is implicated as evidence of the fact that not even ten righteous could be found within it.

19:5 *They called to Lot, and said to him, Where are the men who came in to you this night? Bring them out to us, that we may have sex with them-* The specific sin of Sodom is well known-confirmed by the repeated emphasis on "the *men* of Sodom" in the record. The grossness of their perversion is shown by their clamouring for the Angels, who doubtless appeared as good looking young men. Lot's response and his offer of his daughters to them (Gen. 19:7,8) clearly shows their intention. In the light of this, Jude warns the believers that their punishment for this was what awaited those of the new Israel who threw off their responsibilities. "As Sodom and Gomorrah... giving themselves over (implying this was a conscious apostasy?) to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth an example" to us (Jude 7). In passing, it should be noted that all Jude's examples of Divine punishment involve people who were responsible to God, by reason of knowing His ways. Is Sodom an exception? Perhaps Lot had preached to them. We must give full weight to the Lord's comment that the villages who rejected Him will have a worse judgment than the men of Sodom (Lk. 4:21-24). To reject the saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus is far worse than what these men did. And this is being done by millions as we read these words. Likewise Lk. 17:26-32 speaks of being caught up with the daily stuff of eating and drinking, marrying, planting, building... as being the essential sin of Sodom, just as Ezekiel identifies their sin as idleness, ignoring the poor, and "fullness of bread". It is these things which give rise to sexual perversion. The fall of Rome, of the West today, is directly analagous.

There can be no doubt that the sexual aspects of Sodom's sins have great similarity to the moral filth of our present world. But significantly it was not this aspect which our Lord chose to highlight when speaking of how "the days of Lot" typified those of His return. Instead He spoke of those things which were more likely to ensnare His people: "*They* (as well as our present world) did eat, *they* drank, *they* bought, *they* sold, *they* planted, *they* builded" (Lk. 17:28). Their obsession with daily activities without an awareness of God was as bad as their other sins; a point we would do well to be aware of. However, their eating and drinking must have been to gross excess- Ez.16:49 defines "the iniquity of Sodom" as being "fulness of bread" among other things. Some lavish Christian lifestyles frequently feature "fulness of bread"- but because it is not perceived as a gross sin, this unhealthy similarity with Sodom slips by unchallenged.

"They bought, they sold" suggests that Sodom was a major trading centre, rapidly increasing in wealth; "they planted, they builded" (Lk. 17:28) implies a real boom town. Such success resulted in the people being proud and haughty (Ez. 16:49,50); the wealth created at the expense of others brought about "abundance of idleness in her and in her daughters, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy" (Ez. 16:49). It is these aspects of Sodom which are so precisely matched by our self-centred, money mad world. As our Lord realized, it is these aspects which are most likely to ensnare the child of God. Yet Sodom's people were not completely unaware of their religious conscience. Jeremiah likened the false prophets of Israel who effectively taught that sin was service to God to the people of Sodom, suggesting that they too said the same (Jer. 23:14). This is another hint that the people of Sodom had some degree of responsibility, as have latter day Israel whom they typify.

19:6 *Lot went out to them to the door, and shut the door after him-* Lot was willing to die in order to save the Angels. There is an intended similarity with the entrance door to the ark which was also opened and shut (Gen. 6:16), and the Angelic defence of the "door" of Israelite houses in the night of Egypt's destruction (Ex. 12:22,23). The same two Angels had also stood at the "door" of Abraham's tent (Gen. 18:1,2,10 s.w.). There is without doubt a correspondence between Abraham and Lot, but it seems the similarities are more to point a contrast between the two men, in which Lot comes out negatively.

19:7 *He said, Please, my brothers, don't act so wickedly-* Lot thought that he had authority over them, as a judge who sat in the gate of the city. But their anger and lust was beyond respecting anybody. Perhaps it is specifically this incident which Peter has in mind when he writes that Lot was "distressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked" (2 Pet. 2:7), and Peter even implies that it was because of this that he was "delivered". There is no other Biblical example of Lot being "distressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked" in Sodom. It was on behalf of Abraham's intercession that he was delivered, but confirmed in another dimension by this act of genuine distress at their wickedness. Although Lot is presented as weak, this heat of the moment response was indicative of his genuine distress at their wickedness. Lot was deeply wrong to offer his daughters to be raped (:8), and the fact they raped him later reflects how his sin returned upon him. But as with Sarah's 'laughing' and expulsion of Hagar is read positively in the New Testament, so here, Lot's attitude to the Sodomites is held up as positive. God sifted through his sins, his weakness, and found something positive.

19:8 *See now, I have two virgin daughters. Please let me bring them out to you, and you may do to them what seems good to you. Only don't do anything to these men, because they have come under*

the shadow of my roof- This is really indefensible, and is a deep reflection of Lot's weakness and yet also of his desire to somehow do the right thing on another level. On a psychological level, the daughters took their revenge later by making Lot drunk and sleeping with him. This is absolutely psychologically credible, and confirms the veracity of the Biblical storyline here presented.

19:9 *They said, Stand back! Then they said, This one fellow came in to live as a foreigner, and he appoints himself a judge. Now will we deal worse with you, than with them! They pressed hard on the man Lot, and drew near in order to break the door-* The sense in which they felt he was a "judge" was in that Lot had told them that gang rape was "wicked". They were furious that he criticized their moral standards. We can assume that they intended to rape and murder Lot, and yet their passion for the Angels was unabated, and they attempted to break the door down to get in.

19:10 *But the men reached out their hand, and brought Lot into the house to them, and shut the door-* The same word is used of the Angelic shutting of the door of the ark (Gen. 7:16). Salvation was to be within the house, prefiguring the ecclesia in the last days; for a brief moment as the judgments are poured out on this Sodom like world, we too shall be shut in behind a door (same Hebrew phrase, Is. 26:20). "Reached out [their] hand" is used of Noah in Gen. 8:9. We note that this salvation of Lot was by grace- he has just shamelessly offered his daughters to be gang raped. But instead of turning away from him in disgust, God saves him- and offers to save his family. Again we see the juxtaposition of God's grace and human weakness. So often God's saving grace is revealed in our weakest moments, when furthest from Him.

19:11 *They struck the men who were at the door of the house with blindness, both small and great, so that they wearied themselves to find the door-* Zeph.1:17,18 has a series of allusions to Sodom, indicating that its destruction prefigures that of Israel in the last days: "They shall walk like blind men (as the Sodomites did), because they have sinned against the Lord ("the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the Lord", Gen. 13:13)... neither their silver nor their gold (cp. Sodom's wealth) shall be able to deliver them... the whole land shall be devoured by the fire" (Zeph. 1:17,18). "Blindness" is literally 'dazzling'; the Angels showed their Angelic faces, and the light blinded the Sodomites. The similar blinding of Saul and Elymas was to bring them to repentance, and perhaps even at this late stage, the Angels were still seeking to elicit repentance. Truly we should never give up with people.

The smiting with blindness in a latter day context suggests Zech. 14:12, where this is the plague with which God punishes those who have come against Jerusalem. In this case Lot would represent a feeble-faithed Jewish remnant in the last days, unsuccessfully pleading with others to obey the Lord's call.

19:12 *The men said to Lot, Do you have anybody else here? Sons-in-law, your sons, your daughters, and whoever you have in the city, bring them out of the place-* Perhaps they were mindful of the condition that ten righteous could save the city. And yet they reason as if the destruction of the city is already certain, and that ten would not be found. The destruction of Sodom is paralleled with that of Babylon; "Come out of her, my people" (Rev. 18:4,5) is based upon this call. But Lot could 'bring them out', just as Noah is presented as the saviour of his family. "Whoever you have" is in AV "Whatsoever thou hast". All that we have, finally, is our believing, saved family members who are believers and who will be saved from condemnation. They

are all we have, ultimately and eternally. And that should be our focus. Nothing material can be salvaged from this life. As discussed on :29, although the precondition set by Abraham for "ten righteous" was not met- the essence of his prayer was still answered.

It is recorded that Lot only went to speak with his sons in law, and that the daughters who came with him were young unmarried girls who were still living at home, rather than speaking to his married daughters (Gen. 19:14). There is no mention of his speaking to them or his sons- perhaps because he knew that spiritually they were too far gone to be interested? It is possible that his speaking only to his "sons in law" rather than directly to his daughters also indicates a lack of urgency or comprehension of the seriousness of the situation.

19:13 *For we will destroy this place, because the outcry against them has grown so great before Yahweh that Yahweh has sent us to destroy it-* The language is similar to that of Gen. 15:16 about the sin of the Amorites becoming "full". There are limits to the moral declension which God will tolerate. When the *eretz* was "full" of wickedness, the flood came; and when the sin of Sodom grew to a certain point, this was the trigger for judgment. It is hard to imagine that our world has much further to run until it reaches that trigger point. Angels sent to destroy points forward to the "destroyer" Angel sent to destroy at Passover, with a minority saved by grace.

19:14 *Lot went out, and spoke to his sons-in-law, who were pledged to marry his daughters, and said, Get up! Get out of this place, for Yahweh will destroy the city. But he seemed to his sons-in-law to be joking-* Our last appeal to the world will probably meet a similar response from the "mockers" of the last days (2 Pet. 3:3,4); but it must be remembered that if Lot's leaving of Sodom represents the calling away to judgment, then

those whom he asked to leave with him may primarily represent other believers. At the Lord's coming, the willingness to respond to the call to leave the world is an indicator of our acceptability- those who refuse or delay to obey the call are punished (after judgment) in the sufferings of the world, whilst those who voluntarily obey the call to judgment immediately are those who will be accepted. The parable of the wise and foolish virgins illustrates this too. Thus Lot's appeal to those who presumably knew the true God to leave the city may parallel our frantic pleading with weak believers to immediately respond to the call to leave the world. Sadly there will be the same light hearted refusal on the part of some.

"Lot went out" into streets filled with blind, angry men of Sodom, in order to spread the message as the Angels requested (Gen. 19:14). This picture of preaching amidst bitter hostility but with Divine protection recurs in Rev. 11 concerning the two witnesses.

We note that Lot urged his sons-in-law to flee Sodom, but when it came to it, he was very reluctant to do so. They had surely heard how he had just offered his daughters, their sisters-in-law, to be gang raped. One reason why they laughed off his appeal was because he clearly lacked personal integrity and credibility; he was hardly walking his own talk. And this is a factor in why so many refuse the preaching of the Gospel today; the preachers lack personal credibility. And of course the opposite is so true.

The record speaks of Lot's daughters as if they were his only daughters. They were virgins, and not yet married (:14). The two daughters who fled with him to the cave are described as his "firstborn" and "the younger"- as if he only had two daughters. It was the custom that the firstborn daughter must be married first (Gen. 29:26). So it is quite likely that the daughters whom Lot offered to be raped were in fact engaged to be married. So no

wonder their prospective husbands hardly responded to Lot and considered him a joke of a person. As indeed he was. Another option of interpretation is that the firstborn refused to marry unbelievers. But her younger sisters agreed to. Her sin of raping her father would then have to be understood in that light.

"Joked" is the same word has just been used in Gen. 18 of how Sarah mocked at the Angel's promise that she would become pregnant. But she was saved by Abraham. Lot's family likewise mocked God's prophetic word- but were not saved by Lot. This continues the message that Abraham's faith and intercession saved his family and his seed; and that Sarah, the mother of God's people, "mother of us all", was deeply flawed and saved by grace.

19:15 *When the morning came, then the angels hurried Lot, saying, Get up!-* "Get up" is the same word Lot uses to his relatives in :14. Perhaps his appeal for them to "get up!" and urgently leave was none too credible because he himself was reluctant to do so. Consistently in this record, we see that Lot was saved by grace. Like his wife, he was reluctant to leave Sodom and failed to perceive the urgency of the situation. He represents God's people of the last days; and we can infer therefore that they [we] will be very weak as Lot was, and saved by grace alone.

Take your wife, and your two daughters who are here- "Are here" in the Hebrew means literally 'to come out'- as if to stress that although living with Lot, they still had made the conscious decision to leave. The fact that they did not look back like their mother would indicate a certain degree of spiritual strength- and perhaps they were still virgins because they declined to marry "the men of Sodom (who) were wicked and sinners before the Lord exceedingly" (Gen.13:13). "Who are here" is literally "who are found"; it is the same word used in Abraham's bargaining about not destroying the city if ten righteous were "found" there

(Gen. 18:32). We note that the daughters, and not Lot's wife, were "found". So Lot and his daughters, three people, were "found" righteous. But the daughters will later rape their own father to get pregnant. They were "found" righteous in the sense that the not very righteous Noah was "found righteous" in his generation, and Hebrews 11 says that it was by his faith that righteousness was counted to him. And with pathetically weak Lot and his girls, it is rather sounding like they were counted righteous by the faith of uncle Abraham.

Lest you be consumed in the sin of the city- It is apparent that "sin" is sometimes used as a metonymy for 'condemnation for sin'. The AV margin here rightly suggests that "the iniquity" of the city was the condemnation / punishment for their iniquity. And there are other examples in Ps. 7:16; Jer. 14:16 and Zech. 14:19. This isn't just a matter of cold exposition; the reality is that every sin we commit- and we sin daily- is in fact a self-infliction of condemnation upon ourselves. We rather than the Lord are the ones who in essence have demanded our condemnation; His judgment is merely reflecting our own choice. The idea of self-condemnation is perhaps behind the Lord's teaching in Mt. 18:6.

This command to leave Sodom is clearly one of the source passages for Rev. 18:4 concerning Babylon: "I heard another (Angelic) voice from Heaven, saying, Come out of her, My people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues". Note that it was also an Angel who said this to Lot. Babylon is directly equated with Sodom in Is. 13:19 and Jer. 50:40. Babylon geographically and culturally represents the peoples surrounding Israel of our last days- and therefore it is not surprising that related Arab nations like Edom, Moab and Ammon are also paralleled with Sodom (Jer. 49:18; Zeph. 2:9). This continues a long-standing Biblical theme that the curses on

apostate Israel are the same as those on the Arabs / people of the *eretz*- thus Sodom is representative of both Jews and Arabs.

19:16 *But he lingered; and the men grabbed his hand, his wife's hand, and his two daughters' hands, Yahweh being merciful to him; and they took him out, and set him outside of the city*- Just as the men grabbed him and pulled him inside the house (:10), now they grab him and drag him out of Sodom. Continually we want to use the word "pathetic" about Lot. But he was counted righteous, and saved by grace, thanks to Abraham's intercession. And we have so many people like him in our lives; their salvation may depend finally upon our intercession. They believe, but they are weak; they fail temptation, time and again; and are passive as Lot was.

Lot had been attracted toward Sodom by materialism, and it had consumed most of his family, and almost himself. For despite all he had been through in the last 24 hours, he still lingered, thinking of his wealth, and was saved by special grace alone. He left Sodom with nothing but the clothes he stood up in. Just as we will at our exit from this world. Israel were not to "linger" in leaving Egypt on Passover night (s.w. Ex. 12:39); the urgency of the situation becomes all the more relevant to us once we perceive that the call to leave "Sodom" is not just when the Lord comes, but right now; for we now are not to "look back" as Lot's wife did (Lk. 9:62; Phil. 3:13).

The importance of leaving the world immediately the Angel comes is shown by the consistent impression in the record that the Angels urgently "hastened Lot" (Gen.19:15-17,22), implying that if he did not hurry then he would perish. It was not foreordained that he would not perish- "Arise... *lest* thou be consumed in the iniquity of the city... escape for thy life; look not behind (the Hebrew root means 'to delay') thee, neither stay thou... *lest* thou be consumed" (Gen. 19:15,17 AV). It is quite

possible that the *speed* of our response to the call will be the proof of our acceptability. The speed of response was the basic difference between the wise and foolish virgins. It was only after he had left Sodom that the Angel said that he could not "do any thing till thou be come thither", i.e. to Zoar (Gen.19:22). Yet Lot "lingered", the Hebrew meaning 'to question or argue', as we see him doing later in the record in his discussion with the Angel concerning the danger of going to the mountain as he had been told, and asking leave to go to Zoar. "Lingered" literally means 'Why?' or 'What!', indicating severe incomprehension on Lot's part. We would be foolish to think that we too will not be prone to a serious sense of incomprehension when the Angel appears. Only repeated meditation upon that moment and a true love of the Lord's coming will stop us being so flustered by the Angel's call that we fail to respond to it with the necessary speed.

Therefore the Angel "grabbed" Lot's hand, a Hebrew word elsewhere translated 'to take courage', and definitely meaning to strengthen or encourage. Angels frequently said to faithful men "Fear not" when they have appeared to them. It is therefore tempting to think that our Angel will speak similar words of strength and encouragement to us on their appearing. The typology of Lot would support this. But we have to remember that in Lot's case the Lord was "merciful unto him"- such grace as was shown to him cannot be presumed upon. "Merciful" certainly carries the idea of pity in Hebrew- if we have had a loving relationship with our guardian Angel now, surely we may look forward to their 'pity' then. Despite all this, Lot's wife still looked back; and 'remember her'. The pull of family and materialism was such for that woman, that all this supreme demonstration of mercy and love was not enough to convince her that nothing else mattered apart from obedience to God.

Lot therefore was 'taken out' from the city which he had failed to separate from as he should; all by grace. And likewise with Abraham being 'taken out' from Ur by Divine providence, when he ought to have obeyed of his own volition.

19:17 *It came to pass, when they had taken them out, that one of them said, Escape for your life! Don't look behind you, and don't stay anywhere in the plain. Escape to the mountains, lest you be consumed!-* "Escape" or "flee" is *malat* and is related to the word "Lot". Lot was born to flee [the word is used five times in :17,19,20,22]; but he failed to be the man he was intended to be. Yet he was dragged out, made to flee, by the higher hand of grace, operating on behalf of Abraham's intercession. The exit from Sodom was a type of our calling out of the world on the eve of its destruction in the last days; but when we first respond to the Gospel, we are likewise warned not to "look back" (Lk. 9:62; Phil. 3:13). We are to try to live now in the intensity of the second coming, living on a knife edge, realizing that the ultimate issues of eternity are before us. The world in which we live is as Sodom, ripe for destruction. "The mountains" were exactly where Abraham was living, the barren uplands which Abraham had accepted when Lot chose the fertile plain. He was being driven to reconsider that decision he had taken, and to realize how much he had suffered because of it. The whole "plain", the fertile area once so attractive to Lot, was to be destroyed. And so on the eve of this world's destruction, we need to earnestly consider whether we are as Lot or Abraham.

LXX "lest perhaps thou be overtaken together with them" shows that despite Abraham's intercession being a factor in Lot's salvation, he still would have lost that salvation if he chose to tarry longer. "Look" means to view intensely with love or pleasure; that these words were said to Lot must indicate that he was tempted to look on Sodom in that way. There seems

to be a pointed contrast with Abraham, who looked at Sodom burning without being punished, presumably because he had no attraction towards it (Gen. 19:28). Thus for all his vexing of soul for the sins of the city (2 Pet. 2:8), Lot was still tempted to love it. Our repulsion at the ways of the world is not necessarily a sign of our spiritual safety- there is an uncanny love within human nature for the environment we know. Thus there can be homesickness for drab streets and scenes which we despised whilst living among them. Such love, taken to its logical end, is a love of the world which militates against our desire to see the end of this age and to enter the Kingdom.

It is amazing that with the clear command echoing in his ears, Lot could ask leave to live in Zoar, a small city of the plain, and not go to the mountain. He clearly failed to appreciate the reality and seriousness of the Angel's coming- and this will certainly be a temptation to us in that moment when the typology of Lot is fulfilled in us. The only way to guard against this is by consciously living our lives now in awareness of the fact that now we have been called to leave the world and its ways, and therefore our whole life now should have the spirit which we will have when we leave this world when the Angel comes. This is confirmed by an oblique allusion which our Lord makes to this Angelic command in Lk. 9:62: "No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the Kingdom of God". The context shows that starting to plough represents the start of our new life in response to the Gospel call- but the allusion to the Angel's words to Lot show that we should live our whole lives in response to that call as if we are on the way to the judgment, having been called away by the Angel.

It is a breathtaking thought that all the intricate typology of the judgments on Sodom has been worked out for our benefit- the generation who will be alive at the second coming. To a lesser

extent, the believers of the first century could have seen that the story of Sodom also represented the judgments to come upon Jerusalem in AD70. An impressive group of Old Testament prophets had associated Jerusalem with Sodom: Is. 1:10; Am. 4:11; Dt. 29:23; Jer. 23:14; Lam. 4:6; Ez. 16:46. Jer. 4 and 5 are prophecies which have relevance to Israel's latter day judgments (Jer. 4:28 = Mt. 24:30). Jer. 5:1 seems to allude to God's requirement for their to be some faithful men in Sodom to prevent its destruction: "Run ye to and from through the streets of Jerusalem, and see... if ye can find a man... that seeketh the truth; and I will pardon it". This associates Sodom, Jerusalem and the last days. It confirms the exposition offered on chapter 18- that if only one righteous had been found in Sodom, it would have been saved. And there was one righteous, namely Lot (2 Pet. 2:7). But Abraham set the limit at ten, and God accepted that. As the faithful remnant were miraculously allowed to leave Sodom, immediately unleashing the Divine judgments by doing so, the faithful Christian remnant were allowed to leave Jerusalem just before the final Roman onslaught of AD70, doubtless spurred on by their Lord's command: "Let them which are in Judaea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it (Jerusalem) depart out" (Lk. 21:21). The reference to fleeing to the mountains would have suggested a conscious allusion back to the command to Lot to flee out of Sodom "to the mountain".

19:18 *Lot said to them, Oh, not so, my lord-* Lot recognized he was dealing with Angels, and yet he felt he could dialogue with them, just as Abraham had done in chapter 18. But given the urgency of the situation, we tend to see his words here not so much as a reflection of his intimacy with God, but rather of his fearful lack of faith.

19:19 *See now, your servant has found favour in your sight, and you have magnified your grace, which you have shown to me in saving my life. I can't escape to the mountain, lest evil pursue me there, and I die-* Lot's response to the Angel's call illustrates the contradictions which abound within human nature. He claims to appreciate that the Angel has saved his life, but then goes on to say that what the Angel is telling him to do will result in the loss of his life. Similarly our calling away may well present us with the prospect of apparent pain or loss. He feared that "some evil" would "take me", using a Hebrew word that is not the one usually translated as "take". This one means strictly 'to pursue after and capture', indicating that Lot was all too aware of the Sodomites' desire to kill him, and feared that if he lived alone in the mountains they would easily pursue and kill him. Instead, Lot suggested, there would be more safety in living in the small city of Zoar nearby, which presumably the Sodomites would be loath to invade just to take Lot. Another consideration is that "the evil" (Heb.) referred to Lot's belief that there was some evil, satan-like figure in the mountains which would pursue and kill him there. That belief was so deep that it made him challenge the Angel-saviour even in this desperate moment. And yet for all that wrong doctrine, the Angel still showed mercy and condescended to his misbelief, just as the Lord used the language of demons to those for whom the idea was so entrenched.

All this shows an incomprehension of what the Angel had said. Firstly, Sodom was to be destroyed at any moment, including the men whom Lot feared. Either he did not properly believe this, or he thought that God's judgment would not involve total destruction. Secondly, he had been explicitly told "neither stay thou in all the plain (including Zoar)... lest thou be consumed" (Gen.19:17 AV). Insufficient attention to the words of the Angels therefore resulted in his foolish reasoning which

almost cost him his life. It is easy to imagine that the moment of the Angel's coming will fill the weak latter day believer, perhaps distracted as he will be by the persecutions of the holocaust to come, with such a sense of confusion and incomprehension that he too will fail to take careful note of what is said to him. A love of God's word now, rejoicing in its detail, is surely the preventive for this.

The connection between the Angels as God's eyes and His hearing of prayer becomes more relevant once it is realized that to 'find grace in God's sight' (eyes-Angels) is equivalent to saying 'please hear my prayer'- see Gen. 19:19; 32:5; 33:10,15; 34:11- at least in Genesis. This again explains why early believers conceived of God in terms of an Angel, as they would have prayed to the Angel and received the answers and other revelation of God from one.

The Angels make things potentially possible, but the realization of their potential plans depended upon Israel's freewill effort. When Lot says that he "cannot" flee from Sodom, the Angel responds by saying that he "cannot" [same Hebrew word] do anything until Lot has left- as if to suggest that the Angel's mission depended upon Lot's freewill decision for its realization (Gen. 19:19,22). The same word is found on the lips of another Angel in commending Jacob that he had "prevailed" (Gen. 32:28)- literally, he had 'coulded'. He had achieved what had been made potentially possible in terms of his relationship with that Angel. Caleb and Joshua perceived that Israel were "well able" to overcome the tribes and inherit the land, seeing that the Angel-hornet had gone ahead and prepared the way; and yet due to Israel's disabling of this possibility at the time, it was in some ways so that God Himself was "not able" to give them the inheritance, because *they* judged that *they* were " not able" to take it (Num. 13:30,31; 14:16).

19:20 *See now, this city is near to flee to, and it is a little one. Oh let me escape there (isn't it a little one?), and my soul will live-* The Hebrew for "flee" is also translated 'to hide in', carrying the idea of being chased into. Again, his fear of the Sodomites is shown to loom large in his thinking. The Angel had bidden him flee from the Divine wrath that was soon to consume all the cities of the plain. But instead Lot was preoccupied with the fear of human vengeance against him. Such an attitude appears crazy to our cool, armchair analysis of what happened. Yet Lot is certainly a type of the believers who are alive at the Lord's return. There can be no doubting, therefore, that whatever our theoretical willingness now to leave all and follow the Angel, there will then be at least the temptation to get consumed with the kind of double-think that seized Lot's reasoning. He even tried to accommodate his human desires to the desires of the Angel: "Is it not a little one?", as if to imply that there was little wrong with the place spiritually. The Hebrew translated " little one" is also rendered "a short time"- as if to say 'You are asking me to be quick about leaving Sodom- so I'll go to Zoar, as it won't take long to get there'.

"My soul shall live" is really a reflection of his lack of faith in Divine salvation; he considered that he knew better than God in working out his salvation. All the way through, Lot is portrayed as a man of very weak faith. And yet he was counted righteous, as 2 Peter makes clear.

19:21 *He said to him, Behold, I have granted your request concerning this thing also, that I will not overthrow the city of which you have spoken-* LXX "Behold, I have had respect to thee also about this thing". We see here God's sensitivity and even humility before men; His "respect" of humans in all their weakness. We too should respect people even if they are spiritually weak; and this will affect the language and jargon

we use about people. The intercession of one man saved Zoar; and this feeds back into the theme developed in commentary on chapter 18, that the intercession of one man, Abraham, and the righteousness of one man, Lot, could have saved a whole city- but Abraham lacked the vision and faith to actualize it. God was so open to dialogue; the plans for destruction of the whole plain were ammended at the last moment because of Lot's intercession, even though it was rooted in his fear rather than his faith. We see how sensitive God is to intercession. And it was only because of Abraham's intercession that Lot was saved (:29).

The righteousness of a single man [cp. that of the Lord Jesus] wasn't perceived by Abraham as powerful enough. Perhaps Paul had this in mind when he writes in Romans of how for the sake of "the one", the Lord Jesus, many sinners can be counted righteous. And surely God was trying to bring out the same possibility when we read of how Lot asked for the sake of Zoar- just for his singular sake. And God spared Zoar- just for the sake of one man, Lot. Note how the Hebrew word used for "spare" in Gen. 18:24,26 recurs in Gen. 19:21, where God assures Lot that He will indeed *spare* Zoar [AV "I have *accepted*"]. We are surely intended to reflect that God would have spared Sodom for Lot's sake too. Perhaps God is alluding to the same point when He says that for the sake of just one righteous man He would have spared Israel in Ezekiel's time (Ez. 22:30). Surely there was one righteous man in Ezekiel's time, not least Ezekiel himself. But there was nobody with the spiritual vision to intercede with God to spare Israel for the sake of that one man; their lack of vision of His grace and pleasure in the righteousness of even one person was akin to Abraham's lack. And are we not intended to see some allusion to Abraham's failure in the way that Moses, just one man, prayed for and received Israel's salvation? And could not Abraham have asked for Sodom to be spared for his own

sake, had he had a broader vision of God's grace? Perhaps his legalistic attitude is reflected in his appeal for "the judge of all the earth" to do what was *right*, in not destroying the righteous with the wicked. He perceives God as legalistic judge, not gracious Father. He asked for justice- not mercy. His basis is that the Judge of all the earth shall "do judgment"- note that "do right" is a poor translation. The Hebrew word translated "Judge" is the same root as "do judgment / justice". It's as if Abraham is almost simply observing that the Judge / Justice will of course do justice, and so he's drawing to His attention that there are in fact just people in Sodom, and therefore God's justice will surely preclude Him from destroying them. He assumed there were ten people in Sodom who were righteous; but perhaps later Scripture alludes to this by stressing that there is not one truly righteous person, not one (Rom. 3:10). Paul brings out the point that therefore salvation is by grace, not personal righteousness. And in the end, Lot was saved- but only because he threw himself upon God's grace. Yet he too perhaps suffered from Abraham's legalism; it is possibly referred to by the men of Sodom when they complain that he who had come in to sojourn amongst them "would play the judge" (Gen. 19:9). Significantly, Lot's salvation out of the burning Sodom is applied to all God's people in Am. 4:11. His entire people are saved by a like grace.

Abraham saved Lot out of Sodom by his earnest prayer for him; and there is ample reason to think from the Genesis record and his subsequent reaction to the Angel's invitation to leave that Lot of himself was simply not strong enough. Without those prayers and the concern of Abraham read by God as prayer, Lot may well have been left to suffer the condemnation of the world he preferred to live in. And yet Lot fleeing from Sodom is used in the NT as a type of our latter day exit from the world at the Lord's coming. Is this not to suggest that the latter day

believers will be saved only by grace, they will not be strong and ready to leave; and their salvation will only be on account of the prayers of the faithful? Lot was not without spirituality; but he was simply swamped by the pull of the world in which he had become entangled, not to mention his unspiritual wife. He was the type on which one could have compassion, making a difference, and pull out of the fire. Indeed, it could even be that Jude's words about pulling a brother out of the fire may be a reference back to Lot being pulled out of the fire that came upon Sodom. Those in his position sin a sin which is not unto death only in the sense that we can pray for them, so that their sin will not lead them to condemnation. But only in this sense is sin not unto death; for the wages of sin, any sin, is death (Rom. 6:23). But in some cases this sentence can ultimately be changed on account of our effort for our brother.

19:22 *Hurry, escape there, for I can't do anything until you get there. Therefore the name of the city was called Zoar-* When Lot says that he "cannot" flee from Sodom, the Angel responds by saying that he "cannot" [same Hebrew word] do anything until Lot has left- as if to suggest that the Angel's mission depended upon Lot's freewill decision for its realization (Gen. 19:19,22). The same word is found on the lips of another Angel in commending Jacob that he had "prevailed" (Gen. 32:28)- literally, he had 'coulded'. He had achieved what had been made potentially possible in terms of his relationship with that Angel. The two usages of "I cannot..." suggest that God and man are now at loggerheads. Lot "cannot" obey the required precondition, and God "cannot" go ahead with His plan. And the situation was resolved by God dragging Lot out of the situation by pure grace.

19:23 *The sun had risen on the earth when Lot came to Zoar-* Just as God reads the situation of the righteous as prayer even if they don't verbalize it, so God sees the behaviour / situation

of the wicked as a cry ascending up to Him, as prayer does. Sodom's cry reaching unto Heaven is the obvious example (Gen. 18:20,21; 19:23); but Ps. 74:23 also speaks of the voice of God's enemies 'rising up' [Heb.] to Him in Heaven.

The rising of the sin invites comparison with the description of the second coming as the rising of the sun in Mal. 4:2; the judgments upon this Sodom like world are to come the moment the Lord returns. "But his wife looked back from behind him" (Gen.19:26) suggests the picture of the wife following behind Lot, filled with remorse at the loss of all she had held dear. Our Lord comments concerning not desiring our "stuff which is in the house" in the day of his coming: "Remember Lot's wife. Whosoever (like her) shall seek (Greek: 'plot') to save his life shall lose it". We can infer from this that she plotted and schemed how to save her possessions- i.e. her 'life', seeing that for her, her life did consist of the abundance of the things which she possessed (Lk. 12:15). These feelings grew so strong that she paused to take a loving, wistful look at the city. Remember that the fire only fell after Lot was in Zoar; therefore the city was looking as it normally did. Their exodus was at night- "the sun was risen upon the earth when Lot entered into Zoar" (Gen. 19:23), so she would have seen the flickering lights of the city in the distance. Compare this with how the virgins of Mt. 25 go out to meet their Lord at night.

As a result of Abraham's intense prayer, believing that this coupled with the spiritual preparedness of others really could change God's stated purpose, the judgment of Sodom need not have come. So with Jerusalem in AD70, had there been a suitably large, repentant 'remnant' those horrific judgments could have been avoided. Despite the definite associations of Jerusalem with Sodom in the prophets, the Old Testament also uses Sodom as a symbol of total, permanent destruction of the type which has

not and will not come on Jerusalem, the future capital of the Kingdom (Dt. 29:23; 32:32; Is. 13:19; Jer. 49:18; 50:40; Am. 4:11; Zeph. 2:9). It is for this reason that Paul makes the point that for the sake of the tiny group of Jews who did still hold and practice the truth, Israel would not suffer the judgments of Sodom in totality (Rom. 9:29 cp. Is. 1:9). This would indicate that there will also be a latter day Jewish remnant which will stop the faithless Israel of today receiving the judgment of permanent destruction. But of course for the individuals of both natural and spiritual Israel who have consciously rejected God, "it shall be more tolerable in that day (of judgment) for Sodom" than for them (Lk. 10:12). Jer. 20:16 has a graphic description of the people of Sodom screaming out in anguish, both mental and physical, as the judgments of God fell upon them: "The cry in the morning (when the judgments began, Gen. 19:23,24), and the shouting at noontide". This is in reality a picture of the rejected in the last days.

19:24 *Then Yahweh rained on Sodom and on Gomorrah sulphur and fire from Yahweh out of the sky*- The 'raining' invites us to compare this with the coming of the flood, thereby connecting Lot with Noah. The same word is used in Gen. 7:4. The days of Noah and Lot are brought together in the New Testament; Noah and Lot are clearly intended to be compared. They both sinned through wine after their gracious deliverance. Evidence of this has been uncovered by Albright and other archaeologists, finding it superimposed upon a once fertile area: "Evidence of five freshwater oases have been located at the southeast corner of the Dead Sea, obviously used for irrigation to service the cities of the circuit when they were in existence. Adjacent to these oases, on a plain elevated above the level of the Dead Sea some 500 feet (152.4m), there were found the remains of a great fortified enclosure, a high place for religious festivals.

According to these archaeologists, the evidence suggests that the population of the area ended abruptly about 2000 B.C. It also showed, that at that time, the area was densely populated, fertile and prosperous".

Abraham prayed for the city of Sodom to be saved for the sake of ten righteous who might be there. He didn't specifically mention what was his heart's desire- that *Lot* be saved. But God discerned the *spirit* of his prayer, and saved Lot, even though Abraham 'knew not what to pray for' and asked for the 'wrong' thing in order to obtain what he really wanted, i.e. the salvation of Lot.

19:25 *He overthrew those cities, all the plain, all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew on the ground-* This is mentioned because the fertility of the area had been so initially attractive to Lot. The "all" excluded Zoar; so we have another example of "all" not meaning 'every', in a global sense. The scale of destruction, utter totality, of man and animal and vegetation, recalls the effects of the flood.

19:26 *But his wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt-* The Angels and Abraham looked upon Sodom (Gen. 18:16), but of course they looked upon Sodom differently to Lot's wife. The point of course is that it all depends with what eyes we look upon this world. She was walking "behind him", so Lot would not have actually seen her turn into a pillar of salt. As he ceased to hear her footsteps behind him he must have guessed what had happened- but now the Angel's words seemed more vital to him: "Look not behind you". Likewise it will be a sore temptation for us to be side-tracked from our obedience to the Angel's call by consideration for our natural family. Dt. 29:23 and Zeph. 2:9 show that Sodom was turned into an area of salt, which explains why Gen. 19:25 says that the fire destroyed "that which grew on the ground", by

making the area salty. This salt was presumably formed through the fire intensely burning the rocks and earth until the elements dissolved into a 'salt'. It is reasonable to think that as Sodom was turned into salt by fire, so Lot's wife suffered the same punishment through a bolt of fire striking her and turning her too into salt. This is a prime example of how the unworthy will suffer the same punishment as the surrounding world which they failed to truly leave. There is good reason to think that their punishment may also involve an element of literal fire, as that of Lot's wife did.

"Remember Lot's wife" suggests that we should meditate upon her position as it has especial warning for the last days. Her leaving of Sodom appears to have been due to the personal influence of Lot her husband, yet ultimately she failed to have that personal desire to obey God. It would not be pushing the type too far to suggest that the wives of latter day believers may feel that they can enter the Kingdom in the spiritual shadow of their husbands. One cannot help wondering whether she left Ur not through personal response to the promises but because the others were leaving. Doubtless her husband's uncle Abraham would have led her and the whole family in regular prayer and meditation during the journey towards Canaan. But somehow the reality of the God of Israel was never allowed to touch her inner being, and the years of the soft life in Sodom would have sealed her spiritual state. It is hard to avoid making the point that many of us may be in a similar position.

Gen. 19:14 RVmg. brings out the likely immediate background to her decision. Lot's sons in law "were to marry" his daughters. The Lord too perceived that they were marrying and giving in marriage the very day the flood came, and He pointed out the similarities with the Sodom situation (Lk. 17:27-29). Could it not be that the very day of the double wedding, they

had to leave? With all the build up to the wedding, Lot and his wife would so wanted to have stayed just another day to see the wedding of their two daughters. It is to the girls credit that they both left. But Lot's wife had invested so much in it emotionally that she just had to look back.

19:27 *Abraham got up early in the morning to the place where he had stood before Yahweh-* He went there to see whether the destruction had happened, whether in fact ten righteous had been found there. He went there in faith, responding to the Angel's words. And he found they had come true. Remember that Abraham was informed of the promised destruction of Sodom by the Angel just after the same Angel had promised the conception and birth of Isaac. It's as if the short term fulfilment of the Angel's words was encouragement that the longer term Angelic prediction would likewise happen; and the yet longer term fulfilment of the promises would also occur. We too find the Father operating in a similar way with us. We are given short term experiences of faith rewarded to encourage our faith in longer term outcomes.

19:28 *He looked toward Sodom and Gomorrah, and toward all the land of the plain, and looked, and saw that the smoke of the land went up as the smoke of a furnace-* Of Gog's destruction it is written: "I will rain upon him... great hailstones, fire and brimstone" (Ez. 38:22), associating latter day Gog with Sodom. At the same time, Gog and his supporters will be fighting each other (Ez. 38:21), clearly connecting with Zechariah's prophecy that the local surrounding invaders of the last days will do the same (and cp. Jud. 7:22). God's pleading against Gog with these things is the language of Joel 3:2, again about the destruction of Israel's latter day Arab enemies. The Hebrew word for 'locust' in Joel is almost identical to 'Gog'. All this results in an association between the latter day invaders, the Sodomites, Gog and the

northern invader. This prepares the way for the view that " the beast" is a symbolic epitome of all Israel's enemies.

It is to be expected, therefore, that the fall of Babylon chronicled in Rev. 18 is shot through with allusions back to the Sodom record. The following are the more evident points of contact:

Babylon (in Rev.)	Sodom
"I will shew unto thee the judgment of the great whore" (Babylon); 17:2	Cp. God showing Abraham the judgment of Sodom.
The beast supporting Babylon "was and is not and shall ascend"; 17:8	Sodom and surrounding cities were strong, then overrun by Abraham, then revived.
"Her sins have reached unto Heaven, God hath remembered her iniquities"; 18:5	"The cry of Sodom... is great because their sin is very grievous ... the cry of it is come unto me" (Gen. 18:20,21)
"She hath glorified herself, and lived deliciously"; 18:7	"Pride... fulness of bread" (Ez. 16:49)
"Utterly burned with fire"; 18:8	'Sodom' = 'burning'.
"Her plagues... death... and famine"; 18:8	"He overthrew all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground" (cp. "famine"; Gen. 19:25).
"The great city... great Babylon"; 16:19	The city of Sodom.
"There fell upon men a great hail out of heaven" (16:21)	"The Lord rained upon Sodom... brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven" (Gen.19:24).
"They shall see the smoke of her burning, standing afar off for the fear of her torment (18:9,10)	Abraham standing far away and seeing the smoke of Sodom's burning indicates that the surrounding kings did likewise (Gen. 19:28).
Merchants suffered through Babylon's fall (18:11-19)	Sodom was a trading centre (Lk. 17:28)

" ...a great millstone cast into the sea ... thus with violence shall... Babylon... be found no more at all" (18:21)	Sodom now appears to be submerged in the Dead Sea, to be found no more.
"Her smoke rose up" (19:3)	"Sodom... the land of the plain... the smoke of the country went up" (19:28)

We have reasoned that Lot's call out of Sodom represents how the Angels will call us out of this present evil world. Indeed, our Lord said that Sodom represents the world just prior to the second coming (Lk. 17:28). The evident connections with latter day Babylon would suggest that 'Babylon' too represents the world of the last days; " Come out of her my people" (Rev. 18:4) therefore refers to the Angel's plea to us at the second coming, in addition to any previous historical reference it may have to the Catholic apostasy. The call for the first century Jews to leave Rome or for true believers to come out of apostate systems were pointers towards the ultimate fulfilment of these words, which will be in our leaving this life at the behest of the Angel who comes to call us away. Our obedience then will be the summation of all the previous decisions God's people have made to 'come out' from the 'world' in its various forms.

If 'Babylon' refers specifically to the powers surrounding Israel, it is possible to see Sodom representing the world under Arab control in the last days, offering great material wealth. Yet the obvious Biblical basis for the language of "come out of her my people" is in the many references to Israel being called on to leave the soft life of Babylon and return to the land during the restoration (e.g. Zech. 2:6,7). In this there is a remarkable similarity with Sodom. The Jews in Babylon maintained their separateness, and yet became heavily involved in the government of Babylon (as witness Daniel and his friends, along with profane

history). This is parallel to Lot's position in Sodom. Yet the prosperity of Babylon made the Jews disinclined to leave it in order to go to Jerusalem, as Lot had a similar disinclination. And the easy life of the present world will also seem a greater attraction to the unworthy of the new Israel, when the Angel calls them to go to Jerusalem to meet their Lord.

19:29 *It happened, when God destroyed the cities of the plain, that God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the middle of the overthrow, when He overthrew the cities in which Lot lived-* The situation has many connections with the flood, where God likewise "remembered Noah" and saved a remnant from the total destruction which came (Gen. 8:1). 'Remembering' a person can be read as an idiom for responding to their prayers. Abraham's intercessory prayer in Gen. 18 apparently failed- Sodom was destroyed, and his condition of ten righteous in the city was not met. But the essence of his prayer was 'Please save my righteous nephew Lot'. And that was heard. Just as the essence of our prayers is heard. And here we have a case of a weak believer being saved from condemnation by the prayers of a third party (as Mk. 2:5). This is why the prophets say that Judah and Jerusalem would have been as Sodom- were it not for the intercession of a righteous remnant. They were the seed of Abraham, praying and believing in his spirit.

We learn from this verse that Lot had lived in the cities of the plain, until he eventually settled in Sodom. This adds to the impression of a steady slide downwards in his spirituality. It was only by taking all his wealth and family away from him, until he ended up living as a caveman, that he could be saved. Such is the terrible power of materialism and the soft life.

The days of Sodom are to be read as types of our last days. Thus in the type of the last days, the prayers and loving spiritual concern of the faithful remnant really can have an effect on the

salvation of our weaker brethren. Note that Abraham's prayer that Sodom would be saved if ten righteous were found there, was not answered; but God knew the real spirit of his prayer, that Lot should be saved, and that God's justice should be upheld in not destroying the righteous with the wicked. It was this which God recognized and answered, even though Abraham had not specifically verbalized those thoughts in prayer. Our true spiritual love for our brethren, expressed in such intense prayer, will likewise be heard in these last days.

The record of Lot's leaving of Sodom (a remarkable type of our 'exodus' at the second coming) has the repeated hallmark of 'haste'. This is found repeated in the record of both the Passover and the crossing of the Red Sea. They were told, "You shall eat it in haste" (Ex. 12:11); "they were thrust out of Egypt, and could not tarry" because " the Egyptians were urgent upon the people, that they might send them out of the land in haste" (Ex. 12:39,33). Lot was "sent out" of Sodom by the hastening of the angels. It may be that in some cases our angels will hasten us to leave through their influencing of the surrounding nations (Egypt), rather than through their physical presence.

19:30 *Lot went up out of Zoar and lived in the mountain, and his two daughters with him; for he was afraid to live in Zoar-* Again, we see Lot being brought back to the obedience he should have made originally. He had been told to flee to the mountain, and now he does so of his own volition. His fearing to live in Zoar was really another lack of faith- in the Angelic promise that Zoar would not be destroyed.

He lived in a cave with his two daughters- This is a picture of his absolute poverty, having been plunged from wealthy affluence to cave dwelling.

19:31 *The firstborn said to the younger, Our father is old, and there is not a man in the earth to come in to us in the way of all*

the earth- There were still plenty of men in the *eretz*, and Zoar was still intact, protected by the promised Angelic deliverance of that city for the sake of one man's intercession, Lot. See on :36.

19:32 *Come, let's make our father drink wine, and we will lie with him, that we may preserve our father's seed-* Incest was likely commonplace in Sodom, and the young women were still influened by it, although saved by grace. And yet as with Lot offering his daughters to the men of Sodom to gang rape, in order to protect the Angelic visitors- so here too, the misbehaviour is not purely sensual but is given some wider spiritual justification, For the women considered that there were now no other human beings alive (:31) after the dramatic destruction of Sodom. They were arguing that they had to do this in order to preserve the human race. And so again, the nature of Lot's sin against them is reflected in the nature of how they sin against him. Simple faith, trust in God, would have saved Lot and his daughters from their sins.

19:33 *They made their father drink wine that night: and the firstborn went in, and lay with her father. He didn't know when she lay down, nor when she arose-* We wonder how this could quite have been the case. To achieve ejaculation when so drunk that there is a memory blackout, and for both women to conceive within 24 hours of each other after only one act of intercourse... all seems a straining of physical credibility. It could be that we have here an example of human perception being stated, without any footnote to the effect that 'this is just how they liked to see it and present it'; we have plenty of examples of this kind of thing when we consider the language of demons and exorcism in the New Testament.

19:34 *It came to pass on the next day, that the firstborn said to the younger, Behold, I lay last night with my father. Let us make him drink wine again tonight. You go in, and lie with him, that*

we may preserve our father's seed- As noted on :33, the physical likelihood of conception occuring from one act of intercourse with a man so drunk that he suffers memory blackout, and both sisters conceiving within 24 hours of each other... is so unlikely that we get the impression that we are reading the agreed version of events which the family agreed to publicize. The simple fact may be that seeing Lot thought little of offering those girls for sex to a gang who wanted to rape his guests... he didn't see too much wrong with sleeping with them himself.

19:35 *They made their father drink wine that night also. The younger went and lay with him. He didn't know when she lay down, nor when she got up-* There are strong similarities with Noah getting drunk and apparently being involved in some incestuous sex at the time. It is a sad anticlimax to the life of a man who did show spirituality and faith, despite so much weakness. His life almost comes to this end purposefully, in order to highlight the amazing grace of the statement that in the end, Lot was counted righteous, will be saved, and is to be remembered for how much he detested the immorality of Sodom (2 Pet. 2:7,8). The contrast is so severe that we are driven by it to accept the power of Divine grace.

19:36 *Thus both of Lot's daughters were with child by their father-* I have suggsted on :33-35 that those verses are a transcript of the agreed version of events distributed by the family. Perhaps this is the force of the word "Thus", as if to say, "This is the explanation offered as to how Lot's daughters were with child by their father". But this doesn't have to mean that it actually happened as they said; the girls' complaint that there were no males to marry was also untrue, as noted on :31.

19:37 *The firstborn bore a son, and named him Moab. He is the father of the Moabites to this day-* "Moab" = 'begotten of my father'.

19:38 *The younger also bore a son, and called his name Ben Ammi. He is the father of the children of Ammon to this day*- 'Son of my own people'; and "Ammon" means "tribal", with the implication "inbred". "To this day" again reminds us the initial purpose of the Pentateuch was to explain to Israel in the wilderness the origins of the peoples with whom they were coming into contact as they approached Canaan.

GENESIS CHAPTER 20

20:1 *Abraham travelled from there toward the land of the South, and lived between Kadesh and Shur. He lived as a foreigner in Gerar-* Locating where these places were is not as simple as looking at a "map of Abraham's journeys". The idea may well be that Gerar was "between Kadesh and Shur", the two clauses being in parallel; although that is not how the locations are presented on most maps. In this case, "lived" [Heb. 'settled down'] is parallel with the different Hebrew word translated "lived as a foreigner", or better 'lived temporarily', 'lived as one passing through'. In this case, a powerful lesson emerges: that no matter how stable our living place may appear, even if we lived in the house we were born in all our lives, it is still a passing through, as a foreigner, just temporarily- because the true permanence is yet to come, when the promises to Abraham are fulfilled. See on Gen. 21:34.

20:2 *Abraham said about Sarah his wife, She is my sister. Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah-* Gerar was the very place where Isaac also lied about his wife. Abraham had previously been rebuked for doing the very same thing in Gen. 12; but he failed to learn the lesson. Indeed this time he excuses himself by saying that he regularly did this (:13). Abraham like Lot is presented as a man of consistently weak faith and behaviour; and yet he believed God at His word, that he would really be saved, and showed that in the stellar act of obedience in being prepared to offer Isaac. He believed, and demonstrated that faith by that work; but much of the rest of his life isn't presented as being very full of faith. And in this sense he is indeed the father of the faithful- we who likewise are weak, so weak; and yet cling on to God's promise of final salvation, and with a gun at our head, act accordingly.

Abraham's behaviour at this point is particularly awful because Sarah was surely pregnant with the child of promise. Her rejuvenation had made her physically attractive to Abimelech despite her age. At Gen. 17:21 there were 12 months to the birth of Isaac ("My covenant I establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you at this set time next year"). By Gen. 18:10, there were 9 months to the birth of Isaac: "I will certainly return to you when the season comes round. Behold, Sarah your wife will have a son". And immediately this incident in Gerar is over, Sarah gives birth (Gen. 21:2). It is natural for all of creation to be protective of the pregnant mother of your child. But Abraham says he fears dying for her. He presents as deeply faithless and selfish. "They will kill *me* and let *you* live" (Gen. 12:12) matches his concern here that he not die for his wife. He had clearly not learnt the lesson. If she, as a pregnant woman, was accepted into another man's harem, the consequences for her and the child could have been fatal. For the king would have slept with her and then discovered she was pregnant with another man's child. However it could be that they weren't aware Sarah was pregnant, and lacked the faith to believe she was. In which case, after they realized she had been pregnant at this time, they would have marvelled the more at God's grace.

Abraham is presented as absolutely selfish. Just as in Gen. 12:13 he asks her to lie about their marriage "that it may go well with me because of you". And yet God allowed that to happen: "And it went well with Abram because of her" (Gen. 12:16). Like unbelieving Israel in Egypt, he came up out of Egypt with great wealth. And Abraham at this point also receives great material blessing (:14,16). Just as did Isaac when he lied about his wife, also in Gerar. This all gives the lie to the idea that people get blessed when they are good, and lack of material blessing is due to sin. God's goodness rather is intended to lead to repentance.

As in Gen. 12, Abraham's fear and deceit is all an outcome of his *lack* of faith in the promises given to him. And yet Abraham is held up as an example of faith in those promises. Sarah conceived by faith, and Abraham believed the promise that she would. But now they both appear to have collapsed in faith. Either that, or their much lauded "faith" was accompanied with unbelief at the same time. We see here a radically different definition of faith than that which is presented in standard 'religion'. Faith means somehow holding on to trust in God's promise, despite ups and downs, indeed very low moments of loss of that faith. With the exception of the Lord Jesus, human faith / trust in God is not total, nor is faith absolute. It goes up and down over time, and unbelief can exist at the same time as belief; "I believe, help my unbelief" is our cry. It was however by faith that Sarah conceived and bore a child: "Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised" (Heb. 11:11). And yet her behaviour here, and that of Abraham, seems to lack much faith. Perhaps after the salvation from Abimelech by grace, their faith became very strong at the time Isaac was born. Or it could be that despite their surface level fear and unbelief, they also had a strong faith- and God focused upon that.

20:3 *But God came to Abimelech in a dream of the night, and said to him, Behold, you are a dead man, because of the woman whom you have taken. For she is a man's wife-* God told Abimelech that he would surely die, with evident allusion to God's judgment of Adam; no conditions were stated. But later, it became apparent that the death penalty was conditional upon his not releasing Sarah (:7). Prophetic statements are made in the Bible without the conditions being mentioned; more prophecy

is conditional than we might imagine at first encounter with the Bible text.

Abimelech was "a dead man" for taking Sarah, as if although he was alive, for that sin he was in God's eyes condemned and dead. But that verdict for that case was changed by his change of the situation. The unfaithful now walk naked (Rev. 3:17); but they will do so in the final condemnation of Rev. 16:15. They can walk naked *now* and repent, clothe themselves so as to cover the nakedness of condemnation which they now have; but not then.

20:4 *Now Abimelech had not come near her*- Repeatedly, the surrounding pagan world is portrayed as being of more integrity than the Abraham family. The conclusion is that the people of God believe in His grace, but sadly aren't necessarily good people; although they ought to be.

He said, Lord, will you kill even a righteous nation?- This was precisely the reasoning of Abraham with God in chapter 18. "Righteous" is the same Hebrew word used by Abraham in Gen. 18:23. Maybe Abimelech had heard of this and was influenced by it, even though he must've thought Abraham was good at his theory but hardly walked the talk in practice. We too must see beyond the hypocrisy of others and be prepared to accept that even they have something to teach us. Or perhaps the similarity is in order to demonstrate the parallels between Abraham and Abimelech; in order to point up the fact that Abraham was not much better than the surrounding chieftains, apart from the fact that he believed in God's grace to save him. And that made all the difference. Abimelech is reasoning that the sinner here is Abraham and / or Sarah; and he like Abraham is interceding for his people as Abraham mediated for Lot. And Abimelech's prayer was heard; Abraham was not destroyed because of Abimelech's intercession. Just as Lot was not destroyed because of Abraham's intercession. The whole incident serves to teach

Abraham that despite his peak of faith, devotion and intercession for Lot, he himself is a sinner in need of mediation.

20:5 *Didn't he tell me, 'She is my sister?' She, even she herself, said, 'He is my brother'. In the integrity of my heart and the innocence of my hands have I done this-* Despite this innocence, he was but "a dead man" because of his intentions to commit a sin of ignorance (:3). We see here how sensitive God is to human sin; even the intention to sin in ignorance nets death. This gives backdrop and perspective to the vast extent of His grace in forgiving and saving sinful man. And we see too how God still notices and measures sin even amongst Gentiles [cp. the sin of the Amorites reaching a certain point].

20:6 *God said to him in the dream, Yes, I know that in the integrity of your heart you have done this, and I also withheld you from sinning against me. Therefore I didn't allow you to touch her-* God will strengthen the heart / spirit of those who try to be strong (Ps. 27:14; 31:24). He can even, somehow, withhold men from sinning, and keep us from falling (Ps. 19:13; 1 Sam. 25:39 s.w.; Jude 24). We should therefore have no essential objection to the idea of the Lord granting us His Spirit, in the sense of His thinking, His heart / mind. For the gift of the Spirit, the blessing to Abraham, is not just forgiveness, but to turn us away from our iniquities (Acts 3:25,6).

20:7 *Now therefore, restore the man's wife. For he is a prophet, and he will pray for you, and you will live. If you don't restore her, know for sure that you will die, you, and all who are yours-* There seems here to be a connection between prayer and God's word being within us- for exactly because Abraham was a prophet, therefore he could pray for Abimelech. Faith comes from our appreciation of the word (Rom. 10:17), and faith is the basis of answered prayer (Mt. 21:22)- to the point that we believe we have received the answer the moment we pray (as in Ps. 56:9).

God cried to Israel in the prophetic word, but they would not hear; and so when they cried to Him, He also did not hear (Zech. 7:13). If the Lord's words dwell in us, we will ask what *we* will, and it will be done. Yet only if we ask according to *God's* will can we receive our requests (Jn. 15:7 cp. 1 Jn. 5:14). The implication is that if the word dwells in us, our will becomes that of the Father, and therefore our requests, our innermost desires, are according to His will, and are therefore granted. Therefore the word was what directed and motivated David's regular daily prayers (Ps. 119:164); they weren't standard repetitions of the same praises or requests, but a reflection of his Biblical meditation. He asks God to hear his prayers because He keeps God's word (Ps. 119:145,173).

The language is alluded to in Job 42:10, where Job prays for his friends and they are saved; and later in the Pentateuch we will read of Moses praying for Pharaoh, and having the possibility of obtaining forgiveness for him. Forgiveness is likewise predicated upon the faith and intercession of third parties in Mk. 2:5. This opens up the vista of huge and constant work for us all in praying for others.

"And all who are yours" may seem extreme, a kind of guilt by association. But that principle isn't supported in the Bible. They would've died because they knew Sarah was Abraham's wife, and hadn't spoken out against their master in this matter. Keeping silent about wrongdoing is therefore seen by God as making us culpable for the wrong being done. We think of the price paid by John the Baptist for speaking out against Herod's wrongdoing.

20:8 *Abimelech rose early in the morning, and called all his servants, and told all these things in their ear. The men were very scared-* As noted on :7, their knowledge of the proposed wrongdoing made them culpable if they didn't speak out against the King if he still went ahead and did it.

20:9 *Then Abimelech called Abraham, and said to him, What have you done to us?-* This question is always used to elicit confession of sin (note Gen. 3:13; 4:10). It is found in the wife-sister incidents in Gen. 12:18 ["Pharaoh called Abram and said, What is this that you have done to me? Why didn't you tell me that she was your wife?"] and Gen. 26:10 ["Abimelech said, What is this you have done to us? One of the people might easily have lain with your wife, and you would have brought guilt on us!"]. The similarities between the incidents is clearly intentional, in order to demonstrate how the family of faith simply didn't repent and keep repeating the same moral failures- and yet were accepted because of their faith.

How have I sinned against you, that you have brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin? You have done things to me that ought not to be done!- Abimelech noted that he was "a dead man" (:3) already, and therefore he was guilty of a great sin already- the sin of intending to commit a sin of ignorance. He fully accepted God's standards of judgment and morality in a way which Abraham did not; for he had now multiple times (:13) led Sarah and her suitors into potential sin. Abimelech did this just once, and in ignorance, and is truly penitent and sensitive to God's view of the matter; but Abraham was not. This is the more commendable when we realize that the pagan gods and idols knew nothing of this kind of sensitivity to potential sin.

20:10 *Abimelech said to Abraham, What did you see, that you have done this thing?-* Abimelech is angry that Abraham has led him into sin (:9 also), and he focuses upon that, rather than the more obvious comment that Abraham was hardly a good husband to Sarah. The Lord likewise taught that one aspect of sexual failure is that it can cause others in some cases to commit adultery (Mt. 5:32).

20:11 *Abraham said, Because I thought, 'Surely the fear of God is not in this place. They will kill me for my wife's sake'-* As noted above, all Abimelech says shows that he did in fact fear God. So the record presents Abraham as wrong and spiritually inferior to Abimelech on some points. And in fact Abraham is saved thanks to Abimelech's intercession for him. Abraham's words appear to be purposefully recorded in such a way as to beg the observation that according to the New Testament, the husband should die for his wife's sake. Abraham is consistently presented as weak and with the fear that comes from lack of faith.

20:12 *Besides, she is indeed my sister, the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife-* "Iscah" in Gen. 11:29 is understood by some as another name for Sarah, seeing that she and Abram had the same fathers. The question remains as to why she is given a different name there; and yet if she isn't Sarah, then we wonder why one woman should be singled out for mention, when hardly any other women apart from Sarah are mentioned in the genealogies of Gen. 10 and 11. Such behaviour was condemned under the law of Moses; but we are presented with a man who was in an ongoing situation which broke the law, who attained a righteousness greater than the law. Never was there any hint that Abram should have ended his marriage to Sarah because she was his half sister; and this may have significance for those who consider that marital failure must be put right by separation from current partners.

God clearly and simply promised to make a great nation out of him. But there was a time when his faith in this wavered, and he lied about his wife Sarah, exposing her to great risk, because he feared losing his life more than his wife. She was his half sister (Gen. 20:12), and so he said she was his sister, not his wife...

we are left to imagine the complicated thought processes and contorted reasoning that took place within him before finally doing this. He could justify it, apparently. But he would have been better holding to a simple faith in God's clear statements.

Gen. 20:12,13 could be translated as meaning that Abraham married Sarah at the time he left Ur: "She [Sarah] is indeed my sister, the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife when it happened that God caused me to wander from my father's house; at that time, I said to her, 'This is your kindness which you shall show to me. Everywhere that we go, say of me, He is my brother'". In this case we see that Abraham didn't at all leave his family- he married his half sister! In doing so he was repeating the behaviour of his brother in marrying close family relatives- Nahor married his brother Haran's daughter (Gen. 11:29). They left Ur and went to live in Haran- and it's surely not coincidence that they had a brother of the same name, Haran. Surely there was a connection between the man and the city- and that's where they went to live. This was hardly the individuation from family members which God had required of Abraham.

20:13 *It happened, when God caused me to wander from my father's house, that I said to her, 'This is your kindness which you shall show to me. Everywhere that we go, say of me, He is my brother'-* Abraham's weak attitude to leaving Ur is reflected much later too, when he tells Abimelech that "the gods caused me to wander from my father's house" (Gen. 20:13). The Hebrew *ta'ah* ("wander") has the idea of wandering aimlessly (Gen. 21:14; 37:15) and even sinning (Is. 53:6). It wasn't a very nice term to use about God's providence. That seems to me to be a believer in a moment of weakness speaking about his faith in very worldly terms, as one pagan to another. He doesn't see his leaving of his father's house as obedience to Divine command and promise;

but rather he portrays that response as his being somehow manipulated by the gods, picked up and taken out of the situation. See on Gen. 11:31. The LXX has "when God brought me forth out of the house of my father"; even in this case, we see the emphasis upon God bringing him out to separation from his relatives, rather than his obedience to the call to do so. By saying this, he would be growing closer to appreciating grace; that God caused him to be obedient when he of himself was not. This is the same work of the Spirit which continues in our days. The Gentile believers are in this sense 'made obedient' by the Spirit's work (Rom. 15:18; 1 Pet. 1:2). Truly our salvation is not of works of obedience, lest any man should boast (Eph. 2:9).

Abraham's comment that God caused him to go astray from his father's house would likely have been understood by those who first heard it as a negative reference to God- for the word "gone astray" is used of a lost sheep (Jer. 50:6; Ez. 34:4,16; Ps. 119:176); and it was understood that "A bad shepherd causes a sheep to go astray from the flock because he is careless". Perhaps God recognized Abraham's failure by instructing His people to confess every year that "An Aramean gone astray was my father" (Dt. 26:5). I take this to be a reference to Abraham and not Jacob; for it seems that the people of Aram migrated to Ur, and that Abraham having settled in Padan Aram, Abraham could also for that reason be called an Aramean. So Israel were asked to remember that their forefather Abraham had gone astray both literally and spiritually; and thus Abraham's God was a God of grace, and was thereby their God too.

Our own calling out of this world is likewise a matter of God's grace; He wishes to save us, and leads us out of situations and into new ones, when we ourselves ought to have made the moves of our own volition. He makes us wander from our father's house (Gen. 20:13). This is all part of the "blessing"

to Abraham, which involves turning us away from sin (Acts 3:25,26). God was the one who brought about Abraham's obedience. "From thence [Haran]... *God* removed him into (Canaan)" (Acts 7:4 R.V.).

"This righteousness thou shalt perform to me" (LXX) sounds as if Abraham kidded himself and Sarah that lying was a form of righteousness. And so often in the heat of moments we too are tempted to justify wrong behaviour as being necessary for the cause of righteousness.

Abraham is commended for being a wanderer and sojourner; but this meant he was constantly in new situations. And according to his own words here, he lied each time about his wife. But righteousness was imputed to him, and God focuses upon the positive, as we should with others.

We learn here that Abraham's lying about Sarah had been habitual and frequent; and he had refused to learn the lesson from the incident of Gen. 12 when he lied about Sarah in Egypt. Dishonesty is presented as a characteristic of Abraham and his family. In this light we come to consider his statements as he takes Isaac to be slain: "You stay here with the ass. The boy and I will go up there; we will worship and we will return to you" (Gen. 22:5). He fully intended to sacrifice Isaac. So Abraham expected to return to the servants without Isaac, but he says "we will return" in order to cover his intention of killing Isaac. He lied- rather than having faith that Isaac would be killed by him and then immediately resurrected. And yet he also believed, and his obedience and trust that somehow things would work out is commended and noted by God. He likewise effectively lied to Isaac in answering the question "But where is the sheep for the burnt offering?" (Gen. 22:7). It was by God's gracious hand that these white lies became prophetic.

All through, we see God eager to detect the faith and spirituality in His people which lay beneath their failures. We should be comforted by this, and view His people likewise. Sarah is commended for obeying Abraham (1 Pet. 3:5,6), and yet her obedience to his commands is only recorded in Genesis in the context of obeying his command to lie. In order to pander to the weakness of his faith and his selfishness. But that obedience is seen by God as commendable. Likewise her mockery of the Angelic promise of pregnancy included the phrase "my lord..." about Abraham; and this too is read so positively. She is a pattern for us in our submission to Jesus as Lord / kurios; when we too are far from totally respectful to Him as we should be. And in fact, contrary to the idealized vision of 1 Pet. 3:5,6, it is all actually the other way around- Abraham hearkens to Sarah, he is submissively obedient to her, to do the wrong things: "Abraham hearkened to the voice of Sarah" (Gen. 16:2) and sleeps with her servant Hagar; he obeys her command to cast Hagar out into the desert (Gen. 16:6), and the Angel confirms this: "Whatever Sarah says to you, obey her voice" (Gen. 21:12).

We can better understand how Abraham and Sarah are held up as examples of sinners to whom righteousness is imputed, by grace but through their faith, however weak that faith was at times, and despite its coexistence with unbelief and unspirituality.

20:14 *Abimelech took sheep and cattle, male servants and female servants, and gave them to Abraham, and restored Sarah his wife, to him-* Abraham ought to have apologized to Abimelech. But instead Abimelech gives him a present. We see here an example of grace; and how the unbelieving world is favourably contrasted with the family of faith at this time. The same happened in chapter 12. This is all the spirit of going the second

mile, offering the undergarment if someone takes your jacket. It leaves us with the upper hand.

20:15 *Abimelech said, Behold, my land is before you. Dwell where it pleases you-* We would rather expect Abimelech to consider Abraham a hypocrite and leave the area. But rather he seems to want a man of the true God living amongst him; he wasn't fazed by personal hypocrisy, but saw through to the higher truths.

20:16 *To Sarah he said, Behold, I have given your brother a thousand pieces of silver-* As happened in Genesis 12, and with Isaac when he repeats this sin, the sin is followed by material blessing. This for all time ends the myth that God gives material blessing as a kind of 'well done' for good behaviour. He at times pour out His grace at our weakest moments, as often seen in the lives of the Abraham family. The sum was large- a way of redeeming himself by atonement money from the sin of taking another man's wife. Silver was associated with cleansing properties. It was a 'covering of the eyes' in the sense that in the eyes of the world, he was now exonerated. Again we see the pagan world revealed as being more conscionable than the family of faith.

Or it could be that Abimelech considered that the infertility of his women to have been the result of the 'evil eye' of Sarah, as such beliefs were common- that an evil person looking at someone could impart a curse. But his gift of 1000 pieces of silver would cover her evil eye, so she would not do this again and his women would become fertile again.

Behold, it is for you an adorning of the eyes before all that are with you. In front of all you are reproved- Sarah was "reproved" by King Abimelech for going along with Abraham's lie about her not being his wife. And yet Kings were reproved for her sake, and were not allowed to do anything harmful to her (Ps.

105:14)! And Abraham reproves Abimelech later- for something Abimelech claimed he had not done (Gen. 21:25). The repeat of the word “reprove” is surely meant to indicate that here is an example of Abraham and Sarah being counted righteous because of their faith- when clearly they were not wholly righteous. Abraham, the man who had to be reproved, was used by God to reprove the man who had reproved him... it would have sounded very hypocritical to Abraham’s neighbours. Yet the point was, that God saw him as being righteous. See on Gen. 26:11.

Concerning not outwardly "adorning", the Greek text in in 1 Pet. 3:4-6 is alluding to the Septuagint of Gen. 20:16, which says that Abimelech told Sarah that he had given Abraham many silver pieces "that these may therefore be for thee to adorn thy countenance"; or in another version of the LXX, "those shall be to thee for the price of thy countenance", as if to say 'this is the cost of being a pretty woman'; the suggestion would be that it was the payment for whoredom, although she had not slept with him. Thus Abimelech is speaking sarcastically (note how he calls Abraham "your brother", referring to Sarah and Abraham's family relationship). It was a custom for married women to wear their silver pieces on their face (cp. Lk. 15:8). Presumably she had taken these off, in order to appear single and sexually available. Abimelech is saying: "I've given your so-called 'brother' Abraham 1000 silver pieces, so just make sure you wear them in future and don't lead any more men into sin". And what does the Spirit comment? "Thus she was reproved". Her willingness to pretend she was single and not refusing the sexual advances of Abimelech can only be seen in a negative light from the Genesis record. She lacked continued faith in the promises of a seed, and she disregarded God's marriage principles for the sake of an all too convenient 'obedience' to her husband. It may have been that she regarded her inability to have children as partly

his fault (cp. the deadness of Abraham's body, Rom. 4:19). The thing is, she had already shown enough faith to conceive (Heb. 11:11), and presumably the effect of this was seen in the physical rejuvenation of her body, which made her so attractive to men, although she was 90 years old. Both Sarah and Abraham had shown faith, she was living with her own body as the constant reminder of God's faithfulness, and yet in the incident with Abimelech she wavered and had to be reproved. Yet she is seen in a positive light by the Spirit; her lack of wearing ornaments, even though it was to show she was single, is commended; as is her obedience to her husband, even though she was reproved for this. The point is, like all of us, her motives were probably mixed. She did want to be truly obedient to Abraham, she did want to have a meek spirit rather than outward adorning. Her wrong motives surfaced, and were rebuked. But God saw deep inside her heart, and saw the good motives, and drags them out and holds them up as an example.

"And speak the truth in all things" (LXX) would be a well deserved and stinging rebuke to her; for even today in Semitic cultures, to call someone a liar to their face is an insult.

20:17 *Abraham prayed to God. God healed Abimelech, and his wife, and his female servants, and they bore children-* See on Gen. 45:5. This is the language of Job praying for his friends; see on :7. Abraham's weakness leads Abimelech's wives to become barren; yet through the faith and prayer of an undoubtedly spiritually weak Abraham, their fertility is restored. Again, God was teaching Abraham through circumstances. It could also be reasoned from Gen. 20:6 that God weakened Abimelech's body so that he had no sexual desire for Sarah- and again, this was to teach Abraham the impotent old man that virility and conception is a gift which God can give and take at ease. The wonderful thing is that all these lessons were taught to Abraham

through the incident of lying about and betraying his wife, which shows the weakness of his faith in God's promises. The way God works with and through human weakness is awesome.

20:18 *For Yahweh had closed up tight all the wombs of the house of Abimelech, because of Sarah, Abraham's wife-* Time and again Biblical history demonstrates that sins of silence and omission are just as fatal as sins of public, physical commission. Sarah omitted to say that Abraham was her husband; and was reproved. Abraham's lie about Sarah and unfaithfulness to his marriage covenant with her became a source of God's blessing and the curing of Abimelech's wife from infertility (I read her infertility as a state that existed prior to the incident with Abraham). The righteousness of God becomes available to us exactly because we have sinned and come short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23,24). God works out His plan of salvation actually through man's disobedience rather than his obedience. As Paul puts it again, we are concluded in unbelief, that God may have mercy (Rom. 11:32). It was and is the spirit of Joseph, when he comforted his brothers: "Now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life" (Gen. 45:5). And again, speaking about the sin of Israel in rejecting Christ: "Their trespass means riches for the [Gentile] world" (Rom. 11:12).

GENESIS CHAPTER 21

21:1 *Yahweh visited Sarah as He had said, and Yahweh did to Sarah as He had spoken-* The double emphasis "As He had said... spoken" emphasizes the fulfilment of His word of promise, and perhaps stands in contrast to her laughing in mockery at that same word. "Spoken" refers specifically to the spoken word; so the "Yahweh" in view is the Angel who had visited Sarah nine months previously. Angels can bear the Name of Yahweh, as can His Son, without being one and the same as God Himself.

21:2 *Sarah conceived, and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him-* It could be that the Divine visitation of :1 refers rather to God 'visiting His people' in the sense of getting involved with them and identifying with them, rather than a literal visit. This would mean that the conception was Yahweh visiting Sarah. But it's also possible that the visitation was in order to give Sarah both conception and childbirth at the same time. I suggest this because Paul writes of how Isaac was born after the Spirit, and Ishmael after the flesh (Gal. 4:29). Whilst Isaac was not the only begotten Son of God as the Lord was, all the same it is possible to argue from Paul's language that Isaac was somehow Divinely conceived, by the Spirit, and not as a result of "the flesh" as Ishmael was, i.e. Abraham having intercourse with Sarah. Whatever, her conception is attributed to the visitation of the same Angel who had appeared to her previously. In this case, we have yet another hint at the weakness of Abraham and Sarah's faith. They ought to have slept together, firmly believing the Angelic promise that they would have a child. But if Isaac was born after the Spirit and not after the flesh, we could draw the conclusion that they did not, and the conception and birth were of special Divine

intervention, although the resulting child was miraculously of the seed of Abraham.

21:3 *Abraham called his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore to him, Isaac-* The name was a reminder for all time that initially, Sarah had laughed at the promise of Isaac, and been rebuked for it (Gen. 18:12-15). The laughter of joy at his birth was memorialized in his name, but so was Sarah's terrible mocking laughter at God.

21:4 *Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him-* The circumcision of both Isaac and Ishmael is emphasized; they were both in covenant with God and thereby heirs of the promises, which were at different times made to them both. But Isaac held in with these things, whereas Ishmael pushed off to Egypt and despised them, as Esau was to do later.

21:5 *Abraham was one hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him-* This was 25 years after the first promise of a seed.

21:6 *Sarah said, God has made me laugh. Everyone who hears will laugh with me-* The same word is used of how Sarah had mockingly laughed at God at the news of Isaac's conception (Gen. 18:12-15). And we wonder whether her skepticism may still carry through here, as if to say: 'I can't believe this is for true, everyone who hears I bore a child will laugh their heads off in disbelief'. Sarah is saying 'I laughed / mocked when I heard I was supposed to bear a child at 90, and frankly, who wouldn't have done, you would have laughed with me; and now it actually happened, laugh with me too'. This again is far from the paragon of virtuous faith that she is presented as in the New Testament. But Heb. 11:11 must be given its due weight- she did also believe, despite all this surface level disbelief and wrong self justification. We see here how righteousness was imputed

on account of faith; and we see too how Sarah and Abraham are examples of faith in that they had *our kind of faith*- weak, incomplete, coexisting with disbelief. But they held on to that faith. And that is the point.

21:7 *She said, Who would have said to Abraham, that Sarah would nurse children! For I have borne him a son in his old age*- The answer to her question is "God". Only God would say such a humanly bizarre thing. Likewise Peter reasoned that if it was the Lord Jesus walking on the stormy lake, then the Lord would bid him come unto Him. Nobody else would think of making such an invitation. There is something uniquely challenging about God's way with us, and the possibilities which He alone perceives and seeks to make real for us. Job suffered an incredible 'run of bad luck', and concluded likewise that this was not chance, not 'Satan', but "Who, if not Him?".

21:8 *The child grew, and was weaned, and Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned*- Weaning could take up to three or four years, which would make Ishmael 16 or 17 at this time, and not a toddler.

21:9 *Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, mocking*- Ishmael was a mid teenager; and yet his behaviour was judged as sinful. Children and young people can and do sin, such is God's sensitivity to human failure. What he did to the toddler Isaac is called "persecution" (Gal. 4:29). So there may have been more to it than "mocking" a toddler. We observe however that Sarah too had mocked- and mocked God's promise (Gen. 18:12-15). The record carefully balances out the wrongdoing, to stress that it is not the case that Abraham and Sarah were *per se* more spiritual than others. "Mocking" translates the same Hebrew word translated "caressing" in a sexual context (Gen. 26:8), and when Potiphar's wife accuses Joseph of 'mocking' her (s.w. Gen. 39:14,17), she clearly has

sexual behaviour in view. And it's used in a specifically sexual sense in Ex. 32:6, where the people worshipped the golden calf and then "rose up to play", interpreted in the New Testament as sexual immorality. This is why we read that Sarah "saw" rather than simply 'heard' the 'mocking'. It's therefore possible that Ishmael, the "wild donkey of a man", in some way sexually abused the child Isaac. He was now 'weaned' and 'the child had grown'. He may well have been between 3 and 6 years old. This highlights God's grace in hearing the cries of the teenage Ishmael as he lay dying of thirst in the desert, and how "God was with the boy as he grew up" (:20). Rather than seeing God as being mean to Ishmael, we can see him being blessed by a very great grace considering what he had done. Ishmael was 13 when Isaac was born, and weaning took place at any time from 3 to 7 years later. We see here how Ishmael, the teenage pedophile, pervert and sexual abuser was indeed rejected by God- and yet God seems to feel sorry even for those whom He has to reject. He shows Himself far more gracious than man, who would likely have left Ishmael to die in the scrubland, thinking 'and good riddance'. Even though we can infer that God struck Ishmael with some kind of heat stroke, so that his mother dragged the body of her child under some shade. She calls him at that age her "child" simply because your young adult child is always felt as your "child", especially when they are facing death or acute danger.

21:10 *Therefore she said to Abraham, Cast out this handmaid and her son! For the son of this handmaid will not be heir with my son Isaac!-* Sarah's screaming indignation can be well imagined. Consider which words were probably stressed most by her: "Cast out this bondwoman and her son: for the son of this bondwoman *shall not be* heir (just hear her voice!) with my son, even with Isaac" (Gen. 21:10). This is in harmony with her

previous bitterness and aggression to Hagar and Abraham. But both Ishmael and Isaac had received circumcision, the token of the covenant, and identical promises were made to them both. Sarah was out of step with God's intentions. Her attitude in implying that Ishmael was not the seed is gently rebuked by God in his subsequent words to Abraham concerning Ishmael: "He *is* your seed" (:13). And yet Sarah's words are quoted in Gal. 4:30 as inspired Scripture! Here we see the wonder of the God with whom we deal, in the way in which He patiently bore with Sarah and Abraham. He saw through her anger, her jealousy, the pent up bitterness of a lifetime, and he saw her faith; or even counted righteousness to her, as He did to Abraham and Lot. And He worked through that screaming, angry woman to be His prophet. According to Gal. 4:30, God Himself spoke through her in those words, outlining a principle which has been true over the generations; that the son of the slave must be cast out, and that there must always be conflict between him and the true seed. Sarah in her time of child-birth is likened to us all as we enter the Kingdom, full of joy (Is. 54:1-4); and yet at that time she was eaten up with pride and joy that she could now triumph over her rival. And yet Sarah at that time is seen from a righteous perspective, in that she is a type of us as we enter the Kingdom. God's mercy to Sarah and Abraham is repeated to us daily.

"Cast out" is a word used elsewhere about divorce. Sarah's attitude here is altogether wrong; remember that it was her idea that Abraham should effectively marry Hagar and have a child by her. The contemporary laws were clear that if man got his slave girl pregnant, he must never divorce her. The law of Moses likewise was careful to allow divorce only for adultery. Hagar had done nothing wrong to Abraham. Her teenage son had apparently wronged baby Isaac. But that was no grounds for Abraham divorcing Hagar.

Apostate Israel are described in the very language of the adversaries / Satans of God's people. Because they acted like the world around them, from which they had been called out, they were ultimately judged by God as part of that world. Consider all the times when God's apostate people are recorded as acting in terms of their Arab cousins. Thus apostate Israel and the Jewish system were to be "cast out" (Jn. 12:31) just as Ishmael had been (Gen. 21:10). Indeed, Hagar and Ishmael are representative of Israel "after the flesh" and the earthly Jerusalem (Gal. 4:29,30).

21:11 *The thing was very grievous in Abraham's sight on account of his son-* It is stressed in the record that Ishmael was "his son". Abraham had other sons by Keturah, but clearly Ishmael had a special place for him; for he had been circumcised, and was therefore within the covenant. "Grievous" is the usual word for "evil" and has a definite moral connotation. In Abraham's opinion, he was being manipulated to do something morally wrong.

21:12 *God said to Abraham, Don't let it be grievous in your sight because of the boy, and because of your handmaid. In all that Sarah says to you, listen to her voice. For in Isaac will your seed be called-* What Sarah was proposing was indeed morally evil ("grievous", see on :11). But God asks Abraham not to take that guilt upon himself. I have argued on Gen. 16:11 that Ishmael means "God hears" because God heard Abraham's request that Ishmael might live before God in covenant relationship, and this was confirmed by Ishmael being circumcised as the token of the covenant and receiving the same promises as Isaac. It was a Divine observation that Isaac would be the one through whom the promised seed would come; rather than saying to the effect that 'Don't worry, you can throw Ishmael away, I'm against him and he's not in covenant with Me, but Isaac will be'.

So God asks Abraham not to take that guilt upon himself. There was wrong, but God is saying that in the end, Ishmael will survive and He has a potential purpose with him. But the higher level surely would've been for Abraham to refuse any part in this evil treatment of Hagar and Ishmael. It's a case of different levels and God's willingness to be sympathetic to those who feel they are caught up in a situational ethic... As we should be.

As discussed on Gen. 20:13, Abraham is presented as obedient to Sarah, whereas 1 Pet. 3:5,6 praises Sarah for being obedient to Abraham. We see here again how the Spirit in the New Testament seeks to present God's servant as positively as possible.

21:13 *I will also make a nation of the son of the handmaid, because he is your seed-* The promises to Ishmael are very similar to those to Isaac and the seed of Abraham; God is surely saying that sending Ishmael away didn't of itself mean that the promises could not apply to him. In this, God was as it were disallowing Sarah's desire to disinherit Ishmael. This confirms that the comment in :12 that Abraham's seed would be called in Isaac is not saying that Ishmael was not Abraham's seed. He was, and the record often stresses that Ishmael was Abraham's son.

21:14 *Abraham rose up early in the morning, and took bread and a bottle of water, and gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder; and gave her the child, and sent her away-* There is a much repeated characteristic of God's servants: that they 'rose up early in the morning' and did God's work. In each of the following passages, this phrase is clearly not an idiom; rather does it have an evidently literal meaning: Abraham (Gen. 19:27; 21:14; 22:3); Jacob (Gen. 28:18); Job (1:5); Moses (Ex. 8:20; 9:13; 24:4; 34:4); Joshua (Josh. 3:1; 6:12; 7:16; 8:10); Gideon (Jud. 6:38; 7:1); Samuel (1 Sam. 15:12); David (1 Sam. 17:20; 29:11); Hezekiah (2 Kings 19:35; 2 Chron. 29:20). This is quite

an impressive list, numerically. This can be a figure for being zealous (Ps. 127:2; Pr. 27:14; Song 7:12; Is. 5:11; Zeph. 3:7). God Himself rises up early in His zeal to save and bring back His wayward people (2 Chron. 36:15; Jer. 7:13,25; 11:7; 25:3,4; 26:5; 29:19; 32:33; 35:14,15; 44:4). Yet the above examples all show that men literally rose up early in their service to God; this was an expression of their zeal for God, in response to His zeal for us. I'm not suggesting that zeal for God is reflected by rising early rather than staying up late; but it wouldn't be too much to suggest that if we are men of mission, we won't waste our hours in bed. Get up when you wake up.

There is a word play here, where the word *shawkam* occurs twice. Abraham "rose up early" (*shawkam*) in the morning, took bread, water and Hagar's child, and "laid [them] on her shoulder" *(shawkam*). I understand from this that Abraham really fellowshipped with the suffering laid upon Hagar; he did it with a very sad heart, feeling for Hagar to the point of realistic empathy.

Abraham's behaviour towards Hagar and Ishmael was actually illegal in terms of the near Eastern legal codes. Those of Lipit-Ishtar and Hammurabi, as well as the laws of Nuzi amongst the Hurrians, all specifically stated that a husband with a barren wife may take a concubine through whom he could have offspring, but if his wife then has children, he must not ever disinherit or expel from the family the concubine and her children (Angel Gonzales, *Abraham: Father of Believers* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967) p. 74). Yet Abraham did exactly this, effectively casting out Ishmael and Hagar into the desert, to walk until they perished of heat exposure. Perhaps God's later demand of Abraham to sacrifice his son, "your son, your only son, Isaac" (Gen. 22:2), when he had other children apart from Isaac, was an implicit criticism of Abraham for having rejected

Ishmael as his son; and he was asked to enter into the loss of a child, of how Hagar felt for her only son, as he had effectively sacrificed Ishmael to the desert.

She departed, and wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba- Abraham and Sarah had also been caused to wander by God (see on Gen. 20:13). Again the point is being made that the supposedly holy family were not radically different from Hagar and Ishmael. God wanted them too; but they chose to step out of God's program and return to Egypt.

21:15 *The water in the bottle was spent, and she cast the child under one of the bushes-* Travel in the desert was done by moving from well to well, rather like a light aircraft flies between beacons. The Bedouins only carry as much water as is required until they reach the next well. Hagar had apparently missed her way; or more likely, the Angel had closed her eyes from seeing the well, which is why when her eyes were "opened" she immediately saw the well (:19). Ishmael had been thirteen when Isaac was born, and they were cast out by Sarah when Isaac was weaned, which would likely have been at 3 or 4 years old. So Ishmael was a mid teenager. He apparently fainted because of the lack of water. Hagar tried to carry him, but unable to do so any longer, left him under a bush to die. This tragic situation was brought about not as punishment, but to attempt to intensify her relationship with God, in the hope she would now raise a Godly seed.

21:16 *She went and sat down opposite him, a good way off, about a bow shot away. For she said, Let me not see the death of the child. She sat over against him, and lifted up her voice, and wept-* Her voice of weeping was heard as "the voice of the boy" (:17). Ishmael was about to die and had likely lost consciousness. Our prayers can be heard as the prayers of others, which is how the Lord's prayer intercession for us is described in Rom. 8. The

language however is similar to how God heard Israel's cry in Egypt. The cry of distress at a situation is read by God as prayer; it is our inner spirit or attitude which is read as prayer (Rom. 8). This is comfort for those who feel they cannot well verbalize things in prayer. God hears the spirit of our situation rather than the verbalization.

21:17 *God heard the voice of the boy-* As noted on :16, the voice or situation of someone is heard by God as if it is their prayer; and there is also the possibility that the prayer of another for us, in this case Hagar (:16), is read as prayer by God.

The angel of God called to Hagar out of the sky, and said to her, What ails you, Hagar? Don't be afraid. For God has heard the voice of the boy where he is- The fact we read a phrase like "the Angel of elohim" here suggests that individual angels can be messengers of other Angel-elohim, and that there is a degree of hierarchy in the Heavenly organization.

21:18 *Get up, lift up the boy, and hold him in your arm. For I will make him a great nation-* Ishmael was around 16 or 17. The lifting up was therefore the language of sacrifice- for that is the idiom used for sacrifice and prayer. Again we see a parallel with Isaac, whose parent was also commanded to lift up his beloved son to God. As she looked into the eyes of her helpless, dying son, probably unconscious or delirious, it would have seemed such a juxtaposition with such a great promise. And so it was with the promise repeated to the helpless baby Isaac. But we are brought to know our weakness, that God's grace might be the more revealed. As discussed above, we see here how the passionate prayer of the mother for her delinquent, punk, abusive son was still answered. The young man is described as a boy or child, perhaps because we are being given the perspective of how his mother saw him. Yoour suffering adult child is always

'your little boy'. And thereby we again sense the sympathy of God for Hagar.

21:19 *God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water. She went, filled the bottle with water, and gave the boy drink-* See on Ps. 119:18. I suggested on :15 that travel in the desert was done by moving from well to well, rather like a light aircraft flies between beacons. The Bedouins only carry as much water as is required until they reach the next well. Hagar had apparently missed her way; or more likely, the Angel had closed her eyes from seeing the well, which is why when her eyes were "opened" she immediately saw the well.

21:20 *God was with the boy, and he grew. He lived in the wilderness, and as he grew up he became an archer-* We read in :22 that God was also "with" Abraham. We are being taught that Ishmael was potentially just as much within the covenant purpose of God. God was not against Ishmael, the record really emphasizes this. Despite Abraham having other sons by Keturah, Ishmael and Isaac are mentioned as his sons in 1 Chron. 1:28. He was circumcised, part of the covenant; God was with him; but Ishmael chose the way of his mother and stepped out of the purpose of God, resigning, effectively, the covenant relationship into which he was born.

21:21 *He lived in the wilderness of Paran. His mother took a wife for him out of the land of Egypt-* Hagar was an Egyptian, and when she fled from Sarah in Gen. 16 she began on the road back there. And she takes a wife for her son from there. Egypt clearly represents the world; she was driven out from association with the Abraham family, thanks to Sarah's awfully wrong attitude, but failed to hold on to the covenant which Ishmael had been given.

21:22 *It happened at that time, that Abimelech and Phicol the captain of his army spoke to Abraham, saying, God is with you*

in all that you do- Sarah has effectively tried to kill Hagar and her son Ishmael as she did in chapter 16, apparently because of the teenage Ishmael mocking the baby Isaac. Whilst this incident is symbolic of the persecution of the righteous by the wicked (Gal. 4:29), this in no way justifies Sarah's behaviour. And yet straight after this shameful business, God blesses Abraham in all that he does, and Sarah would have benefitted from this. Clearly material blessing is not related to spirituality.

21:23 *Now therefore, swear to me here by God that you will not deal falsely with me, nor with my son, nor with my son's son. But according to the kindness that I have done to you, you shall do to me, and to the land in which you have lived as a foreigner-* Abimelech had first encountered Abraham when he lied about Sarah, and Abimelech reproved him for his immorality. It must've been a strange experience- to begin relationship with this man realizing he was a hypocrite and didn't walk his talk, and yet coming to see that God was with this man. Abimelech is presented as a God fearer, contrary to what Abraham initially thought. He saw through the weakness of God's representatives, as we should, and came to perceive that this one true God is characterized by grace- working with and blessing those who were not worthy of it.

21:24 *Abraham said, I will swear-* This is the first time this Hebrew word for "swear" is used, and we will now read an unusually elaborate ritual of 'sevening' or swearing, involving seven lambs to represent the 'sevening'. This swearing to a covenant was to be kept carefully and seriously. It was to set Abraham up for God 'swearing' to him in even more solemn terms that the promises to Abraham would really come true (Gen. 22:16). God likewise uses circumstances in our lives in order to prepare us for the next stage in our lives.

21:25 *Abraham reproved Abimelech because of a water well, which Abimelech's servants had violently taken away-* Earlier,

Abimelech had rightly reproved Abraham for what he had done wrong in deceiving Abimelech about Sarah. Perhaps psychologically, Abraham wanted to get equal with Abimelech, although again, as in the incident with Sarah, Abimelech has sinned in ignorance. The similarities point up a comparison between the two which consistently leaves Abimelech in the more positive light. And yet Abraham was the one whom God chose.

21:26 *Abimelech said, I don't know who has done this thing. You didn't tell me, neither did I hear of it, until today-* As noted on :25, again Abimelech is finding himself involved in a sin of ignorance. The same Divine hand was at work in his life; and we likewise find situations repeat in life, to teach us. Abimelech's implication is: 'And why ever didn't you tell me about this matter earlier?'. This was exactly what he said to Abraham regarding the deception over Sarah. Abimelech must have had the impression that Abraham was a strange, furtive guy, somewhat lacking in integrity; and yet the God of all grace was strangely with him. See on :23.

21:27 *Abraham took sheep and cattle, and gave them to Abimelech. Those two made a covenant-* One can't help but notice that God stressed to the later children of Abraham that since they had a covenant with Him, they were not to make covenants with the people who lived around them in the land- time and again God references His covenant with His people, and in that context tells them not to make covenants with the peoples of the land (Ex. 34:10-12,15,27; Dt. 7:29; Jud. 2:1,2,20). Yet Abraham made covenants with those very people (Gen. 14:13; 21:27,32)- perhaps indicating his lack of appreciation of his covenant relationship with Yahweh?

21:28 *Abraham set seven ewe lambs of the flock by themselves-* The idea was that they were separate from the two men,

observing them ["by themselves"], but witnesses. Seven is the number of perfection; or perhaps he had in view the 'plural of majesty', the one great, perfect lamb. Did Abraham perceive that there was some 'perfect lamb', perhaps his future promised seed, who would be the ultimate witness between men?

21:29 *Abimelech said to Abraham, What mean these seven ewe lambs which you have set by themselves?-* This way of swearing was unknown to Abimelech and the surrounding culture. As noted on :24, Abraham had thought up a new ceremony in order to emphasize the gravity and utter dependability of his 'swearing'; and this was then used by God in Gen. 22:16, to show Abraham that now God Himself was going to 'swear' to Abraham.

21:30 *He said, You shall take these seven ewe lambs from my hand, that it may be a witness to me, that I have dug this well-* As noted on :31, to seven oneself was to swear, and Beer Sheba was literally the well of the sevens. This was perhaps the reason for the seven lambs. For the meaning of the seven lambs, see on :28.

21:31 *Therefore he called that place Beersheba, because they both swore there-* Literally, the well of the sevens; to seven oneself was to swear.

21:32 *So they made a covenant at Beersheba. Abimelech rose up with Phicol, the captain of his army, and they returned into the land of the Philistines-* The sober gravity of this covenant was to prepare Abraham for the wonder of God making a covenant with him in the next chapter.

21:33 *Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba, and called there on the name of Yahweh, the Everlasting God-* AV "grove". The idea was of a roofless temple; and the tamarisk was hard and had evergreen leaves and plants growing on it, rather like mistletoe. Groves of such trees were typically associated with idol worship. We note that Abraham didn't build an altar for

worship, but rather this grove; and we wonder whether he was not mixing Yahweh worship with idolatry, as Jacob and his family also did.

21:34 *Abraham lived as a foreigner in the land of the Philistines many days-* I noted on Gen. 20:1 that Abraham is described as both living temporarily, and yet also permanently dwelling. No matter how stable our living place may appear, even if we lived in the house we were born in all our lives, it is still a passing through, as a foreigner, just temporarily- because the true permanence is yet to come, when the promises to Abraham are fulfilled. And no matter how long Abraham lived in an area, even for "many days", he "lived as a foreigner", just as we should, realizing that we are only passing through.

GENESIS CHAPTER 22

22:1 *It happened after these things, that God tested Abraham, and said to him, Abraham! He said, Here I am-* See on Gen. 24:18. Temptation comes from internal processes (James 1:13-15), but God does test, as He did Adam in Eden and Israel in the wilderness (Ex. 15:25; 16:4). The primary audience of the Pentateuch was Israel under testing; and so the example of Abraham was presented in that context. The testing was for Abraham's benefit, not God's; He doesn't need to reach understanding by experimentation. It has been observed: "In Late Bronze Age diplomatic correspondence, vassals attempt to demonstrate their loyalty by declaring they would carry out any command of the king even if it is self-destructive". Abraham was aware of this, but I suggest he loyally accepts it, and the point of the record is "obedience" rather than faith in resurrection, which I suggest is not upmost in Abraham's mind at this point. He believed he would receive Isaac back, so that the promises could be fulfilled (Heb. 11), but in what form and when were surely unclear to him. He showed the faith which is trust. And to be willing to sacrifice his son was effectively sacrificing his future, going against all basic human instinct. And that is indeed the call of Jesus to this day.

We note this [and :11] is the only time when God calls Abraham by name. It was to demonstrate the depth of His personal relationship with Him, and He repeatedly shows how He understands what He is asking of men. Likewise we note that "God" here has the article, *ha*. As if 'God, *the* God, tested Abraham'. And so Phyllis Trible translates: "God, indeed God, tested...".

That God tests man is a common theme. Ps. 26:2 “Probe me, YHWH, examine me, Test my heart and my mind in the fire”;

Ex. 20:20 “Moses said to the people, ‘Do not be afraid; God has come to test you, so that your fear of him, being always in your mind, may keep you from sinning’ ”; Dt. 8:2 “Remember the long road by which YHWH your God led you for forty years in the desert, to humble you, to test you and know your inmost heart— whether you would keep his commandments or not”; Job 23:10 “And yet he knows every step I take! Let him test me in the crucible: I shall come out pure gold”; Zech. 13:9 "I shall pass this third through the fire, refine them as silver is refined, test them as gold is tested”; Ps. 17:3 “You probe my heart, examine me at night, you test me by fire and find no evil”. The testing as fire clearly alludes to probing the quality of gold and silver- and that is for the benefit of the tester, not the tested material. Yet does not God see and know all things? In one sense yes, in another, He limits His omniscience as He limits His omnipotence, in order to enter legitimate, felt relationship with us. "Surely they will reverence My Son [but they didn't]... I looked for My sons to be... [but they weren't]". Proverbs says that the spirit of man is the candle of the Lord, searching the innermost mind of man. I take that to mean that His probing of us is our probing of ourselves. We are revealed both to Him and to ourselves. And because self-examination is hard to totally achieve, He brings tests into our lives, to reveal ourselves to ourselves- and thereby to Him. This I suggest is what happened to Abraham. It is what happens to us as we come before the cross of the Lord in self examination at the communion table. If our hearts are zoned out and His death and resurrection means nothing, we are blank in feeling and response- then this is shown to God. If we feel motivated to lay down our lives, whilst admitting our humanity puts the brake on such desires... and we beg for God's patient endurance with us until we can do that... then, God sees that too.

In the end, Abraham didn't have to sacrifice Isaac; and perhaps one subtext of the story is to show that God wants us to be willing to sacrifice our children to Him, but He doesn't of course want us to do that in literal reality, and instead showed that animal and not human sacrifice was the path He chose for His people.

22:2 *He said, Now take your son, your only son, whom you love, even Isaac-* Isaac was not Abraham's only son. He had Ishmael, and other children by Keturah. But God is foreseeing Abraham's tendency to try to get around things; He is clarifying that He means Isaac, not Ishmael, nor Eliezer, whom Abraham had been tempted to consider his promised 'seeds'. God had always tested Abraham at the point of family relationships- leaving his natural family (Gen. 12:1), separating from Lot (Gen. 13:15-18), separating from Ishmael his son (Gen. 17:17,18); and now being willing to lose his beloved son Isaac, 'laughter', the one who had brought such joy to him and Sarah. Attitudes to family are critical; and so is the willingness to sacrifice what is nearest and dearest to us, whatever it is in our context. Clearly the incident is framed to point forward to the sacrifice of God's only and beloved Son; "the son of His love" (Col. 1:13) surely alludes back here. Perhaps we are to read the words here as meaning that Isaac was the "only" son whom he loved so much. Or it could be that Isaac is framed as Abraham's only son, just as Melchizedek is spoken of as having no parents, and no beginning nor end of life. The reference is to how the record is framed in Genesis; no genealogy nor chronological markers are provided for him. And so it might be there, with this presentation of Isaac as "your only son". But perhaps the idea is that Isaac was the only son of Abraham and Sarah. Abraham had frequently lied about her during their marriage (Gen. 20:13), and hardly comes over as willing to die for her. And yet God here speaks to Abraham as

if he is Sarah, alluding to the unity which He counted as being between them. The decision to sacrifice Isaac would have ideally needed her agreement.

"Your only son" reflects how God did appreciate what He was asking of Abraham. It is stressed six times in the record that Isaac was to be offered as a "burnt offering". The emphasis reflects how God was intensely aware of the enormity of what He was asking Abraham to do. In Gen. 12:1, Abram had been asked to sacrifice his past, his homeland and family or origin- and eventually, Abram had done so. Now he is being asked to sacrifice his future- and he is willing. We naturally struggle with the idea of child sacrifice; but we must note that the later, Mosaic condemnations of child sacrifice were always in the context of forbidding the sacrifice of children *to other gods*. Israel were asked to give their firstborn to God: "You shall give the firstborn of your sons to Me" (Ex. 22:29). This was not literal child sacrifice; but the idea was that instead of giving your firstborn in literal sacrifice to a god, Israel were to give their firstborn in service to Yahweh, as living sacrifices.

And go into the land of Moriah. Offer him there for a burnt offering- It seems reasonable to conclude that Isaac was offered on or near the hill of Calvary, one of the hills (Heb.) near Jerusalem, in the ancient "land of Moriah" (where the temple was built, 2 Chron. 3:1). "Moriah" is a form of the Hebrew *ra'a*, 'to see' or provide. This is going to be a major theme; that on the mount of sacrifice, there Yahweh would provide. The ultimate 'seeing' and thereby provision of human need was in the gift of Jesus to die on Calvary. God sees our sins, and our inability in reality to put them right, nor to escape their consequence. He understood that, and His seeing is also His provision.

The command to sacrifice Isaac would apparently have meant that God's promises about the future seed through Isaac

would not come true. I doubt whether Abraham was expecting to sacrifice Isaac and then see him instantly resurrected. I think his faith was rather in the sense that he trusted that God would somehow fulfil what He had promised, even though Abraham could not see how that would happen. This is where faith means trust, to believe is to trust, even when on an intellectual level we fail to see sense, justice or purpose.

It is stressed six times in the record that Isaac was to be offered as a "burnt offering". Ten times the word "son" is used in :2-16. The emphasis reflects how God was intensely aware of the enormity of what He was asking Abraham to do. The Biblical narrative is so sparse- just a small amount of text to cover decades. So when there is repetition of detail, we must see this as significant.

On one of the mountains which I will tell you of- As with the journey to the promised land, Abraham was not given specific details, and presumably an Angel in a cloud directed him to the specific spot. Abraham's earlier slow response is now far better- he gets up and goes straight away, trusting in guidance.

22:3 *Abraham rose early in the morning-* The flesh would naturally like to delay our response in case we can avoid the sacrifice required. But Abraham arises early in immediate obedience. He may have discussed the situation with Isaac, who would've been about 20, and he would have agreed of his own volition. However, Isaac's question in :7 suggests that he was not aware that he personally was to be offered.

And saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him- The details are added so that we can play "Bible television" with the scene and imagine it. "His young men" may refer to other sons he had had by concubines or Keturah. Perhaps he was willing to sacrifice them too if required. The fact Abraham himself does the mundane things like saddling the donkey and

splitting the wood, when he heads a household of 318 trained servants, reflects how he very personally responded to the call. And we are left to infer that he did not inform Sarah. Our callings to the most intimate sacrifices are invariably faced alone. And the Abraham who elsewhere usually says something in response to God's voice... now is strangely silent throughout the three day journey. The splitting of the wood, saddling the donkey etc. are all recorded as highly calculated, consciously performed actions- all in obedience. And by those works was his incomplete faith "made perfect", the works didn't save him, but the experience of doing them matured his faith.

And Isaac his son- Continually the record reflects God's recognition of the sacrifice. Abraham had had to separate from his father's family, from Lot, he had twice been separated from Sarah his wife (Gen. 12:15; 20:3), twice from Hagar his servant girl partner, twice and finally from his son Ishmael whom he loved; and now, apparently, he was asked to separate from his beloved son Isaac. He had been well prepared for it, but all the same- he does it.

He split the wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him- There are examples of Abraham being progressively set up by God so that his spiritual growth would be an upward spiral. Initially, he was told to walk / go to a land which God would shew him (Gen. 12:1); when he got there, he was told to "arise", and "walk" through that land of Canaan (Gen. 13:17). And Abraham, albeit in a faltering kind of way, did just this. But this was to prepare him for the test of Gen. 22:3 in the command to offer Isaac. His obedience this time isn't at all faltering. He "arises" and 'goes' [s.w. "walk"] "unto the place of which God had told him" to offer Isaac (Gen. 22:3). This is exactly what he had been called to do right back in Ur- to arise and walk / go to a land / place which God would

show him (Gen. 12:1). And so our obedience in one challenge of God leads us to obedience in others. I've elsewhere pointed out how circumstances tend to repeat both within and between the lives of God's faithful. One experience is designed to lead us to another. Nothing- absolutely nothing- in our lives is senseless chance. All- and this takes some believing- is part of a higher plan for our spiritual good, in our latter end.

The taking of wood with them is unusual, and remarkable. Because there would have been wood nearer, rather than having to take it three days journey. This unusual element in the narrative is to highlight the matter; and it becomes understandable once we perceive that the Father and Son were carrying the wood on which the son was to be sacrificed. This was exactly what happened as the Lord carried the wood of His cross to Golgotha. "Wood" and "tree" are the same word, so we picture Isaac carrying the tree on his shoulder. God was totally connected with Him in that last walk.

The record is as it were with the camera zoomed in very close upon Abraham and Isaac. We are to imagine the scene as if it were Bible television. The way the donkey was saddled, the wood split and transported, Abraham puts forth his hand, took the knife... and the silence as the two went "both together". We are being somehow invited into the unity between the Father and Son as the Lord travelled and walked to His death, in obedience to the Father's will.

22:4 *On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes-* The language is usually 'he looked and saw'. The mention of lifting up eyes is therefore suggestive of Abraham looking at the ground as he travelled, lost in thought.

And saw the place far off- The name given to the place, Yahweh-Yireh, means 'in this mount I have seen Yahweh'. The events of the death and resurrection of the Lord which Isaac's

experience pointed forward to were therefore the prophesied 'seeing' of Yahweh. When Abraham '*saw* the place [of Isaac's intended sacrifice] afar off", there is more to those words than a literal description. Heb. 11:13 alludes here in saying that Abraham *saw* the fulfilment of "the promises" "afar off". The Lord in Jn. 8:56 says that Abraham *saw* His day or time [usually a reference to His sacrifice]. And yet that place of offering was called by Abraham 'Jehovah Jireh', 'Jehovah will be *seen*'. Note the theme of *seeing*. In some shadowy way, Abraham understood something of the future sacrifice of the Lord Jesus; and yet he speaks of it as the time when Yahweh Himself will be 'seen', so intense would the manifestation of God be in the death of His Son. We also note the double meaning of 'seeing' as both seeing and providing. Abraham sees the place, and there God also saw / provided. So there was a mutuality between God and man; we see, and we see our need. God sees what we see, but His seeing is His provision. We learnt this when Hagar says "You, God, see me"; she means 'You have provided for me'.

22:5 *Abraham said to his young men, Stay here with the donkey. The boy and I will go yonder. We will worship, and come back to you-* True sacrifice is praise of God; thus Abraham's willingness to offer Isaac was "praise" (s.w. "worship"). Israel in their repentance "will account our lips as calves" (Hos. 14:3 LXX, RVmg.), i.e. as sacrifices. The "fruit of the lips" there was repentance. Which is why the Hebrew writer says that we "make confession to his name" with the fruit of our lips (Heb. 13:15 RV). Continually we should offer this sacrifice of praise (Heb. 13:15), the thankfulness that wells up from knowing we are forgiven, the joy born of regular, meaningful repentance. And we do this "by" or 'on account of' the sacrifice of Jesus for us, which enables this forgiveness and thereby repentance (Heb. 13:12,15).

Mt. 26:36 has the Lord saying to the disciples: "Sit in this place [*kathisate autou*] until going away, I pray there", and then He takes along with him [*paralambanein*] Peter. These are the very words used in the Gen. 22 LXX account of Abraham taking Isaac to 'the cross'. Jesus is seeking to encourage Peter to see himself as Isaac, being taken to share in the cross. Now whether Peter discerned this or not, we don't know. But the Lord gave him the potential possibility to be inspired like this.

"And come back to you" could be read as meaning that Abraham was certain that Isaac would be resurrected. Heb. 11:19 says that Abraham went in faith that "God was able to raise him up, even from the dead". Like Job, he worked out by inference that there had to be a resurrection of the body to fulfil the implications of the promises made to them. But the spirituality of Abraham and Sarah is often spoken of in apparently exaggerated terms in the New Testament. Perhaps this is an example; Abraham's basic simple trust is read as if he had a more detailed faith and understanding than he actually did. Or it may be that Abraham was thinking of resurrection from the dead at the last day, rather than resurrection immediately after he had slain Isaac. He perhaps had no clear understanding of how and when the resurrection would happen. But he trusted that the promises necessitated Isaac's revival. Abraham's faith is never presented as total. We learn from Gen. 20:13 that Abraham's lying about Sarah had been habitual and frequent; and he had refused to learn the lesson from the incident of Gen. 12 when he lied about Sarah in Egypt. Dishonesty is presented as a characteristic of Abraham and his family. In this light we come to consider his statements as he takes Isaac to be slain: "You stay here with the ass. The boy and I will go up there; we will worship and we will return to you" (Gen. 22:5). He fully intended to sacrifice Isaac. So Abraham

expected to return to the servants without Isaac, but he says "we will return" in order to cover his intention of killing Isaac. Perhaps he lied- rather than having faith that Isaac would be killed by him and then immediately resurrected. And yet he also believed, and his obedience and trust that somehow things would work out is commended and noted by God. He likewise effectively lied to Isaac in answering the question "But where is the sheep for the burnt offering?" (Gen. 22:7). It was by God's gracious hand that these white lies became prophetic.

22:6 *Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. He took in his hand the fire and the knife. They both went together-* Twice emphasized (:8), this speaks of the unity between Father and Son as the Lord walked the Via Dolorosa to the place of crucifixion; and of Isaac's willing involvement in the sacrifice, when he was easily old enough to escape from it. The scene looks forward to the Lord carrying the wood upon which He would be offered. Indeed the Hebrew for "wood" is strictly "tree". The same word is used of how Abraham had earlier "laid" provisions upon Hagar and Ishmael's shoulders and sent his son Ishmael away (Gen. 21:14). That experience in 'losing' his begotten son was to prepare him now for this apparent loss.

22:7 *Isaac spoke to Abraham his father, and said, My father? He said, Here I am, my son. He said, Here is the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?-* This would suggest that Isaac had not been told of the plan. And yet he was old enough to have resisted. His willingness to cooperate would therefore have been a result of deciding to give his life at the very last moment. "Here I am" is the very Hebrew phrase Abraham uses in responding to the Lord's call in :1. We are given the impression of a man absolutely ready to obey any call.

22:8 *Abraham said, God will Himself provide the lamb for a burnt offering, my son. So they both went together-* The Hebrew language reflects certain realities about the nature of God's ways. The common Hebrew word for 'to see', especially when used about God's 'seeing', means also 'to provide'. Hagar has this sense when the Angel rescues her in the desert, and she comments "You God see me". She means indeed that 'God sees me', but she clearly has the sense that 'God you see me and therefore have provided, thank You'. This is the huge import of the simply truth that God sees and knows all things. He sees us- and it is axiomatic to that seeing that He will provide. The ultimate seeing-provisioning is in God's understanding of the human fate and condition, and the cross was His provision. Abraham comforted Isaac that "God will see for himself [AV 'provide'] the lamb" (Gen. 22:8 RVmg.); and thus the RVmg. interprets 'Jehovah Jireh' as meaning 'the Lord will see, or provide' (Gen. 22:14). The same word is used when Saul asks his servants to "provide" him a man (1 Sam. 16:17). When Hagar said "You God see me" (Gen. 16:13), she was expressing her gratitude for His *provision* for her. What this means in practice is that the fact God sees and knows all things means that He can and will therefore and thereby provide for us in the circumstances of life; for He sees and knows all things. Perhaps Abraham learnt from the words of his slave girl, whom he and his wife had abused. This is how we are to be, remembering and learning from incidents, even those which involve our own failures, to prepare us for future understandings and commitments.

The Rabbis insist that the Hebrew here should be read "God will provide Himself the lamb for a burnt offering- my son!". As if Abraham is now telling Isaac specifically- 'It's you, my son, who is to be the lamb'. The significance of the next sentence is therefore so poignant- knowing that, they went both of them

together. It is an exact prefigurement of the Father and Son discussing the issue in Gethsemane, and thence going together to the cross. Surely Paul had Abraham's sacrifice in view when he wrote: "He who did not spare His own Son but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" (Rom. 8:32).

We see here Abraham verbalizing his self realization, that the lamb had to be "My son". He begins answering his son's question, but then mutters to himself: "My son". The Father above was having precisely the same thoughts. Unknown to Abraham, as unknown to us, we can come to feelings and realizations that are exact mirrors of God's self realizations. God realized above all that there was ultimately no lamb, the lamb had to be "My Son"; and Abraham came to realize this, and Isaac went along with it. No wonder the Lord alluded to this incident in His own realization that *lama sabbachthani*, how have You entangled *Me*. He too struggled to come to the final realization that there was to be no lamb, no substitute, but *Him*, "My Son", God's Son, the total representative of humanity. And yet surely He was tempted to hope that there would be a last minute substitution to replace Him.

Isaac was clearly willing to be offered. But his silence looks forward to how the Lord "opened not His mouth" during His preparation for sacrifice (Is. 53:7). Truly did Martin Buber observe: "Scripture does not state its doctrine as doctrine but by telling a story and without exceeding the limits set by the nature of a story. It uses the method of story-telling to a degree, however, which world literature has not yet learned to use; and its cross-references and inter-connections, while noticeable, are so unobtrusive that a perfect attention is needed to grasp its intent- an attentiveness so perfect that it has not yet been fully achieved. Hence, it remains for us latecomers to point out the

significance of what has hitherto been overlooked, neglected, insufficiently valued".

22:9 *They came to the place which God had told him of. Abraham built the altar there, and laid the wood in order, bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar, on the wood-* "They came to the place" is echoed in the description of the Lord's arrival at "the place called Golgotha" (Mt. 27:33). Again the details are given, so that we can reconstruct the scene. Thus we read of the wood ["tree [branches]"] being laid "in order", literally 'in rows'.

22:10 *Abraham stretched out his hand, and took the knife to kill his son-* This is the Hebrew term used of Adam and Eve stretching out their hand to take the forbidden fruit (Gen. 3:22). Abraham by contrast stretches out his hand in obedience rather than disobedience. The 'taking the knife to kill ['slaughter in sacrifice']' really does invite us to see Abraham silhouetted against the sky, with the knife in mid air. He really was taken to the brink. Surely this incident is in mind in 1 Cor. 10:13: "No temptation ['testing', as in Gen. 22:1] has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and He will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation He will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it". Abraham is no longer left as an icon to be admitted from afar, as if in stained glass; but rather is he everyman in Christ.

22:11 *The angel of Yahweh called to him out of the sky, and said, Abraham, Abraham! He said, Here I am-* This is presented as his characteristic response (:1,7). He was willing to do and be as directed, both in sacrificing or not sacrificing.

22:12 *He said, Don't lay your hand on the boy, neither do anything to him-* His hand was literally less than a meter from Isaac's heart, with a knife in that hand, just seconds away from plunging the knife into Isaac. Isaac is described as a child, when he wasn't. The same is true with the description of the teenage

Ishmael. Perhaps the idea is that for a parent, your suffering child is always your little boy. And so the record is written from the perspective of Abraham's feelings. As God recognized it was "your only son...", so in this we again see how God wanted to show that He recognized and understood Abraham's feelings, and understood what He was asking Abraham.

For now I know that you fear God- Because the Angels are of limited knowledge, it seems that they bring some trials upon us in order to find out more about us. This is language of limitation- God Himself knows all things, but the Angel wanted to test Abraham. Indeed, the apocryphal *Book Of Jubilees* claims in so many words that it was an Angel called Mastema who was responsible for the idea of testing Abraham in order to determine his level of obedience.

Since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me- "Your only son" [see note on :2] reflects how God was fully aware of the cost of the sacrifice He was asking for. He too did not spare or withhold His only Son, and this passage is alluded to in Rom. 8:32: "He that spared not His own Son". Therefore He was so thrilled with Abraham's attitude because He perceived how a man was connecting with Him in having the same spirit. We too can thrill God by being likewise.

22:13 *Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and saw that behind him was a ram caught in the thicket by his horns. Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering instead of his son-* This was the "way of escape" of 1 Cor. 10:13, which alludes to this incident and presents Abraham as every one of us. When the Lord on the cross cried out "How have You forsaken Me!" (Mk. 15:34), the Aramaic *sabachthani* also means "entangled". It's as if He is saying "You have entangled *me*, I am not Isaac who was saved at the last minute, I am like the entangled ram!". I have elsewhere commented concerning

the possibility that Christ felt that although He would be tied to the cross as Isaac was, yet somehow He would be delivered. Clearly the offering of Isaac is to be understood as prophetic of the Lord's sacrifice. The Lord's growing realization that the entangled ram represented Him rather than Isaac would have led to this sense of panic which He expressed in that cry from the cross. There is more evidence than we sometimes care to consider that Christ's understanding was indeed limited; He was capable of misunderstanding Scripture, especially under the stress of the cross. Surely this incident is in view when John says "Behold the Lamb of God which takes away the sin of the world" (Jn. 1:29).

22:14 *Abraham called the name of that place 'Yahweh Will Provide'. As it is said to this day, On Yahweh's mountain, it will be provided-* See on Job 42:1. Jehovah-Jireh can mean "Yahweh will show Yah", in eloquent prophecy of the crucifixion. There Yahweh was to be manifested supremely. Abraham comforted Isaac that "God will see for himself [AV 'provide'] the lamb" (Gen. 22:8 RVmg.); and thus the RVmg. interprets 'Jehovah-Jireh' as meaning 'the Lord will see, or provide'. The same word is used when Saul asks his servants to "provide" him a man (1 Sam. 16:17). When Hagar said "You God see me" (Gen. 16:13) she was expressing her gratitude for His *provision* for her. What this means in practice is that the fact God sees and knows all things means that He can and will therefore and thereby provide for us in the circumstances of life; for He sees and knows all things. Note that Prov. 28:27 and 29:7 RV speak of 'hiding the eyes' in the sense of not making provision for the need of others. God's eyes are not hidden, and therefore He makes provision. Dt. 2:7 speaks of how God 'knew' Israel's journey through the wilderness, and therefore they "lacked nothing".

22:15 *The angel of Yahweh called to Abraham a second time out of the sky-* There was no Angel standing in front of Abraham to provide as it were visible backup. Really Abraham's faith in and response to the spoken word at this point is commendable.

22:16 *And said, I have sworn by Myself, says Yahweh-* The New Testament comments that this was because God could swear by no greater (Heb. 6:13). God was solemnly promising that all Abraham's seed would be saved because of this faith of Abraham confirmed now in his works. Because of the offering of Isaac, God confirmed His promise with this oath, by Himself. By His own life, is the idea. And God cannot die. This looked ahead to how the death of Jesus resulted in God confirming the promises to Abraham, which are the Gospel, with an oath. That by two unchangeable things [the promise and the oath], in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation and *elpis*, or "Hope", an absolute certainty of salvation. And not a 'hope for the best', as the English word 'hope' can mistakenly suggest. God is offering us salvation, eternal inheritance of the earth. Without conditions. And He has confirmed that. In this sense we take the cup of the new covenant "in His blood"; the new covenant was before the old covenant, it was the promises made to Abraham. The simple offer of eternity by grace alone. But the Lord's blood, the offering of the true 'Isaac', confirmed this- to us. Any doubt about the certainty of salvation was thereby removed. The Lord's blood was not *per se* necessary for our salvation. God who can do anything could as easily immortalize anyone at any point in time; He can forgive sin and deal with its consequences on any basis, or without any basis at all. He is not an angry deity who needed to be appeased by the blood of His firstborn. God is not a magician, neither did the blood of His Son achieve any kind of magic in removing our sin. That is the mistake of Catholicism and

frankly this view is literalism's last gasp, making God's grace and forgiveness and salvation dependent upon literal blood. One of the many reasons for the Lord's death was therefore to confirm the covenant *to us*, to flag our attention to the certainty of the simple promises of salvation given to Abraham which are the Christian Gospel (Gal. 3:8). His death was to persuade us of the certainty of our salvation. It confirmed the covenant which was already sure and certain. That we might have strong consolation and a Hope so certain that it is the anchor of our souls. For we are heirs of the same promise (Heb. 6:17).

Because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son- According to Heb. 11:12, God's promises to Abraham were fulfilled on account of his faith; God in some way allowed Himself to be potentially limited by Abraham's faith. Indeed, the promised world-wide blessing of all nations was promised only "because you have obeyed my voice" (Gen. 22:16,18). In this sense the covenants of salvation were partly due to another man [Abraham] being faithful [although above all our salvation was due to the Lord Jesus]. In this sense he is the "father" of the faithful.

The offering of Isaac was without doubt an act of faith by Abraham. His trust in the invisible God, His reflection upon a series of promises which amount to no more than about 200 words in Hebrew, was balanced against his natural hope for his family, human affection, common sense, love of his beloved son, lifelong ambition... and he was willing to ditch all those things for his faith in God's promises. You can speak 200 words in a minute. The total sum of God's recorded communication with Abraham was only a minute's worth of speaking. Abraham had so much faith in so few words; and perhaps the number of words was so few so that Abraham would memorize and continually reflect upon them. Yet the total number of words God or an

Angel spoke to Abraham about anything was pretty small- the total [including the words of the promises] comes to only 583 Hebrew words- which can be spoken in less than three minutes [Gen. 12:1-3 = 28 words; Gen. 12:7 = 4 words; Gen. 13:14-16 = 44 words; Gen. 15 = 117 words; Gen. 17 = 195 words; Gen. 18 = 87 words; Gen. 21 = 26 words; Gen. 22 = 82 words]. And remember that all these words, these snatches of brief conversation, were spoken to Abraham over a period of 100 years or so. His faith in God's word, His mediation upon it and following its implications, really does make him a spiritual "father of us all". We have the Bible, a whole book of God's words, which we can instantly access and read. Would we were to have a like sensitivity to every word spoken.

Spiritual ambition means that we will desire to do some things which we can't physically fulfil- and yet they will be counted to us. Abraham is spoken of as having offered up Isaac- his intention was counted as the act. And Prov. 19:22 RV appropriately comments: "The desire of a man is the measure of his kindness". It is all accepted according to what a man has, not what he has not. Faith is perfected / matured by the process of works (James 2:22,23). The works, the upward spiral of a life lived on the basis of faith, develop the initial belief in practice. Thus Abraham believed God in Gen. 15, but these works of Gen. 22 [offering Isaac] made that faith "perfect". Through his correct response to the early promises given him, Abraham was imputed "the righteousness of faith". But *on account of* that faith inspired by the earlier promises, he was given "the promises that he should be heir of the world" (Rom. 4:13). That promise in turn inspired yet more faith. In this same context, Paul had spoken of how the Gospel preached to Abraham in the promises leads men "from faith to faith", up the upward spiral (Rom. 1:17).

God 'spared not' His own son (Rom. 8:32)- alluding to the LXX of Gen. 22:16, where Abraham spares not his son. Clearly the offering of Isaac is to be understood as prophetic of the Lord's sacrifice. The Lord's growing realization that the entangled ram represented Him rather than Isaac would have led to the sense of panic which He expressed in "My God, why have You forsaken me?". Christ felt that although He would be tied to the cross as Isaac was, yet somehow He would be delivered. The Greek phrase for 'not withholding' is elsewhere used about God not sparing people when He assigns them to condemnation (Rom. 11:21; 2 Cor. 13:2; 2 Pet. 2:4,5). The Lord Jesus knows how not only sinners feel but how the rejected will feel- for He 'bore condemnation' in this sense. We should be condemned. But He as our representative was condemned, although not personally guilty. He so empathized with us through the experience of the cross that He came to *feel* like a sinner, although He was not one. And thus He has freed us from condemnation.

22:17 *That I will bless you greatly, and I will multiply your seed greatly like the stars of the sky, and like the sand which is on the seashore. Your seed will possess the gate of his enemies-* The promise Paul refers to in Rom. 4:13 was given to Abraham because of, *dia*, on account of, his being declared right with God by faith in Gen. 15:6. Perhaps Paul specifically has in mind the promise of Gen. 22:17,18. Having been declared right with God, Abraham was then promised that he personally would be heir of the world- the implications of being right with God, counted righteous, were thereby fleshed out and given some more tangible, material, concrete form. He would therefore live for ever, because he was right with God; and the arena of that eternity would be "the world". Galatians 3 definitely has this verse in mind when saying that here, the Gospel was preached to Abraham. And Paul

stresses that here, "seed" is singular. But elsewhere it is plural. And the seed in view, is clearly the Lord Jesus. God's reward of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his seed is quite out of proportion to Abraham's willingness to sacrifice. And it is the same with us. Our willingness to sacrifice is counted as if we did it; for the NT speaks as if Abraham did sacrifice Isaac.

God appears to use language with no regard as to whether the people who first heard it could understand it. God spoke to Job about snow (Job 37:6), to Abraham about sand on the sea shore (Gen. 22:17), to Noah about rain (Gen. 7:4) – things which they had never seen. And the New Testament concepts of grace, agape love, humility etc. were outside the ability of first century Greek to properly express; new words had to enter the language in order to express these ideas. Yet God is also capable of speaking in the language of the day, bringing Himself right down to our human level of language use. It is vital to appreciate that God uses language in different ways in different parts of the Bible – otherwise our interpretation of it will be inconsistent and contradictory.

In some cases God uses language in a relative sense in order to emphasize something. Thus we read here of many being saved (Gen. 22:17), yet in another sense few will be saved (Mt. 7:14; 20:16; Lk. 13:23). Relative to the wonder of salvation, many will be saved; but numerically, the figure will be small, from the perspective of this world. The way to the Kingdom is easy relative to the wonder of what is in store for the faithful (Mt. 11:30; 2 Cor. 4:17); and yet from our human perspective it is hard indeed, a life of self-crucifixion (Acts 14:22; Rev. 7:14). Our sufferings now are only for a moment compared to the glorious eternity of the Kingdom (Ps. 37:10; 2 Cor. 4:17), and yet the language of the Bible also expresses God's appreciation that from our perspective, our time of probation is "a long time"

(Mt. 25:19). "Many" – relatively- would be converted to the true ways of God by the work of John the Baptist (Lk. 1:16), whilst numerically the majority of those who heard John's message eventually turned away from it, culminating in their crucifixion of the Messiah.

22:18 *In your seed will all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice-* Those seminal promises to Abraham hinged around what would be realized *in*, not "by", his seed. All that is true of the Lord Jesus is now true of us, in that we are in Him. Often the promises about the seed in the singular (the Lord Jesus) are applied to us in the plural (e.g. 2 Sam. 7:14 cp. Ps. 89:30-35). Baptism is not an initiation into a church. It isn't something which just *seems* the right thing to do. And even if because of our environment and conscience, it was easier to get baptized than not- *now* this mustn't be the case. We really are *in* Christ, we are born again; now we exist, spiritually! And moreover, we have risen with Him, His resurrection life, His life and living that will eternally be, is now manifest in us, and will be articulated physically at the resurrection.

The Lord's later command to preach to "all nations" would ring bells in Jewish minds with these promises to Abraham, concerning the blessing of forgiveness to come upon "all nations" through Messiah (Gen. 18:18; 22:18; 26:4). Therefore God's people are to preach the Gospel of forgiveness in Christ to "all nations". The offer of sharing in that blessing did not close at the end of the first century. Putting the "all nations" of the Abrahamic promises together with Christ's preaching commission leads to a simple conclusion: The Hope of Israel now applies to all nations; so go and tell this good news to all nations, for the extent of the fulfilment of the promises depends to some extent upon us.

The Hebrew word for 'hear' is also translated 'obey' (Gen. 22:18; Ex. 19:5; Dt. 30:8,20; Ps. 95:7). We can hear God's word and not obey it. But if we *really* hear it as we are intended to, we will obey it. If we truly believe God's word to be His voice personally speaking to us, then we will by the very fact of hearing, obey. The message itself, if heard properly and not just on a surface level, will compel action.

22:19 *So Abraham returned to his young men, and they rose up and went together to Beersheba. Abraham lived at Beersheba-* We are left with the impression that they didn't perceive what had happened, neither did Abraham and Isaac tell them. They both returned to them just as Abraham had said they would (:5). Some of our finest acts of devotion and most intimate moments with God are by their nature very personal; so much so, that we do not share them with others. That seems almost axiomatic from the very nature of the encounters.

22:20 *It happened after these things, that it was told Abraham, saying, Behold, Milcah, she also has borne children to your brother Nahor-* The Genesis record seems to frame the confederations of Arab tribes contemporary with the 12 tribes of Israel as being a kind of pseudo-Israel- for they too are described as being 12 tribe confederacies. Here we have 12 Aramean tribes who came from the 12 sons born to Nahor, Abraham's brother (Gen. 22:20-24); and there were 12 tribes from Ishmael (Gen. 25:13-16); and the five tribes from the sons of Esau (Gen. 36:9-14) joined with the seven Horite tribes in Seir (Gen. 36:20-28).

22:21 *Uz his firstborn, Buz his brother, Kemuel the father of Aram-* Job was from "the land of Uz" (Job 1:1) but was a true servant of God. We have here confirmation of what I suggested about Ishmael on Gen. 16 and Gen. 21- all the seed of Abraham could have been within the covenant, although most of them chose not to, and the faithful line continued through Isaac and

Jacob. That was how it was, but it wasn't like that because God rejected Abraham's wider seed only in favour of Isaac. Even if we reject this view, we are still left with the fact that people outside the immediate line from Abraham through Isaac and Jacob could be in fellowship with God. Elihu likewise is presented as a righteous man, and he was a "Buzite" (Job 32:2).

22:22 *Chesed, Hazo, Pildash, Jidlaph, and Bethuel-* The genealogy is introduced at this point to demonstrate that even before Isaac was offered, God had been preparing a potential wife for him. So many people were involved in the wider family, but God was working through Bethuel and Rebekah.

22:23 *Bethuel became the father of Rebekah. These eight Milcah bore to Nahor, Abraham's brother-* Perhaps the information is given so that we can see that how through the mass of humanity, God's purpose has worked out through a minority.

22:24 *His concubine, whose name was Reumah, also bore Tebah, Gaham, Tahash, and Maacah-* Again we wonder why this detail is given, when the children named don't seem to have played much part in the Biblical record. Maybe we are being introduced to the idea that most significant men of the time had concubines, and children by them. Abraham was no exception, and yet Isaac has just been presented as his "only" son; as if he had a special connection with him, which made his sacrifice of him all the more meaningful. Or maybe it is again to just provide us perspective; rather like our wondering why the cosmos is so huge, why so many uninhabited planets, why so many life forms on earth, why such complexity. And one answer to all that is simply "perspective"; to help us appreciate the breadth of God's grace in focusing in upon little me, and the small group of humans which comprise His special people.

GENESIS CHAPTER 23

23:1 *Sarah lived one hundred and twenty-seven years; this was the length of Sarah's life-* No other woman has her age at death recorded in Biblical history. For all her weakness, Sarah is being presented as the spiritual mother of us all. She and Abraham are mostly commendable for hanging on to faith in God's program, for going along with it willingly, despite multiple weaknesses of character. In this senses they become our forbears. Literally "one hundred years, twenty years and seven years". This perhaps reflects the importance given to every year, just as the phrase "he died being full of days" likewise suggests the extreme importance of every moment lived. And that significance attaches to old age too. God has a very limited time frame to prepare us for eternity, and every moment counts. And we are to perceive that. There is no retirement, old age is as significant [arguably more significant] than the rest of our lives. There is no spiritual retirement, and it's not over until it's over.

23:2 *Sarah died in Kiriath Arba (the same is Hebron), in the land of Canaan. Abraham came to mourn for Sarah, and to weep for her-* Abraham 'came' to her presumably in the sense that he came into her tent; or perhaps the reference is to some funeral procedure, at which very time he asked the funeral guests from the surrounding peoples if he could buy a burial place for her.

23:3 *Abraham rose up from before his dead, and spoke to the children of Heth, saying-* Abraham walked around in his promised land with the attitude of a stranger just passing through, although he was probably the most powerful man in it. The record of his purchase of Machpelah seems to exemplify this. Not only is the presence of the children of Heth highlighted (Gen. 23:3,5,7,10,11,12,13,16,18), but the record of Abraham's words demonstrates his appreciation that he was only passing

through: "*Entreat* for me to Ephron... that he may give me the cave of Machpelah, which *he has*... for full money he shall *give it* me for a possession... *amongst you*... and Abraham bowed down himself before the people of the land... and the field... in all the borders round about (was) made sure" (23:9-17 AVmg.). The mention of the borders really rubs it in. Not only was the land promised to Abraham, but he was politically more powerful than the children of Heth; he could have annexed it for himself at ease. The children of Heth were willing to give it to him for free anyway (:11). Yet the realization by Abraham of his present position, the humility created by faith, shines through the narrative. Zacchaeus is called a son of Abraham in that he too humbly repented of his self-centered materialism (Lk. 19:9).

23:4 *I am a stranger and a foreigner living with you-* As a 'foreigner', it appears from inscriptions of local laws that he would have been unable to buy land, and unable to bury his dead [visiting foreigners had to cremate their dead]. So perhaps that is why the 'sale' of the property is arranged as a 'gift with compensation'. This was an acute contrast with the promises of eternal inheritance just reaffirmed to him in Gen. 22. Abraham didn't even have as it were a residence permit. If he were a permitted temporary foreign visitor, he would've been able to bury his dead and buy land. But he didn't even have that status. He was literally just passing through. And he spent his life in Canaan in that spirit. The Biblical account fits admirably with what has been uncovered of the local Canaanite laws. The laws are also specific that foreigners could not pass on as inheritance any land they bought or leased. Again, the contrast is clear with the promise that the whole land would be Abraham's and would pass to his "seed". Living as Abraham's seed in this world, our values are likewise absolutely counter inversions of all around us- where ownership of property is seen as the great aim of life. The

high price Abraham was charged is reflective of how the whole deal ran contrary to the spirit of the law and culture of the local people. The legislation discovered explains *why* land must not be sold to foreigners, nor be allowed to be passed on to their descendants: the concern was that the "seed" of the foreigners would increase and come to dominate the land of Canaan. And yet this was exactly the statement of the promises to Abraham- that his seed would indeed multiply and eternally possess that land. This was why sale of land to foreigners had to be agreed by the community and not just the seller; hence we read of the people who could enter the gate (:10), those who had free access to the town, i.e. the citizens. The world we live in is likewise structured exactly as the opposite of the message of the Kingdom preached in the promises to Abraham which are the foundation of the Gospel of the Kingdom. The whole chapter is remarkably similar to property transaction documents uncovered from that era; but it lacks one thing which they generally all have, namely a reference to who shall inherit the land once the new owner dies. The omission is significant- the sons of Heth were nervous about the "gift for compensation", and didn't want to fall foul of their legal code in allowing for this. At best, it was a gentleman's agreement that Abraham's descendants could be buried there. And the irony of course is that God had deeded that field and the whole land to Abraham and his descendants for ever. "Machpelah" means 'two levels', and truly 'the cave of two levels' spoke of the earthly temporal level, and the eternal level.

Perhaps Heb. 11:13 has this in mind when observing that Abraham 'confessed' that he was a stranger and pilgrim. This act of Abraham was a confession of faith, according to Heb. 11:13. We are to understand that as Abraham said this, he had consciously in mind that the land was in fact eternally his. And we are to have this perspective when we 'buy' things, when we are

ripped off and deceived financially [as I suggest Abraham was], or even when things appear to go well for us materially.

This incident follows straight on from Abraham's amazing expression of faith in the events of Gen. 22, and the reaffirmation of the promises to him afterwards. But now he is reminded, by a kind of enforced juxtaposition, that these promises are far future in ultimate fulfilment. For he doesn't possess even a field in the land of promise. And Gen. 23 is full of legal language; the ties that bind in human life are still there and not immediately released by the promises of the Kingdom.

Give me a possession of a burying-place with you, that I may bury my dead out of my sight- The surrounding peoples were likewise all nomadic and may have also come from other areas (see on :10). The early Hittites (:5) were well know for this. Abraham had been in the area long enough to count as a local. But his receipt of the promises meant that he always considered himself merely passing through- just as we should, no matter what level of apparent permanence we have in our lives. Being a stranger and foreigner is the characteristic of all God's people who are in the spiritual family of Abraham (Ps. 39:12; 1 Chron. 29:15; Heb. 11:13).

We note that the need to purchase the cave came straight after the promises given Abraham in Gen. 22. The contrast could not have been stronger between our present position and our eternal destiny. But Abraham's desire for "a possession of a burying place" could be read as meaning that he still wanted to have his cake [of future eternal inheritance] and eat it in this life [by having a permanent "possession of a burying place"]. See on :11.

23:5 *The children of Heth answered Abraham, saying to him-* "Heth" means 'destruction' or 'dismay', the father of the Hittites (Gen. 26:34 cp. Gen. 27:46). Rebekah later considered their

daughters too unspiritual for Jacob to marry (Gen. 27:46). This points up the clear difference between the Abraham family and those amongst whom they lived. Yet Abraham had been there for a long time. No matter how long we are in a particular location, employment or situation, we should always remember that we live "amongst" this world and are separate from them because of the longer term perspectives which we have.

23:6 *Hear us, my lord. You are a prince of God among us. Bury your dead in the best of our tombs. None of us will withhold from you his tomb. Bury your dead-* They recognize that Abraham lived "among" them rather than being "of" them. No matter how long he lived there, he was never seen as a local. See on :5. The locals perceived that he was a mighty one in God's eyes; his faith had not remained hidden. The offer of any tomb can be read as typical of Middle Eastern business- you can have anything, but of course later, you must pay for it. But it could also be argued that the Hittites wanted to 'give' a place in an existing tomb because of the legal issues discussed above. But Abraham didn't just want a burial place- otherwise he'd have accepted this offer. He wanted a plot for perpetuity, an inheritance, ownership of land. And that is at variance with God's intention to give him nothing in this life.

23:7 *Abraham rose up, and bowed himself to the people of the land, even to the children of Heth-* The 'people of the land' in later scripture (e.g. Zech. 14:1,2) would refer to the Canaanite tribes who originally lived in the land, who are the forefathers of many of the present Arab peoples. They are called "the people of the land (earth)" in Gen. 23:7, 12,13; Dt. 7:6; Josh 4:24. Another possibility is that they are 'people of the land' in the sense that at the times they gather themselves against Jerusalem they are present within the land of Israel.

He bowed himself to those whose land he would eternally inherit. It was all part of the ritual of purchase, but Abraham surely was aware that kings were to bow down to *him* on account of his seed, who would be the blesser of all nations (Is. 49:23). The blesser was understood as superior to the blessed (Heb. 7:7); and these nations of the land were to be blessed in him. But he now bows to them. We constantly feel the same Divinely intended paradox as we pass through life, inferior to those whom we shall soon reign over.

23:8 *He talked with them, saying, If it be your mind that I should bury my dead out of my sight, hear me, and entreat for me to Ephron the son of Zohar-* Ephron was there with them (:10), but because he was himself only dwelling amongst them (:10 AV), he needed the permission of the locals to "sell" the property. This would have heightened the sense of paradox- that Abraham, also living "amongst" the children of Heth for some time, had to buy a parcel of land which was eternally his.

23:9 *That he may give me the cave of Machpelah, which he has, which is in the end of his field. For the full price let him give it to me for a possession among you of a burying-place-* The land was already promised to Abraham as an eternal possession. And yet he had to pay "full price" for it. This entire incident seeks to bring out the paradox, knowing that we as Abraham's seed will have many similar ones in our dealings with this world. It was "*his* field"- and yet the field and the whole land were eternally Abraham's.

23:10 *Now Ephron was sitting in the middle of the children of Heth-* AV "dwelt among". Although note :11 "my people".

Ephron the Hittite answered Abraham in the hearing of the children of Heth, even of all who went in at the gate of his city, saying- As noted on :4 and :8, Ephron may well have been a nomad himself who had come to live amongst the Hittites. This

heightens the sense of paradox, that Abraham was likewise, and yet he had to pay a fortune for a burial plot.

23:11 *No, my lord, hear me. I give you the field, and I give you the cave that is in it. In the presence of the children of my people I give it to you. Bury your dead-* This has the ring of credibility to it; this is exactly how things are done in the Middle East. Something is offered "free" and yet with the expectation of payment later. And yet we can read this another way. Ephron genuinely offered the land for free. But Abraham wanted it as a permanent inheritance, and so he wants to pay for it in the hope this will guarantee it to him. In this case, his confession of faith that he is a foreigner is nuanced by the sense within him that he also wanted a permanent inheritance in this life, even of a field and a cave. This would fit with our sense that his faith had peaks and troughs, and at the same time as showing faith, he also showed unbelief. Just as we do. In fact, in this case, his faith would be typical of our own faith- we believe, but, "Lord, help my unbelief" which can coexist with faith. Abraham's desire for "a possession of a burying place" (:4) could be read as meaning that he still wanted to have his cake [of future eternal inheritance] and eat it in this life [by having a permanent "possession of a burying place"]. He did not receive a possession in this life; Acts 7:5 is clear that God "gave him no inheritance in it, no, not enough to set his foot on it, and He promised that He would give it to him in possession and to his seed after him". But he certainly tried by all means to get a few square feet of permanent inheritance. And he did this right after the undoubted climax of faith in Gen. 22. Our faith likewise is a jagged graph if plotted over time. The contrast is strong and intended between Acts 7:5, and Abraham's intentions of buying a permanent possession, for any price. And in fact Stephen's argument in Acts 7 is that Abraham and all the giants of faith in

Israelite history were in fact not of total faith. And on that basis he is appealing to people with less than perfect faith to throw themselves at the feet of the Lord Jesus.

23:12 *Abraham bowed himself down before the people of the land-* - See on :7.

23:13 *He spoke to Ephron in the audience of the people of the land, saying, But if you will, please hear me. I will give the price of the field. Take it from me, and I will bury my dead there-* Abraham understood that what was offered free in such situations really had to be paid for. The record really is accurately recording words spoken thousands of years ago. The Hebrew for "price" is 'full silver / price'. Abraham was showing how desperate he was for that piece of land.

23:14 *Ephron answered Abraham, saying to him-* There really is such strong emphasis that Abraham didn't own the land whilst he lived in it. Gen. 23:4,7,12,13 seems to draw a difference in legal categories between "resident aliens", "natives" and "the local people". Abraham was an alien, and needed approval from the local community council to buy a burial place; and even then, the council had to speak with the owner and as it were do Abraham a favour. Further, the price of 400 shekels for some land with a cave in it to bury the dead was exorbitant (Gen. 23:14). There are records of the sale of whole villages in northern Syria dating from about this time, recorded in the Alalakh Tablets (E.A. Speiser, *Genesis* [The Anchor Bible] (New York: Doubleday, 1964), p. 171). They were sold for between 100 and 1000 shekels. Jeremiah paid 17 shekels for a field (Jer. 32:9); Omri paid 6000 shekels for the entire site of Samaria (1 Kings 16:24). If ever we feel ripped off by this world, unreasonably treated in this land which is eternally ours, powerless to protest, left without option as Abraham was- then we are following in his steps, and are truly his "seed".

One senses a growing humility within Abraham. Despite being a great man, called a "mighty prince" by local people, with a large household and private army, he personally runs to entertain the strangers who later turned out to be Angels. He so believed in the promised land being ultimately his that he could offer to his younger relative Lot the choice of the best land to live in- when in their culture, the leader of the community, the elder, naturally had the best of everything. Progressive faith in the promises led Abraham to greater integrity and openness. In Gen. 21:25-32 we see Abraham as a secretive, furtive character, secretly digging wells in Abimelech's territory without telling him. By Gen. 23:1-20 we see Abraham buying land from the Hittites in a very public manner, sealed by witnesses- the record emphasizes the integrity and openness of the whole transaction. And this purchase of land is quoted in the New Testament as an example of Abraham's faith that he would inherit the land ultimately. The same effects will be seen in the lives of all those who truly believe in those same promises. Seeing it was traditional to bury people with their ancestors, the purchase of a family "burying place" was also a statement that Abraham had finally separated from his father's house back in Ur and Haran. From no w on, he saw Canaan as truly his land. We saw earlier how Abraham had struggled with this commanded separation from his father's house.

23:15 *My lord, listen to me. What is a piece of land worth four hundred shekels of silver between me and you? Therefore bury your dead-* This was an invitation to barter, stating the starting price, and yet being willing to go lower. But Abraham breaks with tradition and pays this very large price, without responding to the traditional invitation to barter. If the children of Heth are 'Hittites', as commonly thought, then it must be noted that the Hittites were themselves not the owners of the territory around

that cave. Hebron belonged to the Amorites not the Hittites at the time of Josh. 10:5. Josh. 14:15 informs us that "the name of Hebron before was Kiriath Arba, after the greatest man among the Anakim"; "Kiriath Arba, named after the father of Anak (the same is Hebron)" (Josh. 21:11). The Hittites were not "Anakim", they originated in modern day Turkey. The Amorites were "Anakim". The cave was "before Mamre" (:17); and Mamre was the home of the Amorite leader called Mamre, who is called "the Amorite, brother of Eshcol, and brother of Aner" (Gen. 14:13). The critics claim that Hittites would not have actually been the municipal council, as it were, in that area. And maybe they're right. In which case, it's possible we are to conclude that they presented as the owners when in fact they were themselves visiting traders, which is what the Hittites were noted for at that time. And so despite the large price, Abraham was actually deceived. And this gives more poignancy to the NT emphasis that he never permanently owned anything in Canaan, but will receive the land as eternal inheritance. The large price of the land is a hint that the Hittites were less than honest, especially if they began the bargaining by saying 'We will give it to you for free' when clearly that wasn't their intention. Comparison with other Bible texts about who owned Hebron would lead us to conclude that like the Gibeonites, they were deceiving Abraham. This is not stated, but we have here the hermeneutic of *remez*, or 'hints'. Whilst the Gospel message is clear in the Bible, much of the other material is to be interpreted by following hints. This principle is in order to drive us to the text of Scripture and comparison of scripture with scripture, in order to join the dots and see the picture. I would argue that the information about these Hittites is to be read in the same way, and we can conclude that Abraham was deceived by them. The cave never became the

permanent burial place of Abraham's longer term seed as he had imagined.

We recall that Abraham had received 1000 pieces of silver from Abimelech, as a kind of humiliation of him for betraying Sarah (Gen. 20:16). And now those same pieces of silver are used to buy her burial plot.

23:16 *Abraham listened to Ephron-* As noted on :15, the significance of this was that Abraham declined to barter, and the language of :15 was an invitation to knock him down from 400 to something far less. Abraham comes over as desperate to buy the land, to get himself a lasting possession, at any cost. Even though it never really worked out- we never hear of the cave being used for burials of his seed beyond the next two generations after him.

Abraham weighed to Ephron the silver which he had named in the audience of the children of Heth, four hundred shekels of silver, according to the current merchants' standard- Abraham surely realized the paradox, that he was buying his own eternal possession. The price was very high, and yet Abraham must have paid it with almost a smile on his face, knowing that actually all the land was his.

23:17 *So the field of Ephron, which was in Machpelah, which was before Mamre, the field, the cave which was in it, and all the trees that were in the field, that were in all of its borders, were deeded-* The stress upon "deeded" is to highlight the paradox, that the land had been eternally deeded to Abraham and his seed. The language of "borders", defining where the parcel began and ended, is also almost ironic, seeing that the whole land belonged to Abraham. Likewise the strict legal definitions of what was included in the deal are almost laughable when we perceive that the entire land was eternally Abraham's.

23:18 *To Abraham for a possession in the presence of the children of Heth, before all who went in at the gate of his city-* It was God who had given Abraham the entire land for an eternal possession. And yet the elders of the city sat there in all solemnity as if they were global power brokers. The contrast and paradox is being highlighted. Gen. 22:18 spoke of how the gate of all would be in Abraham's power; but he lived in faith of that day as then unseen.

23:19 *After this, Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave of the field of Machpelah before Mamre (that is, Hebron), in the land of Canaan-* "After this" refers not to the initial meeting with the local elders, but to the receipt of the property deed from those "at the gate of the city" (:17,18). There is extreme emphasis upon the legal process; to highlight the paradox in the fact that Abraham had the whole earth deeded to him in possession for ever- by God and not man.

23:20 *The field, and the cave that is in it, were deeded to Abraham for a possession of a burying place by the children of Heth-* "Deeded" is AV "made sure". This is however alluded to in Rom. 4:13,16. The "promise to Abraham and his seed, that he should be heir of the world, did not come through the law, but through... faith, that it may be according to grace; to the end that the promise may be sure to all the seed. Not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all". The 'making sure' was achieved by God's grace, through faith. And this confirmation or making sure of the promises to Abraham, which encapsulate the Gospel of the Kingdom, was through the death of the Lord Jesus. Not by paying money. And this is our challenge; to believe, by faith alone, that by grace alone our inheritance is yet future, but is "made sure" by the Lord's death, and not by any human device.

Our faith in this is sadly not total; and neither was Abraham's. But he endured in faith, and in this sense is "the father of us all".

The repetition of "deeded" in :17,18,20 serves to rub in the paradox- that the whole land, including the field and cave. were deeded to Abraham *by God* and *for ever*. "Deeded" translates the same Hebrew word used of God 'establishing' His covenant (Gen. 6:18; 9:9,11; 17:7,19). The weakness of human deeding is set up against the power of God's eternal deeding. And that establishing was ultimately through the Lord's death. And Abraham has just been taught this in Gen. 22; God there swore by an oath, on His own immortal life, as it were, that He would truly fulfil the promises to Abraham. But now Abraham seeks to 'establish' that in his own strength and with his own wealth. As Hebrews 6 explains, we have anchor-firm hope and consolation, because the promise of salvation has in fact been further confirmed or established / made sure by the Lord's death. Because of this further confirmation, our Hope is "stedfast" (Heb. 6:19), the same word for "made sure" in Rom. 4:16. And again the same word in Heb. 9:17, the covenant / testament is "of force", it is established, by the death of the Lord Jesus.

GENESIS CHAPTER 24

24:1 *Abraham was old, and well stricken in age. Yahweh had blessed Abraham in all things-* The promised blessings referred to the things of the Kingdom and the Lord Jesus, but Abraham had a primary experience of these blessings in his secular life; we too experience the Kingdom blessings "now but not yet". Peter interprets the blessing as the forgiveness of sins (Acts 3:25,26). The stress on their material blessings therefore points forward to our spiritual riches of blessing in Christ. Even earlier in Abraham's life, "Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver and in gold" (Gen. 13:1). Other references to Abraham's wealth occur in Gen. 13:6 and Gen. 14:23. Jacob too was blessed with material wealth (Gen. 31:16; 33:11 AVmg.). His parting with Esau because they were both so wealthy (Gen. 36:7) echoes the division between Abraham and Lot and Abraham and Abimelech for the same reason (Gen. 13:6). The similarities between these incidents serves to emphasize the wealth of the family. The prosperity of Lot in Sodom is also highlighted (Gen. 14:12 Heb.). Each of them seems to have accumulated wealth in their own right in addition to inheriting it.

Rashi claims that "blessed" has the same numeric value as "son"; as if the blessing had been fulfilled in having Isaac as his son. But in fact the blessing had to be fulfilled through Isaac in turn having a son. And he was unmarried; maybe because he had turned into an introvert, a mummy's boy who had been obsessed over by his parents, who named him 'laughter' because *he* was *their* joy; and as a result of the abuse [possibly sexual] from his older half brother Ishmael. This is why Isaac always appears as passive, even in his agreeing to be offered by Abraham. It was unusual for a chieftain's son to be unmarried by 40. He clearly was dominated by his mother, and therefore we read that he was

"comforted" over his mother's death, three years after her funeral, by the appearance of Rebekah- who is thereby presented as a surrogate mother for him. Hence we read that they got married in his mother's tent.

24:2 *Abraham said to his servant, the elder of his house, who ruled over all that he had-* Presumably Eliezer. Eliezer had once been chosen by Abraham to *inherit* all that he had (Gen. 15:2); but he had now made him just manager over it all, and signed it all over to Isaac after his death (:36). And yet Eliezer very commendably seeks only the best for the Abraham family and the extension of God's purpose through them. We note that Abraham was extremely wealthy- with 318 servants. "All" that he had had originally been set to transfer to Eliezer- until Isaac was born. "All" Abraham had was under Eliezer. But now it had all been given to Isaac, although Eliezer managed it. If Isaac died childless, then it would return to Eliezer or his descendants. The oath he took not to marry Isaac to a Canaanite may not have applied to his family, who were from Damascus. So he was keenly aware of the advantage to him of a "no deal".

Please put your hand under my thigh- This appears to be a reference to Abraham's circumcised, reproductive organ. The oath was relative to the covenant made with him, which Abraham knew included Isaac and the raising of a Godly seed in Isaac's line. Clearly Abraham didn't think that the promised blessings would be given automatically; he realized that he and his descendants must do what they could to realize them and live according to them.

24:3 *I will make you swear by Yahweh, the God of heaven and the God of the earth, that you shall not take a wife for my son of the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I live-* It could be argued that Abraham was again trying to force through the fulfilment of God's promises. He had been told that he would

have a great seed, and the promises of blessing were made to Isaac and Ishmael alike. But Abraham and Sarah wanted the Divine purpose to extend through their beloved Isaac; and so therefore Abraham wished to ensure that he married someone who had also been exposed to Yahweh worship. More positively, it could be argued that Abraham realized that having a common faith in Yahweh was critical to the production of a Godly seed, and he simply wanted the best for his son in spiritual terms. Although as discussed on :6, this view is problematic. Perhaps he was seeking to stop Eliezer marrying Isaac off to his own daughter or relative.

In this chapter we have several occurrences of "Yahweh Elohim"; here and also in :7,12,27,42,48; the phrase also occurs in Genesis 2 and 3 often, as well as in Gen. 26:24; 27:20; 28:13; 32:9. There is a theory that Genesis is comprised of two accounts, one written by someone who used the Yahweh Name, and another by one who used *elohim*. They supposedly were fused together. But the occurrence of the names together makes this theory problematic.

24:4 *But you shall go to my country, and to my relatives, and take a wife for my son Isaac*- It follows that there were none of Abraham's country or kindred, which he had been commanded to leave, living anywhere near him. He had truly and fully obeyed the command to separate from them, although as noted on Gen. 11 and 12, it took him decades to get there.

24:5 *The servant said to him, What if the woman isn't willing to follow me to this land? Must I bring your son again to the land you came from?*- Servants were accustomed to fulfilling requirements to the letter, but not taking any initiative. This is where the parables which speak of us as servants have an element of unreality- for we are servants who are left to trade talents and manage the household affairs of our Lord on our own initiative. And for the one talent man, he felt this was too much to ask.

24:6 *Abraham said to him, Beware that you don't bring my son there again-* Abraham knew that Canaan and not Mesopotamia was the promised land, and he wanted Isaac to remain within the things of the Kingdom, rather than returning to Abraham's land of origin. We see here how totally Abraham now self-identified as a man of the *eretz* and had fully broken with his background. Abraham considered that if a woman wasn't willing to come and live in the promised land and live the Kingdom life now, then she wasn't worth marrying in order to raise a Godly seed.

At first blush, Abraham's concerns may appear contradictory: he is a) concerned that his son doesn't return to where Abraham had come from, and yet b) he wants his son to marry someone from there, and not from Canaan. I suggest that here we see Abraham in weakness, again. He had been commanded to separate from both his native land, and his family- in order to receive the promises of a new land and a new family, through his "seed". He had very grudgingly and half heartedly obeyed these commands, with God almost forcing him to fulfil these conditions. He wanted Isaac to not return to their ancestral homeland; to fulfil the 'land' promise. But he seemed less interest in the 'seed' promise. For he wants his son to marry into his own natural family, which was surely a studied rejection of the spirit of the commandment to separate from his own family. And yet, God worked through that weakness, as we see in the providential chosing of a wife for Isaac. Even though the connections with Padanaram and Rebekah's family were to be extremely destructive and difficult for the next generation, i.e. Jacob. There seems no real reason for Abraham insisting his son marry back into his own family. They were equally idolatrous as the women of Canaan. Laban's daughters were clearly idolaters, Rachel in particular. And Laban in Gen. 31:53 swears by the gods of Nahor rather than the God of Abraham. It is specifically

stated that Abraham's father was an idolater. "The city of Nahor", Abraham's brother, is therefore associated with idolatry. It is almost as if he resented the command to break with his family, and even at this late stage in his life, was seeking to get around it by insisting his son marry back into that family.

It is simply not the case that there were no true believers in Canaan, for we have encountered Melchizedek, who was a priest of the true God- and presumably he was a priest to some body of people in Jerusalem who also believed in the true God. So the Biblical data is that the family in Padanaram were idolaters; but there were in fact true believers in the Jerusalem area of Canaan. But Abraham wanted to keep marriage within his wider family, even though he had been commanded to totally separate from them. And we must factor in the repeated evidence within the record that Abraham was not totally obedient to the call to separate from his family [he married his half-sister; only separated from his father when his father died, rather than when he was asked to; only separated from Lot when Lot himself chose to separate]. See on :14. Gen. 31:3 records God telling Jacob whilst he lived with Laban to return to the land and people of his fathers- Canaan. This is the very opposite of Abraham's reasoning here- that the land of his fathers was Mesopotamia. The real land of his fathers was not there in Mesopotomia, but Canaan. Yet Abraham had not perceived that, for he reasons exactly the other way around.

24:7 *Yahweh, the God of heaven, who took me from my father's house, and from the land of my birth, who spoke to me, and Who swore to me, saying, 'I will give this land to your seed'*- See on 1 Pet. 1:10. As with many Christian youngsters today, the avoidance of marrying those in the surrounding world just seemed too much to ask. But Abraham knew that a way would be made. As God

had *taken* Abram from Ur and Haran and Lot, so God would *take* a woman from there, suitable for Isaac.

Abraham was made to us wander from his father's house (Gen. 20:13). God was the one who brought about Abraham's obedience. "From thence [Haran]... *God* removed him into (Canaan)" (Acts 7:4 R.V.). Yet Abraham was, in the end, a willing participant in the process. It could be argued that even here, Abraham was slipping backwards- because he wants his son to marry into his own family, just as he had married Sarah and his brother had married his own niece. Yet Abraham believed that as God had *taken* Abram away from Ur and Haran and Lot, so God would *take* a woman from there, suitable for Isaac. That Abraham did finally break with his family is hinted at by the way that Laban speaks of "the God of Abraham and the God of Nahor- may they judge between us (Gen. 31:53 Heb.). Laban recognized that Nahor and Abraham worshipped different gods- whereas we know that initially, they worshipped the same gods. Heb. 11:8 records things from a positive perspective too, as if there was instant obedience from Abraham: "By faith Abraham when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went". Truly, the Biblical record imputes righteousness to Abraham, and thus sets a pattern for all of us, the equally faltering and stumbling children of Abraham. The comment "So Abram departed [Heb. 'went'- s.w. Gen. 11:31; 12:1], as the Lord had spoken unto him" (Gen. 12:4) is surely the beginning of the wonderful theme of righteousness being imputed to Abraham!

"The God of Heaven" (:3,7) is an unusual term for the time of Abraham, and is commonly used in the books inspired around the time of the exile. This could suggest that Genesis was edited, under inspiration, at the time when Judah were in exile. The

relevant themes are clear- God's people as wanderers amongst the nations, being exhorted not to mix with the surrounding world nor intermarry with them.

He will send His angel before you, and you shall take a wife for my son from there- Abraham told his servant that God would send His Angel before him, so that his mission to find a suitable wife for Isaac would succeed. The Angel prepared in prospect for the success of the mission; but it still depended upon the woman's freewill. The whole incident in Genesis 24 can be read as typical of the search, through the preaching of the Gospel, for the bride of Christ. And yet Abraham realized that even with the Angels preparing the way, there has to be some element of human freewill. It was possible that despite all the preparation, some might still refuse.

24:8 *If the woman isn't willing to follow you, then you shall be clear from this my oath. Only you shall not bring my son there again-* The implication could be that Isaac would have to remain single, and God would raise up a seed for him in some miraculous way. We are reminded of how Abraham said that he and Isaac would return, after sacrificing Isaac. The promises meant to him what they should to us- that somehow, even if we don't see the way, if the path seems impossible- they will be fulfilled. Despite God potentially preparing the way for individuals to become part of the bride of the promised seed, the Lord Jesus- there is still the genuine possibility that we may not respond, preferring the cozy status quo of our lives rather than pushing off into the unknown and resigning all we one held dear. Abraham twice stresses that Isaac is not to return to live in Mesopotamia (:6,8), in loyalty to the command to leave there and separate from it. Yet the command was to sever from both his land and his family of origin. He is keen to obey the command to separate from the land, in order to receive a new

land; but less enthusiastic to separate from his family. Just as his seed seem more interested in the promise of the Kingdom of God than in the things of the Lord Jesus, Abraham's seed.

Abraham doesn't say what Eliezer should do in the case that his mission failed. This omission is very obvious. The conclusion might be that he implied Isaac was to remain single and therefore have no child. Somehow he believed that the promise of a seed would still be fulfilled even though there was no visible way it could be. Abraham had been here before; he had been asked to sacrifice Isaac and had agreed. He had learned that faith in God means trust, trust that He will somehow fulfil His promises even though the path to that fulfilment is invisible and humanly impossible.

We note that Isaac did in fact send his son Jacob "back there again" to find a wife. He didn't learn the lesson, and retained the weakness of his father, in not separating from the original Abraham family. And Jacob suffered because of that. What the father allows or cuts himself slack over will likely be repeated by the son, on an even bigger scale. As we see with David and Solomon with horses and women.

24:9 *The servant put his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master, and swore to him concerning this matter-* As noted on :2, this request to touch Abraham's circumcised reproductive organ was because the whole question of a wife for Isaac was related to the covenant. It was to be done in response to the covenant, which implied that Abraham's seed would marry within the faith.

24:10 *The servant took ten camels of his master's camels, and departed, having a variety of good things of his master's with him. He arose, and went to Mesopotamia, to the city of Nahor-* Ten camels could carry a lot. It would have been an impressive display that the promised blessings had received an incipient fulfilment.

"For all the good things of his master were in his hand" (AV) helps us to see the servant as representative of the Lord Jesus in His role as the seeker of the bride, as well as being the groom. The Hebrew for "good things" is used of the blessings of all "good things" which were to come upon Abraham's seed (Dt. 6:11; Josh. 23:14,15); and this language is behind the description of the things of the new covenant as "good things" (Heb. 9:11; 10:1; Rom. 10:15).

Abraham had been asked to separate from Mesopotamia and his entire family. He struggled over the decades to do this, only doing so when Lot left him. We wonder why Abraham should assume that his family there knew about Yahweh and would have more spiritually minded young women there than in Canaan. They were after all idolaters; we must give due weight to Josh. 24:2: "Thus says Yahweh the God of Israel, 'Your fathers lived of old time beyond the River, even Terah the father of Abraham, and the father of Nahor: and they served other gods". But Abraham is apparently sure that the family of Nahor will be a good family to marry back into. Perhaps he had sent message back to them about his experiences with Yahweh, and they had positively responded. Laban does uses the Yahweh Name; but his later behaviour suggests he didn't believe in Him. And we hardly get the impression that Eliezer knew the family. So perhaps Abraham's attraction to his father's family was still so strong, that he saw them more positively than he ought to have done.

24:11 *He made the camels kneel down outside the city by the well of water at the evening time, the time that women go out to draw water-* The well was the logical place to go to meet local young women. Moses wrote Genesis, and he will go on to record how he also met his wife by a well. And we think of the Lord meeting the Samaritan woman at a well, and Jacob meeting his wife likewise. Clearly there is a kind of Divine hallmark stamped

on all these experiences. He works in the same outline manner with us all, and there are points of connection between our lives and those of others, both in our generation and in Biblical history. Man is not alone, we are not adrift, at the mercy of the winds of fortune. God is active through His Spirit, and working according to a plan.

24:12 *He said, Yahweh, the God of my master Abraham, please give me success this day, and show kindness to my master Abraham-* "Kindness" is a word often associated with God's keeping covenant with His covenant people. It is a way of pleading the promises, asking God to fulfil His promises to Abraham, rather than simply wishing for God to be "kind" to Abraham. The fulfilment required a Godly , and that was what Eliezer was seeking. He prayed according to God's will. "Success" is literally 'to bring the face to'. Jacob uses the phrase in Gen. 27:20 in claiming to have had "success" from God in bringing venison so quickly. //

24:13 *Behold, I am standing by the spring of water. The daughters of the men of the city are coming out to draw water-* God of course knows all things; but like David in the Psalms, Eliezer shares with God his location and situation. This is not to inform God, as it were; but rather for our benefit. It helps us to verbalize our situation before God, it brings about an openness toward God on our side.

24:14 *Let it happen, that the young lady to whom I will say, 'Please let down your pitcher, that I may drink', and she will say, 'Drink, and I will also give your camels drink'—let her be the one You have appointed for Your servant Isaac. By this I will know that You have shown kindness to my master-* This raises the issue of whether it is correct to set God signs to fulfil. Yet God seems to have worked through it in this case. The condition which Eliezer set was pretty tough; to water ten camels was a major task which

would have taken some hours, and it was already evening (:11). The family would worry what had become of their young lady, and the only appropriate thing to do would be to accompany the woman back home. The chance of a woman making this offer was very slim; so slim that we wonder if Eliezer might possibly have been trying to release himself from the responsibility. And as they had come on a long journey, the servants riding the camels would have been quite capable of watering their camels as they had done many times already on the trip. We note that Eliezer prays, he is no atheist, and yet maybe he doubts whether the promises to Abraham will be fulfilled; he sets this rather difficult hoop for anyone to jump through, and then says that if it happens, then he "will know that You have shown kindness to my master". I have earlier suggested that "kindness" is a technical term which often refers to the covenant. Seeing the condition being set was so unlikely, it could be argued that he was trying to disprove the fulfilment of the promises. God could have ignored this kind of manipulation; but He didn't, and instead brought Eliezer to his knees by actually making the girl jump through the hoop. For God clearly made Rebekah respond as she did, when she had no reason to. The whole incident is parabolic and typical of the calling out of the bride of Abraham's seed; and we too are made to do things which we otherwise would never have done. Thus the Spirit works, to bring us to be the Master's bride.

"Appointed" translates a Hebrew word which carries the idea of being declared right; it has a moral sense to it, and is similar in form, although not identical with, the word used about Abraham being 'counted righteous' on account of his faith (Gen. 15:6). The reference is not to prior choosing or predestination, but to being declared as the right one; the theme of imputed righteousness is therefore continued. It was not that Rebekah

was spiritually minded, but rather that she, like her relative Abraham, was counted right because she believed on some level.

The human chances of a woman offering to do this were very slim. It takes a long time to water one camel, and there were ten of them. Other people would've wanted to use the well, and Rebekah had to draw a far larger amount of water than anyone else would be needing. 'Can I just fill my bucket?' would've been the obvious request from everyone else in the line. What does this reflect about the attitude of Eliezer? He was setting God an apparently impossible gambit, throwing down an unlikely gauntlet. And God came through it. We note in :12 that the servant "said" rather than "prayed"; and so in :45 "Before I had done speaking *to my heart*". He spoke to himself rather than praying directly to Yahweh, whom he only considered 'the God of my master' (although the flow of events brings him at times to fall on his face before this amazing God). This would contribute to the sense that Eliezer is not a personal worshipper of Yahweh but is just throwing down a gauntlet to Yahweh. Surely the logical thing would have been to seek out the relatives of Abraham first. But instead he sets up this apparently impossible hoop for God to come through. This would explain why as she was doing the hard and long work of watering the camels, Eliezer "was watching her silently, to find out whether or not the LORD had given him success" (:21). We wonder what were his thoughts. It was as if had she failed to water the tenth camel, he would've turned tail and returned to Canaan. That is how I read that. But when she struggles through to the end, he has to grudgingly accept that indeed, this is of God. And this makes sense of how he "was wondering" as he watched her- for the same Hebrew word is used of cities being "waste and desolate" (Is. 6:11). He was desolated that his plan had gone so wrong.

Rebekah had indeed done exactly what he thought she would never do- to offer to give his camels drink also.

The way he insists that she leave her family immediately could also be read as his almost pushing the plan towards failure. For it was most unlikely that a young woman would just up and leave immediately. If a relatively random stranger turns up and offers you a fortune to take your young virgin daughter to a distant land- who would immediately agree? Especially when the terms were, that she left immediately. I suggest Eliezer was trying to elicit a "No deal" out of it. In any case, only a relatively poor girl would come to draw water herself. She would be either a servant, or from a family who had few servants. He turned up with 10 camels loaded with wealth, rather like arriving with a cavalcade of expensive vehicles. And he proposes the marriage to a poor girl drawing water. It was very unlikely she would believe him or agree. Again, he is setting her up to say no. Likewise he gives the girl very expensive golden nose rings as soon as she had watered the camels. These were a sign of betrothal (Ez. 16:11,12). They were totally disproportionate as a mere "thank you" for watering camels. Did he expect her to just agree to marry someone far away, to whom she had been verbally introduced by a stranger met at a well? I suggest Eliezer was setting her up to say "No". He had turned up with 10 camels, at a time when camels were the transport of the mega wealthy; most folks travelled by horse or donkey. And asks this village girl by a well to marry his master's son in a foreign land. We must note carefully that he offers the betrothal presents *before* he even knows which family she is from (only in :23 does he ask what family she is from). I conclude that he offered this random girl the betrothal gifts before he knew whether she was a relative or not. He wanted her to refuse, so he could be free from the obligation to get a wife for Isaac from Mesopotamia. Time and again he is surprised. He sets

the condition that the girl must offer to water all the camels; and she does. He offers her betrothal gifts- and she accepts. He goes to her home, and demands she leave immediately. She agrees. All his best efforts to elicit a refusal are turned against him.

Perhaps he wanted to marry off his own relative to Isaac. He may have reasoned that because he was from Damascus, the prohibition on marrying a Canaanite didn't apply to him. Rebekah's family come over later as avaricious. They agreed because of the huge wealth offered to them; for to let their daughter or sister go so quickly was unheard of in a culture where such agreements took much time. In :33, the LXX and some manuscripts strangely [at first blush] have Eliezer setting the table and putting food on it. This reading has been dismissed because it seems so unlikely, and an affront to hospitality. But perhaps the reading is true- and it would be another indication that Eliezer was setting up the family to reject his offer. He himself states that his deal with Abraham was that if the relatives refused to let the girl go with him, then he was free of his duty to find a wife for Isaac. And he seems to be trying to engineer that refusal. Abraham's words "if the woman should not want" (:8) are twisted by Eliezer into "if you come to my clan and they refuse you..." (:41). Eliezer is therefore trying to provoke the girl's family to say "no". Rebekah's unexpected agreement, rather like her offer to water the camels, is upstaging all Eliezer's best efforts to stop the deal happening. It was unusual that the girl herself should be made the deciding factor in the dispute as to whether she should leave immediately. It was "no deal" unless she left immediately; for Eliezer was still desperate to achieve a "no deal" despite his recognition that Yahweh was at work in all this. Her family likewise were looking for a "no deal", for they say they cannot respond positively, nor negatively. Both sides were looking for Rebekah to say "no", and that was why she was

summoned and given the deciding vote in the matter. But she says "yes". Clearly the whole thing was overruled to show that this marriage was indeed made in Heaven, despite both of the wider parties trying to stop it.

The heroine of the story is Rebekah, who perceived the hand of God and said yes straight away. Abraham's motivations were also mixed, as discussed on :6. We too look back on our lives, and the major choices within them- baptism, marriage, career path etc. And our motives were mixed. But still God worked through it all, to bring forward His loving purpose with us. We can indeed read this story as that of providence, faith etc. But there is a back story to it, and careful imagination and re-living of the text removes the idealized, romantic view of 'providence' which many wish to see in it. Life is not a bed of roses, faith coexists with unbelief, and human motivation is mixed. Just look at your own life.

Abraham has earlier spoken rather disparagingly of "This Eliezer of Damascus" whom he only reluctantly would have as the inheritor of his wealth (Gen. 15:2). It was in Eliezer's interests that Abraham's child would not marry nor produce children- so that he and his descendants could inherit the wealth. Eliezer addresses Yahweh as the God of his master Abraham, as if he did not fully accept Yahweh as his own God. Perhaps we can infer a degree of scepticism in him; for he has already opined to Abraham that a woman would be unlikely to follow him all the way back to Canaan. Nor would her family probably be very enthusiastic about such a proposition. And so whilst the prayer was sincere and genuine, it likely reflected a scepticism as to whether God would really respond. If no woman fulfilled the challenge, he was likely ready to return to Abraham and say 'Just as I warned you. No deal'. He has no contingency plan. It was this slim chance or nothing. That is the logic of the

situation. The whole experience surely ought to have persuaded him of the truth of Abraham's God. And we also see that although Abraham's desire to take a wife from Padanaram was not purely motivated, and possibly downright wrong (see on :6), God clearly worked through it. Rebekah's hard work ethic, running to be generous to foreigners, matched the spirit of Abraham in his old age. It was a marriage made in Heaven, but brokered and arranged through Eliezer's scepticism and almost cynical giving God an apparently impossible test.

24:15 *It happened, before he had finished speaking, that behold, Rebekah came out, who was born to Bethuel the son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham's brother, with her pitcher on her shoulder-* This is the classic example of God hearing prayer before it is spoken. Prayer is therefore for our benefit rather than for the sake of transmitting information to God which He didn't know. We note from Is. 65:24 that this experience of prayer being heard and answered before it is uttered is one of the joys of the Kingdom age; and yet this is part of the Kingdom life which we can even now experience. The details are added to encourage us to play Bible television with the words- her pitcher on her shoulder, silhouetted against the setting sun; and a relative of Abraham just as he had wished for.

24:16 *The young lady was very beautiful to look at, a virgin, neither had any man known her-* The three terms are all saying the same thing- a "young lady... virgin... neither had any man known her". The triple emphasis is to prepare us to expect that she is ideally suited to marry and bear a child into Abraham's line. When we go on to read that she was barren for 20 years, we are seeing how God doesn't automatically use those who are ideally qualified for a role. He may even delay or impede their usage, so that all is of His Spirit and grace rather than of the flesh. And we have all surely seen this in life many times. The word

"neither" is used in the Semitic sense of 'not [only] B but also A". This must be remembered when we read things like "Christ sent me not to baptize"; the idea is "not [only] to baptize".

She went down to the spring, filled her pitcher, and came up- As noted on :15, we are given the picture of her walking down the steps to the well and then climbing up again with her pitcher full- as if the Divine cameraman has zoomed in upon her, and we are watching her from where Eliezer was sitting.

24:17 *The servant ran to meet her and said, Please give me a drink, a little water from your pitcher-* As observed on :16, the Divine camera is positioned where Eliezer was sitting, and it remains there. We see Eliezer running toward her, having prayed and set up a situation whereby if she responded in a most unusual way, then she would be the one. We notice the sense of speed in the narrative; he runs to meet her, she hurries (:18) in response, Eliezer refuses to eat at Laban's house until the matter is finished, and then he and Rebekah both wish to return to Abraham immediately. Once we are moving in step with the Spirit, life takes on a great speed once we perceive that every movement of ours will unleash the Spirit to lead us further.

24:18 *She said, Drink, my lord. She hurried, and let down her pitcher on her hand, and gave him drink-* As we have seen in the previous verses, it's as if the Divine cameraman is zoomed very close in now; we see the "pitcher on her hand" and can imagine her letting it down to give drink to this stranger. Once a large pitcher was full and balanced on the head, it was a major inconvenience to let it down. She would naturally have wondered why the man had not run up to her before, seeing he was watching her, and asked for water before she had put it up on her head. The way Eliezer does this could almost lead us to think that he was setting her up to fail the preconditions which he was setting God. The normal reply would have been:

'Sorry I can't, now the pitcher is balanced on my head'. And in no way with the sun going down would the woman then offer to water ten camels of a stranger. Perhaps he was really looking for a way out of his mission; he set up the preconditions which appeared impossible for anyone to reach, and set the conclusion- that if they were failed, then he would be free of the oath and could return home. The fact Rebekah was moved by the Spirit to fulfil them all... therefore made him collapse before Yahweh in deep devotion, having been transformed from cynic to believer by Rebekah's response.

It shouldn't just be the nearness of the Lord's return that makes us urgent. Our decisions to give over each part of our lives, radically, to Jesus should be made not just because life is short and the Lord is at the door; but also because it might otherwise be too late to undo the damage a self-engrossed life has already caused, to the self and to others. Rebekah responded immediately to the call to go marry Isaac, in a story which is clearly to be read as an acted parable of the search for a bride for Jesus. Her 'quick' response is one of her characteristics (Gen. 24:18,20,26,46,64). Abraham likewise "rose up early" after his night time vision, requiring him to offer his son to God (Gen. 22:1,3). Joshua "therefore" started to attack the confederacy of local kings, in the middle of the night, immediately after God had assured him of victory (Josh. 10:9). David could write: "I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments" (Ps. 119:60). We cannot be passive on receiving the opportunity to serve God. We will urgently seek to do something with what we have been enabled to do for the Lord: "The servant who got five bags *went quickly* to invest the money and earned five more bags" (Mt. 25:16 NCV).

24:19 *When she had done giving him drink, she said, I will also draw for your camels, until they have done drinking*- As noted

above, this was all a most unlikely response. She is presented as having no reason for making it. It was "evening", sun was setting; to water ten camels was a major job; the man had come running to her exactly when she had already got her own pitcher balanced on her head, and she had to take it down again, unstop it and give him drink from it, meaning she had to pour the rest away (:20). Why make this response? Surely God made her make it, in order to meet the rather bizarre preconditions which the [sceptical?] Eliezer had set up. There are times when we reflect that we have done or said something which was not what we naturally wanted to do. Or we do something having no idea why we did it. This is the movement of the Spirit, and in the great parable of our salvation and calling, Rebekah's humanly irrational response speaks of the Spirit's movement in our lives, that our response may be of grace and not of human volition.

24:20 *She hurried, and emptied her pitcher into the trough-* I suggested on :19 that she had to unstop her pitcher to give Eliezer water, and once it was unstopped and she had given water to a stranger, she had to pour the rest of it away. This heightens the sense of extraordinary inconvenience which she was being put to, and yet she so willingly responded.

And ran again to the well to draw, and drew for all his camels- Her hurrying may have been because the sun was going down and she didn't want to return home after dark, nor have her family worrying about her absence. But the rest of the narrative suggests that the 'hurrying' was because God's purpose was being worked out by willing people. He may appear very slow, but when people are willing, the speed of the Spirit's movement is amazing.

24:21 *The man looked at her amazed, remaining silent, to know whether Yahweh had made his journey prosperous or not-* I suggested on :18 that Eliezer had set hoops for the girl to

jump through which may have appeared unreasonable, in order to get himself out of the oath to find a wife for Isaac and return home. But his ridiculous preconditions have all been met. And yet despite being "amazed", or 'stunned' as the Hebrew means, he apparently still doubts whether Yahweh has prospered his journey. However, once the camels are watered, he then gives her the engagement presents (:22). It was as if he had to wait until the camels were all watered before proceeding. Or the Hebrew could imply that he was so stunned that he couldn't speak, because he had known / perceived that Yahweh had answered positively the question as to whether the journey had prospered or not. It clearly had been, and he was stunned, at how his skepticism and setting up a humanly impossible precondition had been answered.

Ask, believing that you will receive. Otherwise, prayer becomes just a conscience salver, rattled off to calm ourselves rather than meaningfully request something from the throne of Heaven. Eliezer had the answer to his prayer, just as he had asked; but, initially, he didn't believe it had happened. We are *so* similar. It is in those moments that we realize just what a momentous thing it is, to ask something of God, to be performed on this earth. And to realize it actually happened. He did it, for me, a little ant crawling on the surface of a small planet that is hurtling through space, in a remote part of His universe...

24:22 *So it happened, as the camels had done drinking, that the man took a golden ring of half a shekel weight, and two bracelets for her hands of ten shekels weight of gold-* "The man" was a messenger, and so Rebekah ranks amongst those who showed hospitality to strangers and thereby entertained messengers / angels unaware (Heb. 13:2). The half shekel was later the price of the redemption money, the sign that one was numbered amongst Israel (Ex. 38:26). Lange's commentary demonstrates that such

a nose ring (Heb.) and bracelets of that weight were the engagement presents used at the time, and are still used amongst some Bedouin today. Rebekah is presented as having no say in the matter; she was moved to respond, and then for this she was decorated with engagement presents for an unknown man in an unknown distant land. It all rather sounds like the call of Abram- he didn't understand, but said yes to God, and was carried away by event and circumstance to an unknown land- the very same land to which Rebekah was now called away. So it is with our calling to become the bride of the Seed, the Lord Jesus. The essential and only critical thing is to remain part of the program, to keep responding, to never say "no".

24:23 *And said, Whose daughter are you? Please tell me. Is there room in your father's house for us to lodge in?-* Eliezer comes over as very 'forward'. It was not the done thing to invite yourself as a guest, especially when Eliezer had a group of servants and ten camels who also needed a bed for the night. The whole incident speaks of how God takes the initiative in coming into our lives with the unusual call, and our responding to it, partly from our own volition but largely from the prompting of the Spirit.

24:24 *She said to him, I am the daughter of Bethuel the son of Milcah, whom she bore to Nahor-* Genealogy and self-identity was usually traced through males. But she identifies herself according to her grandmother Milcah, and this was of course the way of identifying herself as one of the Abraham family. Perhaps she had indeed heard of Abraham's experiences with Yahweh and chose to identify herself with that family; and God responded to that by sending Eliezer to call her away to marry into it. Now we see the significance of the comment in Gen. 22:20 that Abraham heard that Milcah had born children to his brother Nahor. "Milcah" means "queen" and this idea was behind Sarai being renamed to Sarah.

24:25 *She said moreover to him, We have both straw and provender enough, and room to lodge in-* Her response is as unusually positive as her offer to water the ten camels and give Eliezer water when her sealed pitcher was already balanced on her head or shoulder. She after all was the unmarried daughter, and such agreements had to be made by the male head of the family. 'Something' made her respond like this; that is the impression we get throughout the record. And that 'something' was the Spirit. It was not that a message was preached and she responded in faith. She was as it were made to respond, just as Abram was, by his own father taking him out of Ur. We too cannot claim that our positive response to the Gospel was all by dint of our own devotion, faith, appreciation and intellectual purity of understanding.

24:26 *The man bowed his head, and worshiped Yahweh-* As noted on :21, the man was 'stunned'. He had set up an apparently possible precondition in order to prove that this mission was over and failed; but God met that precondition. And so he gave in, and humbles himself before Yahweh. The Hebrew for "worshipped" means to prostrate. Eliezer fell down on the ground beside that well, as if in the presence of an invisible being. This is how real the invisible God came to be for him.

24:27 *He said, Blessed be Yahweh, the God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken His loving kindness and His truth toward my master. As for me, Yahweh has led me in the way to the house of my master's relatives-* See on Gen. 25:23. I suggested on ::21 and :26 that Eliezer had begun to doubt whether the promises to Abraham [the usual referent of "kindness and truth"] would really be fulfilled in this way. But he praises Yahweh for fulfilling them. The "as for me..." may suggest he still didn't feel that this Yahweh was his personal God; he felt he had simply

been used and directed miraculously as this wonderful God worked out His purpose and fulfilled His promises.

The same Hebrew words for being 'led in the way' are used of how God led Israel in the way to Canaan, also by an Angel (Ex. 13:17,21; Neh. 9:12). Moses was retelling this story to encourage his primary audience, as well as us; that experience is not random, but part of being led.

The AV "I being in the way, the Lord led me..." would suggest that if we make the effort to follow in the way demanded by the promises of grace, then we will be led further. We think of how as the believers ministered to the Lord, they were led further to reach out to the Gentiles; we are led ever further (see on Acts 13:2).

24:28 *The young lady ran-* There was a definite trait of energy and industrious activity amongst the Abraham family, indicated by the record of Rebekah running to respond to the call of Eliezer to marry Isaac (Gen. 24:18,20,28,58). Laban too was spritely (Gen. 24:29). And Abraham as an old boy *ran* to meet the Angels, he *hastened* into the tent, and personally *ran* unto the herd rather than wave his wand at the servants (or the wife) to do it (Gen. 18:2,6,7). The way in which it is stressed that he got up early in the morning gives the same impression (Gen. 19:27; 20:8; 21:14; 22:3; the same is said of Jacob, Gen. 28:18 and Laban, Gen. 31:55). The mixture of zeal and business acumen is reflected in the way both Abraham and Lot greeted the Angels in a similar, outgoing, gentlemanly manner (Gen. 19:1-3 cp. Gen. 18:1-6). Note how Rebekah immediately says "I will go" (Heb. *elek*)- just as Abraham had been called to "go" from Ur (*lek*, Gen. 12:1); "and he went" (*wayyelek*, Gen. 12:4). This would seem to suggest an undesigned similarity of character between the family members.

And told her mother's house about these words- We note "her mother's house" and not "her father's". We do not encounter her father in the record, so perhaps he was dead. Or as the women lived in separate dwellings, she may have gone and told them first.

24:29 *Rebekah had a brother, and his name was Laban. Laban ran out to the man, to the spring-* We can conclude that she left Eliezer and his caravan at the well, and ran home with the good news; for Laban then runs out to the well to meet Eliezer.

24:30 *It happened, when he saw the ring, and the bracelets on his sister's hands-* They would have been valuable, and his basic materialistic instinct is portrayed here. When he saw them, he was interested.

And when he heard the words of Rebekah his sister, saying, This is what the man said to me, that he came to the man- This is similar to how the Queen of Sheba only believed the words she heard once she saw things (1 Kings 10:5,6). And that basic psychology is true to this day; the message of the gospel, the Divine promises, only becomes real when concrete evidence is seen in human lives of the primary realization of the blessings in the here and now.

Behold, he was standing by the camels at the spring- Again we are invited to visualize the scene, the cameraman as it were travelling with Laban as he ran.

24:31 *He said, Come in, you blessed of Yahweh-* Although Laban is not presented as very spiritual, he uses the Yahweh name. It seems for sure that Abraham had sent message back to his family about his experiences with Yahweh. Perhaps it was news of positive response to it which led Abraham to seek a wife for Isaac from there. Laban recognizes that the Abraham household had been blessed by Yahweh; because he saw the

material blessings which the camels were laden with. These were but a foretaste of the more essential spiritual blessings.

Why do you stand outside? For I have prepared the house, and room for the camels- The preparation must have been very quick, because the well was only running distance from their home. Laban's later invitation of Jacob into his home was also motivated by hopes of material gain rather than any desire for real spiritual fellowship. Rebekah is portrayed differently; despite the influence of Laban upon her, she focused upon the spiritual rather than the material.

24:32 *The man came into the house, and he unloaded the camels. He gave straw and provender for the camels, and water to wash his feet and the feet of the men who were with him-* We note that Eliezer is willing for the camels to eat, but not for himself; until the Lord's work is done. He is presented as taking thought for the life of his animals. But the text may suggest that although Rebekah and Laban had offered "straw and provender", Eliezer chose to use his own, and to use his own water- so that the discussions about spiritual things would not be compromised by any sense of material obligation. We note that he had his own water; his request for water from Rebekah was therefore part of his testing her. And likewise the Father brings many things into our lives, the response to which is not important of itself; but the process is all important, for what we show ourselves to be.

24:33 *Food was set before him to eat, but he said, I will not eat until I have told my message. He said, Speak on-* As noted on :32, Eliezer was careful to ensure that the discussion about the essential question was not in any sense distorted by being in the debt of the host. And meals were long drawn out occasions. In our seeking of a bride for the Lord Jesus, our attitude must be the same. And this was why the Lord asked His preachers to not greet those they met on the way (Lk. 10:4), however rude

it seemed; but to focus directly and without distraction on the invitation of people to salvation. But see on :14.

24:34 *He said, I am Abraham's servant-* Eliezer has a commendable humility. He uses the standard word for "servant", when he could have introduced himself as the master of Abraham's household; which would have been a very senior position. In our work as seekers of the Lord's bride, there is to be a similar humility.

24:35 *Yahweh has blessed my master greatly. He has become great. He has given him flocks and herds, silver and gold, male servants and female servants, and camels and donkeys-* The allusion is to the promise of Gen. 12:2 which Abraham had received whilst still living in Mesopotamia; that he would be made great. If Abraham had shared that message with others even at that stage, they would realize that the strange promise had indeed been fulfilled in a primary sense. What is attractive and compelling in our presentation of the Gospel is that there has been an incipient fulfilment of promised blessings in our lives now; not in terms of material blessing, but the essence of the Kingdom life is to be seen in us right now.

24:36 *Sarah, my master's wife, bore a son to my master when she was old-* The suggestion could be that the promises of becoming "great" and "many" had been fulfilled in a material sense, but Abraham had hardly become numerous. And that was why Eliezer had come; to seek a bride for Abraham's one legitimate son, so that the promised blessings of the seed could come true through her.

He has given all that he has to him- It was usual for a father to divide the inheritance amongst all the children, with the firstborn getting a double portion. But whilst Abraham did provide for his children by Keturah, he gave all he had as inheritance to Isaac. This reflects how Abraham considered Isaac

as his one and only legitimate son. The others were by concubines (Hagar and Keturah). And we can better perceive the magnitude of the sacrifice which Abraham had been asked to make, in sacrificing this son. The language is very much that of the father in the parable of the prodigal son- all that he had was the elder son's. But that son went out into the night in bitterness and left the family.

24:37 *My master made me swear, saying, 'You shall not take a wife for my son of the daughters of the Canaanites, in whose land I live-* Although Abraham spent much of his life in Canaan, he always felt himself as one passing through, living in their land. We too, no matter how settled and stable our lives may be, are to feel likewise; that this land is not ours, but we are passing through. The day of eternal inheritance is still coming, and is not fully now.

24:38 *But you shall go to my father's house, and to my relatives, and take a wife for my son'-* This was not precisely what Abraham had said in :4. Perhaps Eliezer, realizing he was amongst the very close relatives of Abraham, interpretted his commission that way.

24:39 *I asked my master, 'What if the woman will not follow me?'-* Perhaps both Rebekah and her family had the impression that Abraham's son was looking to return to his ancestral homeland. But the condition of becoming part of the Abrahamic blessing and seed was to separate from family and to go to Canaan; exactly as Abraham had had to do, as they presumably knew full well.

24:40 *He said to me, 'Yahweh, before whom I walk, will send His angel with you, and prosper your way. You shall take a wife for my son of my relatives, and of my father's house-* Because our Angel has been so zealous in acting for us, we too should be zealous in return- thus Abraham's servant, knowing that God

had sent an Angel before him to prepare the way for his mission of finding a wife for Isaac, was eager to be as zealous as possible to do his part in the work- "Hinder me not, seeing the Lord (the Angel) has prospered my way" (:56). There are many other examples of this. Because the Angel is with us, we must joyfully and enthusiastically do our part. See on Hag. 2:4. He felt he was on a roll, being led onwards by the Angel- and he didn't want anything to interrupt that. The sensitive believer will perceive similar situations, time and again, as we seek to follow the leading of the Angel / cherubim before whom we walk. If we walk in step with the Angel, success is assured.

Here clearly the Angel was physically sent. It seems that great stress is placed in Scripture on the Angels physically moving through space, both on the earth and between Heaven and earth, in order to fulfil their tasks, rather than being static in Heaven or earth and bringing things about by just willing them to happen. See on Gen. 18:10. Moses was writing these things for Israel in the wilderness, who were likewise lead daily by an Angel, to the same land of Canaan. Abraham felt that he walked 'before Yahweh', reflecting how he too saw that he was following an Angel, as Israel were. But the idea is also of covenant relationship, for Abraham had asked that Ishmael might also live before Yahweh, i.e. still be in covenant with Him (Gen. 17:18). And God had agreed, although Ishmael didn't want to know.

On a practical level, a worthy wife in order to raise a Godly seed must herself personally have responded to the call to leave all; she must have personally acted in the spirit of Abraham, in response to the same promises. And Eliezer would not even take a meal from her family until this had been established. Perhaps the equivalent for us is that romance and personal considerations should come after the basic spiritual compatibility is established between two persons.

24:41 *Then will you be clear from my oath, when you come to my relatives. If they don't give her to you, you shall be clear from my oath'*- The events recorded in Gen. 24 concerning a wife being sought for Isaac are all capable of symbolic interpretation; the steward [= the ministry of the preacher] is sent to seek a wife [= the bride of Christ, the ecclesia] for Isaac [cp. Jesus], and told not to bring Isaac back- i.e., they *had* to succeed in their search, and they would; as the shepherd of the Lord's parable sought the sheep until it was found. Yet there was the recognition that she *may not* be found ("If they don't give her to you..."); and yet the response to the question 'Peradventure the woman will not follow me?' was that the Lord would prosper the way "and you *shall* take a wife for my son" (:40). This wasn't blind optimism. The possibility of failure was entertained. But there was a positivism that Yahweh's intention would be carried out. The Lord Himself *marvelled* at the unbelief of men (Mk. 6:6), despite knowing what was in man. Surely He could only have genuinely felt such marvel because He began with such an essentially positive spirit.

24:42 *I came this day to the spring, and said, 'Yahweh, the God of my master Abraham, if now You do prosper my way which I go*- Again we get the impression that Eliezer didn't fully believe that the journey was being prospered. Maybe he had stopped at other towns in the area and not found anyone appropriate. And so he sets a most unlikely condition for Yahweh to fulfil His promise, as he was about to return home. And God made Rebekah perfectly jump through that hoop.

24:43 *Behold, I am standing by this spring of water. Let it happen, that the maiden who comes out to draw, to whom I will say, Please give me a little water from your pitcher to drink*- As mentioned earlier, once the pitcher was full and on her shoulder or head, it was quite an inconvenience to get it down again,

unstop it, and give some water to a person; :20 seems to say that she emptied the rest of the pitcher into the trough after Eliezer had done drinking.

24:44 *And she will tell me, 'Drink, and I will also draw for your camels' - let her be the woman whom Yahweh has appointed for my master's son-* All who heard the account would have agreed that this was really an impossible hoop to set for God to make someone jump through, and Rebekah's response was counter instinctive, counter cultural and so unusual that one could only say that God made her do it. Just as our response to the call is induced by the Spirit.

24:45 *Before I had finished speaking in my heart, behold, Rebekah came out with her pitcher on her shoulder. She went down to the spring, and drew. I said to her, 'Please let me drink'-* Prayer is largely carried out in the mind – how we 'speak in the heart' is effectively read as our prayer to God. Thus our self-talk merges into prayer; Hannah's "prayer" appears to have been the same (1 Sam. 2:1). Solomon's prayer for wisdom is described by God as "in your heart" (2 Chron. 1:11). This close link between thought and prayer is developed in the Lord's teaching in Mk. 11:23,24. In Hannah's time, such prayer in the heart was unheard of. Relationship with the gods was seen as a question of going into a "house of prayer", it was not personal. But the promises to Abraham were of a personal relationship with Yahweh: "I will be their God".

24:46 *She hurried and let down her pitcher from her shoulder, and said, 'Drink, and I will also give your camels a drink'. So I drank, and she also gave the camels a drink-* Eliezer is careful to recount things exactly as they happened, with no exaggeration, omissions or additions. It was so clearly the hand of God.

24:47 *I asked her, and said, 'Whose daughter are you?' She said, 'The daughter of Bethuel, Nahor's son, whom Milcah bore to*

him'. I put the ring on her nose, and the bracelets on her hands- This technically should have happened after the girl and her family had agreed. Eliezer had gone ahead and taken the initiative, in a way which would have otherwise been seen as rude and countercultural, and disrespectful to the family. But this is the insistent demand of the Gospel's call. It's why people were baptized immediately in the New Testament, the same hour or day they believed. This is not in fact the order in which he had done things- he offered and then gave her the signs of betrothal, and only then enquired which family she was from. He did so because he was trying to elicit a "No" from her. What he did was so bizarre that he now recounts it otherwise.

24:48 *I bowed my head, and worshiped Yahweh, and blessed Yahweh, the God of my master Abraham, who had led me in the right way to take my master's brother's daughter for his son-* Biblical genealogies often skip generations, and this is an example. "Right" is the same word translated "truth" in :27, where it is used [as so often, e.g. Gen. 32:10] of the certainty of the fulfilment of the promises to Abraham. And Eliezer goes on to ask them to deal "truly" (:49) in response. God's mercy and truth to us are to be reflected in our responding with these things. Covenant relationship with Him is the ultimate truth or reality of our lives.

The same Hebrew words for being 'led in the way' are used of how God led Israel in the way to Canaan, also by an Angel (Ex. 13:17,21; Neh. 9:12). Moses was retelling this story to encourage his primary audience, as well as us; that experience is not random, but part of being led. Abraham had been led out of Ur to Canaan almost against his will, and Eliezer now likewise had been led to a wife for Isaac, with him kicking and struggling all the way. And it seems he did bow before Yahweh, the God

of his master whom he had sceptically half believed in, when he perceives this.

24:49 *Now if you will deal kindly and truly with my master, tell me. If not, tell me, that I may turn to the right hand, or to the left-* As noted on :48, the kindness and truth of God in the covenant must be responded to "truly" by men. Eliezer comes over as high pressure, forcing them to make a decision before he had even eaten a meal with the family. This speaks of the urgency of response to the Gospel. We are not lamely standing on streets holding out tracts for any who may wish to walk up to us and take them. Rather are we to entreat and implore men to see the intensity of our position, and to respond.

24:50 *Then Laban and Bethuel answered, The thing proceeds from Yahweh. We can't speak to you bad or good-* This is precisely what Laban says years later to Jacob; that he couldn't speak bad or good to him (Gen. 31:29). We feel that Laban and Bethuel were not exactly enthusiastic about going God's way, but rather felt they could say nothing against it, because His hand was so clearly evident.

24:51 *Behold, Rebekah is before you. Take her, and go, and let her be your master's son's wife, as Yahweh has spoken-* There is no record that Yahweh had spoken specifically that Rebekah should be Isaac' wife. But the path of providence was effectively God's spoken voice; and we likewise can perceive God's voice to us through such situations.

24:52 *It happened that when Abraham's servant heard their words, he bowed himself down to the earth to Yahweh-* The cultural thing to do would have been to thank the family. But instead he prostrates himself on the ground to Yahweh, as if in all these acts of providence, he sensed the Angel, or God Himself, standing there albeit unseen. He sensed very much the presence of God, just as we do in such times and situations.

24:53 *The servant brought out jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and clothing, and gave them to Rebekah. He also gave precious things to her brother and her mother-* Ten camels' burden of expensive gifts would have been worth the equivalent of a million or more dollars in our terms. But this was the value Abraham placed upon a Godly wife for his son. It speaks of the invaluable importance of marriage within the faith in order to raise a Godly seed.

24:54 *They ate and drank, he and the men who were with him, and stayed all night. They rose up in the morning, and he said, Send me away to my master-* The immediacy of response was not part of the deal, but it was perhaps implied. They would have been exhausted after the long journey; but the urgency of the work in hand, the following of the Spirit, was such that nothing was to delay them.

24:55 *Her brother and her mother said, Let the young lady stay with us a few days, at least ten. After that she will go-* This sounded reasonable, and indeed it was, from a human viewpoint. But Eliezer was aware that the flesh always seeks the opportunity to use delays and procrastination in order to get out of spiritual commitment. And constantly, we see the man aware of the urgent need to follow the Spirit's leading. The spirit of all this explains why baptism was practiced immediately in the New Testament, as it should be today.

24:56 *He said to them, Don't hinder me, since Yahweh has prospered my way. Send me away that I may go to my master-* This should be our attitude- following the leading of the Spirit, and not allowing anything or anyone to delay us. All procrastination in such cases is of the flesh, seeking to put the brakes on our response to the Spirit; hence Israel should not "delay" or "hinder

ourselves" to offer the first fruits (Ex. 22:29). We can easily get caught up for a whole period of our lives, delaying instead of following. The same word translated "hinder" is used of how Jacob "stayed" with Laban (Gen. 32:4) far longer than he should have done. He failed to learn the lesson; Rebekah and Eliezer had refused to be hindered or delayed with Laban. Situations had repeated themselves, and Jacob had failed to learn the lesson from history, even within his own immediate family history.

The 'prospering' of the way was in direct answer to Eliezer's question as to whether his way had been prospered in :21. This was a characteristic of Joseph, whose way was 'prospered' by God likewise (Gen. 39:2,3,23), despite many hard experiences. Joseph was potentially a primary fulfilment of the great seed of Abraham, as was Solomon, who also 'prospered' so long as he followed God's word (1 Chron. 22:11,13; 29:23; 2 Chron. 7:11). Hezekiah was another potential fulfilment of the seed, and he too prospered (2 Chron. 31:21; 32:30); and the way of the Lord Jesus was prospered above all (Is. 48:15; 53:10; 55:11). But every member of the seed likewise will "prosper" in their path to the Kingdom, although not necessarily in material terms (Josh. 1:8 cp. Dt. 28:29; Num. 14:41). That 'prospering' is the work of the Spirit; the same word is used repeatedly about the work of the Spirit in human lives (1 Sam. 10:6,10; 11:6; 16:13; 18:10; Jud. 14:6,19; 15:14 s.w. "the Spirit came mightily / to cause to prosper upon him").

24:57 *They said, We will call the young lady, and ask her-* He likely thought she would flunk the decision; but she didn't. See on :59.

24:58 *They called Rebekah, and said to her, Will you go with this man? She said, I will go-* There was a definite trait of energy and industrious activity amongst them, indicated by the record of Rebekah running to respond to the call of Eliezer to marry

Isaac (Gen. 24:18,20,28,58). Laban too was spritely (Gen. 24:29). And Abraham as an old man *ran* to meet the Angels, he *hastened* into the tent, and personally *ran* unto the herd rather than wave his wand at the servants (or the wife) to do it (Gen. 18:2,6,7). The way in which it is stressed that he got up early in the morning gives the same impression (Gen. 19:27; 20:8; 21:14; 22:3; the same is said of Jacob, Gen. 28:18 and Laban, Gen. 31:55). The mixture of zeal and business acumen is reflected in the way both Abraham and Lot greeted the Angels in a similar, outgoing, gentlemanly manner (Gen. 19:1-3 cp. Gen. 18:1-6). Note how Rebekah immediately says "I will go" (Heb. *elek*)- just as Abraham had been called to "go" from Ur (*lek*, Gen. 12:1); "and he went" (*wayyelek*, Gen. 12:4). This would seem to suggest an undesigned similarity of character between the family members.

24:59 *They sent away Rebekah, their sister, with her nurse, Abraham's servant, and his men-* It was most unusual for a woman to be allowed such total freedom of decision, especially with respect to her marriage. But as noted on :50, Laban felt that God's hand was at work, and so he feared to speak against it. But we note he was not particularly "for" it; he failed to have the enthusiasm to keep in step with the Spirit which was seen in Eliezer and Rebekah. And so he left it that she could decide herself. He likely thought she would flunk the decision; but she didn't.

24:60 *They blessed Rebekah, and said to her, Our sister, may you be the mother of thousands of ten thousands, and let your seed possess the gate of those who hate them-* She was barren for 20 years and didn't have so many children. But the Divine promises were fulfilled through her seed. We see here the contrast between spiritual and secular viewpoints; the Divine way of fulfilling these promises and hopes was so different from the secular

imagination. And so it is as our own lives unfold. "Seed" here is singular; but the idea is that her specific seed would become very many, just as promised in Gen. 22:17,18.

24:61 *Rebekah arose with her ladies. They rode on the camels, and followed the man. The servant took Rebekah, and went his way-* 'Following the man' reminds us again that everything in this incident is parabolic of the calling of the bride of Christ, the seed of Abraham. We are to respond immediately, and we go to Him into an unknown land and situation, following "the man", "the servant", also representative of the Lord Jesus.

24:62 *Isaac came from the way of Beer Lahai Roi, for he lived in the land of the South-* This was the very well associated with Hagar and Ishmael. We wonder what Isaac's thoughts were. If he were to be the seed through whom the promises were to be fulfilled, then it was surely necessary for him to marry and have faithful children. But he was 40 years old. And now, those prayers and hopes were to be answered in the arrival of Rebekah. Or he may have reflected, as I explained previously, that Ishmael could have been the seed, he had been circumcised into the covenant, and had received the same promises, and Abraham's prayer that Ishmael might live before Yahweh had been heard.

24:63 *Isaac went out to pray in the field at the evening. He lifted up his eyes, and saw, and, behold, there were camels coming-* Surely he was praying about Eliezer's mission, and a faithful wife through whom to continue the seed. On one hand, God is sovereign and shall bring about His purposes. But that sovereignty meshes with human freewill, so that we too must make our moves in the way of faith, and with prayer. "He lifted up his eyes" and saw his bride approaching, just as she "lifted up

her eyes" and saw Isaac (:64). It really was a marriage made in heaven.

24:64 *Rebekah lifted up her eyes, and when she saw Isaac, she dismounted from the camel-* Her lifting up her eyes and seeing Isaac is complementary to Isaac lifting up his eyes and seeing her coming towards him (:63). From this symmetry we can reason that she lifted up her eyes from prayer, as he had done. They were both praying for the same thing, and had their answers in a sublimely beautiful way.

24:65 *She said to the servant, Who is the man who is walking in the field to meet us? The servant said, It is my master. She took her veil, and covered herself-* Eliezer and Rebekah were apparently travelling on the same camel out of the ten camels. He took very personally his responsibility in the matter; his diligence is prophetic of ours in seeking out the Lord's bride. The fact Isaac was walking alone after praying alone in a remote spot speaks much about him; and he represents the Lord, who likewise did this. She veiled herself because the wedding ceremony had not yet been undertaken.

24:66 *The servant told Isaac all the things that he had done-* In the parable of redemption here, the servant represents the preachers of the Gospel. The Lord Jesus uses similar language in Mt. 18:31 and Lk. 17:10, of His servants coming and telling Him what had been done.

24:67 *Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent, and took Rebekah, and she became his wife. He loved her. Isaac was comforted after his mother's death-* Clearly Rebekah is presented as filling the emotional hole left by the loss of Sarah. Rebekah is not given a new tent, as was usual, but instead took Sarah's tent. "He loved her" may sound obvious, but in contracted marriages both then and now, marriage is often not love marriage. This is a commendable note; that he loved his wife. Later we will read

of their physical affection, so strongly felt between them that they met up privately for intercourse when separate from each other (Gen. 26:8). The whole account of Isaac's love for Rebekah has the ring of psychological credibility to it; and such things are major internal evidence reasons for believing the Bible to be Divinely inspired.

GENESIS CHAPTER 25

25:1 *Abraham took another wife, and her name was Keturah-* It would seem that at the time of the promises, Abraham had other children by Keturah, another "concubine", as she is described in 1 Chron. 1:32. Indeed :6 speaks of his "concubines" plural. It seems we are intentionally left to reflect whether in fact Abraham had this concubine, and probably others, at the same time as Sarah; or whether he married her after Sarah's death. But this term "concubine" is only really applicable to other women taken during the lifetime of the wife or wives. The word is repeatedly used in this sense throughout the Bible. Although the children of Keturah and Abraham are only recorded in Gen. 25:1-4, it seems to me that this isn't chronological; this a notice inserted at this point as a genealogical note, rather than implying that Abraham only took Keturah after the marriage of Isaac in Gen. 24. It can also be that now at the end of Abraham's life, the point is being made that Abraham was not at all a perfect man; righteousness was imputed to him, and he is presented as having had only one wife and only two children. But this is as it were a 'PS' to remind us he had had plenty of other children by at least one concubine- and none of them turned out very well in spiritual terms. "Keturah" means 'perfumed' and it never says much for a woman in the Bible when she is named after her cosmetics. In fact, apart from Isaac, who comes over as very passive most of the time and drunkenly blessing his sons at the end of his days, the rest of Abraham's children were no less than a disgrace to him. He was surely not correct to throw them all out of the inheritance and buy them off with gifts, so that he could give everything to his one favourite son. But God recognized his feelings in repeatedly reminding him that he saw Isaac as his only and beloved son, the only one of his sons he loved, as it

could be translated. And God ran with that, and asked him to all the same be willing to sacrifice him. We recall how Rom. 4 says that Abraham is the parade example of how God justifies the *un*Godly. Remember that at the time of the promise in Gen. 15, Abraham was impotent- hence his bitterness at not having any child, and Rom. 4:19 describes his having faith that he would overcome this problem. Having recovered his virility, it could be that he eagerly had children by Keturah to as it were prove himself. Yet one wonders therefore how long he maintained the intensity of his faith that specifically by Sarah he would have a child. Yet that faith of Abraham at the time of the promise in Gen. 15 was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness, is held up as our example and glorified throughout the New Testament- when it would seem that in fact Abraham didn't always maintain the intensity of the faith he had at that time. And God Himself had to reassure him: "Know of a *surety*" (Gen. 15:13), as if God recognized the element of doubt within the faith of Abraham- although God elsewhere holds up that faith to us as such a wonderful example.

Circumcision was a sign of the covenant through Isaac, hence the resentment and bitterness of Zipporah over the circumcision issue; and it seems Moses capitulated to her on this. Their marriage is sure proof that fundamental spiritual differences at the start can only lead to anger and break up later on.

25:2 *She bore him Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah-* Zipporah was a Midianite, a descendant of Abraham through Keturah; and yet she didn't practice circumcision. Ishmael had been circumcised as a sign that if he wished, he could "live before" God, in covenant relationship. We wonder if the same possibility was open to all Abraham's children or seed, but they declined.

Job's friend Bildad was a descendant of Shuah (Job 2:11).

The names of Abraham's children are not very spiritual, and their descendants are often noted for bad behaviour. The Midianites are presented as sinners, Sheba and Dedan are against Israel in Ez. 38, Asshur or Assyria was their evil enemy. We could argue that Abraham was a failed father. He was not a good parent to his many sons- he used his wealth to send them far away and buy himself out of responsibility to his children. And focused in an obsessive way upon Isaac. And yet through this weakness, he still shows faith and devotion to God by being willing to sacrifice even Isaac to God.

25:3 *Jokshan became the father of Sheba, and Dedan. The sons of Dedan were Asshurim, Letushim, and Leummim-* Sheba and Dedan are mentioned in Ez. 38 as amongst those who in the last days turn against the children of Jacob, members of the group of ten neighbours who invade the land under the leadership of Gog. The old jealousy which began here over the apparent favouritism afforded Isaac... will then play itself out in its final climax. Sheba and Dedan were also sons of Cush (Gen. 10:7), and one theme of the genealogies of Abraham's other sons is that they all intermarried with surrounding nations and lost any sense of ethnic purity; see on :14. The theme of needing to marry within the family of God is strongly developed in Genesis, beginning with the sons of God marrying the daughters of men and losing the faith in Gen. 6, and being stressed in Gen. 24 with the search for a suitable wife for Isaac. Abraham's other children all merged into their surrounding worlds. However, "Sheba" here may refer to the Sabeans, who stole Job's herds (Job 2:11).

"Leummim" may simply mean "other nations". It cannot be identified with any location or nation. The idea is that the promise that Abraham would be a father of many nations had its primary fulfilment through the children he had by his

concubines. Although they chose not have a part in God's salvation purpose at the time, they could have had; just as Ishmael could have continued in the covenant.

25:4 *The sons of Midian: Ephah, Epher, Hanoch, Abida, and Eldaah. All these were the children of Keturah-* Is. 60:6 and Ps. 72:10 envisage Ephah and other children of Keturah as ultimately saved along with Israel in the Kingdom age. The blessing upon Abraham will ultimately come true upon all his seed, by grace alone.

25:5 *Abraham gave all that he had to Isaac-* He did this even before he died (Gen. 24:36). It was usual for a father to divide the inheritance amongst all the children, with the firstborn getting a double portion- and for this to happen on his death, not during his lifetime. But whilst Abraham did provide for his children by Keturah (:6), he gave all he had as inheritance to Isaac. This reflects how Abraham considered Isaac as his one and only legitimate son. The others were by concubines (Hagar and Keturah). And we can better perceive the magnitude of the sacrifice which Abraham had been asked to make, in sacrificing this son. The language is very much that of the father in the parable of the prodigal son- all that he had was the elder son's. But that son went out into the night in bitterness and left the family.

25:6 *But to the sons of Abraham's concubines, Abraham gave gifts. He sent them away from Isaac his son, while he yet lived, eastward, to the east country-* The plural "concubines" suggests he may have had more than Keturah; it's just that her children were relevant to the Israelites in the wilderness, for whom Moses initially wrote. Abraham had been insistent that Isaac *not* go to live with any new wife in the east, by which Abraham surely means Mesopotamia, the land he had been asked to leave. By sending his other children back there, he is really saying that he

didn't want them in covenant relationship or having a share in the promises to inherit the *eretz*. He has the spirit of Sarah, who didn't want Ishmael to inherit along with Isaac (Gen. 21:10). But as explained there, God gave Ishmael the chance of covenant relationship, including circumcision. The fact Abraham didn't send Ishmael back into the east perhaps reflects his acceptance of the fact that Ishmael could have had covenant relationship and a share in the promises; although he apparently chose not to. Heading east is the direction of the rejected Adam, Cain and the Babel builders.

25:7 *These are the days of the years of Abraham's life which he lived: one hundred and seventy-five years-* Abraham entered the promised land at 75 (Gen. 12:7), so he lived in it 100 years, the majority of his life. But despite that, he always is at pains to stress that he lived amongst the local inhabitants, as a stranger. No matter how stable and sedentary our lives may be, living in the same house for most of our years, we too are to be but passers through this world in our attitude towards it. "Days of the years" could mean that every day matters in life.

25:8 *Abraham gave up the spirit, and died in a good old age, an old man, and full of years, and was gathered to his people-* "Full of days" (Heb.) is differentiated from being "aged" in Jer. 6:11. The idea is that he didn't live the same kind of day over and over thousands of times; his life was rich with experience, each day was significant, as it should be for us if we are led of the Spirit.

"His people" were idolaters (Josh. 24:2), demonstrating that the separation between faithful and unfaithful is not at the point of death (Ecc. 3:19,20), but at the final judgment.

25:9 *Isaac and Ishmael, his sons, buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron, the son of Zohar the Hittite, which is before Mamre-* We note the absence of the sons by Keturah, who had been sent away to the east; and the

implication that Ishmael was still living in the *eretz* of promise; see on :6.

25:10 *The field which Abraham purchased of the children of Heth. Abraham was buried there with Sarah, his wife-* See on Gen. 23:16. It is continually emphasized that Abraham purchased land in the very *eretz* which had been promised him as an eternal inheritance. This is the intended paradox of our lives- that we live in this world as strangers and passers through, but the earth is eternally ours.

25:11 *It happened after the death of Abraham that God blessed Isaac, his son-* This blessing is surely the blessing of Abraham; although it could mean that his flocks were miraculously increased as a sign that the greater blessing had indeed passed on to him.

Isaac lived by Beer Lahai Roi- This was the well where God had saved Hagar and Ishmael, assuring Ishmael that he could still be part of the covenant family and promises. Isaac living there would have continually reminded him that his own standing with God was by grace, and that Ishmael his half brother was also potentially a part of God's purpose. There is reason to think that Abraham was humble enough to learn from Hagar's observation, that God had seen her and she had seen Him. For at the pinnacle of his faith when he offered Isaac, he in turn names the place 'Yahweh Yireh', Yahweh has seen / will see, and will provide. The idea is identical to that spoken by Hagar, that God had seen / provided for her, and she had seen God. And we note that Isaac himself chose to settle at Hagar's well, 'the well of the living one who sees me' (Gen. 24:62 "the well Lahairoi"; Gen. 25:11). In all this we see a tacit recognition that they had learnt something from Hagar, the slavegirl whom the family had used and abused.

25:12 *Now this is the history of the generations of Ishmael, Abraham's son, whom Hagar the Egyptian, Sarah's handmaid,*

bore to Abraham- "Abraham's son" serves to emphasize that he was in some sense the seed, and could have been part of the Divine purpose if he wished; he was circumcised into the covenant, and is clearly treated separately from Abraham's sons by Keturah, who were sent to the east, back to where Abraham had come from, to as it were keep them out of the covenant.

25:13 *These are the names of the sons of Ishmael, by their names, according to the order of their birth: the firstborn of Ishmael, Nebaioth, then Kedar, Adbeel, Mibsam-* These 12 tribes make them a pseudo Israel, and yet also, as Paul develops in Gal. 4, representatives of unbelieving Israel after the flesh.

25:14 *Mishma, Dumah, Massa-* Dumah intermarried with the Edomites (Is. 21:11,12); see on :3.

25:15 *Hadad, Tema, Jetur, Naphish, and Kedemah-* Teman was an area through which the Israelites passed (Hab. 3:3), and they were the primary audience for whom Moses was recording Genesis. None of the names of Ishmael's sons appear to be very spiritual or God centred.

25:16 *These are the sons of Ishmael, and these are their names, by their villages, and by their encampments: twelve princes, according to their nations-* The names of Ishmael's sons make a statement about their final acceptance in God's Kingdom, in language which is picked up in the later prophecies about them in Is. 60:6,7; 43:19,20: "In the high places a powerful people will experience a miracle of God. For they shall cause sweet odours to ascend, calling His fame to remembrance. Their burden will be lifted, they will become mighty in power, conquerors of the desert, strong in defence, numerous in population, at the forefront of the nations".

Abraham's prayer that Ishmael might be accepted into the covenant was heard [his name means 'God has heard']. The same promises were made to him as to Isaac; his 12 tribes (Gen. 17:20)

could also have become some kind of people of God. But in this world, they chose not to; although for Abraham's sake, their latter day representatives will finally be saved.

25:17 *These are the years of the life of Ishmael: one hundred and thirty-seven years. He gave up the spirit and died, and was gathered to his people-* We note the subtle difference with how Ishmael lived "years", but Abraham lived "days"; see on :8. As noted on Gen. 27:1, Isaac was 137 when he was struck by a premonition of death. This has the ring of psychological credibility; for he would've subconsciously been aware that Ishmael his brother had died at that age. This is another one of many internal evidences that the Biblical record is credible and dovetails within itself so perfectly that only a Divine hand could have brought it about.

25:18 *They lived from Havilah to Shur that is before Egypt, as you go toward Assyria-* Havilah is on the Euphrates and Shur is on the Egyptian border. These were both boundaries of the land promised to Abraham. It could be argued that in this sense, his seed posessed the land. But I would rather see here a lamentation that the intended seed ["In Isaac shall your seed be called"] did not in fact inherit the area intended for them. And so the fulfilment of the promise was recalculated and reinterpreted to mean that the seed is now all in Christ, and the "land" promised will finally be the whole earth.

He lived opposite all his relatives- Or, to the east of his relatives, referring to the encampment of Isaac. He followed the general trend of moving East, as did Cain and the Babel builders, returning to Mesopotamia, rather than living in the land of promise, unlike Jacob and Joseph, who wanted their very bones to be buried in the land of their hopes. He returned to Egypt where his mother Hagar was from, choosing to live just outside the promised land.

This area was relevant to the Israelites as they passed through it on their wilderness journeys. Again we see that the initial relevance of the account was for that generation.

25:19 *This is the history of the generations of Isaac, Abraham's son. Abraham became the father of Isaac-* The way Biblical history is written contrasts strongly with the way secular history is written, focusing as it does on mega movements of peoples, international events etc. Biblical history- and the records of Israel's early history are classic examples- is articulated in the last analysis through the story of individuals. The account of Isaac's family is prefaced by the note: "These are the generations of Isaac" (Gen. 25:19 AV). We expect a genealogical list- but instead we get the accounts of human lives. That history was the 'generation' of Isaac. In this we see a reflection of how God views history- the growth, actions, thoughts, struggles, spirituality and passing of persons. The value placed by God upon individuals is seen by the way in which He inspired Biblical history to be written. Humanly written history tends to focus upon megatrends, the glories and successes of a nation as a nation. God's history focuses upon people. And the Bible is hardly a history of glorious successes- it's a record of one human failure after another, endless rounds of attempt and failure, a historical path that leads God from one disappointment to another with us. Human history records human failure only as it were as a foil, a context, to the successes of the heroes. God's heroes are the lowly, the poor of this world rich in faith like Hannah and Mary, and the megatrends of society's history are passed by. But this is how much He values people on an individual level.

25:20 *Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel the Syrian of Paddan Aram, the sister of Laban the Syrian, to be his wife-* Isaac really is an example of waiting for the right woman to marry and refusing to marry

anyone who doesn't tick all the right boxes on the spiritual front. It is twice emphasized here that Rebekah was a "Syrian". Jacob is likewise described as a "Syrian" (Dt. 26:5). Aram ["Syria", s.w.] was Rebekah's cousin (Gen. 22:21-23); he appears to have been a dominant force and source of identity in the wider family. The later attacks upon Israel by the Arameans were therefore part of the huge family feud which has always gone on amongst the descendants of Abraham. From these considerations it appears quite inappropriate to argue that Jewish people are ethnically pure and separate from the Arabs; their beginnings and early history were absolutely intertwined with each other. Identity as "Israel" was and is a matter of personal spiritual choice and culture, not ethnicity. The arguments of the Judaizers in the first century depended heavily upon definitions of "Israel" in ethnic terms, but they are null and void according to Biblical history.

25:21 *Isaac entreated Yahweh for his wife, because she was barren. Yahweh was entreated by him, and Rebekah his wife conceived-* When Eliezer first met Rebekah by the well, she must have appeared the ideal candidate through whom Isaac could raise a Godly seed. She was attractive, hard working, healthy, spiritually aware- and from within the wider Abraham family. And she was willing to sacrifice all she had known for the sake of emigrating to Canaan and bearing the seed. But she was barren for 20 years. Those who seem to have ideal qualifications are often not used for the job, until they are humbled and made to realize that all is of grace and not of human strength and ability. And Isaac and Rebekah's desire to bear the Abrahamic seed would have been honed by 20 years of prayer. The delay was surely to increase the intensity of that desire. We don't read that Isaac took any concubines in that period, and given the [poor?] example of his father Abraham in this, that surely is

commendable. Unlike his father, he didn't seek to force the fulfilment of the promises in his own ways and on his own terms.

25:22 *The children struggled together within her-* "Struggle" is Heb. to bruise or crush, suggesting the struggle between the two seeds of Gen. 3:15; and Gal. 4 and then Gal. 5:17 confirms that they represent the struggle between flesh and spirit. Paul may have alluded to the situation in his description of flesh and spirit in conflict within his own body (Rom. 7:23).

She said, If it be so, why do I live?- This may be pre-natal depression and nothing more. But it could also reflect her belief that she was the bearer of the promised seed; and so she wondered why there were twins within her, already in conflict with each other. The truth is that the seed of Abraham is only developed as such through struggle with the flesh. The seed of the spirit must "separate" from the fleshly seed (:23).

She went to inquire of Yahweh- The judgment will be the time when God 'requires' of us our behaviour. And yet the Hebrew word is used about our enquiring / searching to God in prayer now (Gen. 25:22; Ex. 18:15; Dt. 4:29; 12:5; 1 Kings 22:5), as well as His 'requiring' / searching of us at the last day (Dt. 18:19; 23:21; Josh. 22:23; 1 Sam. 20:16; 2 Chron. 24:22; Ez. 3:20; 33:6,8). There is a mutuality between a man and his God.

25:23 *Yahweh said to her, Two nations are in your womb. Two peoples will be separated from your body-* The desire of Esau's descendants to "cut them off from being a nation" in Psalm 83 runs counter to God's clear statement here: "Two nations are in your womb. Two peoples...". Note that they were not to be of a different ethnicity, as both Jews and Arabs often claim [for they were from the same parents], but different types of people. The "separation" spoke of the separation of flesh from spirit through struggle; see on :22. The elder serving the younger is not necessarily determinative, i.e. forcing the babies into certain

paths. It also has the element of prediction; this was how it was going to work out because that was how the two people were going to be.

The one people will be stronger than the other people- Who was the stronger? Hosea 12 suggests it was ultimately Jacob, who by his strength had power with God. And yet Esau was likely physically stronger; and there is the paradox of how God works with men.

The elder will serve the younger- God had promised Rebekah that the elder (Esau) would serve the younger (Jacob); and yet her concern to trick her husband into blessing Jacob rather than Esau was studied rejection of that promise. And Jacob followed her in her faithlessness- in this area. He perceived the promises of God through her eyes, rather than his own. Just as many relatives of believers do today. Likewise Isaac saw the promises as "mercy and truth" (Gen. 24:27); and so did Jacob (Gen. 32:10). The blessings of Gen. 27 never came true in this life; for Esau never served Jacob, nor did Jacob serve Esau. It could be argued that they will come true in the Kingdom; or that "Jacob" is to be understood as the church and "Esau" represents the flesh. But another possibility is that here again we have a potential scenario. This could have happened; but Jacob failed to live up to it and experience it. He made decisions which precluded these things coming true for him, and it could be argued that in Gen. 32,33 he resigned the blessings of the firstborn. And God accepted that; see on :31.

25:24 *When her days to be delivered were fulfilled, behold, there were twins in her womb-* The "behold" could suggest she didn't fully believe the Lord's answer of :23, that she had twins. Perhaps she understood those words in some other way than meaning that she would have twins. She was all psyched up to

bear a seed for Abraham and Isaac, and the idea of having twins who would fight each other was outside of her imagination.

25:25 *The first came out red all over, like a hairy garment. They named him Esau-* "Red" connects with the redness of the earth which we encounter in early Genesis; "Edom", who is Esau, is another form of "Adam". He was of the earth, and a representative of the flesh (see on :21). The fact the twins emerged with Jacob holding Esau's heel means they were born in the same sack, rather than, as some twins, in separate sacks. In the case of twins which develop in the same sack, one usually gets more oxygen than the other, and emerges red faced in comparison to the pale and aenemic twin. And this is clearly the case here. The subsequent development of such twins matches exactly what we read here about Esau and Jacob. The record has the ring of truth to it. And this gives more force to the argument that there was predestination at work here; Esau was going to have the temperament which he had, and Jacob the one he had. And Esau's temperament was going to veer towards the thinking of the flesh rather than the Spirit. We are unwise to dwell too much on why some do not believe; rather are we to perceive that our own faith is a gift from God, a grace we must respond further to and are culpable for if we refuse to. Romans 9 is clear, that in one sense things were set up from their birth. And yet Hebrews presents Esau as an example not to be followed, for he represents those who shall be condemned at the last day. It is true that he was born with a strong proclivity to the wrong behaviour he later displayed; just as was Jacob. But the point is that how we are born, with our unique set of weaknesses and temptations, is not deterministic in moral terms. We are not victims of the way we were born, nor of our nature nor nurture. We can rise above them, and are held to ultimate account if we do not.

25:26 *After that, his brother came out, and his hand had hold on Esau's heel. He was named Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them-* This meant that Rebekah was barren for 20 years. "Jacob" literally means 'heel catcher' or 'supplanter'. From the womb his character was set, it appears. Romans 9 presents them as the parade example of calling and predestination. And indeed they are. But Paul introduces that topic directly in the context of exemplifying grace, and that salvation is not of works or human strength. The fact there is an element of predestination is proof enough that our faith and salvation are not purely of ourselves. Jacob always wanted to be the firstborn, and the way as an infant he tried to catch Esau's heel to prevent it becomes programmatic for how he was.

25:27 *The boys grew. Esau was a skilful hunter, a man of the field-* He followed the characteristics of Nimrod (Gen. 10:9).

Jacob was a perfect man, living in tents- By grace, righteousness has to be imputed to us. The spiritual blindnesses and deficiencies of our brethren can be so agonizing to behold; and yet we too have ours, as Jacob had his, and the fact we have them does not mean that we (or they, or Jacob) will not be saved in the end. Jacob didn't quite make it to the spiritually perfect / mature status with which he is credited right here at the beginning. Job is an identical case; he is labelled "perfect" at the beginning, but at the end of his spiritual growth, he didn't quite get to perfection. The weakness of Jacob meant likewise. Thus the record is written in such a way as to make Jacob out to be the righteous one; he is described as "perfect" at a time when he had not even accepted Yahweh as his God. Thus what he eventually was is said of him at the beginning, but with no hint that this is the case; the impression is given that he was always "perfect" from the start. Jacob is here described as living in tents with his righteous father and grandfather; whereas there is

ample evidence that he was quite used to the tough outdoor life, and was an accomplished shepherd. Heb. 11:9 implies that he had faith in the promises and was indeed an heir of them at this time; even though he did not see them as personally applying to him then (Gen. 28:20), and was more involved in idolatry than he should have been.

Jacob was 77 when he fled from Esau. As far as we know, he had lived all that time "dwelling in tents"; and Heb. 11:9 adds the information that at this time, faithful Abraham lived together with Isaac and Jacob in the same tents. Jacob's living in tents is understood as an act of faith; choosing the temporal life rather than the permanent one. Jacob grew up with Abraham and Isaac. He would have known the promises backwards. He lived, as far as we know, a single life, staying at home with his mother, who evidently doted on him, openly preferring him to Esau. Yet at this time, Jacob did not accept the Abrahamic promises as really relevant to him, nor did he worship Yahweh as his God (Gen. 28:20). Familiarity bred contempt: "Thou hast not called upon me, O Jacob; thou hast been weary of me, O Israel... thy first father (i.e. natural Jacob" hath sinned" (in this way) (Is. 43:22,27 AV).

25:28 *Now Isaac loved Esau, because he ate his venison. Rebekah loved Jacob-* The Abraham family were characterized by division, partly due to over favoritism by the leaders. The divided nature of the new Israel is a sad reflection of it. Isaac is not portrayed as particularly stellar in his faith, "just" holding on to the faith of his father Abraham. His attractions were to the things of the flesh; he liked Esau because he brought tasty meat for him to eat. The prophetic word about the sons appears to have been ignored by Isaac.

"By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come" (Heb. 11:20). Yet the record of this in Gen. 25 doesn't

paint Isaac in a very positive light. The AVmg. seems to bring out Isaac's superficiality: "Isaac loved Esau, because venison was in his mouth". This seems to connect with the way Esau threw away his birthright for the sake of food in his mouth. Esau was evidently of the flesh, whilst Jacob had at least some potential spirituality. Yet Isaac preferred Esau. He chose to live in Gerar (Gen. 26:6), right on the border of Egypt- as close as he could get to the world, without crossing the line. And he thought nothing of denying his marriage to Rebekah, just to save his own skin (Gen. 26:7). So it seems Isaac had some marriage problems; the record speaks of "Esau his son" and "Jacob (Rebekah's) son" (Gen. 27:5,6). The way Jacob gave Isaac wine "and he drank" just before giving the blessings is another hint at some unspirituality (Gen. 27:25). Isaac seems not to have accepted the Divine prophecy concerning his sons: "the elder shall serve the younger" (Gen. 25:23), seeing that it was his intention to give Esau the blessings of the firstborn, and thinking that he was speaking to Esau, he gave him the blessing of his younger brothers (i.e. Jacob) serving him (Gen. 27:29 cp. 15). A*nd yet*, and this is the point, Isaac's blessing of the two boys is described as an act of faith; even though it was only one of his passing moments of faith and was done with an element of disbelief in God's word of prophecy concerning the elder serving the younger, and perhaps under the influence of alcohol. Yet according to Heb. 11:20, this blessing was done with faith; *at that very point in time*, Isaac had faith. So God's piercing eye saw through the haze of alcohol, through Isaac's liking for the good life, through Isaac's unspiritual liking for Esau, through his marriage problem, through his lack of faith that the elder must serve the younger, and discerned that there was some faith in that man Isaac; and then holds this up as a stimulant for our faith, centuries later! Not only should we be

exhorted to see the good side in our present brethren; but we can take comfort that this God is our God.

God's words "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated [loved less]" are understandable once we see them as alluding to this statement- that Isaac loved Esau, but Rebekah loved Jacob. God is saying that He had Rebekah's perspective; and Isaac is thereby presented as totally out of step with God's position. In fact, apart from being willing to be offered as a young man, Isaac persistently comes over as spiritually weak and every recorded incident of his life is negative. And yet he is presented as a founding father of the faithful, and the Lord speaks of him as certainly being in the Kingdom.

25:29 *Jacob boiled stew. Esau came in from the field, and he was famished-* The stew was of lentils (:34), not meat. Again the Lord's parable of the prodigal appears to allude here in a strange way; for there, the older brother also 'comes in from the field' and effectively despises his own birthright by refusing to accept his younger brother's repentance (Lk. 15:25). In this case, Jacob is set up as the prodigal, wasting his inheritance amongst the unbelievers, and finally returning home- to be welcomed rather than rejected by his elder brother. The Lord's parable clearly eyes Esau as the elder brother, but his acceptance of Jacob at the end is seen by the Lord as commendable.

To sit in the tents and boil stew was classical female work. Jacob is portrayed as a mummy's boy; and yet it would seem that Rebekah had more faith than Isaac, and perhaps this was passed on to Jacob.

25:30 *Esau said to Jacob, Please feed me with that same red stew, for I am famished. Therefore his name was called Edom-* "Feed me" is a Hebrew term usually used for animals feeding; and Esau displays his animal instincts, wanting the immediate with no further thought for the implications, dominated by the

need of the moment, seizing the present pleasure, avoiding the present pain. This is the characteristic of all the rejected; for he is presented in Hebrews as representative of all who shall fail of God's grace at the last day. It says little for Isaac that Esau was his favourite son. Indeed there is little positive to be said for Isaac apart from his basic faith, and his willingness to go along with Abraham's intention to sacrifice him. Although even that could be understood as passive going along with his father's demand, and sons agreeing to be sacrificed to the gods was not at all unheard of in those days. The fact Isaac preferred Esau, but God chose the crafty Jacob, is indeed as Paul interprets it in Romans 9- the election of grace. And we likewise must see the grace of predestination and calling as the parade example of God's grace to us; we were not called because we were better than others, or had some potential which others don't have. We were called by grace alone, and that is the only answer to the question 'Why me?'. Perhaps "Edom", "red", became his nickname from then onwards, and it stuck. For "Esau is Edom" (Gen. 36:1,8). The Hebrew is literally something like "that Red, that Red there!". Esau is presented as utterly sensual, going after the desire of his eyes. He could have been playing on words, to the effect "Feed with that Red, me the Red one". He was thus personally associated with his belly, his appetite, his food. He didn't even call the lentils by their name; just 'that red stuff'. He is presented as primitively just seeking to fulfil the lust of the eyes and flesh, with no attempt at delayed gratification. The redness of his flesh would've worn off over time; he was known as 'reddy' or 'the red one' because of this incident with the red stew, not his skin colour.

Jacob's basic dishonesty is seen by the way in which Esau begged Jacob for "the red", which he maybe thought was a kind of blood soup [a strange thing for Yahweh's people to be eating at

the time!]- and yet Jacob actually only gave him a dish of lentils. This would explain why Esau later claimed he had been twice deceived by Jacob (Gen. 27:36). The mere sale of the birthright was hardly deception; but if the bitterness of it all was that even in that hard bargain, Jacob didn't really give Esau the food he craved... then we can understand Esau feeling Jacob had twice deceived him.

25:31 *Jacob said, First, sell me your birthright-* Jacob's perception of the promises as only for his personal, physical benefit was clearly evidenced in the way in which he was so bent on obtaining the birthright from Esau. This was no sign of spirituality, but rather of his obsession with material acquisition. We can be sure he arranged to be boiling that broth just at the right moment. It was hardly an off-the-cuff decision to ask Esau for the birthright. He not only disbelieved the promise that the elder would serve the younger, but he misunderstood it, thinking that God's promises were dependent upon human works and wit to be fulfilled. He spoke of how he would bring upon himself the blessing God had promised him (Gen. 27:12). Later, he reveals the same attitude when he describes his children as the fulfillment of the promises of present fruitfulness (Gen. 32:10), but also the children he had obtained by his own service (Gen. 30:26); he thought that his own effort and labour had fulfilled God's promises. He reasoned that Laban had been rebuked by God because God had seen how hard he had worked (Gen. 31:42). He explicitly says that if God further increases his flocks, it would be a sign that he was righteous (Gen. 30:33). Like Job, he had to learn that God's blessings are not primarily *physical*, and that we do not receive them in proportion to our present righteousness. And yet during this learning process, God patiently went along with him to some extent.

Perhaps psychologically, Jacob was driven to do what he did by his father's preference for Esau over himself. It was his way of striking back; and that act of selfishness was however used by God to fulfil His purpose of the elder serving the younger. But he failed to perceive that the promises were essentially of spiritual things, and the blessing of the firstborn was not the same as the Abrahamic promise. He effectively hands back the birthright to Esau after the night of wrestling, when he says "Take [away] my blessing..." because he had experienced God's grace. The blessing of the firstborn involved the other brothers bowing down to the firstborn (Gen. 27:29), so Jacob's protracted and emphasized bowing to Esau (Gen. 33:3,6,7) was likewise a way of resigning from the birthright which he had been born trying to grab hold of, and the desire for which had obviously filled his mind. We too are led to resign all our material, secular aspirations and dreams for the sake of God's grace. And in Jacob's case, he was born with the desire for the firstborn status, with his little hand desperately trying to grab his brother's heel to stop his brother being the firstborn. But encounter with God's grace [as happened to Jacob in Gen. 32] is enough to reorient a man away from even his natural, born-with passions and obsessions towards [in this case] materialism and jealousy. In Jacob's case his very name, 'heel catcher', reflected this obsession which was so strong it had become his self-definition; until he encountered God's grace. The blessing of the firstborn as given by Isaac involved the firstborn being "Lord" over his brothers; but Jacob repeatedly calls Esau his "Lord" in Gen. 32,33. Jacob's gifts to his brothers are described with a standard Hebrew word for "gift" [*minha*]; but in Gen. 33:11 Jacob then starts to consciously refer to them as *berakah*, the word for "blessing". And he urges Esau to take [s.w. 'take away'] his "blessing". I discussed on Gen. 25:23 how the blessing of the firstborn never came true- perhaps

because Jacob's resignation of the firstborn blessings in Gen. 32,33 was accepted by God.

There are no examples of birthrights being sold or bartered over. Jacob was simply revealing a lot about himself- how by all means he sought to get the birthright. The Lord's teaching may well negatively allude to Jacob at this point- "If [even] your enemy hunger, feed him".

25:32 *Esau said, Behold, I am about to die. What good is the birthright to me?-* Esau's attitude is alluded to by Paul in 1 Cor. 15:32 as being typical of the mentality of those who have no faith in the resurrection which the promises to Abraham implied: "Let us eat and drink; for tomorrow we die". "I am about to die" are almost the words found on the lips of his father Isaac (Gen. 27:2). This is what happens within families- sons repeat the words and attitudes of their fathers. We have here yet another ring of truth to the record; that these are the actual words spoken by these men, millennia ago.

25:33 *Jacob said, Swear to me first. He swore to him. He sold his birthright to Jacob-* Esau's behaviour is seen as the essence of all who shall be finally rejected (Heb. 12:16); they want the immediate rather than the things of eternal consequence. Whether or not there was any physical item which defined the birthright, such as a scarlet thread placed on the firstborn- a verbal oath was considered binding.

25:34 *Jacob gave Esau bread and stew of lentils-* I suggested on :30 that Esau thought the stew was a blood broth, but Jacob deceived him a second time by giving him lentils rather than a blood meat stew.

He ate and drank, rose up, and went his way- The same words used of how Eliezer did likewise after securing Rebekah as a wife for Isaac (Gen. 24:54). We are intended to see the contrast- the way taken was so different. Eliezer was respecting the covenant,

whereas Esau despised it. "Rose up" is elsewhere translated "establish" and is used of the establishing of the covenant (Gen. 26:3). So it could be that we are to understand that after reviving from his exhaustion, Esau confirmed the agreement. Instead of establishing the covenant with him, he had as it were disestablished it.

So Esau despised his birthright- The idea is that he considered his birthright worth no more than a bowl of soup. The phrase "vile person" ['despiser'] in Dan. 11:21 connects here to Esau who "despised his birthright". If the first usage of a word in Scripture is significant, then Gen. 25:34 is indeed helpful here– because it is used of Esau, father of many of the Arab tribes. And it recurs in describing Edom in Obadiah 2, Goliath the Philistine / Palestinian (1 Sam. 17:42), "Tobiah the Ammonite and Geshem the Arabian" (Neh. 2:19), and Haman the persecutor of the Jews (Esther 3:6). All these men were Arab prototypes of the "vile person", the ruler of Assyria, who is to again persecute God's people. And his provenance is of Esau, of the relatives of Israel who live nearby to them.

Whilst the Abrahamic promises did not demand fulfilment through the firstborn, it would be fair to assume that they imagined that the firstborn was the promised seed. So Esau's despising of the birthright was in practice a reflection of his attitude to the promises of the seed.

GENESIS CHAPTER 26

Gen 26:1 *There was a famine in the land, besides the first famine that was in the days of Abraham-* The recollection of the famine in Abraham's days is to point up the fact that Isaac found himself in an identical situation to Abraham, and failed in precisely the same way. Circumstances and situations repeat between the lives of God's people, and between our lives and those of Biblical characters. This is so that we might learn the lessons; or upon failure, reflect and discern the similarities.

Isaac went to Abimelech king of the Philistines, to Gerar- He ought to have learnt from Abraham's mistake, and not led himself into temptation. The desire to go to Egypt was likely because the famine meant that his flocks, his wealth, would be decreased- rather than that he would literally die of famine. So as so often, the fear of losing wealth leads believers into temptation and failure. And Abraham had failed in this same way in the very same place, Gerar, again with an Abimelech. And the failure was whilst Sarah was pregnant with Isaac. Her rejuvenation had made her physically attractive to Abimelech despite her age. At Gen. 17:21 there were 12 months to the birth of Isaac ("My covenant I establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you at this set time next year"). By Gen. 18:10, there were 9 months to the birth of Isaac: "I will certainly return to you when the season comes round. Behold, Sarah your wife will have a son". And immediately this incident in Gerar is over, Sarah gives birth (Gen. 21:2). It is natural for all of creation to be protective of the pregnant mother of your child. But Abraham says he fears dying for her. He presents as deeply faithless and selfish. If she, as a pregnant woman, was accepted into another man's harem, the consequences for her and the child could have been fatal. For the king would have slept with her and then discovered she

was pregnant with another man's child. Abraham is presented as absolutely selfish. Just as in Gen. 12:13 he asks her to lie about their marriage "that it may go well with me because of you". And yet God allowed that to happen: "And it went well with Abram because of her" (Gen. 12:16).

Gen 26:2 *Yahweh appeared to him, and said, Don't go down into Egypt. Live in the land I will tell you about-* The fact Isaac lived in Gerar (:6) could be read as rank disobedience. Or perhaps he reasoned that as Gerar was on the edge of the promised *eretz*, he was justified in doing so. But living on the edge of Divine things leads to temptation. Whether Gerar was in "Egypt" or the *eretz* of promise was debatable; and instead of removing himself from temptation, Isaac took himself to the edge, and therefore fell into it. See on Hos. 4:15 for a similar failure in later Israel.

Gen 26:3 *Live in this land, and I will be with you, and will bless you. For to you, and to your seed, I will give all these lands-* As noted on :1, his fear was that he would lose the material blessings of large flocks because of the famine if he remained in "this land". He was being asked to do something counter instinctive. And he didn't want to. He ought to have recalled how Abraham resigned the best pasture land to Lot, and was then told that to look out over the land Lot had chosen, and believe that this land would be his eternal inheritance. And so Isaac was promised that he would be given all Egypt and "all these lands" eternally. The phrase may suggest that certain lands were in view; perhaps like Abraham, Isaac was on an elevated point from where he could view "these lands", and was promised them. Or maybe we have here the first hint that the promise of inheriting one land, the *eretz,* was to be extended to the inheritance of all lands, "the world", the entire planet (Rom. 4:13).

And I will establish the oath which I swore to Abraham your father- The oath to Abraham would be established or repeated to him. That is evidence enough that the Abrahamic blessing was not simply inherited; it had to be established or confirmed to each individual, on their choice. Ishmael clearly didn't want this, despite being circumcised into the covenant. We read in Jer. 34:18 of those of Israel who did not establish or confirm the covenant oath (s.w.). People today allow the promises to be established to them by baptism into Christ (Gal. 3:27-29). We encounter the same word at the end of the wilderness journey, where Moses urges the peoples' faithfulness so that Yahweh might "establish His covenant" with them (Dt. 8:18; 28:9,13); and we note that despite their disobedience, He still "established" the covenant with them, by grace alone (Dt. 9:5). The idea of an "everlasting covenant" being established with God's people (Ez. 16:60) perhaps means that from that time onwards, it would be unconditional, not requiring the human side of reconfirmation. It may therefore refer to our eternal existence. Or the idea could be that from God's side, His offer is eternally there, He is always offering the covenant- and it is the indifference of men which leads to their not confirming it.

Gen 26:4 *I will multiply your seed as the stars of the sky, and will give to your seed all these lands-* Paul's point in Gal. 3:16 is that "seed" is singular and ultimately refers to the Lord Jesus. The singular seed becomes many because people from all nations become "in" Christ by baptism into Him and abiding in Him (Gal. 3:27-29). And yet whether Isaac perceived that is doubtful; perhaps he was driven to understand it that way by the fact that so far as we know, he and Rebecca had only two children, the twins. And that after waiting 20 years. This would have been considered a most *not* blessed marriage and fruitfulness. But again we see the Divine hallmark, of working through human

weakness. It was to be through that apparent lack of blessing that the greatest conceivable blessing was to come.

In your seed will all the nations of the earth be blessed- The Hebrew text says that "a great mixture" of people "went up also" with Israel out of Egypt (Ex. 12:38). There can be no doubt that this refers to the many references in the promises that the seed would come to include such a "mixed multitude" (Gen. 17:6; 22:17; 26:4; 28:3,14; 35:11), thereby showing that by reason of leaving Egypt and passing through the Red Sea these Gentiles became part of the seed (cp. 1 Cor. 10:1; Gal. 3:27-29). But the supreme fulfilment of these promises will be after the 'Red Sea' of the last days. And the "blessing" promised was of relationship with God and forgiveness of sin (Acts 3:25,26). We have to note that immediately after this blessing, Isaac himself is anything but a blessing to the people of Gerar. His dishonesty about his wife was a source of potential cursing for the people, as Abimelech points out. Isaac became very wealthy "in that land", in their land- and like a colonialist, left their land taking his wealth with him and leaving no blessing behind him. The local inhabitants fear him, asking him to make an oath that he will do them no harm (:29). All very far from the idea of Abraham's seed being a blessing to the Gentiles. Again we see the patriarchs so far from fully believing and living the promises given to them. But it was their basic and continued faith in them which is our pattern- for we too believe, despite so much weakness and disbelief, and failure to live according to the implications of those promises.

Gen 26:5 *Because Abraham obeyed My voice, and kept My requirements, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws-* Here again we see the huge significance of Abraham's faith. The promises made to him were available to future generations because of his faith, although individuals still needed to personally respond to the covenant. We wonder whether there

were more laws and requirements given to Abraham than are recorded in Genesis. Or perhaps Moses expressed it this way for the sake of his primary audience, Israel in the wilderness, who were being given the various requirements of the law. Another possibility is that we have here a case of intensive plurals, whereby the one great law or requirement is spoken of in the plural. And the greatest law or command he obeyed was surely to be willing to sacrifice Isaac. As we noted on chapters 11 and 12, Abraham's obedience to God's word of command to leave Ur and break with his family was "obeyed" very poorly and slowly by him; but God counts such obedience to him.

Gen 26:6 *Isaac lived in Gerar-* See on Gen. 25:28 and Gen. 26:1,2.

Gen 26:7 *The men of the place asked him about his wife. He said, She is my sister, for he was afraid to say, My wife, lest, he thought, the men of the place might kill me for Rebekah, because she is beautiful to look at-* See on Gen. 25:28. If he had remained firmly within the *eretz* rather than practicing the spiritual brinkmanship of living in Gerar (see on :1,2), the situation would not have arisen. He repeats the failure of Abraham precisely. Rebekah was indeed his relative, but that was a stretch of the word "sister". The contrast is clearly made with the way that in the New Testament, a husband should be willing to die for his wife.

Gen 26:8 *It happened, when he had been there a long time, that Abimelech king of the Philistines looked out of a window, and saw, and, behold, Isaac was caressing Rebekah his wife-* Isaac is an example of a man who wouldn't be whom God intended him to be- at least, not all the time. His fear stopped him, and it robbed him of the joy God intended for him. It was due to his fear, his lack of faith in God's promises, that he passes off his wife as his sister when he thinks Abimelech or his people have an

interest in her. But Isaac and Rebekah slip off for some intimate time together, and it's noticed that Isaac was "Isaacing ["playing" / "laughing"] himself with Rebekah"- *Yitshaq metsaheq et Ribqah* (Gen. 26:8 Heb.). He was 'being himself' with her, living up to his name, Isaac, which means 'laughter'. It was his fear and lack of faith which had led him to *not* be himself. And we so very often make the same mistake. And yet I observe that Isaac must have really loved his wife to do this; and it gives force to the simple statement that Isaac loved Rebekah, despite it being an arranged marriage and not a love marriage (see on Gen. 24:67).

Gen 26:9 *Abimelech called Isaac and said, Behold, surely she is your wife. Why did you say, 'She is my sister?' Isaac said to him, Because I said, 'Lest I die because of her'-* Again, the contrast is clearly made with the way that in the New Testament, a husband should be willing to die for his wife. Abimelech and his people had already had this experience with Isaac's father Abraham. They must have found God's people rather enigmatic; their personal morality and integrity was low, lower than the surrounding peoples. And yet they strongly believed in their God's promises, and were greatly blessed by Him. Their God was the God of all grace, quite different to their gods.

Gen 26:10 *Abimelech said, What is this you have done to us? One of the people might easily have lain with your wife, and you would have brought guilt on us!-* These are the very words the Abimelech had used to Abraham. See on :9. The fact Rebekah was in this situation for "a long time" (:8) points up the morality of the Gentiles as being superior to that of the supposedly holy family. They didn't rape her, nor have casual sex with her; if indeed she was taken as a wife, she was subject to a long period of ritual preparation before having sex with her. "Abimelech" is likely a generic title for the rulers of the area, but it could conceivably have been the same Abimelech with whom

Abraham dealt. He too realized that sins of ignorance were still reckoned by Yahweh to be sins, and brought guilt. The idea of sins of ignorance was probably unknown amongst the local religions; but the one true God was far more sensitive to sin than they were. "Easily" is literally 'as a light thing'. In their morality, casual sex with a stranger was a light thing; but Abimelech tacitly recognizes that they were answerable to Yahweh, and for Him, such sins of ignorance were not a light thing, and would bring guilt.

Gen 26:11 *Abimelech commanded all the people, saying, He who touches this man or his wife will surely be put to death-* The Abimelech kings appear far more gracious and honourable than the Abraham family who wandered in and out of their territory; the way Abimelech threatens his own people with death if they touch Isaac or his wife, after they had been deceitful to him, is an example. Yet it was not the nice people of the world, but this wandering, spiritually struggling family whom God loved and worked with. See on Gen. 20:16. "Will surely be put to death" may be a comment to the effect that Yahweh, Isaac's God, would surely take vengeance in such a case. Or perhaps Abimelech reasoned that it would be better if his authorities punished such an offender with death, than that Yahweh take vengeance upon them all. He clearly feared and respected Yahweh, realizing that He would judge even sins of ignorance.

Gen 26:12 *Isaac sowed in that land, and reaped in the same year one hundred times what he planted. Yahweh blessed him-* One hundred fold yield is incredible; 25 fold yield would be good. Especially as this was in time of famine. Abraham likewise was greatly blessed immediately after making the identical failure. We would rather expect there to be some punishment; but there was none. Instead, the opposite- blessing. Punishment is often an ineffective way of achieving correction and growth. Hence the

wicked prosper and the righteous suffer in this life. It was the pouring out of grace which led to Abraham and Isaac realizing the depth of their failure.

The Abraham family's considerable wealth is a theme in the records. Here and :13 provide quite some emphasis of the same point. Eliezer commented on Abraham's material wealth: "The Lord hath blessed my master greatly; and he is become great (note the repetition)"; he then goes on to enumerate a long list of possessions: flocks, herds, silver, gold, menservants, maidservants, camels, asses. Truly "The Lord had blessed Abraham in all things" (Gen. 24:1). This suggests that the patriarchs' material prosperity was a primary fulfillment of the Abrahamic blessing in their lifetime. Peter interprets the blessing as the forgiveness of sins (Acts 3:25,26). The stress on their material blessings therefore points forward to our spiritual riches of blessing in Christ. Even earlier in Abraham's life, "Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver and in gold" (13:1). Other references to Abraham's wealth occur in 13:6; 14:23. Jacob too was blessed with material wealth (31:16; 33:11 AVmg.). His parting with Esau because they were both so wealthy (36:7) echoes the division between Abraham and Lot and Abraham and Abimelech for the same reason (Gen. 13:6). The similarities between these incidents serves to emphasize the wealth of the family. The prosperity of Lot in Sodom is also highlighted (14:12 Heb.). Each of them seems to have accumulated wealth in their own right in addition to inheriting it.

Gen 26:13 *The man grew great, and grew more and more until he became very great-* "Great" is the same word used in Gen. 12:2; that Abraham's seed would be "great". As noted on Gen. 24:35, the greatness of blessing had a primary fulfilment as demonstration of how the greater, spiritual blessing would likewise become true.

Gen 26:14 *He had possessions of flocks, possessions of herds, and a great household. The Philistines envied him-* There is a theme of envy in the accounts of Isaac and Jacob. The Philistines envied Isaac; as (we can assume) Laban did Jacob; Rachel envied Leah (Gen. 30:1); Joseph's brothers envied him (Gen. 37:11; Acts 7:9). Family friction certainly stalked the generations, as it has done amongst the new Israel. Jacob against Esau, Isaac against Jacob, Ishmael against Isaac, Sarah against Hagar, Joseph's brothers amongst themselves (Gen. 45:24). Envy of Israel by the world and friction within Israel has been a continued characteristic (what similarities with spiritual Israel?). Yet there was also a soft streak there; Esau and Jacob evidently had a certain affection for each other and willingness to truly forgive (Esau more so than Jacob!); Abraham truly cared for Lot's fate in Sodom on at least two occasions; and the brothers genuinely cared for Benjamin and the grief of their father.

Gen 26:15 *Now all the wells which his father's servants had dug in the days of Abraham his father, the Philistines had stopped, and filled with earth-* This was due to their envy (:14). Flocks were the measure of wealth, and to cut off the water supply was a way of diminishing them. This reflects the basic human feature of wanting to bring others down to our level, the tall poppy syndrome. Abraham is repeatedly called "his father" (see on :18). We get the idea that he was living out parental expectation to some degree, as Jacob also did. Abraham was a hard act to follow; and yet unlike many sons in that situation, Isaac did not lose faith because of it.

Gen 26:16 *Abimelech said to Isaac, Go from us, for you are much mightier than we-* Moses was primarily writing for the Israelites in the wilderness, who had suffered the same treatment from the Egyptians. He was seeking to teach them that

circumstances repeat, just as they had in the lives of Abraham and Isaac; and they were to learn from that.

Gen 26:17 *Isaac departed from there, encamped in the valley of Gerar, and lived there-* I suggested on :2 that God had in fact asked Isaac to remain in the promised *eretz*, and his living in Gerar was in disobedience. At best, seeing it was somewhere on the borders of the *eretz*, he was practicing spiritual brinkmanship; and because he placed himself close to the edge, he went over. Like Abraham, he seems not to have learnt the lesson. For he leaves Gerar town and lives in the valley nearby; and therefore the friction continued with the local Philistines [a term which may then have included Abimelech and the people of Gerar]. The record of the patriarchs is full of such examples of not learning lessons, partial obedience, rank failure- and yet an abiding basic faith in God. And that is what makes them our pattern. The following narrative about conflict over water sources could have been avoided- if Isaac had followed the spirit of what he was asked to do, and actually left the area. Instead of just leaving the town of Gerar and taking his huge flocks to the valley nearby.

Gen 26:18 *Isaac dug again the wells of water, which they had dug in the days of Abraham his father. For the Philistines had stopped them after the death of Abraham-* And yet immediately after Abraham's death, the Lord had richly blessed Isaac (Gen. 25:11). Blessing would have been understood in terms of fertility; growth in flocks or good harvests. Yet this was achieved without the water sources which were seen as so important to achieve wealth. All the time, Isaac was being shown that blessing was by grace alone. But like us, the Abraham family struggled so hard to accept this. See on :22.

He called their names after the names by which his father had called them- As noted on :15, this could reflect an obsession with his father, and a living out of parental expectation.

Gen 26:19 *Isaac's servants dug in the valley, and found there a well of springing water-* As noted on :18, the whole business of the wells was to try to teach Isaac about God's grace. They dug, but God responded by giving them a spring of water, welling up from Him, rather than the stagnant water usually found when a well hits the water table. The implication could even be that they dug in search of water, but found a natural well of springing water which for some reason had as yet been undiscovered. Again, this was grace. This would explain the argument in :20.

Gen 26:20 *The herdsmen of Gerar argued with Isaac's herdsmen, saying, The water is ours! He called the name of the well Esek, because they contended with him-* I suggested on :19 that Esek was a natural well of springing water which for some reason had as yet been undiscovered. It was not as it were dug down to by Isaac's workers. And so the local people claimed it was theirs, because it was in their territory.

Gen 26:21 *They dug another well, and they argued over that, also. He called its name Sitnah-* "Sitnah" is a form of *satan*, to be an adversary or make an accusation. That is all 'satan' means as a word. The Hebrew translated "argued" can as well mean that they fought together (s.w. Ex. 21:18).

Gen 26:22 *He left that place, and dug another well. They didn't argue over that one. He called it Rehoboth. He said, For now Yahweh has made room for us, and we will be fruitful in the land-* The response to contention should be to walk away, rather than "argue", bearing in mind as noted on :21 that the Hebrew can mean that they actually fought over it. Isaac had already been blessed with amazing fruitfulness by God's grace (see on :12). But here Isaac reasons that having his own personal water

supply would make him more fruitful. He had failed to realize that fruitfulness was given not by water supply but God's grace; see on :18. The immediate relevance to the wilderness generation of Yahweh making room for Isaac in Canaan was that He had promised to also make room for *them* in the same land; the same word is translated "enlarge" (Ex. 34:24; Dt. 12:20; 19:8). Perhaps Isaac was thinking that now he finally had his own territory within the land, with his own secured water supply. But he failed to fully believe that the entire *eretz* was promised to him.

Gen 26:23 *He went up from there to Beersheba-* As noted on :22, Isaac was thinking that now he finally had his own territory within the land, with his own secured water supply. But he failed to fully believe that the entire *eretz* was promised to him. And so as soon as he considered himself settled in permanently, he has to move to Beersheba. The reasons aren't given; but the lesson is that the true seed of Abraham never really settle down. We are kept on the move, especially if we are tempted to think that we have a settled place now.

Gen 26:24 *Yahweh appeared to him the same night, and said, I am the God of Abraham your father. Don't be afraid, for I am with you, and will bless you, and multiply your seed for My servant Abraham's sake-* The encouragement not to fear was perhaps because Isaac had had to flee Rehoboth, where he thought he had settled permanently (see on :23), because of some aggressors; perhaps his comment to Abimelech that "you hate me" (:27) has something to do with it. *God* would be the source of blessing for Isaac, through His grace; and not because Isaac had his own secured private water source and apparently secure, permanent territory. And instead of focusing so much upon the literal land aspect of the promises, he was bidden refocus upon the seed. Likewise the idea of inheriting a literal Kingdom on earth can become so focused upon that the things of the Lord Jesus are

obscured or distorted; and thus the New Testament without doubt focuses more upon Jesus than upon the literal aspect of His future Kingdom.

Gen 26:25 *He built an altar there, and called on the name of Yahweh, and pitched his tent there. There Isaac's servants dug a well-* As explained on :23 and :24, Isaac had thought that Rehoboth was to be his permanent home, especially as he had his own private, secure water supply. But the hand of providence moved him on from any sense of permanence in this life; for that is not the spirit of the seed of Abraham, who are merely passing through this world, which they shall eternally inherit in future. Isaac seems to have learnt the lesson this time; for he pitches his tent, calls on Yahweh, and digs a new well in tacit recognition that Rehoboth was not the final well after all (see on :23).

Gen 26:26 *Then Abimelech went to him from Gerar, and Ahuzzath his friend, and Phicol the captain of his army-* This was similar to how they had come and made a treaty with Abraham in Gen. 21:22,32. The names may well be titles rather than personal names. The language used is identical to that in Gen. 21; Isaac was being led through some of Abraham's experiences, so that he would be the true seed of Abraham not just ethnically, but spiritually. And the same is true of us; Abraham is father of all the faithful (Rom. 4:16) in that his life and path is in essence that of us all. We are therefore led through similar experiences to him.

Gen 26:27 *Isaac said to them, Why have you come to me, since you hate me, and have sent me away from you?-* Isaac's criticism of them seems unreasonably aggressive and paranoiac. Abimelech is consistently presented in Genesis as being of great integrity and far higher morality than the Abraham family. Isaac thinks that they "hate" him; but Abimelech can truly say in :29 that he has done nothing but good to Isaac. He had sent Isaac away

"in peace" and not with any personal animosity (:29). I suggest that Isaac was a fearful man, and he had an irrational fear about Abimelech. It was this which led him to leave Rehoboth, after he had imagined that there he finally had found some permanence, and a secure private water source- see on :23,24. The "fear" he had, which God comforted him about in :24, was therefore an irrational fear. But God worked through it, as He works through our irrational fears, in order to keep Isaac on the move, and to save him from losing his pilgrim status and mentality, by settling down in Rehoboth. Even if Abimelech did indeed "hate" Isaac, he had the Abrahamic promise that he would possess the gate of his enemies, those who "hate" him (Gen. 24:60 s.w.). Perhaps Abimelech realized this more than Isaac did, and therefore wanted to make peace rather than experience God's judgment. We recall his fear of Divine judgment if any of his people had slept with Rebekah.

Gen 26:28 *They said, We saw plainly that Yahweh was with you. We said, 'Let there now be an oath between us, even between us and you, and let us make a covenant with you-* Despite Abimelech's poor experiences with Isaac and Rebekah due to their lack of integrity about their marriage, Abimelech could not but accept that Yahweh was with Isaac. And he didn't want to be the enemy of God's people. He had a definite fear of Isaac and his God. The oath between Abimelech and Abraham had been for three generations, including Isaac (Gen. 21:21,22). But Abimelech felt the need to confirm it with Isaac personally; reminding Isaac that God's oath to Abraham and his seed likewise had to be personally reaffirmed by those in subsequent generations. Maybe Isaac's lack of integrity led Abimelech to question whether Isaac still felt bound to Abraham's oaths. The incident was therefore used in Divine providence to help Isaac

see that he must personally reaffirm Abraham's covenants- including, supremely, that with Yahweh.

Gen 26:29 *That you will do us no harm, as we have not touched you, and as we have done to you nothing but good, and have sent you away in peace'. You are now the blessed of Yahweh-* Abimelech makes free use of the Yahweh name. He knew something of the promises about "blessing", and considered that Isaac had received blessing from Yahweh. Those material blessings, however, were but attention grabbers, to signpost that generation to understand that there were far greater spiritual blessings yet to come. But as in our lives, the Kingdom life is also now as well as not yet.

Gen 26:30 *He made them a feast, and they ate and drank-* Eating and drinking at such a feast was a sign of the confirming of a covenant; in this case, the *re*confirming of a covenant already made in Gen. 21:21,22. The memorial feast, the breaking of bread, is our equivalent of this; it is an opportunity to personally reconfirm our part in the new covenant.

Gen 26:31 *They rose up some time in the morning, and swore one to another. Isaac sent them away, and they departed from him in peace-* Abimelech had insisted that *he* had sent *Isaac* away in peace (:29); but now Isaac does that to Abimelech. We are left with the impression that Isaac was unreasonably paranoid about Abimelech, although God worked through his irrational fears; see on :27.

Gen 26:32 *It happened the same day, that Isaac's servants came, and told him concerning the well which they had dug, and said to him, We have found water-* Isaac had moved away from Rehoboth, the dream home, as it were, where he imagined he had 'found room', and had a secure, private source of water. However, as noted on :23,24, he was moved on from there because it was God's purpose that Isaac should not settle down,

but ever live the life of a pilgrim. His sacrifice of the well there was compensated for; he was taught that God can provide wells anywhere, at will.

Gen 26:33 *He called it Shibah. Therefore the name of the city is Beersheba to this day-* All the drama about the wells was unnecessary. Isaac thought he needed them in order to preserve the wealth, in terms of flocks, which Yahweh had given him. But now he realized that God can give wells, water and blessing without his needing to strive and argue and even fight for the wells. And he learnt this at Beersheba, where he had grown up as young man (Gen. 22:19). He came full circle, back to his roots with his faithful father Abraham. And so many lives have done the same.

Gen 26:34 *When Esau was forty years old, he took as wife Judith, the daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and Basemath, the daughter of Elon the Hittite-* Isaac his father had also married at 40. This again has the ring of psychological credibility; that he thought of marriage at the same age as his father. But at 40, Isaac had taken special care to marry within the faith, whereas Esau did the opposite. Abraham had bought property from the Hittites (Gen. 23:10,16,18,20)- this is emphasized multiple times. And that is understood in the New Testament as an act which reflected the great paradox- that he bought land which was his as an eternal possession. But Esau married into them, instead of recognizing that he merely lived amongst them on his spiritual pilgrimage to a far greater destination. We learn from Gen. 27:46 that Rebekah was 'weary of her life' because of her Hittite daughters in law. Rebekah had sacrificed all she knew and once held dear for the sake of marrying within the faith, as explained in Gen. 24. She found her son marrying outside of the faith to be a source of huge mental agony. The names of the girls and their fathers are all suggestive of idol worship.

Gen 26:35 *They grieved Isaac's and Rebekah's spirits*- Gen. 24 explained the great lengths and sacrifices they both went to in order to honour the principle of marrying within the faith, in order to raise the Godly seed. They of all believers would have been so heartbroken to see their son marrying unbelievers; but often we are tested in family life on the very issues over which we ourselves have taken a strong stand. The grief of spirit was intense; Gen. 27:46 records that Rebekah was 'weary of her life' because of these daughters in law.

GENESIS CHAPTER 27

Gen 27:1 *It happened, that when Isaac was old, and his eyes were dim, so that he could not see, he called Esau his elder son, and said to him, My son? He said to him, Here I am-* Isaac was 117 and Jacob 57. "*His* elder son" (:5 also) compares with Jacob being described as Rebekah's son (:6). If Esau was of integrity, he would at this early point have explained that he had sold his birthright to Jacob. Isaac presents poorly here, in spiritual terms. Rebekah had been told that the elder would serve the younger- but Isaac either ignored that because it was God's word through a woman, or because he just wanted to all the same bless his older son, who was his favourite. He specifically states that the younger son is to bow down in service to the older son- as if Isaac specifically wants to undo God's principle stated 58 years previously. Over the years, he presumably forgot it, or just renegotiated it in his mind until the statement became irrelevant to him. As noted elsewhere, Isaac presents poorly throughout his life apart from possibly in being willing to be sacrificed- although a father being asked to sacrifice his son was something which the surrounding gods and religious cults often demanded, and Isaac may have gone along with it on that basis. For it is Abraham rather than Isaac who is warmly commended by God after the event. And yet, Isaac is held up as an example of faith and the Lord Jesus assures us that Isaac will be in the Kingdom. So as with Abraham, Isaac was counted righteous because of a core basis of faith, even though that faith was weakly articulated in his life. We should also be aware that the father had the right to choose who should receive the blessing of the firstborn; Jacob himself later demoted his firstborn son Reuben from "firstborn" status (Gen. 49:4), replacing him with Judah. And the Nuzi documents record how in those times, a father could indeed do this and it was not at

all uncommon. So Isaac's insistence on giving Esau the firstborn status and blessing was a conscious act, and directly against God's intention. The blind Isaac was most impressed by "Esau's" hairy hands and the scent of the field on "his" clothes. The identity test for the firstborn, in Isaac's view, were completely secular and not spiritual. He loved Esau because Esau was a hunter and a macho man; not because of anything spiritual. "Who then was it who hunted game and brought it to me?" (:33) reflects how Isaac thought that the characteristic of being a hunter, with hands as hairy as the animals he hunted, was the prime characteristic of the firstborn whom he sought to bless. When it was well known that Nimrod, the antiChrist figure of earlier history, was characterized by his mighty hunting (Gen. 10:9,10). Isaac had become dominated by the thinking of the world around him, whereby kings and leaders were caricatured as succesful hunters. Thus King Ashurbanipal is presented as a mighty hunter of lions in many reliefs uncovered. Isaac likes to imagine that the smell of Esau's clothing is of a "field blessed by Yahweh", as if he was right in blessing Esau because Yahweh had blessed Esau with prowess in hunting. This of course was a totally wrong position. Yahweh's blessings were by grace alone, and given directly. And they are not given on any human basis; whereas Isaac discerned his firstborn, as he thought, using his human senses of touch, smell and hearing.

Gen 27:2 *He said, See now, I am old. I don't know the day of my death-* Isaac didn't die for another 43 years. Now Isaac was 137 (Gen. 41:46; 45:6; 47:9; 30:25 cp. 29:18,21,27); which was the age at which his brother Ishmael had died, 14 years before. The Biblical record is Divinely inspired, and the psychological 'ring of truth' about the incidents confirms this. It is normal and psychologically credible to get a fear of death when you come to the age at which your brother died. Isaac, and indeed

all in the family, believed that the blessing of Yahweh (:7) was contingent upon it being given by Isaac. If he were to die, then, the blessing wouldn't be given. The idea of personal blessing direct from God, according to the Abrahamic covenant, was not appreciated by them. "He [Isaac] blessed him" (:23) is stressed. They felt that blessing and relationship with Yahweh had to be mediated through a living person, the elder of their family. Just as Israel turned away from direct encounter with Yahweh at Sinai, and wanted Moses to interact with Him on their behalf. This is the basis for religion, and it is the very opposite to personal spirituality. And they were persistently missing the point- that blessing from God was that of forgiveness, personal relationship with Him ["I will be their God"] and future eternal possession of the land. Jacob realizes this in Gen. 33, when he asks Esau to "take away my blessing". But just as his blessing of Ephraim and Manasseh reflects how he still sees parental blessing as important, we find in Gen. 49:25 that Jacob pretty much repeats the [relatively meaningless] blessing of Isaac in his words to his favourite son Joseph: “the Almighty who will bless you with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that crouches beneath, blessings of the breasts and of the womb”. Indeed, Jacob's likewise rather meaningless blessings of his sons repeat elements of the blessing of Isaac which he deceitfully received: "Judah, your brothers shall praise you; your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; your father’s sons shall bow down before you” (Gen 49:8); “The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples” (Gen 49:10). We too may at some moments realize that nothing at all matters apart from God's spiritual blessings; but we may revert to hankering after material blessings, and still take that attitude to our grave planks. See on :29.

Gen 27:3 *Now therefore, please take your weapons, your quiver and your bow, and go out to the field, and take me venison-* About Jacob's last recorded words were his memory of how he took "Shechem... out of the hand of the Amorite with my sword and with my bow" (Gen. 48:22). Perhaps subconsciously he wanted to prove to himself and others that he was not weaker than Esau, and was as adept at the use of bow and weapons as he had been. The connection is made the stronger once we realize that "quiver" is "scabbard" and refers to a sword. The ideas of "sword", "bow" and "take..." are repeated. And later Scripture stresses that Israel [Jacob] did *not* get the land in possession by their sword nor bow. Again, Isaac is set up as not at all understanding how blessing- true blessing- is mediated. Just as many today do not understand.

Gen 27:4 *Make me savoury food, such as I love, and bring it to me, that I may eat, and that my soul may bless you before I die-* The grammar seems to suggests that eating the food was necessary to impart the blessing; see on :9. Clearly Isaac is thinking in human terms; for the only blessing ultimately worth having came from *God*, not from Isaac's "soul", and was not bestowed through having a ritual meal. However we note the understanding they had that blessing and covenant relationship were somehow attested by a meal. This continues in our time with the memorial feast, the breaking of bread, serving the same function. Isaac believes that the blessing must somehow be mediated through food, over a meal. This is the force of "*that* my soul may bless you before I die". He is surely alluding to how Esau sold his birthright over food, feeling he too was about to die [and falsely thus feeling, because he didn't then die, and Isaac too didn't die for some years]. Isaac is seeking to reverse the sale of the birthright. Hence he stresses in :29 "Be lord over your brothers", literally 'become senior to your brother'. Isaac was trying to

reverse the sale of the birthright, instead of accepting God's word that the elder must serve the younger. Isaac really does not present well here in spiritual terms.

Isaac blessed his sons by faith concerning things to come (Heb. 11:20). "Things to come" is literally "to come", and consistently this term is used in Hebrews about the things of the coming Kingdom of God. Abraham "would after", in the coming age, receive the eternal inheritance of the land (s.w. Heb. 11:8); our "continuing city" is "to come" (Heb. 13:14); the fire of judgment "shall" (s.w.) devour the condemned at judgment day (Heb. 10:27); we have only a foretaste of the powers of the world "to come" (Heb. 6:5); the world "to come" (Heb. 2:5) is that of the Kingdom, when we "shall be" saved (Heb. 1:14). The other examples of faith in Hebrews 11 are of faith in the future Kingdom and in the things of the Lord Jesus. So we are to deduce from this that Isaac's blessing of his sons was done with a perspective of the Kingdom within him- even though so much of his blessing was misplaced, wrong and unspiritual. And so often we see this in the NT comment upon Old Testament incidents, such as Sarah's angry words to Hagar, and her mocking reference to Abraham "my lord being old also...".

Gen 27:5 *Rebekah heard when Isaac spoke to Esau his son. Esau went to the field to hunt for venison, and to bring it*- See on Gen. 33:10. The fact Isaac spoke to Esau privately, away from Jacob and Rebekah, could reflect his awareness that Esau had sold the birthright to Jacob but he chose to get around that. Isaac also seems to be in studied disregard of the opening prophecy that Esau as the firstborn would serve Jacob the younger. All through the lives of the patriarchs we see weakness, and they were saved by God's grace and their faith in that grace, with occasional works which reflected that faith. But the general

picture of their lives is not spiritually positive. In this sense they become our "fathers".

Gen 27:6 *Rebekah spoke to Jacob her son, saying, Behold, I heard your father speak to Esau your brother, saying-* One form of Bible study by questions is to ask questions like 'What should Jacob have replied to Rebekah in Gen. 27?', 'What should Eve have said to the serpent'?

Gen 27:7 *'Bring me venison, and make me savoury food, that I may eat, and bless you before Yahweh before my death'-* Rebekah appears to have added "before Yahweh" (:4). The blessing of being the Abrahamic seed and covenant relationship ('before God' is used in this sense in Gen. 17:18) was not predicated upon the paternal blessing of Isaac, but was given by God, by grace. But Rebekah assumed that the birthright was the covenant blessing; and she was bent on making the prophecy about the elder serving the younger somehow come true in her own strength and by her own device. This can so easily be our weakness too. She confused material blessings with the covenant blessings of Yahweh- which are forgiveness and salvation. The only blessings worth having. She also fails to appreciate that the covenant blessings come from Yahweh Himself- not from a man like Isaac.

Gen 27:8 *Now therefore, my son, obey my voice according to that which I command you-* This is clearly alluding to Adam obeying his wife's voice and falling into sin; doing what she commanded rather than what God commanded. And Isaac was surely intended to see the parallel, especially as the narrative included eating and blessing [and cursing]. We too are set up with situations where we are intended to see the Biblical parallel, and act accordingly. This is where basic knowledge of the Bible text is valuable; and moreso, the willingness to perceive that we are really intended to see the links and act accordingly.

Gen 27:9 *Go now to the flock, and get me from there two good young goats. I will make them savoury food for your father, such as he loves-* One goat was quite enough for two men to eat. Two goats suggest some kind of ritual meaning to the meal; we noted on :4 that Isaac felt the blessing had to be somehow mediated through a meal. This was a quite wrong understanding of "blessing", for true blessing is from God and not man. We note that the only other reference to two young goats is when the phrase is used about the ritual of the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:5,7,8), where one represented the sinner who must die, and the other the righteous who was set free.

Gen 27:10 *You shall bring it to your father, that he may eat, so that he may bless you before his death-* As noted on :4, they all understood that the blessing was predicated upon the meal ["so that..."]. Her emphasis was clearly upon the word "you". She was aware of the sale of the birthright, and also wished to force to come true the prophetic word about the elder serving the younger. But blessing is of God; although the memorial feast, the breaking of bread, continues this theme of blessing being associated with a meal. But the meal is a celebration of the blessing already given, a reaffirmation that we want to be part of it; the meal doesn't of itself give blessing. This is the error of transubstantiation, and the essence of that misunderstanding is seen here.

Gen 27:11 *Jacob said to Rebekah his mother, Behold, Esau my brother is a hairy man, and I am a smooth man-* The way Jacob is described at the time as "smooth", without a covering of hair, may be a hint that he needed a covering of atonement. Jacob's concern was how to get away with the deception, rather than any moral issue with what Rebekah was suggesting. "Smooth" is only elsewhere used about flattery (Prov. 5:3; 26:28; Ez. 12:24). It could be that by "smooth" there is a contrast set up with the

hairy Esau to suggest Jacob was like a smooth lamb and Esau the kid of the goats hairy from birth; as explained on :16, "hairy" is usually translated "kid of the goats". The parable of the sheep and goats would then suggest Jacob as the righteous; but he was so far from that at this time, and was only counted as a sheep by grace.

Gen 27:12 *What if my father touches me? I will seem to him as a deceiver, and I would bring a curse on myself, and not a blessing-* See on Gen. 25:31. The true blessing of God according to the Abrahamic promises could not be taken away by men, nor simply due to human failure. And yet Jacob had yet to come to perceive that. And the Divine blessing was given by God; it was not 'brought upon oneself' by dint of human device and skill. It took Jacob a lifetime to come to perceive this grace. "Touches" is the same Hebrew word translated "search" or "felt" when Laban felt all over Jacob's possessions in search of the stolen idols (Gen. 31:34,37). The word "recognize" is likewise common in both incidents; see on :23. We are intended to join the dots between our experiences in life. Jacob was intended to see how he had earlier survived such a 'touching' when he was in the wrong- but to what end? He was to later give back his blessing to Esau, rejoicing instead in God's gracious blessing of him (see on Gen. 33:11).

Gen 27:13 *His mother said to him, Let your curse be on me, my son. Only obey my voice, and go get them for me-* The lives of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and his sons are held up in the NT as our examples. And yet their records are absolutely shot through with reference to the spiritual weakness of those men, and even the suggestion that as men they were not 'nice' people. They, the archetypical believers, aren't good people. Indeed, the records seem to juxtapose their weakness against the more humanly acceptable behaviour of the world around them. The whole business of Jacob obtaining the blessing from his slightly drunk

father Isaac is almost comical; dressed up with skins, with his mum prodding him under the ribs saying "Go on, go on, it's my sin not yours"; Jacob must have been willing the old boy to hurry up, knowing as he did that Esau was about to come in with his meal. Yet this was the most Godly family on earth at the time.

There was no recorded curse from Isaac upon Jacob, and in any case if there was there is no record of it coming upon Rebekah. The whole idea of blessings and cursings uttered by men appears somewhat phony; they were indeed held to be of great value, but the Biblical record demonstrates that it is the Divine blessing and cursing which is important. Thus Jacob's later blessings of his sons don't all seem to have had direct fulfilment; and likewise the expected curse from Isaac either doesn't come or is not carried out. It should've been obvious that Isaac would realize the deception; but both Rebekah and Isaac assumed that what mattered was whether he uttered a curse during the blessing ceremony. And if he didn't, and blessed Jacob, then this could not be retracted. They predicated the receipt of blessing upon the ceremony; but Jacob was slowly brought to realize that it is direct Divine blessing which is to be sought above all, rather than some secular blessing from an old man.

Gen 27:14 *He went, and got them, and brought them to his mother. His mother made savoury food, such as his father loved-* Went, got and bought to her... all emphasize his total obedience and complicity in the plan. The only other times the Hebrew phrase "savoury food" is used outside of this incident is in Prov. 23:3-8, where the "dainty food" is used in the context of deceivers who want to get rich; and as so often in Proverbs, we appear to have a commentary upon this earlier Biblical incident: "Don't be desirous of his dainties, since they are deceitful food. Don't weary yourself to be rich... Don't eat the food of him who has a stingy eye, and don't crave his delicacies: for as he thinks

about the cost, so he is. Eat and drink! he says to you, but his heart is not with you. The morsel which you have eaten you shall vomit up, and lose your good words".

Gen 27:15 *Rebekah took the good clothes of Esau, her elder son, which were with her in the house, and put them on Jacob, her younger son-* These clothes were likely those of the firstborn, and they would have had religious meaning; just as they did when given to Joseph. This would explain why the clothes were not in Esau's own dwelling, but in that of Isaac and Rebekah. Rebekah didn't have to go into Esau's home, and in full view of his pagan wives, grab his best clothes. Isaac liked to think that the smell of these robes was as the smell of the field or garden which God had blessed- perhaps an allusion to Eden. Esau usually led the family worship in these clothes- and yet he was very far from the true God. This shows the low level of spirituality which there was in the family.

Gen 27:16 *She put the skins of the young goats on his hands, and on the smooth of his neck-* Esau was "hairy", the same word translated "kid [of the goats]" (Gen. 37:31; Lev. 4:23 etc.). The word is also used of idols made to goats (2 Chron. 11:15 "devils" AV). Clearly Esau is being set up as an idolater by his very appearance.

Gen 27:17 *She gave the savoury food and the bread, which she had prepared, into the hand of her son Jacob-* The level of detail increases, as it often does in the Biblical narrative when we are being invited to re-imagine the scene, playing "Bible television" with the information presented. Here, we see Rebekah putting bread and meat into Jacob's literal hands. The last time we have heard of Jacob with cooked food, he was again involved in a deception. He ought to have learnt from his mistakes, but like us, he didn't. At the time.

Gen 27:18 *He came to his father, and said, My father? He said, Here I am. Who are you, my son?-* The question "Who are you?" suggests that Jacob's carefully practiced imitations of Esau's voice just weren't much good. He would've panicked at the question. Jacob foresaw that the same question would be asked as he came to meet Esau (Gen. 32:17 s.w.); consciously or subconsciously, Jacob came to realize that the fruit what he had done in that tent with Isaac was being demanded of him.

Gen 27:19 *Jacob said to his father, I am Esau your firstborn. I have done what you asked me to do. Please arise, sit and eat of my venison, that your soul may bless me-* His proud claim to his father that "I have done according as thou badest me" (27:19 AV) when he had effectively done nothing of the sort was the basis for the character of the elder brother in the Lord's parable (Lk. 15:29). Time and again, Jacob emphasizes his works: "I have *done* according as thou badest me (AV)... my days (of service) are fulfilled (therefore) give me my wife... did not I serve with thee for Rachel? (notice Jacob's legalism; Gen. 29:21,25)... give me my wives and my children, for whom I have served thee... thou knowest my service... how I have served thee (Gen. 30:25-33)... with all my power I have served your father (Gen. 31:6)". This trust in his own works was what prevented Jacob from a full faith in the promises. It was only the night of wrestling and his subsequent handicap that drove it from him.

As noted earlier in this chapter, the family understood the blessing as being predicated upon eating this ritual meal; it had to be eaten *that* the blessing might be given. But this betrays a total lack of appreciation of the fact that the only blessing worth having, that from God, is not given by man, and is not dependent upon a meal or ritual.

Gen 27:20 *Isaac said to his son, How is it that you have found it so quickly, my son? He said, Because Yahweh your God gave*

me success- "Your God" is almost cynical; the sort of thing an unbaptized child of a believer might say to their parents. It was only at the very end of his life that Jacob was to talk of God as "my God"; it took him a lifetime to find God for Himself, rather than seeing Him as merely his father's deity. And the same happens in the lives of many born and bred into believing households. "Success" translates a Hebrew word which has only so far been used in the Hebrew Bible in Gen. 24:12, where the mission to find a wife for Isaac is met with Divine "success" through finding Rebekah. Perhaps Isaac and Rebekah had often rehearsed the story, and used this word- which Jacob now uses. As if to say: 'Just as your God gave amazing success in your search for a wife, so He gave me'.

Gen 27:21 *Isaac said to Jacob, Please come near, that I may feel you, my son, whether you are really my son Esau or not-* Jacob was to use the very same words "come near" when he too was blind and Joseph's sons were brought before him for blessing (s.w. Gen. 48:10,13). It's not simply that what goes around, comes around. Even in his old age, God was still working with Jacob to help him realize how his aged father must have felt at that time. The same Divine hand works in our lives to help us appreciate how others feel, whom we have hurt. It's not punishment nor judgment, as it were; but more an attempt at our education and spiritual maturity, as thereby our deeper repentance is elicited. And God was still at work in Jacob's life when he was very old, as He works with us too right to the end.

Gen 27:22 *Jacob went near to Isaac his father. He felt him, and said, The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau-* For "felt", see on :12. Later, Jacob was to beg God to deliver him from "the hands of Esau" (Gen. 32:11 s.w.). He was being taught how wrong he had been to impersonate those hands and make them his own. God ever seeks to reform, rather than

simply punish. His hope and intention was Jacob's repentance; and when Jacob finally meets Esau, he hands back to him the blessing he had stolen (see on Gen. 33:11). Laban was also going to 'feel' all over Jacob's possessions in order to find the idols Rachel had stolen. And Jacob would be saved by grace then, surely being reminded of how he had been 'felt' by his father and had got away with his deception. He would have later reflected how indeed, his life had been a constant experience of grace. Life circumstances sometimes repeat in order to teach us that lesson. "The voice is Jacob's" may not have to be a reference to his tone of voice, because Jacob was surely impersonating Esau. Rather the reference may be to how Jacob spoke with the kind of words Jacob would speak, rather than the ever crude and brash style of Esau. There is a clear connection with Peter being betrayed by his own voice- and again, without doubt, what Jacob does here is condemned by later Biblical allusion and connection.

Gen 27:23 *He didn't recognize him-* The same word translated "recognize" is found in Gen. 31:32, where Jacob invites Laban to "recognize" what is his, and Laban 'feels' his possessions in search for his lost idols; see on :12. Again we marvel at how the Divine hand repeated the essence of circumstances in Jacob's life, in order to lead Jacob to repentance and a transparent life, rather than a deceptive one. The same word is also used in Gen. 37:33, again in connection with deception involving a garment; Jacob's sons bring him the robe of the firstborn, worn by Joseph, and Jacob 'recognizes' it (s.w.), although he draws wrong conclusions from it. He was again being put in the seat of his father Isaac; although Jacob would only have realized this deception some years later, when he met Joseph and the whole deception was exposed.

Because his hands were hairy, like his brother Esau's hands. So he blessed him- Jacob was smooth skinned, but he placed skins

on his hands to deceive Isaac that he was Esau. Yet we read: "his hands were hairy". Were Jacob's hands really hairy? No. He made them *appear* hairy, and this is the perspective the record adopts, without correcting it. It doesn't say 'Isaac didn't realize, because Jacob's hands *seemed* hairy'. This helps us understand the New Testament usage of the language of demons.

Gen 27:24 *He said, Are you really my son Esau? He said, I am-* It's possible that "I am" is an allusion to the Yahweh Name, and that Jacob was thereby swearing by Yahweh. His point blank lie thereby becomes the more reprehensible. The question could be yet another expression of doubt by Isaac, as in :21. But the question and answer could also have been the beginning of the ritual by which the firstborn received the blessing.

Gen 27:25 *He said, Bring it near to me, and I will eat of my son's venison, that my soul may bless you. He brought it near to him, and he ate-* The verb translated "bring / come near" occurs often here (:21,22,25,26,27). We also find a similar cluster of occurrences when Jacob draws near to and meets Esau years later (Gen. 33:3,6,7). Clearly the hand of providence, the working of the Spirit, was seeking to remind Jacob of this earlier incident in his life, just as the Spirit restimulates memories and situations so that we might better understand both ourselves and the others who were involved. And Jacob did respond, for he hands back to him the blessing he had stolen (see on Gen. 33:11).

He brought him wine, and he drank- The taking of bread (:17) and wine over a meal was all part of a ritual for confirming a covenant; and we see the essence of it in the breaking of bread service. But we suspect that the intention was to get Isaac drunk. "Deceiving and being deceived" is so true of Jacob (2 Tim. 3:13). Laban likewise used alcohol and darkness (cp. blindness) to deceive Jacob into marrying Leah rather than Rachel.

Gen 27:26 *His father Isaac said to him, Come near now, and kiss me, my son-* The kissing was likely part of some ritual. For "come near", see on :25. Kissing a parent was a sign of leaving them and becoming independent (Gen. 31:28; 1Kings 19:20). Just as Abraham prematurely gave all that he had to Isaac even before he died, so it seems Isaac now wished to do to his firstborn Esau. This shows how much he loved Esau and wanted by all means for him to be his primary "seed". And in that desire we see an unspirituality and lack of faith in the prophetic words to Rebekah about the elder serving the younger. It was as if Isaac wished by all means to reverse it. God didn't allow him to do so; and yet He worked through the unethical and sinful behaviour of Jacob and Rebekah. God works through sin to the extension of His purpose; rather than turning away from sinners in disgust.

Gen 27:27 *He came near, and kissed him. He smelled the smell of his clothing, and blessed him, and said, Behold, the smell of my son is as the smell of a field which Yahweh has blessed-* The clothes had a distinctive smell, and they were used in family worship. The smell may have been from incense, which might suggest that their religious rituals were not as spiritual as they might have been. The whole question of "blessing" in its human sense is and was very subjective. Isaac liked to imagine that the ritual clothes of Esau even smelt of Yahweh's blessing; but that was in his imagination. Yahweh would bless the field if there was obedience to His covenant (Dt. 28:3); but there was none of that with Esau. We too can imagine spirituality in those we love, especially family members, when it simply isn't there.

The Hebrew for "smelled the smell" is only used elsewhere of God receiving acceptable sacrifice and being pleased with it (Gen. 8:21; Lev. 26:31). But the spirituality of this family had descended into mere tokenism and ritualism. Isaac "smelled the smell" of spiritual acceptability just because a man was wearing

certain clothes which had a distinctive smell, perhaps from incense.

Gen 27:28 *God give you of the dew of the sky, of the fatness of the earth, and plenty of grain and new wine-* Isaac's mind was focused very much on earthly realities. He had failed to appreciate that his noticeable material blessings were really but visible indicators towards the far greater spiritual blessings which the covenant promises were centred upon. And he makes no reference to the all important aspect of the Abrahamic promises- the seed.

The fatness of the *eretz* may refer to Canaan, the best part of the *eretz* promised. Isaac later wishes that wherever Esau dwells shall be likewise blessed (:39).

There are many examples of where God worked through Jacob's weakness, and blessed him in spite of it, imputing righteousness to Jacob. Thus Jacob's use of red stew to wrest the birthright from his red brother was used by God to give him the birthright (the words for "red stew" and "Esau" are related), even though Paul evidently disapproved of Jacob's attitude (Rom. 12:20 surely alludes here); his evil deception of his father was used by God to grant him the physical blessing (Gen. 27:28 is confirmed by God in Dt. 33:28), even though at the time he was dressed like a goat (27:16), connecting himself with fallen Adam and the rejected at the day of judgment; "Deceiving and being deceived" certainly rings bells with Jacob (2 Tim. 3:13). Laban likewise used alcohol and darkness (cp. blindness) to deceive Jacob into marrying Leah rather than Rachel.

Gen 27:29 *Let peoples serve you, and nations bow down to you. Be lord over your brothers-* This was a willful attempt to reverse the Divine statement that the elder would serve the younger. Isaac really doesn't come over as very spiritual. he wished Esau, as he thought, to be lord over Jacob because he seems to have

disliked Jacob and wanted the Angel's words about his dominance over Esau to be untrue. And yet he had faith. It could be argued that his words here were *i*nitially fulfilled in Edom / Esau being dominated by Israel (2 Sam. 8:14; 1 Kings 11:15; 2 Kings 8:21; Ps. 60:8,9). But it seems to me that Isaac's blessings were not so much prophecy as simply his personal wishes, although within that there was still faith (Heb. 11:20).

Let your mother's sons bow down to you. Cursed be everyone who curses you. Blessed be everyone who blesses you- "Your mother's sons" is a strange way for Isaac to talk about his own sons. He clearly considered Jacob to be more of Rebekah's child than his. We note the plural "sons", as if there may have been other unrecorded sons born later. The record of Isaac's blessing of Jacob is framed to portray Jacob as a type of Christ: "Let people serve thee" = Zech. 8:23; Is. 60:12 "nations bow down to thee" = Ps. 72:11; "Be Lord over thy brethren" = Phil. 2:11; "Let they mother's sons bow down to thee" = 1 Cor. 15:7. But Jacob was so far from being the true Abrahamic seed at that time. The fact was that Jacob bowed down to Esau, thereby recognizing that this blessing was not for him; Jacob hands back to him the blessing he had stolen (see on Gen. 33:11). The language of cursing and blessing is indeed taken from the Abrahamic promises; but there is no reference to blessings in the promised seed. Isaac seemed to understand the promises on a far too immediate and material level. Isaac's pronouncement of a curse upon any who cursed Jacob meant that he could not himself curse Jacob; so Jacob's fear of receiving a curse was therefore mitigated.

He effectively hands back the birthright to Esau after the night of wrestling, when he says "Take [away] my blessing..." because he had experienced God's grace. Jacob will seven times call Esau his "lord", bowing seven times to him [remember that the Hebrew word for "blessing" is a form of the verb *berak*, to

bow down], five times calling himself Esau's servant. Clearly he was resigning this blessing of the firstborn, and Isaac's blessing of Jacob was thereby rendered null and void. The blessing of the firstborn involved the other brothers bowing down to the firstborn (Gen. 27:29), so Jacob's protracted and emphasized bowing to Esau (Gen. 33:3,6,7) was likewise a way of resigning from the birthright which he had been born trying to grab hold of, and the desire for which had obviously filled his mind. We too are led to resign all our material, secular aspirations and dreams for the sake of God's grace. We realize that what was once nearest and dearest to us, was all in the end much ado about nothing. And in Jacob's case, he was born with the desire for the firstborn status, with his little hand desperately trying to grab his brother's heel to stop his brother being the firstborn. But encounter with God's grace [as happened to Jacob in Gen. 32] is enough to reorient a man away from even his natural, born-with passions and obsessions towards [in this case] materialism and jealousy. In Jacob's case his very name, 'heel catcher', reflected this obsession which was so strong it had become his self-definition; until he encountered God's grace. The blessing of the firstborn as given by Isaac involved the firstborn being "Lord" over his brothers; but Jacob repeatedly calls Esau his "Lord" in Gen. 32,33. Jacob's gifts to his brothers are described with a standard Hebrew word for "gift" [*minha*]; but in Gen. 33:11 Jacob then starts to consciously refer to them as *berakah*, the word for "blessing". And he urges Esau to take [s.w. 'take away'] his "blessing". I discussed on Gen. 25:23 how the blessing of the firstborn never came true- perhaps because Jacob's resignation of the firstborn blessings in Gen. 32,33 was accepted by God.

Gen 27:30 *It happened, as soon as Isaac had made an end of blessing Jacob, and Jacob had just gone out from the presence of Isaac his father, that Esau his brother came in from his hunting-*

Isaac must have been willing the old man to get a move on. He obviously knew that the deception would be uncovered, but he had the idea that the words spoken at the ceremony were all powerful. He totally failed to understand that ultimately, all blessing is from God and not from man, and is not predicated upon any human ceremony. Jacob went away from "the face of Isaac" (Heb.) just as he was to flee from the face of Esau. The idea of being in the presence of / seeing the face of recurs in the incidents connected with Jacob's meeting of Esau, years later. Again, God was seeking to help Jacob join the dots and realize his need for repentance and for the face / presence of God, seeing he had ended his relationship with the face / presence of his earthly father and brother.

Gen 27:31 *He also made savoury food, and brought it to his father. He said to his father, Let my father arise, and eat of his son's venison, that your soul may bless me-* Again, the misunderstanding is repeated; the blessing was seen as dependent upon eating the food and doing the ritual. And the blessing was seen as most definitely proceeding from the person ["soul"] of Isaac. The Divine blessing was of grace and mediated through direct personal relationship between God and man.

Gen 27:32 *Isaac his father said to him, Who are you? He said, I am your son, your firstborn, Esau-* The insistence that he was the firstborn indicates that he refused to take seriously the selling of his birthright. Like us all, he liked to think that time works a kind of atonement for the past. But because the image of past events becomes distorted and far smaller on our horizon as the years pass, we should not think that the consequence of human action likewise diminishes; especially in God's sight. The mention of "firstborn" is a hint that Esau was already beginning to guess what had happened; and that has the ring of

psychological credibility to it. We can be certain that what we are reading actually happened.

Gen 27:33 *Isaac trembled violently, and said, Who, then, is he who has taken venison, and brought it me, and I have eaten of all before you came, and have blessed him? Yes, he will be blessed-* The violent trembling was not simply in anger at having been deceived. Isaac realized that he had been trying to reverse the Divine statement that the elder would serve the younger; "Yes, he will be blessed" shows how he recognized this. He makes no attempt to annul what he has said in blessing. He trembled before God, knowing that he had gone against Him and His word. And it had been reversed, albeit through human dysfunction. He recognized that as Paul put it, the gifts and calling of God are without changeability (Rom. 11:29). "Who is... he?" was not an enquiry, as all knew it was Jacob, but rather a rhetorical comment as to the nature of Jacob; as if to say "What kind of a person is he?". The reference was to Jacob's name (:36), "supplanter".

Gen 27:34 *When Esau heard the words of his father, he cried with an exceeding great and bitter cry, and said to his father, Bless me, even me also, my father-* The Hebrews were warned not to follow Esau's sinful example, otherwise at the judgment they would experience what he did: "Afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing (cp. our desiring the Abrahamic promises of entry into the Kingdom), he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it with tears" (Heb. 12:17). In view of this, the weeping of the rejected at judgment may be as a result of desperate pleading with the Lord to change his mind. There will be a sense, as with Esau, of an irrevocable decision. Just as the foolish virgins earnestly desire to enter the feast, but all too late. The request for the blessing all the same [this is the idea of the Hebrew word translated "also"] may have

reminded Isaac of how his father Abraham had requested this for his half brother Ishmael, and God had heard this. Heb. 12:17 suggests that he sought to change Isaac's mind, to get him to somehow reverse the blessing and all the same give it to him.

Gen 27:35 *He said, Your brother came with deceit, and has taken away your blessing-* Isaac doesn't immediately agree to make up some kind of blessing. And he refused to change his mind about the blessing of the firstborn going to Jacob (see on :34). Because the blessing of the firstborn had indeed been uttered already, and taken by Jacob. This belief reflects their common understanding that the blessing was solely and totally dependent upon the uttering of the words by the father, and the ceremony. There was no idea that something could be recalculated; whereas God's purpose and word is full of such recalculation.

Gen 27:36 *He said, Isn't he rightly named Jacob? For he has supplanted me these two times. He took away my birthright. See, now he has taken away my blessing. He said, Haven't you reserved a blessing for me?-* "He took away my birthright" indicates that Esau thought he had done nothing wrong by selling his birthright. He chose to remember it as Jacob taking it away. The parental blessing and the birthright went together; so on one hand it seems unreasonable to count up two cases of supplanting. But in another sense, he was right. The demand of the birthright was effectively a taking of it away. And Jacob had used deceit to try to force through the fulfilment of the promise that the elder would serve the younger. Hos. 12:2,3 comment that God would punish Jacob for supplanting; so although what he did was morally wrong, God still worked through it.

Gen 27:37 *Isaac answered Esau, Behold, I have made him your lord, and all his brothers have I given to him for servants. With grain and new wine have I sustained him. What then will I do for you, my son?-* Wine seems an unnecessarily significant

item in Isaac's mind. "All his brothers" suggests there were other brothers who aren't mentioned in the records. Isaac seems to imply that as he had blessed with Jacob with lordship over his brothers and grain and wine, there wasn't much left he could now bless Esau with. This comment reflects his lack of appreciation of the promises to Abraham; the blessing of the seed and eternal inheritance of the land.

Gen 27:38 *Esau said to his father, Have you but one blessing, my father? Bless me, even me also, my father. Esau lifted up his voice, and wept-* At the time of Jacob's deception, Esau lifted up his voice and wept; and this is picked up in Heb. 12:17 as a warning to all those who would fritter away their spirituality for sensuality. The faithlessness of Jacob is disregarded, and the emphasis is placed upon Esau. If Esau's rejection by Isaac is indeed a picture of the rejection of the goats at the final judgment, Isaac there becomes a hazy prefigurement of our future judge. And yet the record presents a scene of both father and rejected son as shaken and helpless, both dearly wishing it could be different (Gen. 27:33). The sadness of Isaac becomes a figure of the pathos and sadness of God in rejecting the wicked. Note how the LXX of Gen. 27:38 adds the detail: "And Isaac said nothing; and Esau wept". We are left to imagine the thoughts of Isaac's silence. Truly our God takes no pleasure at all in the death of the wicked (Ez. 33:11). According to Heb. 12:17, Isaac did not change his mind despite the tears; the blessing of the firstborn was not given to Esau, and the other blessings now spoken were not the result of any change of mind.

Jacob too "lifted up his voice and wept" when he met Rachel (the same words are used, Gen. 29:11). It's not simply that what goes around, comes around. God was working with Jacob to help him realize how his brother must have felt at that time. The same Divine hand works in our lives to help us appreciate how others

feel, whom we have hurt. It's not punishment nor judgment, as it were; but more an attempt at our education and spiritual maturity, as thereby our deeper repentance is elicited.

Gen 27:39 *Isaac his father answered him, Behold, of the fatness of the earth will be your dwelling, and of the dew of the sky from above-* Mal. 1:3 speaks of how God made Esau's inheritance waste and barren. We therefore wonder whether Isaac's words had any relevance at all; the essential thing was the Divine blessing, not that of any man. Yet Heb. 11:20 says that Isaac blessed both his sons "by faith". He had faith that Esau's seed would have blessing and in Christ, that shall be ultimately true. These blessings of dew and fatness were exactly what Isaac had bestowed upon Jacob. But now he repeats them to Esau, despite having said that Jacob had come and irreversibly taken away Esau's blessing (:35). This gives an insight into how the 'blessings' were simply the whim of Isaac and had no ultimate, binding meaning; although he was too proud to retract the blessing he had just given Jacob. He again presents as convinced that blessing depends upon *his* words, uttered at a certain point- rather than the words of God directly. Likewise "When you win your freedom, you will break his yoke from off your neck" (:40) is effectively Isaac's attempt to undo the blessing of mastery over Esau which he has just given to Jacob; and it is again a refusal to accept the Divine word that the elder must serve the younger. Isaac may have been the passive patriarch, but he is clearly struggling by all means to *not* obey and accept God's word. Even though Heb. 11:40 says he did all this "by faith". Such is God's positive view of His children.

Gen 27:40 *By your sword will you live, and you will serve your brother-* Esau was in a similar position to Ishmael (Gen. 16:12). These words could only be seen as a "blessing" if Esau was proud to live by the sword. But the Lord Jesus alludes to this by

saying that those who live by the sword shall perish by it (Mt. 26:52), and the spiritual way of life was not to take the sword. There is no evidence that Esau ever served Jacob, confirming that these blessings, although uttered in faith (Heb. 11:20), were Isaac's wishes rather than predictive prophecy. It could be that Isaac is referring back to the prophetic words that "the elder shall serve the younger" which he had tried so hard to overthrow, and is here accepting they would come true. Jacob would however have been aware of these words of Jacob to Esau when later he had to serve his brother Laban and was deceived into serving him for much longer than he expected (s.w. Gen. 29:15). Jacob deeply resented this service of his brother Laban; he was taught at length what this "blessing" of having your brother serve you meant. He was learning the feelings which Esau would have had, had this "blessing" come true. Constantly, we are seeing the attempted education of Jacob.

It will happen, when you will break loose- This could imply that Jacob meant that if Esau broke away from Jacob and lived elsewhere, outside of the land of promise, then the whole blessing and cursing would not apply to Esau. And this is what happened. Esau did leave Canaan, whereas Jacob remained there; and so these prophesied relationships between the two sons didn't come true within the land of Canaan. The later record makes this clear: “So Esau returned that day on his way to Seir” is juxtaposed with the description of Jacob in Canaan, “And Jacob came safely to the city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan” (Gen. 33:16,18). And again in Gen. 36:8, Esau's settling in Seir is contrasted with how Jacob lived in the “land of his father’s dwelling, in the land of Canaan” (Gen. 37:1).

That you shall shake his yoke from off your neck- Possibly a reference to how Edom broke free from Israel at the time of Ahaz (2 Kings 16:6; 2 Chron. 28:17). And Israel were in fact

ruled over by the Idumean / Edomite Herods just before their final destruction as a nation in AD70, and frequently Israel are described as being yoked by the neck to their neighbours. That would rather disprove Isaac's blessing; but in fairness, blessings were seen more as wishes than as prophetic predictions. Yet Heb. 11:20 says that Isaac blessed both his sons "by faith". But his attitude at the time was weak and his understanding foggy; indeed he may well have been under the influence of alcohol at the time, and he set himself to go against the revealed word that the elder must serve the younger. And yet the Spirit in Heb 11:20 discerns that somewhere within all that confusion, there was faith. This is an extremely generous reading of Isaac at this point! And that same generous God, eager to count righteous on the basis of faith, just because we are the objects of His love, is the same God with whom we have to do. We can take comfort from this in our weakness, and be encouraged to more positively view our brethren and focus upon the positive within the general picture they present to us.

Gen 27:41 *Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing with which his father blessed him. Esau said in his heart, The days of mourning for my father are at hand. Then I will kill my brother Jacob-* Our thoughts *are* our words; the intention is the action. In any case, there is a Biblical theme that what we say in our heart comes out into the open: "Esau said *in his heart*, The days of mourning for my father are at hand. Then will I slay my brother Jacob. And the words of Esau her elder son were told to Rebekah" (Gen. 27:41,42). What Esau said to himself became public knowledge through his actions. Isaac lived another 43 years, so Esau was held back from immediately killing Jacob by Isaac's sickness, which he apparently overcame. Jacob would later have perceived God's grace in that. The connection with Cain killing his brother

Abel is apparent; but Esau clearly didn't care for the Biblical allusions.

Gen 27:42 *The words of Esau, her elder son, were told to Rebekah. She sent and called Jacob, her younger son, and said to him, Behold, your brother Esau comforts himself about you by planning to kill you-* Rebekah comes over as quite the amateur psychoanalyst of Esau (see on :44,45). She imagined him internally comforting himself with his plans to murder Jacob. She may have recalled how she had comforted Isaac after the death of his mother (Gen. 24:67 s.w.), and she saw this same need for comfort in her son at this time. The whole record has strong psychological credibility. Esau was inconsolable by anyone apart from his own inner thoughts; and Jacob was to go through this in later life, when he refused to be comforted over the loss of Joseph (Gen. 37:35). We are brought to know how others feel or felt; we are intended to examine our lives, our histories; and to learn the lessons and come to greater sensitivity and repentance.

Gen 27:43 *Now therefore, my son, obey my voice. Arise, flee to Laban, my brother, in Haran-* "Obey my voice" is what she had told Jacob about the whole plan of deceiving Isaac. Jacob comes over as dominated by his mother, although he was already in his 70s, and like Adam, lead by a woman into sin. The connection with Eve shows clearly that what Jacob and Rebekah did was wrong. Jacob flees, and Rebekah never sees her beloved son again. Her death is not recorded, unlike the deaths of the wives of the other patriarchs [Sarah and Rachel], and she is never mentioned again in scripture- unlike Sarah, Rachel and Leah, the other wives of the patriarchs. What she did was deeply wrong, and an attempt to force the fulfilment of God's word. And she likewise displays a great misunderstanding of Yahweh's blessing;

for she adds the words "of Yahweh" to her comment that Isaac is now going to give the blessing.

Gen 27:44 *Stay with him a few days, until your brother's fury turns away-* She twice states that Esau's anger would turn away (:45). She knew her son to be a man of the moment, living for today, emotional for a moment and then calming down. The Hebrew phrase "fury turned away" is mostly used about God's wrath turning away (Num. 25:11; Ps. 78:38; 106:23; Is. 66:15; Jer. 18:20; 32:37; 36:7; Dan. 9:16). The Bible opens here in Genesis with a picture of a livid, furious man, burning in anger because of the wrong done to him... whose anger turns away. We are intended to apply that word picture to God, and ever remember that He has feelings, and gets red hot angry at sin. His grace and patience is thereby given a backdrop, and such far greater meaning.

Gen 27:45 *Until your brother's anger turn away from you, and he forgets what you have done to him-* Rebekah knew Esau's character; just as he had effectively forgotten his sale of the birthright, so he would soon forget what Jacob had done, and calm down. He is presented as the epitome of the man of the flesh; living life for the moment, without care for longer term consequence, and seeing past history as of no meaning. "Anger" here is literally "nose"; it was as if Esau was a furious animal sniffing out Jacob as his prey and intending to kill him. We get the impression that Jacob must have run away or was hiding himself nearby; hence in :42 Rebekah sends for Jacob.

The Hebrew phrase "anger turned away" is different to that in :44, but as there, it is mostly used about God's wrath turning away. Again we observe as on :44, that the Bible opens here in Genesis with a picture of a livid, furious man, burning in anger because of the wrong done to him... whose anger turns away. We are intended to apply that word picture to God, and ever

remember that He has feelings, and gets red hot angry at sin. His grace and patience is thereby given a backdrop, and such far greater meaning.

Then I will send, and get you from there. Why should I be bereaved of you both in one day?- Rebekah feared that the revenger of blood law would mean that if Esau killed Jacob, he too would be killed perhaps the same day. For her to fear the loss of Esau that same day, there must have been credible revengers of blood nearby. I have noted so far in this chapter the double mention of Jacob being lord over his brothers, plural. There were likely other brothers, not recorded in Scripture, who would have immediately killed Esau. Rebekah paid the price for her obsession about Jacob in that she likely never saw Jacob again, as he was away for at least 20 if not 40 years. Rebekah gets no great mention for spirituality, apart from in her brave decision to immediately leave her family and go to the land of promise to marry the Abrahamic seed. Isaac likewise is not exactly stellar in his spirituality, apart from in his early willingness to be sacrificed by Abraham and his implicit faith in resurrection. Abraham and Jacob likewise only occasionally manifested the works that prove faith is real. Perhaps we are to conclude from all this that the patriarchs and matriarchs of God's people were spiritually weak, but had a dogged faith in God, which they just only occasionally demonstrated in their works. And this is sadly the family characteristic which we too bear.

Gen 27:46 *Rebekah said to Isaac, I am weary of my life because of the daughters of Heth. If Jacob takes a wife of the daughters of Heth, such as these, of the daughters of the land, what good will my life do me?*- Rebekah's apparent zeal against marriage out of the faith was really a cover for her desire to save her son from problems which he had only her to blame for. And yet we do

remember that Rebekah had personally paid a huge price to marry within the faith, and indeed Esau's marriages out of the faith had deeply grieved her (see on Gen. 26:35). In family life we are so often tested on points where we have made a huge sacrifice, but our children act differently. For Rebekah, spiritually weak as she has been presented in the events of this chapter, life was not worth living if she failed to produce a Godly seed because her children had married unbelievers and thus denied the covenant. And yet those genuine feelings were clearly overridden by a simple desire to save Jacob's life and not be bereaved of her two sons (:45). Human motivation is never, or rarely, pure. Always there are other considerations, and our defence of the faith can so easily have more secular reasons for it.

GENESIS CHAPTER 28

Gen 28:1 *Isaac called Jacob, blessed him, and commanded him, You shall not take a wife of the daughters of Canaan-* This 'blessing' is so significant. As noted throughout Gen. 27, all concerned in the sad drama had failed to realize that the true blessing was the Abrahamic blessing, and not corn and wine, i.e. material things. Isaac realizes now that he had been mistaken in trying to fight against the Divine plan that the elder should serve the younger; in this sense he blessed Jacob by faith (Heb. 11:20- although the question is where his faith came in when blessing Esau). In connection with that blessing, he urges Jacob not to follow his brother and marry a Canaanite. Isaac had himself waited until 40 years old and seen his father go to huge effort to find him a wife within the faith. To remain within the Divine program of blessing, Jacob had to marry someone in the faith. And so he went to Mesopotamia subconsciously expecting to find a wife there, just as his father had found one there through Eliezer meeting Rebekah by the well.

Gen 28:2 *Arise, go to Paddan Aram, to the house of Bethuel your mother's father. Take a wife from there from the daughters of Laban, your mother's brother-* Isaac had effectively taken that journey in the person of Eliezer in Gen. 24. He too had found a wife from the family of Laban.

Gen 28:3 *May God Almighty bless you, and make you fruitful, and multiply you, that you may be a company of peoples-* I noted on Gen. 27 that Isaac's allusions to the Abrahamic promises had focused on the immediate and the material, with no attention to the important promises of the seed who would multiply. But now Isaac appears to have learnt his lesson, and understands this as the most important blessing. And he speaks of *God* blessing

Isaac, rather than of he himself blessing his sons ("that my soul may bless you", Gen. 27:25).

Jacob self-admittedly didn't believe as he slept that night at Bethel; for he said that if Yahweh would bring him safely home, only then would Yahweh be his God. But just days before that, as Jacob here sheepishly stood before his sorrowful, betrayed father; right there, right then, God promised Jacob that he would become "a multitude (LXX *ekklesia*) of people", words which could only become true through their application to Christ. The LXX gives: "Thou shalt become gatherings of nations". The idea is that the nations would be gathered together in unity through his seed.

Gen 28:4 *And give you the blessing of Abraham, to you, and to your seed with you, that you may inherit the land where you travel, which God gave to Abraham-* According to the New Testament, and the implications of the inheritance promise in Gen. 15:7, the inheritance of the land was to be eternal, and not in this life. Jacob died in Egypt and didn't inherit the promised land in his lifetime, and so the fulfilment must be yet future at the resurrection of Jacob; and he is to inherit it with "your seed with you", suggesting they too must be resurrected (Heb. 11:8-13, 39,40). Likewise the land was not given to Abraham in his lifetime; but Jacob is invited to see it as being as good as his, so sure is the promise of fulfilment. But Isaac still fails to fully perceive these things, and speaks as if Jacob would receive the full inheritance in his mortal life. But Isaac has commendably moved on from his level of appreciation of the promises displayed in Gen. 27; he accepts that *God* gives blessing, and that "the blessing of Abraham", rather than Isaac's wishes of corn and wine, were the only blessing worth having. But Isaac came to this understanding through God's patient working with the failures and misunderstandings of all the family.

Gen 28:5 *Isaac sent Jacob away. He went to Paddan Aram to Laban, son of Bethuel the Syrian, Rebekah's brother, Jacob's and Esau's mother-* Jacob is now placed before Esau, in recognition that he really is being treated as the firstborn. We recall that Abraham "sent away" his sons by Keturah to the east, to this same location, because he perceived living and remaining in the promised *eretz* as fundamental to covenant relationship (see on Gen. 25:6). Later, both Jacob and Joseph wished to be buried in the *eretz*. So to send Jacob away to the east, out of the *eretz*, to relatives whom Abraham had been told to separate from, could be seen as not the best decision. For Abraham had expressly forbidden Isaac to go there, but rather must a woman be willing to leave that area and come to him in the *eretz*. And indeed Jacob did suffer spiritually from his 20 or 40 years out of the *eretz*; although his earnest desire to be buried in the *eretz* showed that he learnt the lesson at the very end of his long life.

It must be remembered that Israel are ethnically linked to the other Arab nations in the 'land'- Jacob's 12 sons married wives from there; some of their mothers were Arab slave girls; Jacob's wives were Arameans, as was his mother (Gen. 28:5); historically there was much intermarriage with surrounding nations, throughout Israel's history; Ephraim and Manasseh were half Egyptian. Rahab, Ruth etc. are all reminders of the amount of Arab blood in the average Jew. The definition of 'Israel' was therefore not so much on ethnic principles but rather on spiritual ones. Anyone who has walked the streets of modern Israel and pondered the question 'What *is* a Jew?' will have come to this conclusion, as they see Russians, Americans, black Africans... all wearing skull caps.

Gen 28:6 *Now Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob and sent him away to Paddan Aram, to take him a wife from there, and that as he blessed him he gave him a command, saying, You shall not*

take a wife of the daughters of Canaan- It is twice emphasized that Esau noticed that Isaac had blessed Jacob, although the blessing in view is the Abrahamic blessing, which required raising the Godly seed through not marrying unbelievers but those within the Abraham family of faith. He wished to have whatever blessings might be going, and so he takes more wives, from Ishmael's family. And yet although Ishmael was circumcised into the covenant, he had returned to Egypt in every sense and clearly didn't want part in the covenant. Esau continues to be presented as the typical man of the flesh, vaguely interested in external appearances of doing the right thing, but not grasping the spirit of things at all.

Gen 28:7 *And that Jacob obeyed his father and his mother, and was gone to Paddan Aram-* There is sustained emphasis on Jacob's obedience to his parents, especially to his mother (Gen. 27:8,13,43; 28:7). The whole story is a foretaste of the issues involved with Christians and parental expectation in our day. It might not be going too far to say that he grew up far too much under her thumb; he meekly obeyed her faithless suggestion that he deceive his father into granting him the blessing, content with her assurance that it would be mum's sin, not his (and I imagine her pecking him on the cheek as she gave him the tray with Isaac's food on). No wonder he fell madly in love at first sight, when he first saw the girl he knew his mother wanted him to marry, perhaps at the same well where his father's servant had first met his mother. Jacob introduces himself as "Rebekah's son" (Gen. 29:12), although it would have been more normal to describe himself as Jacob ben-Isaac. Gen. 29:10 labours the point three times that Laban was "his *mother's* brother". The fact Deborah, his mother's nurse, was taken under the wing by Jacob, further suggests his very close bond with his mother; he buried Deborah under Allon-Bachuth- 'the oak of his (Jacob's) weeping'

(Gen. 35:8). Jacob struggled to accept his father's God as his God. And yet he in so many ways is portrayed as deeply influenced by Rebekah his mother.

Gen 28:8 *Esau saw that the daughters of Canaan didn't please Isaac, his father-* Perhaps he refers specifically to how his Canaanite wives were a grief of mind to his parents, and his mother had said she wanted to die because of the thought of Jacob marrying such women (Gen. 27:46). Although Rebekah clearly used the 'marriage out of the faith' issue as an excuse to send Jacob away to safety, she also sincerely felt as she said she did about the matter; and we ever remember that both Isaac and Rebekah had sacrificed so much to marry only within the family of faith.

Gen 28:9 *Esau went to Ishmael, and took, besides the wives that he had, Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael, Abraham's son, the sister of Nebaioth, to be his wife-* The polygamy of Esau, in an attempt to please his parents, is presented as so inappropriate- as they were not apparently polygamists, and Isaac isn't recorded as taking any other wives when Rebekah was barren for the first 20 years of their marriage. The names of these women all suggest idolatry.

Gen 28:10 *Jacob went out from Beersheba, and went toward Haran-* Bethel is about 70 miles from Beersheba, so Jacob would have had a few days to reflect before the dream. He went from Beersheba, "the well of the path", to Haran, "the parched place". The hint could be that this was a bad move; it was the apostate who moved eastwards. If he wanted a wife from Abraham's family there, then he could have done what his father did, and send someone to invite someone to come to him within the land or promise.

Gen 28:11 *He came to a certain place, and stayed there all night, because the sun had set. He took one of the stones of the*

place, and put it under his head, and lay down in that place to sleep- Jacob's sleeping with a stone as his pillow is hardly a natural thing to do- but it was done in order to induce dreams and revelations from the gods (J.G. Janzen, *Abraham And All The Families Of The Earth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993) p. 108). And the one true God responded to Jacob, by showing him Angels ascending from him to God, and Angels descending from God to Jacob in response. It wasn't the other way around- because surely the idea was to show Jacob that his prayers really were being heard, Angels were in touch with God about them, and God was zealously responding even then through Angelic providence. Yet all this was done by God when Jacob was so far from Him. Just as a patient and loving father bears with his child, so God bore with Jacob; and He does with us too, and we are to reflect this in our dealings with our brethren.

Gen 28:12 *He dreamed*- This was later understood by Jacob as an answer to his "distress" (Gen. 35:3). God often sees situations as prayers, and responds; demonstrating that the effectiveness of prayer is not simply dependent upon our ability to verbalize, because this ability varies between persons.

Behold, a stairway set upon the earth, and its top reached to heaven. Behold, the angels of God ascending and descending on it- See on Jn. 1:51. The idea of a stairway leading into Heaven of course has obvious connections with the ziggurats of those times; the white limestone cliffs or slopes around him merged into a ziggurat in his dreams. But note that those stairways had a temple on the ground immediately where the stairway started, and led up to a temple at the summit. On a human level, Jacob's subconscious was thinking of pagan temple systems. But God turned all this around. For the man Jacob lying there that night, in all his weakness, was a temple, connected by the Angels to Yahweh's Heavenly temple. And we too in all our weaknesses are

the temples of God on this earth. Thus his idolatrous dream of a Ziggurat was turned into an assurance of Divine care for him, the shrine which topped Mesopotamian ziggurats being turned by God in the vision into the throne of Yahweh. Indeed, 'Babylon' meant "gate of God", and in thinking that he was at heaven's gates, Jacob was confusing Babylon and the true city of God. But still God worked through all this.

The stairway or ladder was "set", literally, erected or stood up. The same word is used for how Jacob later at this very same place stood up or erected an altar (Gen. 35:14). A different word is used here in :18. Jacob realized that his altars and sacrifices were ascending to God Himself personally, just as this magnificent staircase led to God, with Angels ascending and descending upon it, between God and himself. This is the power of prayer, of covenant relationship, of sacrifice and fellowship with God. The idea of reaching up to heaven and God reaching down from heaven is meant literally here, but it is also a metaphor meaning that God paid attention to the point of feeling whatever was done on earth (Gen. 11:5; 18:21; 2 Chron. 28:9; Jer. 51:9; Rev. 18:5). This sensitivity of God, and His response, is articulated through the Angels. Jacob was being taught that it is not just the situation at Babel or Sodom which elicits this huge attention; but the state of a lonely fugitive sleeping rough in the semi-desert. He deals directly with individuals. The order "ascending and descending" suggests that our situation is as it were taken up to God in heaven, and then He responds through Angelic means [descending].

We all grow up with some concept of God. This is as true for those with atheist or apostate backgrounds as it is for those steeped in Sunday School from the cradle. That concept of God which we have in our youth tends to stay with us, and in some ways dogs us for much of our lives. Growth towards a real,

personal knowledge of the true God, *our* Father, is a lifelong process. Jacob grew up in the most spiritual home on earth at the time (although some of the goings on would have made the neighbours doubt this). He was brought up 'in the Truth', we could say. And yet his conception of God was woefully immature for many years. His struggle towards the true knowledge of God is not only fascinating; because Jacob's spiritual growth really is intended as *our* model. Nathaniel thought he really believed in the Lord Jesus. The Lord commented: "You shall see (usually used in John concerning faith and spiritual perception) greater things than these... you will see heaven opened, and the Angels of God ascending and descending upon the son of man" (Jn. 1:51 RSV). It was Jacob who saw Heaven opened and the Angels ascending and descending. And the Lord's comment that Nathaniel was "an Israelite (Jacob-ite) indeed, in whom is no guile" (i.e. Jacob without his guileful side) is a reference to Jacob's name change. It confirms that Nathaniel was to follow Jacob's path of spiritual growth; he thought he believed, he thought he saw Christ clearly; but like Jacob, he was to comprehend far greater things.

Gen 28:13 *Behold, Yahweh stood above it, and said, I am Yahweh, the God of Abraham your father, and the God of Isaac*- This is another way of reminding Jacob of the promise given to Abraham, "I will be their God". Yahweh Himself was involved with Jacob; the huge staircase was to make Jacob see that his situation was directly transferred to God, and God would directly respond; for the bottom of the ladder was Jacob, more precisely, Jacob's mind. And God saw all that was there and responded there, through a huge, awesome system.

It seems that great stress is placed in Scripture on the Angels physically moving through space, both on the earth and between Heaven and earth, in order to fulfil their tasks, rather than being

static in Heaven or earth and bringing things about by just willing them to happen. The vision of Jacob's ladder showed the Angels coming and going, perhaps meaning that they are sometimes physically present with us, sometimes not. Gen. 28:13-15 are the words of the Angel to Jacob. God manifested through Jacob's specific guardian Angel then goes on to say, v. 15, "I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken of unto thee" (AV). At the end of his life, Jacob mentions the presence of the Angel which he had sensed all through his life. But that one Angel controlled the multitude of Angels which he saw that night in vision ministering to him. See on Gen. 18:10.

The land whereon you lie, to you will I give it, and to your seed- This was making specific the Abrahamic blessing, which Isaac had never clearly articulated to Jacob because he seemed so caught up in the literal, material aspects of the promises. So far as we know, Jacob had no wife nor children. He was being set up psychologically to expect that soon, therefore, he would have both. He meets Rachel, but finds that this promise was hard of fulfilment; he had to work seven years for her, and then there were major issues of infertility. All this was not God punishing Jacob, but rather seeking to hone his focus and faith in this prophetic word.

Gen 28:14 *Your seed will be as the dust of the earth, and you will spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south. In you and in your seed will all the families of the earth be blessed-* See on Gen. 12:3. Paul interprets the "seed" as singular, referring to the Lord Jesus, and the multiplication as being through individuals being baptized into that seed (Gal. 3:16,27-29). This promise of spreading abroad geographically didn't happen in Jacob's lifetime, and so he would have been

driven to faith in a resurrection and future fulfilment in the Kingdom of God on earth. The mention of the compass points would have encouraged Jacob to see himself as Abraham, who was told the same (Gen. 13:14). However, he does use the Hebrew for "spread abroad" in describing how his family has "increased greatly" (Gen. 30:30,43). The blessing of all families of the *eretz* came true in a limited sense through his seed Joseph being a blessing for them all in saving them from famine through giving all families of the earth the bread of life, pointing forward to the salvation of all peoples from all compass points in Christ (Lk. 13:29; Rev. 21:13). And so we see what we ought to discern in our lives- an incipient fulfilment of the Kingdom blessings right now.

Gen 28:15 *Behold, I am with you, and will keep you, wherever you go, and will bring you again into this land. For I will not leave you, until I have done that which I have spoken of to you-* Heb. 13:5 combines quotes from Gen. 28:15; Josh. 1:5 and Dt. 31:16. Heb. 13:5 doesn't quote any of them exactly, but mixes them together. This is typical of how the New Testament quotes the Old, and is how the Rabbinic commentaries likewise functioned. The promises just made were eternal, and so the promise to not leave Jacob until they were fulfilled continues right up to the establishment of the Kingdom on earth at the Lord's return; He therefore will never "leave" Jacob and his seed, the true Israel of God. Which is why this promise is so frequently applied to all God's people at various points in history. "I am with you", Emmanuel, God with us, is a promise carried on to all the true seed, as Jacob himself realized when he insists that "God will be with you" (Gen. 48:21; repeated in Dt. 31:23); although it maybe took him a lifetime to realize it, seeing that in :20 he seems to question it at this stage: "If God will be with me..." (AV).

The promise of Divine keeping connects with the Angel cherubim keeping the way to the tree of life (Gen. 3:24); Jacob was promised to be kept in the way, however lonely that way must have seemed at the time, with the end in view being re-entry to a restored Eden. But the same word is used of how Abraham's seed were to "keep" the covenant and "the way of Yahweh" (Gen. 17:9; 18:19); and Israel in the wilderness, for whom Moses was primarily writing Genesis, also had an Angel to "keep" them in that "way" (Ex. 23:20). But the life of spiritually stumbling Jacob shows that this was and is not a tit for tat offer- 'If you keep My covenant, I'll keep you'. God kept Jacob in the way by grace, even when Jacob was not committed to keeping the covenant (see on :21,22). God unilaterally fulfilled His side of it, and it was this grace which finally led Jacob to respond. Moses uses this word "keep" multiple times in Deuteronomy, several times in almost every chapter. He urges Israel to both "keep" the covenant requirements, and also to "keep" themselves and their own hearts (Dt. 15:9). The covenant was therefore so intensely personal, and the Angel who worked to "keep" them within the covenant way (Ex. 23:20) was therefore working on a personal level with every heart within Israel. And that Angel in its work is understood as the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts and lives today (Is. 63:9,10 cp. Eph. 4:30). Under the new covenant, the Spirit is placed within our hearts to cause us to "keep" the covenant requirements (Ez. 36:27). As Jacob came finally to "keep" the covenant in which he himself had been kept by grace, we are to follow his path (Hos. 12:6).

"Bring you again into this land" is the same Hebrew word for word as in Gen. 3:19: "return unto the ground", from which Adam had been taken just as Israel in the wilderness and Jacob had originally been in the *eretz* and were being brought again to it, albeit by a long and circuitous route. The connection is

to highlight the way in which there is a way out of the curse upon Adam; we shall indeed return unto the ground, but we can also be brought into the promised land- necessarily, through a bodily resurrection from the dead. This is one of so many nudges throughout the Bible that the curses upon Adam can ultimately be reversed for God's people.

God promised that He would not leave or forsake Jacob. He said the same to Israel in the wilderness, and yet predicted that Israel would leave or forsake God by forsaking the covenant and thereby God would leave / forsake them (Dt. 31:8,16,17). Likewise God did not forsake or leave Jacob's father Isaac because Isaac respected the implications of the covenant (s.w. Gen. 24:27). But the way God speaks to Jacob here appears to be unconditionally promising that He would not leave Jacob; and it was that unmerited grace which in the end elicited Jacob's response to it.

Gen 28:16 *Jacob awakened out of his sleep, and he said, Surely Yahweh is in this place, and I didn't know it*- The conflict of tenses is arresting. Yahweh *is* [present] here, but I did not [previously] know it. Although the vision was ended, Jacob realized that the promised presence of God, with Angels ascending and descending upon him, was ongoing, and not just a dream. And he admits that he had not appreciated this when he first laid down in that place, nor earlier in his life. We see here definite growth in Jacob. The same Hebrew term is found in Ex. 6:3, where we read that Yahweh revealed Himself to Jacob and He was 'known' to him thereby. So we conclude that after the dream, Jacob 'knew' Yahweh, although he had not previously done so. We note the gradual growth of Jacob in knowing or having relationship with God.

"Yahweh is" in Hebrew here means more than the present tense of the verb "to be". The idea is that Yahweh exists, right here.

Moses was primarily writing for Israel in the wilderness, who had questioned whether "Yahweh is among us" using the same Hebrew (Ex. 17:7, as Jud. 6:13). Even if they had not known it, they were to realize that His presence, mediated perhaps by the same Angel who dealt with Jacob, was just as real for them as it had been for him in the desert that night. Dt. 29:26; 32:17 and other passages teach that the idols of the nations were not 'known' by Israel who worshipped them; the idea is that Yahweh alone enters into personal relationship, which is the Hebrew idea of 'knowing'. And likewise all the possible idols in our lives do not offer the personal knowing / relationship with God which He alone does.

Gen 28:17 *He was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! This is none other than God's house, and this is the gate of heaven-* "Dreadful" suggests that Jacob feared God with the fear of one who has no real relationship with Him. He was on one hand in awe at God's closeness; and yet he was afraid. I suggest this was the fear of sinful man before God Almighty. The first reference to "fear" is in Adam's words of guilt before God: "I was afraid" (Gen. 3:10). He feared because he felt he was so close to God now; at the gate of heaven. The Lord maybe used this idea in speaking of the virgins in the parable knocking at the door of the Kingdom. Jacob felt he was still "outside", at God's gate, so close, but perhaps he felt so far, and therefore feared.

Gen 28:18 *Jacob rose up early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put under his head, and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil on its top-* See on Jn. 1:50. As noted on :12, Jacob understood this makeshift alter as his poor replica of the stairway to heaven. His humble altar and sacrifice of the oil of his spirit were a way of ascending to God Himself personally, just as this magnificent staircase led to God, with Angels ascending and descending upon it, between God and himself. This is the power

of prayer, of covenant relationship, of sacrifice and fellowship with God.

Gen 28:19 *He called the name of that place Bethel, but the name of the city was Luz at the first-* Before that watershed night of Gen. 32, Jacob was influenced by the surrounding religious ideas, and was possibly involved with idol worship. The fact he openly says that Yahweh will only become his God *if* He brings him back home in peace is proof enough that up until age 77 at the earliest, Jacob was not an unreserved worshipper of Yahweh. Yet knowing the nature of the man, it seems impossible to believe that he was totally irreligious until the time of his repentance in Gen. 32. The connections between Jacob and idolatry are so very numerous throughout the prophets that it seems impossible to totally disconnect him from idolatry. "Luz" appears to refer to a tree which was associated with idolatry. Jacob renamed it to Bethel, the house of God, although his later life was hardly free from the influences of idolatry. But here we see the beginnings of the development of a rejection of idolatry. He also perceived that God needs no "house", for He reveals Himself deep within the heart of His people, and ascends and descends upon them, wherever they are. This was a not insignificant paradigm shift; for the 'religion' of his day as of ours tended to think in terms of having a 'house of prayer', a place you went to do your religious stuff and find contact with your deity.

Gen 28:20 *Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go-* See on Gen. 48:20; Jer. 10:16. As Jacob set out to relatives in a distant land, hoping to find a wife, he was fully aware that he was in principle replicating his father's experience. When he spoke of God keeping him "in this way that I go" and bringing him again "to my father's house" (:21), his mind was on the story he had so often heard of how God lead Abraham's servant in "the right way" and leading back

home with a wonderful wife for Isaac his father (Gen. 24:27,40,42,48,56). When at this stage in life (he was 77, remember) things suddenly took a different turn, his great hope was that God would bring him back safely "again to my father's house in peace" (28:21); he wanted to go back to the stay-at-home life. What God put him through in the rest of his life was the exact opposite of this. He says that if God does this, he will "surely give the tenth unto thee" (28:22 cp. 14:20)- exactly as granddad Abraham had done (Gen. 14:20), who had doubtless told Jacob this many a time as they 'dwelled together in tents' (Heb. 11:9). We very much get the impression that Jacob was wrapped up with his parents too much; he had not yet avowed Yahweh as his personal God, but he felt a safety in his religious family and consciously and subconsciously living out their expectations. He was like many raised "in the faith"; he had to discover it all for himself, alone, and throw away the crutches of the family environment, upon which a man shall never see his God for himself.

And will give me bread to eat, and clothing to put on- This is simply incredible in its lack of faith; '*If* God will really look after me, which includes giving me food and clothes, *if* He's as good as His word, then I'll accept Him as my God'. And yet Paul speaks of how we should serve our Master well, especially if he is our brother (alluding to Jacob and Laban), and "having food and raiment be content" (1 Tim. 6:2,8), as if the fact Jacob only expected food and clothing from God was a sign of his unmaterialism. The Spirit focused upon one part of Jacob's words and imputed righteousness to him because of them, just as the bitter and cynical words of Sarah are quoted so positively in the New Testament. At the very time Jacob said those words, he at best only half believed, and the next 20 [or 40] years of his life were devoted to accumulating far more than just food

and clothing. And yet his words regarding food and raiment, sandwiched as they are between much that is wrong, are treated as a reflection of his spirituality.

Having heard the promises concerning his future seed and the present protection God would grant him, Jacob immediately seized on the latter: "If God will be with me... then shall Yahweh be my God" (:21). He brushed past the implications of Messiah, although later he came to see that these were the most fundamental things God had promised. The way he raised up (cp. resurrection) the pillar and anointed it at this time may have shown a faint conception of Messiah, but this took years to seriously develop.

"If God... then..." implies was that Jacob didn't consider Yahweh to be his God at that time. He was not totally committed to Yahweh as his God. The fact he promises to give a tenth to God *in the future* suggests that he did not then consider God to be his King, for the idea of tithing seems to have been established before the Law of Moses was given (as were many other elements of that Law; Gen. 14:20). Jacob's words sound as if he believed in 'God' as a kind of force or spirit, but did not have Yahweh as his personal God. And yet God had promised Abraham that He would be the God of his seed (Gen. 17:7,8); Jacob was aware of these promises, and yet he is showing that he did not accept their personal relevance to him at this time. The fact at the end he does call God his God reveals that he then accepted the Abrahamic promises as relevant to him personally. His offer to give a tithe to God if God delivered him would have been understood in those days as saying that Yahweh would then be his *king* (cp. 1 Sam. 8:15,17); and yet he evidently felt that Yahweh wasn't then his King. There is no record that Jacob ever did build a temple or tithe; but at the end of his life he realizes that God had kept *His* side of the deal, in that He had been with

him and fed him all his life long. The fact he hadn't kept his side of the deal made Jacob realize the huge grace of God...

The fact at the end he does call Yahweh his God reveals that he then accepted the Abrahamic promises as relevant to him personally (Gen. 49:24,25). This is an essay in the titanic difference between knowledge and belief. At baptism we tend to have knowledge, which masquerades as belief. And all our lives long we must struggle, as Jacob did, to turn knowledge into faith. His *personal* grasp of the wonder of the promises at the end is revealed in Gen. 48:4, where Jacob recounts how "God Almighty... said unto me, Behold, I will make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, and I will make of thee a multitude of people; and will give this land to thy seed after thee for an everlasting possession" (AV). God never actually said all this to Jacob; Jacob is quoting the promise to Abraham of Gen. 17:8 *and applying it to himself*. And with us too, a personal grasp of the wonder of it all, that it really applies to *me*, is a mark of that final maturity we fain would achieve.

So only at the end, Yahweh was Jacob's God. God seems to recognize this by describing Himself as the God of Jacob / Israel so very often. His joy, His sheer delight at Jacob's spiritual achievement is recorded throughout the Bible. The way God describes Himself as "the God of Israel" (201 times) or "the God of Jacob" (25 times) infinitely more times than anyone else's God is proof enough that God saw His relationship with Jacob as very special. "God of Abraham" occurs 17 times; "God of Isaac" 8 times; "God of David" 4 times. Remember that whenever we read "Israel", we are reading of the man Jacob and his children. That God was the God of mixed-up, struggling Jacob is a sure comfort to every one of us. God is not ashamed to be surnamed the God of Jacob (Heb. 11:16 Gk.). The clear parallel between the historical man Jacob and the people of Israel is brought out

in Mal. 1:2: "I loved you... I loved Jacob". Had Israel appreciated God's love for the man Jacob, and perceived that he was typical of them, then they would never have doubted God's love for them. And the same is true of us, whom Jacob likewise represents.

The covenant God made with Abraham was similar in style to covenants made between men at that time; and yet there was a glaring difference. Abraham was not required to do anything or take upon himself any obligations. Circumcision [cp. baptism] was to remember that this covenant of grace had been made. It isn't part of the covenant [thus we are under this same new, Abrahamic covenant, but don't require circumcision]. Perhaps this was why Yahweh but not Abraham passed between the pieces, whereas usually both parties would do so. The promises to Abraham are pure, pure grace. Sadly Jacob didn't perceive the wonder of this kind of covenant- his own covenant with God was typical of a human covenant, when he says that *if* God will give him some benefits, then he will give God some. Although he knew the covenant with Abraham, the one way, gracious nature of it still wasn't perceived by him.

Because of the great importance of Angels or a specific Angel in our lives, many of God's people seem to have conceived of God in terms of an Angel. Jacob (Gen. 48:15) and the patriarchs are clear examples. The extent of this is shown by Jacob vowing to his Angel at Bethel that "if God (the Angel) be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go... so that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall the Lord (Yahweh) be my God" (Gen. 28:20,21). That the 'God' was definitely the Angel is shown by Gen. 31:11,13: "The Angel of God spake unto (Jacob)... I am the God of Bethel, where thou anointedst the pillar, and where thou vowedst a vow unto me". So was Jacob promising his Angel that if He protected him, "then shall Yahweh be my Elohim (Angel)"-

i.e. 'then I will recognize Yahweh is behind you, and I will relate to Him as I do to you'?

Gen 28:21 *So that I come again to my father's house in peace, and Yahweh will be my God-* The AV and others suggest that Yahweh becoming Jacob's God was part of the deal which Jacob was offering God. See on :20 for the implications of this. We can each personally, as members of the seed, enter into Jacob's experience at this time. David certainly did:

Gen. 28:20,21 re. Jacob	Psalm 23 re. David
He is with me	For You are with *me* (i.e. just as You were with Jacob)
He will keep me	He makes me lie down, he leads me, he restores my life
He will give me bread to eat	He prepares a table before me in the presence of my enemies
I come again to my father's house in peace	I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever

David was a man who saw the height of Jacob, perceiving Jacob as our example, and the deep significance of his spiritual growth as our pattern. His almost fanatic devotion to "the Law" would have included the record of Jacob- around a fifth of "the Law" which he studied all the day (and deep into the night watches).

It's questionable whether Jacob ever did really return to his father's home in peace. But all the same, as is clear from Jacob's final words, he fully accepted Yahweh as his God at the end of his life. He realized that his passionate hankering after being back home with mum and dad, of returning to how things used to be... was of the flesh. God wanted him to be a man, standing alone before Him. And Jacob realized that, and made Yahweh his God all the same, despite never really returning home in peace. He likely never saw his mother again, and the record of

his burial of Isaac with Esau leaves us to imagine his nervousness and inability to ever live again near Esau.

Gen 28:22 *Then this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, will be God's house. Of all that you will give me I will surely give the tenth to you-* As noted on :20, this was understood as accepting Yahweh as his king. There is no record that Jacob ever did tithe to Yahweh, nor that he ever attempted to build a sanctuary, a literal "house", at the spot where he had erected that pillar. He does return there and erect a pillar later (see on :12), but he built no literal "house" of worship for God. He would've looked back and perceived how inappropriate was his bargain with God; and all he offered to do, he concluded was inappropriate. God was worthy of his all, not just a tenth; and the house of God was him, his heart, upon which Angels ascended and descended constantly because of his covenant relationship.

GENESIS CHAPTER 29

Gen 29:1 *Then Jacob went on his journey, and came to the land of the children of the east-* A 450 mile journey. Balaam was from here (Num. 23:7), and he apparently had a relationship with Yahweh. So the knowledge of the true God was somehow still around there; perhaps Abraham had told his family why he was leaving Ur, or had sent message back there of his relationship with Yahweh. But as noted on Gen. 25:6, to go to the East was a sign of leaving the land of promise and returning to where the true seed of Abraham should have left from. Jacob's parents had operated on the principle that Isaac would not go to the land of the east, rather Rebekah must leave there. So the whole journey was not on the right basis; yet still God worked through it, and out of so much failure and dysfunction there, forged the people of Israel, His covenant people.

Gen 29:2 *He looked, and behold, a well in the field, and, behold, three flocks of sheep lying there by it. For out of that well they watered the flocks. The stone on the well's mouth was large-* The repeating similarities between our lives and those of others also reveal to us that God at times arranges for us to suffer from our *alter ego-* persons who behave similarly to us, and who through those similarities cause us suffering. In this way we are taught the error of our ways, both past and present. It seems that Jacob the deceiver suffered in this way from Laban the deceiver- in order to teach him and cause his spiritual growth. For example, as

Jacob deceived his blind father relating to an important family matter, so Laban deceived Jacob in the darkness of the wedding night. And Jacob learnt from this- whereas Laban [so it seems] just didn't "get it". Indeed, so many themes repeated in Jacob's life in order to teach him. For example, when he first meets Rachel, there are three other flocks of sheep waiting to be watered (Gen. 29:2); but the implication of Gen. 29:10 is that Jacob rolled away the stone from the well and watered them and ignored the other three flocks. But did not this stone return upon his own head when God rolled away the reproach of the other three women in Jacob's life (Leah and the two servant girls) but not that of Rachel, who initially remained barren? Is this the significance of the three unwatered flocks? We wonder at the significance of these three flocks of sheep. Perhaps the reference is to the division of the earth / *eretz* dwellers into the three sons of Noah.

Jacob went to Haran expecting to find a wife. He was the favourite son of his mother Rebekah, and she wanted him to marry into her family. He also, at either 57or 77 (depending how you read the chronology of his life), was eager to marry. He had always lived with mum and dad, the favourite son of his mother, staying at home with her all the time. Jacob introduces himself as "Rebekah's son" (29:12), although it would have been more normal to describe himself as Jacob ben-Isaac. Gen. 29:10 labours the point three times that Laban was "his *mother's* brother". Her marriage had been arranged at a well;

she had encountered the invitation to marry Isaac at the well in Haran. And now Jacob is at a well near Haran, just possibly the same well. He was psychologically set up to fall in love with any woman from his mother's family. And a pretty girl comes to the well to water her sheep; just as his mother had done. Men have a tendency to want a wife to be a surrogate mother for them. Isaac too, Jacob's father, had been the same. He too had been a mumma's boy, the obsessive love of his elderly mother, and so he was comforted after her death by Rebekah. He took Rebekah into his mother's tent, as if he had kept her tent just as it was when she died, and slept with her there. Clearly, he treated his wife as a surrogate mother. Jacob was going down the same path. He had lived at home, apparently single, for a long time. And now he was looking for a surrogate mother. And he found her. Both Isaac and Jacob come over as weak men, mumma's boys who had not individuated from mummy and their father's house. Just as the macho man who falls for the girl who looks like his mother and irons his work clothes as she did, and cooks like mum did at home... is not really strong, psychologically, not rugged at all- but weak. He is not (at least, not yet) a real man, his own person. My point is, that from such weak, pathetically pampered mumma's boys, came the house of Israel, God's people. For *He* worked to make them men, to individuate them.

Rebekah had told him to go there "for a few days" and, by implication, to find a wife there and return

with her to Canaan. This is why we read that the seven years service for Rachel seemed to Jacob but "a few days" (:20). And this is why he says to Laban at the end of the period that he has served his *days* for Rachel (:21). Jacob told himself throughout the seven years of service that this was the "few days" his mother had spoken of. He was totally dominated by the desire to do his mother's will. But he ended up serving another 7 years for Rachel; when he ought to have just accepted Leah and returned to Canaan. Rachel was an idolater, just like the wives whom Esau had married who were a grief of mind to Rebekah. So Jacob failed to see the spirit behind his mother's reasoning, and just followed her desires on the basis of living out parental expectation. Just as many raised Christian do today, at least in the shape of their early lives.

Gen 29:3 *There all the flocks were gathered. They rolled the stone from the well's mouth, and watered the sheep, and put the stone again on the well's mouth in its place-* This was their tradition- to wait until all the flocks were gathered and then remove the stone. Jacob felt this to be inefficient, as the sheep could have been grazing for the hours they were kept hanging around the well (:7). The headstrong, intelligent, hard working Jacob was to soon face years of looking after sheep day and night, consumed by the frost at night. Truly he was brought down, that he might be exalted.

Gen 29:4 *Jacob said to them, My relatives, where are you from? They said, We are from Haran-* Jacob apparently didn't know how close he was to Haran.

There would've been no informative signposts on the road of the type we are used to. He addresses them as "brothers", a standard Middle Eastern form of address; but he could have sensed that he was drawing near to where his relatives lived. He was psychologically set up to expect a meeting of his relatives and his future wife, by a well- just as had happened to Eliezer in choosing a wife for Jacob's father. So he was hopeful that these indeed might be his relatives.

Gen 29:5 *He said to them, Do you know Laban, the son of Nahor? They said, We know him-* Laban was Nahor's grandson, but Hebrew genealogies frequently skip generations. The identification of Laban with Nahor is significant, in that Nahor is specifically defined as an idolater. Jacob's marriage back into the family of origin must be read as continuing a long line of such failure. Abraham was to separate from his native land and family, in order to be given a new land and family / seed. But he was very reluctant to do so. And Isaac and Jacob likewise were. But despite this refusal to fulfil the apparent conditions for the promises to be fulfilled, God still as it were drove forward His purpose to fulfil them. By grace alone.

Gen 29:6 *He said to them, Is it well with him? They said, It is well. See, Rachel, his daughter, is coming with the sheep-* The structure of the Hebrew language seems to reflect something of God's way of thinking. In Biblical Hebrew, there's no term for "yes" in replying to a question. Instead, the person answering repeats the question. Thus here Jacob asks: "Is he well?"; and the shepherds reply "Well". God's way of saying "Yes"

to our prayers / requests is to repeat back to us as it were our requests; and thus the form and wording of our prayers becomes in some sense important; for what we ask for is what we will receive back, if He answers positively.

"Rachel" means "ewe", identifying her with her sheep. Jacob's heart would have been in his mouth, expecting to meet his future wife. The fact Laban used his daughter to water the sheep indicates that he was not wealthy. For this was the work of slaves. And if one young woman could control his entire flock, his flock was not large. We reflect how Laban had been made rich by the lavish presents given him in return for his sister Rebekah marrying Isaac. Back then, Rebekah had shepherded and watered the flock. But despite Laban's avarice, his economic position had apparently not progressed much. I suggested on Gen. 24 that Laban only agreed to the quick marriage of his sister because he wanted the expensive gifts on offer. But desire for wealth has no lasting effect, as we see here. We also reflect that Jacob was from a very wealthy family; and he was marrying in to a relatively poor family. His 14 years of slave labour for his wives was therefore a bringing of him down from his previous soft and prosperous life.

Gen 29:7 *He said, Behold, it is still the middle of the day, not time to gather the livestock together. Water the sheep, and go and feed them-* Jacob displays here the typical zeal and acumen of the Abraham family. The shepherd girls were wasting time, as he saw it; they should water the animals and then take them for

feeding, rather than losing feeding time milling around the well with them. However it may be that Jacob wanted to meet Rachel alone, or at least, without the presence of the male shepherds; and he therefore took the initiative to get these men watering their flocks, so that he could meet Rachel without them. He was absolutely psychologically set up to expect that he would be meeting his future wife.

Or Jacob could be read as accusing the men of being lazy- perhaps he thought they were hired hands, and were gathering the animals together to water them and then return them to their stalls. But, he considered, it was too early in the day to be doing that.

Whatever, Jacob was driven to observe that what they were doing with the flocks was not, to his mind, very wise. He comes over as hard working and knowledgeable about pasturing animals. And then... Rachel, the beautiful shepherd girl, appears on the scene. Herself the very picture of hard work; her name meaning 'ewe', she is associated with the sheep. He was psychologically set up to fall in love with her. And yet my suggestion is that he would have been better off marrying into the Canaanite worshippers whom Melchizedek had pastored, rather than into an idolatrous family. Of whom Rachel turned out one of the most fanatic idolaters. But that was his choice, and we see God confirming him in it, and setting him up to fall headlong in love with Rachel and marry into that unbelieving family. We are indeed confirmed in the way in which we wish to go.

Gen 29:8 *They said, We can't, until all the flocks are gathered together, and they roll the stone from the well's mouth. Then we water the sheep-* They may be alluding to some local custom; for Jacob alone could move the stone. It wasn't that they couldn't budge the stone. Perhaps they were fearing evaporation from the well or water warming if the stone was left off for too long. But see on :7 and :10.

Gen 29:9 *While he was yet speaking with them, Rachel came with her father's sheep, for she kept them-* This is emphasized (:7 too). "Coming with the sheep" would have restimulated images of his mother Rebekah coming with her father's sheep to a well near Haran. The record very cleverly presents Jacob as bound to fall in love with Rachel at first sight, and indeed he does.

Gen 29:10 *It happened, when Jacob saw Rachel the daughter of Laban, his mother's brother, and the sheep of Laban, his mother's brother, that Jacob went near, and rolled the stone from the well's mouth, and watered the flock of Laban his mother's brother-* As explained previously, Jacob was psychologically set up to fall in love with Rachel at first sight. We don't read that he fell in love on first sight, but rather that he moved the stone. He had been psychologically set up to expect that like his father, he too would find a wife in Laban's family (Gen. 28:2), and God would bless him in his mission (Gen. 28:15). So when he finds that one of the pretty shepherd girls he meets by a well is in fact Laban's daughter, his heart and whole psychology would have been elated. And so he finds the physical

strength to impress the girl by shifting the heavy stone; or, as suggested on :8, to upset the local customs of only moving the stone once all the flocks were gathered. And then the stress and relief issues forth in the tears of emotional breakdown (:11). This has absolute credibility in psychological terms and confirms the internal veracity of the inspired record.

We see reflected here Jacob's psychological domination by his mother- Laban is three times called "his mother's brother". And he followed his mother's weaker side too. Rebekah rejected the promise of Gen. 25:23 in ch.27; as Jacob in Gen. 33:3-5. There is sustained emphasis on Jacob's obedience to his parents, especially to his mother (Gen. 27:8,13,43; 28:7). The whole story is a foretaste of the issues involved with Christians and parental expectation in our day. It might not be going too far to say that he grew up far too much under her thumb; he meekly obeyed her faithless suggestion that he deceive his father into granting him the blessing, content with her assurance that it would be mum's sin, not his (and I imagine her pecking him on the cheek as she gave him the tray with Isaac's food on). No wonder he fell madly in love at first sight, when he first saw the girl he knew his mother wanted him to marry. Jacob introduces himself as "Rebekah's son" (29:12), although it would have been more normal to describe himself as Jacob ben-Isaac. 29:10 labours the point three times that Laban was "his *mother's* brother". The fact Deborah, his mother's nurse, was taken under the wing by Jacob, further suggests his very close bond

with his mother; he buried Deborah under Allon-Bachuth- 'the oak of his (Jacob's) weeping' (Gen. 35:8). Jacob struggled to accept his father's God as his God. And yet he in so many ways is portrayed as deeply influenced by Rebekah his mother.

Gen 29:11 *Jacob kissed Rachel, and lifted up his voice, and wept-* That he should break down in tears is absolutely in line with the psychology of the situation which I have outlined so far in this chapter. The pressure release would have been enormous, mixed with joy that the apparently chosen wife for him was very beautiful. And yet God's intention was that he should marry Leah, not Rachel. Jacob was being led this way to try to teach him that marriage is not about the flesh but the spirit. For Rachel never comes over as very spiritually minded, indeed she was so attached to the family idols that she stole them when the family left Laban's encampment.

Gen 29:12 *Jacob told Rachel that he was her father's brother, and that he was Rebekah's son. She ran and told her father-* We note his self-identity as "Rebekah's son"- not Jacob ben-Isaac, as would've been the usual introduction. See on :10. Her running was another connection with how Rebekah, Jacob's mother, had likewise run from the well back to her father with the news.

Gen 29:13 *It happened, when Laban heard the news of Jacob, his sister's son, that he ran to meet Jacob, and embraced him, and kissed him, and brought him to*

his house. Jacob told Laban all these things- Again the similarities are so clear with Eliezer's visit to get Rebekah as a wife for Isaac. Circumstances do indeed repeat in human lives, so that we might discern the principles and lessons.

Gen 29:14 *Laban said to him, Surely you are my bone and my flesh. He lived with him for a month-* We recall Laban wanting Rebekah to stay with them about a month before agreeing to marry Isaac. As noted above, the similarities with the marriage of Rebekah are so clear. But the spiritual aspect wasn't paralleled at all. To continue that, Jacob ought to have explained that Rachel would have to leave the land of the east and return to the *eretz* with him; and he should have pointed out to everyone that he had had a vision at Bethel which had assured him that this was God's program for him, and he wished to remain part of it. But the spiritual side of things was quite lacking. He apparently only saw a pretty girl who restimulated his feelings for his mother.

We note that "my bone and my flesh" means 'blood relative', and the same term is used of our relationship to the Lord Jesus within His body (Eph. 5:30). This is indeed a challenging level of intimacy; our relationship with Him is no mere occasional hobby. In a very detailed study of this language, the theologian Henricus Renckens concluded: "In Israel, in order to say that someone was a blood relation, one said: "He is my flesh and my bones" (Gen. 29:14; Jud. 9:2; cp. Gen. 37:27; 2 Sam. 5:1; 19:13 ff.; Is. 58:7)" (H. Renckens, *Israel's Concept of the Beginning: The*

Theology of Genesis 1-3 (New York: Herder & Herder, 1964) p. 228). This is how close we are to the Lord Jesus- blood relatives. This language could in no way be justified if Jesus were God Himself in person.

Gen 29:15 *Laban said to Jacob, Because you are my brother, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me, what will your wages be?-* Laban had been given a fortune in the ten camels' worth of expensive presents and metals which he had been given when Rebekah married Isaac. But his avarice is clear. He saw in Jacob a good worker. We meet here the idea of 'serving', and in the next verse, the idea of older and younger siblings. Jacob had laboured wrongly and in his own strength to bring about God's prediction that between him and his brother, the elder would serve the younger. The word "serve" is so repeatedly used about how Jacob served Laban (:18,20,25,27,30; 30:26,29; 31:6,41; Hos. 12:12). Jacob had so wanted the blessing to come true, of his older brother serving him. But he never really got that in his life, and he was made to realize what serving your brother or relative [Laban] was really like. He was being made to understand how Esau would have felt if he had served Jacob as Jacob intended. We too are taught how things we once hankered after would've been, had they come true. And this is why the motif of elder and younger siblings is included in Jacob's experience of "serving", to remind him of the whole drama in his own earlier life about the elder serving the younger.

Gen 29:16 *Laban had two daughters. The name of the elder was Leah, and the name of the younger was*

Rachel- See on :15. If we are to assume these were his only daughters, then he had not been greatly blessed with children. Laban is presented as focused on material wealth and blessing, and yet never really achieving it as he wished, despite his schemes. And Jacob ought to have learnt from that.

Gen 29:17 *Leah's eyes were weak, but Rachel was beautiful in form and attractive-* The reference could be to weak eyesight, which was a feature of the Abraham family. Or the reference could be to how Semitic peoples value vivacious, sparkling eyes; Rachel had these, but Leah didn't. Leah was "in appearance dull" [another acceptable translation] in comparison to Rachel. Again we see that Jacob's attraction to Rachel was of the flesh.

Gen 29:18 *Jacob loved Rachel. He said, I will serve you seven years for Rachel, your younger daughter-* Jacob had been promised that he was to "let people serve you" (Gen. 27:29) and yet he effectively said he didn't want that promise, by serving Laban for a wife (29:18,25,27); at the end he was brought through life's experiences to see that the promises are the basis of life, and that we must let God fulfill them to us. Seven years labour was a significant dowry; the once wealthy Jacob, apparent heir of Isaac's huge wealth, was now reduced to a penniless man in love, willing to sign himself up for seven years hard manual labour in order to get married. It was a huge comedown, and he must have wondered at times how God's promise "I will be with you" would really work out, as it certainly

seemed to have little cash value through all those years; "for a wife he kept sheep" (Hos. 12:12).

The deal was clearly defined- it was for "your younger daughter", perhaps stressed because Jacob was aware of the tradition to marry off the elder daughter first. He ought to have realized that it was God's plan he marry Leah, and seeing she was weak eyed, possibly an invalid, he would've served fewer years for her. But he wanted to go his own way and marry the pretty but less spiritual girl, and he suffered for it.

Gen 29:19 *Laban said, It is better that I give her to you, than that I should give her to another man. Stay with me-* The implication could be that she was already promised to "another man" but Laban was prepared to cancel that agreement. In this case, we again are left with the impression that Jacob was Divinely intended to marry Leah and return with her to his father's house in peace. But he wanted to get around that and have Rachel, and so the whole sorry saga unravelled further; and yet through it all, God worked to build up His people from such unspiritual beginnings. Just as He does with us.

Gen 29:20 *Jacob served seven years for Rachel. They seemed to him but a few days, for the love he had for her-* This may seem commendable, but we must remember the observations already made that it was the Divine 'Plan A' that he marry Leah. Instead he was obsessed with Rachel and making God's purpose work out in such a way that would reinforce his own desires. In essence, this temptation is present with all God's

children. That same kind of obsession had led Jacob and Rebekah to defraud Esau of the birthright and blessing. See on :2.

Gen 29:21 *Jacob said to Laban, Give me my wife, for my days are fulfilled, that I may go in to her-* We note that he didn't sleep with his betrothed for seven years, which is commendable. The fact Jacob had to take the initiative in asking Laban for his betrothed may already hint at a reluctance on Laban's part. Jacob's term "my days are fulfilled" sounds as if he had counted the days; to still feel like this toward Rachel after seven years of betrothal indicates a besotted love for her, although I have suggested earlier that this was an obsession which was ignoring the fact God had clearly intended him to marry Leah and then return to the *eretz*. See on :2.

Gen 29:22 *Laban gathered together all the men of the place, and made a feast-* Laban was perhaps expecting some attempt by Jacob to take Rachel by force, or otherwise make a scene. So he gathered all the local men to be present. Surely they knew what was being planned. See on :27 "we". The Hebrew for "feast" is literally "a drinking", and this would explain why Jacob didn't realize he had slept with Leah rather than Rachel.

Gen 29:23 *It happened in the evening, that he took Leah his daughter, and brought her to him. He went in to her-* Surely one reason that Jacob disliked Leah subsequently was that he understandably felt she had played a conscious part in the deception. As noted

on :32 and :34, she seems to have truly loved Jacob and wished that he would be joined to her in love. He clearly didn't feel joined to her nor love her, at least initially. However it's hard to imagine that Rachel didn't get wind of the conspiracy, and was not in some way part of it too. We are to suppose that in the earlier part of the ceremony, Rachel was acting the part of the bride; and then, as stated here, only in the evening, when Jacob was drunk, was Leah brought to Jacob. The idea was clearly that once Jacob had slept with her, he had to have her as his wife. So Rachel was surely involved in the deception. After all, where was she whilst all this was going on? What did she feel, what did she say?

Gen 29:24 *Laban gave Zilpah his handmaid to his daughter Leah for a handmaid-* Laban gave Jacob his castoff maidservant, rather than Leah having her own maidens, as happened with Rebekah. This was somewhat of an insult, and an attempt to get power over Jacob in this way too. Zilpah was apparently given to Leah before the evening, if these verses are chronological. So she too was part of the deception. Jacob must have felt so alone, but that was all part of the Divine plan- to bring him to Him, just as He did at the vision of the ladder at Bethel.

Gen 29:25 *It happened in the morning that, behold, it was Leah. He said to Laban, What is this you have done to me? Didn't I serve with you for Rachel?-* We naturally enquire why only "in the morning" did Jacob realize the deception. I suggest he may well have been drunk; as noted on :22, "feast" is literally 'a drinking'.

This would form a parallel with how Jacob had given Isaac his father wine when he likewise deceived him, under cover of the darkness of Isaac's blindness.

Why then have you deceived me?- Jacob was verbalizing the thoughts and words of Isaac and Esau whom he had deceived. The truthful answer was more or less: 'For money / material advantage'. And that was the answer which Jacob had to give to the same question asked of himself.

Gen 29:26 *Laban said, It is not done so in our place, to give the younger before the firstborn-* The obvious response is that he should not have therefore contracted with Jacob for her. There is however evidence that this tradition of only giving the elder first could be waived if the elder was in some way deformed or blind; and there is the possibility that Leah was indeed like this, which would explain why it was Rachel and not Leah who was out with the sheep when Jacob first met her. It would also explain why Laban was at such pains to marry her off; and why Jacob specifically made the contract stating that Rachel was the younger daughter. So in every way, Laban had deceived Jacob, just as he had deceived his own father.

Gen 29:27 *Fulfill the week of this one, and we will give you the other also for the service which you will serve with me yet seven other years-* The "we" connects with "the men of the place"; see on :22. This really left Jacob trapped; he had to agree. His obsessive love for Rachel had led him into the position; whereas if he

had married Leah as it seems God planned, then he wouldn't have gotten into the impossible situation he was. For marrying two sisters was not only immoral, it was going to give rise to a miserable domestic life. He, the one time heir to all Isaac's huge wealth, was indeed brought very low.

Gen 29:28 *Jacob did so, and fulfilled her week. He gave him Rachel his daughter as wife-* He had a Divinely provided opportunity here to accept Leah as the wife God intended, and return home to the *eretz,* trusting God to keep His promise of bringing him home in peace. But his infatuation with the unspiritual Rachel and his pride led him to agree. And so many spiritual people have become obsessed with an unspiritual partner, leading to many wasted years, and frustration of the Divine possibilities for them. And we all miss Divine possibilities and potentials.

Gen 29:29 *Laban gave to Rachel his daughter Bilhah, his handmaid, to be her handmaid-* As noted on :24, unlike Rebekah, Rachel was not given her own virgins to assist her, but rather her father's ex. We notice that Bilhah and Zilpah were "his" handmaids. No mention is made of his wife. They may well have effectively been his women on the side, perhaps having had his children, and were therefore a way of exercising control over Jacob's family. To later have children by the ex-mistresses of his hated master would've been so emotionally painful for Jacob.

Gen 29:30 *He went in also to Rachel, and he loved also Rachel more than Leah, and served with him yet seven*

other years- Jacob was under the one man: one woman ideal of Genesis; and yet he evidently didn't take this too seriously. His mad infatuation with Rachel meant that he thought nothing of polygamy. The idea of accepting one's married circumstances for the sake of principle was obviously foreign to our Jacob. Many aspects of the Mosaic Law were already in place before it was pronounced to Moses; the prohibition on marrying a second wife who was the sister of the first wife could well have been known among God's people in Jacob's time, seeing that it was a precept based on the principles of Eden (Lev. 18:17,18). "It is wickedness" was God's comment to Moses, and there is no reason to think that His essential moral judgment on this kind of thing has ever changed much. Yet Jacob thought nothing of breaching this command, and committing this "wickedness".

Likewise, Dt. 21 was clear that when in a case when a man had two wives and loved one and hated the other, and the firstborn son was from the hated / loved less wife... he was not to promote the firstborn of the loved wife to be his firstborn, and to demote the firstborn by the hated wife. But this is precisely what Jacob does. He demotes Reuben in favour of Joseph and in fact Joseph's sons: "Now your two sons, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you into Egypt, are mine; Ephraim and Manasseh, even as Reuben and Simeon, will be mine" (Gen. 48:5); Reuben "was the firstborn; but, forasmuch as he defiled his father's bed, his birthright was given unto the sons of Joseph the son of Israel:

and the genealogy is not to be reckoned after the birthright" (1 Chron. 5:1). The connection is so precise that we can assume that Dt. 21 is warning Israel to not do what Jacob did. Jacob, the founding father of Israel, was far our of step with the spirit of God's law. The two passages are clearly connected; Dt. 21:17 uses the term "the firstborn of his vigour", just as in Gen. 49:3 about Reuben being the firstborn of Jacob's vigour.

Leah's reaction to Jacob's evident favouritism for Rachel was to become obsessed with having children, maybe because she saw that as a guarantee Jacob wouldn't divorce her. But from that, was built up the house of God in Israel. When she failed to conceive, she panicked that she was barren, and therefore asked Jacob to have intercourse with her servant Zilpah in order to produce children. During the first seven years of her marriage, she produced 6 sons and 1 daughter. This indicated not only an incredible fertility, but also a high womanly status in those times, seeing that she produced so many more sons than daughters. The fact none of her children died in babyhood was also remarkable for the times. Her fertility became proverbial in later Israel (Ruth 4:11). And yet despite this evident fecundity, whenever she thought she had failed to conceive, she asked Jacob to have intercourse with Zilpah. Despite knowing her fertility, Jacob did so. It seems he sacrificed basic principles in order to placate a neurotic wife who, it would seem, he didn't care too much for anyway, seeing he made it plain he had never wanted to marry her in the first place

(29:25,31). The whole sense that we get is that his relationship with Zilpah was unnecessary, and he was far too casual in his attitude to it. Leah felt she was "the hated one" (:33), she was "afflicted" (:32- depressed, miserable, victim of injustice). She was in a miserable position; Jacob loved her sister, her father had used her, and Jacob clearly felt she was guilty of going along with Laban's deception of him. Leah's father didn't love her, but had used her to trick another man in order to get more labour out of him on his farm (and Gen. 31:14-16 reflects how she felt unloved by her father). She was unloved by her husband, and jealously hated by her sister, who was more attractive than her. Rachel surely also hated Leah for having played her role in Laban's great deception on the wedding night. Leah was, in a word, unhappy. And she was unhappy all her life because of what happened on one night. The names of her children express her hope her husband would now love her, or be joined to her; she was married to a man who was not joined to her in the spirit of God's intention for marriage in Genesis. Gen. 29:32: "'Yahweh has seen my misery'; and she said, 'Now my husband will love me'"; Gen. 29:33: "Yahweh heard that I was unloved, and so he has given me this one too". Gen. 29:34: "This time my husband will become attached to me, because I have borne him three sons". She longed for love and true connection with her husband, and thought having children was going to lead to that. Children were going to be her only source of human love; she was obsessed with having children. She recognizes this, and her naming of

Issachar in Gen. 30:18 could mean she feels like a whore: "God has given me my reward for giving my slave-girl to my husband". Indeed it would seem from Gen. 30:20 that Jacob didn't live with Leah, but just slept with her when she begged him to, in order to produce children: "Now my husband will live with me, because I have borne him six sons. She named him Zebulun". But all this miserable existence was used in God's bigger purpose to build up the house of Israel. She had been railroaded into a marriage with a man who didn't love her; she felt it was all so unjust and unfair. And in a way it was. The only way forward for her, as she saw it, was to produce many sons for Jacob. And she produced six in seven years, plus a daughter. And none of them died, all survived to adulthood. Which was amazing for those days. Psychologically, she as it were willed herself to do this. Her firstborn Reuben means "See! A son!", as if he fulfilled her all consuming desire to produce a male offspring for Jacob. But out of the misery of her depression and tough situation, she was used to build the house of Israel. And so many dead end situations and unhappy lives are used by God to extend His purpose and to build up His people on this earth. The unloved, the used, those manipulated, or who suffer all their lives for the misjudgment of 'going along' with something unethical one evening... are used powerfully by God. What Leah did at the wedding was somewhere on the border between sin and misjudgment, somewhere between 'going along' with her father [and probably other males in her male dominated society], and the moral failure of not standing up to what was wrong.

We've likely all met people like that, whose unfortunate lives were defined by an evening and night many years ago. Whereas Rachel, lover of idols, died before she reached Bethlehem, the birthplace of the Lord Jesus. She dies giving birth to Benjamin, whom she names Ben-Oni, 'son of my sorrow / affliction'; the very word used about Leah's affliction / sorrow / depression. In fact, Rachel didn't at all have a happier life. Gen. 30:1 could well be a suicide threat by her. She had the same affliction / sorrow that Leah had. Life is not so awesome for anyone; but for the believer (Leah), that sorrow is used by God for greater ends, whereas as Paul puts it, "the sorrow of the world works death" (2 Cor. 7:10). The isolation, depression, dead ends, lack of love, being used by others... is all used towards a far more glorious end. But those whom we may feel have a great life, like Rachel- *they go through the same feelings. But unproductively, for nothing.* Their lives are not in fact awesome at all. The "Leah" type tend to look at the "Rachel" type on social media and think that "Rachel" is having an awesome life... but they suffer as much as "Leah". Whether or not Leah was culpable for going along with Laban's deception, it was after all the failure of a day or so, into which she had been railroaded. And she was suffering because of it all her life. Indeed Jacob was the deceiver who was now being deceived; he had used the darkness of his father's blindness to switch the two brothers, himself and Esau; and now, in the darkness of that night and his own drunkenness, he was himself deceived, and two siblings were switched. Jacob's anguished "Why have you deceived me?" (Gen.

29:25) is the cry of Esau; he was being made to feel how he had made Esau feel. Again, the issue is related to 'Who is the firstborn?'. The firstborn must be recognized as the firstborn and treated as such. And the answer to his question is so clear to us readers: 'Because that's what you did to your father and your brother'. It's clear enough, but from Leah's viewpoint- 'Why me? Why mess up my life just to complete this Divine circle of 'measure for measure'?'. The idea of going to Haran and marrying Laban's daughters was so that Yahweh would make Jacob "fruitful, and make you multiply so that you become a group of nations" (Gen. 28:3). Rachel was barren, so the channel for the fulfilment of God's purpose and promises was clearly through Leah. But on the ground, she only became fruitful because of the awful background situation she found herself in, driving her psychologically to become hyper fertile and to produce male offspring; as she felt that having many male children was the only answer to her dead end situation. Leah's situation appears to be alluded to in Ps. 10:12-14, where she is presented as programmatic of us all: "Rise up, O LORD; O God lift up your hand; do not forget the oppressed... But you do see! Indeed you note trouble and grief... that you may take it into your hands; the helpless commit themselves to you". There are other allusions to Leah's "affliction" as representative of all God's children (Ps. 9:12; 25:18; 31:7). "The Lord has *heard* that I am hated" (Gen. 29:33) is perhaps alluded to when David often thanks God for 'hearing' him, the hated one (Ps. 30:11 and often when he says to the effect 'They all hated me, but You heard me').

Jacob had set out for Laban's home intending to get married, and God had promised to be with him. It could be argued that he should have accepted God's choice in Leah, especially as she clearly loved him (:32,34). But he wished to force things through his way, and so ended up marrying two sisters and serving at least 14 years of his life in relative poverty.

Gen 29:31 *Yahweh saw that Leah was hated-* Jacob maybe did hate Leah because of her part in the deception practiced on him. But it is also possible to understand "hated" as meaning "loved less", he loved Rachel more than he did Leah (:30), and he possibly speaks with fondness of Leah after her death at Gen. 49:31. This is a Semitic idiom, and is seen by comparing Lk. 14:26 [hating parents] with Mt. 10:37 [loving parents less than Christ]. We note that God gave these barren women children because He felt sorry for them, as part of His sovereign purpose; there is no mention of the women and Jacob praying to God for children, as there is with Jacob's parents. Again we see the establishment of God's people Israel upon the basis of unilateral grace and Divine pity rather than human spirituality. One loved and one hated / loved less was exactly the situation God was in with Jacob and Esau (Rom. 9:13). And Jacob was the beloved one. He ought to have perceived this, and responded with a similar grace.

And he opened her womb, but Rachel was barren- Scripture repeatedly speaks as if God notices things and only then responds (also in Jonah 3:10; Ex. 3:4; Dt. 32:19; 2 Kings 14:26; 2 Chron. 12:7; Ez. 23:13;

Is. 59:15 cp. Lk. 7:13). If He knew in advance what they were going to do, this language is hard for me to understand. I suggest God so enters our experience that in a sense He may limit His omniscience just as He can limit His omnipotence.

Gen. 29:31 speaks of closed and open *wombs*, not fallopian tubes. There was no need for inspiration to produce a document that was so scientifically correct that the generation contemporary with it couldn't cope with it. Indeed, the whole beauty of God's revelation is that He takes people from where they are as they are, and leads them on to higher truth without having head on confrontation with them regarding their incorrect scientific understandings.

Gen 29:32 *Leah conceived, and bore a son, and she named him Reuben-* The root meaning fallacy arises from the false assumption that a word has a "proper meaning", which can be reached by tracing it to its source. But seeing that words change their meaning, the 'root' of a word isn't really much of a guide to its meaning. Take the English word 'nice', i.e. pleasant. In the eighteenth century this word meant 'precise' rather than 'pleasant'; and it actually derives from the Latin *nescius*, meaning 'ignorant'. It's obviously wrong to read the word 'nice' in a contemporary book and think that the word therefore means 'precise', or, even more accurately, 'ignorant'. Context and usage is obviously the key. I'm constantly amazed at how respectable lexicons like Liddell & Scott use the term "prop.", i.e. 'proper meaning', with the evident understanding that the earliest use of a word is

somehow its real, 'proper' meaning. This is an utter fallacy. The meaning of the names of Jacob's children are parade examples. Reuben means 'behold a son', but the inspired narrator suggests a meaning of 'affliction' because the consonants with that word are vaguely similar to 'Reuben'.

For she said, Because Yahweh has looked at my affliction-'Looking upon' is an idiom for answered prayer or God's response to human request (Gen. 6:12; 29:32; Ex. 2:25; Dt. 26:7; Jud. 6:14). Now apply this to how in Lk. 1:48 Mary exalts: "he hath looked upon..." (ASV). All this implies that Mary like Elisabeth had requested to have this child- to bear Messiah. She sees what God has done as "His mercy" to her (Lk. 1:50), as if a request had been granted.

For now my husband will love me- The way Leah comments about Jacob to Rachel "Now will my husband love me... now this time will my husband be joined unto me" (Gen. 29:32-34) all imply that Jacob's marriage was in a mess. Jacob, Rachel and Leah were indeed a tangled web. God joins together a married couple; yet Jacob, apparently, neither loved his wife Leah / Rachel, nor had allowed God to join him unto her in emotional bonding. And there he was, having kids by his domestic servants as well, his boss's cast-offs. And God *loved* this man, and worked with him *so* patiently, to build the house of Israel His people. There's comfort enough for every man and woman, reading this record. The way Jacob is simply described as the one whom God loved in Ps. 47:4 is majestic in its brevity. God loved Jacob. He really did.

Simple as that. When Jacob is the one presented as having struggled with God more than any other.

We can assume from Gen. 49:4 that Reuben later committed incest with Bilhah, his father's concubine. Leah was perhaps obsessed with the fact she had produced Jacob his firstborn son, and came to dote inappropriately upon her son. Whatever happened, the seeds of his later perversion would've been sown in early childhood. Truly Jacob's family life was a tragedy and a moral shambles; and yet out of it came the twelve sons who would be the foundations of God's people. This perhaps was to encourage us as that people, that we were created and are saved by grace and not by any moral purity or spirituality of our own.

Gen 29:33 *She conceived again, and bore a son, and said, Because Yahweh has heard that I am hated, He has therefore given me this son also. She named him Simeon-* Her hopes that Reuben's birth would lead to Jacob loving her (:32) were misplaced; he still "hated" her, perhaps literally because of her willing part in the wedding night deception, or perhaps in the sense of being loved less; see on :31. If "loved less" is the sense of "hated", then we can conclude that Leah wanted to be loved *more* than her sister. The whole situation was an unspeakable agony for Jacob, but it was of his making. The wife God gave him was Leah, but he was so infatuated with Rachel that he ignored God's clear movement, and suffered for it in his family life. And yet out of that came God's people, Israel.

Gen 29:34 *She conceived again, and bore a son. She said, Now this time will my husband be joined to me, because I have borne him three sons. Therefore his name was called Levi-* She seems to have truly loved Jacob and wished that he would be joined to her in love. He clearly didn't feel joined to her, for the reason noted on :23. The Genesis record has explained that God would help a married couple cleave or be joined together (Mt. 19:6). The fact Jacob and Leah were not "joined" therefore reflects how Jacob or perhaps both of them were resisting God's joining power.

Gen 29:35 *She conceived again, and bore a son. She said, This time will I praise Yahweh. Therefore she named him Judah. Then she stopped bearing-* She actually started bearing again later (Gen. 30:17); but here we have an example of Scripture reporting things as they seemed at the time; we see something similar in the language of demons being cast out in the New Testament. The way Leah uses the Yahweh Name implies something positive about her level of spirituality; and despite feeling unloved by her husband, she felt she had something to praise Yahweh for. We don't see this kind of spirituality in the record of Rachel.

GENESIS CHAPTER 30

Gen 30:1 *When Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, Rachel envied her sister. She said to Jacob, Give me children, or else I will die-* Proverbs often alludes to historical portions of the Hebrew Bible, and Prov. 30:15,16 surely alludes here; the barren womb says "give!" and will never be satisfied. I suggested throughout Gen. 29 that God intended Jacob to marry Leah and return in peace to the *eretz*, but instead he became obsessed with Rachel, the vivacious but unspiritual beauty. He dreamed for 7 years of hard labour about marrying her, and instead of returning home with Leah, he agreed a further 7 years labour for Rachel. And now it turns out she is barren, and she seems to have little love for Jacob. She would've had to play a conscious part in the deception at the wedding ceremony when she was replaced with Leah. And Jacob's domestic life becomes really awful, married to two sisters, with the younger bitterly jealous of the older. And that was surely exactly how Jacob had been with Esau, seeking by all means to get equal to him, taking the birthright and then deceiving Esau out of the blessing of the firstborn. Rachel clearly blames her infertility upon Jacob, and unlike Rebekah, doesn't bring God into the situation; although fertility is from God (1 Sam. 2:6).

The repeated promise was that the Abraham family would become many, and their children would be fruitful. But there is a repeated theme that all the women struggled with fertility. This is typical of

God's work. He achieves His purpose through our inadequacy. We are being prepared to rule the entire cosmos in glory, the rulers of the age to come; but we are not fit for purpose, just as Sarah, Rebekah and Rachel were infertile and yet were to build the fruitful and widely multiplying people of God; and those who are fit for purpose, like the very fertile Leah, are persuaded that they are not. As we learn in Job, He seals up the hand of man, that His hand might work. The infertility of the matriarchs is repeatedly seen as being from God (Gen. 16:2 and see Jacob's response to Rachel). So He did this, in order to glorify His ability to make fertile and bring life from death.

"I will die" is a phrase used in contemporary inscriptions to describe how a barren woman felt her line would die out if she didn't have a male heir. Probably that is the sense here- but she is displaying lack of faith in the promises about Abraham's seed. She was failing to learn the lesson of Sarai being barren when the promises of the seed were first given. It could be that she was threatening suicide unless Jacob got her pregnant, and his anger was in response to the unreasonable placement of such guilt upon him. We again see, as discussed on Gen. 29:30, that both Rachel and Leah were equally miserable- but Leah ends up concluding "From now on, I will praise the Lord", whereas "the sorrow of the world brings death" in Rachel's case.

Gen. 48:7 records Jacob stating simply that "Rachel died by me", before she reached Bethlehem, birthplace of the Lord Jesus, the great seed of Jacob. Surely Jacob

has in mind Rachel's threat "Give me children or else I will die" (Gen. 30:1). "By me" could mean 'next to me', but if that were the intention then this would've been stated differently in Hebrew. The plain meaning of the text is that she died by Jacob, because of Jacob. He took false guilt over Rachel's barrenness, right to the end. Instead of giving up trying to 'make it work' through Rachel, and accepting Leah as his intended wife. And the promised seed, the Lord Jesus, came through Judah, through Leah, and not through Rachel. Hence she died without reaching Bethlehem, His birthplace. And so many die still desperately trying to make things work in their own strength, when God clearly intended another path. Rachel was obsessed with producing male children for Jacob, just as Leah was. Rachel was unsatisfied by Jacob's amazing love for her, unimpressed by his 14 years labour for her. But it was this obsession to produce male children which was used by God, dysfunctional as it was, in order to found His people of Israel. And He works through similar human dysfunctions to the same end.

Gen 30:2 *Jacob's anger was kindled against Rachel, and he said, Am I in God's place, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?*- Jacob saw the infertility as coming from God, and insisted Rachel was wrong to blame him for it; after all, he had had children by Leah her sister, and Rachel's suggestion he sleep with her maid was a tacit recognition that Jacob was fertile and the problem was with her. These words of Jacob were surely remembered by Rachel, and she

quoted them to her son Joseph when she finally did become fertile; for he alone uses this Hebrew phrase in comforting his brothers that he is not going to judge or punish them, as he [like Jacob] was not "in God's place" (Gen. 50:19). Joseph learnt from the story of his mother's previous barrenness that we are not in God's place; and in practice, this helped him in the psychologically gigantic task of forgiving his brothers and not seeking to judge them.

Gen 30:3 *She said, Behold, my maid Bilhah. Go in to her, that she may bear on my knees, and I also may obtain children by her-* Jacob should have been aware from the situation with his grandfather Abraham and Hagar that this was unwise; Sarah's suggestion to Abraham brought nothing but grief and family feuding, and it was clearly a lack of faith in the Divine promises. But Jacob wouldn't learn from that, and again went along with the suggestion of the woman in his life. He failed to learn from his mistake in listening to his mother's idea about deceiving Isaac into blessing him. It could be that Rachel was in fact alluding to the example of Sarah as a precedent (Gen. 16:2); whereas the spiritually perceptive would have seen this as an example which ought not to be followed. The implications of "also" imply this. What Sarah did was wrong, but it was used as a justification. Just as Solomon justified his many women and horses on the basis of his father David's weaknesses. Bearing 'on my knees' is something reported often in the texts uncovered from those times. The idea was not simply that the newborn baby was placed on the knees of the

surrogate mother after birth, as a sign of ownership. This ritual was done because it was thought it would give fertility to the surrogate mother. So again we see how pagan notions were used to achieve fertility; and the material later in the chaper about achieving fertility amongst animals are parallel to this. In this case "And I also may obtain children by her" would be read as meaning that Rachel hoped she would herself fall pregnant because of what her handmaid had done. Leah seems to think the same; she too had her handmaid sleep with her husband, and she sees her own next pregnancy as being because of this: "Leah said, God has given me my hire, because I gave my handmaid to my husband. She named him Issachar" (:18).

Gen 30:4 *She gave him Bilhah her handmaid as wife, and Jacob went in to her-* The woman slept with was considered a "wife", which was why Laban was at such pains to get Jacob to sleep with Leah at the wedding ceremony. if Jacob had remained with Leah as the Divine provision, he would not have slipped into polygamy let alone marrying two sisters; nor would he know slip further into the immorality of having children outside marriage. Once he had agreed to this with Rachel, he was going to have to with Leah.

Gen 30:*5 Bilhah conceived, and bore Jacob a son-* Conception is portrayed as being of God, and although all the circumstances surrounding this were unspiritual, clearly God worked through it in order to create the basis for His future people of Israel.

Bilhah and Zilpah had had children by Laban (Gen. 37:2). As with Leah and Rachel, a spaghetti junction, deeply dysfunctional situation involving four miserable women... was used to found Israel. Jacob must have hated Laban because of the deceptions, and to sleep with women whom Laban had also slept with and had children by... would've been very humilitating for him.

Gen 30:*6 Rachel said, God has judged me, and has also heard my voice, and has given me a son. Therefore called she his name Dan-* Rachel felt that God hearing her voice was Him judging her. The prayer of the poor is judged by God in His response to them (Ps. 10:7,8). Coming boldly before the throne of grace in prayer is again judgment seat language (Heb. 4:15). Our attitude to God in prayer now will be our attitude to Him at the judgment; we are 'bold / confident' before Him now, and we can be 'bold' then (1 Jn. 2:28). Before the throne of grace we find grace to help (Heb. 4:16); whereas we will "find" [s.w.] mercy in the day of judgment (2 Tim.1:18). Each time we receive grace to help before the throne, we are anticipating the judgment day scenario.

But did God really judge and justify Rachel through this? I'd say this was just her imagination. We note however that in :1,2 she had left God right out of the question, but now Rachel brings God into it, and even prayed for the child to be conceived. But her naming of it "Dan", Divine judgment, seems rather bitter. She may have meant that God was judging her sister somehow, as the next child refers also to her

wrestling with her sister (:8); or liking to imagine that God judged her faithful to Him just because she had suggested her husband sleep with another woman.

Gen 30:7 *Bilhah, Rachel's handmaid, conceived again, and bore Jacob a second son-* As Leah had apparently stopped having children, maybe because Jacob stopped sleeping with her, Rachel was apparently set on getting an equal or greater number of children. And so the use of Bilhah was not just a one off situation but was intended to be ongoing. The race for numbers is reflected in Leah then getting Jacob to sleep with her maid, and naming the first child "A troop comes!" (:11).

Gen 30:8 *Rachel said, With mighty wrestlings have I wrestled with my sister, and have prevailed. She named him Naphtali-* Translated literally, 'Naphtali' means 'my wrestling / struggle'. Again, it was all about Rachel and her feelings. Translated into German, this would be *Mein Kampf*, the title Hitler chose for his autobiographical ranting that led to the destruction of multi millions of lives worldwide in World War 2. Such intense self obsession drags everyone else into it, and we see this with Rachel. See on :13.

Another take on this is to see 'Naphtali' as Naphtalijah, the wrestling of Yah. "Mighty" is literally *elohim*, and the parallel with the 'Yah' form is another nail in the coffin of the hypothesis that there were different source documents for Genesis, one using Yahweh and the other *elohim*. The name suggests that her struggles with her sister were her struggles with

God; and the whole idea is lived out in Jacob's wrestling with an Angel, which was effectively his wrestling with Isaac, Laban and Esau. We sense that the women named their sons in reflection of their obsession with the male baby race, as they desperately vied to be the one who produced the most boys. The names reflect how *they* wished to see things, rather than how they were in reality. For Rachel hardly "prevailed" just because her maid had another son. Leah had more male sons at this point and 'won' the race to get the most. It's an example of where people drag "God" into their interpersonal struggles; her struggle with her sister became a struggle with God. She may not have "prevailed" as she meant, in a human sense. But the similarities with Jacob's wrestling with God continue when we realize that "prevailed" is the same word used of how Jacob did "prevail" over "God" in the form of the Angel he wrestled with (Gen. 32:25,28). He started off trying to force his way upon God, but because he repented, he did in another sense prevail over the Divine judgment which was what Jacob deserved; Jacob prevailed over God in that he asked for grace and was granted it, and in this he becomes our example (Hos. 12:4 s.w.). Rachel's struggle with God perhaps went according to the same pattern.

Gen 30:9 *When Leah saw that she had finished bearing, she took Zilpah, her handmaid, and gave her to Jacob as a wife*- This is recorded from the viewpoint of Leah (see on Gen. 29:35); she actually did bear more children. But the Bible at times records things

from the viewpoint of the subjects of the narrative, without correcting their limited perspectives. Which is why we have the language of demon possession in the New Testament. Leah didn't actually stop bearing at this point, so we see again her obsession with producing male offspring for Jacob- an obsession, dysfunctional as it was, which was used by God in His bigger purpose of founding His Israel from Jacob's many sons, all born to used, manipulated and miserable women who all had an obsessive interest in producing male children for him.

Gen 30:10 *Zilpah, Leah's handmaid, bore Jacob a son-* As noted on :12, she gave Zilpah to Jacob "as a wife", but the inspired record still calls her "Leah's handmaid". For that is who she was, and Jacob's behaviour with these women was not really moral.

Gen 30:11 *Leah said, How fortunate! She named him Gad-* Or, "a troop cometh!" (AV), which is how Jacob understood the name in Gen. 49:19. As noted on :7, the race for numbers is reflected in Leah getting Jacob to sleep with her maid, and naming the first child "A troop comes!". The names of the sons who were to be the basis of the people of God, Israel, were anything but spiritual. And yet God works through such unspirituality to form His people, as He does to this day. Indeed "Gad" was a local deity (as in Is. 65:11); even Leah, the more apparently spiritual, was caught up with paganism at this time. Perhaps Jacob alludes to this in his final comment upon Gad; that he would be overcome by a troop rather than leading a

troop, although he would overcome at the last (Gen. 49:19).

Gen 30:12 *Zilpah, Leah's handmaid, bore Jacob a second son-* Although Leah gave Zilpah to Jacob "as a wife" (:9), the Divine commentary is that she remained Leah's handmaid. God worked through a situation which was hardly moral, just as He does today.

Gen 30:13 *Leah said, Happy am I, for the daughters will call me happy. She named him Asher-*

Asher meams 'my happiness'; as with Isaac, the name reflects the mother's feelings at the time. It is all about her at that moment and not anything further. The personhood for the child appears irrelevant; the child served a function for the parent, and the name reflects that. All the sons of Jacob have names which reflect this feature. No future hope was expressed for the child, but rather for the mother. Thus Joseph means adding, because Rachel hoped that now she had had one son, she would have another. Likewise Zebulun, now will my husband dwell with me; Gad, a troop of more children will come from me. There is no spiritual dimension in these names. Thus we read of Dan and not Daniel. God's Name doesn't feature in the names of the sons. But from all this came the Israel of God.

The Lord's mother constantly quoted and alluded to Old Testament scripture. All this reflects the level of spiritual ambition to which Mary attained. Her

self-perception went beyond that of Leah to whose words she alludes ("all women call me fortunate / blessed", Gen. 30:13 LXX). Elisabeth had said the same: "Blessed are you among women" (Lk. 1:42). But Mary perceives that all generations, not just all contemporary women, would call her blessed. So when Mary spoke of all generations calling her blessed, her mind was here in Gen. 30:13: "the daughters [i.e. future generations of them] shall call me blessed" , and yet at the same time on Zilpah the servant maid [cp. Mary the handmaiden] bearing Asher [happy]. These women were seen by Mary as representatives of her. And yet Leah was mistaken in thinking that all would call her "blessed" because her servant girl had got pregnant again, and she now had the lead in numbers of children compared to her sister. The one who would be called "blessed" by all was not her, but Mary; the real seed was the Lord Jesus, not these sons who were being born as part of a race for superiority between two bitter sisters in a polygamous marriage.

Gen 30:14 *Reuben went in the days of wheat harvest, and found mandrakes in the field, and brought them to his mother, Leah. Then Rachel said to Leah, Please give me some of your son's mandrakes-*

Rachel wanted the mandrakes so that Jacob would sleep with her. But initially as soon as his seven years service for Rachel had finished, he asked Laban to give her to him so that he might sleep with her. Clearly things had changed. Jacob was being brought down, so that he might arise as the true Israel of God.

The evidence seems to be that until he left home, Jacob was influenced by the idolatrous thinking of the surrounding world. For the next 20 years, he more tacitly went along with these things being practiced in his family. The mandrakes used by Leah were not just aphrodisiacs, but were believed to have the magical ability to induce fertility. This pagan nonsense was believed by Leah and Reuben, and tacitly gone along with by Jacob- although God worked through these wrong ideas, apparently uncorrected, in order to bring about His purpose. And yet from these mixed up women God built the house of Israel.

The love apples were understood to induce a man to sleep with a woman. This would suggest that Jacob had stopped sleeping with his wives, perhaps in response to their endless desire to keep trying to get pregnant in their race for numbers of children, when both had fertility problems and both had already produced children for Jacob, even if fictively in Rachel's case. This again shows how low Jacob was brought; he had signed away 14 years of his life due to his obsession with Rachel, impatiently asking Laban to give him Rachel so that he might sleep with her (Gen. 29:21). But now he didn't sleep with her. Because Rachel wants the mandrakes so that Jacob would sleep with her. He is pictured as a man returning tired from work in the field, wanting to eat and as it were watch telly and go to bed early as he had another early start.

We note it was Reuben who brought the mandrakes, and it was also Reuben who slept with Rachel's maid

Zilpah (Gen. 35:22). Perhaps this was done at Rachel's bidding, in order to notch up another pregnancy; perhaps Reuben had fallen out with his mother Leah and was as it were on Rachel's side at the time. This is where jealousy and lack of spirituality lead- to a downward spiral of behaviour which affects more and more people.

Gen 30:15 *She said to her, Is it a small matter that you have taken away my husband? Would you take away my son's mandrakes, also?-* One is hard pushed to find women-only scenes in contemporary literature written during Biblical times. The women are presented in terms of the men with whom they inter-relate. Yet Elizabeth and Mary are recorded as having a conversation with no male present (Lk. 1:39-45); and there are other such passages in Scripture (Gen. 19:32,34; 30:14,15; Ex. 2:1-10; Jud. 5:28-30; Ruth 1:6-2:2; 3:16-18; 4:14-17; 2 Kings 5:2,3). The narrative of the women at the tomb and the resurrection is another example (Lk. 23:55-24:4). In all these passages, the reader is invited to share the woman's perspective.

It could be that the "She said to her" is Rachel talking, not Leah (although the AV translates otherwise), complaining that Reuben had actually stolen her son's mandrakes and taken away her husband. In this case, Rachel was also not being slept with at this time, hence she too wanted the mandrakes. She taunts Leah that Jacob is "my husband" whom Leah has "taken away"; perhaps Jacob came to love Leah more, because she had produced more children for him than Rachel.

At least, Rachel perceived it that way. I have argued throughout Gen. 29 that God intended Jacob to marry Leah and return to the promised land; his obsession with Rachel made his path home so much harder. If indeed he did become more attached to Leah, then this would really demonstrate that all too late, he was accepting God's rightness in the matter.

If the speaker is Leah, then the complaint that Rachel had 'taken away' her husband is harder to understand. Maybe she legalistically held to the idea that as she was the firstborn, and married Jacob a week before Rachel did, therefore she was the legitimate husband. This is the kind of contorted reasoning that arises out of family jealousy and stress. It was no secret that Jacob loved Rachel and had agreed to marry her, but Laban and Leah had played a cruel deception on Jacob, with Leah clearly wanting Jacob and also in love with him. So Leah can hardly complain that Jacob loved Rachel more than her.

Rachel said, Therefore he will lie with you tonight for your son's mandrakes- This could be mocking, as if to say "Jacob really loves me, not you; he'll only sleep with you for the mandrakes, not because he loves you". And so we have yet another insight into the endless feuding between the two, with every word and action being twisted and used as a source of conflict. The Hebrew can also be translated, as GNB: "Rachel said, "If you will give me your son's mandrakes, you can sleep with Jacob tonight"". This would indicate that Rachel placed huge faith in the power of the coveted mandrakes to make Jacob sleep with her; clearly his

love for her had abated, a far cry from serving seven years to have sex with her, as Gen. 29:21 implies.

Gen 30:16 *Jacob came from the field in the evening, and Leah went out to meet him, and said, You must come in to me; for I have surely hired you with my son's mandrakes. He lay with her that night*- The record brings out the bizarre nature of what she did. Jacob did not then dwell with her (:20). He was on his way to Rachel's tent, but she says that because she has mandrakes, he must come to her tent. But the idea of mandrakes was that they were supposed to attract a man to a woman. But she reasons as if mere possession of them was enough to demand he come and sleep with her. The language of "hire" is used in :18, where Leah bitterly suggests she feels like a prostitute, hired by God to have sons. And here she implies she is treating Jacob as a male prostitute. The language is very low, and reflects how Leah felt; she was so addicted to having sex with Jacob because she so wanted to get pregnant by him, and so she came to feel like a whore. This was how far love went right out of the whole situation, because Jacob didn't follow God's direction- which was to marry Leah and return to the promised land. The scene is so reminiscent of Jacob's father Isaac walking in the field, apparently one evening, and meeting Rebekah, in a love marriage that only Heaven could have arranged. The same Hebrew words are used in Gen. 24:65. But this meeting with Leah was for Jacob similar but tragically different; tragic, for a man so clearly dominated by a desire to replicate his parents' relationship.

Gen 30:17 *God listened to Leah, and she conceived, and bore Jacob a fifth son-* Maybe Leah prayed to God and He heard, and her attempt to use the mandrakes was just a surface level thing, and the essence was her prayer. Or it could be that God looked with pity at the whole situation with the mandrakes, and 'heard' the whole situation as if it were Leah's prayer to Him. Because God responds to our spirit, our overall situation, sometimes He does things which seem to be an answer of prayers which were not properly believed in by the person who prayed. Examples include: Gen. 30:16,17; Ex. 14:10,11 cp. Neh. 9:9; Ps. 31:22; Lk. 1:13. Presumably the Father reads circumstances as prayers, even though the believer's faith in their actual verbalized request may be weak.

Leah got pregnant because she prayed (:17). Not because of the mandrakes. We see here clearly how their human efforts to become fruitful were misplaced, but God still gave the fruitfulness. And it will be the same with the fertility of the animals. God often does give blessing even when it is wrong ly sought. Because He is more subtle than to simply reward righteousness and punish or refuse badly motivated desires. But later reflection leads us to marvel at His grace. Just as Abraham and Isaac must have later done after they received material blessing right after their unfaithfulness.

Gen 30:18 *Leah said, God has given me my hire, because I gave my handmaid to my husband. She named him Issachar-* Although she apparently prayed and God heard her (:17), Leah's attitude is so wrong.

She considers that God has rewarded her for allowing her maid to sleep with her husband, when this was immoral. The idea of being given her "hire" is however decidedly cynical; she feels as a prostitute, paid by God, who later gives her a dowry (:20). Yet despite this unspirituality, God listened to her and gave her conception (:17). This is His grace, focusing upon the positive, and patiently bearing with our anger and immaturity. God saw through all this (the bitterness of post natal depression?), through her recourse to using mandrakes to induce fertility... and God discerned the real faith in her. And this God is our God, who likewise bears with our Christian hypocrisy.

Isaachar means something like 'So these are my wages'. Her husband Jacob had been paid her and her sister as his wages. And so she sarcastically quips that she too was a worker for wages, and her kids were her wages. This reflects how deep in her psyche was the fact that she had been paid as a wage. Again we see no spirituality, just an obsession with producing children for her own psychological and personal needs. But from all this unspirituality came the people and Israel of God.

We note that the women named the children themselves, which was unusual at the time; and the names reflected their struggles and feelings. One gets the impression that Jacob was a distant father and wife, at least at this stage, finding the domestic scene unbearable and staying out at night with the flocks (Gen. 31:40). See on :3 for how Leah wrongly

believed Isaachar's conception was due to some ritual performed using her handmaid.

Gen 30:19 *Leah conceived again, and bore a sixth son to Jacob-* Notice "son". We read only of their male children, apart from Dinah, which is just the female form of "Dan". But surely there were daughters born as well, but the women didn't count them in the race to produce as many sons as possible for Jacob and thereby to acquire the ascendancy in domestic life.

Gen 30:20 *Leah said, God has endowed me with a good dowry-* We note the metaphor becomes somewhat more respectful than when she spoke earlier of God giving her her "hire" as if she was a prostitute used by God (:18). But she still mixes her metaphors, suggesting that the gift of sons from God was in fact a dowry paid, and a high price too.

Now my husband will live with me, because I have borne him six sons. She named him Zebulun- "Now will my husband live with me" surely implies that Jacob and Leah had effectively split up. He wasn't sleeping with her, hence the use of aphrodisiacs on him. And yet including Dinah, Leah managed to produce at least seven children in 7 to 14 years. This is why her fruitfulness became proverbial in later Israel. It would have been evidence enough that Leah had been the wife intended for Jacob and not Rachel; it was his insistence on forcing that through which led to so much grief.

Jacob was under the one man: one woman ideal of Genesis; and yet he evidently didn't take this too seriously. His mad infatuation with Rachel meant that he thought nothing of polygamy. The idea of accepting one's married circumstances for the sake of principle was obviously foreign to our Jacob. Many aspects of the Mosaic Law were already in place before it was pronounced to Moses; the prohibition on marrying a second wife who was the sister of the first wife could well have been known among God's people in Jacob's time, seeing that it was a precept based on the principles of Eden (Lev. 18:17,18). "It is wickedness" was God's comment to Moses, and there is no reason to think that His essential moral judgment on this kind of thing has ever changed much. Yet Jacob thought nothing of breaching this command, and committing this "wickedness". Leah's reaction to Jacob's evident favouritism for Rachel was to become obsessed with having children. When she failed to conceive, she panicked that she was barren, and therefore asked Jacob to have intercourse with her servant Zilpah in order to produce children. During the early years of her marriage, she produced 6 sons and 1 daughter. This indicated not only an incredible fertility, but also a high womanly status in those times, seeing that she produced so many more sons than daughters. The fact none of her children died in babyhood was also remarkable for the times. Her fertility became proverbial in later Israel (Ruth 4:11). And yet despite this evident fecundity, whenever she thought she had failed to conceive, she asked Jacob to have intercourse with Zilpah. Despite knowing her

fertility, Jacob did so. It seems he sacrificed basic principles in order to placate a neurotic wife who, it would seem, he didn't care too much for anyway, seeing he made it plain he had never wanted to marry her in the first place (Gen. 29:25,31). The whole sense that we get is that his relationship with Zilpah was unnecessary, and he was far too casual in his attitude to it. "Now will my husband dwell with me" (Gen. 30:20) surely implies that Jacob and Leah had effectively split up. The evidence that Leah bore seven children in seven years is evident from the chronology of Jacob's life, reflecting as it does the traumatic Jacob, Rachel, Leah relationship.

Gen 30:21 *Afterwards, she bore a daughter, and named her Dinah-* As noted on :19, their obsession was with bearing sons in order to acquire dominance in the family. Even "Dinah" is just the female form of her son Dan. She probably bore other daughters, but only Dinah is mentioned because of her later significance in the narrative. 'Dinah' is the female form of 'Dan', and again we see how the sisters were competing and wrestling with each other. It was as if Leah thought she could as it were get equal with Rachel over the birth of Dan by having a female 'Dan'.

Gen 30:22 *God remembered Rachel, and God listened to her, and opened her womb-* In :1,2, Rachel is presented as not having God on her horizon at all. But the misery of the whole situation maybe led her to pray to her husband's God. Or it could be that she didn't specifically pray, but rather God took pity upon her, reading the whole sad situation as prayer,

and responded to her. Psychologically, it appears sometimes true that when a barren woman adopts a child, she then becomes fertile. But the stress here is that the pregnancy was from God, no matter what psychological processes were at work. And yet again we find the language of the day being used- her "womb" was opened, when it was her tubes not her womb that was opened. Just as the language of demons is used in the New Testament, so here the limited scientific perspective of the time is reflected in the narrative; because God is concerned with relationship and communication with people, rather than purist truth for the sake of it.

Gen 30:23 *She conceived, bore a son, and said, God has taken away my reproach-* As noted on :22, Rachel was brought through her domestic misery, in her case being the loser in the race to produce sons, to turn to God. Initially she lacked this dimension (see on :1,2). Her comment here is tacit recognition that her idea of getting Jacob to sleep with her maid did not in fact resolve her misery, it didn't take away her reproach. The idea of "reproach" occurs nearly 100 times in the Old Testament, mainly reflecting a fear of reproach or shame. It was and is so important in Middle Eastern society.

Gen 30:24 *She named him Joseph, saying, May Yahweh add another son to me-* Rachel's use of the Yahweh Name, when initially she didn't have God on her horizons much at all (see on :1,2), is all reflective of how through the endless Divine patience, Rachel herself grew in spirituality. Even though she was so

attached to her father's idols that she stole them when she finally left home. Yet "Joseph" can also mean 'one who takes away', and this would have been in reference to how she felt now her reproach at being barren was taken away (:23).

Gen 30:25 *It happened, when Rachel had borne Joseph, that Jacob said to Laban, Send me away, that I may go to my own place, and to my country-* Jacob seems to have seen Rachel giving birth as the sign that he could now return home in peace. But this was a self-assigned signal. I explained throughout Gen. 29 that he ought to have married Leah alone, and returned with her to his country. It is commendable that after 20 or 40 years, Jacob still sees the *eretz* as "my place... my country". His heart was in the land of promise. However, "my place", Jacob's particular *maqom*, often used of a sanctuary or altar, may have in his own mind referred to Bethel, where he intended to build a house or sanctuary for God if indeed he returned to his father's house in peace. *Maqom* is used three times in Gen. 28:11 alone, and often throughout the record of Bethel in Gen. 28.

We note that it is twice recorded that Isaac "sent away" Jacob (s.w. Gen. 28:5,6). Now, Jacob wants to be "sent away" by Laban. We get the impression of a man who needed direction; which might explain why he remained to long with Laban. He ought to have returned to the *eretz* in faith in the promise that God would bring him back there; and yet he was perhaps lacking in initiative, perhaps the result of "living in

tents" with his parents and being dominated by his mother.

When Jacob asks Laban to allow him to leave, he uses very similar words to those used by Eliezer when he asked Laban's family to let Rebekah leave to go marry Isaac:

Eliezer in Gen. 24	Jacob in Gen. 30
"Send me back" (*shallehuni*) 24:54	"Send me away" (*shalleheni*) 30:25
"Let me go (*shallehuni*) that I may go (*w'eleka*) to my master" 24:56	"that I may go (*w'eleka*)... let me go (*w'eleka*)" 30:26
Laban's blessing of Rebekah 24:60	Laban's blessing of his grandchildren and daughters 31:55
The servant "went his way (*wayyelak*)" 24:61	"Jacob went on his way" (32:1)

Intentional or not, the inspired record strives to bring out the similarities. The lesson is that culturally, Jacob was very much his mother's son- just as those raised

Christian today may be culturally Christian, and yet not truly accept their parents' God as theirs until they pass through the valley of the shadows, the school of hard knocks. See on Gen. 28:7.

Gen 30:26 *Give me my wives and my children for whom I have served you, and let me go; for you know my service with which I have served you-* See on Gen. 25:31. The suggestion could be that Laban effectively kept Jacob's wives and children within his encampment, refusing to honour the agreement regarding serving for them. It could be that Laban had further manipulated Jacob by demanding he serve also for the children. It was a way of keeping a person in endless servitude; and yet Jacob had been promised that the elder would serve him, the younger. His extensive experience of servitude was surely to help him fuller appreciate what this promise meant. And Laban's continual deceit of him regarding what was rightfully his... taught him what he had done to Esau.

Genesis was written by Moses primarily for the wilderness generation. So much in the story of Jacob would have demonstrated the wisdom of the various laws that generation were given- to release servants after the seventh year (Ex. 21:2), and especially the command not to marry two sisters (Lev 18:18) nor for a polygamist to have a "hated" [loved less?] wife (Dt. 21:17).

Gen 30:27 *Laban said to him, If now I have found favour in your eyes, stay here, for I have divined that Yahweh has blessed me for your sake-* We see here the

mixture of paganism and spirituality which was apparent amongst all of them. Laban "divined", by paganism, that there was the blessing of Yahweh in all this. Anyone who used enchantment [s.w. "divined"] was to be killed under the Mosaic law (Lev. 19:26; Dt. 18:10), and it's hard to think that God's basic morality was radically different before the law was codified by Moses.

We have here a primary fulfilment of the promise that Abraham's seed would be a blessing to the nations; for Laban was blessed because of his association with the seed. Laban is presented as a "foreigner" in relation to Jacob; see on Gen. 31:15). And the covenant promises we likewise have received have their primary fulfilments in this life, as well as the promise of eternal inheritance in the future Kingdom of God on earth. And yet the grace of it all is that at the time, Jacob was largely still in unbelief. He had been promised that he and his seed would be a blessing to those of north, south, east and west; and straight after that promise he continues his journey *to the east* and is a blessing to those there (Gen. 28:13-15; 29:1). See on :39.

Gen 30:28 *He said, Appoint me your wages, and I will give it-* We recall how initially, it was Jacob who offered the terms of wages to be given. Clearly Jacob is now in the ascendancy, with Laban desperate for him to stay. Jacob reasons in the typical Eastern way: 'I intend to do this, but if you pay me that, then I will not do so, at least not straight away'. Perhaps Jacob took some time to think about the possibilities, coming up with the mad idea of increasing his wealth

by pagan practices if he could obtain large numbers of spotted animals.

Gen 30:29 *He said to him, You know how I have served you, and how your livestock have fared with me-* The repeated idea that "You know I have served you" (:26) may be referencing some claim by Laban that Jacob had actually not finished his service and owed him more time.

Gen 30:30 *For it was little which you had before I came, and it has increased to a multitude-* The allusion is to the promises to Abraham about multiplication and blessing, and that there would be blessing for those who blessed his seed. Laban had hardly blessed Jacob, and yet Jacob perceives now that the fulfilment of those promises is by grace; for even Laban had picked up some of the promised blessing. "Before I came" is Heb. "at my footsteps" which reflects again how Jacob feels now in the ascendency over Laban, and is sensing that the elder (Laban) is serving the younger (Jacob) by Divine blessing, according to the promises to Abraham.

Yahweh has blessed you wherever I turned. Now when will I provide for my own house also?- Jacob saw God as the one who gave physical blessing; he saw the promises of Divine blessing as primarily about material blessing. He missed their basic import, which was of forgiveness and the Kingdom (Acts 3:26,27). However it is also true that God did bless Laban materially because of Jacob. This was very much part of the promise that Abraham's seed would be blessed

and be a blessing to others. But Jacob didn't himself accept Yahweh as his God at this point. We see again how the covenant promises to Abraham had initial fulfilments even when the people were not committed to the covenant. Just as the preconditions of leaving land and family, in order to receive another land and family, were not obeyed by Abraham and Isaac- and yet they still received the blessings promised. It's rather like how the Lord shared His table with sinners, in order to lead them to repentance. The goodness of God leads us to repentance, as Paul says. God therefore doesn't simply reward righteousness with blessing, and disobedience with cursing. He is more subtle than that. Because He wants to elicit our obedience. And He does that by blessing us even when we are disobedient- so that the thoughtful soul will *later* perceive and marvel at His grace, and respond. It is so that God is outside of our kind of time, but beyond that, we see here how grace operates. And we too are to relate to others beyond an immediate response to their acceptance or rejection of our message and love for them.

Jacob thought that God had blessed Laban in fulfillment of the Abrahamic promises, simply because Laban's flocks had greatly increased; he saw the "blessing" as physical prosperity. He was sharing the over-physical view of the promises which his father Isaac held, who mentioned the promised blessing as essentially concerning material blessings in this life (Gen. 28:3,4). As with David and Solomon, the weakness of the parents was repeated in the child.

This perception of the promises as only for his personal, physical benefit was clearly evidenced in the way in which he was so bent on obtaining the birthright from Esau.

"Now when will I provide for my own house also?" Jacob slyly asked Laban, and on this pretext spent then next six years using some pagan myth about cattle breeding to take Laban's cattle from him and amass them for himself. What he came to think of as "his flock" (Gen. 31:4) was a reflection of his mad materialism; he used all his (considerable) human strength to achieve it, and then turned round and said he had only been serving Laban with it (Gen. 31:6). Yet these very words are alluded to in 1 Tim. 5:8 as an example for faithful men to copy; indeed, Paul says, if you don't do as Jacob did, you're worse than a pagan! We see here the great focus of God upon what is positive in a person, just as elements of Sarah's bitter and sceptical words are quoted in the New Testament with approval. And yet the Spirit through Paul also recognized the weak side of Jacob; "evil men... deceiving and being deceived" (2 Tim. 3:13) is a sure reference to Jacob.

Gen 30:31 *He said, What shall I give you? Jacob said, You shall not give me anything. If you will do this thing for me, I will again feed your flock and keep it-* Jacob asks not for wages, but for Laban's spotted cattle. Perhaps Jacob was beginning to think more of his grandfather Abraham, for "You shall not give me anything [because God has blessed me]" was the spirit of Abraham after his victory near Damascus (Gen.

14:23). He may well also have been sardonically alluding to Laban's words that he 'could not give' Jacob his younger daughter Rachel despite his having served for her (Gen. 29:26).

Gen 30:32 *I will pass through all your flock today, removing from there every speckled and spotted one, and every black one among the sheep, and the spotted and speckled among the goats-* Stipulating the terms of his own contract recalls how Jacob did likewise when offering to work seven years to marry Rachel. The similarity is such that it would seem Jacob is here trying to get equal with Laban for the deception done to him. He is seeking to deceive Laban, as Laban deceived him. But he later wouldn't wish Esau to so take revenge for the deception he had performed, and would've remembered this with shame. Jacob believed that through some pagan ritual, he could increase the numbers of the spotted animals; and perhaps he also had some idea to get them to breed unspotted offspring if they conceived in front of white rods. This has no truth to it and yet God worked through it. We must look for the positive in others, and like the Lord in His attitude to demons, bear with them and recognize faith when we see it. God worked through the pagan superstitions of Jacob regarding the speckled animals, and through the wrong beliefs of Rachel and Leah regarding their children... in order to *build* the house of Israel. He didn't cut off His dealings with men at the first sign of wrong understanding or weak faith or mixed motives.

This will be my hire- Leah has just used this word in claiming that one of her pregnancies was her "hire" from God (:18 s.w.). All of them had the idea that good and wise behaviour led to directly related reward or "hire". Such justification by works was and is a way of feeling good about ourselves. Jacob was yet to learn the reality of grace; that it's not about measure for measure. The *wages* of sin are contrasted with the *free gift* or grace of God in Rom. 6:23 and elsewhere.

Gen 30:33 *So my righteousness will answer for me hereafter, when you come concerning my hire that is before you. Every one that is not speckled and spotted among the goats, and black among the sheep, that might be with me, will be counted stolen-* See on Gen. 25:31. This attitude that *he* could bring about the fulfillment of God's promises through his own efforts was the outcome of Jacob's self-righteousness; see on :32. This is clearly shown when he says that his righteousness had caused his cattle to increase, although he later came to see that this increase of cattle was due to his receipt of the promised Divine blessing (Gen. 32:10). The RSV renders "righteousness" as "honesty"; Jacob had been far from honest in his life, and although he was intimating to Laban that he was going to gain from this because of his honesty / righteousness, Jacob does come over as very hypocritical and self-righteous. Jacob's plan was to use a pagan myth to multiply his initial flock of speckled and spotted goats and black sheep. "Black sheep" had the same connotations in those days as the term has even today; the flock of Jacob / Israel were black sheep, and yet

God blessed and multiplied them and they became the foundation of His people.

Gen 30:34 *Laban said, Behold, let it be according to your word-* The idea could be as the AV implies, 'You must be joking, I wish it might be so advantageous for me!'. Jacob was aiming to multiply his numbers of black sheep, which were despised by other shepherds and surrounding society, to such a degree that he would redefine and change the negative perception of black sheep and spotty goats. And he succeeded; as in a wider sense the Father did likewise through His work with black sheep and spotty animals.

Gen 30:35 *That day, he removed the male goats that were streaked and spotted, and all the female goats that were speckled and spotted, every one that had white in it, and all the black ones among the sheep, and gave them into the hand of his sons-* It's hard to know whether this refers to Laban or Jacob. If to Laban, then he was removing even the spotted animals so that Jacob would have even fewer of them to start off with, hence Jacob accuses Laban of deceit in this matter (Gen. 31:7). Yet despite this, from the tiniest group of black sheep and spotty goats... God's purpose of blessing worked out, just as it does today, despite all Jacob's misunderstandings and wrong attitudes.

Gen 30:36 *He set three days' journey between himself and Jacob, and Jacob fed the rest of Laban's flocks-* The last phrase shows that despite Laban removing even the spotted animals, Jacob acted with integrity in still

feeding Laban's flocks. Although he had not been honest in the past, Jacob was learning integrity.

Gen 30:37 *Jacob took to himself rods of fresh poplar, almond, plane tree, peeled white streaks in them, and made the white appear which was in the rods-* Jacob's superstitious use of mandrakes and poplar rods was used by God to fulfill the physical aspect of the promised blessing; he used "white" rods to take power from Laban, the "white" one ["poplar" and "Laban" are related words in Hebrew], and to give him white animals- and God worked through it. Poplar had pagan associations (s.w. Hos. 4:13); Jacob was acting according to paganic beliefs and yet claiming it would be Yahweh's blessing of him. He later came to see how wrong he was, and that the increase had not been due to the paganism but alone due to Yahweh's actual blessing (Gen. 32:10). "Almond" is *luz*, the name of the place where God had first appeared to him and promised him blessing (Gen. 28:19); again we see a hopeless mix of paganism and tokenism along with his awareness of Yahweh's promises, wishing to make those promises come true through his paganic rituals. The streaks in the rods were supposed to encourage the streaked animals to bear prolific numbers and quality of streaked offspring if they looked at them whilst mating. This has no truth in reality, although similar myths about looking at certain colours or images during intercourse are around to this day in some parts of the world.

The whiteness of the rods appears to be thought to serve the same function as the mandrakes; a kind of

animal aphrodisiac. And the point is that all these human attempts to fulfil the promise of fertility are inappropriate. Indeed the record almost pokes fun at them, not least in Jacob returning from work to be told he must sleep with a woman because her son had gathered mandrakes. The account of Jacob and his wives is clearly parallel with that of Jacob and his flocks. That is the key to understanding the otherwise enigmatic and difficult story of Jacob's breeding experiments. This becomes even clearer if we understand the rods as being inserted into the female animals so that they "conceived / became heated upon the rods" (Heb.). Jacob returns from a day doing this kind of thing with animals to have his wives trying to get pregnant by him through mandrakes.

The connection between rods and a phallic symbol is clear in Hos. 4:10–12: "Truly, they shall eat, but not be sated; they shall fornicate, but not be satisfied, because they have forsaken obeying Yahweh; fornication, wine, and new wine take the mind of my people: it consults its rod, its phallus directs them". This is confirmed if indeed the 'poplar rods' are *styrax officinalis* (Arabic *lubnay*), which are called in this way from the secretion of a milk-like gum. All this was pagan idolatry, and Jacob uses these things.

Gen 30:38 *He set the rods which he had peeled opposite the flocks in the gutters in the watering-troughs where the flocks came to drink. They conceived when they came to drink-* The idea was as in some primitive cultures today, that by looking at something at the time of intercourse, the offspring will become like it. He

wanted his spotted animals to produce more spotted offspring; and then through the procedure of :40-42 to produce white offspring (although :33 might preclude that view), and so he made them conceive whilst looking at white peeled poplar rods, which would've been "streaked" in the sense that there was some white and some dark showing on the rods.

Gen 30:39 *The flocks conceived before the rods, and the flocks produced streaked, speckled, and spotted-* See on :38; on :37 I suggested that they conceived *upon* the rods. The flocks conceiving in front of the rods / poles surely has reference to the concept of the pagan *asherah* poles, before which worshippers had sex. Jacob was clearly influenced by this wrong idea- and yet God patiently worked with him through it. Jacob appears to have had the idea that what a female thinks about or has before her eyes at the time of labour or conception, will affect the child. And so he peeled stripes off the rods so they appeared 'ringstraked', or striped- in the belief that if the female cattle gave birth or conceived looking at them, then the offspring would be striped too, like the striped rods. However, the connection with the asherah poles suggests that Jacob's beliefs were associated with pagan fertility myths, rather than faith in Yahweh the God of his fathers. Mic. 1:5 explicitly links Jacob's sin with idolatry. Jacob's superstitious ideas about the cattle mating were used by God to teach Jacob that He would bless him physically, as a prelude to the more important spiritual blessings which Jacob was later to value. There is no biological truth at all in what he did.

Jacob wasn't specifically corrected for his paganism; later he must have realized the depth of God's grace in still working through him at this time, still giving him blessing. God blessed the whole thing so that it worked, apparently confirming Jacob in it by a vision (Gen. 31:10-12). God will go along with things which are poorly motivated and even incorrect- but in order to finally teach that it was all nonsense, and His gift of grace shines through it all. We have been introduced to this whole mixture of paganism and Yahweh's involvement in :27, where Laban's pagan 'divination' was used by Yahweh. And now we are reading of how Jacob's pagan ideas were likewise used by Yahweh, to bless him.

Gen 30:40 *Jacob separated the lambs, and set the faces of the flocks toward the streaked and all the black in the flock of Laban: and he put his own droves apart, and didn't put them into Laban's flock-* Although initially Laban had separated many of the spotted and speckled and put them in his own flocks, Jacob still had the job of looking after them. Perhaps the idea is that Jacob made his black sheep look at the white sheep in Laban's flock, which he had at his disposal as he cared for them. His theory was that the offspring of black sheep whilst mating would be speckled if they conceived whilst looking at white sheep. This has no truth to it, but God used it to provide Jacob with great fertility and blessing of speckled animal offspring. We recall that "Rachel" means "ewe lamb", so perhaps the idea was that he was using the Rachel situation, under God's hand, to still produce blessing.

Gen 30:41 *It happened, whenever the stronger of the flock conceived, that Jacob laid the rods before the eyes of the flock in the gutters, that they might conceive among the rods-* The "stronger" may refer to the flocks who were more strongly in heat, and the "feeble" those who were less in heat. The peeled rods would have secreted gum and resin which were thought to be aphrodisiacs. The situation here is introduced by Leah using mandrakes to get Jacob to sleep with her and to induce her fertility; the mandrakes didn't give fertility, God alone did. And yet God worked through this bunk science and quasi-faith to give blessing. And again here. The "stronger" or more virile animals were Jacob's because they had been supposedly influenced by the aphrodisiacs from the rods; but as we learn in Gen. 31:10-12, the blessing was from God and not from that.

Gen 30:42 *But when the flock were feeble, he didn't put them in. So the feebler were Laban's, and the stronger Jacob's-* The idea is not the "the feeble cattle..." were not put in. Rather, those who had less virility at the time because they had not been put into intense heat by the supposed aphrodisiac effect of the rods. As noted on :40, although initially Laban had separated many of the spotted and speckled and put them in his own flocks, Jacob still had the job of looking after them. He did them no harm and didn't steal them. He simply didn't operate his pagan trick on them; and his cattle brought forth stronger animals than those of Laban, for whom he didn't place his striped rods in

their troughs. And so *relatively speaking*, Jacob's flocks were stronger than Laban's.

The blessing was due to God not the rods (Gen. 31:10-12). But the flocks would have been stressed by the separation made by Laban (:40). The differing behaviours of pure white and spotted animals *when the group is under stress* has been studied, and it has been found that the spotted will become dominant and more virile, and the unspotted less so. This on a human level may have been behind the blessing experienced. An academic article in the *Russian Journal of Genetics: Applied Research, 2011* confirms this, and actually quotes this passage in Genesis 30 as confirmation for what was observed by academics at the University of Novosibirsk, Russia: "Stress can induce piebaldness in progeny. We are able to test this statement not only experimentally, but in natural conditions. Animals with white spots are always present in the water vole population that we have been studying for many years. We regularly assessed the level of stress in this population. Indeed, the assumption that in years with higher stress more white spotted animals would be born was confirmed. Then we found that the spotted animals are more resistant to stress and outperform unspotted animals in reproduction in stressful years" (Mikhail Anatolievich Potapov, 'Evolutionary ecology of animal fertility: Five decades of studies of reproduction as a link between generations' in Russian Journal of Genetics: Applied Research · July 2011).

Gen 30:43 *The man increased exceedingly, and had large flocks, female servants and male servants, and camels and donkey-* This indicated to him that the promise to him at Bethel was coming true (Gen. 28:14). "The man" hints that Jacob was very human in all this. He used his newfound wealth from the spotted animals, and his redefinition of the value of black sheep, to buy servants, camels and donkeys. We recall how both Abraham and Isaac are recorded as being materially blessed straight after they had lied about their wives. Likewise, the use of paganism, folklore and bunk science to increase his wealth was not exactly spiritual; but God worked through it to bring about the primary fulfilment of the promises to him. Just as He so graciously works with us.

GENESIS CHAPTER 31

Gen 31:1 *He heard the words of Laban's sons, saying, Jacob has taken away all that was our father's. From that which was our father's, has he gotten all this wealth-* This recalls how Esau spoke in his heart, that he would murder Jacob; and those words were heard. Attitudes were heard as words, as they are today. Laban had doubtless misrepresented the agreement about the spotted and speckled, as noted on :8. They likely believed his story, and of course noted that the Jacob who had been a poor shepherd for 14 years had now suddenly got wealthy. The sudden wealth did of course look suspicious. The tension served to help their sisters, Rachel and Leah, to have to make a decision between Jacob and their fathers' family; and they came down on the right side.

Gen 31:2 *Jacob saw the expression on Laban's face, and, behold, it was not toward him as before-* Laban had abused Jacob for 14 years. But the sudden increase in Jacob's wealth had altered the balance of power; and no longer was Jacob legally bound to serve Laban. Laban would have sensed that he the elder was coming to serve the younger. The changed relationship became a push factor, encouraging Jacob to do what he should have done earlier- to make returning to the *eretz* a priority.

Gen 31:3 *Yahweh said to Jacob, Return to the land of your fathers, and to your relatives, and I will be with you-* The plan had originally been that Jacob would remain with Laban until Rebekah his mother sent him a message to return home. That message apparently never came, and it seems Rebekah was dead. God now replaces Rebekah for Jacob. I've noted several times that he seemed psychologically dominated by her, the stay at home mamma's boy who ended up trapped in a complex situation far from home, obsessively in love with a woman who restimulated his feelings toward his mother; and for whom he

spent 14 years in servitude. And now God replaces Rebekah; *He* specifically calls Jacob homeward, and not Rebekah. This was all part of His program to draw Jacob into a direct personal relationship with Himself, rather than Jacob passively going alone with the religion of mum and dad.

Here we have God telling Jacob whilst he lived with Laban to return to the land and people of his fathers- Canaan. This is the very opposite of Abraham's reasoning in Gen. 24:6- that the land of his fathers was Mesopotamia. The real land of his fathers was not there in Mesopotomia, but Canaan. Yet Abraham had not perceived that, for he reasons exactly the other way around. This is yet another hint at incomplete faith in Abraham, and his desire to *not* totally separate from his land and family as required.

Gen 31:4 *Jacob sent and called Rachel and Leah to the field to his flock*- Seeing they had young children to care for and bring with them, this was a major invitation. It seems from :17 that they left from "the field" without returning home. The need to all be together "in the field" was fabricated so that they could make the escape without Laban and his sons forcing them to remain.

Gen 31:5 *And said to them, I see the expression on your father's face, that it is not toward me as before; but the God of my father has been with me*- We note "my father"- not '*my* God'. Although Yahweh was still not fully Jacob's God, Jacob puts before his wives a clear choice- the god of their father, or the one true God of *his* father. There is something almost childishly proud about the way Jacob sets off *his* father against the deceitful father of his wives (:5-7). Laban mocks this almost immature homesickness in Gen. 31:30. "Has been with me" could refer to an Angelic visitation, but it is more likely referring to the promise of Gen. 28 at Bethel, that "I will be with you". Jacob was starting to see that that promise of 20 (or 40) years ago had indeed been

fulfilled; and he had vouched that if it were, then Yahweh would be his God. He still struggles with fulfilling that, as he talks about Yahweh as the God of his father, rather than his own God.

Gen 31:6 *You know that I have served your father with all of my strength-* The suggestion could be that he had served Laban with all his strength, when the implication of the first commandment was that a man should serve God with all his strength (Mk. 12:30). Now Jacob wanted to serve God and not Laban; his heavenly Father rather than "your father". The scene would have been programmatic for the wilderness generation who first heard the Genesis history; they had been called to no longer serve Pharaoh, but to escape and travel through the desert to the promised land of Canaan and serve Yahweh instead of Pharaoh. There was a period of great physical blessing upon their offspring, just as there had been upon Jacob's cattle; see on :7,21,28.

Gen 31:7 *Your father has deceived me, and changed my wages ten times, but God didn't allow him to hurt me-* The situation is similar to how God "didn't allow" the Abimelechs to take Sarah or Rebekah and sleep with them. Jacob was coming to see that there was this same unmerited, gracious activity on his behalf by the Spirit. Jacob had of course deceived his own father. He was being helped to realize how Isaac had felt; to the end he might repent the more deeply and learn the lessons. We go through similar prodding from the Lord who works also in our lives.

I suggested on :6 that Jacob's escape from Laban has similarities with Israel's exodus from Egypt and Pharaoh. As Laban "deceived" Jacob, so the same word is used of how Pharaoh dealt "deceitfully" with Israel (Ex. 8:29). See on :21.

LXX "ten lambs" could suggest 'ten lambing seasons'. Each season, Jacob offered Laban a different deal as to which types of animals he could keep; and each time, those types multiplied.

Gen 31:8 *If he said this, 'The speckled will be your wages', then all the flock bore speckled. If he said this, 'The streaked will be your wages', then all the flock bore streaked-* Laban was obviously aghast at how Jacob's flocks were growing so rapidly, and tried to amend the original agreement so that some of the increased numbers would be his. He is portrayed as an avaricious liar and deceiver; although Jacob had been little better. The difference between Jacob and Laban was simply God's grace, and Jacob's eventual openness to this.

Gen 31:9 *Thus God has taken away your father's livestock, and given them to me-* Yet Jacob was soon going to be telling Esau that he wanted him to 'take away' all his material blessings; see on Gen. 33:11. Jacob didn't steal Laban's animals, but his own flock did grow from the stock of black and spotted animals which Laban originally agreed to give to Jacob. Their increase was as it were taken away from Laban and given to Jacob. But Jacob insists this was done by God, and perhaps this is an admission that the paganism and folklore bunk science he had used was not the real cause of the great increase. He now justifies what he did as obedience to an Angelic dream (:10,11), although the dream is ill defined and unspecific about how the breeding was to be done.

Gen 31:10 *It happened during mating season that I lifted up my eyes, and saw in a dream, and behold, the male goats which leaped on the flock were streaked, speckled, and grizzled-* The explanation suggests that the wives were ignorant as to how Jacob had acquired such huge fecundity amongst his flocks. Or perhaps he is telling them to the effect: 'We thought it was all due to those pagan rituals and folklore we believed; but let me tell you, it wasn't that at all. It was from God'. There was nothing told Jacob about using the rods, bunk science or other pagan devices which he did. That was his interpretation of the dream.

Gen 31:11 *The angel of God said to me in the dream, 'Jacob', and I said, 'Here I am'-* These were the very words of response to Angelic visitation made by Abraham and Isaac. Jacob is being led into situations which they were in, and he responds as they do. His knowledge of how they responded was therefore significant; and whilst Biblical knowledge of itself will not save anyone, the more we are aware of Biblical history, the quicker we will perceive when we are in essentially similar situations and will respond correctly.

Gen 31:12 *He said, 'Now lift up your eyes, and behold, all the male goats which leap on the flock are streaked, speckled, and grizzled, for I have seen all that Laban does to you-* "Lift up your eyes, and behold..." is a promise couched in the language with which God invited Abraham to lift up his eyes and behold the land which He would give him (Gen. 13:14,15). Even whilst Jacob was trying to fulfill God's promises for Him, still half worshipping idols, God gently went along with him to teach him firstly that He *would* keep promises, and then to show Jacob the more spiritual essence of it all. The idea was that God had seen Jacob's affliction, and His response was to give Jacob huge numbers of spotty animals. But Jacob worked this out in practice through his usage of the pagan rods and other devices; but all the same, God worked through it. I see this as the first hint at Jacob''s conversion, which will become more developed over the next two chapters. He is accepting the teaching that despite all his human efforts to be fruitful, it is God who has given him blessing.

Gen 31:13 *I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar, where you vowed a vow to me. Now arise, get out from this land, and return to the land of your birth'-* The memory of 20 or 40 years ago would have been dim for Jacob, so maybe he needed reminding. It was presumably an Angel who appeared

to him at Bethel, so the Angel he now sees is saying that He is the same Angel as in the earlier vision. As noted before, Jacob originally planned to only return to the *eretz* when he received a message from his mother; but she was probably dead, and so the Angel is effectively telling him that He is now replacing Rebekah. Jacob is to grow up and relate with God as a man, directly, and not through fulfilling parental expectation. Jacob is saying that the call to return to the *eretz* came from God at the same time as the vision of amassing wealth from spotted and black animals. It could therefore have been six years before this time of final exodus. But Jacob is only now telling his wives about the vision. We sense a distance between him and both of them, and a lack of spiritual connection between them. Yet out of this dysfunctional and unspiritual background, the Father formed His special people.

So although Jacob may have forgotten his vow, God was needling him to return from Mesopotamia to Canaan- so that God could fulfil the promise and keep covenant with Jacob. Just as Abraham had been 'encouraged' to make the same journey. In Jacob's case, God worked through the totally dysfunctional situation with Laban as the push factor to make Jacob obedient and return to Canaan; just as with Abraham, it was his father Terah who wanted to emigrate from Ur and took Abraham with him. Man is not alone before the call to obedience; God nudges and coaxes us towards it. Jacob left Mesopotamia for Canaan because he feared Laban ["Because I was afraid...", :31]; not because of faith and perception that Canaan was the land of the covenant. Jacob's wives were likewise prepared by their father's materialism and abuse- they had to leave, as they saw it, in order to assure their inheritance and old age provision.

Gen 31:14 *Rachel and Leah answered him, Is there still any portion or inheritance for us in our father's house?-* There was

no statement here of love for Jacob nor Yahweh. Rather they considered that being Jacob's wives cut them out of any possible inheritance in their father's family, and so they may as well throw in their lot with Jacob. The decision making process as revealed here seems very mercenary. The idea is as GNB "There is nothing left for us to inherit from our father"- because he had spent it on himself (:15). This could mean that he had spent their dowry on himself- perhaps implying that any benefit arising through Jacob's 14 years of service to Laban should have gone to them. And there is material in the Nuzi documents which suggests this was how dowry was reckoned in those times. Hence they consider that whatever Jacob had taken from Laban (:16) was not in fact theft, but a taking of what was rightfully theirs. Or it could be that Laban had declared that he was leaving his estate to the sons he had had by Bilhah and Zilpah. We can then see again the spaggheti junction syndrome- the sons Jacob had had by those same women received nothing. There would have been huge conflict between the sons. Jacob's family was riven by conflict and dysfunction- but out of it came the Israel of God. Yahweh showed for all time how He works through human dysfunction.

Gen 31:15 *Aren't we accounted by him as foreigners? For he has sold us, and has also quite devoured our money-* We learn from this that Laban counted Jacob a "foreigner". This means that the blessing he felt from Jacob was an example of the Abrahamic blessing starting to come upon 'foreigners' (see on Gen. 30:27). It seems that as Laban ten times changed the "wages" of Jacob (:7), so he had also added to the terms of marriage. It was not only seven years service for each daughter, but also "money", or (Heb.), "silver". And he had spent that money, in ways the daughters seem not to approve of, because it has left them with nothing to inherit anyway (:14). Devouring an inheritance is the language

of the prodigal son; and yet that same parable presents Jacob as the prodigal. But the language is in places also appropriate to Laban, showing that in essence these two deceitful and materialistic men were little different. The saving difference was simply God's grace and Jacob's openness to it.

"Sold" is 'deceived' or 'tricked'. The sisters had been deceived by their father, both at the wedding night and in subsequent issues. The whole Jacob family had been both deceivers and deceived. Jacob 'deceives' Laban (:20). "Money" is a term used in the Nuzi tablets about a dowry. Laban had presumably demanded even more dowry than the 14 years of service- and had been given it, and blown it. The idea of a dowry payment in Mesopotamia was so that the father had resources to care for his daughter if for any reason she returned to live with him. Or the dowry was kept by the wives, worn as gold around their heads, in case they were divorced or widowed and needed to care for themselves later in life. Remember that divorce was very easy for men at that time, and was often practiced for petty reasons. Rachel and Leah consider that they have no assured future with their father, because he had spent their dowry money. He treated them "as foreigners"- perhaps meaning that he treated them as foreigners treated their daughters, just spending the dowry money, rather than following the local custom of keeping it in case the father had to care for his daughters again. Their decision to remain with Jacob is therefore presented as being not out of love, but from fear for their future without him. Just as Leah so wanted to have male children so that Jacob wouldn't divorce her. So out of this loveless family, God formed the Israel of God.

Gen 31:16 *For all the riches which God has taken away from our father, that is ours and our children's. Now then, whatever God has said to you, do-* They seem to reason that their father has spent all his wealth, so they have no inheritance from him

anyway (:14); therefore it's as well that God had taken some of their father's wealth and given it to Jacob. And they feel justified in taking it because they consider it to be their inheritance anyway. However, they were repeating a misunderstanding common amongst Laban's children (see on :1). Jacob hadn't stolen or taken away anything from Laban. They are saying how it appeared. He had originally had a prime flock of unspotted animals, which Jacob would look after in return for Laban's spotted animals becoming his. But God had hugely blessed those spotted animals and the herds of them had multiplied. It was only an incorrect appearance that God had taken Laban's wealth and given it to Jacob. But as with the language of demons, the Bible often records things from the perspective of the characters, without clarifying that their viewpoint is actually false or only partially correct.

Gen 31:17 *Then Jacob rose up, and set his sons and his wives on the camels-* Travel by camel would have recalled the account of Rebekah, Jacob's mother, travelling from the same area to the *eretz* on camel. Now finally Jacob was doing what God had intended he do when he first met Leah; marry her and return to the land of promise. The motivation of Rebekah was spiritual, it seems; whereas Rachel and Leah returned because they effectively had no other option, and faced poverty if they remained behind (see on :14,15). Jacob clearly would have had daughters too, although we only read of Dinah. But the focus is upon the sons; because this is to be taken as the account of when "Israel" as a nation, "the fathers", first entered the land of promise. And it was in a state of unspirituality.

We note that Jacob put his sons and then his wives on the camels, whereas when Esau moved, it is mentioned that he took his wives first and then his sons (Gen. 36:6 "Esau took his wives and his sons"). It could be argued that Jacob didn't really love

his four wives apart from Rachel. His focus was upon the sons they had produced. Whereas Esau focuses firstly upon his wives-perhaps another of several indications that on a secular level, Esau was a far nicer guy than Jacob. But Jacob the twister was the one God worked with, as Jacob had that basic faith which Esau apparently didn't. On its own, this may appear to be over interpretation; but it must be put together with many other instances of Esau appearing a 'nicer guy' than Jacob in secular terms. More forgiving, more honest etc.

Gen 31:18 *And he took away all his livestock, and all his possessions which he had gathered, including the livestock which he had gained in Paddan Aram, to go to Isaac his father, to the land of Canaan-* The AV better reflects the manic 'getting': "all his goods which he had gotten, the cattle of his getting, which he had gotten". After 14 years of servitude as a labourer, his plan with the rods had led to huge and sudden increase of wealth. This would have surely reminded him of the Divine promise at Bethel to bless him and be with him, and return him to his land. His plan to return "to Isaac" suggests Rebekah was dead; her ruse to get blessing for her favourite son led to her never seeing him again in this life.

An example of following the negative spiritual traits of our forbears is seen in Jacob's penchant for materialism. This was a weakness of the whole Abraham family; a specific word is used about how they “gathered" material wealth. Abraham did it (Gen. 12:5), and so now did Jacob. The list of what they "gathered" is almost identical (Gen. 24:35 cp. Gen. 30:43). Faithless fear (cp. Dt. 20:8; Mt. 25;25; Rev. 21:8) was another characteristic; in Abraham (Gen. 15:1; 20:11); Isaac (Gen. 26:7,24; 31:42,53); and followed by Jacob (Gen. 28:17; 31:31; 32:7,11; 41:3).

Gen 31:19 *Now Laban had gone to shear his sheep: and Rachel stole the teraphim that were her father's-* He used them for divination (Gen. 30:27), so maybe she thought Laban would use them to divine where Jacob and his family had fled to, or would use the teraphim to curse them. Such images were also thought to be the guardians of the family property and the source of blessing, "teraphim" coming from the root *taarap* to be prosperous. Rachel had just lamented that she was written out of the inheritance, as it were, such as it now was. So it wasn't simply that it was her idolatry which led to her stealing them; she was angry with her father and was bitter about the issue of the inheritance (see on :14,15). This was used providentially by God to ensure she would wish to emigrate with Jacob to the land of promise. They were also thought to be the source of fertility; Rachel should have learnt that they actually had no power in this at all, but such power was only of God. It was not until Gen. 35:2 that Jacob ordered these images to be discarded and buried beneath a tree; they were likely valuable, as such teraphim were typically covered in gold and precious stones. He sacrificed family wealth to ensure that idolatry was ended amongst his children and wives, and that they recognized that blessing was solely from Yahweh; a principle which remains relevant to this day.

The escape was planned for when Laban would be out in the field. Rachel presumably knew that her going out to meet Jacob in the fields was a signal to escape; so she stole the teraphim before leaving. Or perhaps she was the guardian of them anyway and carried them in her personal stuff; for they may have been quite small household gods. Her lack of spirituality is here clearly displayed; and yet Jacob had spent 14 years working for this woman. Jacob had recently protested to Laban that he would not steal a thing from him (Gen. 30:33); and now his favourite wife

steals her father's images. The same word for "stole" is now used in :20,26,27 for how Jacob "stole away" (AV) from Laban, as if to suggest that he was just as deceitful as was Rachel.

Gen 31:20 *Jacob deceived Laban the Syrian, in that he didn't tell him that he was running away-* Laban is called "the Syrian"; although he was a member of the Abraham family, he is spoken of now as a Gentile. And yet his "blessing" on account of Jacob was therefore the primary fulfilment of the Abrahamic blessing, that the nations would be blessed through his seed. Jacob's behaviour at this point is presented as 'deceit' although it was perfectly understandable- in order to continue the idea that both Jacob and Laban were equally deceitful. It was just that Jacob accepted God's grace.

Gen 31:21 *So he fled with all that he had. He rose up, passed over the River, and set his face toward the mountain of Gilead-* "The river" refers to the Euphrates, the boundary of the *eretz*. Jacob is presented as now returning to the promised land. But the "river" also refers to the Nile, and is perhaps used to portray the similarities with Israel's exodus from bondage in Egypt, and then passing through the water of the Red Sea; see on :6,7,22.

Gen 31:22 *Laban was told on the third day that Jacob had fled-* This continues the connection with Pharaoh, who was "told... that the people fled" and then pursued them over the water (Ex. 14:5,8). The parallels were of great relevance to the initial audience of Genesis- Israel in the wilderness, who had likewise fled their abusers and been pursued. And they too were saved by grace; for Ez. 20 says that they took the idols of Egypt with them after spoiling the Egyptians, just as Jacob was accused of spoiling Laban and taking his idols with him. See on :6,7,21.

Gen 31:23 *He took his relatives with him, and pursued after him seven days' journey. He overtook him in the mountain of Gilead-* See on :22; this continues the parallel with the exodus from Egypt, with Pharaoh (cp. Laban) being informed the Israelites had fled (Ex. 14:5) and taking his chosen people with him to purse and overtake the fleeing Israelites (Ex. 14:9); see on :6,7,21,22. The distance is about 500 km. from Haran to the Gilead mountains. We wonder why it took Laban so long to catch up with Jacob, who was moving slowly because of the huge herds he was driving, some of whom were pregnant (Gen. 33:13). Surely the delay was providentially overruled so that Jacob had time to cross the Euphrates into the promised land, and the meeting between them with the conclusion that Jacob and family could never return past that point was made once they were firmly in the *eretz*.

Gen 31:24 *God came to Laban the Syrian, in a dream of the night, and said to him, Take heed to yourself that you don't speak to Jacob either good or bad-* If this is the correct translation, then we reflect that there are times when God leaves us with a kind of neutral situation- in order to elicit our own self-examination and choice of the right path ourselves without it being forced upon us by Him. But the LXX reads: "Take heed to thyself that thou speak not at any time to Jacob evil things", and the literal Hebrew: "From good to bad". This makes better sense of Laban's words in :29; and in :42, Jacob understands this visitation of Laban as a "rebuke". This can only mean that Laban intended to murder Jacob, but was "rebuked" from that plan by God. Jacob would've recalled how Esau had likewise wanted to pursue and murder him, and he had been saved by grace. Again, circumstances repeat within our lives, as a loving Father teaches us the extent of His grace.

Gen 31:25 *Laban caught up with Jacob. Now Jacob had pitched his tent in the mountain, and Laban with his relatives encamped in the mountain of Gilead-* The impression is given of two camps, Jacob's and Laban's. This forms the basis of "Mahanaim", the place of the two camps (Gen. 32:2). But those two camps then were Angels on one camp and Jacob in the other. And he was saved from the camp of Angels coming in judgment by his pleading with the Angel he wrestled with. We are therefore to conclude that Laban indeed was coming to destroy Jacob, as noted on :24. But Jacob had been saved by the Angel who came and warned Laban not to; the same Angel Jacob wrestled with. The Angel foresaw that Jacob would at a point then future wrestle with him in prayer and prevail; and so the answer to that prayer was granted ahead of time, in saving Jacob from Laban and his camp. Laban in this sense had God behind him, as noted on :29.

Gen 31:26 *Laban said to Jacob, What have you done, that you have deceived me, and carried away my daughters like captives of the sword?-* Jacob was indeed a deceiver, of Esau and Isaac; but this was a relatively false accusation. And yet through the process of false accusation we often find that our real and actual sins are elicited. Laban perhaps genuinely considered that his daughters were still his; he had lied so often about the conditions upon which Jacob obtained them that he perhaps came to actually believe his own lie, just as the sons of Jacob did regarding the supposed death of Joseph. And this is the problem with lying; unless repented of, the lie becomes our perceived truth.

Gen 31:27 *Why did you flee secretly, and deceive me, and didn't tell me, that I might have sent you away with mirth and with songs, with tambourine and with harp-* The only other party Laban had arranged for Jacob, when he married Leah, had been riddled with deceit. Laban is presented as clearly being deceitful.

Gen 31:28 *And didn't allow me to kiss my sons and my daughters? Now have you done foolishly-* The charge of doing foolishly has a moral dimension, as if to say 'You sinned' (1 Sam. 13:13). This was a false accusation when taken specifically; and yet Jacob was indeed a sinner. And so we have what I myself have experienced, and likely many others too- a totally false and unreasonable accusation elicits within us an awareness of wherein we have actually sinned; see on :31. Laban's desire to kiss his sons and daughters could refer to his grandchildren; but it could also mean that some of his sons, the brothers of Rachel and Leah, had gone over to Jacob's side (cp. :1), just as some of the Egyptians joined with the Israelites in fleeing Egypt (see on :6,7).

Gen 31:29 *It is in the power of my hand to hurt you-* "Power" translates *el*, "God"; Keil translates "there is to God my hand". He felt he had Divine right to hurt Jacob, as noted on :25, but God had also warned him not do. Laban was wrong as to why he thought Jacob could be "hurt"; Jacob had done nothing wrong to him, but we are aware from Jacob's earlier life that he had much in it that deserved Divine judgment.

But the God of your father spoke to me last night, saying, 'Take heed to yourself that you don't speak to Jacob either good or bad'- See on :24. That Jacob worshipped the God of his father rather than his own God was well known. "*Your* (plural) father" (cp. AV "thee" in the previous and following verses) may suggest that Jacob was confident enough of his father's God to have introduced it to his family, although he himself still had not reached the point where he had made this God completely his own.

Gen 31:30 *Now you want to be gone, because you greatly longed for your father's house, but why have you stolen my gods?-* The implication is that Jacob was a homesick boy, pining for his mum and dad. Whilst this was provocative, I have repeatedly

noted that Jacob was indeed psychologically dominated by his parents to an unhealthy extent.

Gen 31:31 *Jacob answered Laban, Because I was afraid, for I said, 'Lest you should take your daughters from me by force'-* "Because I was afraid" is the language of a guilty Adam in Eden. As noted on :28, a false and unreasonable accusation can elicit in us an awareness of wherein we have actually sinned. And this seems to have happened to Jacob. Jacob wisely ignores the provocation noted on :30, and focuses on the essential accusation; a good pattern for our dealing with such difficult situations. The reason Jacob gives here is absolutely true; and total honesty was not his strong point. Just as his sons were led by Joseph's interrogations to total honesty, so Jacob was led here. And we too are led to this point by the Divine hand in human life.

Gen 31:32 *Anyone you find your gods with shall not live. Before our relatives, discern what is yours with me, and take it. For Jacob didn't know that Rachel had stolen them-* We note the contrast between "your gods" and "the God of your father" (:29). Jacob loved Rachel and obviously assumed she had a higher level of ethics and spirituality than she actually did, imputing righteousness to the one he loved. Jacob would later reflect how the life of his beloved and yet spiritually weak Rachel had been saved at this point by absolute grace. We see again how God uses Jacob's over confident self righteousness and Rachel's human weakness and even sin- for Rachel was surely wrong to have stolen the idols- in order to finally awe us with His grace and bring us to repentance and devotion to Him alone.

Jacob's cursing of whoever had taken the idols actually came true. For Rachel died soon afterwards. Hence Jacob later reflects that Rachel died by or because of him. This is one of many Biblical warnings that what we say, especially in wishing evil,

has a way of coming true. We think of David's cursing of Saul and Absalom in his Psalms, and how bitterly he wept when his cursings came true. Again we see the importance of life and living, and the significance of words, even if said in anger.

Gen 31:33 *Laban went into Jacob's tent, into Leah's tent, and into the tent of the two female servants; but he didn't find them. He went out of Leah's tent, and entered into Rachel's tent-* The Divine cameraman is zooming in, so we can visualize the movement at close range, as Laban moves from tent to tent, with us knowing that the idols are in the last tent, building up a sense of suspense, realizing that Rachel's life depends upon this... and he doesn't find them.

Gen 31:34 *Now Rachel had taken the teraphim, put them in the camel's saddle, and sat on them. Laban felt about all the tent, but didn't find them-* The Mosaic laws about uncleanness from contact with menstruating women were surely known in essence at this time. The holy was not to be mixed with the unclean. For a menstruating woman to squat upon an idol, the supposedly holy, would've been anathema and deeply obnoxious; and the power of the idol would surely be seen as having been compromised. Rachel was driven to do this in desperation to save her own life; and God in His amazing economy worked in this way, so that Rachel had to desecrate her own beloved idols in order to save her life.

It has been suggested that Rachel stole the teraphim because they were the equivalent of the title to inheritance. Even if this is the case, she thereby betrays the same kind of obsessive materialism as her father Laban. And moreover, a lack of faith in the promises to Abraham- which were all about receiving the ultimate inheritance at a future point. Perhaps she was concerned that Laban's earlier sons by his handmaids would inherit Laban's wealth- whereas she obsessively wanted the

inheritance to pass to her son. She considered herself the senior wife and that therefore her son should inherit most. Whereas Leah was technically the first wife of Jacob, at least by one week; and had born Jacob more sons, including his firstborn. "But I am the favoured wife", her argument may have run, "And so the inheritance should pass to my son". In the Emar wills from this period, uncovered in the same area in the late 20th century, there appears the case of a father bequeathing his property to his daughter "if she invoke my gods". Some of the wills on the Nuzi tablets use the same phrase. Perhaps Rachel had done this, and thought that possession of those gods would bring her inheritance from her father. She thereby appears insecure in her relationship with Jacob, just as Leah did [judging from how she named her sons]. But from all this dysfunction, God built the house of Israel. Whatever reconstruction we make, Rachel appears totally unspiritual by her actions.

When Laban sets out to attack Jacob, it was clearly in his power to kill him. But the incident of him accusing Jacob of stealing his idols, him publicly searching the whole camp, feeling absolutely everything, and not finding them, probably led to a loss of face which meant he couldn't do what he planned to Jacob. Jacob then bursts out in proud, arrogant denunciation of Laban- not realizing that his beloved, idolatrous Rachel couldn't bear to be without those idols, and had stolen them. Despite Rachel's deceit and idolatry, and Jacob's arrogance, God worked through all this to save them. The way God works with us in our weakness, leading us on, hoping we will later reflect back and marvel at His grace and patience... all this God works oftentimes with man. Not only should we be deeply humbled as a result of our self-examination. We ought to reflect this kind of patience and going along with weakness in the hope of later change in our attitude to our brethren.

Gen 31:35 *She said to her father, Don't let my lord be angry that I can't rise up before you; for I'm having my period. He searched, but didn't find the teraphim-* They may well have been under some precedent of the laws about touching menstruating women which were later codified in Lev. 15:22; and Laban surely assumed that his daughter would not sit upon a holy idol whilst menstruating. The theme of deceit continues; Rachel lies to her father, deceiving him as Jacob had done to his father. The idea is that the chosen family were not more righteous than the surrounding unbelievers; they were chosen and transformed through grace alone.

The Hebrew is literally "let it not become hot in my lord's eyes" or "let not my lord's eyes burn". The reference is almost certainly to the popular idea of the 'evil eye', something we often find alluded to in the Hebrew Old Testament. We note that Laban claimed the power to do Jacob 'evil', although Jacob's God had warned him not to use it. Rachel believed in the 'evil eye' just as many mistakenly believe in the existence of demons and a 'Satan' figure today; rather than accepting that Yahweh really is God almighty and all power is with Him alone. Jacob apparently also used the 'evil eye'; for the same phrase is used in Gen. 30:2 of how "Jacob's face glowed against Rachel". If nothing else, we see a family angry with each other; Jacob against his wife Rachel, and Rachel's father Laban against her. This is all part of the same nexus of belief which led Rachel to steal the teraphim; we know the family were idolators because after the incident with Dinah and Shechem, Jacob appeals to the family to quit idolatry and they bury their idols. Later Scripture features frequent appeals to "Jacob" / Israel to abandon their idolatry- after the pattern of their father Jacob. But at this point, he was an idolater, who only wanted Yahweh as his God if Yahweh returned him safely to his father's house. Which at this point was yet distant with

many obstacles in the path. Condemnation of using the 'evil eye' is common: “Those who hate pinch with their eye in vain” (Ps. 35:19); “a wicked man... pinches with his eyes" (Prov. 6:12,13); “what do your eyes wink at?” (Job 15:12). Prov. 28:22 likewise: “he who has the evil eye hastens after riches”. Zech. 3:9 features a stone with seven eyes which Yahweh presents to Joshua, as if assuring him that all the supposed power of the 'evil eye' was nothing compared to Yahweh's power. If Yahweh turns His eyes upon a man for evil, then this shall happen; it is *His* 'evil eye' which was to be feared, not that of pagan superstition (Am. 9:4; Lev. 20:5 "I will set My eye against that man"; Jer. 24:6; Ps. 34:17).

Jacob has told his wives that their father's face is not toward him as before (Gen. 31:5); he feared the 'evil eye' from Laban. But Rachel defeats it through her lie. The overall impression, as with God's usage of the myths about conception in Gen. 30, is that wrong ideas and beliefs are worked with by God- to bring the thoughtful to realize that He is really all powerful.

Gen 31:36 *Jacob was angry, and argued with Laban. Jacob answered Laban, What is my trespass? What is my sin, that you have hotly pursued after me?-* Jacob was indeed innocent and his flight from Laban was not morally wrong. But he was a big time sinner apart from that. The trouble with being falsely accused is that it can make us very self-righteous, failing to accept that we may not have sinned in *that* matter, but we have indeed failed in others. Jacob would later have realized God's grace to him when he learnt that Rachel had in fact stolen the idols. And he would have repeated back to himself his question: "What is my sin...?". No sin against Laban, indeed; but the question would have elicited self-examination.

Gen 31:37 *Now that you have felt around in all my stuff, what have you found of all your household stuff? Set it here before my*

relatives and your relatives, that they may judge between us two- Laban and his relatives had travelled 500 km. at high speed. This was a real showdown, as their haste and anger would have been fuelled by the thought that Jacob had stolen their teraphim. The situation had been reflected upon by Jacob's son Joseph, when he later sets up his brothers in a similar situation- accusing them of things [stealing the cup, lying to him about their family] of which they were guilty and yet thought they were innocent, in order to elicit in them repentance. Because Joseph would've perceived that this incident had led his father Jacob to repentance; indeed, Jacob may have told his sons as much in reciting the family history to them.

Gen 31:38 *These twenty years I have been with you. Your ewes and your female goats have not cast their young, and I haven't eaten the rams of your flocks-* The chronological problem is well addressed by H.P. Mansfield:

"Jacob was ninety-seven years of age when he fled from Laban. If he were with his father-in-law only twenty years, the events of his life are compressed in too narrow a compass to be practical, and introduce contradictions.

Consider the following: At the end of two years' famine (Gen. 45:6) Joseph would have been between 39-40 (Gen. 41:46), and Jacob was 130 (Gen. 47:9). Joseph was thus born when Jacob was 90-91, and this is dated just prior to the six years that he served Laban for his cattle (Gen. 30:25). If, to that point of time, he had been only fourteen years with Laban, it would mean that he fled from Esau to seek a wife when he was about 77! Assuming that he first worked seven years for Leah, his first son would not be born before he was 85; and if Joseph were born when he was 90, he had eleven sons and at least one daughter in five years! In that case, also, he had children and grandchildren to the number of sixty-six in the short space of forty-five years.

At that rate, Judah, the fourth son could not have been born before he was 88, and would have been about 42 when the events of Genesis 38 took place, or 48, if Jacob married Leah before the completion of the seven years that he worked for Laban to obtain her.

Esau visited Ishmael and married his daughter after Jacob left for Haran at the age of 77, though Ishmael died when Jacob was 63 (Gen. 25:17). Isaac married at 40 (Gen. 25:20). Jacob was born twenty years later (Gen. 25:26). Ishmael, thirteen years older than Isaac died at 137 (Gen. 25:17). These problems are solved if we can add a further twenty years to Jacob's sojourn with Laban, making his age 57 when he fled from Esau, though still 97 when he left Laban. This would allow for forty years with Laban, the period of probation or trial. And that forty years seem to be provided for in Jacob's conversation with Laban. He makes reference to two periods of "twenty years" each (cp. vv. 38,41). The first twenty years, he was with Laban as a friend: "I have been with thee." The second twenty years, he was there as a covenant servant: "I have been twenty years in thy house; I served thee..." The first fourteen years he served Laban for his two daughters; the following twenty years, he was with Laban in his capacity as shepherd; the final six years, he served him for his cattle. The first fourteen years, and the last six years, represented twenty years of servitude; the intervening twenty years he was employed as a shepherd, during which Laban's flocks remarkably increased.

The Hebrew provides some warrant for this interpretation which also disposes of the difficulties mentioned above. The Hebrew *zeh* (rendered this: v. 38, and thus v. 41) when used in conjunction one with the other is often used by way of distinction as in Ex. 14:20, there rendered one and other; Ecc. 6:5-8: "this and that"; Job 21:23-25: "one and another". And so here. Jacob could have meant "this twenty years have I been with

thee" and "that twenty years I have been in thy house." The first twenty years he served Laban as a friend. At some personal loss, but in gratitude to his father-in-law, he cared for his flocks (Vv. 38-40), the other twenty years he profited from his labour: first in the acquisition of his wives; and then from Laban's herds. The Hebrew *zeh li esrim* signifies "this for myself (*li*) twenty years..." In other words, during one twenty years he showed a profit; whilst during the other twenty years he showed a loss. In all, he was in Haran forty years: fourteen for his wives; twenty as a friend and son-in-law; six for the cattle. In all, forty years, a period of probation".

Gen 31:39 *That which was torn of animals, I didn't bring to you. I bore its loss. Of my hand you required it, whether stolen by day or stolen by night-* See on Gen. 33:10. Jacob was afflicted with legalism, and struggled all his life to understand and accept grace. Here we see Jacob at his most self congratulatory and meretricious; although his anger and self-justification is understandable, seeing how Laban had abused and manipulated him through legalistic methods. But again, both Laban and Jacob are presented as legalists as well as both being deceivers. The legalistic attitude of Jacob and his family is brought out by the behaviour of his wives as well as himself when they are caught up with by Laban as recorded here in Gen. 31. The society in which they lived had codified legal practices, as has been established by archaeological research into contemporary towns in the area. For example, part of the bride price had to be kept by the wife personally; and thus Rachel and Leah accuse their father of taking away from them that which was rightfully theirs. Likewise, according to the Nuzi documents, daughters and sons-in-law had legal title to part of the father's estate, and this was proven by their possession of the household idols. Hence Jacob and his wives stole those idols. E.A. Speiser quotes par. 266

of the Code of Hammurabi, which states: "If there occurs in the fold an act of god, or a lion takes a life, the shepherd [cp. Jacob] shall clear himself before the deity; the owner of the fold [cp. Laban] must then accept the loss incurred" (E.A. Speiser, *Genesis* [The Anchor Bible] (New York: Doubleday, 1964) p. 247). It was surely with allusion to this that Jacob complained that he as the shepherd had had to bear the loss of Laban's lost cattle.

Earlier in his life, Jacob had learned to "bear the loss" of that which was "torn in pieces of beasts"; and the same terms are used in Gen. 31:39 and Gen. 37:33, when again Jacob has to 'bear the loss' of [apparently] having his beloved son torn in pieces of wild beasts [s.w.]. As so often in our lives, one experience is used to prepare us for a similar one, but to a much greater extent. In this case, not bearing the loss of an animal, but of a beloved son.

Gen 31:40 *This was my situation: in the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night; and my sleep fled from my eyes-* Jacob appears to have distanced himself from the domestic nightmare caused by his various relationships; see on Gen. 30:18. Through those years of insomnia and slave labour, Jacob must have struggled to believe the promises of blessing made at Bethel, and the idea that he the younger would have the elder and more powerful serving him. We too may pass through whole periods of life where the promised blessings seem mythical. But those valleys are needed in order to appreciate the wonder of the blessings, and also to drive us all, as happened with Jacob, to perceive that the essence of "blessing" is not material prosperity in this life, but rather the blessing of forgiveness and fellowship with God (Acts 3:25,26).

Gen 31:41 *These twenty years I have been in your house. I served you fourteen years for your two daughters, and six years for your flock, and you have changed my wages ten times-* See on :38. Spare a thought for Jacob at this time. During those years he

would have gone through all the shame of an intelligent man who is desperately poor, and knows himself to be hopelessly in love (at 77). And when he finally gets the object of his lust, still having to work for her, it really doesn't turn out as he thinks. Bitterness between his wives escalates to the point where he has to have sexual relations with their handmaids; who were, remember, Laban's ex women. He had to go in to the women of a man he must have hated, picking up his throw offs. And then his wages were changed ten times, the conditions of service were ridiculous. To escape from his domestic pain he must have gone out and talked to those sheep, consumed at night by the cold and by the heat in the day time (:40). This was all a far, far cry from the cozy life with mum and dad and granddad, thinking that he'd go off and pick up a lovely wife just as Isaac obtained Rebekah.

Speaking in the context of Israel's punishment for idolatry (remember, in God's eyes Israel = Jacob), we are told, apparently out of context, that Jacob served for a wife (singular), and for a wife he kept sheep (Hos. 12:12). Yet this is in the context of Hos. 12:2, which says that God would punish Israel for their idolatry, according to their ways. And the terrible 14 years of keeping the sheep which their forefather Jacob went through was a type of their punishment for idolatry. As Jacob *served* for Rachel, so Israel served idols and would have to *serve* those idolatrous nations as an appropriate punishment. Keeping sheep in Gentile lands is the basis of the prodigal parable; the young man who left home, tricked his father, sidled past his hostile elder brother with what he was sure was his inheritance by rights, squandered it, kept sheep, and came back a new man. Clearly the Lord had his mind on Jacob, although that parable is full of reference to prophetic descriptions of the nation of Israel, too. Hos. 12:4-6,12,13 seem to say that Jacob's humiliation at the

hands of Laban is a type of the future suffering of Jacob, before their final homecoming

Gen 31:42 *Unless the God of my father, the God of Abraham-* Again, not *my* God. And he saw God as the supplier of physical blessing; he understood the promise to Abraham that "I will be with you" as referring to blessing of cattle more than anything more spiritual. See on Gen. 25:31. Abraham was promised that his seed would have Yahweh as their personal God, and would eternally inherit the land. But Jacob, like us, was slow to perceive this. In a sense, the promises that the seed *would* inherit the land, and that God *would be* their God were fulfilled straight after God said them. He became Isaac's God (Gen. 31:42,53 refer to this), the God of Abraham's son. Time and again God reminds Israel that He *is* their God. And that land in a sense *was* given to the Jewish fathers (Gen. 15:18; Dt. 28:63; 30:5 NIV; Josh. 1:2-9; 21:43; 1 Kings 4:20,21).

And the fear of Isaac, had been with me, surely now you would have sent me away empty. God has seen my affliction and the labour of my hands- See on Ex. 23:27. An element of fear is not wrong in itself. Israel in the wilderness had the pillar of fire to remind them of God's close presence, and to thereby motivate them not to sin: "His fear (will) be before your faces, that ye sin not" (Ex. 20:20). Notice how Isaac's guardian angel is described as "the fear" in Gen. 31:42,53 cp. 48:15,16. But "the fear of Isaac" would've been alluding to how after Jacob deceived Isaac, he trembled greatly at the realization that he had tried to force a stop to the fulfilment of God's promises about Jacob. And this image remained with Jacob, and he now clings on to belief that those promises shall be fulfilled; just as he admits that God "had been with me", alluding to the promises to Jacob at Bethel, that God would be with him.

God seeing affliction and noticing hard labour alludes to how God saw the similar sufferings of His people in Egypt (Ex. 3:7; 4:31; Dt. 26:7 s.w.); see on :6,7. But the very same Hebrew phrase "God has seen my affliction" is used by Leah when she gives birth to her first son (Gen. 29:32). As happens in families, the same turns of phrase were used, especially about God. In the hard servile years, Jacob would have remembered his wife's words and come to believe that God was likewise seeing his affliction at Laban's hands.

And rebuked you last night- Laban's intention was to murder Jacob, but by grace, he was restrained. The "rebuke" was therefore to stop him killing Jacob. The same word has just been translated "judge" in :37.

Gen 31:43 *Laban answered Jacob, The daughters are my daughters, the children are my children, the flocks are my flocks, and all that you see is mine: and what can I do this day to these my daughters, or to their children whom they have borne?*- These accusations were false and so easy to answer. Unless he was claiming that Jacob was somehow his adopted son, or that some agreement meant that Jacob had resigned his claims upon his wives and children. For sure Laban had acted even more deceitfully than is recorded, and is presented as a scheming materialist who still never quite made it in life. But Laban had travelled 500 km. with his relatives and now had to travel them back home. Jacob was sensitive to the need to save Laban from a loss of face, so that peace might ensue. And we too are unwise to 'take up' every issue of false accusation and unreasonable treatment. We have to allow a saving of face and be pragmatic, with peace for God's true seed as the desired final outcome. The accusation of theft of the teraphim had been dropped; but Jacob isn't recorded as questioning these wider accusations of theft.

Gen 31:44 *Now come, let us make a covenant, you and I; and let it be for a witness between me and you-* This was a way of saving face and Jacob accepted it. Notice the connection between covenant and witness. It is axiomatic that those who are in the new covenant must be witnesses to it; such witness is not therefore optional, but part and parcel of covenant relationship. God witnesses His covenant to us (2 Kings 17:15), and we too witness to the covenant; both in witness to the world, and in witness to Him through the breaking of bread service, in our day. The equivalent of that in Jacob's time was to eat a sacrifice as a meal together.

Gen 31:45 *Jacob took a stone, and set it up for a pillar-* This was to recall the pillar he had erected that night at Bethel, where God had promised him that he would be with him and make him return from Paddan Aram to the *eretz*.

Gen 31:46 *Jacob said to his relatives, Gather stones. They took stones, and made a heap. They ate there by the heap-* The "relatives" may refer to Laban's relatives who had accompanied him on the pursuit; for they were Jacob's relatives by marriage. The record notes that there was this family connection. Sacrificial meals were understood as confirming a covenant, and this is what the breaking of bread meeting is all about; a confirmation of the new covenant with us.

Gen 31:47 *Laban called it Jegar Sahadutha, but Jacob called it Galeed-* Despite 40 years living with non-Hebrew speakers, Jacob didn't forget his native tongue. His heart was in the land of promise, the Kingdom, for all his weakness. And Jacob insists that the circular heap of witness stones ("Galeed") be named in Hebrew, perhaps because he wanted his future seed never to return to the land of the east, never to leave the promised land as he had done.

Gen 31:48 *Laban said, This heap is witness between me and you this day. Therefore it was named Galeed-* Inanimate things are often spoken of in the Old Testament as being somehow alive; or non-human things spoken of in human terms, e.g. forests clapping their hands. The Bible doesn't footnote these things; just as the usage of the language of demons isn't specifically explained in the New Testament, and yet it is not to be taken as literally true.

Gen 31:49 *And Mizpah, for he said, Yahweh watch between me and you, when we are absent one from another-* Again we see Laban using the Yahweh Name; as noted on :53, he wrongly mixed pagan and Divine things, although Jacob and his wives did the same. To harp on about 'God sees even when men don't' (:50) was of course hypocritical for Laban; but Jacob had likewise failed to perceive this.

Gen 31:50 *If you afflict my daughters, or if you take wives besides my daughters, no man is with us; behold, God is witness between me and you-* Perhaps Laban did have some reason for thinking that Jacob might harm his daughters; because it does seem that Jacob's relationship with them was strained as I have pointed out throughout these notes. And we recall his great anger with Rachel at Gen. 30:2. Laban appears to mean what he says here and to believe it; that God sees even when no other witness is present. And the nature of his argument seems to presuppose that just one all-seeing God is in view, which was certainly not what the surrounding culture believed. We dare to hope that through all his weakness, Laban may have turned to the one true God at the end of his life.

Gen 31:51 *Laban said to Jacob, See this heap, and see the pillar, which I have set between me and you-* It was Jacob who set up the pillar, and so we can interpret this as meaning that

Laban was setting the significance of these things as being that they marked the boundary between the two families (:52).

Gen 31:52 *May this heap be a witness, and the pillar be a witness, that I will not pass over this heap to you, and that you will not pass over this heap and this pillar to me, for harm-* Laban proposed this condition; but God used it to ensure that Jacob and his family would never be tempted to leave the land of promise back towards the East. For they all promised, including Laban's daughters, never to return. And the heap of stones was near the river Euphrates, the border of the land of promise; see on :21. Again we see God as it were needling Jacob towards Canaan, the land and things of the Kingdom. For due to this initiative of Laban, Jacob now cannot return to Mesopotamia. He can only go onwards towards the things of the Kingdom, to Canaan. As we eat the symbols of the covenant at the communion service (:54), we can likewise perceive that God is locking us up into a one way direction towards His Kingdom, making the way of return to the world harder and harder.

Gen 31:53 *The God of Abraham, and the God of Nahor, the God of their father, judge between us-* Here we see the classic mixing of true and false worship. The god of Nahor was an idol (Josh. 24:2); the God of Abraham was Yahweh, whose Name Laban knew. But Laban mixes the two together, and the grammar for "judge between" is plural, as if both 'gods' would judge. Perhaps here Laban means to imply that his god was the god of Nahor, and Jacob's was the God of Abraham.

Then Jacob swore by the fear of his father, Isaac- Jacob unashamedly swore "by the fear of his father Isaac"; the picture of his father trembling in fear of God when he realized his superficiality stayed with Jacob (Gen. 27:33). It seems he spoke publicly of God as the God of his father, for this is the term Laban used to him (Gen. 31:29). The influence of his father

and grandfather lasted a lifetime; even in old age, he feared to go down to Egypt because of the precedents set by the bad experience of Isaac and Abraham there; it seems that he delayed to obey Joseph's invitation to visit Egypt because of this, and was possibly rebuked by Yahweh for this: "Jacob, Jacob (such repetition is often a rebuke), Fear not to go down into Egypt" (Gen. 46:3). Likewise Christians can live out parental expectation without much personal faith.

The structure and balance of the statement seems to be emphasizing that Laban swore by his fathers' gods, because he knew no better, and Jacob did likewise. A Baptist is a Baptist because his father is, and at the beginning of spiritual life, a Christian can be one for no better reason than his parents are. Jacob was still at this stage in middle age. And so many of us must pass through that inevitable growth curve of Jacob. That Abraham did finally break with his family is hinted at by the way that Laban speaks of "the God of Abraham and the God of Nahor- may they judge between us (Gen. 31:53 Heb.). Laban recognized that Nahor and Abraham worshipped different gods-whereas we know that initially, they worshipped the same gods.

Gen 31:54 *Jacob offered a sacrifice in the mountain, and called his relatives to eat bread. They ate bread, and stayed all night in the mountain-* Eating bread was a sign of covenant fellowship. Jacob did this with a self-confessed unbeliever in the true God (see on :53); just as the memorial meal of the new covenant can be used in various ways, and there is no guilt by association through sharing it even with an unbeliever. The calling of "his relatives" may refer to Jacob inviting Laban's family to eat bread as a sign of their agreement to the covenant; they were his relatives by marriage. So the story with Laban ends with a reminder of their unity; see on :55.

Gen 31:55 *Early in the morning, Laban rose up, and kissed his sons and his daughters, and blessed them. Laban departed and returned to his place-* This is Laban at his best, and the curtain closes on Laban with us feeling somewhat sorry for him, as he knows he will never see his family again, and we note his fondness for his daughters who were clearly agree with him and saw no point in living further with him (see on :14,15). We note that some of his sons [or grandsons?] were with Jacob now. We get the impression of a humbled Laban returning those 500 km. to Haran, and although he clearly at that time believed in other gods, we are left with the hope that he converted to the one true God with all his heart and repented, or at least regretted, his behaviour with Jacob.

GENESIS CHAPTER 32

Gen 32:1 *Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him-* Jacob had promised the Angel that if he was kept on his way, then Yahweh would be his God. Hence the connection between the Angels and Jacob going on his way. The meeting of Jacob by Angels looked forward to the meeting with Esau; the angels could have rightfully slain Jacob as could have both Laban and Esau, but they did not, because God influenced them by grace not to. These Angels were representative of the forces of Esau who were coming to likewise 'meet' Jacob, and so his reconciliation by grace with the Angels was prophetic of his reconciliation with Esau.

Jacob had promised at Bethel, at least 20 years ago [possibly 40, depending how you read the chronology] that Yahweh would be his God *if* Yahweh brought him back to his father's house. And Yahweh wanted that... even though I suggested on Gen. 31:13 that Jacob may have forgotten that vow ["I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar, where you vowed a vow to me"]. And even though the whole tenor of Jacob's vow was sceptical and not exactly generous towards Yahweh, offering to give Him just a tenth of all he had if Yahweh came through for him. And so the Angels as it were come forth to meet Jacob, who now stands near the Euphrates, the border of the promised land, to welcome him home. As the Angels meet Jacob now, so they had done at Bethel (Gen. 28:12 s.w.); as Jacob was "on his way" (Gen. 32:1 s.w. Gen. 28:20). Jacob names the places with words which have very similar meanings, Bethel and Penuel. Clearly this meeting with Angels was to help Jacob see that in order to return "home" to the land of promise and the covenant, he had to engage with God, through the Angels, and not just keep ignoring Him. Perhaps this explains the otherwise strange way that Hos.

12:3,4 appears to call Penuel "Bethel": "he struggled with the angel, and prevailed; he wept, and made supplication to him. He found him at Bethel, and there He spoke with us". The apparently obvious error is in order to make a point- that the wrestling with Angels was effectively at Bethel, because the Penuel incident was so similar to that at Bethel.

Rabbinic Judaism understands that the one met is greater than those who go forth to meet him, as the one carried is greater than the one who carries. And that is not without Biblical support. We see here the huge respect of God for a man who as yet had not returned to his God. Jacob's last experience with Angels was at Bethel, so this was to remind him of that experience. The Angels had appeared in their hosts to Jacob, as he fled from his brother. Now they appeared as he returns to meet his brother. The meeting with the Angel is clearly parallel with Jacob's meeting with Esau. Jacob perceives this when he says in Gen. 33:10: "I have seen your face, as one sees the face of God, and you were pleased with me". The simple take away is that our attitudes to our brother are of extreme interest to God. Hosts of Angels were involved with Jacob at the point of leaving his brother and reconciling with his brother. God saw Jacob's attitude to Esau as so absolutely significant. His struggle with his brother was his struggle with God. Hosea states this in so many words: “In the womb he grasped the heel of his brother, and in his manhood he struggled with God”.

Gen 32:2 *When he saw them, Jacob said, This is God’s army. He called the name of that place Mahanaim-* The idea of "camps" is developed throughout this section. Jacob and Laban had both camped in Mount Gilead, forming two camps. And the Angel had influenced Laban's camp not to harm Jacob, as explained on Gen. 31:25. But now Jacob perceives that the 'two camps' of Mahanaim had not so much been his and Laban's; but Laban's

and this Angelic camp. And he is now to learn that likewise Esau's "camp" had an Angelic "camp" reflecting it in Heaven; and Jacob's camp was hopelessly set against the Angelic camp. See on :7.

Jacob actually saw the Angels. "This is God's host", he commented, with the implication that this sight further humbled him and led him towards the necessary contrition of mind for deliverance from Esau. If "the sign of the son of man" which appears over Israel and leads the tribes of Israel to mourn in repentance is a literal vision of the Angel-cherubim (Mt. 24:30), then this has a basis in Jacob seeing the Angelic vision in the time of his distress, the "time of Jacob's trouble".

Particularly in that watershed night of wrestling, Jacob was our example. The Lord taught that we must all first be reconciled with our brother before we meet with God (Mt. 5:24)- an obvious allusion to Jacob's reconciliation with Esau in his heart, and then meeting with God. We really must *all* go through that process, whether in one night or a longer period. The commentary on that night in Hos. 12 makes this point: "In his (spiritual) manhood (RVmg.) he had power with God... he wept, and made supplication unto him: he (God) found him (Jacob) in Bethel, *and there He spake with us*, even the (same) Lord God of Hosts [armies of Angels]... therefore turn *thou* to *thy* God" as Jacob made Yahweh *his* God and *turned* to Him (vv. 3-6). Jacob is our example. Jacob only truly turned to God that night of wrestling, at the age of 97, despite having been brought up in the ways of the true Gospel, and after having lived almost a century of half commitment to God. We can so easily slip into the same life of half-commitment and never, even for a century, turn to our God with all our heart. Ps. 34:3 promises that the Angel of the Lord will encamp / Mahanaim around *all* His servants, just as the Angel did at Mahanaim for Jacob. Jacob's struggle

at [or with] Peniel strikes a chord with each of us. Frank Lake has pointed out that each person struggles to find peace in their relationships with others and also with their God- whether or not they are conscious of those struggles (Frank Lake, *Clinical Theology* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1966)). Jacob's experience is clearly set up as representative of our own.

Gen 32:3 *Jacob sent messengers in front of him to Esau, his brother, to the land of Seir, the field of Edom-* "Messengers" translates the same word *malak* just used in :1. If the record intended us to make a distinction between human and divine messengers, surely another Hebrew word would have been used at this point; for there were other words which carry the idea of 'messenger' or 'sent ones' which could have been employed. I suggest therefore that Jacob meets the Angels and then sends some of them to Esau. This impression of apparent command over Angels then sets the context for him then wrestling with one of them; and Hos. 12:4 comments that Jacob "had power over the angel and prevailed".

Through the whole incident with the wrestling Angel, Jacob was led to understand something of the meaning of the Gen. 28 vision of a ladder with Angels (*mal'akim*) ascending *from* him to Heaven and returning to him. He sends messengers (*mal'akim*) to Esau (Gen. 32:3)- and they return to him as it were as a mighty host of an angry army. Hence he named the place Mahanaim, two camps / hosts- for he perceived that Esau's host was indeed the host of God in His Angels. And thus he comments that he saw the face of the Angel / God as if it were the face of Esau (Gen. 33:10). And so God can masterfully arrange incidents in our lives too, which are somehow the summation of all our previous encounters and interactions with people... to teach us His way. This is why there is sometimes a sense of *deja vu* in our lives.

Jacob evidently forgot or resigned the promise that the elder would serve the younger when he sent messengers to Esau, describing himself as Esau's servant, and Esau as his Lord; yet just a few hours later he was pleading in almost unparalleled intensity to receive the promised blessings of forgiveness. Such oscillating faith and perception of the promises is tragically a characteristic of Israel after the Spirit too.

Gen 32:4 *He commanded them, saying, This is what you shall tell my lord, Esau: 'This is what your servant, Jacob, says. I have lived as a foreigner with Laban, and stayed until now-* Describing Esau as his lord and himself as Esau's servant is all a studied rejection of the blessing he had stolen, that he would be lord over his brothers and they would bow down to him (Gen. 27:29). The way Jacob bows to Esau and asks him to "take away" the blessing in Gen. 33:11 is all tantamount to saying that he was handing back the blessing of the firstborn, because he had experienced the Abrahamic blessing. Having the blessing of forgiveness and fellowship with God was all he needed.

Jacob's desperate humility before Esau is remarkable: "My lord Esau... I have sent to tell my lord, that I may find grace in thy sight... peradventure he will accept of me" (Gen. 32:4,5,20 AV). This was a far cry from his nonchalance and cold shouldering of Esau at the time of the theft of the birthright. Likewise the present Jewish attitude towards the Arabs will dramatically change. Jacob sending droves of presents to appease Esau will connect with Israel's frequent appeasement of their aggressive Arab neighbours in the last days, on the road to their final repentance in the time of Jacob's trouble.

Jacob says that he had lived as a foreigner with Laban- for either 20 or 40 years. This is so much the language of the patriarchs, living as passers through and not permanent residents; and that is the spirit of all the true seed. But he says

he "stayed until now" with Laban. The Hebrew implies procrastination, as if he had stayed longer than he should have done. Significantly, it is the same word used by Eliezer when he had gone to Laban seeking Rebekah as Isaac's wife; he refused to be 'delayed' by Laban (Gen. 24:56 AV "hinder me not"). Jacob is recognizing that he had remained longer than he should with Laban because initially he had been obsessed with Rachel and had not taken Leah and returned home sooner; and latterly, he had remained longer with Laban as he built up his fantastic wealth with the myth of the rods, which was really Divine blessing. He recognized he had not been as his mother and father in spiritual terms, he had delayed with Laban, whereas Rebekah had followed the Spirit and not allowed Laban to delay her.

"Lived as a foreigner" [AV "sojourned"] has a numerical value of 613, the number of commandments in the Law of Moses. Perhaps we are to deduce that it was through his exile in the East that he learned obedience to God's law.

Gen 32:5 *I have cattle, donkeys, flocks, male servants, and female servants. I have sent to tell my lord, that I may find favour in your sight'-* This isn't Jacob boasting; he was hardly in the mood for that. Rather is he wishing to inform Esau that he has indeed received Divine and human blessing, and wishes to share this with Esau. If indeed the messengers were Angels (see on :3), then Jacob was sending them, relying upon God, in order to find grace before Esau.

Gen 32:6 *The messengers returned to Jacob, saying, We came to your brother Esau. Not only that, but he comes to meet you, and four hundred men with him-* As noted on :4, this is the going and returning of the Angels ["messengers"] upon Jacob which he had seen in the staircase vision of Gen. 28. I suggested on :3 that these messengers were in fact Angels, even if they appeared as men. This suggestion is confirmed by the way this verse seems to

differentiate between the Angel-messengers 'coming to Esau' and also, separate to that, 'finding out' that he was coming to meet Jacob with 400 men with him. The Angels coming to meet Jacob in :1 were in a sense representative of Esau coming to meet Jacob. Just as Laban was out to kill Jacob but he was saved by Angelic grace, so Esau was out to kill him. Rebekah had been wrong in thinking that Esau would soon forget it all. Having 400 men with him was really evidence enough that he was out for conflict. The same figure of four hundred men refers to a battallion of soldiers (1 Sam. 22:2; 25:13; 30:10).

Gen 32:7 *Then Jacob was greatly afraid and was distressed-* Jacob has just been "afraid" of Laban (Gen. 31:31), just as he now was of Esau (:11 s.w.). Yet he had learnt that God's Angels had saved him from what he feared; for the Angel appeared to Laban and warned him not to do evil to Jacob. We pass through one experience or test in order to prepare us for the next one; and we see this so clearly in the parallels between the meeting with Laban and now that with Esau.

Jacob is clearly not believing the promise made at Bethel- that Yahweh would indeed bring him back to his father's house / family in peace, i.e. peace with Esau. His chronic fear reflects his lack of faith in the promises to Abraham and himself.

He divided the people who were with him, and the flocks, and the herds, and the camels, into two companies- Literally, two camps- Mahanaim. These two camps of Jacob are stressed (:8,10,21).

Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed- This is the basis of "the time of Jacob's trouble" (Jer. 30:7), the "time of trouble" from which Israel will be Angelically "delivered" (Dan. 12:1) after the pattern of Jacob. Yet this "time of trouble" is picked up by the Lord in Mt. 24:21 and applied to the time of great tribulation "such as was not" which will encompass all God's people, natural

and spiritual. What this means is that the Jacob experience must be gone through by all of us, natural and spiritual Israel; and this will entail a desperate praying to God and an earnest repentance, recognizing that we have lived out our parental expectations for too long; and above all, a realization that "this God is *our* God", a personalizing of God, a grasping of the wondrous reality of those things which we have previously seen as only so much correct theology and logical theory.

Gen 32:8 *And he said, If Esau comes to the one company, and strikes it, then the company which is left will escape-* "Company" is "camp"; Jacob should have perceived that there was a camp of Angels with him, that we was not alone, but his camp was but a reflection of the heavenly camp of Angels whom he had just "met" as a foretaste of how he would "meet" Esau's camp / company.

Gen 32:9 *Jacob said, God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, Yahweh, who said to me, 'Return to your country, and to your relatives, and I will do you good'-* He came to see that 'God' was Yahweh (cp. notes on Gen. 28:20); he saw that there was only one 'God', and that the vague sense of 'God' which he had was in fact 'Yahweh'. But still he speaks of this Yahweh God as someone else's God. And the promise made was that he would be kept, blessed, and brought to his father's house in peace. Yet he admits that he 'fears' this will not be the case, and he and his family will be 'struck' by Esau (:11). He was being led to realize that he couldn't just plead a part of the promise, and doubt that the rest would be fulfilled too, questioning whether in fact it was God's plan to "do [him] good" and not evil. We likewise have this tendency. And Moses' primary audience, Israel in the wilderness, were likewise challenged to believe that indeed it was God's purpose to do them good and not evil in their latter end (Dt. 8:16). The story of Jacob was to be their encouragement.

Jacob however is still manipulative. Yahweh had promised that "I will be with you", but Jacob turns this into claiming God had promised "to do you good" (Gen. 28:15; 31:13; 32:9). He wanted God to come through for him in material, visible terms. God's promise of His abiding presence was not enough for Jacob.

Gen 32:10 *I am not worthy-* This is new language for Jacob, and we see that indeed as Dt. 8:16 teaches, he had to be humbled before being done good and not evil in his latter end. The same word for "worthy" is used by David when likewise faced with God's covenant promises (2 Sam. 7:19). David was humbled when he received the promises, just as we should be by realizing that we really are in covenant relationship with God. "Who am I...?" was his response (2 Sam. 7:18). Like Jacob, he felt himself unworthy of all the "mercy and truth" shown him in the promises. And we too should be humbled by these promises; for we are in the same new covenant. The word is also used of how Jacob was the "younger" son (Gen. 27:15,42). He surely alludes to that; he had so struggled to rise above being the younger son, but he now finally realizes that he is who he is before God. And once he realized that, the promise could come true- that the elder would serve the younger. And the little one, Jacob the small / not worthy / younger, would become a great multitude finally (Is. 60:22 s.w.).

Of the least of all- The LXX here is alluded to by Paul when he confesses that he is less than the least of all (Eph. 3:8). Jacob's path is indeed that of us all.

The loving kindnesses, and of all the truth, which You have shown to Your servant; for with just my staff I passed over this Jordan- Strong comments that the word for "staff" here suggests a magical, pagan stick associated with fertility, coming from a root meaning 'to germinate'. Jacob and idolatry go together. The same word occurs when we read that Jacob put the animals before

the "rods"; it seems this is an intensive plural for 'the great rod', i.e. his staff. Yet, fascinatingly enough, at the very point when Jacob leaves home to start his wilderness journey with only (in his eyes) his pagan staff to bring him good luck, God as it were takes a snapshot of him, and asks Israel to leave Egypt with a staff in their hands- a strange request, surely, unless it was intended to drive their minds back to Jacob, asking them to emulate his example. Again we see the relevance of the Genesis narrative to its primary audience, Israel in the wilderness.

Jacob saw material prosperity as an indicator of the fulfillment of the promises to him. Because he *was* physically blessed in his life, he came to feel that the promises had been fulfilled, and therefore he almost lost sight of the future aspect of our relationship with God. There are powerful lessons for us here. He saw the promises ("mercies... truth") as having been fulfilled to him already, and therefore he needed the night of wrestling to bring him to the realization that the blessing of *forgiveness* (Mic. 7:20), with its eternal, future implications, was what the promises are really all about. But now perhaps he was realizing this- that he had indeed been materially blessed, but what he needed far more than that was forgiveness for his sin against his brother Esau, both by Esau and God, and peace thereby with God and man. This dimension of the promises suddenly came into focus for him. We likewise can dwell too much upon the material aspect of the promises- resurrection of the body to receive eternal life in future. What we need even more essentially is the blessing of forgiveness and reconcilliation with God and man which will enable that to be so.

And now I have become two companies- Before the wrestling began, Jacob evidently felt that basically, the promises to him had been fulfilled in the material prosperity which he had; for "kindness and truth" is a common idiom for the promises.

Gen 32:11 *Please deliver me from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau: for I fear him, lest he come and strike me, and the mothers with the children-* Because Jacob saw, for much of his life, that the fulfillment of God's promises depended on his effort, he so often doubted them; because, of course, men can never make enough effort. And as noted on :10, he had seen the promises as too much about material blessing rather than the blessing of forgiveness and reconcilliation with God and man which is the more essential part of them. Thus he asks God to deliver him from Esau, because if Esau killed him, the covenant would not be fulfilled. "I fear him, lest he come and strike *me* (first!) and the mothers with the children". The AV and Hebrew have "mother" singular- as if he was still fixated upon Rachel and her son, and those born to her maid. Whether he died or not that night would not have nullified God's promise that his seed would become a multitude (:12) and that God would return him to his father's home in peace and blessing (Gen. 28:20). Until now, Jacob had seen the promises as offering him personal, temporal blessing, rather than having a firm faith in their future and spiritual implications. His wrestling with the Angel was a cameo of this whole attitude; he thought that the promised blessing of God could be achieved through *his* wrestling and struggling. This is why, in the course of that night, he stopped wrestling with the Angel and clung on to him with tears, begging that through pure grace he might receive the spiritual blessing of forgiveness (Hos. 12:2-4).

He effectively hands back the birthright to Esau after the night of wrestling, when he says "Take [away] my blessing..." because he had experienced God's grace. The blessing of the firstborn involved the other brothers bowing down to the firstborn (Gen. 27:29), so Jacob's protracted and emphasized bowing to Esau (Gen. 33:3,6,7) was likewise a way of resigning

from the birthright which he had been born trying to grab hold of, and the desire for which had obviously filled his mind. We too are led to resign all our material, secular aspirations and dreams for the sake of God's grace. And in Jacob's case, he was born with the desire for the firstborn status, with his little hand desperately trying to grab his brother's heel to stop his brother being the firstborn. But encounter with God's grace [as happened to Jacob in Gen. 32] is enough to reorient a man away from even his natural, born-with passions and obsessions towards [in this case] materialism and jealousy. In Jacob's case his very name, 'heel catcher', reflected this obsession which was so strong it had become his self-definition; until he encountered God's grace. The blessing of the firstborn as given by Isaac involved the firstborn being "Lord" over his brothers; but Jacob repeatedly calls Esau his "Lord" in Gen. 32,33. Jacob's gifts to his brothers are described with a standard Hebrew word for "gift" [*minha*]; but in Gen. 33:11 Jacob then starts to consciously refer to them as *berakah*, the word for "blessing". And he urges Esau to take [s.w. 'take away'] his "blessing". I discussed on Gen. 25:23 how the blessing of the firstborn never came true- perhaps because Jacob's resignation of the firstborn blessings in Gen. 32,33 was accepted by God.

There can be no doubt that the wrestling experience of our lives will result in our rejection of materialism, and wholehearted devotion to the more spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. Jacob began that night by pleading: "*Deliver* me from Esau", and he concludes by marveling that his life is "preserved (s.w. "deliver") from *God's* wrath (Gen. 32:30). The camp of Esau coming to meet him was the camp of Angels he had met and in a way become superior to as noted on :1,3,4. His concern with immediate physical problems became dwarfed by his awareness of his need for reconciliation with *God*. In essence,

this is Paul's teaching concerning peace in the NT; if we have peace with *God,* the wonder of this will result in us having peace in any situation. This is easy to write, so easy. And yet it is still true. If we see the seriousness of sin, and the wonder of being in free fellowship with the Father and Son, we will have peace. The wholehearted repentance and clinging on to God of Jacob that night is used in Hosea 12 as an appeal to all Israel to repent as our father Jacob did, and rise to his level of maturity.

If Jacob's prayer had not been heard, Esau would have smitten "the mother with the children". This will be done by the latter day Esau to those Jews who do not match Jacob's intensity of prayer and repentance (Zech. 14:2), as it happened at the time of the Babylonian invasion which prefigured the Arab attack of the last days (Lam. 5:11).

Gen 32:12 *You said, 'I will surely do you good, and make your seed as the sand of the sea, which can't be numbered because there are so many'* - The promise to make Abraham's seed as the sand of the sea, he saw as implying that his children would not be physically harmed; yet the New Testament teaches that this promise fundamentally refers to Messiah, and those of all nations who would become "in him". At the end of his life, it seems that Jacob learnt this. We note that Jacob doesn't plead so much the promises made to him of personal preservation (Gen. 28:20), but those to Abraham (Gen. 22:17). He had spiritually grown to the point that he no longer viewed Abraham's God as somehow different to his God; he now believes that this God is his God, and the promises made to his ancestor are indeed to him personally, and have real implication for him in his personal crises. This growth is to be our pattern, as we move on from Sunday School Christianity, the faith of our fathers or of those

who first taught us the Gospel, to the awesome personal reality- that this is all deeply true for little me.

The latter day "time of Jacob's trouble" is based upon Jacob's meeting with Esau at Jabbok. Jacob's reliance on his own strength and subsequent semi-faith in God's word of promise typifies the Jews of today; his time of trouble truly humbled him, and his wrestling in prayer brought out the great faith which he was potentially capable of, as the last days will do for the Jews. Jacob's prayer is peculiarly apt to a repentant Jewry: "O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac (going back to their roots), the Lord which saidst unto me, Return unto thy country (since 1948)... I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which Thou hast shewed unto Thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan (cp. the Atlantic, Mediterranean; the airways of Eastern Europe; through the immigrant ports of Haifa, Tel Aviv...); and now I am become two bands. Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother (cp. the Arabs), from the hand of Esau: for I fear him... and Thou saidst, I will surely do thee good, and make thy seed as the sand of the sea" (32:9-12 AV). The reference to the Jewish fathers will be the result of listening to the Elijah ministry, which will turn "the heart of the children to their fathers" (Mal. 4:6). And this message of 'back to the promises, the Hope of Israel' is exactly the message we can take to the Jews in our communities today. My dream is that world-wide, we will make this witness.

Gen 32:13 *He lodged there that night, and took from that which he had with him, a present for Esau, his brother-* Jacob is an example of the hurrying man beset with unvoiced inner conflicts trying to buy off his guilt. Struggling with an awful conscience, he sent huge gifts ahead of him to try to appease his offended brother Esau. But he wasn't thereby freed from his bad conscience. He had to wrestle it out with God, with an Angel

who at times appeared in the form of both Jacob's father and brother, and come to know his own desperation and God's utter grace and love towards him.

"Present" translates a word more commonly used for sacrifice or offering; if simply a "present" was in view, a different word would be used. Jacob came to see his meeting with Esau as his meeting with God; he met the Angels as if he met Esau (:1), and he makes the connection specific in Gen. 33:10. The presents to Esau were therefore his equivalent of a sacrifice to God, by which he sought reconciliation. He would be taught that the sacrifice was in a sense necessary- for it indeed pacified Esau; but essentially it was his clinging to the Angel in tears begging for grace which was the essential thing.

Gen 32:14 *Two hundred female goats and twenty male goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams-* All told, Jacob gave Esau 550 animals. His wealth in terms of herds was therefore immense; and he had acquired this by the relatively sudden Divine blessing upon his herds in the final part of his life with Laban.

Gen 32:15 *Thirty milk camels and their colts, forty cows, ten bulls, twenty female donkeys and ten foals-* Just one camel was considered very valuable; to give 30 plus their colts was a huge gift or sacrifice. I noted on :13 that "present" is better translated "sacrifice". As we learn from Noah's ark, there was a concept of clean and unclean animals, and yet unclean animals such as camels are here effectively offered as sacrifice; and were accepted, as the impure likewise was.

Gen 32:16 *He delivered them into the hands of his servants, every herd by itself, and said to his servants, Pass over before me, and put a space between herd and herd-* There were five different groups of animals: goats, sheep, camels, cows and donkeys. And then there was Leah and her children, and finally, as the seventh group, Jacob and Rachel. This would connect with Jacob bowing

seven times to Esau (Gen. 33:3). "Before me" is literally 'before my face'; and the idea of faces / presence occurs often here in this incident. Jacob had feared the face of Laban and been preserved (Gen. 31:2,5). Now he was preparing for his face to come before the face of Esau, and again with Angelically provided Divine grace, he would see his face and be saved. All this leads up to the significance of the wrestling incident, where for an extended period, Jacob looks at close quarters into the face of an Angel as they wrestle, and due to Jacob's desperate tears of repentance he is preserved to see the face of Esau and finally that of God, by grace. So he comes to marvel that he has seen God face to face and was preserved (Gen. 32:30); and he saw in the Angel's face that of Esau (Gen. 33:10).

Gen 32:17 *He commanded the foremost, saying, When Esau, my brother, meets you, and asks you, saying, 'Whose are you? Where are you going? Whose are these before you?'*- The question 'Who are you?' was exactly that which Isaac had asked Jacob, and he had lied (Gen. 27:18 s.w.). It was the question Jacob had asked the shepherds when he first came to Mesopotamia. Now all the wrestlings of his life, against Isaac, Laban and Esau, were coming together. They same questions were being asked, to take him back to previous failures.

Gen 32:18 *Then you shall say, 'They are your servant, Jacob's. It is a present sent to my lord, Esau. Behold, he also is behind us'*- Jacob was of course aware that "the elder shall serve the younger". But he wanted to give away the blessing of the firstborn to Esau (see on Gen. 33:11). He felt quite unworthy of the blessing that the elder should serve the younger and is as it were resigning it. Or it could be that he was driven to realize a future dimension to the fulfilment of the promises. In this life just as he was not to literally inherit the *eretz* for ever, so too, he would not be served by the elder. As Abraham bought land- his own eternal

inheritance- in which to bury Sarah, so Jacob may have humbled himself as the younger before the elder, when he knew that in the scheme of eternal realities the opposite would be the case.

Gen 32:19 *He commanded also the second, and the third, and all that followed the herds, saying, This is how you shall speak to Esau, when you find him-* I suggested on :16 that there were in fact five droves of animals sent. Jacob had rightly guessed the psychology of his brother. The droves of 'presents' or offerings did indeed appease Esau and turn away his wrath. But as Esau had come to slay him, so had the Angel who was to wrestle with him. And Moses' own account of how an Angel sought to slay him for his unfaithfulness to the covenant is surely based upon this. Moses recognized that the path of all the true seed, including himself, was to be based upon Jacob's.

Gen 32:20 *You shall say, 'Not only that, but behold, your servant, Jacob, is behind us'. For, he said, I will appease him with the present that goes before me, and afterward I will see his face. Perhaps he will accept me-* The appeasing of Esau by sacrifice ["presents"] is not to be taken as meaning that God too was somehow appeased by sacrifice. For God is not an angry deity. Rather, God's anger turned away by Jacob's appeal to His grace with tears, and deep repentance. As noted on :16, Jacob's seeing of Esau's face represented how he saw the Angel's face and was preserved. In the end, the plan to appease Esau using presents / sacrifice wasn't used.

The approach of Esau in angry judgment reflected God's attitude to Jacob (Gen. 33:10). Jacob realized that he must "appease" (Heb. *kaphar*, normally translated 'to make atonement') Esau with gifts of animals. This is surely a confession of sin on his part. But when he offers them to Esau, Esau kindly responds that he "has all". But all the same Jacob wants to make the sacrifice, to give up the material things... and in all this, too,

we see an accurate reflection of God's position with Jacob (and indeed all of us).

The Hebrew here is significant: "He said that I may cover his face with the gift to go toward his face; and after I will appear to his face, perhaps he will uplift his face". He had "set his face" to make the journey (Gen. 31:21), and now he realizes that he must meet the face of Esau. We note that Jacob is concerned about the face of Esau; and now he will wrestle with the very face of God. And afterwards reflect that in the Angel's face he saw the face of Esau. His attitude to his brother's face was his attitude to the face of God. And the wrestling match brings him right up against that face. Jacob tried to "appease" Esau with material things, in his own strength; but later he reflects that he was seeking "to find favour / grace in the eyes of my lord" (Gen. 33:8). And so it was with God; he realized that God cannot be appeased, He is not an offended deity who is appeased by sacrifice [the word used for the "presents" Jacob sent Esau is that for sacrifice]; rather must He be appealed to for His pure grace.

Gen 32:21 *So the present passed over before him, and he himself lodged that night in the camp-* "The present" uses the Hebrew term usually and many times translated "offering"; and acceptable offerings come up before the face of Yahweh. That is stressed many times; and the offering here comes before the face; "before *him*" is added by the translators as the phrase as it stands seems strange. But so many times these words offering and "before [the face]" are used together about sacrifice coming acceptably before Yahweh. So there is the hint that this present / sacrifice, although it largely included unclean animals, was acceptable with God.

Gen 32:22 *He rose up that night, and took his two wives, and his two handmaids, and his eleven sons, and passed over the ford of the Jabbok-* Jacob passed over the ford; but then we find him

alone, wrestling with the Angel all night; and then in :31 he passes over the ford again. So I suggest his fear was at such a pitch that he left his family and crossed back over the ford, alone. And it was at that point, so alone and so fearful, that he met God.

'Jabbok' and 'Jacob' are related; the idea is that now Jacob was crossing over from his old name and being obsessed with material blessing and catching his brother's heel; and becoming Israel, the struggler with God. The idea of 'crossing' is emphasized four times in the Hebrew of :22,23; and 'Hebrew' means 'one who crosses over'. And yet in his final blessing of his sons, and demoting Reuben from being firstborn, Jacob shows that he still retained the elements of the old Jacob, and his conversion here was a peak of spirituality and perception that tailed off, as so often happens in human spiritual experience. There are clear similarities with how Jacob had fled from Laban and passed over a river, being again "two camps", and again being saved by God's grace articulated through Angels. Here again Jacob passes over a river. The primary audience of Genesis were Israel in the wilderness, who likewise "rose up in the night" with all they had, and passed over the Red Sea to salvation and the *eretz*. Constantly, Moses was seeking to encourage them from the historical precedents found in the story of the Abraham family. We note that the "two wives" are differentiated from the "two handmaids", even though the wives both gave their maids to Jacob 'to be his wife'. The inspired commentary clearly doesn't accept that, and thereby raises questions over the legitimacy and spirituality of what Jacob [and Abraham] did in this regard.

I noted earlier on Gen. 31:2,35 that Jacob believed in the 'evil eye' and in the standard mythology of his time; he had not yet made Yahweh his God. Which ought to have precluded all such beliefs. And so it cannot be ignored that the folklore of the time believed there were 'river demons' which must sometimes

be overcome before crossing a river. Jacob wrestles with the Angel on the banks or on the pebbly shore of the Jabbok, before he himself passes over it. He was being taught that the real demon he had to wrestle with was himself, and his attitudes to his father and brother. And there are in fact no river demons to wrestle with- only God.

Gen 32:23 *He took them, and sent them over the stream, and sent over that which he had-* The language of taking and sending over is exactly that used of how he had crossed the Euphrates before meeting Laban (Gen. 31:21). Truly circumstances repeat; one situation is to strengthen us for the next. "That which he had" meant that Jacob was now stripped of everything. He wasn't even with Rachel; he had sent her over the Jabbok, and was totally alone. We wonder whether he was hatching some desperate plan to try to return alone toward Haran, or at least to cross the Euphrates back into the land of the east. He was in a similar situation to when 20 or 40 years previously, he had been left alone at Bethel and saw the staircase with Angels.

Gen 32:24 *Jacob was left alone, and wrestled with a man there until the breaking of the day-* Through this, Jacob learnt the real import of the promises. Like us and Elijah, he had to come to a point of being totally alone to perceive how they applied to himself personally (the same Hebrew phrase "left alone" is used in 1 Kings 18:22; 19:10,14). The tension of ideas is between being "left alone", and yet having "a man" with him- clearly an Angel, representing God's presence when a man is truly stripped of all else, just as Jacob had been earlier at Bethel. All Jacob's scaffolding was removed, to leave him "alone" with God, and yet not alone because God was with him. This is the path of all who comprise the Israel of God. Perhaps it was in retrospect that he named the place Mahanaim, the two camps, Jacob's camp and that of his guardian Angels. Jacob came to realize that all his life,

he had been wrestling with God, his Angel, and he now came to beg his God for the blessing of forgiveness, implying he had repented. The Hebrew for "wrestle" can mean both to wrestle and also simply to cling on to. It seems he started wrestling, and ended up clinging on to the Angel, desperately begging for salvation and forgiveness. His great physical strength (remember how he alone moved the huge stone from the well, Gen. 29:2) was redirected into a spiritual clinging on to the promises of forgiveness and salvation. And this will be our pattern of growth too. It seems Jacob was familiar with the idea of wrestling with God as being related to prayer. Rachel speaks of how "with wrestlings of God have I wrestled... and I have prevailed" in obtaining a child (Gen. 30:8; AV "great" = Heb. 'elohim'). We know from Hos. 12 that Jacob became aware that he was wrestling with an Angel, not just a man. At first, he thought this was a random stranger. But the random stranger in his life was in fact God. He began wrestling, then the Angel touched his thigh, and then he realized... and clung to the Angel in prayer with tears, begging for mercy, as Hosea describes. And received the Angelic blessing. And so it was a case of the magnificent defeat; the wrestling turned into a desperate clinging to the Angel, refusing to let go until he was blessed / forgiven; even though the promises to Abraham were all about blessing. His wrestling is therefore to be understood as prayer and pleading, although doubtless it started as a physical struggle with an unknown stranger, who he later recognized as an Angel, and then perceived as God Himself. The Angel came to Jacob with the desire to kill him, as Esau (whom the Angel represented) approached him in the same spirit. It was by Jacob's desperate clinging on to God, his pleading, his intense prayer (Hos. 12:4) that he changed God's intention, after the pattern of Moses in later years. The sentence of death we received in Adam perhaps

doesn't mean as much to us as it should. Our reversal of it will involve quite some struggle.

Jacob wrestled / struggled in prayer with the Angel. Consider the Biblical emphasis on the idea of struggle, quite apart from the fact that Jacob's night of wrestling is a cameo of the experience of all who would be counted among the Israel of God. Job felt that his prayers were a striving with God (Job 33:13). Christ's prayers in Gethsemane are described as a "striving" (Heb. 12:4); Paul asks the Romans to *strive* in prayer, so that he may be *delivered from unbelievers* (cp. Esau), and *return* to them with a *blessing* (Rom. 15:30). This is all allusion to Jacob. Likewise Epaphras 'strove' for the Colossians in his prayers (Col. 4:12 AVmg.). Our prayers are to give the Father no "rest" (Is. 62:7), no cessation from violent warfare (Strong).

The spiritual weakness of Jacob at the time of the wrestling incident can be inferred from the way Hosea speaks about Jacob in Hosea 12. Hosea paints Jacob as a hypocrite, one who prays to God and yet serves idols. Hosea is recognizing that the sins of the fathers tend to continue in subsequent generations; and yet those generations are still culpable for their sin [alcoholics who blame 'inherited genes' should bear this in mind]. But the point is, Hosea is reasoning upon the basis of the similarities between Jacob and the Israel of his day; and he's urging them not to be like Jacob, not to blame their weakness on the fact Jacob was their genetic ancestor; and perhaps urging them to go and make the conversion to true spirituality which Jacob eventually made.

Gen 32:25 *When he saw that he didn't prevail against him*- God had taught Jacob this idea through Rachel saying that she had wrestled with God's wrestling in order to have a child (Gen. 30:8). Jacob however did not prevail in prayer, and neither did God as it were prevail against or upon him. It was a perfectly equal balance of power [or so it seemed to Jacob]. But then the

Angel with a touch demonstrated that this apparent balance of power between God and man was [and is] utterly illusory. Jacob was being made to realize that this was how he had perceived things; but God's grace makes all such balance of power theory irrelevant. Hos. 12:4-6 presents the wrestling as Jacob begging the Angel for grace, and prevailing over God, as it were, by receiving this. So I suggest that the hours of wrestling to a perfectly balanced stalemate was not the time Hos. 12 refers to. Rather it was once Jacob had got to this point of apparent balance of power with God, that the Angel touches his thigh. And then after that, knowing he was utterly beaten, Jacob begs for grace and mercy and will not let the Angel go, looking right into his face, and it is in this sense that he 'prevails' as Hosea says.

Hosea comments that Jacob had power with God and prevailed. But the folklore of the time was full of stories of mighty men who wrestled with the gods- and always lost. But here, with Yahweh the only true God, God allows Himself to be defeated; or, holds Himself back from conquering and humiliating man. And in fact, allows man to win; in that man's collapse and clinging to God for His grace is in fact the magnificent defeat. Until both sides collapse into each other's arms in love and mutual respect. Hence the Hebrew words for "wrestle" and "embrace" are virtually identical. It is therefore hugely significant that Esau embraces Jacob in Gen. 33:4. His embrace of Jacob reflected how the Angel ended up embracing Jacob, as Jacob clung to him begging for mercy. Esau's embrace of Jacob reflects how after Jacob's repentance, the Angel embraced him. Indeed, all God's wrestling with Jacob was really an embrace of him, all done in love.

This is what it is, to be Israel. When a man starts to wrestle with another, the other has to wrestle against the body that begins wrestling against his. And this is how wrestling becomes

such an appropriate image. Man wrestles with God in resisting His ways; and so God ends up wrestling with man. And He never prevails against man by some overpowering use of force or strength; indeed, He allows His Israel to win, although thereby He also wins; and He shows at the end how with just one touch, all our muscular strength is revealed as nothing. The wrestling was at night, recalling how it was in the darkness of the womb that he had grasped at Esau's feel; and how he had used the darkness of his father's blindness to deceive him and grasp the blessing of the firstborn. He now realizes that the only blessing he desperately wants is that of God's mercy and forgivenss ["I will not let you go until you bless me", :26].

He touched the hollow of his thigh, and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was strained, as he wrestled- "Wrestled" translates a Hebrew word which is a form of that for 'Jacob'. Jacob's wrestling, trying by sleight of hand to win in his own strength, was what Jacob was all about. He 'Jacobed' against God. To touch the thigh is an image used elsewhere in the Jacob story, where the same Hebrew word for "thigh" is used: When Abraham makes his servant touch his thigh to promise to not marry Isaac to a Canaanite (Gen. 24:2); and about Jacob asking Joseph to promise not to bury him in Egypt (Gen. 47:29). So to touch the thigh is to promise. God through the Angel was reaffirming the promises to Jacob- even whilst he was pitting all his strength against God. And that touch of the thigh disabled Jacob, making him give up all reliance upon human strength. Our response to being sworn to by God has to be the same. We limp the rest of our lives, clinging on to His grace. We would have expected God to wait until Jacob realized he was fighting God, beg for forgiveness- and only then reconfirm the covenant with him. But God's grace is such that whilst Jacob was pitting all his strength against God, God reconfirms the covenant. Grace takes the

initiative. We have the same experience. Jacob was born the seed of Abraham, but we likewise are the seed of Abraham, in the same covenant, through baptism. Jacob had [rather manipulatively] pleaded the promise to Abraham that his seed would be "as the sand of the sea", reasoning as if that promise was also made to himself. When that had not yet been promised to Jacob personally. So Jacob was slowly moving towards accepting he was the seed of Abraham; and God moved towards him in leaps and bounds. He does the same with us.

The sign of circumcision was given as the confirmation that the promise regarding a son would be fulfilled. Abraham had to figuratively cut off part of his vital organ in order to be assured that *God* would provide a son for him. Accepting God's promises means that we too must give up our human strength and attempts to fulfil them. Likewise when Jacob was given the repeated covenant acceptance, he was wounded in his "thigh" and thereafter walked with a limp. "It is not impossible that the damage to the "thigh" means Jacob was assaulted in his vital organs. Thus, the "limp" refers to the mark left on his very manhood and future". So the touching of the thigh may have removed his virility; whatever, it was a touch at a very deeply internal point. God likewise touches us deep within, to convict us of our weakness. And we walk through the rest of life limping, just as we have a choice to fall upon the stone of Christ and be broken, or have that stone fall upon us and grind us to powder.

It has been observed: "Three biblical scholars, S. Gervitz, L. Eslinger, and S. H. Smith, also argue that

Jacob's injury occurs to his genitals.The *kap yareh*, they point out, refers either to the "hand of the thigh"—the penis, or to the "hollow, pouch-like" scrotum. Citing J. Skinner, L. Eslinger suggests that when Genesis says that Jacob's hip was put out (32:25), what it means is that "Jacob had a hernia at the place

of the scrotum's attachment to the body in the course of the struggle." This interpretation of Jacob's injury as sexual has far-reaching implications...". Possibly we could argue that his wasted years with Laban were a result of his sexual list for Rachel, and now this was revealed to him- by one gentle touch of the Angel.

Gen 32:26 *The man said, Let me go, for the day breaks-* We enquire why the Angel was so urgent that Jacob stop wrestling before daybreak. It could be that the idea was that Jacob was to be slain by the Angel unless he learnt his lesson before daybreak. But it was clear Jacob wasn't going to do so. But the Angel wanted to bless him; hence he urges him to give up his wrestling with God before daybreak. Rather like Gen. 19:22,23 could imply that the Angel could do nothing to destroy Sodom until Lot was in Zoar at day break. So we see again how God urges Jacob to meet the preconditions for salvation, despite Jacob struggling against submitting to them. Just as Abraham was dragged kicking and screaming, as it were, from Ur to Canaan. We see here the essence of Yahweh, the God who so desperately wants to save, and who was to be so exactly manifested in His Son Yahshua, 'Yah saves'.

Jacob said, I won't let You go, unless You bless me- Notice the chronology of events and the explanation give on :25. They wrestle but neither wins. They are apparently at perfect balance between Divine strength and Jacob's. Then the Angel touches Jacob, and after that Jacob knows he is humanly beaten. But he clings on to the Angel begging for mercy and in this way 'had power with God' as Hosea 12 says; he in that sense "had power over the Angel" and prevailed, refusing to let the otherwise victorious Angel go, unless he blesses him with forgiveness. There is a strong link between blessing and forgiveness; we think of Pharaoh asking to be blessed (Ex. 12:32), and David speaking

of the blessedness of forgiveness (Rom. 4:6). Acts 3:25,26 makes explicit that the Abrahamic blessing was essentially of forgiveness. Having been made powerless and beaten, Jacob clung on to the Angel [this is one possible understanding of the Hebrew translated 'wrestle']. And it was this which paradoxically gave Jacob the upper hand.

Gen 32:27 *He said to him, What is your name? He said, Jacob-* There is reason to think that the Angel also reminded Jacob of his father Isaac; for it was Isaac who had asked Jacob 'Who are you?', and he had lied in saying 'I am Esau'. His father had loved him less than Esau; and he had struggled with his father because of this. The way Jacob begs the Angel to bless him recalls how he so earnestly wanted to obtain his father's blessing. Jacob's pleading for blessing with the Angel would have reminded him of Esau's desperate pleading for the blessing from Isaac.. But the struggle with his father, as with his brother, was all now revealed as essentially a struggle with God. All these things were restimulated in Jacob's mind by the wrestling. The Angel asks him what his name is, in exactly the same way as Isaac had asked him 20 or 40 years before. At that time he had lied. But now he truthfully answers the Angel: "Jacob", the deceiver. And then he begs for the blessing of forgiveness. He had struggled with men, with Isaac and Isaac's influence of Jacob's spirituality, with his brother Esau, with Laban, and with himself. And the Angel said that in all these struggles with men, Jacob had ultimately won in that he had confessed he was a deceiver, a sinner.

Gen 32:28 *He said, Your name will no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have fought with God and with men, and have prevailed-* As explained on :25-27, after reaching a stalemate where Jacob did not prevail against God, the Angel touched his thigh and he became powerless. But he desperately clung to the

Angel, peering into his face, and begged for the true Abrahamic blessing of forgiveness and fellowship with God. And this was granted. So the paradox was that by not prevailing in his own strength, he did prevail. This is why he was renamed "Israel". "Israel" effectively means something like 'God rules' (Gen. 32:22-28) (James Muilenburg, *The Way Of Israel* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962) p. 45); His people of the new Israel are those over whom He rules. We therefore are under His Kingdom now, if we accept Christ as King over our lives. The name was a testament to the fact that in a way, God had prevailed; in another sense, Jacob had prevailed. We see here the endless mutuality between God and man, once we surrender. He wins, and we win. "With God and with men" confirms the idea often presented in this section, that the Angel represented men like Isaac, Laban and Esau with whom Jacob had wrestled.

But the meaning of 'Israel' is hard to define; just as the true nature of God's people, His "Israel", is hard to define. It can mean 'God struggles' just as much as it means 'struggler with God'. It can also imply 'let *El* rule / prevail / win'. Israel are those who let Him rule and have His way in their lives. It perfectly reflects the mutuality of man's relationship with God. Our struggle with Him means that He inevitably, axiomatically struggles with us. "Israel" is the epitomy of the whole Divine-human encounter. "Israel" likewise can mean 'God struggles' as well as 'God rules', i.e. wins the struggle. God wrestles with us because we wrestle with Him. But because He struggles / wrestles, He must win / rule. For God shall not be ever defeated. And His 'winning' means our salvation and blessing, as happened with Jacob. This incident gave birth to the whole name 'Israel'; it is therefore programmatic of every man's walk with God. And so Hosea says, commenting on this incident, that there God spoke with us; or as the Hebrew means, "There He keeps on speaking with us". This

is what it is, to be Israel. And I suggest that "Israel", with all it implies, is the fulfilment of the promise to Abraham to make his name great. Great in significance, freighted with God's grace and human struggle against it. The question is whether man, as Jacob, wants to become Israel, or remain fearful Jacob in the darkness, trying to manage life in our own strength.

Gen 32:29 *Jacob asked him, Please tell me Your name. He said, Why is it that you ask what My name is? He blessed him there-* The Hebrew idea of a name is connected with the idea of who a person essentially is. In Biblical Hebrew, one would enquire after a person's literal name by asking "Who (*mi*) are you?"- not, as was asked of Jacob, "What (*mah*) is your name?" (Gen. 32:28). This question to Jacob was therefore a request for him to ask himself who he really was. God's Name in this sense is to become part of ours- hence after God's declaration of His Name to Moses, the Israelites started to insert parts of the Yah / Jah name into their own. Jacob's request to know [effectively] God's Name is not answered with a specific word or lexical item. His natural quesion would have been "Will you please not harm me?". Instead he asks for the Name of his opponent. He guesses it's an Angel. It is God. And he asks for the Name, because he senses that he needs the grace which he guesses is in that Name. It is answered by giving Jacob a blessing by grace, and that blessing is of forgiveness. Jacob of course would have perceived that "This is Yahweh"; but Yahweh is not so much a word [and all who are obsessed with the Name *per se* are missing this], but an intention, the Divine intention to bless by grace. That is His Name, His "I will". And it came to full term in Yahoshua, 'Yah saves'. Jacob's statement 'I am Jacob', 'the twister', is effectively a statement of repentance. He twice lied to his father, "I am Esau". Now he is honest about who he really is. God's response is to bless, to forgive, and to assure Jacob that this is effectively His

eternal Name. And "Jacob have I loved...". In fact all obsession with pinning God down to a lexical item like Jehovah or Yahweh is utterly misplaced.

Manoah had to learn the same in Jud. 13:17-19: "And Manoah said to the angel of the LORD, “What is your name, so that, when your words come true, we may honor you?” And the angel of the LORD said to him, “Why do you ask my name, seeing it is wonderful?”". The Name is to be experienced, not mouthed off as a word, as a mere lexical item. "Why do you ask my Name?", as here with Jacob, is a rhetorical question. 'Why do you ask it? Because you want to just think that relationship with Me is a question of knowing a word. But it's more wonderful than that. Experience My grace and blessing, and then you will know My Name'. Likewise when Moses asked to be given the name of God in order to tell Israel who had met with him, he was told a seven fold series of "I will..." statements. God is who He is to us in our experience of His salvation."I am who I am" *to you*, in experience. The obsession with pronouncing the Name, as seen in the "Jehovah's Witnesses" and other groups, is thus presented as primitive and totally misplaced.

Jacob knew the Yahweh Name, he knew the name El Shaddai (Ex. 6:3); surely he was asking for a deeper exposition of the Name. He realized his need to draw closer to God. But the Angel grants him the blessing of forgiveness, and says that Jacob doesn't need such an exposition, because he now knows the character of God: he has received such grace and forgiveness and future assurance. This is the Name / character of God revealed. Thus Jacob realized that he knew the theory of God, but not the practice. Latter day Jacob, natural and spiritual, are little better. In so many ways, so often, we know but don't believe; and it has been commonly observed that the problem with us is that we are right in doctrine but very weak in practice. This shouldn't

surprise us. It was exactly the characteristic of our father Jacob. But the God of Bethel is our God too, and will bring us through to a deeper maturity. That night, Jacob reached "manhood", spiritual maturity (Hos. 12:3 RV).

Gen 32:30 *Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for, he said, I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved-* Jacob's comment at the end of the wrestling experience was that "my life is preserved"; and that Hebrew phrase is so often used by David (Ps. 7:2; 22:20; 25:20; 33:19; 56:13; 86:13; 97:10; 120:2). Likewise Jacob commented that the experience had shown him that God had been gracious unto him (Gen. 33:11); and *that* Hebrew phrase too is a catch phrase of David's (Ps. 4:1; 6:2; 9:13; 25:16; 26:11; 27:11; 30:8; 31:9 and many others). We too can make Jacob our hero, as David did.

It could be that 'seeing face to face' is being used in the same way as in 2 Kings 14:8, where armies 'see each other face to face', i.e. in confrontation. He is marvelling that he has had confrontation with God, both that night and throughout his earlier life- but has been preserved by grace.

Jacob will tell Esau, "I see your face as seeing the face of God" (Gen. 33:10). Clearly He saw what happened at Peniel, 'the face of God', as having been a foretaste of meeting Esau- and being saved from rightful death by grace. The Angels went out to meet him (:1) just as Esau came out to meet him. His meeting with God [in the Angel] was his meeting with his brother. Again he was shown that wrestling with our brother, even in our own mind, is actually wrestling God. We have here an Old Testament form of the explicit New Testament teaching, that our attitude to our brother is our attitude to God. The blessing of Num. 6:24-26 associates God's face with blessing and peace. And Jacob saw that face. We can infer from this that Esau was totally forgiving towards Jacob, because Esau's faith reflected that of

God. We note that in wrestling, Jacob would have looked right into the face of the Angel, from very close quarters. This is how close we can get to God in our struggles. It is not possible for man to see God's face (Ex. 33:20). The idea is that Jacob has done the impossible. Without realizing it at the time; just as at Bethel he felt that "The Lord is in this place, and I knew it not" (Gen. 28:16). The experience of grace and blessing is the experience of that which is impossible by any other means. The Hebrew for "preserved" is that used in :11, where Jacob prays to be preserved from Esau. The wrestling with the Angel and obtaining blessing and victory through surrender... was understood as prophetic of Jacob's preservation from Esau, and final victory over him.

Gen 32:31 *The sun rose on him as he passed over Peniel, and he limped because of his thigh-* Paul may well allude to Jacob in speaking of how his "thorn in the flesh" humbled him. The same word for "limped" is used of how latter day repentant Israel will also limp, and yet likewise be saved by grace from their neighbouring enemies, whose ancestors were Laban and Esau (Mic. 4:6,7; Zeph. 3:19). Again we have a case of 'Bible television', of the text enabling us to envisage the situation, and focusing in upon an individual; and here the spotlight is upon Jacob limping, silhouetted against the dawn of a new day and worldview for him.

Yahweh had earlier promised Jacob, quite simply: "I will do you good", and had undertaken to return Jacob. But this involved His meeting with Jacob and wrestling with him, and wounding him so that he limped the rest of his life. All this was the path needed [because of Jacob's being 'Jacob'], in order to ultimately 'do him good'. And as Hosea notes, "There He spake with *us*" each one. We limp into God's Kingdom. All the calls and claims to triumphalism, to healing and blessing *now*, are rather missing the whole point.

Gen 32:32 *Therefore the children of Israel don't eat the sinew of the hip, which is on the hollow of the thigh, to this day, because he touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh in the sinew of the hip*- This refers to the nerve tendon which extends from the thigh down the leg to the ankle. But I suggested above that the wound to the thigh may have been an equivalent to circumcision, and could refer to damage to Jacob's reproductive organ. The Hebrew for "thigh" is used in this way both specifically (Gen. 24:2; 47:29) and more figuratively when it is the same word often translated "loins" in the context of begettal of a child. As with us, it was the touch of Jacob at his most sensitive which humbled him, and made him give up his attempts to justify himself in his own strength. This is why we often fail, or made to realize our weakness, at what we may think of as our strongest point. The careful driver runs a red light, the capable craftsman makes a foolish mistake.

GENESIS CHAPTER 33

Gen 33:1 *Jacob lifted up his eyes, and looked, and, behold, Esau was coming, and with him four hundred men. He divided the children between Leah, Rachel, and the two handmaids-* We should read this as reminding us that Jacob had already divided up his family. For he had sent them over the Jabbok whilst he wrestled alone with the Angel. Jacob had already been informed by the "messengers", who I suggested were Angels, that Esau was coming with 400 men. We imagine Jacob counting them and accepting that the Angel messenger had told the truth; although he perhaps hoped they had got it wrong. I suggested on Gen. 32 that "four hundred men" is a term elsewhere used about a military brigade. The fact Esau keeps coming with this large group of soldiers suggests that Jacob's attempts at appeasement by "presents" [the same Hebrew word for "sacrifice"] had been unsuccesful. All he could do was cast himself upon Esau's grace. And so it had been in his wrestling with the Angel, just one of the army of [400?] Angels who had come to meet him. His attempts to appease God by sacrifice were no good; and he had thrown himself upon God's grace, and succeeded. It all looked ahead to how reconcilliation with God was to be by grace and not sacrifice.

Gen 33:2 *He put the handmaids and their children in front, Leah and her children after, and Rachel and Joseph at the rear-* We see here his favouritism; not only of Rachel and Joseph, but his consideration that the sons of the maids were somehow second class children. We again see how his wives' attempt to give him

their maids 'as his wife' was mistaken and didn't work out happily in the end.

Gen 33:3 *He himself passed over in front of them-* Before wrestling the Angel, he had been behind them, having sent them in front of him; and I suggested his plan had been to try to return alone to Haran. But after his experience of grace with the Angel, he believed that if he had seen God's face, peering right into it close up as he [as it were] wrestled with God, and had been accepted by grace... so it was going to be with Esau. And so he changes plan, and instead of putting himself last, passes in front of them all. This explains the force of "he himself".

And bowed himself to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother- Jacob's new appreciation of the blessing of forgiveness is reflected by the way in which he effectively tells Esau that he is handing back to him the birthright, the physical blessings. The way he bows down seven times to Esau is rejecting the blessing he had obtained by deceit from Isaac: "Be master over your brethren, and let your mother's sons bow down to you" (Gen. 27:29). His experience of the blessing of God's grace was sufficient for him, and he rejected all else. I noted on Gen. 32:16 that the seven bows were intended to be preceded by the six droves of gifts; but now, apparently, Jacob forgets that plan and himself goes to Esau. "Present" is the word more usually translated sacrifice or offering. So Jacob as it were makes the sacrifice but realizes that grace removes its power, and goes himself to the front. Jacob casting himself upon grace is every man. The image of a man falling seven times to the earth, and then arising in spiritual triumph, is used about every believer in Prov. 24:16.

Gen 33:4 *Esau ran to meet him, embraced him, fell on his neck, kissed him, and they wept-* Jacob's meeting with the Angels (Gen. 21:1) and then with the Angel was all predictive of his

meeting with Esau. He feared God's judgment, as he feared Esau. But in a beautiful way, his fears are met. God runs to meet the sinner, meeting us in Christ, by grace; and Esau Jacob's rightful enemy meets him in tears, probably much to the shock of the 400 men with Esau. The primary audience of Genesis was Israel in the wilderness, who likewise were called to go and meet God and yet feared to do so because of their conscience of their sins and idolatry (Ex. 19:17 s.w.). The same word for "meet" is used of how Edom, which is Esau, came out to "meet" Israel with the sword (Num. 20:18,20), as did other formidable enemies of Israel as they travelled through the wilderness (Dt. 1:44; 2:32; 3:1). The encouragement was that what seemed impossible odds would somehow be overcome.

The Lord Jesus reflected the Father's positive spirit in the way He framed the parable of the prodigal son to feature the Heavenly Father as running out to meet the returning son, falling on his neck and kissing him...in *exactly* the language of Gen. 33:4 about Esau doing this to Jacob. The connection can't be denied; but what was the Lord's point? Surely He was willing to see something positive in the otherwise fleshly Esau at that time, He as it were took a snapshot of Esau at that moment...and applied it to God Himself, in His extravagant grace towards an unworthy Jacob. This was how positive minded the Lord was in His reading of even the darkest characters.

At the end of Jacob's life, Joseph also falls on his neck and weeps for him, just as the Father does to the repentant prodigal (Gen. 46:29). Jacob's neck had once been covered with animal skin in the deceit of his father Isaac (Gen. 27:16), and Esau too wept on that same neck, the neck which had been used to deceive and rob Esau. And Joseph was to weep upon it too, after Jacob has again sent an ambassage ahead of him to Joseph as he did to Esau (see on Gen. 46:28). These otherwise strange

connections with Jacob's neck would have served to show him that through his acceptance of the spiritual seniority of his great son Joseph, he had indeed been forgiven of all this miserable past.

The Hebrew word for 'wrestle' and for 'embrace' are the same. I discussed on Gen. 32:25 how Esau's embrace of Jacob reflects how after Jacob's repentance, the Angel embraced him. Indeed, all God's wrestling with Jacob was really an embrace of him, all done in love.

Hosea uses the wrestling incident as an appeal for Israel / Jacob to come to intimacy with God. The idea of the wrestling incident is that the Angel like Esau came out to destroy Jacob because of his deceit- which is a major complaint of God against Israel, and Hosea against Gomer. Jacob began life in the womb in a wrestle with Esau, and the Angel represents Esau. Hosea repeatedly warns that destruction is just around the corner for Israel. The Assyrians / Babylonians are about to pounce, like an eagle hovering above God's house. But Jacob wrestled with the Angel, and ended up getting a blessing, with his life preserved. And in the wrestling, both Jacob and the Angel changed or matured. And so it could have been between God and Israel. The tortured mind of God revealed in Hos. 11:8 was reflected in the Angel whilst wrestling with Jacob. Jacob is alluded to, as he was a deceiver like Gomer / Israel had been. Yet even he came to faith and covenant with God, as Gomer / Israel could do. And just as the wrestling produced literal intimacy between Jacob and the Angel, so intimacy between God and Israel, as between Hosea and Gomer, could be created. Jacob had been a wrestler from the start. The Hebrew word used for wrestling is *abaq*, related to the word *yabboq*, the Jabbok river which Jacob crossed to wrestle with the Angel. And these words likewise sound like 'Jacob', *Yaaqob*. The word for "heel" likewise is *aqeb*,

and Jacob's first wrestling was with the heel of Esau. In Gen. 33:4, Jacob embraces Esau, and the word *habaq* is used. The wrestling [*abaq*] resulted in the intimacy of embrace, *habaq*. Just as it did with the Angel. Literally, the Angel *'yabboq*'ed Jacob, he Jacobed Jacob. And yet "he [Jacob]struggled with" contains the Hebrew letters for "Israel". Jacob 'Israeled' the Angel. This is what it is to be Israel, to struggle with God and attain His grace, as God 'Jacobed' Jacob. We have here a picture of the mutual intimacy achieved through the wrestling.

Gen 33:5 *He lifted up his eyes, and saw the women and the children; and said, Who are these with you? He said, The children whom God has graciously given your servant-* As noted on :3, Jacob's original plan of sending droves of presents in front of him and then appearing last of all... had been changed by the wrestling experience. Knowing God's grace, Jacob had presented himself alone. But as the droves pulled up behind him, Esau naturally enquired about them.

Jacob called Esau his master by describing himself as Esau's servant, in evident rejection of the Divine promise they both knew: that Esau would serve Jacob (Gen. 25:23). And yet at this very point, Jacob speaks of "the children which God has graciously given your servant"; and this scene is cited in Is. 8:18 as a type of Christ and his spiritual children of promise. In similar vein, Is. 49:21 uses this scene as a picture of the faithful remnant among Jacob in the last days. Jacob was reflecting his experience of grace; he realized that his many children were a gift of grace. All the human devices used to produce them- marrying two sisters, sleeping with their maids, mandrakes etc.- he now realized were not the real source of them. This blessing was solely and totally of God's gracious gift.

Gen 33:6 *Then the handmaids came near with their children, and they bowed themselves-* The original plan had been that they

would all meet Esau alone, and then Jacob would come. The wives were after all Esau's relatives. But as explained on :3, Jacob's encounter with grace the previous night had led to a radical change of plan. He came to Esau first, and the wives and children afterwards. They too bowed down, as if recognizing that they were inferior to Esau and he was master of all their clan.

Gen 33:7 *Leah also and her children came near, and bowed themselves. After them, Joseph came near with Rachel, and they bowed themselves-* The Hebrew for "came near" is used insistently and multiple times in the record of Jacob's coming near to Isaac and deceiving Esau out of the blessing (Gen. 27:21,22,25,26,27). The whole incident is an undoing of the sin, an attempted repentance.

The other women go forward first, followed by their children. But Joseph went in front of Rachel. Perhaps even as a child, he felt himself to be the saviour of others. Or perhaps Rachel was so utterly self absorbed that she used her child as a human shield.

Gen 33:8 *Esau said, What do you mean by all this company which I met? Jacob said, To find grace in the sight of my lord-* "Present" is the Hebrew word usually translated sacrifice or offering. Esau, like God, was saying that such sacrifice was not needed for reconciliation. Grace is found in the face of God and man not by sacrifice, but by a broken and contrite spirit. David had to learn the same.

Jacob admits he had sent the presents in order to buy grace, but Esau makes it clear that such grace cannot be bought, and he is not interested in having them. Esau in this way exactly reflects God's position with Jacob. Esau may be asking a rhetorical question: 'Why are you trying to buy grace from me with these presents? You can't buy it. I'm giving it'. The meaning of the gifts, and their acceptance, is therefore that we give in response to

what God has given us- and not in order to attain His gifts in the first place.

Gen 33:9 *Esau said, I have enough, my brother; let that which you have be yours-* God likewise is not in need of presents / sacrifice. "Enough" is the same Hebrew word translated "elder" in the controversial promise that the elder would serve the younger (Gen. 25:23). Esau may be saying that he considers himself hugely blessed, and doesn't therefore need any more confirmation that he was in fact the elder; he felt Isaac's material blessing of the firstborn had come true for him in any case. Esau therefore also learnt something through this incident; he came against Jacob not to get the blessing, as he felt he already had received it; but for revenge. But he now realizes that having God's blessing means that revenge is not something that is necessary.

Esau's statement that he has everything may be a way of saying that he has anyway received the blessing of the firstborn and therefore all Jacob's machinations to get it had not achieved anything anyway. This would also be a tacit recognition that Isaac's much coveted words of blessing had not come true for Jacob anyway.

Gen 33:10 *Jacob said, Please no, if I have now found grace in your sight, then receive my present at my hand, because I have seen your face, as one sees the face of God-* Jacob is brought to understand that it was not his gifts that had earned him acceptance by God and Esau. It was of grace alone. But his response to that grace was to give perhaps all he had materially.

Jacob recognizes that the second stage of his wrestling with the Angel, when his natural strength had been neutralized and he was close up face to face with God begging for grace, had effectively been seeing the face of Esau. "Present" is the Hebrew usually translated offering or sacrifice. Jacob had at the last

minute reversed his plan of sending presents / sacrifice ahead of him to appease Esau; see on :3. He realized that sacrifice of itself would not enable sinful man to meet the face of God nor his offended brother. Only a desperate, face to face appeal for grace could do that. But having learnt that, he all the same wants to give the present / sacrifice. And this should be our motivation too for any offering we bring. Of itself, it cannot reconcile us to God and man. We offer it in gratitude for grace. And this would have been so relevant to the primary audience of Genesis, Israel in the wilderness who were hearing commandments about sacrifice.

And you were pleased with me- "Pleased" in Hebrew carries the idea of satisfying debt, and is often used of how God "accepted" sacrifice. So the purposeful paradox of ideas is: 'Because you accepted me without sacrifice, you accepted by broken and contrite heart as sacrifice, then please in any case accept my material sacrifice'. And this was exactly what David was brought to understand when forgiven regarding Bathsheba and Uriah. The unexpected nature of Esau's forgiveness and acceptance is therefore felt by Jacob to be a reflection of God's forgiveness of him. His wrestling with the Angel reflected his wrestling with his father, and with his brother. All of that was wrestling with God. God's forgiveness, when properly perceived, has a similar unexpected quality to it, as explained well by C.S. Lewis in *Surprised by Joy*.

The Angel commented that Jacob had struggled with both God and men, and had prevailed. Which men? Jacob recognized that the face of the Angel represented that of Esau, his brother with whom he had emotionally struggled all his life. The struggle in the womb had been lived out all their lives to this point.

Perhaps the Angel's face appeared like that of Esau? Jacob saw the face of the Angel as it were the face of Esau- implying that the Angel he wrestled with was Esau's guardian Angel. He was being more obliquely shown the truth which New Testament passages like 1 Jn. 4:12,20,21 state plainly: that our relationship with our brother is our relationship with God. And Jacob was thus repenting of how badly he'd treated his brother.

The parable of the prodigal contains multiple allusions to the record of Jacob and Esau, their estrangement, and the anger of the older brother [Esau] against the younger brother. K.E. Bailey, *Jacob And The Prodigal* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2003) lists 51 points of contact between the Jacob / Esau record and the prodigal parable. There is a younger and an elder son, who both break their relationships with their father, and have an argument over the inheritance issue. Jacob like the prodigal son insults his father in order to get his inheritance. As Jacob joined himself to Laban in the far country, leaving his older brother Esau living at home, so the prodigal glued himself to a Gentile and worked for him by minding his flocks, whilst his older brother remained at home with the father. The fear of the prodigal as he returned home matches that of Jacob as he finally prepares to meet the angry Esau. Jacob's unexpected meeting with the Angel and clinging to him physically is matched by the prodigal being embraced and hugged by his father. Notice how Gen. 33:10 records how Jacob felt he saw the face of Esau as the face of an Angel. By being given the ring, the prodigal "has in effect now supplanted his older brother" (A.J. Hultgren, *The Parables Of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000) p. 79); just as Jacob did. As Esau was "in the field" (Gen. 27:5), so was the older brother.

What was the Lord Jesus getting at by framing His story in terms of Jacob and Esau? The Jews saw Jacob as an unblemished hero, and Esau / Edom as the epitome of wickedness and all

that was anti-Jewish and anti-God. The Book of Jubilees has much to say about all this, as does the Genesis Rabbah (see e.g. Jacob Neusner, *Genesis Rabbah: The Judaic Commentary To The Book Of Genesis* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985) Vol. 3 p. 176). The Lord is radically and bravely re-interpreting all this. Jacob is the younger son, who went seriously wrong during his time with Laban. We have shown elsewhere how weak Jacob was at that time. Jacob was saved by grace, the grace shown in the end by the Angel with whom he wrestled, and yet who finally blessed him. As Hos. 12:4 had made clear, Jacob weeping in the Angel's arms and receiving the blessing of gracious forgiveness is all God speaking to us. The older brother who refused to eat with his sinful brother clearly represented, in the context of the parable, the Jewish religious leaders. They were equated with Esau- the very epitome of all that was anti-Jewish. And in any case, according to the parable, the hero of the story is the younger son, Jacob, who is extremely abusive and unspiritual towards his loving father, and is saved by sheer grace alone. This too was a radical challenge to the Jewish perception of their ancestral father Jacob.

The parable demonstrates that both the sons despised their father and their inheritance in the same way. They both wish him dead, treat him as if he isn't their father, abuse his gracious love, shame him to the world. Both finally come to their father from working in the fields. Jacob, the younger son, told Laban that "All these years I have served you... and you have not treated me justly" (Gen. 31:36-42). But these are exactly the words of the older son in the parable! The confusion is surely to demonstrate that both younger and elder son essentially held the same wrong attitudes. And the Father, clearly representing God, and God as He was manifested in Christ, sought so earnestly to reconcile both the younger and elder sons. The Lord Jesus so wished the

hypocritical Scribes and Pharisees to fellowship with the repenting sinners that He wept over Jerusalem; He didn't shrug them off as self-righteous bigots, as we tend to do with such people. He wept for them, as the Father so passionately pours out His love to them. And perhaps on another level we see in all this the desperate desire of the Father and Son for Jewish-Arab unity in Christ. For the promises to Ishmael show that although Messiah's line was to come through Isaac, God still has an especial interest in and love for all the children of Abraham- and that includes the Arabs. Only a joint recognition of the Father's grace will bring about Jewish-Arab unity. But in the end, it will happen- for there will be a highway from Assyria to Judah to Egypt in the Kingdom. The anger of the elder brother was because the younger son had been reconciled to the Father without compensating for what he had done wrong. It's the same anger at God's grace which is shown by the workers who objected to those who had worked less receiving the same pay. And it's the same anger which is shown every time a believer storms out of an ecclesia because some sinner has been accepted back...

Gen 33:11 *Please take away my blessing that I brought to you, because God has dealt graciously with me, and because I have all things. He urged him, and he took it-* Jacob now saw God as the one who graciously gave physical blessings, not simply to fulfil Divine predictions for the sake of it, but in order to pour out His grace. And that grace was not so much gifts of material things as the God who gives spiritual grace / mercy to undeserving sinners like himself. Thus a growing appreciation of grace was a facet of Jacob's perception of God and spiritual growth.

It's a shame that the English translations often conceal Jacob's rejection of the physical blessing here. The Hebrew for "Take" is 51 times translated "take away". The only ultimately

important thing is grace and right standing with God; that now for Jacob was having "all things". The Hebrew words translated "take (away)" and "blessing" are exactly the same as in Gen. 27:35,36 AV: "(Jacob) came with subtlety, and hath *taken away* thy *blessing*... Is not he rightly named Jacob? he *took away* my birthright, and now he hath *taken away* my *blessing*". Yet now Jacob is saying: 'I have experienced the true grace of God, I stand forgiven before Him, I see His face in His representative Angel, I therefore have all things, so I don't want that physical, material, temporal blessing I swindled you out of'. This is why Jacob pointedly calls Esau his "Lord" in the record. He was accepting Esau as the firstborn. And Paul, in his spiritual maturity, came to the same conclusion; he counted all the materialism of this world as dung, that he might win Christ and be found in him, clothed with his gracious righteousness. Because God had dealt graciously with him, he felt that he had "all things". All he needed was God's grace, and he had that. Rev. 21:7 appears to allude to Jacob by saying that he who overcomes [by wrestling?] shall inherit "all things". We are all to pass through Jacob's lesson; that material advantage is nothing, and God's grace is everything. Truly could Jacob later say, after another gracious salvation, that there God had appeared to Him, had been revealed to him [RV] in the experience of grace (Gen. 35:7).

Jacob had made "supplication" to God (Hos. 12:4) as he wrestled the Angel; and at that very same time, God dealt "graciously" (the same word translated "supplication") with Jacob. At that time, God "recompensed" to Jacob according to his sins in that the Angel like Esau came forth to slay him; and Jacob responded by "turning" (same word translated "recompensed") to his God (Hos. 12:2,8). It's too bad our translations disguise these things. By the end of his life, this spirit

of mutuality between him and God had become perfected. And so with us; we too can live our lives thinking that if we do this, that and the other, God will do this and that for us. The idea of a two-way relationship with Him, of His Spirit, with all that implies, dwelling in us, until our will is His will; all this takes time to develop.

Gen 33:12 *Esau said, Let us take our journey, and let us go, and I will go before you-* This may simply be because Esau knew the route better than Jacob. But it may also reflect Esau's acceptance of the blessing that had been given back to him by Jacob; he was a man of this life, and he enjoyed that blessing of the firstborn, and made use of it by going in front of Jacob.

Gen 33:13 *Jacob said to him, My lord knows that the children are tender, and that the flocks and herds with me have their young, and if they overdrive them one day, all the flocks will die-* "My lord" reflects Jacob's genuine recognition that Esau in this life was to be as his master; the younger was to serve the elder. But Jacob's faith in the promises was undiminished; he now appreciated as never before their future dimension. This is a feature of our spiritual growth too. But Jacob's deceitfulness returns- he is making excuses here. He simply doesn't want to be with Esau. Esau's character comes out too, however; as a hunter, he had never had to bother with caring for animals and moving at their pace. He wanted to live life in the fast lane, and wouldn't move over to go at Jacob's pace. If the children were indeed "tender" and unable to move quickly, we would have to assume Jacob was with Laban 20 years and not 40 years, as suggested on Gen. 28; otherwise they couldn't have been described in this way.

Gen 33:14 *Please let my lord pass over before his servant, and I will lead on gently, according to the pace of the livestock that are before me and according to the pace of the children, until I come to my lord to Seir-* As noted on :13, "Lord" [stated twice]

and "servant" reflect Jacob's genuine resignation of his stolen birthright blessings, and his recognition that Esau in this life was to be as his master. Jacob's deceit still had not been completely cured; he gave the impression that he would come to Esau's encampment at Seir, but it seems he never did.

"Gently" or AV "softly" may also allude to Jacob's limp. It is s.w. 1 Kings 21:27 of Ahab walking softly in humbled repentance. Indeed Jacob at this point is every man after encounter with God. As Hezekiah resolved to walk softly and quietly the rest of his days [Is. 38:15 "He has both spoken unto me, and He Himself has done it. I will [now] go softly all my years with a broken soul"]. This must be our resolve. But all these men failed to keep their resolve. Even Jacob, at the very end of his life, returned to his obsession with material blessings and the angst over the firstborn. We too can come down very small at times, and walk softly / gently- but life with its petty schemes obtrudes upon that spirit, and we tend to return to the old ways of self assurance.

Gen 33:15 *Esau said, Let me now leave with you some of the folk who are with me. He said, Why? Let me find favour in the sight of my lord-* He could be saying 'Don't, please, force me to come live with you. If indeed I have found grace in your eyes, then please let me go my own way'. And that is indeed an aspect of grace; to let the beloved go their way and not have to live with us in every way. Jacob, on a human level, compares unfavourably to Esau. He was deceitful of Esau even after this watershed time. When Esau had the chance to take vengeance on Jacob, he wonderfully forgave him. He never lied to Jacob. Mal. 1:4 makes the point that Edom (Esau) was zealous to return and rebuild the ravaged land which God had once given him, whereas Israel wasn't. And yet despite this, God says He still

chose to love Israel (Jacob) and hate Esau. His behaviour in this is an example of how He saves by pure grace and not works.

Gen 33:16 *So Esau returned that day on his way to Seir-* The differing destinations of Esau and Jacob are emphasized; Esau to "Seir", the place of wild goats, whilst Jacob went to the place of booths. The wandering, roaming nature of Esau is compared with the more stable lifestyle of Jacob, and in this sense the predictions of Isaac about the firstborn came strangely true, even though Jacob had handed that blessing back to Esau.

Gen 33:17 *Jacob travelled to Succoth, built himself a house, and made shelters for his livestock. Therefore the name of the place is called Succoth-* See on :16. The faithful seed were characterized by continual dwelling in tents and moving on. As noted on Gen. 26:22,23, whenever they tried to settle down, as Isaac had tried to at Rehoboth, they were moved on by the leading and work of the Spirit. So although Jacob was seeking for the stability of a house and permanent residence, he was to be moved on from that.

Gen 33:18 *Jacob came in peace to the city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, when he came from Paddan Aram; and encamped before the city-* As noted on :17, Jacob's attempt to settle permanently in Succoth was not to be. Even if we live in the same suburban house all our days, the way of Abraham's seed is to be moved on all their lives long. Jacob's 'coming in peace' is surely to connect with the promise at Bethel, which Jacob interpreted as meaning that Yahweh would bring him back to his father's house "in peace" (Gen. 28:21). And Jacob's bargain with God had been that in this case, Yahweh would be his God. "Paddan Aram" is maybe mentioned in order to positively strengthen the similarities with Rebekah coming from there to the land of promise to marry Isaac (Gen. 28:2). "Father's house" nearly always refers to a family, rather than a physical house.

"Tents" is how a 'home' was referred to at the time, not "house". So Jacob had promised Yahweh that he would accept Him, if Yahweh returned Jacob to his father's family in peace. He said that having just stolen the birthright and firstborn blessing from Esau his brother, and having deceived his father Isaac. It would've seemed impossible to ever return to that family in peace, and probably Jacob made that wager with Yahweh in a sceptical spirit- as if 'You would never be able to achieve this!'. But he has met Esau and has been forgiven by him, and Esau has urged Jacob to come and live with him. And now he is back within the borders of the land of promise, Jacob does respond. He builds an altar, although not a "house" to God as promised, nor is there any record of him now paying tithes to Yahweh. But he calls the altar 'the God who is the strength of Israel'. He accepts his new name, and the now limping Jacob confesses that God is his strength. But God has to later reemind Jacob that he is indeed Israel; again, he slipped from that intensity.

Gen 33:19 *He bought the parcel of ground where he had spread his tent, at the hand of the children of Hamor, Shechem's father, for one hundred pieces of money*- The New Testament emphasizes the paradox: that the patriarchs bought land in the land which was their eternal inheritance. They couldn't bury their dead nor pitch their tent without having to realize that the land wasn't theirs. The same paradox was taught in Jacob having to call Esau his "lord", the younger serving the elder; but in faith that things would not eternally be that way. Joseph's bones were buried here later (Josh. 24:32), which suggests that Jacob bought it with a view of it becoming a burial place and Israelite sanctuary. Yet Acts 7:16 says that Abraham bought this land as a burial place; perhaps the paradox deepens in that they were deceived out of their "own" land and had to pay for it twice, even though it was eternally theirs.

In the bigger picture, we wonder 'why things like the Dinah incident in Gen. 34 happen'. I have suggested on Gen. 34 that one dimension was in order to stop the Jacobites intermarrying and socializing with the Canaanites. But we also note that Jacob had bought [probably leased] some land near Shechem and therefore intended to settle down there (Gen. 33:19). But after this incident, Jacob obviously wanted to move on- and God confirmed this by telling him in Gen. 35 to go to Bethel, to fulfil his covenant with God to make Yahweh his God if he returned to Bethel. We too look back on our lives, and perceive that we were moved on, even when we wanted to stay. The record shows weakness all around- but God works through that weakness.

Gen 33:20 *He erected an altar there, and called it El Elohe Israel-* This seems to have been a flash of spiritual insight, a peak of faith which was not afterwards sustained; not only did Jacob accept the new name God had given him (although he needed reminding of this again in Gen. 35:9), he saw that 'God' was his God, the God behind the powerful ones (Angels) who looked after Jacob / Israel. He had come "in peace" (:18 cp. Gen. 28:21) and now wished to keep his bargain, to accept Yahweh as his God. But still he saw God as pre-eminently *physically* powerful, and manifested in many Angels. And still he had not fulfilled his promise to make *Yahweh* his God, for he doesn't use the term "Yahweh" here. Jacob hid behind the idea of God manifestation too long. This is not to say that there is no such thing; but we can take it to such a point where we lose sight of the glorious reality of the one true, real God, who is our God, and who is ultimately *there*, at the back of all the things and ways in which He may be manifested. Jacob saw God manifest in Angels to the point where he failed to see the God who was behind them. Building the altar 'El-elohe-Israel' was his first step towards rectifying this. As time went on, he saw God as one, not as multitudes of Angels,

even though he knew from the vision of Bethel that they were all active for him; he saw the El behind the Elohe, and realized that this was Yahweh, his very own God.

Shechem was the spot where Abraham had built an altar upon entering Canaan, the promised land. Jacob progressively felt a sense of identity with Abraham and Isaac on a spiritual level.

GENESIS CHAPTER 34

Gen 34:1 *Dinah, the daughter of Leah, whom she bore to Jacob, went out to see the daughters of the land-* She went to see the girls, not the boys; but any movement toward the world exposes to further temptation. And that's just what happened here. The Jacob family by reason of their life path would've been quite insular; being on the move all the time, they had no opportunity to build up friendships or relationships with others outside the group. And so we can understand the desire for a young person to go out to meet the locals. But females in those days never travelled alone, always there was a male relative present. But it seems Dinah almost escaped alone. We can assume she was a naive teenager.

It is the fashion these days to present Dinah as totally innocent. But Gen. 27:46 ff. has spoken negatively of "the daughters of the Canaanites" and "the women of the land"; they were seen as not suitable for God's people to marry into. In my judgment, Dinah was very young and acted in a teenage way; but her choice and action was unwise and not ideal. And yet the lesson is that we see how huge chains of events ensue from unwisdom and misjudgment, even if it is not sin *per se*. Which is how I read Dinah's sneaking off to hang out with the local girls. Mass genocide, women and children taken off by Jacob's sons, mass looting, the abuse of the covenant symbol of circumcision etc.

And Jacob surely is at fault because he allows his daughter to slip out of the encampment to the nearby city, without any chaperone. Perhaps because she was the daughter of Leah, the unloved wife, he paid little attention to her. Dinah "went out", using the same term used of how Leah "went out" to meet Jacob in the field. She was her mother's daughter- likewise treated as

an incidental, unloved and uncared for. Jacob's 'silence' when he receives the news must be compared to his passionate outcry regarding the loss of his son Joseph. He presents as having no great passion for Leah's daughter. Everyone in the story of Genesis 34 is at fault in some way. There are no heroes here. We have at very least a reminder that God's Israel came, and comes, from very weak spiritual beginnings.

Gen 34:2 *Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, the prince of the land, saw her. He took her, lay with her, and humbled her-* "Humbled" is the same word translated "afflict"; and yet if he brutally raped her, his genuine love for her in :3 and :12 is hard to understand. So the idea may be that she was humbled by the experience. See on :3. The use of the word "humbled" rather than 'raped' suggests this was not rape. This was the result in the long term, yes. But there is no Hebrew word for "rape" so we are required to interpret this. We note that the word order is the other way around when Amnon shamed and then lay with Tamar. Here, the couple lie together, and then shame arises from that act. The word "forced" is not used here as it is in other rape scenes [e.g. "Forces and lies with her", Dt. 22:25]. Dinah's brothers of course wanted to take it as rape, but that doesn't mean it was; although they then went and carried off for themselves all the women of Shechem, effectively doing far worse than the supposed crime they were protesting. It was their shame rather than their sense of righteousness which motivated them. Jacob later curses their "anger" and "selfwill". They used the moral failure of others to unleash their native anger in a totally immoral way. Just as many religious people today seem to allow the weakness of others to trigger an unleashing of their native anger. Shechem firstly "took her", and that may simply mean he took her into his home; the very same word is used in :9,16 of taking a woman in marriage. If forced kidnap were

in view, a different word would have been used. This was not therefore street rape. Indeed to take someone into your home meant hospitality and acceptance. And yet *contra* the idea of teenage romance gone too far is the way that 'saw and took' is the language of sin throughout the Bible, beginning with Eve seeing and taking the fruit, the sons of God seeing and taking the daughters of men, and Achan seeing and taking the spoil of Jericho. Time and again in this chapter we will see the same- we are invited to consider the degree and nature of the sin or failure, but there is no doubt that there was moral failure in all the characters involved. But the way we are left to ponder the degree and nature of sin is intentional- for we look back on our own lives and ponder the same issues.

My suggestion is that this entire chapter is intentionally left open to interpretation. To what degree did Shechem's lust overcome his love? Dinah is presented as silent- we aren't told her feelings. We are left to imagine. Is her silence that of the raped woman? Or the silence of the lover who has lost her beloved at the hand of her own brothers? Shechem "took her, lay with her" can be simply read as saying that they had sex. Feminist 'translators' like to read this as "he seized her and lay with her by force". But the Hebrew words required for such a translation would have been different. And there is actually no word in Biblical Hebrew for "rape". Perhaps indeed he did rape her, although that rape is presented by the text as part of "love". My point is, we aren't told. As often in Biblical narrative, we are left to reconstruct so that we might enter more deeply into the situation. And that process may restimulate self examination, as we ponder the path of our own lives. Did we do this or that for God from pure motives? Were we in love or in lust when we married? Those questions are provoked by these narratives which invite us to reconstruct what might have been the feelings

and situations. Or perhaps the silence concerning Dinah is to lead us to appreciate that she was the victim of Shechem's lust, Hamor's political machinations, her father's shame, her brothers' anger issues etc. And this is to provoke our sympathy for her and many similar women at the time. The very fact we hear no more of Dinah leads us naturally to enquire 'What happened to her? How did she feel?'. There are other gaps in the narrative which beg questions from us, which in turn lead us deeper into imagining the feelings and situations- which we ourselves have been in, in essence.

Gen 34:3 *His soul joined to Dinah, the daughter of Jacob, and he loved the young lady, and spoke kindly to the young lady-* The language of 'joining' or [AV] 'cleaving' is that of Gen. 2:24 about cleaving in marriage. His kind words and genuine love for her all suggest his desire to marry her was sincere. What was wrong was that he prematurely slept with her. But the whole incident had a far grosser spin placed upon it by Jacob's sons. Shechem spoke kindly to her, Heb. 'to her heart', with comfort- presumably the comfort that he had not just used her, but would marry her and promised her a wonderful life. This is quite opposite to how her brothers interpreted the situation, falsely claiming Shechem had used her as a prostitute (:31). Shechem's behaviour was wrong, but Dinah's brothers imputed wickedness to him rather than righteousness. We note from the Biblical example of Amnon, as well as observation, that rapists typically hate their victims after the sex act- even murder them. But Shechem loves her and is desperate to marry her. And yet, he "saw... and took". He did wrong. But it was not rape. And there are degrees of sin, just as there are degress of righteousness. And there is wisdom and unwisdom, at times beyond the parameters of "sin" and morality generally.

Gen 34:4 *Shechem spoke to his father, Hamor, saying, Get me this young lady as a wife-* She was indeed young. If Joseph was only 17 when he was sold into Egypt about 11 years later, Dinah would have been around 16 at this time (cp. Gen. 30:21).

Gen 34:5 *Now Jacob heard that he had defiled Dinah, his daughter. And his sons were with his livestock in the field. Jacob held his peace until they came-* Perhaps she had gone with other young folks, who returned to the encampment with the news. "Defiled" is a strictly ceremonial or moral word. The idea is not of rape; see on :2. The response and evil plan of the sons appears to have been done without Jacob's knowledge. He appears very passive; if he had acted more decisively at the time, perhaps events might have turned out differently. The entire story is full of weakness and failure on the part of absolutely all involved; and yet the end result of it was the casting away of idols from Jacob's family, as they threw themselves upon God's grace to preserve them.

We wonder what Jacob was thinking and planning as he "held his peace"; which is typical of how this record begs so many questions, to help us reconstruct the situation and to elicit our own self examination. What we do know is that Jacob later boasts about the conquest of Shechem: "Shechem... which I took out of the hand of the Amorite with my sword and with my bow" (Gen. 48:22). Shechem was a fertile area: " It is to you and not to your brothers that I am giving Shechem, that fertile region which I took from the Amorites with my sword and my bow" (GNB). Jacob later condemns Simeon and Levi for their anger; but he also boasts that he took Shechem by violence. Even though later scripture comments that the land was not possessed by their own sword and bow but by God's grace (Ps. 44:3). So we can infer that Jacob's silence was spent scheming how he could manipulate the situation to his own benefit. His complaint is that Simeon

and Levi went too far; but clearly Jacob also had his own agenda. Some manuscripts, followed by the AV, offer in :17: "But if ye will not hearken unto us, to be circumcised; then will we take our daughter, and we will be gone". "Our daughter" rather than "our sister" would suggest that the brothers were speaking on behalf of Jacob at this point; he was clearly involved. He was the deceiver [of his father and brother] who had been deceived [by Laban]. But still Jacob had not learnt his lesson. He answers Shechem "deceitfully". But even so, Yahweh still miraculously protected Jacob from the consequences, and we marvel at that grace. He had far slipped from the attitude of Gen. 33, that having experienced God's grace was all he needed, and he didn't need any material blessings, and had given up trying to get it by his own strength.

Jacob gave Shechem to Joseph, but in fact Shechem was later given to Levi as one of the priestly cities- as if in the bigger picture, God did somehow work through what Levi did although it was so wrong. Jacob's intention was undone by God's later choice: " It is to you and not to your brothers that I am giving Shechem, that fertile region which I took from the Amorites with my sword and my bow" (Gen. 48:22 GNB). And to ultimately give Shechem to the pillager and genocidal Levi, whilst accepting Levi's sin... is nothing but grace. This later connection between Shechem and the Levites is one of those things where we clearly sense 'something's going on', but to attach meaning to event is difficult.

Gen 34:6 *Hamor the father of Shechem went out to Jacob to talk with him-* We have the impression of Jacob living at the city limits, and the city clearly defined with a gate and houses within the walls. Hence Shechem 'goes out' to Jacob. There may be an intended similarity with how Lot pitched his tent just outside Sodom, and then moved in to the city (Gen. 13:12).

Shechem was also an area of rich pastureland which would've been attractive to Jacob.

Gen 34:7 *The sons of Jacob came in from the field when they heard it. The men were grieved, and they were very angry, because he had done folly in Israel in lying with Jacob's daughter; a thing which ought not to be done-* There is reason to think that even at the end, Jacob was still in some ways weak. Thus despite his name having been changed from Jacob to Israel, the two terms are used by God in the record in juxtaposition (here and Gen. 35:22; 46:2, 5,8; 48:2) as if to reflect the way the full change of Jacob would only take place in the Kingdom, when each believer will receive his new name (Rev. 3:12).

The sons of Jacob are presented here as hypocritical; they despised the sign of the covenant, circumcision, and were ruthless and self-willed, murdering and pillaging. So their outrage was hardly because of their own morality. And as noted on :2 and :3, it was they who had decided that Shechem had raped their sister and treated her as a prostitute (:31). "Folly" is an extreme term, used of prostitutes and rapists (Dt. 22:21; Jud. 19:23,24). In reality he had not raped her, and she was at least partially responsible. But the problem with the usage of inflammatory language is that it creates images which do not easily subside. This incident stands for all time as a warning to us all; a mistake is made, a sin is committed, as these youngsters Shechem and Dinah did; but others get involved, and for the sake of family pride, they exaggerate what happened into something quite different, and once that image is in their mind, they will kill and pillage for it. This sort of thing goes on in secular and religious life all the time.

Gen 34:8 *Hamor talked with them, saying, The soul of my son, Shechem, longs for your daughter. Please give her to him as a wife-* Hamor avoids mentioning that Shechem has slept with

her already. This was clearly intended to be a love marriage, it was not casual rape nor usage of a girl as a prostitute (:31). The sincerity of Shechem is consistently contrasted with the exaggeration and serious over reaction of Jacob's sons.

Gen 34:9 *Make marriages with us, give your daughters to us, and take our daughters for yourselves-* Jacob had other daughters apart from Dinah, mentioned also in Gen. 46:7. The sons of Jacob would have known the family stories of how Isaac and Jacob had both gone to such trouble not to marry local Canaanite women, and how these had been a grief of mind to Isaac an Rebekah when Esau married them. They ought to have immediately turned away from such a proposal, and simply ensured Dinah's safety and return to their camp.

Gen 34:10 *You shall dwell with us, and the land will be before you. Live and trade in it, and get possessions in it-* The land [*eretz*] had been promised to the sons of Jacob as an eternal inheritance; the men of Shechem suggested that an agreement with them would make the *eretz* before them. They speak not for the town of Shechem, but the entire *eretz*, as if an agreement with them would mean the rest of the Canaanite tribes would be acceptant of them. This reasoning was quite contrary to the Divine promise that by His grace He would give them the *eretz;* it was because of this that "the land [is] before you" (Dt. 1:21- the identical Hebrew is used). The whole behaviour of Jacob's sons reflects a lack of spiritual perception and appreciation of the promises. "Possessions" is literally 'things taken hold of' and is the same word used of how Jacob took hold of Esau's heel (Gen. 25:26). He ought to have learnt that he had given up grabbing hold, and would instead take hold of God's grace.

What was offered here by Hamor was hugely attractive, on a secular level. For there is no lack of secular evidence that "foreigners" had few rights; they couldn't buy land, not even to

bury their dead. They had to keep moving, and their economic activities were limited. The fear of the locals was that the foreigners would take over their land. They themselves were against intermarriage. So the offer from Hamor could have put an end to the Abraham family being always on the move. Were it not for the bad temper and arrogant, hurt pride over reaction of Simeon and Levi- they may well have given in to the offer. And so God's Israel would have become disolved and assimilated into the surrounding world. And if their genocide of Shechem had not happened, then Israel would have been likely to have assimilated into the Canaanite tribes- for as Dinah demonstrates, they clearly found them attractive. But after the genocide, there was a mutual fear and distance between Israel and all others. Again we see how God worked through the failure of His own children in order to preserve His people. God in this sense is never defeated by sin.

Gen 34:11 *Shechem said to her father and to her brothers, Let me find favour in your eyes, and whatever you will tell me I will give-* This is the language of someone desperately in love. Again we note the emphasis upon Shechem's integrity and that he most definitely did not treat her as a prostitute (:31). Their accusation was therefore their imagination, and their reaction was wrong.

We too can so easily impute sin to people on the basis they did something wrong, but we can exaggerate that. The brothers accuse the people of Shechem as treating their sister as a prostitute, when the sex act was only between Hamor's son and Dinah.

Gen 34:12 *Ask me a great amount for a dowry, and I will give whatever you ask of me, but give me the young lady as a wife-* AV "dowry and gift"; the dowry being to the parents, and the gift to the bride. He was obsessed with Dinah, the language is similar to Samson's about his first Philistine wife; but despite

that, he was eager to do things in accordance with norms of societal behaviour, and his relationship with her was clearly not of a casual nature.

Jacob is offered huge gifts for Dinah. He earlier gave Esau huge gifts because he realised that having God's grace was everything and he didn't need gifts. But now he wants more than presents / gifts from Shechem. He wanted everything in Shechem. How far he had fallen from his humbled appreciation of grace which he had in Gen. 33. We too can have a momentary appreciation of grace and total trust in God's provision... but fall away from it. Likewise he later sends gifts to Pharaoh thinking this may appease him... instead if trusting in God's grace.

Gen 34:13 *The sons of Jacob answered Shechem and Hamor his father with deceit, and spoke, because he had defiled Dinah their sister-* "Defiled" has a religious, moral connotation. They were justifying their anger and bloodlust by claiming they had to settle some gross religious blasphemy. But Shechem is portrayed as most definitely not having used Dinah, but rather wishing by all means to marry her in a responsible way. And so often we see this; quasi religious / spiritual reasoning is used to justify arrogance, pride and a desire to justify the outpouring of native anger. And so they acted true to the character of their father Jacob and grandfather Laban; they were deceitful. "Defiled" was their perception. I suggested above that Shechem didn't rape Dinah. It was a case of teenagers going too far in first love. But we see here historically what we have surely all observed. That a hunch about a less than ideal momentary action is nursed into a conspiracy theory, which is repeated within the minds of a family, and then repeated between them, until it becomes truth and perceived reality. Just as later the brothers repeated the lie that Joseph had been killed, until even before Joseph in Egypt they really believed it. Here we see the importance of

"speaking the truth in our hearts". Anything else will push and distort the envelope until it is perceived as truth, and judgment for the supposed sin becomes felt to be necessary. The woman spotted smoking a cigarette around the corner from the church hall... becomes a drug addict, an alcoholic, and finally a whore. In the eyes and perceptions of a group of hypocritical people with anger problems, all too eager to launch off into judgmentalism, to unleash their anger on what they perceive to be a legitimate cause.

Gen 34:14 *And said to them, We can't do this thing, to give our sister to one who is uncircumcised; for that is a reproach to us-* Again, as noted on :13, they used quasi spiritual reasoning to justify their own wrong behaviour. They made out that uncircumcision was a shameful thing for them, pretending they were men of such high spiritual principle when they were nothing of the sort. The brothers present as having a simmering anger problem, that was allowed to come to the surface because of quasi religious concerns about holiness. The fact two teenagers slept with each other is of course not great, but is twisted by them into rape; and they justify their anger by saying that they cannot abide the thought of their sister marrying the uncircumcised. We see the same today; religious people just about managing to contain their simmering anger problem, but allowing it to come to full term on the excuse that God's principles have been breached by others.

Gen 34:15 *Only on this condition will we consent to you. If you will be as we are, that every male of you be circumcised-* Circumcision was the sign of the covenant; to even be willing to offer it to others shows a deep lack of appreciation of covenant relationship. All the way through, they are presented as being most unspiritual. "Every male of you..." is to be circumcised, so that they might live "among" the sons of Israel, is an allusion to

Gen. 17:10: "All males among you [are to] be circumcised". But clearly the brothers had an agenda- to make all the males weak, and then massacre them. This twisting of scripture and abuse of the covenant is surely reprehensible and unconscionable.

Gen 34:16 *Then will we give our daughters to you, and we will take your daughters to us, and we will dwell with you, and we will become one people-* As noted on :15, to even talk about being "one people" with those who were not the people of God is reflective of their lack of spirituality and appreciation of their relationship with God.

Gen 34:17 *But if you will not listen to us, to be circumcised, then we will take our sister, and we will be gone-* Jacob had only just purchased land at the city limits. So "we will be gone" was not going to be so easily executed. "We will take our sister" could suggest a threat of force. They do not ask for her to be delivered, but rather say they will take her.

Gen 34:18 *Their words pleased Hamor and Shechem, Hamor's son-* Not least, because it was an honourable way out of the situation caused by Shechem and Dinah's inappropriate and premature behaviour.

Gen 34:19 *The young man didn't wait to do this thing-* The Hebrew idea of waiting or delaying is nearly always used in a bad sense; not delaying is associated with right behaviour. Again, Shechem is portrayed as honourable. Perhaps the idea is that he was circumcised first, immediately.

Because he had delight in Jacob's daughter, and he was honoured above all the house of his father- This could also mean, as AV, that he was the most honourable. The others wanted to deceive the Israelites for material advantage, but Shechem is presented as being of integrity and sincerity despite his initial sin of passion in sleeping with Dinah.

Gen 34:20 *Hamor and Shechem, his son, came to the gate of their city, and talked with the men of their city, saying-* The emphasis seems to be upon them doing everything in a correct, transparent and appropriate manner- in direct contrast to the devious behaviour of Jacob's sons.

Gen 34:21 *These men are peaceful with us. Therefore let them live in the land and trade in it. For behold, the land is large enough for them. Let us take their daughters to us for wives, and let us give them our daughters-* The implication is that Jacob had bought some land on the city limits, but this was recent; they had not yet begun to trade with the locals and were without relevant permissions to do so. Moses alludes to their words by saying that the entire *eretz* was a "large" land, and because of the largeness of the inheritance, they would possess the land of the Hivites (Ex. 3:8). The primary audience of Genesis were intended to make this connection; the Hivites were reasoning as if it were all *their* land when in fact it was the eternal inheritance of the wayward but chosen-by-grace sons of Jacob.

Gen 34:22 *Only on this condition will the men consent to us to live with us, to become one people, if every male among us is circumcised, as they are circumcised-* Marriage out of the Faith is associated with a chronic lack of appreciation of covenant relationship. If Dinah had married Hamor, this would have been a covenant relationship which would have resulted in the people of God and the surrounding world becoming "one people" (:16,22). How can we marry out of the Faith and claim we are still God's people, separated from the world and not "of it"? Living together ["live with us"] was going to result in the process of time with 'becoming one people', and this is so often how it goes when a believer marries an unbeliever.

Gen 34:23 *Won't their livestock and their possessions and all their animals be ours? Only let us give our consent to them, and*

they will dwell with us- Here we see a less honourable side of Hamor and Shechem; the Jacob family were perceived as wealthy, perhaps more wealthy than the whole of Shechem. However, Shechem is definitely presented as honourable, and as a young man we can assume that the idea of getting Jacob's wealth was perhaps more pushed by his father. Or perhaps they felt they had to offer some attractive side to the bargain, so that their people would agree; when Shechem himself simply wanted to marry the girl he had fallen in love with.

Gen 34:24 *All who went out of the gate of his city listened to Hamor, and to Shechem his son; and every male was circumcised, all who went out of the gate of his city-* The reference is not to those who *sat* in the gate, which would have referred to the leadership. Those who went out of the gate might therefore simply refer to "every male" who was old enough to travel independently, i.e. to leave the city.

Gen 34:25 *It happened on the third day, when they were sore, that two of Jacob's sons, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, each took his sword, came upon the unsuspecting city, and killed all the males-* This was a classic case of guilt by association. "All the males" were hardly guilty of what one had done. The awfulness of the crime was not simply that they over-reacted in hot blood, but that they planned this massacre over a period of days. Although Simeon and Levi did the killing, it is clear that the other brothers knew the plan; and surely Jacob did, and his silence is significant. The whole incident portrays all involved as weak; and yet out of it arises the mass repentance from idolatry of Gen. 35.

The mention of the third day connects with how the Hivites later deceived the Israelites; and that became apparent after three days (Josh. 9:16). And those Hivites showed themselves more faithful to God than the Israelites. We note the play on the word "take". Shechem "took" Dinah, but her brothers "take" their

swords and then "take" Dinah (:26) and "take" the spoil of Shechem (:28). Their 'taking' is presented as disproportionate to Shechem's 'taking' of Dinah.

Gen 34:26 *They killed Hamor and Shechem, his son, with the edge of the sword, and took Dinah out of Shechem's house, and went away-* The poor girl must have been so terribly traumatized and confused to see all this happening at the hands of her brothers.

Gen 34:27 *Jacob's sons came on the dead, and plundered the city, because they had defiled their sister-* The term "Jacob's sons" usually refers to the group; they were clearly complicent in the crime, although the actual murders were committed by Dinah's two brothers. The plundering was perhaps their way of showing that they had seen through the real motivation of these people- it was to take the wealth of the Jacob family (:23). But as with the language of demons in the New Testament, the final clause is written from their perspective- they did this because "they" had defiled their sister. Only Shechem could be accused of defiling Dinah, so they are in the grip of guilt by association thinking; and the language of 'defilement' for pre-marital consensual sex seems rather a quasi-spiritual motivation for doing what was plainly wrong.

Gen 34:28 *They took their flocks, their herds, their donkeys, that which was in the city, that which was in the field-* This was showing that they had seen through the real motivation of these people- it was to take the animals wealth of the Jacob family (:23). It must have been a major operation, consciously planned and executed; for they took the animals which they had which were "in the field". But Jacob later curses his sons for how they hamstrung the cattle- presumably, those they couldn't carry away with them. And he saw this as a reflection of their deep anger problem. We note that straight afterwards, whilst the Jacobites are still at Shechem, Jacob commands the family to throw away

all their idols. We can assume they took some of those idols from Shechem.

Gen 34:29 *And all their wealth. They took captive all their little ones and their wives, and took as plunder everything that was in the house*- Taking the wives / women rather than killing them suggests that they then married them or slept with them; for this was the idea of taking women as "plunder". They did this on the excuse that one of the men had raped their sister, when in fact the young couple wanted to get married and the sex was consensual. Their evil is presented as being far greater than that done by Shechem, and their sin was of the same order and nature of rape, which they falsely accused Shechem of. Yet they did it on a mass scale. They are presented as very selfish and hypocritical.

Just as Shechem compares favourably with the Israelite Amnon, so the behaviour of Jacob's sons here is utterly reprehensible compared to the sin of Shechem. They massacred the men and took their women captive- the implication being, they raped / had sex with them. That was how conquest was done- kill the males and rape the women. But the genealogies of Jacob's sons never reveal they had any children by all these very many women of Shechem whom they took. The implication therefore is that they raped and then abandonned them. All in reaction to how Shechem had slept with their sister and sought to honourably marry her. It is part of a wider theme of God's people behaving far worse than the secular people around them. The point being, that God's people are His people by grace and not because they are better than others.

Gen 34:30 *Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, You have troubled me, to make me odious to the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and the Perizzites. I being few in number, they shall gather themselves together against me and slay me, and I shall be destroyed, I and my house*- So true to our experience, even

after the night of wrestling Jacob slipped back at times into the old way of thinking. His pathetic bleating here is a case of this: "*I* being few in number, they shall gather themselves together against *me* and slay *me*; and *I* shall be destroyed, *I* and *my* house". Just note all those personal pronouns. God had promised to go with him and make him a multitude, not "few in number", and the whole tenor of all the promises was that there would come a singular seed from the line of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob who would become a great house, or nation. But in the heat of the moment, all this was forgotten. He had only recently feared that he would be 'slain' by Esau and his family destroyed (Gen. 32:11 s.w., "he will come and *smite* me, and the mother with the children"), and been brought to see that this fear was a lack of faith in the fulfilment of the promises to him. We too can learn something in one crisis, but then need to be re-taught it, or reveal our lack of having learnt, when the essence of the crisis is repeated again in a later similar incident.

The primary audience of Genesis was Israel in the wilderness, and as they approached Canaan, they must likewise have felt that they were going to be overcome by the local tribes. Yet such fears of not inheriting the Kingdom are presented as being but the same element of faithless fear which was in Jacob at this time. They feared they would be "destroyed" (s.w.) by the local tribes (Dt. 1:27). But somehow God would miraculously preserve them, as He did "Israel" at his first formation as a nation.

This section began with Jacob returning in peace (Gen. 33:18), just as he had wagered with God- 'If You return me in peace, then Yahweh shall be my God'. But that peace is shattered by the sins of his own sons. However in the next chapter, Jacob goes out of his way to indeed make Yahweh his God, by insisting that all idols be cast away. So Jacob was driven by circumstance and failure to realize that the only "peace" worth having was

peace with God. He was being reminded of what he learnt on the night of wrestling- that having peace with God is "all things" even if you don't have peace with man.

In the bigger picture, we wonder 'why these things happen'. I have suggested above that one dimension was in order to stop the Jacobites intermarrying and socializing with the Canaanites. But we also note that Jacob had bought [probably leased] some land near Shechem and therefore intended to settle down there (Gen. 33:19). But after this incident, Jacob obviously wanted to move on- and God confirmed this by telling him in Gen. 35 to go to Bethel, to fulfil his covenant with God to make Yahweh his God if he returned to Bethel. We too look back on our lives, and perceive that we were moved on, even when we wanted to stay. The record shows weakness all around- but God works through that weakness.

Gen 34:31 *They said, Should he deal with our sister as with a prostitute?*- Humanly, the sons of Jacob, unrepentant as they were, should have taken the consequence of their evil at the hand of the vengeful surrounding tribes. But God, in His grace, preserves them by a miracle (Gen. 35:5). By contrast, the unbelieving Shechemites acted more honourably. The Prince of Shechem didn't rape her, and he didn't just discard her. He could easily have just taken her as his wife with no more discussion with her family. He did the honourable thing in that he honestly wanted to marry her, and would do absolutely anything to enable this (Gen. 34). The brothers acted in greed and hurt pride, but justified it by exaggerating what had happened in their own mind; and they repeated the lie to themselves until they believed it were true.

As noted on :3, Shechem did not use Dinah as a prostitute, and their comment is tantamount to accusing their sister of being a prostitute. But they were so desperate to justify their

sick actions that they cared nothing for the logic of their false accusations. We see that in people today, and their comment has the ring of psychological credibility in the situation. Indeed it was generally understood that a prostitute was a woman whose family disowned her and took no responsibility for her. A prostitute's honour has no need to defence. A prostitute is willing to engage in her deeds in return for some benefit; and so the language of prostitution is clearly inappropriate to Dinah. And the story ends with this, inviting us to view the brothers as totally misresponding to the situation. The story of course begs the question, 'Was Dinah raped?'. My take is that she was not raped by Shechem- but she was terribly used and abused by her own father and brothers in order to advance their very wrong material agenda, not to mention their hypocritical, religious pride.

GENESIS CHAPTER 35

Gen 35:1 *God said to Jacob, Arise, go up to Bethel, and live there. Make there an altar to God, who appeared to you when you fled from the face of Esau your brother-* God wished to restimulate in Jacob memories of how God had been with him from others who sought to kill him in the past. And He works in our lives according to the same pattern. God was asking Jacob to perceive that the promise that he would return home in peace had in fact been fulfilled; and Jacob needed to respond. Jacob had promised that "this stone which I have set for a pillar shall be God's house" (Gen. 28:22). It seems Jacob had somewhat forgotten that wonderful incident (Gen. 31:13 also sounds like a reminder), and his promise of response. This is why God uses the name "Bethel", house of God, rather than Luz, the local name of that place. Jacob didn't need to build a house for God, Bethel; God had already done that in building Jacob a house in the sense of a family, by His grace. David had to learn the same lesson. But what God wanted was grateful sacrifice in response; and this God is our God.

Gen 35:2 *Then Jacob said to his household, and to all who were with him, Put away the foreign gods that are among you-* They were "foreign" in that they had taken them with them when fleeing Laban.. Just as Israel took the idols of Egypt with them through the Red Sea. But Rachel and Leah were from Haran; Rachel had taken her father's gods with her. Now they were being asked to perceive the land and people of their birth as "foreign" and strange. They were being asked to perceive the land promised to Abraham, which they had entered now many of them for the first time, as their native land; and to reject their birth culture and gods as "foreign". The same radical reorientation is experienced by all who truly identify as

Abraham's seed. The moment of truth came during Jacob's wrestling with the Angel. He realized then that in our relationship with God, it's all or nothing. And after that, he firmly rejected the ways of the world in his own life and that if his family; he made them bury all their idols. This connection between the night of wrestling and Jacob's rejection of idols is hinted at in 1 Kings 18:31; here, Israel openly renounce their idolatry and claim to turn to Yahweh with their whole heart. To celebrate this, "Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of *Jacob* unto whom the word of Yahweh came saying, Israel shall be thy name". The change of name that night, and its repetition here after they throw their idols away, is associated with Israel's rejection of idolatry. And then finally, at the very end, Jacob realizes his earlier idolatry and confesses it, and emphasizes his utter conviction that there is only one God, the God of his fathers, Yahweh, the God of Messiah, his very own God. Jacob resigned the things of this world for the sake of what was implicit in the promises, when he told his family to throw away their idols. These household teraphim would have been the property deeds to Laban's property, but because of what God had promised him at Bethel all those years ago, Jacob was willing to resign all that hope of worldly advantage. The reference may specifically be to idols which they had just looted from Shechem in Gen. 34.

Purify yourselves, change your garments- The garments were presumably used for pagan rituals. The young Joseph may well have had to do this, and the same words are used of how he did so later when leaving prison and going before Pharaoh (Gen. 41:14). So much in Joseph's life repeated; and it was as if God was weaving a theme with him concerning his clothes, which are mentioned at several critical points in his life. The connections for Joseph would've continued, as he reflected how he had been

saved out of his "anguish" (Gen. 42:21), the same word translated "distress" in :3, just as his father and indeed Joseph and all the family had been at this time.

Gen 35:3 *Let us arise, and go up to Bethel-* The language of arising and going is all careful obedience to the command received in :1, and echoes the call of Abram to leave Ur and go where he was told.

I will make there an altar to God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went- As noted on :1, Jacob is aware of his promise in Gen. 28:22 and wishes to recognize that God has returned him in peace. But he had to recognize that by faith, because he was at this point fearful that the surrounding tribes would wipe him out in revenge for the murders at Shechem. He reasons that God's past deliverance of him must encourage them that He would continue to do so. The Hebrew word for "distress" is often used about the anguish and distress which befell Israel / Jacob because of their sins; and yet by grace they were delivered from them. All those deliverances are based upon this deliverance of Israel / Jacob and his sons from the consequences of their shameful actions at Shechem. And this looks forward to Israel's latter day deliverance likewise. Jacob shall be saved from his final day of distress at the hands of the peoples of the *eretz* (Jer. 30:7), and *yasha*, "saved", is a form of Yehoshua, Jesus- for He will be the final source of that great salvation by grace. But it requires a like repentance, of casting away their idols and self reliance. And yet God was with Jacob in the way he went... even before Jacob had accepted Yahweh as his God. This is the grace all God's Israel have known- that He is "with" us even before we come to Him.

The LXX uses the same word as the New Testament does for “tribulation” in several passages pregnant with latter day significance:

"The day of my [Jacob's] *distress*" at the hands of Esau (Gen. 35:3)

"The *anguish* of his [Joseph's] soul" at the hands of his half brethren and the Ishmaelites (Gen. 42:21)

"I will hide my face from them, and they shall be devoured, and many evils and *troubles* shall befall them; so that they will say in that day, Are not these evils come upon us, because our God is not among us?" (Dt. 31:17)- a passage in the Song of Moses regarding Israel's latter day tribulations.

"Thus saith Hezekiah, This day is a day of *trouble*, and of rebuke, and blasphemy" (2 Kings 19:3)"- Sennacherib's Assyrian invasion at this time was a clear prototype for the latter day invasion described in Ezekiel 38 and elsewhere.

"The time of Jacob's *trouble*" from which he will be delivered (Jer. 30:7)

"There shall be a time of *trouble*, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book" (Dan. 12:1). This time of trouble is specifically for Israel in the last days.

Gen 35:4 *They gave to Jacob all the foreign gods which were in their hands, and the rings which were in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the oak which was by Shechem*- Ornaments / amulets were worn at the time in order to fend off evil spirits; the way Moses records how at least twice Israel threw them away could be understood as a hint that they needed no defence against demons, because of God's Almightiness (Gen. 35:4; Ex. 32:24). As in the New Testament, the false beliefs concerning demons / gods are not tackled head on, but rather by implication. The Law of Moses required that such things be destroyed, so we wonder quite why Jacob "hid" them under an oak which was doubtless used in pagan worship, part of the "grove" there (Gen. 12:7).

Perhaps this is a hint that the repentance was not total. We think of Achan hiding such things in the earth (Josh. 7:21 s.w.). The idols were typically made of gold or precious stones and would have been the basis for much of the family's material wealth. But they sacrificed it all because they threw themselves now on Yahweh alone. Although we fear that the hiding rather than destruction of them suggests a hope to somehow regain them at some time.

"The oak" is literally "the terebinth", a word meaning 'the tree without fruit'. Worshipping idols is fruitless, as the prophets make clear.

Gen 35:5 *They travelled, and a terror of God was on the cities that were around them, and they didn't pursue the sons of Jacob-* "Terror" is literally 'dismay' and this is commonly used to describe the terror / dismay that came upon the Canaanites as Israel approached them. The primary audience of Genesis was Israel in the wilderness; they were being encouraged to ditch the idols they had brought from Egypt, as Jacob's sons did with the idols they brought from Mesopotamia; and to believe that their more powerful enemies would likewise be stunned with dismay, just as the earlier inhabitants of Canaan had been at this time.

Gen 35:6 *So Jacob came to Luz (that is, Bethel), which is in the land of Canaan, he and all the people who were with him-* As noted on :1, God specifically spoke of Bethel and not Luz, in order to help Jacob see that his plan to build a "house of God" at the place where he had slept (Gen. 28:20-22) was inappropriate; God had already done that. All Jacob had to do was offer grateful sacrifice. The stress on "in the land of Canaan" is perhaps to show that indeed God had returned Jacob to his father's house in peace; although Jacob was at that point surrounded by his enemies. But he had to believe that with God's abiding help, he was indeed at peace. Or perhaps he now understood "peace"

as not meaning peace in this world, in which we must have tribulation, but peace with God.

Gen 35:7 *He built an altar there, and called the place El Beth El; because there God was revealed to him, when he fled from the face of his brother-* See on Gen. 33:11. As noted on :1 and :6, Jacob now accepts the new name for Bethel, realizing that it was the grace of God's revelation to him which meant that effectively God had built His own house; and Jacob's response was to recognize that and offer grateful sacrifice. "Revealed" translates a word used often in the Pentateuch to mean 'expose naked', to denude, multiple times used in the phrase "uncover nakedness". This in Hebrew is a shocking, radical idea. That God revealed Himself naked as it were to Jacob, that night he laid down alone when fleeing from Esau. The denuding was in showing what God is really and essentially about- which is pure grace, offering to a man who didn't yet fully believe in Him to preserve him and return him home, and do him good at his latter end.

Gen 35:8 *Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died, and she was buried below Bethel under the oak; and its name was called Allon Bacuth-* Why the mention of this, and the stress on such great grief for her (Allon Bacuth = "oak of weeping")? Perhaps because she had been the *de facto* mother figure for Jacob. We note that little is said of Rebekah apart from her stellar commitment to the leading of the Spirit when invited to go and marry Isaac. Her evil plan for Jacob to get the birthright blessings reveals very much that is faithless and unspiritual; and she has no other recorded behaviour in the record. If indeed she was a distant mother to her children, hence the note about Deborah, this might explain some things. Deborah is presented as being buried under an oak just as it was beneath an oak that the idols were buried

(:4). Again, one could suspect that this pagan symbol was being somehow taken over by Jacob's family.

It could be that she was the wet nurse for Rebekah, who went with her mistress in the expectation that Rebekah would soon produce children, and she would be the wet nurse for them. She is simply anonymous in Gen. 24:59: "They sent away Rebekah, their sister, with her nurse". Her faith in the fulfilment of the promises would have been tested for 20 years. No woman's death is recorded in the OT unless she is significant. It could be that she, the obscure, the lowest of the low servant [as a wet nurse was], is given the honour of a mention just as "Quartus, the [slave] brother" is mentioned amidst the list of erudite believers in Rom. 16. To demonstrate how God is the God of the small and insignificant, and their deaths are as significant to Him as those of the more notable. But *contra* this is the possibility that she had come to Jacob's family with news of his mother's death, and remained with Jacob. In this sense, she would've effectively become a surrogate mother to him. It could be that she had been Rebekah's nurse in the sense that she had breast fed Jacob and Esau. So Jacob saw in her a mother figure. His deep grief at her passing reflects how he was indeed a mumma's boy. It has been observed: "It is entirely in keeping with the sentiments of the narrative as well as the marriage customs and practices of the times for Rebekah to give her wet nurse Deborah to her favoured son Jacob. Thus, Deborah could have joined Jacob's retinue at any time that Rebekah chose to award ownership of her dowry slave woman to Jacob". So she may even have gone with Jacob when he fled from Esau; she would have been present at Bethel when Jacob first slept there. And had to have all that scaffolding removed to come finally to total relationship with God. Deborah was buried beneath an oak / terebinth in Bethel- and we've read in :4 that this was where they had just buried

their idols. It was as if the loss of the scaffold of Deborah led Jacob to deeper commitment to Yahweh, symbolized by burying his idols. Hence the connection between burials beneath an oak within this chapter. These things happened at Bethel, the very place where Jacob had promised to make Yahweh his God if he returned there. And so it was no accident that his surrogate mother died there.

We see that in this chapter, the deaths of Rachel and Isaac are also recorded. And the apparently insignificant Deborah ranks amongst them. But maybe that's because she was a surrogate mother to Jacob. The place is named in memory of the intense weeping for Deborah, just as the place of his beloved Rachel's burial gave rise to the naming of the place as 'Rachel's pillar'. 'Allon Bacuth' can mean 'Another / double mourning' as well as 'the oak of mourning'; lending weight to the Jewish tradition that Deborah had come to tell Jacob of his beloved mother's death. The mention of Deborah's death at this point is hard to otherwise understand. Thus he mourned for them both. If the loss of his mother was indeed prominent in Jacob's mind, this would explain why God now reminds him that his real name is Israel and not the name Jacob which his mother had given him. The loss of parents at whatever age is still a removal of our scaffolding, prodding us towards the intimacy with God which He so seeks.

Jacob had apparently reached that point when he wrestled with the Angel, and ended up clinging to the Angel, begging for the blessing of grace and forgiveness for who he was and how he had been. But he had slipped away from it. But I suggest that when Deborah died and he quit his idols for good, he returned to that intensity of personal relationship with God. This would explain why the wrestling with the Angel with tears is somehow associated with Bethel in Hos. 12:5, as if the tears of weeping

for Deborah were connected with the tears of weeping in the Angel's arms and grip: "Yea, he had power over the angel, and prevailed: wept, and made supplication unto him:

he found him at Bethel, and there he spoke with us". Jacob didn't wrestle with the Angel at Bethel [but at Mahanaim / Peniel]; but the connection is because it was there at Bethel, at the funeral of Deborah, that his weeping for his surrogate mother turned into a weeping for God's grace and forgiveness, just as he had done in Gen. 32. "Deborah" means 'bee' or 'source of honey'; and she had provided milk to Jacob in his infanthood. She dies as soon as Jacob is established in the promised land, a land of milk and honey. Perhaps we are to deduce from this, again, that she had been a crutch for him; and now she was removed, so that he would experience God's promises for himself.

Gen 35:9 *God appeared to Jacob again, when he came from Paddan Aram, and blessed him-* This may not be strictly chronological, in which case it is not a description of the name change being repeated a second time. Whether that is the case or not, the idea is that God appeared to Jacob "again" as He had done at Bethel, where God denuded Himself to Jacob (see on :7). The idea would then be that this amazing self revelation of God at Bethel was repeated when Jacob's name was changed. This could refer to the night of wrestling, or to some new appearance when the name change was repeated. The 'denuding' of God was in showing the very barest essence of Himself; which was grace, to call Jacob "Israel", by grace.

The blessing alludes to God's earlier promise at Bethel: "I will not forsake you until I shall have done" what I promised. But those promises will only have their total fulfilment at the Lord's return and Jacob's resurrection. So although death is unconsciousness, in that we feel nothing; God does not forsake

us at death. All His working amongst the nations to bring about the time of His Son's return is done for us, because He has not forsaken His dead people. Death itself is not, therefore, a being forsaken by God.

We see too God's grace. It seems Bethel was an existing shrine; and Jacob says that if indeed Yahweh returns him in peace, he will accept Yahweh as his God and make a house to God there, Bethel would become a shrine devoted to Yahweh rather than the gods it currently served. Jacob never does this; instead, God offers to multiply Jacob's descendants so that *He* builds Jacob a house- a house of people. Exactly as He responded to David's desire to build Him a physical house.

Gen 35:10 *God said to him, Your name is Jacob. Your name shall not be Jacob any more, but your name will be Israel. He named him Israel-* As noted on :9, this may not be a repeat of the name change, but rather a historical reference to the name change on the night of wrestling. If it is a repeat, the suggestion would be that just as Jacob appears to have somewhat forgotten about the significance of God's appearance at Bethel 20 or 40 years previously (see on :1), so he was failing to appreciate the wonder of the name change.

Jacob's name change being repeated may reflect God's perception that Jacob had changed; or it could be that he was being encouraged to accept it still, to accept that it was really true. 2 Kings 17:34 criticizes men for worshipping Yahweh but also their own gods; they are rebuked with the comment that God had made a covenant with "the children of Jacob, whom he named Israel". The suggestion is surely that when Jacob became Israel, he quit the life of half-hearted service to God. This was the decision he came to that night when he wrestled with the Angel, and his name was changed. Then he realized that there were only two ways, the way of the flesh and the way of God (cp.

Mt. 6:24; 7:13,14; James 3:11,12). It is for this reason that soon after the wrestling incident and change of name, Jacob purges his family of their idols (:2). Once he has done this, God now reminds him the second time that his name has been changed. Like Jacob, we find it very hard to ascertain our spiritual growth; the very construction of our natures makes 100 % accurate self-examination impossible (Ps. 19:12; Prov. 14:12; 1 Cor. 4:4 RSV). It's not only that we fail to perceive all our errors; we also fail to realize when we have made a significant turn for the better in our lives. Yet God perceives this, as He did with Jacob that night when He renamed him. This perhaps the hardest struggle we have; to really grasp the height of God's positive perception of us. It took Jacob, spiritual hero that he was, 50 years; for only in his final speeches does Jacob openly use the term Israel about himself. And a like joy, that almost child-like playing around with that 'new' name he'd received 50 years back, should characterize our spiritual maturity.

Your name *is* Jacob could be read as God's lament that Jacob was still acting as the heel catcher, rather than being Israel. The way God repeatedly interchanges the names Jacob and Israel (e.g. Is. 46:28 "Fear not Jacob, be not afraid Israel") reflects His acceptance that the formation of Israel in each of Israel's component members... is still not total. None of us are yet totally transformed into the image of the Lord Jesus, who is the final, finished, perfected Israel of God. For the suffering servant called Israel is ultimately the Lord Jesus crucified and thus glorified.

Gen 35:11 *God said to him, I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply. A nation and a company of nations will be from you, and kings will come out of your body-* See on Gen. 43:14. The command to be fruitful and multiply recalled the command to Adam and to Noah. It was as if Canaan was now a new land for them to populate; as it were, empty of anyone else.

This promise was given only once Jacob had openly renounced idolatry in his family. At this point, Jacob already had plenty of sons and probably grandchildren. His sons had been old and strong enough to destroy Shechem. So Jacob is being led to realize that the essential fulfilment of the promises was not in immediate material things. He was being led to realize that the fruitfulness in view was yet future, and the promise of "kings" was only going to be fulfilled in the future. For his sons never became kings but remained as shepherds all their days. It may even be that "kings" was to be read as an intensive plural, hinting at the one great Messianic King who was to come. Likewise it is hard to see any immediate fulfilment of the idea that from one nation would come "a company of nations"; indeed, the idea is apparently contradictory. How could one nation be a company of nations... The fulfilment was and is in the way that peoples from all nations can be baptized into Jacob's great seed, the King, the Lord Jesus, and be counted as part of the one nation of God's people. And who knows how much of this Jacob perceived as he mulled over this strange promise.

God is almighty, and therefore He will and can fulfil His promises. The command to be fruitful and multiply is that of Gen. 1:28. Jacob was being encouraged to make a new start. He is told to multiply, to have more children. But apart from Benjamin, he apparently disobeys this. He did make some kind of new start by casting away idols, but as with so many of our new starts, it was incomplete.

Gen 35:12 *The land which I gave to Abraham and Isaac, I will give it to you, and to your seed after you will I give the land*- Again, upon closer examination, these words were pregnant with future implication. The land was not given to Abraham and Isaac in their lifetimes; they died without possessing it, let alone eternally. It was given to Abraham in the sense that it was 'given

by promise' (Gal. 3:18); the promise of future inheritance was seen as the gift in this life. And as the land had thus been 'given' to his fathers, so it was given to Jacob.

Gen 35:13 *God went up from him in the place where He spoke with him-* Why is this mentioned? Perhaps to invite us to see the Angel ascending away from Jacob, recalling to his mind the vision of the stairway to heaven in Gen. 28:12,with Angels ascending and descending upon it, directly from him to heaven. But the same term is used of God going up from Abraham (Gen. 17:22); clearly Jacob is being assured that he is the seed of Abraham with the very same promises made to him. All Abraham's seed go through the same reassurance.

Another reason why "God went up from him" is the complete the clear allusions to the promises to Abraham in Gen. 17:

Yahweh 'appeared' to Abram (17:1)= God 'appeared' to Jacob again (35:9)

I am 'El Shaddai' (17:1) = I am 'El Shaddai' (35:11)

Neither shall thy name anymore be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham (17:5) = Thy name shall not be called anymore Jacob, but Israel shall be thy name (35:10)

And I will make you exceedingly fruitful and I will make you nations (17:6) = be fruitful and multiply, a nation and a company of nations shall be of thee (35:11) [*we note here how "I will make you fruitful" required Jacob to act, to "be fruitful". But he apparently has no other children apart from Benjamin. But despite not obeying the condition, Jacob still receives the blessing, by grace]*

And kings shall come forth from you (17:6) = And kings shall come out of thy loins (35:11)

And I will give to you and to your seed after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession (17:8)= And the land which I gave to Abraham and

Isaac, to thee will I give it and to thy seed after thee will I give the land (35:12)

And God went up from Abraham (17:22) = And God went up from him (:13).

The clear similarities were to confirm to the doubting Jacob that indeed, he was the seed of Abraham; and the promises to Abraham had indeed been made to him too. We too have moments in our pilgrimage when that truth is reaffirmed to us. We became Abraham's seed at baptism, heirs according to the promise; but the personal truth of it has to be reaffirmed to us, we must be persuaded again that what we are in theory and status is in fact to be felt reality for us.

Gen 35:14 *Jacob set up a pillar in the place where He spoke with him, a pillar of stone. He poured out a drink offering on it, and poured oil on it-* There are a few hints that the way of thinking associated with a life of idolatry was still in Jacob. Thus he set up pillars to God and also put a pillar over Rachel's grave (:20); something which was later forbidden under the Law because of its evident association with idolatry (same word in Lev. 26:1; Dt. 12:3; 16:22; 2 Kings 3:2; 10:27). He had done this previously, in a way his forefathers are not recorded as doing (Gen. 28:18,22; 31:45,51,2). However, this was done at this moment in time as a genuine sign of his devotion to God. Instead of building a house to God as he had earlier promised, by turning the pillar he had earlier set up into a temple (Gen. 28:22), he simply repeated what he had done there 40 years ago- he just set up a piece of rough stone as a makeshift altar, recognizing that this was all he was, rough stone; and that was in fact all God wanted. The anointing of the rock with oil was later understood by Jacob as pointing forward to the Messianic seed, Jesus the good shepherd; for he ends his days with reflecting

upon "the shepherd, the stone of Israel / Jacob" who would 'come out of' him (Gen. 49:24).

Gen 35:15 *Jacob called the name of the place where God spoke with him Bethel-* God had already referred to the place by this name (:1), in allusion to how Jacob had promised to build God a house there, but by grace God had built him a house / family there. Only now does Jacob accept this, and refer to Luz as Bethel. It's rather like his slowness to accept his renaming from Jacob to Israel. It had to be twice repeated to him, and even then, only at the end of his life did he openly use the word about himself.

Jacob had vowed to build a house to God there, but he only makes a stone altar. And there is no mention of him tithing to God now. So as with ourselves, he was indeed grateful, but the gratitude was not as deeply expressed as he had undertaken to. How many of our prayers of thanks are similar?

Gen 35:16 *They travelled from Bethel. There was still some distance to come to Ephrath, and Rachel travailed. She had hard labour-* The fact Rachel did just before Ephrath or Bethlehem, where Messiah was to be born, may be another hint at her unspirituality. She didn't make it to Christ. We wonder why they were travelling when Rachel was about to give birth. Perhaps they travelled because they were still fearful of the vengeance of the tribes because of their massacre of Shechem. If they had trusted in God's protection, they would have remained in one place at least until Rachel had given birth. Perhaps it was this lack of faith and the stress connected with fearing death at the hands of the surrounding tribes which contributed to Rachel's pregnancy complications and untimely death.

Gen 35:17 *When she was in hard labour, the midwife said to her, Don't be afraid, for now you will have another son-* The reference was to Rachel's proud boast when Joseph had been born some years before, that Yahweh would give her "another son" (Gen. 30:24). She must have struggled in those years as she failed to fall pregnant. God had not promised her another son; she presumed upon that. And getting pregnant now much later in life was not without its risks, and led to her death. The "don't be afraid" may well be a reference to Rachel's fear that her proud boast that Yahweh would add another son would not be fulfilled. Or perhaps "Don't be afraid, you have had another son" addresses Rachel's fear she had 'only' brought forth a female. Sadly she died in slavery to others' perceptions- that ultimate worth in life for a woman was in how many sons she produced for her husband. And yet she died having been out performed in that metric by her despised sister. It was the tragic death of all those who will only compare themselves amongst themselves. And so she died in "sorrow", naming the child 'son of my sorrow / bitterness', her sorrow that she hadn't 'made it'. She had earlier told Jacob: "Give me children, or else I will die" (Gen. 30:1). She had nothing else in her worldview apart from being the mother of many sons. And she died giving birth to her second son, consumed by sorrow, and bitterness that she had not produced more sons than her sister. And so many die like this, in the bitterness of broken dreams, because they would not set their sights on spiritual ambitions rather than those in mere conformity to the metrics of success in their culture. Be it home ownership, second home ownership, career, wealth etc.

The Hebrew here means 'You have had another son'. The gender of the child was apparent to the midwife. It has therefore been suggested that Rachel died of complications associated

with a breech birth. And we can ponder the effect that had upon Benjamin.

Gen 35:18 *It happened, as her soul was departing (for she died)-* The soul of a person is their life, and at times the idea of soul and spirit are interchangeable; the idea is that as she breathed her last, she used her last bitter breaths to name the child Benoni.

That she named him Benoni, but his father named him Benjamin- There is a strange appropriacy in Rachel dying in childbirth; for in great unspirituality she had asked Jacob [who had served 14 years for her, so great was his love for her] to give her children or else she would die (see on Gen. 30:1). We do tend to get what we really want, with all its consequences. Rachel dies not in joy that Yahweh had given her another son (Gen. 30:24), but rather in depression, naming the child "son of my sorrow". She passes from the scene a bitter woman, who was ultimately unfulfilled and untouched by the unusual love of Jacob for her, let alone the love of God. Jacob tried to reverse this shameful naming, by calling the son Benjamin, the son of his right hand, almost implying favouritism in the very name.

Gen 35:19 *Rachel died, and was buried in the way to Ephrath (the same is Bethlehem)-* As noted on :16, Rachel didn't quite make it to the birthplace of the Messianic seed, the Lord Jesus. She was buried by the roadside, rather than in the family grave where Leah was buried along with Abraham and Sarah and Isaac and Rebekah (Gen. 49:31). Jacob sadly recognized that the love of his life for whom he had been obsessed for 14 years and made such huge problems for himself... was not really one of the faithful family, and had no real heart for the things of the promises.

Gen 35:20 *Jacob set up a pillar on her grave. The same is the Pillar of Rachel's grave to this day-* Pillars were later forbidden

because of their pagan associations, but it's left an open question as to whether there were such associations with Rachel. However the others of the faithful family were buried in a cave (Gen. 49:31); no mention is made of a pillar. It was Rachel who so loved her father's idols that she felt she couldn't live without them, and therefore stole them. So perhaps the paganic associations of a pillar were appropriate for her.

Gen 35:21 *Israel travelled, and spread his tent beyond the tower of Eder-* This is the "tower of the flock" associated with Bethlehem in the Messianic prophecy of Mic. 4:8. Rachel died before reaching Bethlehem; Jacob went there and beyond. I have suggested this may hint at her lack of Messianic appreciation, and in this case, Jacob would be presented here as having what she lacked in this respect.

Gen 35:22 *It happened, while Israel lived in that land, that Reuben went and lay with Bilhah, his father's concubine, and Israel heard of it. Now the sons of Jacob were twelve-* It could be that with Rachel's death, it became clear that Jacob favoured the sons of Rachel and Joseph, although one of the youngest sons, was effectively now the firstborn for Jacob; even though Reuben was the firstborn. He therefore rapes Bilhah as an expression of his anger with his father, and also as an expression of power; we recall how Absalom slept with his father's wives publically in order to demonstrate his power, rather than doing so from lust. I suggest that Reuben's action was likewise not from lust, but rather he used sex as it is still often used in primitive societies- as a demonstration of power. It was for this reason that at the end of his life, Jacob stripped Reuben of the birthright and effectively gave the double portion intended for the firstborn to Ephraim and Manasseh, Joseph's sons. Sadly, Jacob never fully learnt to forget the whole 'thing' about the blessing of the firstborn that he and his mother had been so wrongly obsessed with gaining.

And Reuben too didn't learn the lesson. We too can come to our deathbeds with elements of weakness, no matter how God has sought to help us overcome them. And yet like Jacob, we are still saved by grace.

As with the incident concerning Dinah and Shechem, Jacob comes over as being informed of the matter but not doing much. He did however strip Reuben of the birthright, although apparently only at the very end of Jacob's life.

The Hebrew of this verse has a strange pause in the middle of it, suggesting we need to pause and consider how awful was the thing Reuben had done. Paul may well have the incident in mind when he rebukes the Christian church in Corinth for a brother sleeping with his father's wife, which Paul says is unheard of amongst the Gentiles (1 Cor. 5:1). But, it was heard of amongst the people of God- Reuben, the firstborn of Israel, had done it. And so the theme develops that the people of God are often more immoral than the unbelieving world around them; but are saved by grace, not their good works. This seems so true of the Abraham family, whose 'faithful' members often contrast poorly with the more decent and ethical unbelievers amongst whom they lived. The point is that the people of God aren't necessarily good people, although they ought to be; they simply throw themselves upon God's grace.

We will note in the Joseph story that it is Reuben and Judah who show compassion to Joseph, seeking to save him from being murdered by the other brothers; and proactive in responding to the feelings of Jacob their father about Benjamin. But it is Reuben and Judah whose gross failings are recorded at this point; here we read of Reuben's gross sexual misbehaviour, and we will read of Judah's in Gen. 38. But it was those two who, whilst never apparently expressing repentance in a public way,

were thereby so touched by God's grace that they became compassionate to others.

Gen 35:23 *The sons of Leah: Reuben (Jacob's firstborn), Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun-* The list is of twelve tribes, and this number rather stuck throughout the Biblical record. And this raises the question as to whether Jacob's attempt to incorporate Joseph's two sons Ephraim and Manasseh as his personal sons... was really accepted as legitimate by God. Because in this case, there would have been 14 tribes of Israel. Reuben is still called the firstborn, right after the note in :22 that he had slept with his father's concubine, for which Jacob demoted him from being firstborn. On the stones on the High Priest's shoulders which bore the names of the tribes, Reuben's name comes first ("You shall take two onyx stones, and engrave on them the names of the children of Israel: six of their names on the one stone, and the names of the six that remain on the other stone, *in the order of their birth*", Ex. 28:9,10). We also later read things like "The sons of Reuben the firstborn of Israel" (Ex. 6:14); "These are the names of the children of Israel, who came into Egypt, Jacob and his sons: Reuben, Jacob's firstborn" (Gen. 46:8); "The children of Reuben, Israel's firstborn" (Num. 1:20; 26:5). It's as if God did not accept Jacob's obsession with rearranging the firstborn- an obsession he had momentarily quit after wrestling with the Angel, whose face appeared as that of Esau. Jacob was weak in this matter right to his death. And God as it were took no notice of Jacob's machinations about the firstborn. Perhaps this is also why in :29 we read the "Esau and Jacob his sons buried him"; Esau the firstborn is named first. It could equally be that Reuben repented; God forgave him, but Jacob didn't.

Gen 35:24 *The sons of Rachel: Joseph and Benjamin-* We wonder why Benjamin is listed amongst the 12 sons born to

Jacob in Paddan Aram (:26). I think that the answer is that quite simply, Semitic writing and culture is not so strictly accurate as Western and other cultures today. There are no footnotes pointing out exceptions; numbers and situations are rounded up; "all" is used in a very general sense. This is difficult for literalists to cope with, but it is of such pathetic literalism that has arisen so much of the petty criticism of the Biblical text.

Gen 35:25 *The sons of Bilhah (Rachel's handmaid): Dan and Naphtali-* The order is: Sons of Leah, sons of Rachel, sons of Rachel's handmaid, sons of Leah's handmaid. Perhaps the order is an attempt to demonstrate that the sons of the handmaids were finally accepted as legitimate sons of Jacob, although the sons of the proper wives are put first as if to reflect that God never fully accepted the handmaids as Jacob's legitimate wives.

Gen 35:26 *The sons of Zilpah (Leah's handmaid): Gad and Asher. These are the sons of Jacob, who were born to him in Paddan Aram-* See on :24. The impression is being given that the people of Israel / Jacob were formed outside the land of promise, and then brought into it. Just as Adam was as it were introduced into Eden, and Abraham likewise brought into the land. It was again so relevant for the wilderness generation, who had been born in Egypt and were being brought into the *eretz* as they heard Genesis first read to them.

Gen 35:27 *Jacob came to Isaac his father, to Mamre, to Kiriath Arba (which is Hebron), where Abraham and Isaac lived as foreigners-* This is presented as his first meeting with Isaac after returning from Laban, but quite some years had passed now, around 10-14. The promise that God would return him to his father's house in peace was not therefore fulfilled at this point; it was fulfilled in him coming to his father's house in the sense of his family, Esau, in peace- in peace with God through forgiveness, most importantly. I think that is how Jacob came

to understand it, otherwise we would expect to read of him making some symbolic visit to his "father's house" immediately after meeting Esau acceptably. However, the father's house to which he returned in peace may well refer to the family, rather than any literal "house". His peace with Esau was the fulfilment of that promise, to return him in peace to his father's house.

Gen 35:28 *The days of Isaac were one hundred and eighty years-* This meant that he would have lived until the time Joseph supposedly died. The record is not in strict chronological sequence, as the story of Joseph is told separately, and this concludes "the generations of Isaac" (Gen. 25:19).

Gen 35:29 *Isaac gave up the spirit, and died, and was gathered to his people, old and full of days. Esau and Jacob, his sons, buried him-* "Full of days" rather than full of years could mean that his days had been filled with significance, rather than living the same day over and over year after year. The term is clearly not the same as just meaning "old".

GENESIS CHAPTER 36

Gen 36:1 *Now this is the history of the generations of Esau (that is, Edom)-* Semitic peoples tend to add second names in reflection of an incident experienced or particular theme or characteristic displayed in the person's life. And thus Esau was also called Edom, 'the red one', reflecting his red complexion and being covered in red hair, and perhaps also the incident with the "red, red soup" which led to his selling his birthright. We note that these generations of Esau include those of Seir from Hor (:20-30), implying the family of Esau had intermarried with that family. Rather than converting people into his family, Esau's family as it were married into the world around them.

Gen 36:2 *Esau took his wives from the daughters of Canaan-* In contrast to Isaac and Jacob, who went to great efforts not to do so. Time and again in the record of Esau it is emphasized that he married Gentiles. The record mentions this fact no fewer than nine times in Gen. 36 alone! Why such emphasis? Surely to demonstrate how through the millennia of human history, God has remembered Esau's behaviour and held it against him, recording it for our learning.

However this particular verse could be translated as meaning that he took his wives [and children] from among the Canaanites and sent them elsewhere, out of the promised land- which also reads spiritually negative, see on :6.

Adah the daughter of Elon, the Hittite- Adah is the Bashemath of :34. As noted on :1, Semitic peoples went by more than one name because names were added to them which reflected their experiences and characteristics. Aholibamah is also called Judith (Gen. 26:34); Adah is there called Bashemath in the same place; and the woman who is here called Bashemath is called Mahalath in Gen. 28:9.

And Oholibamah the daughter of Anah- "Tent of the High Place". The names of Esau's line and wives often suggest idolatry. The description of Israel as Aholibah in Ezekiel 23:4 recalls Esau's wife Aholibamah, again associating them with their relatives who had chosen to leave the covenant. Apostate Israel are described in the very language of the adversaries / Satans of God's people. Because they acted like the world around them, from which they had been called out, they were ultimately judged by God as part of that world.

The daughter of Zibeon, the Hivite- Called a Horite (:20) because Hor was the area Zibeon lived in, although by ethnicity he was a Hivite. LXX "Aholibamah, the daughter of Anah the son of Zibeon", as in Gen. 36:14,24.

Gen 36:3 *And Basemath, Ishmael's daughter-* The Mahalath of Gen. 28:9. Ishmael had been circumcised into the covenant but chose not to remain in it.

Sister of Nebaioth- "High places", another hint at idolatry.

Gen 36:4 *Adah bore to Esau Eliphaz-* The Eliphaz the Temanite of the book of Job, who it seems eventually came to know God through Job's forgiveness of him and prayer for him. So we see here how relationship with God skipped a generation, as often happens.

Basemath bore Reuel- "Friend of God". We wonder if as with Eliphaz, this was another example of a spiritual person emerging from an unspiritual background and genealogy.

Gen 36:5 *Oholibamah bore Jeush, Jalam, and Korah-* Again the names are not indicative of spirituality, these three respectively meaning things like "Hasty" (like Esau), "Occult" and "Bald".

These are the sons of Esau, who were born to him in the land of Canaan- Esau's family is set up as a fake Israel. Jacob's sons are presented as all born outside Canaan from non-Canaanite

women, whereas Esau's sons were all born to him from local Canaanites, and were in that sense Canaanites.

Gen 36:6 *Esau took his wives, his sons, his daughters, and all the members of his household, with his livestock, all his animals, and all his possessions, which he had gathered in the land of Canaan, and went into a land away from the presence of his brother Jacob-* Leaving the land of promise is tantamount to taking oneself out of the things of God's Kingdom. It is never used in a very positive way. Esau went out from the land of Canaan into Edom, maybe slinking away from the face of his brother Jacob, sensing Jacob's righteousness and his own carnality; he didn't want to inherit the Kingdom, he wanted a kingdom for himself in this life. "Went out" is the language of Judas going out (Jn. 13:30), Cain '"went out" (Gen. 4:16), as did Zedekiah in the judgment of Jerusalem (Jer. 39:4; 52:7). Even in this life, those who leave the ecclesia 'go out' after the pattern of Judas, condemning themselves in advance of the judgment by their attitude to the ecclesia (1 Jn. 2:19 cp. Acts 15:24). The unrighteous flee from God now, as they will then (Hos. 7:13). The ungrateful servant "went out" and condemned his brother-thus condemning himself (Mt. 18:28). Yet Peter in this life "went out" from the Lord (Mk. 14:68) and then some minutes later further "went out and wept bitterly" (Lk. 22:62), living out the very figure of rejection at the judgment- and yet was able to repent and come back. In this life we can be judged, condemned, weep... but still repent of it and thereby change our eternal destiny. But at the final judgment: it will be just too late. That 'judgment' will be a detailed statement of the outcome of the ongoing investigative judgment which is going on right now.

Gen 36:7 *For their substance was too great for them to dwell together, and the land of their travels couldn't bear them because of their livestock-* Circumstances repeat within the experiences of

God's family and of human beings generally, with whom God is working. This is exactly the language of Abraham and Lot separating from each other for the same reason. And Lot went off to a land, Sodom, which was the spiritual death of most of his family.

Gen 36:8 *Esau lived in the hill country of Seir. Esau is Edom-* The primary audience of Genesis was Israel on their wilderness journey; perhaps so much detail is given about Esau's descendants, and the emphasis is upon "Esau is Edom" (:1,8,9,43) because Israel were passing through or near these peoples. Genesis sought to explain to Israel the historical background of those peoples; they were their distant relatives, who had chosen not to be part of the Abrahamic line of promise, although individuals amongst them did so, as I have noted several times in this chapter.

Gen 36:9 *This is the history of the generations of Esau the father of the Edomites in the hill country of Seir-* See on :8. The Israelites who first heard "Genesis" were "many days" in this hill country (Dt. 2:1), and were told that God had given this area to Esau as a possession (Dt. 2:5; Josh. 24:4). Esau as the direct grandson of Abraham could have had the promises of inheritance of the *eretz* relevant to him; but he chose to go out of that land. Mount Seir was just outside the promised land (Josh. 15:10). And so God accepted that and gave him an inheritance in Seir, although without the promises of eternal inheritance and of the saviour seed. He wanted a possession immediately in this life, and God gave Esau what he really wanted.

Gen 36:10 *These are the names of Esau's sons: Eliphaz, the son of Adah, the wife of Esau; and Reuel, the son of Basemath, the wife of Esau-* Reuel, friend of God, may have been a believer, despite having a father and mother and maternal grandmother who didn't want the things of the Kingdom promises. The new

creation in Christ means that we are free of such background influences if we truly respond to the word of promise.

Gen 36:11 *The sons of Eliphaz were Teman, Omar, Zepho, and Gatam, and Kenaz-* This could be the "Eliphaz the Temanite" of the book of Job, who [unlike most of his relatives] had *El*, God, in his name, and who thanks to God's grace and Job's prayer for him, is presented as finally being a penitent believer. So not all Esau's line were outside of God's salvation purpose; always, individuals can step out against the wind of their environments, and forge a relationship with God.

Gen 36:12 *Timna was concubine to Eliphaz, Esau's son; and she bore to Eliphaz Amalek. These are the sons of Adah, Esau's wife-* Amalek became a major enemy of Israel; but his father Eliphaz was a believer, if as suggested on :11 he is the Eliphaz of the book of Job. And so we see what is apparent in the records of the kings of Judah; good men have bad sons and bad men have good sons. Spirituality is personal and not inherited; and bad background is not an insurmountable handicap to faith and spirituality.

Gen 36:13 *These are the sons of Reuel: Nahath, Zerah, Shammah, and Mizzah. These were the sons of Basemath, Esau's wife-* Again, the names of the sons are distinctly unspiritual, especially bearing in mind the Semitic way of giving a name to a person which reflects their character. Respectively, these names mean "declining", "sun rising" and "wasting". Their birth names could have been recorded, but instead the names they were known by later are recorded.

Gen 36:14 *These were the sons of Oholibamah, the daughter of Anah, the daughter of Zibeon, Esau's wife: she bore to Esau Jeush, Jalam, and Korah-* As noted on :5, these three respectively meaning things like "Hasty" (like Esau), "Occult" and "Bald". And as explained on :13, people were born with a name but then were known by another name, which reflected their later

character, appearance or experiences. We have a prime example here, in the name "Korah" which means "bald" or strictly 'one who has become bald'; hardly a birth name for a baby boy. The fact the names of the children often reflect paganism or other unspirituality (e.g. "hasty" and "occult") is therefore a reflection of how they actually became known in their lives. And Esau's descendants are full of such spiritual wasters.

Gen 36:15 *These are the chiefs of the sons of Esau: the sons of Eliphaz the firstborn of Esau: chief Teman, chief Omar, chief Zepho, chief Kenaz-* Some Kenizites (Caleb and Othniel) were adopted into Israel (Josh. 14:14), confirming the picture we get here- that some individuals could always break free of family environment and associate themselves with God's purpose and promises. As the twelve sons of Jacob were to be princes of Israel, so the sons of Esau were "chiefs" or sheikhs. We have here the idea developed that the children of Esau were an imitation Israel; they too were blessed materially, but without the spiritual dimension which was present in the people of Israel, God's people.

Gen 36:16 *Chief Korah-* See on :14. It seems Eliphaz had a grandson and also a brother of this name (:5). "Sons of Adah" could easily mean 'grandsons' as well.

Chief Gatam, chief Amalek: these are the chiefs who came of Eliphaz in the land of Edom; these are the sons of Adah- This would have been significant information for the Israelites in the wilderness who first heard Genesis, as they fought with Amalek (Ex. 17:8,9).

Gen 36:17 *These are the sons of Reuel, Esau's son: chief Nahath, chief Zerah, chief Shammah, chief Mizzah: these are the chiefs who came of Reuel in the land of Edom; these are the sons of Basemath, Esau's wife-* Respectively, the names mean 'He who declines', 'dawn' [maybe with pagan reference]and 'he who faints

from fear'. Again, bear in mind that these names were not birth names, but reflected how these men became known.

Gen 36:18 *These are the sons of Oholibamah, Esau's wife: chief Jeush, chief Jalam, chief Korah: these are the chiefs who came of Oholibamah the daughter of Anah, Esau's wife-* Oholibamah, "tent of the high places", was remembered for her idolatry in her name. And women were only associated with tents on the high places because of their prostitution, as "worship" there was male oriented. Esau married a cultic prostitute, and bore him three children. This is a tacit admission of his own idolatry. As noted on :5, the names of the sons are not indicative of true spirituality, these three respectively meaning things like "Hasty" (like Esau), "Occult" and "Bald".

Gen 36:19 *These are the sons of Esau (that is, Edom), and these are their chiefs-* The preceding verses have listed 14 "chiefs" who came from Esau. Jacob had 12 sons and two adopted sons counted as his sons (Ephraim and Manasseh) making 14. Again we see Esau's descendants presented as a mirror of the true people of God, an anti-Israel, a fake imitation of the true. See on :20.

Gen 36:20 *These are the sons of Seir the Horite, the inhabitants of the land: Lotan, Shobal, Zibeon, Anah-* The idea is that they were formerly the inhabitants of that land, but were driven out by the Edomites (Dt. 2:12,22), an encouragement to Israel in the wilderness who first heard Genesis to likewise drive out the tribes from their allotted possession as Edom / Esau had done. The sons of Seir are listed amongst the descendants of Esau perhaps on the basis of the idea that Gentile peoples were counted as his descendants, just as was to be true, in a different sense, of Abraham's true seed. As noted on :19, Esau's nation is portrayed as an imitation of the true people of God. Or it could be argued that the similarities are because God chose to

bless Isaac's son in this life, but without the eternal and Messianic dimension which was attached to the line through Jacob.

Gen 36:21 *Dishon, Ezer, and Dishan. These are the chiefs who came of the Horites, the children of Seir in the land of Edom-* Again the names are hardly suggestive of true spirituality; Dishon and Ezer respectively mean "the trampler", "man of treasure". "Dishan" is another form of "Dishon"; it would be likely that Dishon died prematurely and so was as it were replaced by Dishan.

Gen 36:22 *The children of Lotan were Hori and Heman. Lotan's sister was Timna-* "Heman" means "raging anger", continuing the uncontrolled passion of the moment which was seen in Esau. The Chronicles genealogy likewise contains the uncommon mention of a woman. Why this special mention of Timna ["restraint"] as being the aunty of "Heman", "raging anger"? Perhaps to continue the theme developed here- that out of all this unspirituality and unrestrained human nature, there were various individuals who were different and rose above their surrounding environment. This is of huge encouragement to us today. See on :23,26,43.

Gen 36:23 *These are the children of Shobal: Alvan, Manahath, Ebal, Shepho, and Onam-* Shobal = 'overflowing'; Alvan = 'haughty'; Manahath = 'rest / peace'; Ebal = 'naked'; Shepho = 'naked'; Onam = 'strong man'. As noted on :22, in the midst of these names with sexual and other very human connotations, Manahath has a much nicer meaning. Perhaps again we have one spiritual person amongst unspiritual siblings. See on :22,26.

Gen 36:24 *These are the children of Zibeon: Aiah and Anah. This is Anah who found the hot springs in the wilderness, as he fed the donkeys of Zibeon his father-* This continues the similarities between the faithful family and the Edomites; for Isaac was also noted for discovering wells / springs. Or as AV "This was that

Anah that found the mules in the wilderness" could mean that Anah was the first to produce mules, by mating horses and donkeys in the wilderness.

Gen 36:25 *These are the children of Anah: Dishon and Oholibamah, the daughter of Anah-* Oholibamah means 'tent of the high places' and women were only famed for such places because they were cultic prostitutes there. Women are rarely named in these records unless there is some significance to them; and perhaps the idea of this reference is to show that Esau's family included a woman famed for her cult prostitution. But it is twice emphasized in this verse that this sad woman was the daughter of Anah, 'one who gives heed / pays attention'; and Anah is mentioned nine times in this genealogy, more than anyone else. Although she is described as a "son of...", "son" can simply mean 'child of'. Perhaps she is singled out for her obedience, but the point is clearly made that a spiritual person can have very unspiritual offspring.

Gen 36:26 *These are the children of Dishon: Hemdan, Eshban, Ithran, and Cheran-* Hemdan = 'desirable wine' (s.w. Is. 27:2 AV "red wine"); Eshban = 'vigorous growth'; Ithran = 'excess'; Cheran = 'angry'. We have the same idea as noted on :22,23; in the midst of very unspiritual names, we have one which speaks of something positive, of growth. Out of all this unspirituality and unrestrained human nature, there were various individuals who were different and rose above their surrounding environment. This is of huge encouragement to us today.

Gen 36:27 *These are the children of Ezer: Bilhan, Zaavan, and Akan-* Bilhan = 'humble'; Zaavan = 'not at peace'; Akan = 'twister'. As noted on :26, we again have here one spiritual name in the midst of very unspiritual ones, remembering that names

were attached to individuals according to what they were known well for. See on :22.

Gen 36:28 *These are the children of Dishan: Uz and Aran-* Job lived "in the land of Uz" (Job 1:1), another reminder that out of all this unspirituality, there were spiritual individuals within the line of Esau who rose above all the bad environment. Aran means 'shouter' and Uz means "fertility man", although Strong suggests otherwise. Fertility and paganism were well connected; out of this bad environment came the "perfect" Job.

Gen 36:29 *These are the chiefs who came of the Horites: chief Lotan, chief Shobal, chief Zibeon, chief Anah-* Anah is mentioned nine times in this genealogy, more than anyone else; see on :25. Although she is described as a "son of...", "son" can simply mean 'child of'. Perhaps she is singled out for her obedience, but the point is clearly made that a spiritual person can have very unspiritual offspring such as Oholibamah. We note that Oholibamah was a woman but also a chief (:41).

Gen 36:30 *Chief Dishon, chief Ezer, and chief Dishan: these are the chiefs who came of the Horites, according to their chiefs in the land of Seir-* See on :21.

Gen 36:31 *These are the kings who reigned in the land of Edom, before any king reigned over the children of Israel-* The hint therefore is that Israel's desire for a king was in order to be like the nations around them, such as Edom. And by so doing they were rejecting God as their king, and becoming like those such as Edom who had left the family of faith.

However, the reference could be to Moses as "king" of Israel effectively (Dt. 33:5), and the idea may simply be that this was how things were before the time of Moses. The list of kings we now have could be a chronological list of those who reigned in the area up until the time of Moses and the book of Genesis being completed, which would explain why the last king in the

forthcoming list is not recorded as dying, whereas the others are (:39).

Gen 36:32 *Bela, the son of Beor, reigned in Edom. The name of his city was Dinhabah-* "Robbers' den" (Gesenius). As noted on :33, Job overcame this bad background, as we can, to become a truly spiritual person. Balaam is very close to "Bela" and was also "the son of Beor", and if there is a reference to Balaam, then it would be in that he is framed as related to this man and similar to him. Again we get the impression that knowledge of Yahweh was not totally absent amongst all the descendants of Esau.

Gen 36:33 *Bela died, and Jobab, the son of Zerah of Bozrah, reigned in his place-* According to the addition to the book of Job found in the Septuagint, this is Job. Again we see how individuals amongst the otherwise unspiritual line of Esau did turn to the true God and were accepted in covenant relationship; some of the names and localities of his three friends also occur in this list of Esau's descendants and associates. In this case we marvel at the spiritual growth of Job, coming from such an unspiritual background, with the previous king living in a city called "Robbers' den" (see on :32).

Gen 36:34 *Jobab died, and Husham of the land of the Temanites reigned in his place-* Teman is apparently near Petra and Mount Paran (Hab. 3:3), as is Dinhabah (:32). We can therefore assume that Job lived in that area too.

Gen 36:35 *Husham died, and Hadad, the son of Bedad, who struck Midian in the field of Moab, reigned in his place. The name of his city was Avith-* Israel in the wilderness were the primary audience of Genesis, and they too smote Midian (Num. 31:8; Josh. 13:21). The fact others had "struck Midian" was therefore recorded as encouragement to them; and we too are intended to be inspired by Biblical history, realizing that our experiences

are not totally unique, but in essence are repetitions of Biblically recorded situations and past victories.

Gen 36:36 *Hadad died, and Samlah of Masrekah reigned in his place-* Masrekah means "vineyards" and we assume he was famed for his wine; contributing to the generally negative spiritual tone found in most of these names. "Samlah" likewise means 'mantle', perhaps a referring to the mantles used in religious rituals.

Gen 36:37 *Samlah died, and Shaul of Rehoboth by the river, reigned in his place-* "The river" is the Euphrates, which formed the boundary of the promised land; again the impression is given that the people of Esau chose to live outside the promised land.

Gen 36:38 *Shaul died, and Baal Hanan, the son of Achbor reigned in his place-* Strong offers "possessor of grace" as the meaning of Baal Hanan, which would fit in with the theme of there being occasionally very spiritual people amongst the otherwise unspiritual line of Edom, encouraging us also to rise up against the factors of environment and hereditary; for his father Achbor means 'attacker'. But it could equally mean the Baal or Lord of Canaan, even though they were not in Canaan.

Gen 36:39 *Baal Hanan the son of Achbor died, and Hadar reigned in his place. The name of his city was Pau. His wife's name was Mehetabel, the daughter of Matred, the daughter of Mezahab-* More detail is given about this Hadar, and his death isn't recorded. I suggested on :31 that this list of kings could be a chronological list of those who reigned in the area up until the time of Moses and the book of Genesis being completed, which would explain why this last king in the list is not recorded as dying, whereas the others are. In this case, Hadar would be "the king of Edom" with whom Israel had dealings in Num. 20:14.

Gen 36:40 *These are the names of the chiefs who came from Esau, according to their families, after their places, and by their*

names: chief Timna, chief Alvah, chief Jetheth- There are only 11 recorded here compared to the 14 earlier in this chapter. This could be because some were assimilated into others; or because what we now read is a list of their localities rather than of individuals, and there may have been more than one "chief" within the same single locality.

Gen 36:41 *Chief Oholibamah, chief Elah, chief Pinon-* Oholibamah ['tent of the high places'] was a woman, and I suggested on :29 that Anah was also a female chief. Elah = 'oak tree', associated with paganic shrines; Pinon = 'distracted'. All evidence of paganism and unspirituality.

Gen 36:42 *Chief Kenaz, chief Teman, chief Mibzar-* Kenaz = 'hunter'; Teman = 'stronger', Mibzar = 'strong hold'; all the language of human strength and prowess. See on :43.

Gen 36:43 *Chief Magdiel, and chief Iram. These are the chiefs of Edom, according to their habitations in the land of their possession. This is Esau, the father of the Edomites-* Iram = 'wisdom of the city'. The names of the other chiefs in :41 and :42 were all very unspiritual and some have definite paganic hints. Therefore Magdiel, 'precious to God', stands out in its meaning. Again as noted on :22, we are being shown that out of an unspiritual lineage, family and environment, individuals can be transformed and overcome all that to be part of God's covenant purpose. This is significant encouragement for we today who can feel swamped by unspiritual environments.

GENESIS CHAPTER 37

Gen 37:1 *Jacob lived in the land of his father's travels, in the land of Canaan-* The significance of this statement is that Jacob was intended to live in Canaan and had suffered hugely in order to leave Mesopotamia. The contrast is between the Hebrew term for "lived", which means 'to settle down', and that for "travels", which means to live temporarily. Although Isaac spent more of his life in the *eretz* than Jacob did, he moved around a lot in the land; whereas Jacob settled down permanently [relatively speaking] in one location.

Note that Isaac never left Canaan, he lived there all his life, but it was still the land of his sojourning ["travels"], his temporary dwelling. Just as this world is for us, no matter how stable our lives may appear in secular terms.

The word "God" never occurs in any form throughout Genesis 37. Nor is there any mention of prayer nor faith- exactly as we have in the book of Esther. But clearly we are to discern the hand of God at work. Just as God may be apparently absent in our lives and do no visible miracles; but considering His higher hand reveals invisible miracles and His definite presence and purpose.

Gen 37:2 *This is the history of the generations of Jacob. Joseph, being seventeen years old, was feeding the flock with his brothers-*

"Joseph, being seventeen years old, was shepherding the flock with his brothers" is the standard English translation; but the Hebrew word order is: "Joseph was shepherding his brothers, along with the flock". He had been made the family priest, and therefore had the coat of many colours. The "evil report" he brought back was therefore about their insubmission to his leadership. His dreams asserted that leadership- and he asks his brothers to "hear" or 'obey' them.

So it seems that at 17, Joseph had already been made the chief shepherd of his father's extensive flocks. But he was deposed from that by his brothers. He would likewise quickly become the chief household manager of Potiphar's house, and be quickly deposed. He quickly became the prison manager- and that ended quickly. He was then suddenly made the ruler of all Egypt, the greatest civilization and empire on planet earth at the time. But given his previous experiences, he would have accepted this humbly and with a premonition it wouldn't last long. In fact it lasted all his life. Likewise with being given a significant item of clothing, initially the coat of many colours, which he suddenly lost. He was given a similar significant coat when the manager of Potiphar's house, and it was suddenly removed from him. So that when he was suddenly dressed in all the regalia of Egypt, he took it humbly and was prepared to lose it at any time.

Literally "being the son of seventeen years". Joseph is also described as "the son of old age" in Jacob's opinion (:3). This could quite legitimately be read as meaning that he was considered by Jacob to be spiritually mature beyond his years, and indeed it does seem he was.

He was a boy with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father's wives. Joseph brought an evil report of them to their father- The sons of Bilhah (Dan and Naphtali) and Zilpah (Gad and Asher) were perhaps the least connected to the Jacob family and the promises. Perhaps this was what led to their poor behaviour which Joseph reported. "Was feeding the flock" could mean "was the shepherd of the flock"; although very young, he had been pronounced 'chief shepherd' by Jacob, as a way of investing him with the titles and roles of the firstborn after Reuben had lost that role. In this case, we see again how Joseph is set up as a type or representative of the Lord Jesus, the chief shepherd of Israel's flock.

The patriarchs having more than one wife at a time signals that all was not well morally within the Abraham family. The repeated way in which they lied about their wives also indicates that they didn't take their marital responsibilities as they should have (Gen. 12:13; 20:3,13; 26:7). Abraham's apparently casual relationship with Hagar, Judah's use of a harlot (apparently the sort of thing he often did), Esau's many carnal wives, Dinah's love affair, Reuben's incest (Gen. 49:4)... all this creates a certain impression of weakness in this area. Joseph's evil report regarding his brothers may well have featured news of their playboy escapades while far away from usual family life (note the similarities with 1 Sam. 2:23,24).

The generations of Jacob began with Joseph. God effectively saw him as the firstborn, whereas Jacob had machinated about Reuben and Judah as being the firstborn. Again we see how human firstborn and preeminence is seen otherwise by God.

"Being a lad with" the sons of Bilhah may mean they treated Joseph as their servant or lackey. But the servant was to become their saviour. Maybe this treatment was part of the evil report Joseph brought to Jacob. Noah likewise was the youngest son, treated as a run around by his older brothers, which meant he married much later than them. But it's all a classic case of the despised, suffering servant becoming the saviour. We see the intended juxtaposition- Joseph was 17 but was the shepherd of the flock and his brothers, but he was the servant. He was the classic servant leader, clearly looking forward to the Lord.

Gen 37:3 *Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age*- Here the Spirit frames the record in Jacob's favour. We have shown that most of Jacob's children were born within a few years of each other, and in any case, Benjamin was the youngest. It seems that the Spirit is almost making a weak excuse for Jacob's favouritism, or perhaps

picking up Jacob's self-justification for his favouritism and treating it as if it is valid. This is imputed righteousness. Jacob should have learnt from all the problems caused by his father's favoritism towards Esau and his mother's towards himself. But he didn't, and just as both Abraham and Isaac lied about their wives, so this weakness of having favourites continued from Isaac to Jacob.

Literally "being the son of seventeen years" (:2), Joseph is also described as "the son of old age" in Jacob's opinion (:3). This could quite legitimately be read as meaning that he was considered by Jacob to be spiritually mature beyond his years, and indeed it does seem he was.

And he made him a coat of many colours- A priestly robe (s.w. Gen. 3:21; Ex. 28:4; 29:5) which likely went with the firstborn's responsibilities. Jacob therefore dressed in Esau's clothes, and he seems to have wanted to use this opportunity to reflect his own experiences to his sons. Maybe Jacob made Joseph the firstborn after Reuben (the firstborn) slept with Bilhah. The special garment was the equivalent of a priestly robe, as the role of priest went with the firstborn role. This explains why Joseph wore it when he went out to shepherd his brothers, and why they so hated that garment. Reuben, who had been demoted from the firstborn, commendably sought to save Joseph from being killed. His weakness was therefore temporary, and he subsequently demonstrated that he held no resentment but only love towards Joseph who had been chosen to replace him.

There seems to have been something unusual about the Lord's outer garment. The same Greek word *chiton* used in Jn. 19:23,24 is that used in the LXX of Gen. 37:3 to describe Joseph's coat of many pieces. Josephus (*Antiquities* 3.7.4,161) uses the word for the tunic of the High Priest, which was likewise not to be rent (Lev. 21:10). The Lord in His time of dying is

thus set up as High Priest, gaining forgiveness for His people, to 'come out' of the grave as on the day of Atonement, pronouncing the forgiveness gained, and bidding His people spread that good news world-wide.

One simple takeaway from the Joseph story is that he was born with good cards and bad cards, just like us all. The record doesn't mention his weaker points although for sure like any man, he had them. But this is to point up how he was born into a hard situation, the favourite son of the favourite wife, hard working, smarter than the others, spiritually minded, a born victim of jealousy. He couldn't help that, as many are born likewise into impossible situations or with handicaps of various kinds. But he rose above them and tenaciously held to his mission, to save his brethren. That's the lesson.

Gen 37:4 *His brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, and they hated him, and couldn't speak peaceably to him-* They wouldn't greet him with the standard *shalom* greeting. This hatred "grieved" Joseph deeply (Gen. 49:23); Jacob says that it was as if Joseph had archers shooting at him, so we can assume that he had several attempts to harm or kill him before the incident now recorded. This means that Jacob sending Joseph alone to them was done with his full knowledge that harm was going to arise, and his attitude was a window onto the feelings of God as He sent His Son to his brethren. According to that parallel, Jacob sent Joseph to them hoping that without his presence, he would somehow reconcile them to himself. See on :13. It meant also that Joseph's willingness to go to his brothers alone was spiritually motivated; for he would surely have sensed what might happen.

Gen 37:5 *Joseph dreamed a dream, and he told it to his brothers, and they hated him all the more-* This parallels how the Lord spoke forth what He heard from God (Jn. 8:38; 12:50) and

was hated unto death for it. Joseph likely didn't want to speak forth what he had been shown, and he did so with the spirit in which we may nervously share God's word and plan with those whom we know will hate us for saying it. The same word for "hated" is used in the promise that the Messianic seed would triumph over those who hated him (Gen. 24:60). It was their hatred which was therefore the background of the dreams, which I suggest were extensions of the Abrahamic promise repeated to Joseph; for the dreams stated as much, that Joseph would triumph over those who hated him, i.e. his own brothers.

Gen 37:6 *He said to them, Please hear this dream which I have dreamed-* This is entreaty, as if he is asking them to believe something they don't want to. Perhaps if they had fallen before him then, accepting he was the chosen firstborn and spiritual leader, then the whole sad history of the next chapters need not have happened. The dreams were an invitation to "hear" them and respond to them. In this we see the open ended approach to God to the fulfilment of His will and prophetic plan. And yet perhaps Joseph was repeating the mistake of Jacob, in insisting that in this life he should be accepted as the firstborn. Before birth it had been decreed that Esau should serve Jacob, but that was only to come true in the future. But Jacob wanted it in this life. And Joseph possibly made the same mistake, in wanting the brothers to accept him in this life as the firstborn. The way the dreams feature his mother bowing to him, when she was dead, was surely a hint that the intended fulfilment was not in this life but at the resurrection. And the fulfilment was not essentially in Joseph, but in the future Messianic seed whom he represented and prefigured. Jacob's final comment upon Joseph is that he was representative of the future Messianic seed (Gen. 49:22-26), but if they had all been more Christ-centred then all the personal angst against Joseph would not have happened.

The Hebrew translated "hear" carries the idea of 'be obedient'. Joseph had the coat of many colours, he was the priest of the family; but they didn't want to heed him. Probably they had returned to their idolatry after burying their idols in Gen. 35. And he is asking them to obey him in a spiritual sense. But they refused. And yet the following years would bring them to this obedience. This approach would explain why in the apparent fulfilment of the dream, his mother Rachel did not bow to him, as she was dead. Indeed, that aspect of the dream requires the fulfilment is ultimately at the resurrection. It is perhaps why there is no comment that the dream was fulfilled when the brothers bowed to him. God wants our obedience; if we don't give it, then He still works, even through the consequences of our sins, in order to bring it about. And Genesis is full of examples of where disobedient people are still worked with by God to their final blessing [think of Abraham not immediately going to Canaan, nor separating from his family].

Gen 37:7 *For behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and behold, my sheaf arose and also stood upright; and behold, your sheaves came around, and bowed down to my sheaf-* The patriarchs were shepherds and cattle herders- not sedentary crop farmers. The dream transported them into another world or situation other than what they knew then. The dream was God's way of giving the Abrahamic promises to Joseph. He was being given more detail- that his mother Rachel would be resurrected, and along with his brothers, would all bow down to his sheaf, which also would be lifted up [another hint at resurrection?]. Jacob in Gen. 49 understands all this correctly, finally- that it spoke not so much of Joseph, but of the Messianic seed whom he typified. This means that the bowing of the brothers to Joseph was but a primary fulfilment of the promise. It wasn't complete, because Rachel was not there. Joseph was likened to a sheaf

(37:7)- and Christ was the wave sheaf (Lev. 23:11,12). It was "his sheaf", Messiah, who was to be worshipped by all Israel. The things of the Kingdom / land were revealed in the picture of fruitful grain harvests, and those of the Name of Jesus in the way that Joseph is being set up as a type of the Messianic seed. Perhaps if the brothers had immediately accepted him as such, then the course of history would have not gone as it did. The way the promise had a primary fulfilment as the brothers bowed to Joseph in Egypt fits in with the theme of the promises all having initial fulfilment in this life, but pointing forward to the more significant future fulfilment.

Jacob had quite wrongly sought to obtain the blessing of the firstborn, which included the wording that his family should bow down to him (s.w. Gen. 27:29). Although he had resigned that stolen blessing to Esau when he repented on the night of wrestling, Jacob still likely disliked the message being repeated here- that he was to bow down to others, in this case, his young son Joseph or the Messianic seed represented by him.

Gen 37:8 *His brothers said to him, Will you indeed reign over us? Or will you indeed have dominion over us? They hated him all the more for his dreams and for his words-* This was the Lord's experience: "We will not have this man to reign over us" (Lk. 19:14), "We have no king but Caesar" (Jn. 19:15). But "have dominion" is the Hebrew word used of how Joseph ruled over all Egypt and those who came to buy corn from him such as his brother (Gen. 45:8,26). However, that was but a primary fulfilment; the main fulfilment must be yet future.

One lovely feature of this whole account is that when these dreams came true, there is no mention of the fact. Joseph doesn't rub the point in; neither are the brothers recorded as humbly admitting that the dreams had come true. Likewise the New Testament often doesn't labour the point that the Lord's life and

work was fulfilling Old Testament prophecies like Is. 53. This is left for us to perceive- and be even further strengthened in faith by the beautiful subtlety of it all.

Gen 37:9 *He dreamed yet another dream-* The double dream of Gen. 41:32 was a sign of absolute certainty of fulfilment. When Pharaoh had two dreams, and the prisoners together had two dreams, Joseph would have recalled his double dreams, and would have thereby been encouraged that they would be fulfilled too. Each of the three dreams in the Joseph story is a double dream (Joseph's dreams, the dreams of butler and baker, Pharaoh's dreams). When Joseph tells Pharaoh that double dreams mean they definitely come true, he said this, therefore, in faith- that his own dreams would come true. That faith is contrasted with both his father and his brothers protesting that these dreams could never come true. And I suggest he had this in mind all through, that circumstances would work out so that his brothers came bowing to him. I suggest that is what motivated him to suggest Pharaoh set a man over all Egypt to manage the people would come to buy grain- inwardly scheming that he would be the one chosen. He showed great spiritual ambition in all this. But Joseph also understands the double dream of Pharaoh to mean that God will "soon" fulfil it- and the double dream of the butler and baker indeed immediately came true. Joseph therefore understood that his own dreams would "soon" come true; but he understood that the "soon" was relative to God's view of time, and not his. The dreams of Pharaoh would take seven to fourteen years to come true; but Joseph understood that as "soon". We like Joseph must see that our redemption and the fulfilment of God's plan for us is likewise "soon"- in the ultimate perspective.

It could also be that Joseph's two dreams were fulfilled [to some extent] in the two visits of the brothers to Egypt- they

twice bowed before him. Although the fulfilment is still incomplete, because at those points his parents didn't bow to him. The full fulfilment will be at the resurrection.

And told it to his brothers, and said, Behold, I have dreamed yet another dream: and behold, the sun and the moon and eleven stars bowed down to me- It must have taken Joseph quite some courage to explain the dreams to his brethren. "He dreamed yet another dream, *and* told it his brethren" (AV). There was quite likely a certain bucking up of courage in the spirit of the Lord Jesus at age 30, when he 'came down from Heaven' and started preaching the glories of his future Kingdom to a cynical Israel. This is our struggle, to tell forth the things revealed to us. As noted on :36, Potiphar and Pharaoh both mean "sun", and had temporal mastership over Joseph. When Pharaoh ["the sun"] pointed out that in the throne, he would be above Joseph... he must have remembered this dream. We have established here the basis for how sun, moon and stars, the figurative heavens, refer to Israel and its leadership, or founding fathers.

Gen 37:10 *He told it to his father and to his brothers. His father rebuked him, and said to him, What is this dream that you have dreamed? Will I and your mother and your brothers indeed come to bow ourselves down to you to the earth?-* This reveals how Jacob's view of the promises, even at the age of 108, was very much on a surface level. Rachel was dead (Gen. 35:19), and Jacob mocked the suggestion that she would ever "come" to bow to her son as it implied a resurrection. It has been suggested that Joseph had the dream as a very small child, before the death of Rachel. But the dream spoke of his eleven brothers; so that is not a possibility, unless his dream was also a prophecy that Jacob would have another son.

Jacob's anger with Joseph's claim that all his brothers would bow down to him is explicable when we remember that Isaac had

promised Jacob that this would be *his* blessing (Gen. 27:29 cp. 37:10). Yet at the end, he realized that the promised blessings didn't *only* apply to him on a personal level, and he even conferred such a blessing on Judah (Gen. 49:8). See on :7.

The bowing down will ultimately be in gratitude. And Rachel, presented in the record as unspiritual to her last gasp, will do likewise. We wonder if she will bow down in gratitude because she will be saved because of Joseph (consider how the faith of third parties can save in some cases, Mk. 2:5).

Gen 37:11 *His brothers envied him-* As Israel envied Moses for spiritual reasons (Ps. 106:16; Acts 7:9), so they did the Lord(Mt. 27:18), after the pattern of the brothers' spiritual envy of Joseph. Spiritual envy leading to persecution is quite a common feature in Biblical history (Job, Jeremiah, Paul...). And it isn't absent from the Christian experience either. Envy is a great theme in the Abraham family. The Philistines envied Isaac (Gen. 26:14); as (we can assume) Laban did Jacob; Rachel envied Leah (Gen. 30:1); Joseph's brothers envied him (Acts 7:9). Family friction certainly stalked the generations. Jacob against Esau, Isaac against Jacob, Ishmael against Isaac, Sarah against Hagar, Joseph's brothers amongst themselves (Gen. 45:24). Envy of Israel by the world and friction within Israel has been a continued characteristic (what similarities with spiritual Israel?). Yet there was also a soft streak there; Esau and Jacob evidently had a certain affection for each other and willingness to truly forgive (Esau more so than Jacob!); Abraham truly cared for Lot's fate in Sodom on at least two occasions; and the brothers genuinely cared for Benjamin and the grief of their father.

But his father kept this saying in mind- As did Mary, mother of the Lord Jesus (Lk. 2:19,51). In Lk. 2:51 it is recorded that Mary "kept these sayings". It could be that she had pondered

from the LXX of Gen. 37:11 how Jacob "observed" (s.w.) the saying of Joseph / Jesus, and therefore felt that she too must meditate on all the words associated with her Son. She speaks in Lk. 1:55 Gk. of "*the* seed of him"- she understood the seed of Abraham to be Messiah, her son, and makes many references and allusions to the promises to Abraham. She had clearly reflected upon her 'first principles'.

Gen 37:12 *His brothers went to feed their father's flock in Shechem-* About 60 miles from their base in Hebron. Shechem was where they had massacred all the male population and pillaged the town. They were only able to return there and graze their flocks by God's absolute grace. And yet it was whilst living in this wonderful grace and salvation of them, from the consequences of their own sins, that they allowed their envy of their brother to turn to hatred and almost murder. All our sins are committed because we forget the amazing grace we live under; and because we fail to appropriately remember our past. They had clearly just hived off the memory of their shameful behaviour at Shechem. And lived graceless lives as a result.

Gen 37:13 *Israel said to Joseph, Aren't your brothers feeding the flock in Shechem? Come, and I will send you to them. He said to him, Here I am-* The fact Jacob sent Joseph with the priestly robe, which wouldn't have been worn apart from in a religious context, suggests he intended Joseph to conduct a religious ceremony with them, which he hoped they would accept. See on :4. He wished the ceremony to give them "peace" (:14).

Joseph readily responded to his father's desire that he go to his brethren: "Here I am". Isaiah, another type of Christ, uttered similar words before his mission to Israel (Is. 6:8), and the Lord's spirit was likewise (Heb. 10:7). Yet in both Joseph and Isaiah there must have been a sense of apprehension, sensing the persecution that would come. In line with the typology of

Joseph and Isaiah, there was a point when the Lord received and responded to His Father's commission. This may have been some time in His teens; perhaps 17, as with Joseph? Or at 30 when he began His ministry and came "into the (Jewish) world"?

Gen 37:14 *He said to him, Go now, see whether it is well with your brothers, and well with the flock; and bring me word again. So he sent him out of the valley of Hebron, and he came to Shechem-* "Go... see whether it is well with your brothers" is the same Hebrew as in 1 Sam. 17:18, also typical of the Lord. He was sent to the shepherds and the sheep of Israel. This accounts for the special effort he made to appeal to the Jewish religious leaders, even when it seemed he was wasting time with them. Jacob wanted there to be "peace" for them ["it is well" = *shalom*, peace], which was the Lord's mission likewise; whom "God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ" (Acts 10:36). We recall that they had not even given Joseph the "peace" greeting, and Jacob thought that the keeping of the ritual would rectify that. Perhaps the conclusion intended is that keeping religious rituals will not of itself bring peace between brethren. Even if our brethren cannot say "peace" to us, we should still seek their peace and blessing.

Gen 37:15 *A certain man found him, and behold, he was wandering delirious in the field. The man asked him, What are you looking for?-* The life of Jesus was a life of outgiven grace and seeking the salvation of men, after the pattern of Joseph going to seek the welfare of his brethren. Even when he was delirious [AV "wandering"] he told the stranger that he was seeking his brethren (who hated him); seeking them was his dominant desire. And so it was in the life of the Lord. Like His Father, He was willing to be incredibly patient, in order to win people. The man may well have been an Angel. The incident functioned to remind Joseph later that his life had been preserved at this

point; and this would have encouraged him when in the pit and in prison that God had preserved his life before. His purpose with Joseph was therefore far from over. The question "What are you looking for / seeking?" was thereby so strongly engrained in Joseph's mind, so that in all decisions and situations he would be asking himself this crucial question. But the Hebrew translated here "delirious" is usually used in a negative context, or erring or going astray. Perhaps his resolve to seek and find his brethren spiritually (see on :16) had weakened, and he needed this Angelic encounter to encourage him to go forward to what he rightly guessed could be death or suffering, for the sake of his brethren who hated him.

Gen 37:16 *He said, I am searching for my brothers-* The Hebrew for "searching" is also used in the sense of asking / enquiring of God in prayer. As noted above, both Jacob and Joseph had premonitions that there would be trouble, and Joseph's mission involved taking the coat of many colours for some religious rite, and seeking the peace of those who would not give "peace" to him. The incident with the man / Angel who found Joseph was likely to focus him upon his mission, to get him to verbalize it. And we have similar encounters in our lives, to make us realize our mission. The way Joseph talks about "my brothers" could imply that he felt the man knew him and his brothers, strengthening the suggestion that this was an Angel.

Tell me, please, where they are feeding the flock- The record speaks often of "the flock" in the singular. It was specifically Jacob's flock, so large that it needed all his adult sons and probably others to feed it. Joseph assumed the man knew where his brothers were; suggesting he himself understood the man who had come to seek *him* as being an Angel. And he was thereby comforted, that God was in search of *him* just as he was of his brothers.

Gen 37:17 *The man said, They have left here, for I heard them say, 'Let us go to Dothan'. Joseph went after his brothers, and found them in Dothan-* About eight miles further. This all points forward to the Lord Jesus seeking and finding His Father's wayward children. In the incidents with his brethren later regarding the cup, Joseph likewise chases after his brethren and 'finds' them. His whole work with them was to seek and find them, for God. From youth to middle age, this was his very gracious mission toward them.

Gen 37:18 *They saw him afar off, and before he came near to them, they conspired against him to kill him-* There are steep hills near Dothan which would have enabled them to see Joseph approaching across the plain. The leaders of first century Israel initially recognized Jesus of Nazareth coming to them as the Messiah (Mt. 21:38 cp. Gen. 37:20; Jn. 7:28). They saw (i.e. understood, recognized) him, but then they were made blind by Christ (Jn. 9:39). It was because they "saw" Jesus as the Messiah that the sin of rejecting him was counted to them (Jn. 9:41). "When the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves (i.e. conspired), This is the heir; come, let us kill him" (Mt. 21:38). Mt. 21:38 is quoting the LXX of Gen. 37:18.

Gen 37:19 *They said one to another, Behold, this dreamer comes-* Heb. '*baal* / master of dreams'. They perhaps meant that he considered himself the *baal*, their master as the one having the status of the firstborn, on account of his dreams. Jealousy over the status of being the designated firstborn is a major theme in the record. Isaac replaced Ishmael, Jacob replaced Esau, Jacob wanted Joseph to replace Reuben, and even at the end of his life, Jacob wants to replace Manasseh with Ephraim (Gen. 48:14). The lesson was never learnt, an yet by grace, Jacob and his sons will be saved. This is comfort to us as we come to realize that both we and others shall go to their graveplanks with some areas

of our lives and thinking still not subdued by the Spirit as they should have been.

Gen 37:20 *Come now therefore and let's kill him, and cast him into one of the pits, and we will say, 'An evil animal has devoured him'*- They never 'said' this; Jacob was led by them to wrongly deduce it (:33). But such misleading and deception is tantamount to telling the lies. Giving false impressions, even without speaking a word, is therefore the same as lying. This legalistic, but vain, attempt to avoid guilt for the sin is all prophetic of the Jewish attitude to the Lord's crucifixion.

The plot to kill Joseph is here directly related to his dreams. Dreams, when publically spoken forth, were believed to have absolute power in the lifetime of the dreamer. There are many accounts of those who spoke forth a dream being killed, lest their dream come true. It was thought that the death of the dreamer would stop the dream coming true. When they finally do bow before Joseph, they were tacitly admitting that his dreams were coming true and therefore he was not dead. By doing so, they should have joined the dots and seen that therefore Joseph must be alive. And their psychological fixation with believing Joseph was dead was because they were so adamant that they could never bow down before their spiritual superior.

We will see what will become of his dreams- Likewise the Lord's inspired prophecies of His death and resurrection must have motivated the Jews' slaying of Him. The brothers failed to appreciate that the dreams were not so much talking about this life as about some future point, when Rachel would be resurrected. So murdering Joseph would not disprove the dreams. The selling of Joseph as a slave was probably seen by them as a way of forcing his dreams to not be fulfilled- they thought that by doing this, he was not to be a ruler, but a slave.

Again and again we see how human efforts to falsify God's word only in fact fulfil it.

Gen 37:21 *Reuben heard it, and delivered him out of their hand, and said, Let's not take his life-* Reuben had slept with his father's concubine, and yet despite that awful sin, he still had a better side to him. And we should remember this in considering our feelings about those who have committed what are without doubt serious sins. He still considered himself the firstborn, despite his demotion from that as a result of the incest of Gen. 35:22. He points forward to the efforts of the unspiritual Pilate to save the Lord (Jn. 19:12).

Jacob cursed Reuben as being as downhill as water in sleeping with his concubine. He meant that Reuben had acted as caught up in a downward spiral of lust, just as water always continues to flow downhill. But here and later, Reuben shows that man can repent and pull out of such downward spirals.

Gen 37:22 *Reuben said to them, Shed no blood. Throw him into this pit that is in the wilderness, but lay no hand on him-that he might deliver him out of their hand, to restore him to his father-* Joseph and Nicodemus were inspired with that sense which we possess all too fleetingly: that in the light of the Lord's death, *nothing else matters.* They were both typified in some way by Reuben and Judah, who when confronted with the reality of murdering Joseph, spoke out unashamedly in front of their unspiritual brethren (Gen. 42:22). They pointed forward also to Pilate, who wanted to chastise and then release the Lord (Lk. 23:16). Like the Jews who crucified the Lord Jesus, these men clearly had a conscience even in the midst of their sin. In our outreach to the world, we must never conclude that some people have no religious conscience. All are made in the image of God and somewhere, there is a conscience toward Him which we can connect with through the message.

Gen 37:23 *It happened, when Joseph came to his brothers*-Just as the Lord came to His brothers and was rejected, betrayed for pieces of silver and slain (Jn. 1:11 "he came to his own"). The camera, as it were, is showing Joseph walking across the plain towards them (:18), and now is zoomed in close-up as Joseph comes to them, and they grab his coat.

That they stripped Joseph of his coat, the coat of many colours that was on him- Just as the Lord was stripped of a specially made coat (Jn. 19:23). Was Joseph naked in the pit? The same LXX word is used in Mt. 27:28; was the Lord naked on the cross? See on Heb. 6:6 "open shame". Joseph came to them wearing the special coat, the sign of the firstborn, as if he came to them with some religious message and wanted to perform some religious ritual. We recall how Jacob dressed in Esau's coat of the firstborn when deceiving Isaac.

Gen 37:24 *And they took him and threw him into the pit. The pit was empty-* "Dothan" means 'two wells'. Perhaps he was thrown into one of these which was dry.

There was no water in it- Representing death and the grave (Zech. 9:11; Ps. 40:2). When Zedekiah called Jeremiah out of the prison house to meet him and show him the word of God, he ought to have perceived that he was going through the very experience of Pharaoh with Joseph (Jer. 37:17,20). Jeremiah's desperate plea not to be sent back to prison to die there surely echoes that of Joseph to his brethren; for Jeremiah was let down like Joseph had been into a pit with no water in, so reminiscent of Joseph. But Zedekiah didn't want to see all this; he should've listened to Jeremiah, as Pharaoh had listened to Joseph and saved himself. It was all potentially set up for him; but he refused to take note. The lack of water in the pit may imply there were therefore poisonous snakes and scorpions within it, as was typical in that area.

Gen 37:25 *They sat down to eat bread-* Ignoring Joseph's screams for mercy (Gen. 42:21), as the soldiers sat down and watched the Lord on the cross, eating their army rations. The callousness of the brothers reminds us of what they did in the massacre at Shechem. Every one of them would receive multiple life sentences in high security prison if they were alive today. And yet these harsh, wicked men... became the foundation pillars of God's people. Even though there is little record of their transformation in this life. They were saved by the grace of their wonderful brother and heavenly Father. They are parade examples of men who cannot find the humility to express their repentance in public words, and yet in their own way are still repent. For repentance is a matter of the heart, and it is the heart God looks upon.

"And they sat down" after killing the Lord Jesus- Mt. 27:36.

Their sitting down to eat suggests a lack of conscience. Haman did the same after arranging for the Jews to be slain, as Jehu did after the murder of Jezebel. In contrast, Darius refused to eat after he had sent Daniel to the lion's den. In this case, as with Haman and Jehu, the eating was done rather than fasting to demonstrate a good conscience. But God worked on them to help them repent. And we see how feeling good conscience does not of itself justify us, as Paul also states (1 Cor. 4:5).

And they lifted up their eyes and looked, and saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead, with their camels bearing spices and balm and myrrh, going to carry it down to Egypt- Jacob later sent such balm, made from fragrant gum trees which grew in Canaan, called ladanum (Gen. 43:11). The brothers were intended by the hand of providence to reflect that in going to Egypt with such gum balm, they were retracing the steps of Joseph and those merchants. God works to restimulate within us memory of our unrepented of sins, and this is a classic example.

Throughout the records of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and his children there is continual repetition in the manner in which the record is written. This repetition is of both experiences and of the language used to describe those experiences. The repeated language about going down to Egypt is an example. Thus Gen. 39:1- 8: "Joseph was brought down to Egypt... the Ishmaelites, which had brought him down thither... down to Egypt" (37:25). There are other examples: "The Lord was with Joseph... and his master saw that the Lord was with him". "His master the Egyptian... his master". "Joseph... was a prosperous man... the Lord made all that he did to prosper". Potiphar "made him overseer over his house...from the time that he had made him overseer in his house". "All that he had he put into his hand... over all that he had... the blessing of the Lord was upon all that he had... he left all that he had in Joseph's hand". "His hand... into his hand... Joseph's hand... to my hand". This kind of linguistic device suggests that the Spirit in Genesis is inviting us to observe the development of theme and to note emphasis. The above example from Joseph's life is one of many such sets of evidence. The repetition of certain descriptions and common experiences in the lives of Abraham's family members is to enable us to build up a very clear picture of what they were like as people. We are being enabled to get to know them as a family. This is necessary for us if we are to realistically obey the New Testament commands to see Abraham and the patriarchs as our spiritual fathers, to model our daily walk upon them, to see in them the examples which should dominate our lives and thinking. The way the record repeats their similar experiences reveals certain family traits; the majority of which are *negative*. This takes some appreciating.

Gen 37:26 *Judah said to his brothers, What profit is it if we kill our brother-* At least two of his ten persecutors were unhappy

about what they were doing , and said so (:22). Perhaps the whole group egged each other on to adopt an attitude none were totally happy with in their conscience- Ditto for first century Israel? But the motivation of Judah may simply have been "profit", and we note that "Judah" is effectively the same word as "Judas". The Hebrew for "profit" is usually used of wealth unjustly obtained. Judah reasons that there is no cash value in just murdering Joseph. Later, Joseph was to shower them with silver in the mouths of their sacks, and even his silver cup; to show them that he repaid this evil with good, and that silver was immaterial when compared to grace.

And conceal his blood?- Blood is a symbol of both life and also death (also in Num. 35:19,33; Lev. 20:9). Both the Lord's death and His life form a covenant / testament / will for us to obey- in both baptism and then in living out the death and life in our daily experience. We cannot be passive to it. Judah means that there is no cash advantage if they just kill Joseph and conceal or cover their [responsibility for] his blood (as in Job 16:18; Ez. 24:8). The same word is soon to be used twice of how Judah in turn will be deceived by Tamar covering / concealing herself (Gen. 38:14,15). This is not simply an example of 'what goes around, comes around'. God makes such circumstances repeat because He wants to help people to repent, to realize the effect of what they have done to others in the hope it will elicit sensitivity and repentance.

Gen 37:27 *Come, let's sell him to the Ishmaelites, and not let our hand be on him; for he is our brother, our flesh. His brothers listened to him-* This recalls "We are members of his body, of his flesh and of his bones" (Eph. 5:30). "Let not our hand be on him" may mean that they thought that the rigours of slavery

would be enough to kill him, and in the same spirit, the Jews handed Jesus over to the Romans. Does the antitype indicate some of the brothers thought this fact would absolve them of guilt? Like the Jews, they were very eager to minimize their guilt through legalistic manouevre; but they end up, like we do, realizing that they had to throw themselves upon the grace of the one who had effectively died and been resurrected. They likely held some belief that a special curse would come upon them if they themselves killed their own flesh brother; I suggest this is how we should read this verse, rather than seeing any softness toward Joseph on their part.

Gen 37:28 *Midianites who were merchants passed by-* These Ishmaelites lived in Midian.

And they drew and lifted up Joseph out of the pit, and sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver- The Lord Jesus was "him... whom they priced on the part of the sons of Israel" (Mt. 27:9 RVmg.). The reference to "the sons of Israel" is surely an allusion to the sons of Jacob selling Joseph for his value. Twenty pieces of silver was the price of redemption for a teenager (Lev. 27:5); the Lord was sold for thirty pieces, the price of a slave (Ex. 21:32). There is much intended repetition of theme within the Joseph story. They received pieces of silver for Joseph; and Joseph later stuffs their sacks full of silver. He is showing his absolute grace- not demanding silver back from them, but rather showering them with even more silver.

The idea of selling Joseph into permanent slavery was perhaps attractive to the brothers because it apparently assured them that his dream would never come true. They would never be his slaves, they thought- because they were making him a lifetime slave. But as with the Lord Jesus, the slavery of the despised, suffering servant becomes the path to His Lordship over those He was sold to serve.

They brought Joseph into Egypt- According to some reconstructions of the geography, their route would have taken them through Mamre and Hebron, where Jacob was and from where Joseph had just come from. It would've all been so terribly painful for him, as it was for the Lord. Joseph later understood that he had been sent by God to Egypt for a saving purpose (Gen. 45:8); and Ps. 105:21 is explicit that God "sent" Joseph to Egypt. This was perhaps one key to Joseph's amazing grace and forgiveness towards his brothers- he firmly believed, and eagerly perceived, that their dysfunction and bad behaviour towards him was in fact used by God. We need to perceive the same, lest we become consumed by bitterness.

Gen 37:29 *Reuben returned to the pit; and saw that Joseph wasn't in the pit; and he tore his clothes-* Reuben wasn't present; perhaps he had gone somewhere in order to try to arrange some release of Joseph. The Divine camera of inspiration invites us to view Reuben alone at the pit, and then returning to his brothers (:30) who were nearby but not directly at the pit. Maybe he had gone to the pit alone in order to get Joseph out of it. I suggest on :30 that Reuben may not have been totally sincere in all this. He tore his coat because he wanted Joseph's coat, the sign of the firstborn.

Gen 37:30 *He returned to his brothers and said, The child is no more; and I, where will I go?-* Such an outburst would be appropriate for Reuben as the firstborn who was responsible for his brothers. But he had been stripped of that position after the incest of Gen. 35:22. So his words may not have been completely sincere, but rather an insistence that he was in fact the firstborn.

Gen 37:31 *They took Joseph's coat, and killed a male goat, and dipped the coat in the blood-* This is full of reference to atonement rituals; the point being that their sin could not be covered by any such ritual of animal sacrifice, but only by the gracious

forgiveness of Joseph [cp. the Lord Jesus]. To make it realistic, the dipping may not have been complete immersion. And yet the blood soaked garment becomes the visual characteristic of the Lord Jesus (Rev. 19:13). Their father would now have to make a new coat and designate another firstborn.

Gen 37:32 *They took the coat of many colours, and they sent it to their father, and said, We have found this. Examine it, please, whether it is your son's coat or not-* They sent it by messengers before they themselves arrived. This was so cruel to Jacob. The brothers implied that they did not know for sure whether it was Joseph's coat or not; even though it was the object of their intense jealousy. Their language has credibility. Even when trying to deceive, they couldn't but call Joseph "your son" rather than "our brother"; and likewise they pretended not to know very much about the coat. The whole story must have had less and less credibility as the years went by; and yet the brothers would have continued the lie all the more insistently.

"They sent it" by messengers; for the brothers themselves wouldn't have asked Jacob to discern whose the striped garment belonged to. The whole immediate family knew it was Joseph's.

We observe here how the brothers cared little for the pain of their father. But years later, they present as genuinely concerned at the damage that would be done to him if Benjamin doesn't return. So we see some genuine spiritual growth in them, although they had been unwilling to make public confession of their sin against Joseph. Likewise the headstrong and unspiritual Judah and Reuben, whose sexual failures are recorded especially in Gen. 38, appear as the ones most eager to save Joseph, and to save their father from the pain of losing the son of his beloved favourite wife Rachel. They passed through their selfish sexual failures to being compassionate towards others. But all this spiritual growth was without specific repentance. We would so

like them to all make a grand confession and beg for mercy. But pride apparently stops them from doing so, as it does so many. But that is not to say that there is no spirituality nor spiritual growth in such persons. This is why demanding the fruit of repentance for specific sins is often misplaced. Repentance may not be expressed for specific sins, people may continue believing the lies they spun [in this case, that Joseph had been killed by a wild animal]; but the apparently impenitent person may have spiritual fruit in other areas.

Jacob's response to receiving Joseph's garment was to tear his own garments and to conclude that Joseph was torn in pieces (:33). We can surely infer that the garment was torn. We can likewise infer that Joseph's garment was torn by Potiphar's wife. Because merely presenting Joseph's garment was no evidence he had tried to rape her. But presenting it torn would suggest she had struggled with her supposed rapist. In reality, she threw herself onto him, and he ran away with her gripping hold of his garment so that it tore. So again we see how circumstances repeated in Joseph's life; he not only lost his garment, but it was torn by his abusers in order to give a false impression.

Gen 37:33 *He recognized it, and said, It is my son's coat. An evil animal has devoured him. Joseph is without doubt torn in pieces-* "Joseph is... rent in pieces. And Jacob rent his clothes" (:34); Jacob shared in Joseph's death. This is a fine prefigurement of the (sadly ignored) pain of God, as well as another example of the record having absolute psychological credibility. Jacob is pretended as falling completely ["without doubt..."] for their story. And yet he must have had his doubts. He was being placed precisely in the position of his father Isaac when he had deceived him regarding the birthright blessing. Jacob's later words about the matter are pregnant with the hint that he guessed something was wrong with the story: "[Joseph] went out from me, and I

said, Surely he is torn in pieces; and I haven't seen him since" (Gen. 44:28). This could be taken as meaning 'This is what I thought at the time, I was sure of it; although it's true that since then, I never saw him again'.

Judah "recognized" / discerned his personal identifying items (Gen. 38:26) when Tamar exposes his sin; the same word is used of how Judah and the brothers challenged their father to recognize / discern Joseph's coat of many colours (Gen. 37:33). So through Judah's sin, he was led to appreciate how his father had felt. And that is why it is Judah who is so careful later to ensure his father is not made to feel about Benjamin how he did about the loss of Joseph.

Earlier in his life, Jacob had learned to "bear the loss" of that which was "torn in pieces of beasts"; and the same terms are used in Gen. 31:39 and Gen. 37:33, when again Jacob has to 'bear the loss' of [apparently] having his beloved son torn in pieces of wild beasts [s.w.]. As so often in our lives, one experience is used to prepare us for a similar one, but to a much greater extent. In this case, not bearing the loss of an animal, but of a beloved son.

Gen 37:34 *Jacob tore his clothes, and put sackcloth on his waist, and mourned for his son many days*- As Joseph's coat was torn, so his father tore *his* clothes. This sense of identity with the deceased is natural and is another example of where these ancient records have every psychological credibility, adding to our faith that what we are reading really did happen as stated. The "many days" can be understood as lasting until he met Joseph again, 22 years. This was the same period that he was absent from his father's house. Jacob returned to Isaac 22 years after he left when fleeing Esau [Gen. 31:41 "These twenty years I have been in your house. I served you fourteen years for your two daughters, and six years for your flock", plus the 18 months he lived in Shechem and Bethel on the way back to Isaac]. To his

father he had effectively been dead. He ought to have returned sooner. But he was being taught the grief he had brought upon Isaac his father.

Gen 37:35 *All his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. He said, For I will go down to Sheol to my son mourning. His father wept for him-* The Syriac says: "I will go down into the grave on account of my son mourning". He felt suicidal and wanted to die with his 'dead' son. As noted on :34, his recorded reaction is absolutely psychologically credible. His refusal to accept their comfort could reflect his skepticism about the whole story. We note too that he had "daughters", as well as Dinah. And one lie led to others. It was this which all contributed to Jacob's sense of loneliness, suspecting all around him were deceiving him.

Jacob's love for Rachel is reflected and acknowledged by the inspired record when we read of *Rachel* weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted "because they are not" (Mt. 2:18; Jer. 31:15). But these ideas are more relevant surely to *Jacob* weeping for Rachel and especially for Joseph- for Jacob wept for Joseph and refused to be comforted (Gen. 37:35). This was after the death of Rachel (Gen. 35:19). Surely the record is reflecting the unity which there was between Jacob and Rachel; even after her death, Jacob wept as it were with her kind of weeping. And yet she was not a very spiritual woman. Martin Buber notes that "womenfolk bring the household gods to the homes of their husbands from the homes of their fathers" (*Moses* (Oxford: Phaidon Press, 1947) p. 205). By doing this, Rachel showed both her loyalty to her husband and yet also her attachment to idolatry; a classic case of mixed motivation arising from not having wholly given herself to the one true God.

Both good and bad people go to *sheol,* 'hell', i.e. the grave. Thus Jesus "made his grave with the wicked" (Is. 53:9). In line

with this, there are other examples of righteous men going to hell, i.e. the grave. Jacob said that he would "go down into the grave (hell)... mourning" for his son Joseph.

Gen 37:36 *The Midianites sold him into Egypt to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh's, the captain of the guard-* "Officer" is 'eunuch', which would explain his wife's sexual frustration. "Captain of the guard" is Heb. 'captain of the slaughterers'; he was in charge of execution. This raises the question as to why Potiphar didn't immediately have Joseph executed for trying to rape his wife; the fact he didn't makes us think that actually, he suspected she was lying and didn't want to kill Joseph, although he had to be seen as punishing him. The LXX gives "chief cook", which would mean that the presence of the butler and baker in prison was likewise at the hands of Potiphar. They would've all known each other, and surely the butler and baker knew Joseph to be innocent. There is also the possibility that the keeper of the prison was in fact Potiphar, if "captain of the guard" is correct.

The words Potiphar and Pharaoh are very similar; they both mean "the sun". As Joseph was subject to these men, he would have remembered his dream- that ultimately the sun would bow down to him. But his faith in that prophetic word was to be sorely tested.

GENESIS CHAPTER 38

Gen 38:1 *It happened at that time-* Judah was intended to be in the line of Messiah. And yet he married an unbeliever. It would seem that he married young, and he made his sons marry young likewise. Note that his sons are recorded as dying "in Canaan", before Judah left Canaan to emigrate to Egypt. This requires that the events of Gen. 38 occurred whilst Joseph was suffering in Egypt, and are typical of the sin of Israel / Judah in the Gentile world before their repentance and acceptance by Joseph / Jesus. As discussed on :6, there is a chronological issue with this chapter, and the Hebrew may mean that these events happened at the time that Judah went down from his brothers sometime earlier, rather than "that time" connecting with Gen. 37.

However, it is very hard to fit all the events of this chapter into the time period between when Joseph at 17 was sold into Egypt, and when at 30 he stood before Pharoah. I suggest that this is what today we would call a footnote or excursus- to remind us that the Judah we have just read about in Gen. 37 had messed up big time. And his effort to save Joseph, who had replaced him as the firstborn, was a fruit of his repentance. He had lost two sons, and this led him towards not wanting his father to have to go through losing sons, not Joseph nor later Benjamin. We too are to trade upon our life experience, including of our failures, to come towards sensitivity towards others and their feelings. So "at that time" may effectively mean 'It should be understood that the events at that time should be read in the light of Judah's earlier messed up life'.

That Judah went down from his brothers- See on Gen. 44:33. He separated himself from God's people, associated with Gentiles and was led into sin. But the point of the story is that

God still worked through him, because Tamar was directly in the line of Messiah. God's purposes were not stopped by human failure. There were only 22 years from this time to the emigration of the family to Egypt, and it is noted that Judah's adult sons died in Canaan. Therefore we can conclude that this separation was immediately after the attempted murder of Joseph (:1), so perhaps the result of the sin was a disagreement between the brothers, so that Judah went off on his own.

"Went down" connects with how at the end of the preceding chapter, Joseph's loss makes Jacob feel he is 'going down' to his grave; and in the next chapter, we read that Joseph "went down" into Egypt. So Gen. 38 is not in fact out of context. We are being shown that through his various sins, Judah knew in essence the experience of his father and brother.

And visited a certain Adullamite, whose name was Hirah- "Visited" is AV "turned in"- Heb. 'to bend away', the language of apostasy. Clearly Judah is presented as having turned away from his brothers to the Canaanites, even though the family of Jacob were a "stench" to the Canaanites (Gen. 34:30). Judah therefore clearly identified and intermarried with the Canaanites and thereby separated from his own family. The interlude of Genesis 38 clearly presents Judah as a man who had been weak and yet through his response to his sins, was made strong. "Adullam" literally means 'to turn aside', so Judah turned aside to the place of turning aside.

Gen 38:2 *Judah saw there a daughter of a certain Canaanite whose name was Shua. He took her, and went in to her-* Shua was the name of her father, according to the LXX and also :12. "Saw... took... went in to her" is the language of David's sin with Bathsheba; note the use of messengers to try to get themselves out of the consequences of their action. "See... take" is used throughout Genesis in a negative sense (Gen. 3:6; 6:2;

12:15; 34:2). Judah took a Canaanite woman and shamefully treated her. Esau took [s.w.] Canaanite women, but married them and treated them responsibly (Gen. 36:2). But by grace, it is Jacob's line and not Esau's who were chosen. There is a theme in the record that the sons of Jacob were not better than the sons of Ishmael and Esau who chose not to continue in God's covenant purpose, indeed they were often worse; the only difference was that they chose to hand in with God's grace.

"Canaanite" is the same word as "merchant", and we could conclude that Judah's initiative to sell Joseph to merchants was because he actually knew them and had been previously involved with them. He was possibly their son in law. The whole story is perhaps to show that from a man as mixed up and hypocritical as Judah, there arose the royal line of Israel's kings which would climax in the Lord Jesus. "Shua" means 'wealthy / opulent'. Perhaps we see here materialism in Judah; it was he who suggested selling Joseph and getting some money out of the whole thing, rather than just killing him. His interest in the 20 pieces of silver clearly connects with that of Judas [the same name as Judah] in the 30 pieces of silver for the Lord. His son Onan likewise means "wealthy".

However this incident also shows the great hypocrisy of the brothers in slaying the men of Shechem in Gen. 35, claiming that they could not possibly intermarry. When Judah had behaved as he did with Canaanites, and in any case, the brothers grabbed the women of Shechem for themselves afterwards.

Gen 38:3 *She conceived, and bore a son; and he named him Er-* He was slain for his wickedness (:7) and yet Judah's son Shelah had a son of the same name, to as it were replace him rather than leave this wicked man unremembered in the family (1 Chron. 4:21)."Er" is a reversal of the letters 're', the Hebrew word for evil, and a play is made on this in :7. This chapter

emphasizes the deep unspirituality of Judah; and yet from him was to come the Messiah and future people of God. The function of the chapter is to show "that the pre-eminence of Judah in the patriarchal family was due exclusively to grace". We may also be left to perceive that unless God had providentially moved the family into Egypt, they would have intermingled with the Canaanites and lost their covenant relationship with Yahweh. Which again is an example of grace.

Gen 38:4 *She conceived again, and bore a son; and she named him Onan-* Judah was probably only a few years older than Joseph, who was 17 at this time (:1); perhaps he was 21 (Gen. 29:35 cp. Gen. 30:25). See on :6.

Gen 38:5 *She yet again bore a son, and named him Shelah: and he was at Chezib, when she bore him-* Chezib means 'falsehood'. Why else mention the place? Maybe the idea is that Judah wasn't present at the birth of his third child because he was away at 'falsehood', perhaps implying he was involved in an illicit relationship there.

Gen 38:6 *Judah took a wife for Er, his firstborn, and her name was Tamar-* Er would have been very young at this time; for there were only 22 years from the this time when Joseph was 17 (:1) to when the family moved to Egypt. The 22 years can be calculated from Gen. 30:31; 31:41; 37:2,25; 41:46; 46:5,12. Judah was keen to see his sons married and to build up his family; Isaac and Jacob married much older. So perhaps Judah, like his fathers, was trying to force through the fulfilment of God's promises of a multitudinous seed, although his attempts failed. Indeed for the history to fit, it has been argued by Adam Clarke that Judah would have married as a teenager and Er likewise. An alternative is to think that this chapter is out of historical sequence and has been placed here for some narrative purpose, and the "at that time" of :1 refers to some time other than the events of

Gen. 37. But the record may be demonstrating Judah's manic desire to have children and force the fulfilment of the promises of fruitfulness. Another possibility is that :1 should mean "It had come to pass at the time that Judah went down from his brethren...". The incident would then refer to an earlier incident; but if Joseph was 17 at the time of chapter 37, then it would still mean that Judah was very young when he married and these events happened.

"Tamar" means "palm tree" and was used as a fertility symbol. She was set up to be fertile, but was deceived, as she saw it, by Judah and his family God, Yahweh, so that she had no children. To be left a childless widow in another man's house was real social death. It seems she was made to wear the garments of widowhood for very many years (:14), so that she would be perceived as unavailable to any other man. Inflicted because of Judah's fears that she was a *femme fatale*, and his one remaining son would also die because of her. Instead of facing the truth that his two older sons had died because of their sins and not because of Tamar.

Gen 38:7 *Er, Judah's firstborn, was wicked in the sight of Yahweh. Yahweh killed him-* Despite his youth (see on :6). We may think that behaviour in our late teens or early 20s can be as it were scribbled because we were young. But human behaviour counts to God, at whatever age. We note that Yahweh killed wicked people at this time. And yet the sons of Jacob had committed major wickedness in the effective murder of Joseph and the massacre of Shechem. And yet Yahweh didn't kill them. This note about Er demonstrates not only that once again, being the literal firstborn was not related to spirituality; but also that the founding fathers of Israel were preserved by pure grace. See on :10. "Wicked in the sight of Yahweh" is the phrase used about the sins of Sodom (Gen. 13:13).

Gen 38:8 *Judah said to Onan, Go in to your brother's wife, and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her, and raise up seed to your brother-* As noted on :6, Judah was desperate to generate a multitudinous seed in his own strength and by his own devices. The Levirate laws in the later law of Moses were clearly in existence before Moses' time. Some argue that we should keep the Sabbath because it was in existence before Moses' time; but on that basis, so should we keep this principle of raising up seed, and also the separation between clean and unclean animals which was clearly known at the time of the flood.

Gen 38:9 *Onan knew that the seed wouldn't be his; and it happened, when he went in to his brother's wife, that he spilled it on the ground, lest he should give seed to his brother-* The sin was not masturbation as such, as has wrongly been supposed, but not loving his brother and being selfish. It was a sin of ommission, cloaked under an appearance of obedience- and God hates that. The same Hebrew phrase is used repeatedly of how the world's population in Noah's time *corrupted* God's way *in the earth*, and how God in appropriate response *destroyed the earth* (Gen. 6:11,12,13,17). There is therefore the implication that Judah wasn't interested in raising up a seed for God, but rather just wanted his own seed on the terms he wished. The phrase is repeatedly used in the prophets for how the earth / land of Judah was to be 'destroyed'. Judah were destroyed because like the historical Judah, they didn't want to raise a Godly seed. Ewald suggests the Hebrew suggests that Onan did this 'whenever he went in...' to her, taking sexual gratification from her without consummation. He therefore treated her as a prostitute, for his own pleasure; and was slain for it. And yet Judah his father used a prostitute at least once (and we could infer that he often used prostitutes, as Tamar knew his behaviour to be predictable) and

was not slain. Again we see that Judah, one of the prominent founders of Israel, was saved by grace.

We note that in the story of Ruth, an anonymous relative refuses to raise up seed to his dead relative- and was apparently not slain. Indeed Dt. 25:5-10 taught that such a person should be shamed but not executed. But here, Onan is slain for that same sin of omission; perhaps because he didn't just refuse, he gave an appearance of obedience which was fake. Perhaps the lesson is that God hates such hypocrisy. And surely many others committed it. So we see how the same sin is punished with immediate death in Onan's case, whereas others commit the same sin but don't experience that judgment at that time. We are to learn from this that even though sinners don't always drop dead immediately, sin is still sin and the judgment in God's book is just as real. That is why we have Achan slain for touching the ark, the disobedient prophet killed by a lion, Ananias and Sapphira slain immediately- whereas others apparently get away with sin. The contrast is intentional, and serves as a reminder to never forget that the wages of sin is indeed death, despite God's patient grace. This should serve to shake us from the numbness and half awareness with which man tends to drift through life.

Gen 38:10 *The thing which he did was evil in the sight of Yahweh, and He killed him also-* Even in the darkness of a tent or inner room, God's eyes noticed every detail. Time and again Biblical history demonstrates that sins of silence and omission are just as fatal as sins of public, physical commission. Onan omitted to raise up seed to his brother, and was slain. Given the serious sins of the family, this judgment may appear severe. But as noted on :7, the function of this chapter is to underline that the development and preservation of the people of God was by grace alone. They had done far worse things than these young

men who were punished so severely, and yet they were preserved by grace.

The experience of losing two sons is surely what leads Judah to be especially sensitive to how his father would feel if Benjamin were not to return to him. God has a way of working through human sin, and its consequences, in order to bring us to greater sensitivity to others. If we respond as God intends. And so the Judah who breaks with his family (:1) becomes the one who becomes so responsible towards his younger brother Benjamin and the feelings of his aged father. Judah who had deceived his father with a garment [Joseph's blood stained coat] is himself deceived by a woman hiding beneath a garment (:14). And yet he learns from this and moves towards responsibility for his earlier deception of his own father. Likewise the Judah who had caused his father so much grief over the loss of Joseph, becomes the Judah who is so careful to avoid causing his father such grief over Benjamin.

Gen 38:11 *Then Judah said to Tamar his daughter-in-law, Remain a widow in your father's house, until Shelah, my son, is grown up; for he said, Lest he also die, like his brothers. Tamar went and lived in her father's house-* Judah saw Tamar as some kind of *femme fatale*, responsible for the deaths of his two sons when clearly they died for their own sins. And yet she was to become the source of fruitfulness (Ruth 4:12) and directly in the line of Messiah (Mt. 1:3). Judah is again portrayed as totally wrong in his judgments and attitudes.

Gen 38:12 *After many days, Shua's daughter, the wife of Judah, died. Judah was comforted, and went up to his sheepshearers to Timnah, he and his friend Hirah, the Adullamite-* One wonders if Judah was in an illicit homosexual relationship with this man. The word for "friend" is also translated "lover". Having lost his wife early, Judah was in the mood for living as a single

man; and Tamar knew this meant using prostitutes and capitalized upon that. We see here how so many factors worked together, including serious human sin and dysfunction, to result in a pregnancy given by God which led to the Messianic seed (Ruth 4:12; Mt. 1:3). It is all an example of how God never gives up with human weakness amongst His covenant people, but seeks to work His purpose out despite it and through it.

Gen 38:13 *It was told Tamar, saying, Behold, your father-in-law is going up to Timnah to shear his sheep-* Sheep shearing was associated with immorality and alcohol abuse. Tamar knew that Judah was the type who would sleep with prostitutes at such a time- again indicating his low moral character at this time.

Gen 38:14 *She took off of her the garments of her widowhood, and covered herself with her veil, and wrapped herself, and sat in the gate of Enaim, which is by the way to Timnah; for she saw that Shelah was grown up, and she wasn't given to him as a wife-* The camera is trained as it were directly upon her, so that we imagine her wrapping herself and sitting in the gate, in the shadows. "Enaim" means 'place of the opening of the eyes'. Through this sin, Judah's eyes were to be opened to himself. And that was what made him sensitive to the sufferings of his brother Joseph and his father Jacob.

There is a connection with how Rachel was not given [s.w.] to Jacob to wife when she ought to have been (Gen. 29:26). Circumstances repeated within the lives of the Abraham family, just as they do within and between our lives, that we might learn the lessons. Given the chronological issues discussed on :6, she was expecting to marry Shelah when he was just a teenager, which seems to mean that Judah had given her other reasons to think that he would not let her marry Shelah. Her motives may well have been simply revenge against Judah, whom she

rightly considered a hypocrite. And yet from these poor motives came the one who would be in the direct line to the Messiah. We wonder if she did in the end marry Shelah, because he had children, who became respected within Judah (Num. 26:20; 1 Chron. 4:21-23).

We wonder what Tamar's motives were. It is fashionable to present her as the powerful feminist who fought back from an underdog position. But we can perhaps more realistically read her as a woman who is understandably and justifiably angry that Judah has messed around, and left her without children. She was desperate to fall pregnant at any cost. And whilst she was condemned to a life of celibacy by Judah, she observed him sleeping with whores when he had the inclination. She was angry with him, and the anger and frustration boiled over. And so she hatched the plan she did- and it worked perfectly, because she knew Judah and had spent many frustrated years watching his behaviour patterns. He was so angry that she was willing to die the death of a whore in order to by all means get pregnant and spite and shame Judah. But despite all that, it was from this unlikely pregnancy between Judah and Tamar that the line of Judah's kings was to come- and the Lord Jesus. Whatever dysfunctional background there is, it does not force us to sin. The Lord Jesus had it, but never sinned.

Gen 38:15 *When Judah saw her, he thought that she was a prostitute, for she had covered her face*- There may be a connection with how Jacob didn't know he had slept with Leah rather than Rachel. Perhaps there was such a culture of shame about sex that women covered their faces during intercourse; and we can understand a prostitute in those shame based societies wishing to do that. Again we see the strange continuities within the Abraham family, the same experiences passing from father to son. A different word for "prostitute" is used in :21,22; that word

means a cult prostitute. It could be that Judah thought nothing of sleeping with cult prostitutes as part of idol worship, which makes his spirituality appear at an all time low.

In Gen. 37:26 Judah argued that there would be no cash advantage if they just killed Joseph and concealed or covered their [responsibility for] his blood. The same word is now used twice of how Judah in turn is deceived by Tamar covering / concealing herself (:14,15). This is not simply an example of 'what goes around, comes around'. God makes such circumstances repeat because He wants to help people to repent, to realize the effect of what they have done to others in the hope it will elicit sensitivity and repentance.

Gen 38:16 *He turned to her by the way, and said, Please come, let me come in to you, for he didn't know that she was his daughter-in-law. She said, What will you give me, that you may come in to me?-* Tamar's plan was based upon the assumption that Judah on returning from a sheep shearing celebration would likely want a prostitute. And she was correct. Judah later sees her as "righteous" for what she did (:26). He presumably was felt to have a legal duty to get her pregnant even if Shelah refused. He had turned aside to Adullam, and now he turns aside to Tamar. His progressive failure was at Enaim, the place of the opening of eyes.

Gen 38:17 *He said, I will send you a young goat from the flock. She said, Will you give me a pledge, until you send it?-* The fact Judah was apparently unprepared for sleeping with a prostitute, having nothing of value upon him to pay her apart from his personal identity items, all suggests that he was drunk and just looking for opportunistic sex under the influence of alcohol and lust.

Judah gives a pledge in Gen. 38:17 in connection with his immorality. It cannot be incidental that he later offers his life as

a pledge to his father to guarantee the return of Benjamin (Gen. 43:8-10). We are surely meant to detect Judah's spiritual growth between these two "pledge" incidents. pledge" incidents. We note Judah offers to "bear the blame / sin" if Benjamin doesn't return (Gen. 43:9). He has matured from seeking to hide his blame / sin in his behaviour with Tamar.

Gen 38:18 *He said, What pledge will I give you? She said, Your signet and your cord, and your staff that is in your hand. He gave them to her, and came in to her, and she conceived by him-* These sound like large demands, from a woman who was anonymous behind her veil. Judah perhaps only agreed because he was drunk at the time, and felt desperate to have sex at any cost. Judah's staff was the symbol of his rulership. By grace alone it was later to be promised: "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come" (Gen. 49:10). The staff / sceptre he had abused and devalued was ultimately not to be "lost" but to last eternally. But he had thrown it away in his mad desire for immediate sexual gratification with a whore.

Gen 38:19 *She arose, and went away, and put off her veil from her, and put on the garments of her widowhood-* The camera is as it were close in now upon her, as we see her removing the veil and returning to who she was.

Gen 38:20 *Judah sent the young goat by the hand of his friend, the Adullamite, to receive the pledge from the woman's hand, but he didn't find her-* The connections within the record continue; for Judah had been party to using a goat to deceive his father (Gen. 37:31) just as his father Jacob had used goat skin to deceive his father. Yet this family who apparently 'never learnt', never 'got it', were the family God chose from which to build His covenant people- in order to display His grace and sovereign choice. The way Judah sent the payment through another person

reflects his desire for anonymity, and we note his subsequent fear of shame over the issue. The fact he parted with his personal identity documents, as it were, is therefore confirmation of my earlier suggestion that he was a drunk man desperate to have sex at that moment at whatever personal cost to his reputation.

Gen 38:21 *Then he asked the men of her place, saying, Where is the prostitute, that was at Enaim by the road? They said, There has been no prostitute here-* The word for "prostitute" differs from that in :15; this one means a cult prostitute. Again the implication is that Judah thought nothing of such idolatry.

Gen 38:22 *He returned to Judah, and said, I haven't found her; and also the men of the place said, 'There has been no prostitute here'-* All this enquiry would have meant that everyone knew what had happened. Rotherham gives "devotee" for "prostitute", confirming the idea that Judah slept with her on the basis of idolatry.

Gen 38:23 *Judah said, Let her keep it, lest we be shamed. Behold, I sent this young goat, and you haven't found her-* The fear of shame confirms my earlier suggestion that he must have been drunk to behave like this, giving his personal identification to an anonymous prostitute. Judah is trying to present himself as an honourable man who kept his pledge to send a goat. But he had not kept his pledge to give his son to Tamar. Around the Lord's death we see the same attempt at petty obedience to cover more major disobedience. And we can do the same, and so much legalistic obedience is of this nature.

Gen 38:24 *It happened about three months later, that it was told Judah, saying, Tamar, your daughter-in-law, has played the prostitute; and moreover, behold, she is with child by prostitution-* The person who told Judah this was presumably part of Tamar's plot. Because she was technically free to marry. The reason given for the death penalty was that she was a prostitute; and only

Tamar or those party to her plan knew that she had acted as one only for Judah. Perhaps they only knew she was pregnant from prostitution because she herself had said as much. The men of the place claimed there were no prostitutes operating there.

Judah said, Bring her out, and let her be burnt- This may not necessarily mean to be burnt to death, but rather to be branded in the cheek or forehead so that she would be stigmatized as a prostitute. If burning to death, this was a more extreme punishment than death by stoning. Burning was the specific punishment for a whore whose father was a priest. So we wonder whether Tamar's father was a pagan priest, thus making Judah and his family's involvement with her even more hypocritical. We note the obvious hypocrisy in Judah- it's a classic. He transferred his own guilt for immorality and usage of prostitutes onto another, namely a prostitute. And this is why religious people often condemn others in the strongest terms for what they themselves do. They subconsciously transfer their own sense of guilt and need for punishment onto another, whom they punish. And they at times do this by slandering and then punishing another person for the very sins which they themselves commit.

Burning to death for adultery was stipulated only for the wife of a priest (Lev. 21:9). Judah perhaps considered himself or Shelah to be the family priest, again showing his deep unspirituality and the tragic state of affairs within Jacob's family.

Judah didn't give Shelah to Tamar because he clearly feared that he would lose his son, just as he had lost two other sons and his daughter by Tamar. He was concerned about preserving his own inheritance, and assumed that Tamar was somehow cursed by God and would be the source of death rather than the continuation of his line. Whereas God worked through that woman, by utter grace, to ensure that Judah would have children

through Tamar who would be in the line of Messiah. God works through human sin, in order to show His grace, as it comes to a climax in Jesus.

Gen 38:25 *When she was brought out, she sent to her father-in-law, saying, By the man, whose these are, I am with child. She also said, Examine, please, whose these are- the signet, and the cords, and the staff* - Just as Judah had said to his father, "See, is this your son's coat" (Gen. 37:32); so it was now said to him, in order to try to bring him to repentance for what he had done to Joseph and Jacob. We see similar repetition of circumstance in the brothers' encounters with Joseph- to try to lead them to repentance. It's not merely some poetic justice; but these things were worked through by the Spirit to bring people to realize how others felt when we sinned against them. The Hebrew translated "cords" can mean a distinctive personal garment. So Judah used a goat and a distinctive garment (Heb.) as pledges, and was deceived with regard to them. Yet we have just read of him using the blood of a goat on Joseph's garment to deceive his father.

Gen 38:26 *Judah recognized them and said, She is more righteous than I, because I didn't give her to Shelah, my son-* Her motives may have been partly revenge against the hypocritical Judah who had purposefully tried to leave her in her father's house without children. But perhaps she believed in the promises of the Messianic seed and believed that Judah should produce Messianic ancestors; and indeed, the Lord's line is traced through their son Perez (Mt. 1:3). And this was her 'righteousness' in the matter.

Judah "recognized" / discerned his personal identifying items (Gen. 38:26) when Tamar exposes his sin; the same word is used of how Judah and the brothers challenged their father to recognize / discern Joseph's coat of many colours (Gen. 37:33).

So through Judah's sin, he was led to appreciate how his father had felt. And that is why it is Judah who is so careful later to ensure his father is not made to feel about Benjamin how he did about the loss of Joseph.

"She is more righteous than I" is indeed a confession of sin and repentance. But Pharaoh said the same, and didn't retain the intensity. Whereas to his credit, it seems Judah remained humbled and his attitudes to Jacob and Benjamin reflect that abiding transformation. What Judah did was a serious sin, worthy of the Canaanites but not Israel: "You shall not uncover the nakedness of your daughter-in-law: she is your son's wife. You shall not uncover her nakedness... for all these abominations have the men of the land done that were before you, and the land became defiled); that the land not vomit you out also, when you defile it, as it vomited out the nation that was before you. For whoever shall do any of these abominations, even the souls that do them shall be cut off from among their people" (Lev. 18:15,27-29). So we could also read "She is more righteous than I" to actually be a rather incomplete statement of repentance. Judah presents himself as righteous, and Tamar as more righteous than himself. The more usual expression is simply "I have sinned" (Ex. 9:27; Num. 22:34; Josh. 7:20; 1 Sam. 15:24,30; 26:21; 2 Sam. 12:13; 24:10,17). We might rather wish to find this on the lips of Judah at this point. As with Aaron after the golden calf incident, repentance is incomplete and hardly verbalized- but there is still fruit of it.

But Judah develops from this idea that he has at least some righteousness, so that in Gen. 42:12-14 he says to Joseph: "What can we say to my lord? What can we speak? Or how can we dec1are ourselves righteous? God has found the iniquity of your servants". He realized finally that he has no righteousness at all. And on that basis, Joseph / Jesus counts him as righteous.

He knew her again no more- This could suggest that he had used her several times as a prostitute. Pregnancy after one act of intercourse is unusual, although clearly God's hand was in it. Her whole plan depended upon her getting pregnant by Judah so it would be unsurprising if she had played her trick several times.

Gen 38:27 *It happened in the time of her travail that, behold, twins were in her womb-* The similarities are clear with Rebekah bringing forth Esau and Jacob, and we are going to read a similar tension over the matter of the firstborn. By now we are fully prepared for the firstborn not to be the most blessed; and we are not disappointed. This was something which God kept trying to teach the family over the generations, but like us in some areas, they were very resistant to it. Judah ends up effectively married to Tamar, although they never have sex (:26)- so he lived as he had made her live. Why they didn't have sex isn't explained- perhaps she refused him. And so life goes, that we come to understand what we put others through. To help us to repentance, but also to deepen our self understanding, our empathy for others, as we are prepared for the Kingdom which we shall share with those we sinned against. Judah and Tamar were the joint parents of the twin boys, and they as it were replaced the two sons whom Judah had lost. We see here the Divine ecology. And the implication is that Judah repented, although he is not recorded as expressing it very clearly; and was blessed as a result.

The Judah of Gen. 38 is transformed. At this point, he presents as a man "motivated by self-interest, cold-hearted and detached from familial relationships, lacking judgement, untrustworthy, deceptive, self-righteous and merciless". But all that was finally transformed in the Judah who speaks with Joseph at the end.

Gen 38:28 *When she travailed, one put out a hand, and the midwife took and tied a scarlet thread on his hand, saying, This*

came out first- Scarlet seems a strange colour to use, seeing that there is plenty of red blood flowing anyway at childbirth. Scarlet is the colour of kings and rulers; they all realized that there was going to be tension over the issue of which child emerged first from the womb, as in that culture, this was so important. What now happens is God's way of trying again to teach the family that the firstborn was not so significant, because the ultimate firstborn was the promised Messianic seed of the future.

Gen 38:29 *It happened, as he drew back his hand, that behold, his brother came out, and she said, Why have you made a breach for yourself? Therefore his name was called Perez-* The theme of the second born being the chosen one continues. It was accepted that Perez was the one in the line of the Messianic seed and that this pregnancy was of God (Ruth 4:12), even though he was not technically the firstborn. "Made a breach" is literally 'to spread abroad', and is the word used in the promises of how the Messianic seed was to break forth or spread abroad (Gen. 28:14).

We note the theme in the Abraham family of sibling rivalry; the account here clearly echoes that of Jacob and Esau struggling, and the persistent failure in perceiving that birth order is irrelevant. We note too that Onan showed no loyalty to his brother Er, in refusing to raise up seed to his brother.

Gen 38:30 *Afterward his brother came out, that had the scarlet thread on his hand, and his name was called Zerah-* As noted above, the firstborn was to come "after" the younger. But the entire family struggled to learn this. Although Jacob had made Joseph firstborn instead of Reuben by giving him the priestly robe of many colours, at the end of his life, Jacob still seems to bless Judah as the firstborn. They just would not learn that order of birth was irrelevant to the only blessing that really mattered. We too can be blind to some whole area of thinking or behaviour, despite the Father's continual efforts to help us

get our priorities right. So the story concludes with Judah's repentance, and yet as ever, that repentance doesn't mean that he 'got it' completely; he clearly didn't, just as his father Jacob was to die uttering things which reflected spiritual immaturity and a failure to 'get it'.

GENESIS CHAPTER 39

Gen 39:1 *Joseph was brought down to Egypt. Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh's, the captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him from the hand of the Ishmaelites that had brought him down there-* "Officer" is 'eunuch', which would explain his wife's sexual frustration. "Captain of the guard" is Heb. 'captain of the slaughterers'; he was in charge of execution. This raises the question as to why Potiphar didn't immediately have Joseph executed for trying to rape his wife; the fact he didn't makes us think that actually, he suspected she was lying and didn't want to kill Joseph, although he had to be seen as punishing him. The LXX gives "chief cook", which would mean that the presence of the butler and baker in prison was likewise at the hands of Potiphar. They would've all known each other, and surely the butler and baker knew Joseph to be innocent. There is also the possibility that the keeper of the prison was in fact Potiphar, if "captain of the guard" is correct.

Egyptologists suggest that "the captain of the guard" was specifically responsible for the execution of prisoners, and the "prisons" of Egypt were really just holding areas for those condemned to execution or trial. The cases of the butler and baker confirm this. The fact Joseph is sent to prison rather than to death, and remains in prison so long, is all rather strange. It is indeed a parade example of God's grace working behind the scenes to preserve Joseph. But it is also a sign that Potiphar wished to preserve Joseph, probably because he actually disbelieved his wife, and his recorded anger was with her not Joseph. And we see the connection between the captain of the guard and the prison keeper; I suggest they were the same person. And indeed, Joseph married the daughter of "Potiphera", possibly again the same person.

We wonder how Joseph was feeling at this time, and what story he told Potiphar. In his desperation in Gen. 40:15, Joseph repeats the narrative he had told so often that he almost believed it: "For indeed I was stolen away out of the land of the Hebrews". "For indeed" suggests this was his repeated self explanation and how he presented himself to others. He so loved his brothers that he kept repeating the narrative that he had in fact been kidnapped and sold into Egypt. When in fact it was his own nasty brothers who had tried to murder him in the dry pit, infested with scorpions and snakes, and had sold him into slavery. On one hand, we may argue that this is living an Alice in Wonderland life, painting evil as good and unrealistically counting the wicked as righteous. That is particularly out of vogue in our ever complaining society, where people love to raise past hurts and present them in the most negative light. On the other hand, this is what imputing righteousness by grace is all about.

The words Potiphar and Pharaoh are very similar; they both mean "the sun". As Joseph was subject to these men, he would have remembered his dream- that ultimately the sun would bow down to him. But his faith in that prophetic word was to be sorely tested.

Throughout the records of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and his children there is continual repetition in the manner in which the record is written. This repetition is of both experiences (e.g. lying concerning their wives: Gen. 12:13; 20:3,13; 26:7) and of the language used to describe those experiences. Gen. 39:1-8 provides an example of this: "Joseph was brought down to Egypt... the Ishmealites, which had brought him down thither... down to Egypt" (Gen. 37:25). "The Lord was with Joseph...and his master saw that the Lord was with him". "His master the Egyptian... his master". "Joseph... was a prosperous man... the

Lord made all that he did to prosper". Potiphar "made him overseer over his house... from the time that he had made him overseer in his house". "All that he had he put into his hand...over all that he had... the blessing of the Lord was upon all that he had... he left all that he had in Joseph's hand". "His hand... into his hand... Joseph's hand... to my hand". This kind of linguistic device suggests that the Spirit in Genesis is inviting us to observe the development of theme and to note emphasis, realizing that God likewise works according to patterns in our lives.

Gen 39:2 *Yahweh was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man. He was in the house of his master the Egyptian-* "The Egyptian" (:1) is stressed because if the Hyksos dynasty were then ruling Egypt, they were not Egyptian but closer to the Semitic peoples of Canaan; and it was an unusual for an Egyptian to be in such a position of power. But the idea is that the promises to Abraham began to be fulfilled in a primary sense, in that a Gentile family was blessed for the sake of the seed of Abraham. "Prosperous" is s.w. used about Daniel and his friends prospering in captivity in Babylon (Dan. 3:30 6:28); and there are clearly intended parallels between Joseph and Daniel, both being called to interpret dreams and then suddenly promoted. Again we see a continuity in God's dealings with men, which we should also discern between our lives and those of Biblical characters or other contemporary believers we know.

Gen 39:3 *His master saw that Yahweh was with him, and that Yahweh made all that he did prosper in his hand-* All this is language appropriate to the Lord Jesus, whom Joseph pointed forward to. For Yahweh was "with" Him supremely and prospered His "hand" (Jn. 16:32; Acts 10:38 cp. Acts 7:9). It is really stressed that Yahweh "was with" Joseph (:2,3,21,23; Acts 7:9). Yahweh was likewise "with" Abraham through making a covenant "with" him (Gen. 15:18 s.w.); Yahweh being personally

"with" Abraham's seed is a major part of the promise (Gen. 28:20).

Gen 39:4 *Joseph found favour in his sight-* Just as the Lord grew in grace or favour with God and man (Lk. 2:52).

He ministered to him, and he made him overseer over his house, and all that he had he put into his hand- "Overseer" is s.w. Gen. 40:4, where in prison Joseph is given the oversight of the other prisoners. I suggested on Gen. 37:2 that when he was a teenager, Jacob had put his entire flock under Joseph and made him the religious head of the family with status of the firstborn after Reuben's demotion. He was to have the situation repeat when in prison, and then under Pharaoh. Situations repeat within our lives too, each one preparing us for another. With Jacob, Potiphar and in prison, each exaltation led to a dramatic demotion or a sudden end; and this prepared Joseph not to be proud when exalted under Pharaoh. He would've thought "And how long is *this* exaltation going to last?". Because he was humble, that final exaltation lasted for the rest of his life. But each exaltation was so that he might serve others (or the sheep, in the first case).

Gen 39:5 *It happened from the time that he made him overseer in his house, and over all that he had, that Yahweh blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; and the blessing of Yahweh was on all that he had, in the house and in the field-* This blessing was a primary fulfilment of the promise of blessing through the seed of Abraham, who would "be a blessing" (Gen. 12:2,3). Joseph may have reflected that the same had happened to Laban's house due to the presence there of his father Jacob. The same Hebrew words are used: "Yahweh has blessed me for your sake" (Gen. 30:27). We should be on the look out for the primary fulfilment of the new covenant blessings in our lives too.

Gen 39:6 *He left all that he had in Joseph's hand. He didn't concern himself with anything, except for the food which he ate-* This confirms what we later learn in the history, that Egyptians would not eat with Hebrews (Gen. 43:32). The Biblical record meshes together perfectly.

Joseph was well-built and handsome- "Joseph was a goodly person, and well favoured" clearly means he was good-looking (like his mother, Gen. 29:17 s.w., grandmother and great-grandmother). The record seems to stress that the family was good looking. Perhaps this gives another angle on an old chestnut: Was the Lord Jesus Christ good looking and handsome as the Son of God, or weak and ugly as the suffering servant? On the cross, "his visage was so marred more than any man... there is no beauty that we should desire him... despised... we hid as it were our faces from him" (Is. 52:14; 53:2-4). Yet Joseph was strong and good looking, pleasing in the eyes of men (and women). So may we suggest that the Lord too was naturally strong and attractive, but he lost this due to the mental trauma of his life, resulting in his repulsive physical appearance as he hung on the cross.

There is an undoubted link between sexuality and spirituality (witness the typical meaning of the Song of Solomon). The Hebrew text of Gen. 39:6,7 suggests that it was Joseph's spiritually attractive personality that mesmerized Potiphar's wife; and what good living, socially aloof Christian office worker has not experienced the attention this attracts from colleagues of the opposite sex?

Gen 39:7 *It happened after these things-* Joseph came to Potiphar when 17, and was 30 when he was exalted before Pharaoh (Gen. 41:46 cp. Gen. 41:1), so he may have been in his early or mid 20s. He contrasts favourably with Judah, who at that age married a Canaanite and lived immorally (see on Gen. 38:6).

That is perhaps the reference of "these things". The brothers had falsely accused Shechem of raping Dinah and judged them harshly on the basis of that false accusation. Joseph is likewise falsely accused of rape and punished. He was like the Lord Jesus carrying the sins of others in his own body and life, suffering as others suffer for their sins although he was personally innocent.

That his master's wife cast her eyes on Joseph; and she said, Lie with me- The Egyptian tale of Anat tempting Aqhat is similar in outline terms to Potiphar's wife tempting Joseph; as the god Khnum hides a precious object in grain, so does Joseph; the Egyptian fertility deities were gods of dreams and associated with the stars; they are at times slain by wild animals and their blood stained clothes presented as evidence (Documented in Donald Redford, *The Biblical Story of Joseph* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1970) p. 100; W.F. Albright, *From the Stone Age to Christianity* (Oxford: O.U.P., 1957) p. 241; A. Jeremias, *The Old Testament in the Light of the Ancient East* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1911) Vol. 2 p. 64). Having lived several generations in Egypt, the Israelites for whom Moses was composing Genesis would've been aware of these myths. And Moses is clearly referring to them- and applying them to a real, historical person, an Israelite, who had lived 400 years previously.

We naturally dislike Potiphar's wife. If indeed Potiphar is Potiphera, whose daughter Joseph marries, this was the story's final, painful judgment of her. But this anonymous, immoral woman was in fact a vital part in the bigger picture of Joseph's development and the salvation of so many. We have to see our own false accusers and thorns in our lives as somehow also part of a wider and far better and eternal purpose for us. Ps. 80:2 says that God as the shepherd of Israel "leads Joseph like a flock". The simple statement is that God led Joseph- and that leading was through this awful false accusation. And He still leads Joseph in

that we are Joseph. Joseph is everyman. Through all these things we too are led- although it's so hard to see it at the time. God declares the past as well as the future, Isaiah says. He alone gives meaning to event. Otherwise, life is indeed "night", and we are defeated by man's search for meaning. Once we grasp the hand of God in our lives, we perceive that nothing is chance, we are all 1 percenters, our lives woven and preserved by God, to do us only good at our latter end. Without God declaring our past, giving meaning to event, we go the way of secular 1 percenters- turning to depression and addictions, because the fact we survived and the other 99 were scribbled still has no ultimate meaning.

Gen 39:8 *But he refused, and said to his master's wife-* There is a difference between his refusal, and what he says to her. We see that his refusal was deep within his own mind, a determined conviction and decision to say "No". And his words to her issued from this internal decision. This is what it is, to overcome temptation.

Behold, my master doesn't know what is with me in the house, and he has put all that he has into my hand- There may be a play on the word "know" being a euphemism for the sexual act. And Joseph may have had in mind that although his earthly master didn't know what was going on, God as his heavenly master did. It should be remembered that in the surrounding culture, slaves were seen as sexually available to their owners, as alluded to in Ex. 21:9-11. Potiphar may possibly have been OK with her behaviour. Joseph was brave to disobey the repeated command of his owner (:10). It was the accusation of rape which led to his imprisonment, but his disobedience was clearly also an issue.

Gen 39:9 *He isn't greater in this house than I, neither has he kept back anything from me but you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?-* We note that sin is against man ["wickedness" against Potiphar] as well as

against God, as the prodigal son perceived. Just as our actions hurt others, so sin actually hurts God. Perceiving this, rejecting the "You're an awesome human being" narrative, is that leads us to intimacy with God. David confessed that he had sinned against God (Ps. 51:4), using the very language of faithful Joseph who refused ongoing temptation with these words (Gen. 39:9). Could this not imply that Bathsheba wife of Uriah was similar to Potiphar's wife? Joseph is unashamed to tell this secular woman that he believes in God, and that it is axiomatic to being a believer in God that he would not do "great wickedness"; and sin against another person is sin against God. Such a view of the gods was unheard of amongst the idolaters, who had little concept of sin in a moral sense. This same phrase is used about the "great wickedness" of marriage to unbelievers in Neh. 13:27; and yet we will soon read that Joseph does this.

The account of Joseph's resistance of adultery is consciously reflected in the account of king David's adultery. And we see this in life- for all life is ultimately structured by God. It's not just that one life reflects another, with similarities and so forth. But one life may be an inverse of another's life, a reflection which is inverse. Because the lessons of history were not learnt. Only by fellowship with each other, engaging with each others' paths rather than mere surface level connection, can we come to discern this. So both Joseph and David are presented as young shepherd boys ["shepherding the flock" of their father is a phrase which occurs only in Gen. 37:2 and 1 Sam. 16:11; 17:34]. They were both sent by their father to enquire of the *shalom* / "peace" of their brothers, and they were both despised by their brothers when they arrived to do so. They both are "prudent" and chosen to serve a king because of it (Gen. 41:33,39 s.w. 1 Sam. 16:18). It was noted about both of them that Yahweh was with them (Gen. 39:2,3,21-23 cp. 1 Sam. 16:18; 18:12). Both are described

as being young men of "beautiful appearance" (s.w. only Gen. 39:6; 1 Sam. 17:42). Both began their ruling at 30 years of age. Both were victims of others deciding it were better to kill them by others' hands (the Ishmaelites, Gen. 37:27, and the Philistines in David's case, 1 Sam. 18:17).

So this sets us up to consider the differences between Joseph and David when it comes to the adultery issue. Just as men may lead parallel lives, so close that clearly the hand of God was in the parallels- but then one fails to decide correctly when faced by temptation, and fails to take the lead from the earlier, or perhaps Biblical, character. But only by getting to know each other, or thinking ourselves into the Biblical characters, can we perceive this. Someone older than you maybe had a very similar life path, but, let's say, at age 40 encountered major temptation- which they overcame. You as the younger person are to learn from that and decide rightly as they did. Or, if they failed at that point, you are to learn that lesson.

So with David and Bathsheba and Joseph and Potiphar's wife, there was an imbalance of power. She like David could just demand sex. In both cases they were "alone in the house". Bathsheba was very beautiful, just as Joseph is described. Ms. Potiphar asked Joseph to lie with her, just as David asked Bathsheba. Uriah and Joseph are both presented as very faithful to "my lord". Potiphar's wife has Joseph thrown into prison; David has Uriah sent to his death. Likewise Bathsheba's "I am pregnant... by you, David" matches the message of Tamar to Judah- another reflection of a story. Joseph was given his lord's house to rule over, just as David was given his lord Saul's house ("I have given you the house of your lord", 2 Sam. 12:8). But David saw eventually the similarities with Joseph when he finally admits "I have sinned against the Lord" (2 Sam. 12:13), whereas Joseph refuses to sin against God (Gen. 39:9). And so David is

presented as Potiphar's wife. God gave Joseph everything except Potiphar's wife; God gave David everything likewise. The language is so similar. Uriah's "I will not do this thing" (2 Sam. 11:11) is Joseph's "How can I do this thing..." (Gen. 39:9).

Gen 39:10 *As she spoke to Joseph day by day, he didn't listen to her, to lie by her, or to be with her-* This is the more commendable as Joseph was in his mid 20s (see on :7) and so far as we know had not had the chance of sexual experience although being so handsome. The preceding Gen. 38 has recorded the various sexual sins of Judah and his family; Joseph is presented here as the parade example of avoiding and resisting sexual temptation whatever the consequences. "day by day". The contrast is intentional; and Joseph's attitude is the more outstanding because he came from a family where these values were not modelled to him by his older siblings.

Gen 39:11 *About this time-* Heb. 'On that day', or 'On this day'. The impression is given that this was not a fateful day, as many would see it; but rather the day chosen by God in His wider, longer plan. Only by reading the Joseph story to the end do we appreciate this. Or AV "On a certain day" might imply this was a feast day, and therefore all the other staff were not in the home. Perhaps Ms. Potiphar was faking illness, and Joseph was avoiding attending the pagan feast.

He went into the house to do his work, and there were none of the men of the house inside- Doubtless set up by the woman.

Gen 39:12 *She caught him by his garment, saying, Lie with me! He left his garment in her hand, and ran outside-* Joseph running for the door is the visual image picked up in the New Testament and held before us as an example: "Flee fornication" (1 Cor. 6:18); "flee youthful lusts" (2 Tim. 2:22). Again, Joseph is presented as everyman. Potiphar's wife is therefore set up as the embodiment of our own lusts. To have done this she must

have been totally obsessed and infatuated. As with the likes of Delilah, we wonder what a miserable life she lived after this incident until she came to her Godless, bitter and unfulfilled last breath.

Gen 39:13 *When she saw that he had left his garment in her hand, and had run outside-* Joseph lost his garment before he went into the pit and before he went to prison; Pharaoh dressed him in one, just as Jacob had done, and probably this garment was a sign of his being the house manager and had been given him by Potiphar. Situations repeated, as they do in our lives. When Joseph was given Pharoah's prestigious garment, he would have wondered how long that would last. And it was all to prepare him not to be proud.

Gen 39:14 *She called to the men of her house, and spoke to them, saying, Behold, he has brought in a Hebrew to us to mock us. He came in to me to lie with me, and I cried with a loud voice-* The record has the ring of truth to it- for infatuation turns to hatred in a moment (as in 2 Sam. 13:14,15). The way she speaks of her husband as "he", and suggests Potiphar had intentionally sought to mock her by putting a handsome young man under her nose... all suggests she did not have a good relationship with him. And again, there is a psychological credibility to the entire record, of a kind which is not found in uninspired histories of the time, all of which feature gross exaggerations which are not credible if they are a strictly accurate retelling of history. The Hebrew for "mock" is used in a distinctly sexual sense in Gen. 26:8 and Ex. 32:6. "To mock *us*" may imply she claimed Joseph had sexual designs on others too.

Gen 39:15 *It happened, when he heard that I lifted up my voice and cried, that he left his garment by me, and ran outside-* She repeats her statement word for word in :18. This repeating a story word for word is a clear indication that it has been

fabricated. Her story lacked credibility anyway. If there were no other men in the house at the time, he need not have run outside. He was still on the premises when Potiphar came home and there is no record of him seeking to flee. To leave his garment with her would seem foolish of him, if he were guilty. And what evidence is an outer garment anyway, in this context? On examination, her story was fake. But it is perfectly credible that this is the kind of thing an infatuated woman would do when firmly turned down. The whole account has the ring of truth and credibility to it; these words were indeed spoken by this woman, and the whole thing is no myth nor garbled folklore, but the specifically inspired and recorded word of God.

Gen 39:16 *She laid up his garment by her, until his master came home-* We are left to imagine Joseph's feelings as he awaited the return of his master. The record draws us in to the events so that we enter into the feelings.

Gen 39:17 *She spoke to him according to these words, saying, The Hebrew servant, whom you have brought to us, came in to me to mock me-* She cannot resist putting the blame upon her husband; see on :14. This fits exactly with the situation of the frustrated wife in a dead marriage which the record describes. And so we can confidently believe that we are reading words which were actually spoken in a house in Egypt millennia ago. The Hebrew for "mock" is used in a distinctly sexual sense in Gen. 26:8 and Ex. 32:6.

Gen 39:18 *And it happened, as I lifted up my voice and cried, that he left his garment by me, and ran outside-* She repeats word for word her prepared statement which she first made to the other male servants; see on :15. This exact word for word repetition of the statement is exactly what we would expect from someone who has fabricated a story.

Gen 39:19 *It happened, when his master heard the words of his wife, which she spoke to him, saying, This is what your servant did to me, that his wrath was kindled-* It may be significant that it is not stated that his wrath was with Joseph. He could have been angry at her statement that *your* servant did this *to me*, putting so much guilt upon Potiphar. Perhaps it was with his wife, as he could see through the whole story. This would explain why Joseph was not killed but "only" imprisoned, when death would have been the usual punishment. Indeed a case can be made that this Potiphar was also the captain of the guard who managed the prison, and it was his daughter whom Joseph later married (see on Gen. 41:45. There was therefore this man Potiphar who was hanging around in Joseph's life, clearly used by providence. And why do we have to as it were read between the lines of the record to make this connection? Because that is how providence works, subtle rather than direct and 'in your face'. Joseph would have realized that clearly God's hand was at work with him. As he stood as a nervous 17 year old in a slave market in Egypt... it was all of God's grace and plan that he was bought by Potiphar or one of his servants. But it took him many years to perceive this. And the same can be said of events in our lives.

Joseph was being encouraged to see that the butler and baker were in a similar position to himself. They too had been thrown into prison and suffered the wrath of their lord for no reason (Gen. 40:1,2); both Potiphar and Pharaoh are called 'Lord' (Gen. 39:16; 40:1). They too were given dreams which came true, and one of them was exalted as promised in his dream- to encourage Joseph that his dreams would likewise ultimately come true.

Gen 39:20 *Joseph's master took him, and put him into the prison, the place where the king's prisoners were bound, and he was there in custody-* "Took him" could mean Potiphar personally

took him to the prison, as if he personally cared for Joseph. And the prison for the King's prisoners might mean that the conditions in it were better than in the prisons for commoner folk.

Heb. "the round house", perhaps the Tower of Heliopolis. Joseph in prison was typical of the Lord's death. Ps. 105:17-23 is the Spirit's commentary upon the sufferings of Joseph: "He (God) sent a man before them, even Joseph, who was sold for a servant; whose feet they hurt with fetters; he was laid in iron: until the time that his word came: the word of the Lord tried him... Israel also came into Egypt". In the context of the Psalm, God is comforting Israel that all their sufferings had been experienced by Joseph. His descent into prison, just like our humiliations, was part of being Divinely "sent", although it would hardly have appeared like that at the time. Our tendency is to focus on the injustice, rather than to accept the Divine hand, even if we cannot immediately attach meaning to event. Israel as a nation are often spoken of as being in prison in a Gentile world (Ps. 79:11; 102:20; Is. 42:7,22; 49:9); just as Joseph was. Prison and death are often associated because a spell in prison was effectively a death sentence, so bad were the conditions. Israel being in prison is therefore a symbol of a living death. On the cross, the Lord was the great, supreme prisoner (Ps. 69:33- this is an intensive plural, referring to a singular great prisoner). Like Joseph, He went through all the emotions of the prisoner; the shame, depression, introspection, struggle with issues of injustice and the removal of freedom. As Israel were comforted in their living death by the fact that there was an individual in the past who had gone through all they were going through as a group; so the new Israel ought to take comfort together in contemplating the experiences of the Lord. He bore our communal sorrows, injustices, griefs and sins; this is why

we as a community rather than purely as individuals need to be bound together in remembering Him.

"In custody" could suggest a temporary holding until the case was considered; the fact he remained there some years without trial would again indicate that Potiphar [who perhaps was also the chief of the prison] chose as it were not to prosecute. We see the similarities with Joseph being in the pit in limbo, whilst Reuben and Judah sought to rescue him; and we wonder whether Potiphar was doing the same.

Gen 39:21 *But Yahweh was with Joseph, and showed kindness to him, and gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison-* *Chesed*, "kindness", is a term often associated with the fulfilment of the promises to the fathers. It was on account of them that even in prison, Joseph was sustained. This favour in the eyes of the prison manager was what he had experienced with Potiphar, and we again wonder whether the keeper of the prison was in fact Potiphar. The way God made the eyes or view of the prison keeper gracious toward Joseph is a reflection of how God showed Joseph grace or favour; the Hebrew words for "kindness" and "favour" are related. We see here how the gift ['grace'] of God can be revealed through giving people an attitude of mind, a new pair of eyes; and this is the gift of the Spirit in the New Testament.

Gen 39:22 *The keeper of the prison committed to Joseph's hand all the prisoners who were in the prison. Whatever they did there, he was responsible for it-* The similarities are clear with how Potiphar had treated him, and how Pharaoh would later treat him. Joseph had to pass through these two experiences and see them come to an abrupt end, so that he was prepared for the responsibility given him by Pharaoh, and to accept it with humility, suspecting all his life that this period would likewise come to an end in a Divinely controlled moment. We think of

how Moses led a flock of sheep in the Sinai desert for 40 years to prepare him to lead Yahweh's flock of people in that same desert 40 years. We too can discern phases in our lives, preparing us for ever heavier responsibilities, and always seeking to educate us against pride and to make us totally dependent upon the Father rather than the flesh. The Hebrew can mean that everything was done at his command. Although Joseph was desperate to get out of prison, this period was to prepare him for the time when all Egypt would obey his commands and organization.

Gen 39:23 *The keeper of the prison didn't look after anything that was under his hand, because Yahweh was with him; and that which he did, Yahweh made it prosper-* As noted on :22, this is exactly the language used of his prospering under Potiphar and later under Pharaoh. The Hebrew for "prosper" is used several times in the record of God prospering the plan to take a believing wife for Isaac (Gen. 24:21,40,42,56). If our heart is set on the things of the covenant, the Abrahamic promises, then somehow all will prosper. The ultimate prospering of that purpose is through the work of the Lord Jesus on the cross and in our final salvation (s.w. Is. 53:10; Is. 48:15). But there is continually the evidence that that final prosperity is experienced to some degree now, even whilst we suffer injustice and the loss of freedom in life which Joseph did at this time.

GENESIS CHAPTER 40

Gen 40:1 *It happened after these things, that the butler of the king of Egypt and his baker offended their lord, the king of Egypt-* "After these words" (Heb.) could refer to the words of Potiphar's wife. We are led to suspect that the butler and baker were somehow also her victims, and this would confirm the experience of identity between Joseph and these two men. The obvious accusation against the butler and baker was that they had tried to poison the king. Most likely they hadn't, but the paranoia which goes along with absolute power led the king to suspect this. Stalin was similar, falsely accusing his butlers and cooks and often having them murdered. So they would have had an immediate bond with Joseph, who was likewise totally innocent. The force of "here also" in :15 may mean that Joseph "also", like the butler and baker, was imprisoned under false accusation. The death of one and release of the other was arranged to remind Joseph of what could have happened to him, and yet of the possibility too of his total rehabilitation. Commonality of experience is a bond we too can use in relationship building and sharing God's word. There seems a parallel between their sin against "their lord" and Joseph's apparent sin against his "lord" Potiphar. He is consistently called Joseph's "lord" throughout Gen. 39.

But the Hebrew for "offended" can as well mean "sinned against"; the LXX reads "sinned". The butler later comments: "I remember my sins today" (Gen. 41:9- an intensive plural for 'my great sin'). Maybe he was reflecting that his real sin was the sin of omission in forgetting Joseph and being ungrateful- which is our sin, so very often. To be unmindful of the affliction of Joseph is seen as the epitomy of the sin of materialistic, self satisfied members of God's family: "who drink wine in bowls, and anoint

themselves with the best oils; but they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph" (Am. 6:6). Perhaps they were in prison for real offences; and one was saved by grace, and the other rightly condemned. The type is of the Lord's suffering together with two such thieves, on the cross. It would have made Joseph realize what grace means, in this case- for he would have seen a guilty man saved by grace, and even then be ungrateful for it. And this was really the story of his father's life.

Gen 40:2 *Pharaoh was angry with his two officers, the chief cupbearer and the chief baker-* Perhaps these two, one saved and one condemned, point forward to the two criminals with whom the Lord was crucified. Again the similarity with Joseph continues, as he was in the same prison because of his "lord's" anger (Gen. 39:19). It was this commonality of experience which enabled Joseph to reach out to those men, and this is the same basis for our appeal.

Gen 40:3 *He put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, into the prison, the place where Joseph was bound-* Here we learn that the prison where Joseph was kept was only a temporary holding place for prisoners before trial. Joseph by grace was kept there for some years. Even when it seemed all was against him, as with us, there was another dimension of his life in which he was kept alive by grace alone.

Ps. 105:18 says that Joseph's feet were hurt with iron fetters, but presumably this was only initially; so we should read this as "where Joseph had been bound". He was able to relate to how they were on the basis that he too had been through it when he was first incarcerated. At this time he was actively running the prison and not "bound" (:6).

Gen 40:4 *The captain of the guard assigned them to Joseph, and he took care of them. They stayed in prison many days-* "Assigned" is s.w. Gen. 39:4, where in Potiphar's house Joseph

was given the charge or oversight of everything. See note there. He served them [Heb.] in that they were senior officials and were in custody awaiting trial, and therefore had the right to be served. The ancient world didn't practice long prison sentences; rather was the death sentence carried out, and people remained in prison relatively short periods or whilst awaiting trial. Joseph's extended stay in prison therefore points to something unusual- the captain of the guard maybe preserved him, or Potiphar was against the death penalty, as he disbelieved his wife, but felt he had to keep Joseph there. In all this there was Divine providence. "Many days" perhaps invites comparison with Joseph's belief that double Divine dreams were definitely answered, and were answered "soon", as he says to Pharaoh. On one hand, his time in prison was "years of days" (Gen. 41:1 Heb.); the butler and baker were "many days" in the holding prison, as it felt to them. But Joseph's perspective was that God's word is answered quickly. Indeed, as Ps. 105 notes, his trust in God's word was tested. And faith really is all about our perception of time, and how far we are able to adopt the Divine perspective on it.

Gen 40:5 *They both dreamed a dream, each man his dream, in one night, each man according to the interpretation of his dream, the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt-* "Each man according to the interpretation of his dream" is hard to understand. It could be intended to mean "and the interpretation of those dreams came true to each of the men", but that is not quite what the text says. The LXX simply omits the phrase. The GNB repoints the Hebrew to offer "and the dreams had different meanings", but that appears to be stating what is surely axiomatic; although it may be preparing us for the contrast with Gen. 41:25 when the two dreams of Pharaoh had the same one interpretation. The two men assumed their dreams were saying the same thing (see on :8). Joseph likewise had had

a double dream in his youth. He must have wondered whether each dream had a different meaning, or whether they were saying one and the same thing. And these recurrences of double dreams would have reminded him of his own double dreams, lest he forget them. For there in prison, the temptation would have been to shrug them off as bizarre and obviously irrelevant to his life.

Each of the three dreams in the Joseph story is a double dream (Joseph's dreams, the dreams of butler and baker, Pharaoah's dreams). When Joseph tells Pharaoh that double dreams mean they definitely come true, he said this, therefore, in faith- that his own dreams would come true. That faith is contrasted with both his father and his brothers protesting that these dreams could never come true. And I suggest he had this in mind all through, that circumstances would work out so that his brothers came bowing to him. I suggest that is what motivated him to suggest Pharaoh set a man over all Egypt to manage the people would come to buy grain- inwardly scheming that he would be the one chosen. He showed great spiritual ambition in all this. But Joseph also understands the double dream of Pharaoah to mean that God will "soon" fulfil it- and the double dream of the butler and baker indeed immediately came true. Joseph therefore understood that his own dreams would "soon" come true; but he understood that the "soon" was relative to God's view of time, and not his. The dreams of Pharaoh would take seven to fourteen years to come true; but Joseph understood that as "soon". We like Joseph must see that our redemption and the fulfilment of God's plan for us is likewise "soon"- in the ultimate perspective.

Who were bound in the prison- Joseph had previously been "bound" with harsh fetters (Ps. 105:18) but was now free enough to serve them. So he could relate to them and empathize with

their suffering. This was going to be an important feature of his life; and the reason for many of our negative experiences is likewise so that we can relate to others in similar sufferings. Indeed 2 Cor. 1:4-8 says that this is the purpose of suffering. The Lord's empathy with our suffering was achieved through His own suffering and tasting death for every man. These men were "confined in the prison" (Heb.), but Joseph believes they will be led by their dreams to a far greater destiny beyond those prison walls. And this encouraged him that his dreams would likewise take him beyond the narrow confines of his present experience in the prison. But he could of course have bitterly concluded that others' dreams come true- but not his. But he rose above that. We have the same choice of perspective.

Gen 40:6 *Joseph came in to them in the morning, and saw them, and saw that they were sad-* We note Joseph's sensitivity to others and desire to help them, instead of being lost in his own bitterness and sense of injustice. This feature was taught by his sufferings; because he clearly had grown up the favourite and spoilt child, and such a background would militate against such characteristics.

One theme of the record is that circumstances repeat in life, because there is the higher hand of God over all. These men came to Joseph in the morning- and we are told concerning Pharaoh: "And it was in the morning that his spirit was troubled" (Gen. 41:8). The butler and baker tell Joseph: "We have dreamed a dream, and there is no one to interpret it" (40:8), and Pharaoh likewise told Joseph: "I have dreamed a dream and there is no one to interpret it" (Gen. 41:15). Joseph's "Do interpretations not belong to God?" (40:8)is then matched by what he tells Pharaoh: "It is not me; God will restore Pharaoh's peace of mind" (Gen. 41:16). Joseph saw the parallels. And just as he had the right, humble attitude about dream interpretation in the first

case, so he did in the second case when the situation was repeated. We may fail the first time and get it right the second time; or get it right the first time and fail the second time. Or like Joseph, get it right and keep getting it right. But you have to think about your life with God in order to perceive this. And only then will you overcome man's obsessive and often depressive "search for meaning". For if man's search for ultimate meaning is left unanswered, then rich or poor, fat or thin, we slip further and further into depression and meaninglessness.

Gen 40:7 *He asked Pharaoh's officers who were with him in custody-* The text stresses, as in :3, that the men were in the same prison as Joseph. Again we see the theme of identity between Joseph and those he sought to help.

In his master's house, saying- "In the ward of his master's house" again suggests the prison house was under Potiphar.

Why do you look so sad today?- "Sad", *ra*, has the sense of evil. They knew Pharaoh's birthday was in three days, and there would be decisions made in connection with it which would affect them; they had a presentiment of something significant and probably evil that was to happen to them.

The sensitive reader will perceive that Joseph had a strong fatherly image, even from a young age (also Gen. 41:43 mg.; 45:8). The Lord Jesus likewise; hence He referred to the disciples as His children when they were in the same peer group. This is understandable in that He is the supreme manifestation of *the* sovereign Father.

Gen 40:8 *They said to him, We have dreamed a dream-* They assume that their two dreams are one dream, and the interpretation will be identical. See on :5.

And there is no one who can interpret it. Joseph said to them, Don't interpretations belong to God?- Joseph is so sure dreams come true- and he likewise must have lived in faith that his

would too. He would therefore have been looking for the day when his brothers came to him and knelt before him. Ps. 105:19 says that at this time, Joseph was tested by the word of God; he was tested as to whether he would continue to believe that God's word would come true for him, and his experience of these other dreams coming true would have encouraged him. We too are challenged to believe that the apparent disjuncture between who I am now, and who I shall eternally be... will be breached, faith shall be turned to sight, the prophetic word for me shall come true. Joseph's statement that interpretations belong to "God", i.e. the one and only God, his God... is more radical than it may seem. For the Egyptians were persuaded that interpretations belonged to the revered class of court magicians whose job it was to interpret dreams [called the *hartummim*]. To say that actually interpretations are from the God of Israel... was a slap in the face to that entire culture, and would have been immediately noticed. The butler would have recalled Joseph's statement, when later the magicians were unable to interpret Pharaoh's dream.

Another example of Joseph being tested by repeating circumstances was in the matter of playing God. In interpreting the dreams in prison, Joseph twice said that interpretations of dreams belong to God; "it is not in me; God will give Pharaoh an answer..." (Gen. 40:8; 41:16). Thus twice Joseph resisted the temptation to claim Divine power to himself. Some years later, however, I fear he failed a similar temptation, when he says to his brothers: "Such a man as I can indeed divine" (Gen. 44:15). He seems to be claiming for himself the power that earlier he had ascribed solely to God. But at the end of his life, when his brothers express their fear that Joseph will judge them harshly now that Jacob has died, Joseph assures them that he will not, as he is not going to play God: "Fear not, for am I in the place of God?" (Gen. 50:19). Significantly, these were the very words

of Joseph's father to his mother in Gen. 30:2- showing how temptations and the essence of situations repeat across the generations and within the collective experience of groups of believers. We can discern what happened to Joseph going on in our own lives, if we will only take time to examine ourselves and the patterns of our experiences. A specific temptation or situation may, in essence, occur once, and we respond rightly; again it happens, and again we get it right; then again some years later, and we fail; and then some years later still, and we get it right. Constantly our understanding and obedience is being tested, developed, expanded, confirmed... by the Divinely controlled, providential structure of our lives and the situations and persons we encounter. Whether we travel the world each day meeting new people and apparently "new" situations all the time, or we sit in the same room confined by illness and with a limited pool of interaction... all the same, God is equally at work with us all, every moment. Let's not lose sight of the fact that Joseph stands as a pattern for us all.

Please tell it to me- This is the same word used of how Joseph told his dreams to his family, resulting in all his suffering (s.w. Gen. 37:9,10). He was further seeing the similarities between himself and these men. If indeed they were both guilty and one was to be exalted by grace (see on :1), then Joseph would have perceived that his promised exaltation was by grace alone, as although he was innocent of what he had been accused of, he was still a sinner deserving death.

Gen 40:9 *The chief cupbearer told his dream to Joseph, and said to him, In my dream, behold, a vine was in front of me-* The critics claim that the Egyptians didn't drink wine. The chronology of Egyptology is open to much academic debate, and so this criticism is far from solid. But I wonder if this dream is not intended to encourage Joseph as to the fulfilment of his

dreams, which were about a future time, when Israel would engage in agriculture and not pasturing cattle, and when his mother would be resurrected. Joseph's dream had only a primary fulfilment when his brothers bowed to him. Likewise it could be that Joseph perceived this dream of the butler to refer to some long distant point; it would come true in a primary sense, however. And this would have guided Joseph towards correctly understanding his own dreams- they would indeed have a primary fulfilment but the main fulfilment was at a time and culture yet to come.

Gen 40:10 *And in the vine were three branches. It was as though it budded, it blossomed, and its clusters produced ripe grapes-* The budding of the branch is elsewhere a symbol of resurrection. At this time, Joseph was being tested as to whether he would believe that God's word to him would come true (Ps. 105:19), and that word involved the resurrection of his mother to one day bow before him. The way this symbol came true for the butler was an encouragement to him. The budding and blossoming of the branch is a symbol of righteousness and Divine acceptance (s.w. Num. 17:5; Ps. 72:7; 92:12; Prov. 11:28). If the butler was righteous, he was still saved by grace according to this dream; and yet he failed to be grateful in saving another. This would have been a great lesson for Joseph; that although he was innocent of what he was accused of, he was still to realize that his salvation and predicted exaltation was all of grace, and he needed to learn the lesson of the butler and seek to save and be gracious to others. And indeed this was to be true of all Israel / Jacob's seed, who finally were to blossom and bud (Is. 27:6).

Gen 40:11 *Pharaoh's cup was in my hand; and I took the grapes, and pressed them into Pharaoh's cup, and I gave the cup into Pharaoh's hand-* Joseph was to later use a cup, perhaps even Pharaoh's cup, in order to try to convict his brothers of their

sin. He comments that he can "certainly divine" (Gen. 44:15) because of the cup through which he divines (Gen. 44:5). Joseph may be referring back to how he had correctly interpreted or divined this dream about the cup; and so the cup would be used in bringing about the fulfilment of his own dreams of exaltation above his brothers.

Gen 40:12 *Joseph said to him, This is its interpretation: the three branches are three days-* Joseph was confident that he had the right interpretation of dreams, and his confidence was strengthened by his interpretation of these men's dreams being proven right. He therefore was being encouraged that God's word for him too would come true.

Gen 40:13 *Within three more days, Pharaoh will lift up your head-* The Hebraism had a double meaning- to lift up in glory, or lift up ones head in execution and crucifixion. The baker's head was likewise 'lifted up'- but from off his body. The similarity was to make Joseph see that those who benefitted from the fulfilment of Divine dreams only did so by grace. For it was "just" grace that the butler was exalted and the baker beheaded.

And restore you to your office. You will give Pharaoh's cup into his hand, the way you did when you were his cupbearer- The language here so emphasizes restoration, "to your place... after the former manner" (AV). This is the language of the restoration from Babylon. Maybe Joseph reflected that what he had been promised in his dreams was so much greater; not an exaltation in order to be restored, but an exaltation far higher than he had ever been.

Gen 40:14 *But remember me when it will be well with you, and please show kindness to me, and make mention of me to Pharaoh-* To hold a plan in one's own mind is to have it 'with' them. The Hebrew text here bears this out, when Joseph begs: "Remember me with yourself". So for the essential purpose of

God in His Son to be 'with' Him does not in any sense imply that a person was literally 'with' God in Heaven. "Remember me with thee" (AVmg.); Joseph perceived that the exaltation of the butler was intended to look forward to his own exaltation. He realized that his dreams would have their final fulfilment at the resurrection when his mother would arise; but he confidently expected a primary fulfilment in his own life. We ought to have that same confidence for this life as well as that which is to come. But Joseph also realized that the fulfilment of the Divine plan requires some volition from men; and so he begged the butler to play his part. "Show kindness" is a term elsewhere associated with the fulfilment of the Abrahamic promises; Joseph believed that those promises would have a primary fulfilment in his life, in his exaltation from prison. And he urged the butler to play his part in fulfilling them. And yet as with us, and all the Abraham family, especially his father Jacob, there is here a very human desire to force through the fulfilment of the promises by dint of human device.

"Remember me..." is almost a pathetic plea, recalling his desperate pleas for help when in the pit (Gen. 42:21). Joseph learnt what it felt like to beg for assistance, and not find it. Instead of getting bitter about it, he surely vowed to be different, and he was given the opportunity to do so when made the manager of the world's greatest famine relief program. Many of course respond to having their pleas unheard by closing up their heart of compassion. But he instead used his negative experiences to confirm him in being eager to do for others what had not been done to him.

Doubtless the thief on the cross had in mind the desperate plea of Joseph: "Have me in remembrance when..." you come into your position of power (Gen. 40:14 RV). The thief had perhaps meditated upon the implications of the Lord's prayer:

"Your kingdom come". He saw it as now being certain because of the cross- "when you come in your Kingdom...". And yet he felt as if he was in prospect already there before the coming King, as he hung there before Him on the cross. The thief's words "Remember me when you come in your Kingdom" is almost certainly reference to Gen. 40:14, where Joseph desperately and pathetically asks: "But think on me when it shall be well with you..". Joseph went on to say "...here also have I done nothing that they should put me into the dungeon" (Gen. 40:15). This is very much the spirit of "This man has done nothing amiss...". And again we have the Lord in the midst of two criminals, one to be saved and the other damned, just as here with Joseph.

And bring me out of this house- The same words are often used by Moses in describing how Israel had been brought out of the house of Egyptian bondage (e.g. Dt. 13:5,10). The primary audience of Genesis was Israel in the wilderness, and they would have clearly seen the connection. Just as it seemed Joseph was suffering unfairly in that house of bondage at the hands of the Egyptians, so had Israel been. But they too had been brought out, through the Red Sea.

Gen 40:15 *For indeed, I was stolen away out of the land of the Hebrews-* Joseph wasn't "stolen", he was sold by his brothers; but he had so often generously told the story that way that he spoke of it as "indeed" true. Just as his brothers repeated the lie about Joseph being dead to the point that they believed it. His generosity of spirit is revealed also in how he doesn't talk in detail about his suffering at the hand of Potiphar's wife. The same words are found in Gen. 44:8, where the brothers are accused of having stolen things out of the house of Joseph's house. Perhaps the idea was that Joseph felt they had stolen him, in that they had stolen the best years of his life; and he wanted them to know how it feels to be a convicted thief, because they had in this

sense stolen him. Joseph like the Lord was very positive about his brothers. But in talking to them, he is quite clear that "You sold me here", "You meant it for evil". Just as the Lord was very realistic with the disciples about their slowness of heart to believe, and yet spoke of them so positively to the Pharisees. He is likewise realistic with us in His relationship with us, but very positive about us to the Father.

And here also- The force of "here also" here may mean that Joseph "also", like the butler and baker, was imprisoned under false accusation; see on :1.

Have I done nothing that they should put me into the dungeon- The shame of Joseph in the dungeon was that this was for the lowest of the low, according to Ex. 12:29- a type of the supreme degradation of Christ on the cross. "Dungeon" is s.w. "pit", the grave, in Zech. 9:11. We sense Joseph's deep internal outcry against the cruel injustice of what had happened to him. He remains for all time an encouragement to those tempted to lose their faith through the experience of bitter injustice.

Gen 40:16 *When the chief baker saw that the interpretation was good, he said to Joseph-* This again has the ring of psychological, imaginable truth to it. We are led by the text to correctly imagine his eagerness to hear something good about himself too.

I also was in my dream, and behold, three baskets of white bread were on my head- White bread would be leavened bread. Just as the things in the butler's dream represented good spiritual things elsewhere in the Bible, so the things in the baker's dream have generally negative associations.

Gen 40:17 *In the top basket-* If this means the third basket, then the idea is that the baker's death would be on the third day. Or maybe the idea was that his body would be pecked by birds on the third day.

There was all kinds of baked food for Pharaoh, and the birds ate them out of the basket on my head- The works of the baker came to represent him personally; for it was his flesh which was to be eaten by birds (:19). Birds devouring the works of the hands of sinners is the language of the final judgment (Rev. 19:21), suggesting that this is all encouragement to Joseph that judgment day would come and all injustice will be then finally resolved; see on :19.

Gen 40:18 *Joseph answered, This is its interpretation. The three baskets are three days-* We wonder if the three days look forward to the Lord's death and resurrection, which is the basis upon which men shall be judged, and thereby saved or condemned.

Gen 40:19 *Within three more days, Pharaoh will lift up your head from off you, and will hang you on a tree; and the birds will eat your flesh from off you-* It could be that the baker really was guilty. The language here is used of the sinner whom God curses (Dt. 21:22,23). The whole situation looks forward to the day of final judgment. Maybe Joseph was being encouraged that judgment would indeed come, and the wicked condemned and the innocent restored. For he would have struggled so much with a sense of injustice, of judgment / justice not being done for him. And this situation encouraged him that finally, it would be done.

Gen 40:20 *It happened the third day, which was Pharaoh's birthday, that he made a feast for all his servants, and he lifted up the head of the chief cupbearer and the head of the chief baker among his servants-* We can imagine how Joseph felt when the message came that these two men who were in bonds, fed and perhaps washed by him as their servant (:4), were suddenly to go into Pharaoh's presence. He would have seen the power of the prophetic word in the dreams, and reflected that his dreams required a like exaltation. This is why when the call came, he

would have been expecting it; the experience of the butler was to show him the path he was to tread.

Gen 40:21 *He restored the chief cupbearer to his position again, and he gave the cup into Pharaoh's hand-* The final salvation of Israel is often described in terms of restoration (Acts 3:21). It is a theme which began with the cursing of Eden, in hope of restoration in terms of the Kingdom of God coming on earth. But even in this life there is a sense of restoration; restored to how God intended us to be for Him.

Gen 40:22 *But he hanged the chief baker, as Joseph had interpreted to them-* The point is made that Joseph's interpretation of dreams came true. It was to encourage him that his own dreams would likewise.

Gen 40:23 *Yet the chief cupbearer didn't remember Joseph, but forgot him-* Joseph was "forgotten" in prison, just as Simeon later felt the same. Joseph therefore did this to him, knowing his brothers would leave Judah in prison feeling 'forgotten', so that Judah would enter into his sufferings. Our trials likewise are lovingly orchestrated so that we might identify with the sufferings of Christ. Joseph's pleas for mercy were ignored when he was in the pit; and now likewise in the dungeon. Later Israel were condemned for not being "grieved for the affliction of Joseph" (Am. 6:6). This experience of being ignored and forgotten didn't make Joseph bitter and self-centred; rather it made him the more sensitive to others. For all time we have the challenge to resist the natural human tendency towards ingratitude, and to simply forget the grace shown to us, allowing life and daily busyness to crowd out our obligation to gratitude. The same word will be used of how people would quickly forget the blessing of seven good harvests (Gen. 41:30). Time and again in Deuteronomy, Moses begs Israel to "not forget" God's goodness. So often we are given examples of people who did not

remember but forgot God's grace, or Joash who remembered not the kindness of Jehoiada to him (2 Chron. 24:22). It is why we break bread, to remember and not forget- because that is our tendency. Regular giving thanks for food is one way in which we can keep working at our need to show more gratitude. The grateful person is far less likely to be consumed in bitterness and self pity.

GENESIS CHAPTER 41

Gen 41:1 *It happened at the end of two full years-* Joseph would have been expecting that the butler would get him out of prison, and thus his own dreams would have their primary fulfilment. But that didn't seem to happen, for two years. Perhaps at this time particularly, Joseph was tested by God's word (Ps. 105:19), i.e. his faith in it was tested. Each day would have dragged... "two years of days", as the Hebrew is literally. And yet Joseph lived believing that double dreams meant they would surely be fulfilled- and soon. But "soon" from God's perspective. Over 14 years in the case of Pharaoh's dreams. Like us, on one hand Joseph by faith accepted God's perspective. In another sense, he felt the drag of time.

The parallels between Joseph and Daniel are clearest in Gen. 41. They were young Hebrews in Gentile lands, both "handsome" (Dan. 1:4). Pharaoh's dream occurs two years after Joseph's incarceration (41:1), just as Nebuchadnezzar's dream occurs two years into his reign (Dan. 2:1). "Pharaoh had a dream" (41:1), and "Nebuchadnezzar dreamed dreams" (Dan. 2:1), the spirit of both kings was "troubled". They called their wise men, who were unable to explain the dreams. Their officials [Arioch cp. the the butler] in both cases are aware of a Hebrew captive who can interpret dreams. In both accounts they were "hurriedly" brought before the king, and both were asked by the king if they would really interpret the dream. Both ascribe interpretations to God- perhaps Daniel perceived the similarities, and was encouraged in his humility by that of Joseph. Both recount the king's dreams, and provide interpretation. Joseph's statement that the dream is "determined by God, and God will quickly bring it about" (Gen. 41:32) surely inspired Daniel to say that "The dream is true; and its

interpretation is trustworthy" (Dan. 2:45). Both men were subsequently worshipped, given gifts, and made rules in a foreign land, with the Gentile rulers perceiving the spirit of the one true God in these young men. Some of these similarities could never have been contrived by Daniel. But he chose to continue the similarities in that he perceived how he was being 'set up', as a second Joseph, and responded appropriately- especially by saying that it was his God and not him who could interpret dreams. We must be on the lookout for which Bible characters are being repeated in our lives. Perhaps the Joseph story is so long and detailed because so many of us have found his life indeed to be the template for our own experiences. We might also ponder how Joseph is never recorded as praying to God. But Daniel immediately thanks God for being given the interpretation and is presented as a man of prayer. Perhaps he perceived this apparent deficit in Joseph, and decided to learn from Joseph's apparent omission. This leads on to the observation that Daniel's response to his interpretation of the dream in Daniel 5 differs sharply from Joseph's response. Although they receive the same rewards [gold chain about the neck etc.], Daniel refuses them whilst Joseph accepts them. And Daniel appears to have always gotten out of working for the evil empire, whilst Joseph marries into it and dedicates his life to it. But we are assured of Joseph's salvation in Hebrews 11.

That Pharaoh dreamed: and behold, he stood by the river- In consort with the gods, for the Nile was thought to be the god Hapi. And yet Joseph will go on to speak of one singular God, the God of Joseph, who is responsible for both good and bad, famine and fertility.

Gen 41:2 *Behold, there came up out of the river seven cattle, sleek and fat, and they fed in the marsh grass-*

The cow was a symbol of fertility. The Egyptian goddess Hathor is represented with the head of a cow. The god Osiris is represented in Egyptian drawings as an ox accompanied by seven cows. Clearly the Egyptian theology was being subverted and it would seem Pharaoh accepted that, and quite possibly became a believer. He like other Pharaohs removed his officers at a whim; but Joseph remained in power for decades and was never removed.

A hymn to the Nile now in the British Museum describes the Nile as "overflowing the gardens created by Ra giving life to all animals ... watering the land without ceasing ... Lover of food, bestower of corn ... Bringer of food! Great Lord of provisions! Creator of all good things!". Pharaoh imagined that such prosperity came up out of the Nile; but his pagan ideas were overturned by *evil* and famine coming up out of the Nile. And then Joseph explains that his God, the one God, is the One responsible for all things, not the god of the Nile. Pharaoh was being challenged deeply, and he does well to resign his whole belief system in a moment.

Gen 41:3 *Behold, seven other cattle came up after them out of the river, ugly and thin, and stood by the other cattle on the brink of the river-* As noted on :2, this was a radical inversion of the Egyptian paganic worldview, whereby only good and fat things came from the Nile. The Nile played a huge part in the thinking and belief structure of Pharaoh. Yet he stood by the river, on its banks (:1), and now the cattle appear on its banks. Presumably we are meant to understand that he was looking across the river to the opposite bank. He was being encouraged not to 'stand before' the Nile as a man stands before an idol, but to look over it, beyond it, to new possibilities and realities. Consistently, the nature and symbolism of the dreams and Joseph's repeated talk

about one God... was all designed to uproot his whole belief system and bring him to Israel's God.

Gen 41:4 *The ugly and thin cattle ate up the seven sleek and fat cattle. So Pharaoh awoke-* He may have seen the two types of cattle merge into each other. "Sleek and fat" is AV "well favoured", the very Hebrew phrase used of Joseph (Gen. 39:6). He may well have been called or nicknamed that term. Joseph may have perceived that those good cattle were him. He therefore was inspired to assume he would be the man through whom the effect of evil, the seven thin cattle, would be resolved. He would later realize that all meant for evil in his life was turned to good through his remaining a part of God's saving plan (Gen. 50:20). "The ugly" is s.w. "evil"; and the same words are used of the false suggestion that an "evil beast" had "eaten up" Joseph (Gen. 37:33). See on :20. The dreams showed that evil was not going to prevail ultimately- because Joseph was going to be faithful to the Abrahamic covenant, and God would work through him, therefore, to the blessing and salvation of Israel and the world around them.

The good and evil cattle taught a profound lesson. The loss of the good to the evil was so that a far greater good could come. The unbeliever would see the glass half empty, forgetting the good years and lamenting the evil. Joseph likewise could have just lamented his evil. He was the well favoured cattle who lost all that due to evil, but his loss overcame that evil. That evil, the loss of his good, was to bring about a far greater good. This is the only way to successfully cope with our experience of evil. Otherwise we are left lamenting our loss of good, potential or otherwise, and are left with no answer to man's search for meaning.

Gen 41:5 *He slept and dreamed a second time: and behold, seven heads of grain came up on one stalk, healthy and good-* The

corn of the Nile valley, the *triticum compositum*, was famed for bearing seven ears upon one stalk; and it was exactly that which was to be offered to the gods. The paintings of the Thebaid show stalks with seven heads of grain being specifically offered to the gods, and other stalks being eaten by the people. Joseph's suggestion was that it not be offered to the gods, but be stored up by a man acting on behalf of God, and given to hungry people. This was all a request to Pharaoh and the Egyptians to invert their whole belief system.

Gen 41:6 *Behold, seven heads of grain, thin and blasted with the east wind, sprung up after them-* There is an element of unreality in this, because as the miserable critics correctly point out, a wind directly east is rare in Egypt. But this was the point- a new thing was to arise in Egypt. And it was an east wind which destroyed a later Pharaoh at the Red Sea, and was used by God in bringing the plagues. The dreams, like Joseph's about his dead mother bowing to him, all have this element of unreality which speaks of something Divine. We could observe further that the hot winds which afflict Egypt came from the South; it is the land of Israel which is affected by the *hamsin*, the hot wind from the East. Perhaps Joseph gathered from this that the famine inducing East wind was going to affect Israel too; it would come primarily as judgment upon his family, but the wind would be so strong that Egypt would suffer that judgment too. He would have been encouraged to see that this was the very scenario which would make his brothers come begging to him for grain, as he had dreamed years ago. And it would have encouraged him to suggest Pharaoh appoint a man to manage things, envisaging exactly how events did indeed transpire. But still he had to wait through the seven good years for the famine to come. In faith, and having adopted God's perspective, he still considered this as a "soon" fulfilment of God's prophetic word.

Gen 41:7 *The thin heads of grain swallowed up the seven healthy and full ears. Pharaoh awoke, and behold, it was a dream-* The swallowing up of good by evil was perceived by the Egyptians as a sign the gods were either dead or had turned against them. And they were intended to think that- and come to realize that Yahweh was the only God, responsible for good and 'evil' (Is. 45:5-7).

Gen 41:8 *It happened in the morning that his spirit was troubled, and he sent and called for all of Egypt's magicians and wise men. Pharaoh told them his dreams, but there was no one who could interpret them to Pharaoh-* The situation repeated at least twice in Daniel's time (Dan. 2:1; Dan. 4:5). These similarities are in order to teach us that our situations are not unique, but rather are in line with the Father's previous activities with men.

One theme of the record is that circumstances repeat in life, because there is the higher hand of God over all. These men came to Joseph in the morning- and we are told concerning Pharaoh: "And it was in the morning that his spirit was troubled" (Gen. 41:8). The butler and baker tell Joseph: "We have dreamed a dream, and there is no one to interpret it" (Gen. 40:8), and Pharaoh likewise told Joseph: "I have dreamed a dream and there is no one to interpret it" (Gen. 41:15). Joseph's "Do interpretations not belong to God?" (Gen. 40:8)is then matched by what he tells Pharaoh: "It is not me; God will restore Pharaoh's peace of mind" (Gen. 41:16). Joseph saw the parallels. And just as he had the right, humble attitude about dream interpretation in the first case, so he did in the second case when the situation was repeated. We may fail the first time and get it right the second time; or get it right the first time and fail the second time. Or like Joseph, get it right and keep getting it right.

Gen 41:9 *Then the chief cupbearer spoke to Pharaoh, saying, I remember my sins today-* I discussed on Gen. 40:1 the question

of whether the butler really had sinned. But all the same, he felt he had committed a very serious sin in allowing the busyness of daily life and his demanding job to make him simply forget Joseph's need and tragedy. Perhaps an intensive plural is being used here- as if to mean 'my very great sin'. To forget others' need due to the busyness of our lives is a great sin.

Gen 41:10 *Pharaoh was angry with his servants, and put me in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, me and the chief baker-* I suggested earlier that the butler may not have sinned and like Joseph was in prison at the whim or "anger" of others. Therefore he became an example to Joseph of how Divine dreams could really change destiny. For Joseph too was placed in prison due to the "wrath" of Potiphar.

Gen 41:11 *We dreamed a dream in one night, I and he. We dreamed each man according to the interpretation of his dream-* The idea is that the interpretations came true.

Gen 41:12 *There was with us there a young man, a Hebrew, servant to the captain of the guard, and we told him, and he interpreted to us our dreams. To each man according to his dream he interpreted-* I suggested that Potiphar was in fact the manager of the prison, and also the father of Joseph's future wife. In this case we have this confirmed, for even in prison Joseph was known as the servant of the captain of the guard, who was Potiphar. Joseph is described here with the term for "slave". Evidence has been found of Egyptian laws and culture which stated that a slave must never become a ruler nor be arrayed in royal clothes, not even as a reward for faithfulness. I will later suggest that Joseph calmly believed that he would be exalted to power in Egypt, so that his brothers would come bowing to him for food when his sheaf [grain] stood and their grain had collapsed. Just as God had revealed to him in his youth. So Egypt, the world, appeared to preclude Joseph from ever getting

to a position where he would be in power in Egypt, receiving international visitors [his brothers] and having them bow to him. But he believed in God's word to him, and believed that this would happen even if Egypt, the world, appeared to make that an impossibility. We face the same challenge of faith.

Gen 41:13 *It happened, as he interpreted to us, so it was: he restored me to my office, and he hanged him-* The implication was that Joseph's interpretations were what had restored him.

Gen 41:14 *Then Pharaoh sent and called Joseph, and they brought him hastily out of the dungeon. He shaved himself, changed his clothing, and came in to Pharaoh-* "They made him run hastily out of the dungeon...and changed his raiment" (AVmg.)- This speaks of the energy of Christ's resurrection; the change of clothing would then speak of the Lord's change of nature, Zech. 3:3,4.

Gen 41:15 *Pharaoh said to Joseph, I have dreamed a dream, and there is no one who can interpret it. I have heard it said of you, that when you hear a dream you can interpret it-* Perhaps Paul alludes here in saying that no man can know the things of the Spirit of God, apart from the man to whom the Spirit reveals them (1 Cor. 2:10,11). In this case, Joseph like Daniel is being set up as our pattern.

Gen 41:16 *Joseph answered Pharaoh, saying, It isn't in me. God will give Pharaoh an answer of peace-* I have developed the point throughout this chapter that the nature of the dreams and their interpretation was a direct attack on Pharaoh's belief system; God was seeking to convert him, as He was the Pharaoh at the time of the exodus. The LXX brings this out here: "Without God an answer of safety shall not be given to Pharaoh". The one God alone could give the king peace.

Joseph at this point was clearly the role model chosen by Daniel in similar situations, centuries later. And this is how the

Biblical record should function for us too. This is the advantage of knowing the Biblical text; we see our own situations are not without precedent, but are repetitions of the same Divine hand in earlier human history.

Joseph is repeating his earlier experience with the butler and baker when interpreting their dreams. He insists that he is not of himself a magician or psychologist. He stresses that God can interpret dreams, and therefore, he, Joseph, can interpret dreams- implying that he is very very close to God and feels he knows God's mind. He is confident he manifests God. In Gen. 40:8 the Hebrew is a word play, although not apparent in translation: "Isn't it *God* who has interpretations? So tell *me*". And he says the same here to Pharaoh. He got it right the first time, and he gets it right again when the temptation to self-exalt is again placed before him.

Gen 41:17 *Pharaoh spoke to Joseph, In my dream, behold, I stood on the brink of the river-* Literally, on the lip of the river; this apparently is an Egyptian term and is found in the papyri discovered from that time. It has been observed that the text here was written by one who was fluent in both Egyptian and Hebrew, which would fit Moses, who was educated in all the learning of Egypt.

Gen 41:18 *And behold, there came up out of the river seven cattle, fat and sleek. They fed in the marsh grass-* 'Coming up' is a major theme. The ears of corn 'came up' (5), as the cattle came up from the river. The word is used of how blossom 'came up' on the vine in the butler's dream (Gen. 40:10), of how Joseph 'came up out of' the pit (Gen. 37:28); and of how finally the brothers came up to Joseph (Gen. 44:33). The Egyptian hieroglyph for a year was the picture of a cow. So the interpretation of seven years was logical. Drawings of seven fat cows are found on Egyptian tombs from the time; they represented a prosperous afterlife. The

dream is seeking to lead Pharaoh away from these ideas, and to see that in this life he is going to have both a blessed future for a while, and also suffering. And he cannot just let the future happen, hoping and assuming his future will be good; he must act now to manage it succesfully. The later Pharaoh, like so many people, failed to learn from history.

Gen 41:19 *And behold, seven other cattle came up after them, poor and very ugly and thin, such as I never saw in all the land of Egypt for ugliness-* There is an element of the unreal in all the dreams in the Joseph story; this is not simply seven years of famine, but famine such as had never been known, whereby animals ate each other (:20). Pharaoh says that the seven good cattle came up out of the river Nile, in line with his belief that the gods of the Nile only gave good. But we are specifically told in :3 that the bad cattle also came up out of the Nile, "seven other cattle came up after them out of the river, ugly and thin". Pharaoh cannot bring himself to say this about the Nile. But he was being taught that his entire worldview was mistaken. Both good and evil came from Israel's God, not the Nile, and the Nile gods were not therefore only the source of good. And he appears to have the humility to accept this.

Gen 41:20 *The thin and ugly cattle ate up the first seven fat cattle-* Animals only eat each other in extreme famine. The dreams of Pharaoh at the time of Joseph were a clear inversion of the surrounding pagan ideas. One of the foremost Egyptian gods, Osiris, had seven cows; it must have taken some courage for Joseph to comment on the fact that the seven fat cows were to be eaten up by the seven thin ones (possibly representing Israel in the long term, cp. Hos. 4:15–16; Am. 4:1). The pagan ideas of Pharaoh were not explicitly corrected; instead, the supremacy of Yahweh and His people over them was taught by implication.

"Ate up" is the same word used in Gen. 43:2 of Joseph's brothers eating up the corn of the good years. They then are presented as the "ugly" [s.w. "evil"] cattle in Joseph's life who meant evil to him (Gen. 50:20), who was described with the same term as the handsome sleek cattle; see on :4.

Gen 41:21 *And when they had eaten them up, it couldn't be known that they had eaten them, but they were still ugly, as at the beginning. So I awoke-* This was not simply a prediction of seven years of plentiful harvest followed by seven years of famine. The idea was that the evilness [s.w. "ugly"] of the famine years would be neutralized. But as Joseph explained, that was in fact conditional upon wise management and strong leadership in the first seven years. This conditional aspect to the fulfilments would have made him reflect that his own dreams likewise depended partly upon his sheaf standing up, of his own volition. The description of the thin cows eating up the fat cows (Gen. 41:21) is alluded to in the Hebrew text of the curses for Israel's disobedience in Lev. 26:26: "you shall eat, and not be satisfied". The seven years of famine were therefore to be seen as a curse. Disobedient Israel would be treated like Egypt, which is a theme throughout all the curses of Lev. 26. Egypt represents the world, and those rejected from the new Israel will likewise "be condemned with the world" (1 Cor. 11:32), sent back into the world they loved to share the world's judgment.

Gen 41:22 *I saw in my dream, and behold, seven heads of grain came up on one stalk, full and good-* "Heads of grain" translates a single Hebrew word which has no reference to grain; it means a stream, a branch, something which comes off something else. And "stalk" likewise translates a Hebrew word usually translated "branch"; it is the word used for the seven branches of the candlestick. The picture may not necessarily have been of grain, although we shall later read of grain being

gathered in abundance; but of seven branches coming out of one branch, the impression being of fecundity. The idea could be that the goodness of the Israelite candlestick was to bring blessing on the world to neutralize the evil. The Egyptian corn god, Npri, was symbolized by seven such ears of corn. But the Egyptian gods were to be shown unable to resist or countervail the evil which Yahweh would bring. And Pharaoh humbles himself to accept that, whereas a later Pharaoah refused, and so all the ten plagues were targetted at the Egyptian gods to make him learn that lesson. Man can avoid so much suffering, if he humbles himself before God's word and simply believes it- rather than insisting upon being an empirical learner.

Gen 41:23 *And behold, seven heads of grain, withered, thin, and blasted with the east wind, sprung up after them-* The same word for "blasted" is repeatedly used as a figure for Divine judgment (Dt. 28:22; 1 Kings 8:37; 2 Kings 19:26 "corn blasted"; Am. 4:9 etc.). Seeing that Egypt doesn't usually get an east wind, Pharaoh was surely intended to understand that this spoke of superhuman judgment from one almighty God.

Gen 41:24 *The thin heads of grain swallowed up the seven good heads of grain. I told it to the magicians, but there was no one who could explain it to me-* Dream interpretation was a major science with the Egyptians. There were "dream books" which were consulted to give the meaning of the various things dreamt, and provided guidelines for interpretation. None of these had the ring of truth for Pharaoh. "Explain" is s.w. "declared" in :25; *God* explained / declared it whereas the magicians could not. Yet it was Joseph who in contrast to the magicians declared it. Joseph knew that he was God's man in this situation, the manifestation of God, although as he clarifies in Gen. 50:19 "Am I in the place of God?". However that sentence could as well be translated "I am in the place of God", and therefore, in the context, his

brothers need not fear that he would condemn them as God didn't.

Gen 41:25 *Joseph said to Pharaoh, The dream of Pharaoh is one-* This is in contrast to the two dreams of the butler and baker, which they assumed were one singular dream, but had different interpretations. See on Gen. 40:5,8.

What God is about to do, He has declared to Pharaoh- See on :24. Speaking within a society where there were multiple gods, Joseph gives no opening statement to the effect that he believes in only one God. He simply speaks from that assumed position, and our witness likewise has power from speaking from assumed positions about God and His Son, rather than seeking to offer some apologetic argument for those positions. When you talk to an agnostic about God, using phrases like "God willing", talking unashamedly and naturally about your prayers, you make a powerful witness. As noted on :38, Joseph's language of only one God rubbed off on Pharaoh and he too started reasoning likewise.

The Hebrew is literally 'what He is doing'. Joseph so believed in the dreams that for him, it was as if the whole sequence of events was already in motion. He adopted the Divine perspective, as we should; see on :32.

Gen 41:26 *The seven good cattle are seven years; and the seven good heads of grain are seven years-* Seven was understood as a Divine number, a good number. That it would be associated with good years was understandable for the Egyptians, but not that it should be associated with evil. The belief system of Pharaoh was being challenged- the one God of Joseph and Israel was responsible for both good and evil (Is. 45:5-8).

The dream is one- See on Gen. 40:5,8.

Gen 41:27 *The seven thin and ugly cattle that came up after them are seven years, and also the seven empty heads of grain*

blasted with the east wind; they will be seven years of famine- Several studies have revealed the similarities between Moses' account of Joseph and the Gilgamesh Epic and other Mesopotamian writings. World-wide famines of seven years' duration are a common theme in many of the Epics. But they are usually explained as arising from the death or anger of a demon / god (See documentation in Donald Redford, *The Biblical Story of Joseph* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1970) p. 98; C.H. Gordon, *The Common Background of Greek and Hebrew Civilizations* (New York: Norton, 1965) pp. 69,88). Gilgamesh 6.104 describes Ishtar as preparing for the seven year famine in an almost identical way to Joseph. Ishtar is being deconstructed, and brought down to a human level- a faithful human being, Joseph, rather than any god or Ishtar, was who prepared for and staved off the effects of the famine through his obedience to God. And it was the one God of Israel who brought the seven year famine, rather than any demon or Satan figure. The similarities between Joseph and Osiris, the Egyptian fertility god, 'the provider of food', also can't be lightly dismissed. Like Osiris, Joseph was confined until the word of his prediction came true, and afterwards he taught wisdom to the elders of Egypt (Ps. 105:19,22). The allusion is surely intended to rid the Israelites of any hankering to still believe in Osiris, within whose cult they had lived for 400 years, and instead to believe that it is Yahweh who provides fertility and the blessing of food through His obedient servants here on earth like Joseph. The pagan fantasies are alluded to but brought down to more human, earthly terms, with Yahweh being presented as the only true God.

"Empty" is the word used of the empty pit that had no water where Joseph was thrown (Gen. 37:24). It is quite likely that the pit where Joseph was cast was in fact a grain storage pit that was

"empty". There were such "tithepits" in the old England, where grain was also stored in pits. The description of it as "empty" of itself supposes that it was at times "full" of something- probably grain. Joseph himself had in essence been through what the people were to suffer, lack of water and empty, dry conditions; and had been saved out of it. As 2 Cor. 1:4 makes clear, all we suffer or experience is in order for us in some way to help others who suffer. Only in this way can we answer man's native, inborn search for meaning.

In a dated but fascinating book entitled *The Language of the Pentateuch in its Relation to Egyptian* (Oxford: O.U.P., 1933), A.S. Yahuda demonstrated that the syntax and vocabulary of the Joseph story is very similar to Egyptian idiom. This would strengthen my suggestion that Moses is consciously seeking to engage with and deconstruct the Egyptian stories, amongst whose influence Israel had lived for four centuries. Moses is writing what could be termed 'The *Israelite* epic', in response to the 'stories' and epics of the surrounding peoples amongst whom they lived and through whom they travelled. But Moses paints this picture, constructs the true, Divinely inspired version of the story, through engagement with and allusion to the incorrect stories and epics of the Gentiles. And in linguistic terms, Yahuda shows at depth how Moses is writing with allusion to Egypt and Egyptian in a manner which only the Israelites who had lived in Egypt would have perceived- e.g. Moses records how the cows in Pharaoh's dream represented years, but the hieroglyphic symbol for "year" was a cow. And Moses, trained in the learning of Egypt whilst being a native Hebrew speaker, would have been the appropriate person for the Spirit to inspire to write in this way.

Gen 41:28 *That is the thing which I spoke to Pharaoh. What God is about to do, He has shown to Pharaoh-* Joseph invites

Pharaoh to perceive him as speaking for God; and Pharaoh agrees, stating that God's Spirit is in Joseph (:38). Joseph mixes the ideas of present and future in saying that this thing "is" and yet is "about" to be done; hence GNB: "It is just as I told you-God has shown you what He is going to do". The weather pattern was already working out. And God through Joseph had shown it to Pharaoh.

Gen 41:29 *Behold, there come seven years of great plenty throughout all the land of Egypt-* The Hebrew for "plenty" is used many times in the record here, but only twice elsewhere; Prov. 3:10, as so many Proverbs, alludes to this historical incident in saying that if Yahweh is honoured with substance [a reference to the tithe], "so shall your barns be filled with plenty". Pharaoh's acceptance of Joseph's interpretations was tantamount to rejecting his paganic belief system, and so effectively Yahweh was being honoured with Egypt's substance. The emphasis upon "all the land of Egypt" may mean a more radical change in weather than we immediately imagine. For the Egyptians only cultivated along the banks of the Nile, and a good harvest was a result of the Nile flooding the river plains to a high level. But good harvest throughout "all the land of Egypt" seems to imply far more than that; there would be abundant harvest not only along the Nile flood plain. The emphasis is upon the good harvests coming in Egypt, but famine consuming the entire "land" or 'world' around Egypt, the land promised to Abraham. Joseph clearly perceives that therefore his brothers will come from Canaan to Egypt to buy food and he wants to be the one before whom they bow in gratitude for it.

Gen 41:30 *There will arise after them seven years of famine, and all the plenty will be forgotten in the land of Egypt. The famine will consume the land-* The same word is used of how the butler forgot Joseph (Gen. 40:23). Joseph had spent two years (:1)

reflecting how blessing was so easily forgotten, and he imagined how this would be the case. We too easily forget blessing, it is human to do so; hence the "cup of blessing which we bless" at the regular breaking of bread meeting. This is designed to help us against this tendency to forget blessing and be swamped by what is immediately before our eyes. People want to enjoy blessing now, and then they forget it. Joseph knew that the way of wisdom, seeing both good and evil as from God, meant that in time of blessing one must remember the evil and seek to negate it. He could of course have become swamped with bitterness, but he didn't.

Gen 41:31 *And the plenty will not be known in the land by reason of that famine which follows; for it will be very grievous-* "Which follows" translates two Hebrew words which together can mean 'which rightly follows'. The imagery of the dreams, such as blasting and the east wind, is all elsewhere used of Divine judgment. "Seven years of famine" is specifically stated to represent Divine judgment in 2 Sam. 24:13. There would be blessing and then judgment. Perhaps this was God's way of saying that Egypt's injustice to Joseph was to be punished by judgment, and yet through Joseph's grace they were to be saved out of it. See on :34. Just as Joseph saved Egypt from the consequences of the evil they did to him, so he was to save his brothers from the consequences of their sins. Whilst we do at times suffer the consequences of sinas David did, it is not inevitably nor always so, and the Lord's work is in fact to save us from those consequences. See on :34.

Gen 41:32 *The dream was doubled to Pharaoh, because the thing is established by God, and God will shortly bring it to pass-* The idea is 'God is hastening to do it', as if Joseph saw that this apparently future sequence of events was already being operationalized; see on :25. The idea may be that God will very

suddenly bring about the fulfilment. Which is why we cannot predict things like the Lord's return, as if we have a timeliness of preceding events. The fulfilment of the dreams in the Genesis story was always sudden. The good harvests began immediately, the butler and Baker had their dreams fulfilled suddenly, and the brothers suddenly found themselves bowing to Joseph. Or we could reflect that the dreams of the prisoners and Pharaoh began to come true immediately; but Joseph's dreams didn't. He was to accept by faith that the process leading to the fulfilment had started right away.

Each of the three dreams in the Joseph story is a double dream (Joseph's dreams, the dreams of butler and baker, Pharaoah's dreams). When Joseph tells Pharaoh that double dreams mean they definitely come true, he said this, therefore, in faith- that his own dreams would come true. That faith is contrasted with both his father and his brothers protesting that these dreams could never come true. And I suggest he had this in mind all through, that circumstances would work out so that his brothers came bowing to him. I suggest that is what motivated him to suggest Pharaoh set a man over all Egypt to manage the people would come to buy grain- inwardly scheming that he would be the one chosen. He showed great spiritual ambition in all this. But Joseph also understands the double dream of Pharaoah to mean that God will "soon" fulfil it- and the double dream of the butler and baker indeed immediately came true. Joseph therefore understood that his own dreams would "soon" come true; but he understood that the "soon" was relative to God's view of time, and not his. The dreams of Pharaoh would take seven to fourteen years to come true; but Joseph understood that as "soon". We like Joseph must see that our redemption and the fulfilment of God's plan for us is likewise "soon"- in the ultimate perspective.

Gen 41:33 *Now therefore let Pharaoh look for a discreet and wise man, and set him over the land of Egypt-* Joseph knew that there must be some fulfilment of the prophetic revelation that his sheaf must arise. I dare to think that Joseph made this suggestion hinting that he could be that man. The Hebrew for "look" is literally 'to see'. Joseph is definitely offering himself- 'see for yourself a discreet and wise man', he tells Pharaoh. When Pharaoh is looking at and 'seeing' Joseph right in front of him. This was spiritual ambition indeed. The years in slavery and prison, all the rejection, injustice and betrayal by his brethren... did not break his faith in God's prophetic word to him. Had he not had those experiences, and the dreams had come true painlessly, he would have been proud; and there would have been no reason for his brothers to bow before him. There can be no true, legitimate exaltation without the humbling hand of providence first. By seeking to fulfil the dreams, Joseph showed that he recognized that God's revelation requires some degree of human effort to fulfil it. But we note that he understood the dreams as meaning that he was to care for and provide for his brothers- not simply get aggrandisment over them for its own sake. See on Gen. 45:6 for another example.

The same Hebrew phrase "discreet and wise man" is used about the leaders of Israel (Dt. 1:13) and also every individual in Israel (Dt. 4:6; Ps. 107:43; Hos. 14:9), and is used multiple times in Proverbs about whoever gives heed to God's word. Joseph knew that he had received God's word, and that it had given him the wisdom he had just shared with Pharaoh. His desire to be set over Egypt was not motivated by personal pride, but in order to be a blessing to the world and to save his brethren, all in fulfilment of the Abrahamic promises. We too cannot just wait for these promises to be fulfilled; they are the basis of the new covenant in which we are. We must have vision and be proactive

as to how we can be a blessing and source of salvation in this world.

Gen 41:34 *Let Pharaoh do this, and let him appoint overseers over the land-* "Appoint" is the same word used three times of how Joseph was appointed to authority in prison and in Potiphar's house (Gen. 39:4,5; 40:4). He had clearly been prepared for the responsibility he would now bear and the job he was to do. "Overseers" is the same word used of Pharaoh's officers with whom Joseph had been imprisoned. All he had been through was now making sense and was appropriate background experience for what he now had to do. And so it shall be in our eternal work in the Kingdom; we are being prepared for it now, although we don't realize the details.

And take up the fifth part of the land of Egypt's produce in the seven plenteous years- A fifth was a double tithe. It was also seen as the amount which should be paid in compensation for theft or fraud, especially when committed in ignorance (Lev. 5:16; Lev. 6:5; 22:14; 27:13; Num. 5:7). This is quite a significant catena of verses; and we must remember that the Law of Moses was codifying things which were already understood. It all suggests that Egypt had sinned, even if most were ignorant, and there had to be this compensation. I discussed on :31 the idea that the famine was Divine judgment upon Egypt in response to what they had done to Joseph. It was Joseph who suggested this "fifth", so we wonder if he did struggle with feelings of anger over it all, and yet came down on the side of mercy rather than judgment. He clearly wanted the brothers to come to repentance through experience of discipline, he wanted there to be some recognition of wrong, as he saw it as a step required toward their salvation. And so perhaps he also saw the situation with the Egyptians.

Gen 41:35 *Let them gather all the food of these good years that come, and lay up grain under the hand of Pharaoh for food in*

the cities, and let them keep it- The "them" refers to the overseers whom Joseph suggests should be appointed. It would have meant a huge administrative task and a shakeup of the existing administration and government. Ps. 105:22 states that Pharaoh gave Joseph power "to discipline (AV "bind") his princes at his pleasure, and to teach his elders wisdom". The wisdom Joseph had was from God (see on :33), so this was really an invitation to teach the Egyptian leadership the wisdom of the true God. There is no record that Joseph ever 'bound' any princes; he didn't want to do to others what had been done to him, rather than seeking the opportunity to make others suffer as he had. The idea presumably was that any who didn't invert their superstitions and follow Joseph's policies would be disciplined or "bound" in prison. There would've been much opposition to Joseph's plans; he was a foreigner, a newcomer without political experience, and he was asking Egypt to go against their previous superstitions and religious ideas. But he was empowered by Pharaoh to do so. We tend to therefore think that effectively, Pharaoh accepted Joseph's religion, or at least, rejected his own. During the seven good years, this would have been difficult; it would have seemed that nothing now could go too wrong. So the way Pharaoh persevered in faith in the dream over an extended period is significant.

Gen 41:36 *The food will be for a store to the land against the seven years of famine, which will be in the land of Egypt-* "A store" is the noun from the verb 'to oversee', which was been used about Joseph being made an overseer in prison and in Potiphar's house (Gen. 39:4,5; 40:4). The food would oversee them; and yet Joseph would be the supreme overseer. We can therefore understand the association perceived between Joseph and the food, for he was given a title meaning 'Bread of life' (:45).

That the land not perish through the famine- This is surely alluded to in the Bible's most well known verse; God so loved this world, as He did Egypt [which represents the world] that He sent His Son, prefigured in Joseph, that whoever believes in him "should not perish" (Jn. 3:16).

Gen 41:37 *The thing was good in the eyes of Pharaoh, and in the eyes of all his servants-* As noted on :36, it all required quite some faith in Joseph personally and the Divine message he was giving; and that faith had to continue over the seven good prosperous years. And prosperity is never a good environment for faith in God regarding future things.

Gen 41:38 *Pharaoh said to his servants, Can we find such a one as this, a man in whom is the Spirit of God?-* Pharaoh believed in multiple gods, but Joseph had adopted the assumed position that there was only one God. And that rubbed off upon Pharaoh, who now speaks likewise. He was open to the inversion of his belief system and was blessed because of it. Pharaoh means that Joseph knew the mind of God; this is what it means to have the Spirit of God, in this context.

"In whom the spirit of God is" is the same phrase used Belshazzar when he addresses Daniel in Dan. 5:14, "I have heard of thee, that the spirit of the gods is in thee". On one hand Daniel had to perceive the connections with Joseph, but on the other, God worked to nudge him towards this.

Gen 41:39 *Pharaoh said to Joseph, Because God has shown you all of this, there is none so discreet and wise as you-* Without doubt the absolute power of the Pharaohs made them capricious and often unwise in who they rewarded on the cusp of emotion or personal pleasure. But the exaltation was so major and so sudden, and was respected for the rest of Pharaoh's life, that we have to see something more here than the momentary emotional outburst of a powerful man. He saw something of God, and as

noted throughout this chapter, he had accepted the inversion of his belief system, thanks to Joseph.

Gen 41:40 *You shall be over my house-* Pharaoh wanted Joseph to not only rule over all Egypt, but over his own family (:43). We see here another hint that Pharaoh personally accepted Joseph and wanted his private matters ruled according to Joseph's Divine principles. Joseph had been prepared for this by being made ruler over Pharaoh's house. If we keep responding to God's movement in our lives, one experience leads to another.

And according to your word will all my people be ruled. Only in the throne I will be greater than you- This must have been the greatest and quickest exaltation of all time. A man who was just an hour before a miserable prisoner shaving himself in the prison washroom was now the second most powerful person on the planet. It speaks of the Lord's exaltation, from earth to heaven, from a shamed, bleeding, spittle covered body lying in a cave in Palestine... to the exalted Lord of heaven and earth. But it also demonstrates for all time that no human situation is as permanent as it may seem. God can really do anything.

It's a debatable question as to whether Pharaoh created this new position, or whether by giving Joseph this exaltation he was effectively firing another man from his post; or maybe, providentially enough, the post was open. It could be that all this happened two full years, precisely two years, after the exaltation of the butler (:1), which would mean that again it was the time of Pharaoh's birthday, when apparently judgments were made; the baker put to death, the butler exalted. So perhaps the position was open. Joseph would have accepted the position fully aware of how easily such senior officers could be removed or killed by Pharaoh. But unlike Daniel, he accepted the position because he knew that he could use it to save his family, and he perceived that it was part of the fulfilment of the dreams he had been given.

That Joseph remained in power all his life beneath the Pharaoh was of itself a testament to God's power and purpose. Or perhaps the Pharaoh came closer to the morality of the one God whom he had come to recognize, and ceased to act in the capricious manner of despots.

The rulership of Egypt according to Joseph's word was backed up by the power to bind any objectors in prison, and to teach the officials Divine wisdom (Ps. 105:22). It points forward to the supremacy of the word of the Lord Jesus.

Gen 41:41 *Pharaoh said to Joseph, Behold, I have set you over all the land of Egypt-* Joseph was *given* the *land* of Egypt (Gen. 41:41 Heb.), using the same words as in Gen. 45:18; 48:4 concerning how the true *land* -of Canaan- had been *given* to Abraham's children. The gift of the land of Egypt was but a primary fulfilment of the greater promise. Again, we see the theme developed of primary fulfilment of the promises in this life. The promises of being fruitful and being given a land were being fulfilled, in a primary sense, in Israel's experience in Egypt (Gen. 48:4 cp. 47:27). And that fruitfulness was shared with all Egypt in the seven years of plenty. Abraham's seed was in a primary sense a blessing for the world (Egypt).

Gen 41:42 *Pharaoh took off his signet ring from his hand, and put it on Joseph's hand, and arrayed him in robes of fine linen, and put a gold chain about his neck-* Joseph had been given a special robe by Jacob which he lost; the garment Potiphar gave him was likewise grabbed from him by Potiphar's wife; so he must have thought 'how long will this one last?'. And his previous experiences were so that he would now not feel proud about having this robe of honour from Pharaoh. We note how Biblical history repeated in the similar experiences of Daniel; and we can discern such similarities in our own lives, as the Bible's narrative helps us too to make sense of our lives. The exaltation and

empowerment of Joseph clearly speaks of the Lord's exaltation and similar total empowerment, so that He functions as God, without being God Himself in person.

Gen 41:43 *And he made him to ride in the second chariot which he had. They cried before him, Tender father!-* Although only 30, Joseph already had a fatherly image because of his loving care for others. Or we can read as AV "Bow the knee". Joseph's faith in his dreams would've helped him not to be proud. He knew this wasn't the fulfilment of his dream of others bowing to him, but it was going to lead up to the primary fulfilment of it. He would've realized that if his brothers came to Egypt, they too would have to bow the knee to him, and thus fulfil his dreams. So he would've been on the lookout for them coming to him. Adam Clarke suggests the term could be translated "Father of blessing". In this case, we see Joseph as a primary fulfilment of the promised Abrahamic seed who would bring blessing upon Israel's Gentile neighbours.

He set him over all the land of Egypt- It seems there were rulers over the regions of Egypt, but this was a new position created- total control over the whole nation. Joseph was a foreigner and unknown to anyone much. His rulership was very strongly dependent upon his personal relationship with the king, and the direct delegation to him of all Pharaoh's power. This again gives an insight into the Lord's relationship with the Father. The dreams and their interpretation would have been preached and taught throughout Egypt; otherwise there would have been no motivation to pay the double tithe and make operational the plans which Joseph had. Those dreams were God's word; and perhaps some perceived what we noted earlier, that the seven years of famine suggested Divine punishment, and they needed to repent of sin.

Gen 41:44 *Pharaoh said to Joseph, I am Pharaoh, and without you shall no man lift up his hand or his foot in all the land of Egypt-* As noted on :43, for Joseph to practically have authority to execute his plans, he needed a clearly understood delegation of total power to him from Pharaoh; and this is what happened. It gives insight into the nature of the Lord's current exaltation. Lifting up hand or foot could be understood as idioms for agriculture; Dt. 11:10 speaks of Egypt as a place where agriculture depended upon the watering of the land by foot.

Gen 41:45 *Pharaoh called Joseph's name Zaphnath-Paaneah-* 'Saviour of the world', or 'bread of life'. The Lord was likewise given a new name on ascension (Phil. 2:6-9; Rev. 3:12). See on :36. The giving of an Egyptian name and an Egyptian wife, daughter of a higher caste leading figure, is typical of how Egyptian citizenship was granted to foreigners. Joseph the Hebrew accepted this. Like us in this world, he was on one hand an Egyptian, appearing as one to his brothers and also to the Canaanites when he returned there to bury his father. But he retained his essential identification as a Hebrew and named his children appropriately.

And he gave him Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera priest of On as a wife. Joseph went out over the land of Egypt- "Asenath" means 'worshipper of Nath'. Joseph's wife had to forget all about her pagan past (Ps. 45:10 = Dt. 21:13), especially her father's house. Joseph alluded to what she had gone through when he spoke of how he too had forgotten all his past suffering and his father's house (41:51). What a pair they were! Both had broken free of their pasts and were dedicated to the new life together. As such they typify the relationship between Christ and His bride.

It seems hardly chance that Potiphera is the same word as Potiphar. Under Egyptian law, a slave or foreigner could not have any exalted political position unless they married their master's

daughter. So it would make sense that Pharaoh ordered Joseph to marry his master Potiphar's daughter, so that his exaltation remained legal. It could be that "Priest of On" just meant he was from the ruling caste, rather than that he was actually a priest. I suggested on Gen. 39 that Potiphar didn't believe his wife's story. Could it be that he also bore the title "Priest of On", and now his daughter married Joseph? "On" is Heliopolis (as in LXX), and I suggested that the "round house" prison was in fact the circular tower of Heliopolis. All this points to an identity between Potiphar and Potiphera. See on Gen. 39:19; it was the same "captain of the guard" who was also the manager of the prison. There was therefore this man Potiphar who was hanging around in Joseph's life, clearly used by providence. And why do we have to as it were read between the lines of the record to make this connection? Because that is how providence works, subtle rather than direct and 'in your face'. You have to read between the lines of your own life to see it, rather than having providence baldly stated. Joseph would have realized that clearly God's hand was at work with him. As he stood as a nervous 17 year old in a slave market in Egypt... it was all of God's grace and plan that he was bought by Potiphar or one of his servants. But it took him many years to perceive this. And the same can be said of events in our lives.

Gen 41:46 *Joseph was thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh king of Egypt. Joseph went out from the presence of Pharaoh, and went throughout all the land of Egypt-* "Went throughout" is literally 'to cross over', and is a strange term to use. But the Hebrew *abar* is the root of the word "Hebrew". Literally, Joseph 'Hebrewed' throughout Egypt. News of his one God principles, the word of that God in the dreams, the rejection of superstition and paganic ideas... along with Joseph's personal travels throughout the land would have spread the

Hebrew religion throughout Egypt. This would explain why even 500 years later, a significant number of Egyptians considered themselves Hebrews and left Egypt with Israel to settle in Canaan.

Gen 41:47 *In the seven plenteous years the earth produced abundantly-* Literally, 'by handfuls', a term more appropriate to the harvesting of rice than grain. The exact crop isn't specific in the original Hebrew.

Gen 41:48 *He gathered up all the food of the seven years which were in the land of Egypt, and laid up the food in the cities: the food of the field, which was around every city, he laid up in the same-* The bread laid up in preparation for the famine seems to be alluded to when Paul writes of laying up the word as a foundation against the judgment (1 Tim. 6:19). To build storehouses in every town was a significant amount of work; perhaps it was in bitterness at this memory that a later Pharaoh made the Hebrews build him storehouses (Ex. 1:11).

Gen 41:49 *Joseph laid up grain-* Laying up or gathering corn would have made him reflect upon his dreams; he realized it was his sheaf standing up, and so he expected his brothers to come and bow down to it for the sake of corn.

As the sand of the sea, very much, until he stopped counting, for it was without number- This was the description of Abraham's seed. He realized that all this was happening for the sake of preserving Abraham's seed; which meant his brothers would come to him and bow down in search of corn from him. Likewise world events can happen for the sake of the people of God, who may be a tiny minority.

Gen 41:50 *To Joseph were born two sons before the year of famine came, whom Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera priest of On, bore to him-* The implication is that he had other children, but these are the two who remained within the purpose of God.

It's a sober thought that such a spiritual person as Joseph produced children who didn't all accept the covenant.

Gen 41:51 *Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh, For, he said, God has made me forget all my toil, and all my father's house-* Joseph's (half-Gentile) sons were counted as the twelve tribes of Jacob, just as we are Christ's sons (Heb. 2:13). Joseph was called "tender father" (41:43 mg.) as the Lord will be called 'Father' in the future age (Is. 9:6 Heb.)

The same word for "toil" is used of the "travail" of the Lord's soul during the crucifixion process (Is. 53:11). He forgot the pain of it all but clearly remembered what had happened. His apparent hardness to the brothers was therefore not from any motive of revenge. We find here a profound statement of God's ability to make us "forget" things which otherwise would remain an endless fountain of bitterness and regret. He clearly had not forgotten his family, and it could be argued that he did all he did with the hope of saving them, although on the right spiritual basis. It is clear from :52 that he considered Egypt "the land of my affliction"; he had not forgotten the affliction in prison and through the slander of Potiphar's wife; but he forgot the pain psychologically and didn't keep reliving it. He "forgot" in the sense that God forgets sin; the fact of them is still there, as witnessed by the Biblical history being full of the record of forgiven sins. But they are forgotten in the sense of not being counted against us, and this is how Joseph was helped to "forget" his sufferings. "My toil" could refer to hard labour in prison, although the Hebrew word is also translated "misery" and "sorrow". In this word choice we have a window back onto the deep psychological sufferings which the behaviour of others brought about. They are associated with his father's family. But there is such huge encouragement here, that God through the work of the Holy Spirit on the human heart is able to do such

psychological miracles. And He does so to this day. To deny such operation of His Spirit is to leave ourselves bitter and at the mercy of hard memories which we will otherwise find impossible to deal with. This was an amazing miracle; no amount of steel-willed suppression of his past could have made Joseph paper over all the pain. But God did a psychological miracle upon him. God did not obliterate or delete Joseph's memory cells, but He made him "forget" the pain.

Gen 41:52 *The name of the second, he called Ephraim: For God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction-* Life without his brothers was an affliction, and the soft life was only affliction without that relationship. The idea of fruitfulness is an allusion to the promised fruitfulness of the Abrahamic seed (s.w. Gen. 35:11). But Joseph noted that this was experienced in the land of his affliction, not in Canaan; so it was only a shadow fulfilment of the greater fruitfulness of the Kingdom which those promises spoke of. Again we see the theme of primary fulfilment of the promises in this life, even if we are not physically located in Canaan. The first audience of Genesis was Israel in the wilderness, who would well relate to Egypt as "the land of affliction", and the same word is used in this sense (Gen. 15:13; Ex. 3:7,17; 4:31; Neh. 9:9). But they were to grasp the point that even when things were going wonderfully in that land, for God's true people, it was still a land of affliction; as is anywhere apart from the Kingdom. Jacob would later comment on Joseph's fruitfulness (Gen. 49:22); but the fruitfulness was in spiritual terms, for only two of his children have any further mention in the Biblical record.

Gen 41:53 *The seven years of plenty, that were in the land of Egypt, came to an end-* Joseph may have reflected upon the strange similarity with how his father Jacob had served Laban for two periods of seven years, and Joseph had apparently been

born in year two of the second seven years; which was exactly when he met his brothers again. There are at times such strange coincidences which are surely Divine, and yet we fail to attach meaning to them. Perhaps we shall know in the Kingdom; or maybe we are just supposed to take outline encouragement from the fact that our lives are under the Father's loving overall control.

Gen 41:54 *The seven years of famine began to come, just as Joseph had said. There was famine in all lands, but in all the land of Egypt there was bread-* The "all lands" refer not to the whole planet, but the lands of the *eretz*. Just as the knowledge of the one true God had been distributed throughout Egypt, so all lands of the *eretz* would now come and meet Joseph in Egypt and hear of the dreams and their fulfilment by the one God. Jacob's sons likely heard the story- strange dreams had been fulfilled in Egypt, and there was therefore the bread of salvation available to all. And the brothers would have thought of Joseph's dreams, although probably on the level of the unconscious.

Gen 41:55 *When all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread, and Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians, Go to Joseph. What he says to you, do-* When Mary tells the servants to do whatever Jesus says (Jn. 2:5), she is quoting from the LXX of Gen. 41:55, where Joseph's word has to be obeyed in order to provide food for the needy Egyptians. I have several times pointed out the inversion of Egyptian religious values which was required to believe in the dreams and the interpretation being enforced by Joseph. Egypt was being given the chance to know God, and famine is a judgment from God designed to elicit repentance (see on :31) and faith in Him (Israel therefore were "famished" in the desert, Dt. 8:3 s.w.). But we note that such judgment doesn't come immediately; there is not a connection between sin and Divine judgment in real

time; otherwise we would all be dead. In this case, God brought blessing and then only after that judgment for sin. We may balk at the idea of the whole nation and surrounding Canaan being afflicted for the sake of one man's mistreatment. But this is how significant is just one individual to God; and we think of the huge ramifications of the Lord's crucifixion.

Gen 41:56 *The famine was over all the surface of the earth. Joseph opened all the store houses, and sold to the Egyptians. The famine was severe in the land of Egypt*- The Proverbs often allude to historical incidents in earlier Biblical books. Prov. 11:26 clearly fills out the situation that arose: "People curse someone who withholds grain, but blessing will be on the head of him who sells it". Joseph would have been blessed by the Egyptians; and thus there was again a primary fulfilment of the Abrahamic promises of blessing upon the Gentiles of the *eretz*.

Gen 41:57 *All countries came into Egypt, to Joseph, to buy grain, because the famine was severe in all the earth*- We wonder why Joseph didn't invite his family to come, as surely he knew they were suffering. Perhaps he had learnt enough of the ways of providence to leave it all to God. Or he felt they had to take the initiative, and needed to most importantly repent before simply getting material salvation from their situation. Whatever the reason, one suggests it had a spiritual dimension to it, and was not because he didn't care for them or wanted them to suffer. Or it could be that as with Joseph's rather strange responses to his brothers, that he simply didn't know how to act. He had no game plan, because he didn't know. Perhaps he was indeed partly angry with them, and partly sorry; and partly wished their judgment, and partly their repentance. And in his character, mercy triumphed over judgment. This would give a window into the internal struggles of God and the Lord Jesus, before they finally

come down on the side of mercy to us rather than the judgment we deserve.

GENESIS CHAPTER 42

Gen 42:1 *Now Jacob saw that there was grain in Egypt, and Jacob said to his sons, Why do you look at one another?-* Their silence was because of their unspoken suspicion that Joseph was alive in Egypt and they must meet him and maybe bow down to him as he had once predicted. I suggested on Gen. 41:54 that the news of Pharaoh's amazing dreams and their interpretation by a Hebrew had spread around the neighbouring countries; and people believed they had come true to the extent that they went to Egypt to buy grain. And this would have triggered subconscious chords in the minds of the brothers; for they had effectively murdered their brother because of his dreams, which they considered impossible of fulfilment. They could not explain their inaction, sitting in silence looking at one another, as none would dare have revealed their innermost thoughts. If their cattle had died and the land was parched, they would have had little else to do apart from sit and look at one another.

The brothers look at one another in silence; later in this chapter we will read that they say to one another, "We are truly guilty about our brother Joseph" (:21). Connecting these two statements we surely learn that their silent looking at one another, not saying anything, but all reticent about returning to Egypt... was likewise because they had an unspoken conscience that there in Egypt they might just meet Joseph. The Hebrew in :21 is "They said each to his fellow". The idea is that every one of those men was convicted in their conscience, and they all burst out and said the same thing at the same time; the thing which was unspoken amongst them in :1

Gen 42:2 *He said, Behold, I have heard that there is grain in Egypt. Go down there, and buy for us from there, so that we may live, and not die-* Jacob "saw" the grain in Egypt (:1), but

he "heard" about it. Hearing is seeing; the word becomes flesh. This is true of 'seeing' by the eye of faith as a result of hearing the word of the Gospel. The situation was desperate; they were really facing death by starvation. The sons surely had heard before Jacob that there was corn in Egypt, for he was not elderly; but he speaks to them as if they don't know this. They had acted as if they didn't realize; and thus their guilty consciences are revealed to us. Another alternative is that Jacob "saw" in vision- bear in mind he was virtually blind in his old age.

Gen 42:3 *Joseph's ten brothers went down to buy grain from Egypt-* We wonder why they all went, especially as Judah had apparently separated himself from them (see on Gen. 38:1). Perhaps the famine had bound them together. Maybe they took with them all the wealth they had, and so they were not needed to stay and protect Jacob's encampment as there was nothing left to steal by robbers. Or perhaps Joseph had created a rule that corn would only be sold to heads of families personally, to avoid speculative purchase of corn for re-sale.

Gen 42:4 *But Jacob didn't send Benjamin, Joseph's brother, with his brothers; for he said, Lest perhaps harm happen to him-* Jacob clearly suspected the brothers of foul play with Joseph, and he figured that the other son of the favoured Rachel, his favourite and youngest son, would likely suffer from them too. One theme of the Joseph story is that people subconsciously believe and understand home truths, and those subconscious beliefs are then brought out into the open by the hand of providence. This is how people "come to the truth" today- they are led to see that what they intuitively sensed and knew, both about God and themselves, was in fact true. No matter how unpalatable it is to the conscious mind.

Gen 42:5 *The sons of Israel came to buy among those who came, for the famine was in the land of Canaan-* They were made to

realize that for all their separation from the Gentiles, they were "among" them in a common need for salvation. This was another step in their progressive and intended humiliation which would lead to repentance. Latter day Israel have to come to realize this. Or it could be that their unspoken, unarticulated conscience about Joseph led them to try to fade in with the other Canaanites, from whom they were supposed to be spiritually separate.

Gen 42:6 *Joseph was the governor over the land. It was he who sold to all the people of the land-* The situation would have required a major management team, headed by Joseph. He would surely have had to delegate much of the day to day selling of corn. Yet he guessed his brothers would come to him, and so he arranged things so that he would personally interview those who came from Canaan, perhaps stationing himself near the northern border from whence he knew his brothers would arrive. All along he had structured his life in accordance with the fulfilment of God's word which he had received as a teenager. And this has great power of example for those of us who likewise encountered the Gospel as teenagers.

Joseph's brothers came, and bowed themselves down to him with their faces to the earth- This was only a primary fulfilment of the dreams, as I have often noted. For both Jacob and a resurrected Rachel had to be present for them to fulfil, and the brothers had to be involved in prosperous agriculture rather than cattle ranching.

Gen 42:7 *Joseph saw his brothers, and he recognized them, but acted like a stranger to them, and spoke roughly with them. He said to them, Where did you come from? They said, From the land of Canaan to buy food-* The apparent roughness of God at times is here explained. As with Joseph, it is not because of anger with us; for behind those rough words was a love passing description.

It is to elicit response in us, towards our greater blessing and final salvation; because in His love, He wants us only good in our latter end. And on a more simple, human level, it could be that the only way Joseph could hide his emotion and passionate love toward them was to mask it with harsh words. Anything less would have blown his cover. Joseph acted like a stranger, with the rudeness which Middle Eastern peoples tended to have towards foreigners.

Gen 42:8 *Joseph recognized his brothers, but they didn't recognize him-* He was 30 when elevated from prison, and they had last seen him at 17. And there had been seven good years and now two bad years of famine, meaning they had not seen him for 22 years. He would have changed more than they had, would have had a shaved head, and he spoke through an interpreter and was likely arrayed in Egyptian clothing appropriate to his position.

The New Testament emphasizes that it was only at their second encounter with Joseph that he was recognized by them, and this points forward to Israel's recognition of their Messiah only at His *second* coming (Acts 7:13). Perhaps we can infer from this clear parallel that the brothers were intended to perceive Joseph at this first meeting, but their consciences didn't let them. In this case, again we have a probe into the realms of the deep subconscious. On one level, the brothers recognized Joseph, like the Jews of the first century ["This is the heir, come let us kill him" alludes to the words of the brothers as they saw Joseph approach them at 17 years old]. In their case it was only the passionate nudging of Joseph which led them to repentance.

Gen 42:9 *Joseph remembered the dreams which he dreamed about them-* This doesn't mean he had forgotten them; he remembered them in the same way as God 'remembers' promises; it's not that He has forgotten them out of mind. His

whole plan with his brothers was based upon his realization that those dreams would come true in a primary sense even in this life, although the greater fulfilment was to be when his mother was resurrected and also bowed before him. At this point he may well have recalculated the interpretation of the dreams. They were not about his simply having power and seniority over his older brethren. His brothers came to him and bowed before him in that they were begging for mercy. Or maybe he 'got that' from the start, and had calculated his becoming grand vizier of Egypt and personally meeting all foreigners who wanted to buy food- exactly to bring about this fulfilment. That one day, his brothers would come to him begging for mercy and salvation. This is what they had not wanted to accept when he was 17 and first had the dreams. He was then the family priest, but they didn't want to accept him as that. But, the dream said that one day they would be desperately begging for his grace, mercy and salvation. And in this sense the dreams were coming true. But he wants them to seek not just material blessing from him, but spiritual blessing. Hence, having remembered the dreams, he goes on to accuse them of being spies / liars- because he wanted to bring them to repentance.

"About them" uses the term *lehem*, which can as well mean "for" as in Gen. 11:29. Perhaps Joseph now better understood that his youthful dreams were about him doing something "for" his brothers, saving them, showing them grace; and not simply meaning that he would have power over them. His dreams were "for them" in that they were pictured finally bowing before him, begging for and then in gratitude for his grace and salvation. We note that bowing can mean gratitude rather than mere servanthood. Thus Abraham bowed to the Hittites in gratitude for their agreement to sell him a burial place (Gen. 23:7,12).

And said to them, You are spies! You have come to see the nakedness of the land- "Spies" can mean various things in the original. They were a group of ten men, perhaps with servants. Their response was that they were "one man's sons" (:11). Therefore this would have been in reply to the accusation that they were a group of men looking to invade Egypt or otherwise do harm. Joseph's accusation was not therefore made in anger, but to elicit from them news about their father and family. Egypt was most prone to attack on its northern border, over which Joseph's brothers would cross. So perhaps this was his excuse for stationing himself there, so that he could meet his brothers.

It was unlikely that a single family would be "spies". If they were acting on behalf of another nation, that might be reasonable. But seeing they were the sons of one old man who was separate to the other tribes, 'spying' is a strange accusation to make. The brothers would have thought about it. The double meaning of the Hebrew term for spying, meaning also 'liars', would have made them wonder, at least silently, whether his real accusation was simply that they were liars. It was their untruthfulness to Jacob which was the issue Joseph wanted to help them come to terms with. His false accusation that they were liars ["spies"] was to make them reflect that although they were innocent of this accusation at this point, they were not innocent of it historically.

"To see the nakedness..." is a phrase used in the Hebrew Bible in a distinctly sexual sense. The French Jewish Bible translation of Andre Chouraqui has: "Vous etes venu pour voir le sexe de la terre". A man saw the nakedness of another person through inappropriate sexual behaviour with their family members. We recall that both Reuben and Judah had behaved in a sexually abusive way to their own family members. Maybe through this false accusation, Joseph was seeking to elicit their acceptance of

their sexual guilt over other matters. Or it could be that Joseph was unaware of the behaviours of Reuben and Judah, and his point rather was to falsely accuse them of sexual behaviour in Egypt- because that was what had happened to him. Their response was that they were innocent, and had only been forced to visit Egypt because of pressure of circumstance. And this of course had been precisely Joseph's experience. We too are led through the hand of providence to know the sufferings of the Lord Jesus, that this mind might be in us which was in Him throughout His sufferings.

Gen 42:10 *They said to him, No, my lord, but your servants have come to buy food-* The purpose of the false accusations was to make them totally honest in their answers, desperate as they were to avoid prison and to obtain corn so as to keep alive. Joseph elicits a spirit of total honesty from them, in the hope that this will lead them to recognize their sin against him. "Your servants" was another primary fulfilment of the dream. God's leading of us to repentance likewise involves using circumstances, e.g. false accusations, to lead us to total honesty.

Gen 42:11 *We are all one man's sons; we are honest men. Your servants are not spies-* As noted on :9, the accusation of being spies was made on the basis of them being a significant group of men together; and Joseph's intention was thereby to elicit from them a statement about their connection to each other, and information about their father. The false accusations were made to elicit from them the statement that they were "honest / true men"- and as soon as the words were off their lips, they would have realized that in another context, they were not true men at all. This is why God allows false accusation- to elicit from us an awareness of where in fact we are really and truly at fault.

Gen 42:12 *He said to them, No, but you have come to see the nakedness of the land!-* Joseph disagreed with their claim to

be honest, because they had not recognized him, and they had repeated the old lie that Joseph was dead. Seeing or looking upon nakedness is the very phrase used of Ham in Gen. 9:22. To look upon nakedness was also a euphemism for incest; and this was what Reuben and Judah had both committed, Reuben with Jacob's concubine, and Judah with Tamar. And who knows which other of the brothers had done similar things. Perhaps this was a further attempt to prod their consciences. They were indeed not spies, looking upon the nakedness of *the land*; but they had looked upon nakedness.

Without understanding and appreciating all the psychological prodding and eliciting that is going on in Joseph's words, his behaviour would appear haphazard and bizarre. But it was far from that. Joseph's accusation was that they were not in fact brothers. The implication was that they did not appear to act as brothers act toward each other. This was to elicit their self examination on this point. His doubt of their story may well imply that if they were true men then they would surely not have left their old father alone. 'Do you really care for your father?' was the implication. Their answer would have been "Yes we do care for him, we love him very much"... but then, the memory of their previous deception of him about Joseph would have been elicited. God likewise probes our conscience at every point, to try to lead us to self knowledge and repentance.

Gen 42:13 *They said, We, your servants, are twelve brothers, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan; and behold, the youngest is this day with our father, and one is no more-* They were being careful to be truthful, and yet they had repeated the lie about Joseph's death so often that they had come to believe it. And this is the problem with lying; we deceive ourselves until we live in a false reality. Therefore, "speak the truth in your heart".

"We are", present tense, is surely another psychological slip that reflected their conscience that Joseph was still alive. We observe that they lied to their father Jacob about Joseph, and were believed; and God leads them to repentance over this matter by putting them in a position where they tell the truth, but are accused of lying. They lied and were believed; now they tell the truth and are disbelieved and accused of lying. God is the perfect psychologist, and worked on a human level through Joseph being a pretty good psychologist. This is in fact a psychological classic. Guilt over a past failure is elicited by being falsely accused in the same area of failure, in this case, honesty. This is one function of our experience of false accusation; we were falsely accused of some behaviour, but in fact we were guilty of that behaviour in another form many years ago. And thus we are lead to repentance. Again we see how nothing is wasted with God; even false accusation has a part to play in our spiritual path, if we allow it. This technique is used in interrogation; the suspect is accused of something the interrogators know is false, in order to elicit within the suspect an accute awareness and current consciousness of what he actually did do wrong. And that consciousness is then further probed by the interrogators. Joseph was working on behalf of God, but it is also true that he had developed a fine psychological awareness through his sufferings and wide life experience. His behaviour to the brothers reads as bizarre and haphazard- until we perceive that he is in fact purposefully seeking to elicit repentance and awareness of the past within them. He will finally cut short his process with them simply because of his love and grace toward them- he accepts them anyway, despite the fact they hadn't fully got to expressing repentance.

His interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams was "of God" and not of himself, and yet it is also possible that he figured out the

interpretations himself. For they were not impossibly difficult to figure out, just as the dream of Nebuchadnezzar was fairly clear in its meaning even on face value. The Egyptian hieroglyph for a year was the picture of a cow. So the interpretation of seven years was logical. Drawings of seven fat cows are found on Egyptian tombs from the time; they represented prosperity. The magicians failed to tell these kings the meaning because it was bad news for the monarch, and in Pharaoh's case, evil cows arising from the Nile was a radical inversion of all he believed as a worshipper of the Nile as a source of only good.

Gen 42:14 *Joseph said to them, It is like I told you, saying, 'You are spies!'-* Perhaps just before this point in the narrative, Joseph asked them specifically the question we learn of in Gen. 44:19, when Judah reminds Joseph: "My lord asked his servants, saying, 'Do you have a father or brother?'". Maybe this was rhetorical. For the brothers had told Joseph of their own initiative that they had a father and a brother, Benjamin. Was Joseph saying, Do you really have a father and brother? Do you act like you do? So Joseph's question "Do you have a brother?" was designed to probe their subconscious conscience. Did they have a brother, Joseph? Did they still have him? Was he really dead, as they had persuaded themselves? Constantly, Joseph is seeking to nudge their conscience, to bring them to repentance. That is why he calls them spies, which is the same Hebrew word for "liars".

We also learn from Gen. 44:21 that Joseph at this point made a special promise about Benjamin: "*You said to your servants, 'Bring him down to me, that I may set my eyes on him'".* It implies Joseph was going to do something with him, rather than just wanting to literally see him. The Hebrew could mean "I will keep my eye on him". And this was to elicit from the brothers the impression that this vizier of Egypt had a special interest

in Benjamin. It was another nudge towards perceiving that this vizier was in fact Joseph, the only blood brother of Benjamin.

"It is like I told you" is AV "That is it"; they had lied about Joseph by saying "one is no more". Joseph therefore repeated his claim that they were lying- over years of faith in the fulfilment of his dreams, Joseph had carefully planned all this. His sufferings had made him very sensitive, and he was like the Lord Jesus, a great psychologist. And the brothers responded just as he thought they would, but they refused to allow him to elicit from them the stark truth: 'And one we effectively killed and his blood is upon us to this day'. The Hebrew word translated "spies" can also mean "slanderer" and it is translated like this in 2 Sam. 19:27 and Ps. 15:3. It was a word with a range of meanings, and Joseph repeatedly uses the word, hoping to elicit in them a recognition that they were indeed tale bearers, although they were not spies.

Joseph was implying that they are lying about the one brother whom they said was no more. In the context of the spying accusation, surely Joseph was implying that this missing brother had actually been sent ahead of them to spy out or see the land of Egypt and the famine there. Again he is seeking to gently and subtly to lead them to the right conclusion about Joseph. Perhaps he was too subtle, just as many today do not grasp the subtleties of God's many nudges towards repentance. For Paul says that in His goodness, God does lead us to repentance. Or tries to. The brothers, wide eyed and innocent, would have struggled to understand how they were lying. In prison and on the way back to Canaan, they would have had plenty of time to work through the implications of what Joseph had said to them. They would've talked and thought about nothing else. Indeed they had a brother back at home, indeed their father was an old man, and they were all brothers. The point at which they were lying was therefore in saying that

Joseph was dead. They were being asked to prove that Joseph was dead. And this was to prod and nudge them to wonder whether actually, this grand vizier with whom they were speaking had evidence that Joseph was in fact alive and not dead. And that was why he insisted they were lying.

Gen 42:15 *By this you shall be tested. By the life of Pharaoh, you shall not go out from here, unless your youngest brother comes here-* This is effectively saying that they are liars. As noted on :14, "spies" can mean both spies and liars, slanderers. So Joseph is trying to get them to see his point- that "spies" can mean both spies and slanderers. And he wishes to 'test' them to try to get them to realize his *double entendre*.

Gen 42:16 *Send one of you, and let him get your brother, and you shall be bound-* Joseph later changes his game plan, so that instead of nine remaining in prison and one going for Benjamin, one remains in prison and nine return for Benjamin. To some extent, he was unsure of his game plan because of the emotion and relative suddenness of the situation. But it is also clear that their repentance and spiritual reformation was his intention, and all he asked of them, and all his changes of plan with them, were to that end. It could be that he guessed they hated Benjamin as they hated him; and he wanted to give them the opportunity to be alone with Benjamin and learn to treat him better than they had Joseph. The apparent change of plan might however have been purposeful, to indicate to them that change of plan was possible with those who have power, and God Himself changes His plans and position on things- in order to give us inspiration towards repentance, change of mind on our side.

The command to send just one of their brothers was a test as to whether they would imagine the feelings of their father. They had not done so when they led him to believe Joseph was dead. And so he again is trying to lead them to repentance over that.

"Bound" (also the word used in :19,24) is the Hebrew word used about Joseph being bound in the Egyptian prison (Gen. 39:20; 40:3,5). So the word is used three times about the binding of Joseph, and three times about the binding of Simeon on behalf of the brothers. In line with our view that Joseph is seeking to bring the brothers to repentance, we must not see this as Joseph seeking to 'do others as he was done'. Rather he was seeking to bring them to understand the consequences of their actions to him- so that they might repent. We too are led through suffering and experience to this understanding, so we might not only repent, but be prepared to live eternally with those whom we have hurt. And the Lord is seeking to teach those who hurt us the same lesson.

That your words may be tested, whether there is truth in you, or else by the life of Pharaoh surely you are spies- The idea was that they were to perceive that the Hebrew word for "spies" meant both liars, and spies. Joseph wanted them to confess that they had been liars, about his 'death'. John seems to allude to this idea of truth within us when he writes: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us" (1 Jn. 1:8). Joseph wanted them to admit that in the brief biography they had presented, they had sinned. But they were still denying they had sin.

Gen 42:17 *He put them all together into custody for three days-* As they had cast Joseph into the pit (Gen. 37:22) and as he had been cast into prison because of false accusation (Gen. 39:20). The three days in prison perhaps recalled Joseph being three days in the pit- although such a time period isn't stated in the record, we can maybe infer he was there for three days because he is such a clear type of Jesus in the grave for three days. He did all this so that they could enter into His sufferings. Or perhaps their three days in prison corresponded with three years in prison

for Joseph, although the period isn't mentioned. It is unusual for groups of offenders to be imprisoned together, in the same cell. But Joseph did this, because he wanted to overhear their conversations, and he hoped that their collective guilt would result in a collective confession to him; but their pride and self deception was still too strong for that to happen at that time.

Perhaps the three days point forward to a three year tribulation of Israel in the last days to bring them to accept Christ? We get the impression that Joseph changed his plans for them several times; he recalled them when already on their journey etc. Does this show that he hastened the day of revelation to them from purely emotional considerations- and will the Lord do the same with His Israel?

Gen 42:18 *Joseph said to them the third day, Do this, and live, for I fear God-* The Hebrew could mean "I *also* fear God", as if to encourage them to indeed fear God, and join the dots and perceive he was Joseph before he had to reveal it to them. H.P. Mansfield claims that the article is present in the original: "I fear *the* God", as if inviting them to get the hint that he like them worshipped only one God. "Live" could carry the suggestion that if they remained in prison, they would die; the death threat is still there in :20. For the significance of them facing death in Egypt, see on Gen. 43:8. He wanted them to understand what Egyptian prison was like, and to place before them death in Egypt if they were not honest about their family situation, or death from famine in Canaan.

Gen 42:19 *If you are honest men, then let one of your brothers be bound in your prison; but you go, carry grain for the famine of your houses-* Joseph changed the conditions- instead of all the brothers going to prison, only one of them would (cp. :16). He wanted to develop within them appreciation of the idea of one brother suffering for and in the place of his brothers- to prepare

them to realize what had been achieved through Joseph's sufferings. In addition to this, we should consider that their appearance before him was unexpected, and he was reeling under shock. He perhaps had no clear game plan in place. And he would have had a desire to simply forget his father's family and move on with life; on the other hand, he loved them and wanted their salvation; yet without doubt he would have had natural feelings of anger and a desire at least for them to appreciate the magnitude of what they had done.

"Honest men" is literally 'upright men', but the word carries the sense of 'something being so'. It occurs in :20 "They did so" and in :21 "*therefore* is this distress...". The idea could be that they were proving themselves 'upright'; but they still could not make the confession Joseph sought. In fact, they never did; his pity and grace was such that he gave up demanding it. God likewise so loves us that it seems He accepts our internal recognitions of sin, even without the articulation of it as confession in the terms He ideally seeks. We should likewise not be too demanding of confession of sin from others, but grace and pity should dominate our attitude.

Gen 42:20 *Bring your youngest brother to me; so will your words be verified, and you won't die. They did so-* See on :19. As noted on :18, Joseph was threatening them with death. But they could have just remained in Canaan; they would have reflected that Joseph spoke of death even in Canaan as somehow within his power. They would have concluded that he was speaking somehow from God. Why did Joseph insist on their bringing Benjamin when he knew it would cause his father so much stress that it might kill him? Was it a form of anger with his father, for having set him up as the favourite and thereby causing all the problem, or for disbelieving his dreams? Or as mentioned on :19, was it quite simply that he had no clear game plan in

place and was reeling under the emotion of the situation? Or it could be that he correctly guessed that Benjamin was now the pampered, favourite son as he once had been. And he realized that for Benjamin to come to spiritual maturity, he had to become a man spiritually and separate from his father.

Gen 42:21 *They said one to another, We are certainly guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he begged us, and we wouldn't listen. Therefore this distress has come upon us-* See on :19 and on :1. The Hebrew is "They said each to his fellow". The idea is that every one of those men was convicted in their conscience, and they all burst out and said the same thing; the thing which was unspoken amongst them in :1. This was a major step forward in the process of repentance. But there was nothing done further, no attempt at a guilt offering, and no public confession. Joseph obviously thought that private acceptance of guilt was not enough; there needed to be something further. And that is a challenge to us. However, Joseph never succeeded in getting such a confession from them. This is the nearest he got to it. His grace and pity led him to simply reveal himself to them. "Distress" and "anguish" translate the same word. They were being brought to experience Joseph's feelings in the pit. We too are led by a loving Lord to know His mind during His sufferings, and we are to allow that mind to be in us which was in Him then (Phil 2:4,5). "The anguish of his soul" and pleas for deliverance, ignored by the brothers, point forward to "The travail of his soul" (Is. 53:12 s.w.), ignored by Israel (Is. 53:1-4).

We were not told about Joseph's pleas for mercy when in the pit. But now we learn of them. This reflects how the brothers likewise had heard those pleas but were unaware of them and only now do those pleas come into their conscious awareness.

We note that their guilt was not about deceiving their father, not about hating their brother, not about selling him into a miserable life of slavery in a foreign land... but about their refusal to hear his cries for mercy. This was because they were within themselves crying out to God for mercy and grace. Although they don't do so out loud, nor collectively; but they all collectively recall and comment that they were deaf to Joseph's cries. So we deduce that they each said this, because each of them internally felt they were crying out to God and not being heard. So cleverly, the record invites us to view their hearts. And for all time the point is made, that if we ignore the cries of others, then our cries to God for grace will be apparently ignored. The passage of time must never be allowed to work a kind of quasi atonement, as if our past sins are dealt with by the passing of the years. The crises of our lives lead us to recall our past deafness to others' needs.

And yet in their cases, we marvel that there is simply the feeling of guilt, and observation that they must apparently suffer for their past sins. *There is no statement of repentance*. It can be discerned between the lines that they did repent in their hearts, but the lack of any statement such as "And each man verily repented of his sins against Joseph" is very obvious. One message of the Joseph story is that God accepts incomplete or unexpressed repentance. His grace and passion toward us as His family is very great, and is reflected in that of Joseph towards his brothers. Each time we read that Joseph cries, as he does when he hears these words (:24), the record intentionally leaves us to wonder why he cries. Perhaps in this case it was because they were reacting merely like caught criminals, regretting their actions and preparing to accept the consequences... but still not coming to repentance.

Gen 42:22 *Reuben answered them, saying, Didn't I tell you, saying, 'Don't sin against the child', and you wouldn't listen? Therefore also, behold, his blood is required-* Reuben is perhaps more persuaded than the rest of them that Joseph is dead- for he talks of "his blood" being required. He is quoting the law of Gen. 9:5, which says that blood will be required from both animal and man if they slay a man. The brothers had created the story that an animal had killed Joseph; and they had been concerned at the time not to personally slay him. But now they realize that effectively, they had killed him by their decision; his blood was upon them. Even Reuben who had been against killing Joseph felt himself guilty for his blood. This is a huge challenge to us. We may carefully avoid the actual commission of sin, but the implications of our actions against others are tantamount to the same sin we thought we were technically avoiding. This is particularly true in the sin of excluding believers from Christian fellowship. The brothers were driven to realize that they were personally each one guilty of Joseph's blood. No shifting of the blame onto an animal or anonymous traders or Egyptians could take it away from them. Judah had suggested that by doing so they would "conceal his blood" (Gen. 37:26) and they had agreed with that. Now they realized that this was just a technical get out, and they were all guilty of his blood. We note the progress: "We are honest men" (:11) to "We are guilty". Joseph's probing of their statement to be "honest" therefore worked- "If you are honest men..." (:19). But Joseph maybe didn't know that. Because their confession of guilt was not said to him. And the wonder of the Joseph story is that the brothers never confess their sin and apologize. There is no famous final scene where the brothers confess, Joseph graciously forgives, and they walk off into the sunset arms around each other and live happily ever afterwards. No. That is the scene we expect, but it never

comes. And yet the story cleverly shows that the brothers were in fact moved to repentance and self understanding regarding what they had done to Joseph. Here for all time we see that repentance means re-thinking, and it may or may not be reflected in specific words or actions reflective of regret. This is why we are to forgive without demanding evidence of repentance.

The brothers recognize their guilt and that "his blood is required"; they sense they must be punished for what they did to Joseph. The Joseph novella leads us to expect that indeed they will be punished. But there is no famous final scene of judgment. In fact, they aren't really punished. The classic moment of 'measure for measure' and 'crime and punishment' never really occurs. Although we are set up to expect it, and the brothers themselves expect it. I suggest this is because the repentance of the brothers in their hearts is accepted, and punishment is therefore unnecessary because it would not teach them anything further. Rather like 'Truth and Reconcilliation' approaches in Bosnia, parts of the USSR and South Africa have granted amnesty and no actual punishment to those who confessed their wrongdoing and abuses of others. The confession was accepted as obviating the need for punishment; and God was prepared to accept the unspoken confessions of the brothers in their hearts as good enough. Joseph appears to perceive their repentance, and therefore doesn't punish them.

Gen 42:23 *They didn't know that Joseph understood them; for there was an interpreter between them-* The Lord Jesus likewise keeps an apparent distance from us, when He understands exactly what we are saying and feeling.

Gen 42:24 *He turned himself away from them, and wept-* Joseph wept (this is recorded seven times in the record, also Gen.

43:29,30; 45:1,2,14,15; 46:29; 50:1,15-17), as did the Lord Jesus. Joseph is revealed as having passion and emotion arising from a very strong sense of love. His apparently hard exterior therefore hid this passionate love. Just as God's work in our lives can obscure His essential love from the eyes of the imperceptive. He must have found it hard to prolong the agony of not revealing himself to them immediately; he was motivated by a desire to make them see the enormity of their sin, for their spiritual good rather than his own vindication. This is a stunningly deep prophecy of the intensity of the Lord's feelings, as the mighty Son of God, towards wayward Israel in the last days. He was a man of sorrow in his mortal life, and will still have an element of this characteristic in the future.

Then he returned to them, and spoke to them, and took Simeon from among them, and bound him before their eyes- We wonder why Simeon was chosen; perhaps it was the outcome of his discussion with them when he returned "and spoke to them". Jewish tradition claims he was the one who was most aggressive to Joseph and had been the ringleader in trying to kill him in the pit. That would make sense; but again we must ever note that Joseph's actions were not so much punishment, as attempts to provoke their consciences. He had Simeon tied up before their eyes in order to restimulate their memories of how they had had Joseph bound.

Gen 42:25 *Then Joseph gave a command to fill their bags with grain, and to restore each man's money into his sack, and to give them food for the way. So it was done to them-* This was grace indeed, and he wanted them to perceive it, and perhaps return to him from the lodging place (:27) once they realized. But their consciences were still not ready. Likewise, Israel ought to have recognized the Lord Jesus at their first meeting; but they will

only do so at their second meeting, because their hearts were hardened the first time, and were too proud to repent.

Gen 42:26 *They loaded their donkeys with their grain, and departed from there-* The camera is as it were close up on them. We see them strapping the bags to the animals, lost in their own thoughts. They would all surely have been thinking: "This Egypt is an absolutely awful place". But this was to make them realize that they had sold their brother into Egypt to be a slave there. They were being brought again to understand the consequences of their previous actions, over 20 years before.

Gen 42:27 *As one of them opened his sack to give his donkey food in the lodging place, he saw his money. Behold, it was in the mouth of his sack-* They for some reason were dishonest with Jacob about this; for they made out that only one of them opened his sack in the lodging, and that Jacob and the rest of them were seeing their money in their sacks for the first time when they returned to him (:35). But as their repentance deepens and they are brought closer to being totally truthful, which is what repentance is about, they admit that each of them opened their sacks in the lodging and found their money (Gen. 43:21). It was anyway psychologically unlikely that one of them would open his sack and find his money, and the other brothers wouldn't even bother checking their sacks. See on :29 for another example of their lack of total honesty.

Gen 42:28 *He said to his brothers, My money is restored! Behold, it is in my sack! Their hearts failed them, and they turned trembling one to another, saying, What is this that God has done to us?-* They were being introduced to grace; but like many who encounter grace, they shy away from it, because it demands too deep a recognition of sin and unworthiness. We recall how they had looked at one another in the silence of a guilty conscience (:1). They realized that God was in this. They trembled as they

experienced the depth of God's grace. They whose sins were found out had been given grace not judgment. We very often experience such practical grace at our lowest moments. You may be driving furiously or foolishly- and God saves you from an accident; you may be cursing your husband at top voice when unexpected news of blessing arrives on your phone. We likewise must reflect this by showing grace to those who are at this point undeserving of it.

In Gen. 43:22 we can infer that Joseph asked them: "Who put the money in your sacks?", and the brothers say they don't know, and Joseph tells them that it was God working through him. But they had remarked about the money in Gen. 42:28 "What is this that God has done to us?". The God they privately sensed but would not openly accept was being revealed to them- through Joseph. God put the money in their sacks, but Joseph put the money in their sacks. That was the point Joseph was trying to make, the realization he was seeking to elicit in them. He was trying to get them to admit what subconsciously they knew all along- that Joseph was alive in Egypt, God knew their sin, was working with them, and was leading them to repentance. In all this we see how God works- never forcing us, but strongly nudging us towards self realization, repentance and salvation. And all that involves accepting the truth of what we already subconsciously knew was true all along. Here we see them admitting that "God" had put the money in their sacks; but before Joseph they say they don't know who put the money in their sacks. And so Joseph then tries to join the dots for them- he tells them that it was God, through him, who put the money in their sacks. But he was telling them what they already secretly, intuitively knew.

Gen 42:29 *They came to Jacob their father, to the land of Canaan, and told him all that had happened to them, saying-* The

force of the word "Saying..." is that they did not literally tell him everything, because they omit to say they had been imprisoned, and threatened with certain death. Again we see that although they were shaken up by what had happened, they were still far from total honesty. and that is required for total repentance. See on :27.

Gen 42:30 *The man, the lord of the land, spoke roughly with us, and took us for spies of the country*- They are willfully missing the point. Joseph had accused them of being "spies", using a word which could mean both spies and liars; see on :14. They chose to focus on the meaning "spies of the country".

Gen 42:31 *We said to him, 'We are honest men. We are no spies*- Jacob would have immediately realized that his sons had lied; they could hardly be called "honest men", given their suspected behaviour with Joseph, the massacre of Shechem and Judah's behaviour with Tamar- and probably much else which is not recorded.

Gen 42:32 *We are twelve brothers, sons of our father; one is no more, and the youngest is this day with our father in the land of Canaan'*- Again they repeat the lie about Joseph; they had told it so often that it was now perceived truth and reality for them.

Gen 42:33 *The man, the lord of the land, said to us, 'By this I will know that you are honest men: leave one of your brothers with me, and take grain for the famine of your houses, and go your way*- Jacob's refusal to allow Benjamin to return with them was therefore tantamount to agreeing that they were not honest men. He also shows his obsession with Benjamin and disregard for Simeon who was left in prison.

Gen 42:34 *Bring your youngest brother to me. Then I will know that you are not spies, but that you are honest men. So I will deliver your brother to you, and you shall trade in the land'*- Joseph is not recorded as saying anything about future trading.

Perhaps we have another example here of how the brothers had still not come to the total honesty which is required for true repentance; they were prepared to add in some things here and there, to effectively lie to their father as Jacob had done to Isaac, to make their message more palatable or attractive to Jacob.

Their claim to Jacob that Joseph had offered them trading rights in Egypt was untrue. What Joseph had said was that they would die unless they brought Benjamin with them (:20). This implied he had power over them even in Canaan. They omitted to tell Jacob that they had all been kept in prison for three days. Joseph had accused them of being spies, whereas they tell Jacob that he had treated them *as* spies. Five times Joseph accused them of actually being spies (:9,12,14,15,20), but they severely moderate this in retelling the story to their father. And they omit to tell Jacob the critical truth that Joseph had told them that unless they brought Benjamin with them, "you shall not see my face again" (:23), they would get no grain and Simeon would remain lost and in prison. They were still not being honest with their father; we have here a mixture of untruths and withholding truth which all amounted to deception. Their story didn't hold much weight- why would Joseph keep one of them with him whilst at the same time offering them special trading rights in Egypt? And as noted on :36, Jacob basically disbelieves them. They claim that they were asked "Leave one brother with me" (:33) when in fact Joseph had said "One brother shall be imprisoned in your prison" (:19). Simeon was not "with me" [Joseph], he was in prison. So we see that they still had some travelling left to do in order to come to complete truthfulness and honesty with their father. Repentance is therefore a process. And we must bear that in mind not only concerning ourselves, but regarding those whose repentance we await and seek. Repentance or impenitence are not simply binary states, i.e. you

are either repentant or impenitent. Like forgiveness between persons, repentance is a process. And in fact we never read of the brothers fessing up and telling Jacob what they had done to Joseph and asking his forgiveness. We are led by the structure of the Joseph story to expect this; but this expected climax never comes. And yet these men were still accepted as the founding fathers of Israel God's people.

Gen 42:35 *It happened as they emptied their sacks, that behold, each man's bundle of money was in his sack. When they and their father saw their bundles of money, they were afraid-* This is recorded from the perspective they wished to give; this was the impression they gave Jacob, but they were still being deceitful; see on :27.

Gen 42:36 *Jacob, their father, said to them, You have bereaved me of my children! Joseph is no more, Simeon is no more, and you want to take Benjamin away. All these things are against me-* This implies Jacob knew they had killed Joseph. There is a theme in the records of unspoken knowledge; in 42:1 the brothers fear to go to Egypt because of their unspoken suspicion they might meet Joseph there.

Jacob clearly disbelieved their story that Simeon had been retained in connection with offering the family trading rights in Egypt. He assumes the brothers killed Simeon as they had Joseph. Again we see how people subconsciously know truth, in this case that Joseph had disappeared because of the brothers' machinations and not because of being killed by an animal. But they only express that truth under duress of circumstance. And the brothers were to go through the same. When Joseph reveals himself, we are left to correctly assume that each brother was quietly thinking "Yes I had a strange feeling you were Joseph". And this is the intended result of God's leading us to repentance-

that we accept what we subconsciously, intuitively knew was the Truth all along.

Gen 42:37 *Reuben spoke to his father, saying, Kill my two sons, if I don't bring him to you. Entrust him to my care, and I will bring him to you again-* This is typical hot headed language. Jacob could hardly be comforted over the death of another son by then murdering two of his grandchildren. The whole series of events was intended to lead the brothers to the truthfulness which is required for repentance. Reuben would have reflected on this foolish usage of language and how there was no real truth to it of itself... and been provoked in his path toward truthfulness. But we can see some growth in responsibility here in Reuben. He offers his two sons as it were in place of Jacob's two sons, Joseph and Benjamin. He is saying that he feels responsible for the loss of Joseph, as he will feel responsible for the loss of Bemjamin. It is taking responsibility for our brethren which is a sign of maturity, and indeed it was in this that Joseph's maturity was displayed. Judah went further and offered his own life as a guarantee that Benjamin would return.

Gen 42:38 *He said, My son shall not go down with you; for his brother is dead, and he only is left-* As Joseph had perhaps imagined, Benjamin was perceived by Jacob as his only remaining child. He was clearly the favourite, and by saying this, Jacob showed the disregard he had for the rest of his sons. He had still not learnt the need to not show favouritism.

If harm happens to him along the way in which you go, then you will bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to Sheol- Clearly enough, *sheol* refers to the grave, and not to a place of torment where only the wicked go. We also see here how Jacob's grief was from believing and imagining false narratives, when we will see that the very causes of grief were what were being used by God towards a glorious final resolution. Believing and imagining false

narratives, over consumption by fear... all these things are used by God to bring us to the glorious final resolution of all things.

GENESIS CHAPTER 43

Gen 43:1 *The famine was severe in the land-* As explained on :8, Jacob's sons were facing death by starvation. And yet they had been threatened with death in Egypt if they returned and were not totally truthful about their family situation (Gen. 42:18,20 "*Bring your youngest brother to me; so will your words be verified, and you won't die"*). The same word for "severe" is used in the interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams in Gen. 41:31; the prophetic word came absolutely true. And Joseph would have been encouraged that likewise *his dreams would come true.*

Gen 43:2 *It happened, when they had eaten up the grain which they had brought out of Egypt, their father said to them, Go again, buy us a little more food-* "A little" perhaps hints at their poverty; they were now facing death and their resources were nearly spent. See on :8. We note that they could only afford "a little" food as presents for Joseph (see on :11). They 'ate up' the grain just as the evil cows ate up the fat ones; this is who they were being likened to. Their actions against Joseph 22 years before were not forgotten by God. We can easily assume that time works a kind of pseudo atonement for sins of youth. But God is outside of our concept of time and has no fading memory; He is more sensitive to sin than that, and works so that we might recognize the impact of our actions and come to repentance even many years later. The Hebrew phrase for "eaten up" occurs again in Am. 7:2,3: "It happened that when they made an end of eating [up] the grass of the land, then I said, Lord Yahweh, forgive, I beseech You! How could Jacob stand? For he is so small. Yahweh relented concerning this. It shall not be, says Yahweh". Jacob and his sons had indeed been brought down very small, to the point of death by starvation; and were saved

only by God's grace manifested through the amazing grace and forgiveness of Joseph.

Gen 43:3 *Judah spoke to him, saying, The man solemnly warned us, saying, 'You shall not see my face, unless your brother is with you'*- Joseph didn't actually say these words. So again we see that the movement of the brothers towards honesty is a case of three steps back and two forwards. Our own spiritual path is likewise never smoothly incremental. It's a jagged graph.

The Hebrew idea of solemn warning is used so often in the Pentateuch and later Old Testament, with the implication of Divine judgment. Am. 3:13 uses the same word concerning God's solemn testimony to "the house of Jacob", the family of Jacob, concerning the visiting of their past sins upon them; and always, judgment is in view. Joseph wanted them to think about the implications of having their brother with them. He referred not only to Benjamin but to himself. The same word is used in Gen. 37:2 of how Joseph had been "with" his brothers, and because of this he had seen their sins and reported to Jacob about them; and of how finally Joseph was "with" his brothers (Gen. 45:1,15). They would later have reflected how his demand was met- by his revelation of himself to them.

For months, and all the way back from Egypt to Canaan, the brothers would have mulled over every word of Joseph. "Your brother" must be with them before they saw his face... which of their two missing brothers did he mean? Surely Benjamin? But they would have wondered whether in fact he referred to Joseph, whom they claimed was dead, but he insisted they were lying about that. How could they find Joseph in Egypt and present him to this vizier? The ambiguity was intended, in order to exercise their consciences about whether Joseph really was dead, and what their chances were of meeting him in Egypt.

Gen 43:4 *If you'll send our brother with us, we'll go down and buy you food-* They preferred death by starvation rather than being dishonest before Joseph. They were responding, slowly, to the nudges towards honesty. And yet we still never find a total confession of sin before Jacob nor Joseph. The brothers must have discussed how they could get over the problem of Jacob not agreeing to let Benjamin go with them. They would have discussed every option. The easiest way out of their problem would have been to return to Joseph without Benjamin and tell him that Benjamin had died and therefore couldn't come with them. But they resisted that temptation to do as they had done previously over Joseph; to create a lie about the death of their brother. And their truthfulness was doubtless elicited by a strange sense that Joseph knew all about them. The omniscience of God should have the same effect upon us.

Gen 43:5 *But if you'll not send him, we'll not go down, for the man said to us, 'You shall not see my face, unless your brother is with you'-* Seeing Joseph's face is paralleled with buying food and avoiding death by starvation (:4). The threat that they could not see Joseph's face without their brother with them clearly stuck in their minds (Gen. 43:3,5; 44:23,26). To see a person's face meant to be accepted by them; to not see their face meant rejection and the ending of relationship (Ex. 10:29; 2 Sam. 3:13; 14:24,28; Jer. 18:17). Everything was structured by Joseph so that they could not avoid this; for he would not delegate the work to others. Likewise personal encounter with the Lord Jesus and acceptance by Him, seeing His face, is the end point for each believing life. But it requires the absolute honesty without which repentance is impossible.

Gen 43:6 *Israel said, Why did you treat me so badly, telling the man that you had another brother?-* "Badly" is literally "evil". The brothers would have felt this was a false and unreasonable

accusation; for since when was being honest 'doing evil'... The same word is used of the false accusation that they had 'done evil' in stealing Joseph's cup, which they had not done (Gen. 44:5). Joseph was the master psychologist. He knew that false accusation is likely to elicit in people a realization of their actual sins; for as we clamour to protest 'That's untrue! You're unreasonable in saying that!', there will arise an awareness that 'Although *that* is untrue, I am not innocent in other areas'. I have had exactly that experience and have seen others pass through it; this then is one of the reasons why God allows false accusation, misunderstanding and slander.

Gen 43:7 *They said, The man asked directly concerning ourselves, and concerning our relatives, saying, 'Is your father still alive? Have you another brother?' We just answered his questions. Is there any way we could know that he would say, 'Bring your brother down?'-* They insisted that they had honestly answered the questions about their family and other brothers. But they had not done so, because they had lied about Joseph. But they still can't admit that. "We just answered his questions" is AV "We told him according to the tenor of these words". The exact phrase is used in Ex. 34:27: "After the tenor of these words" God made a covenant with Israel, and "solemnly testified" it, as Joseph had done (:3). This language of covenant relationship offered not only judgment if they were being dishonest; but also ongoing relationship if they were honest, such as "trading in the land". This offer of covenant relationship ought to have again made them wonder who exactly this man was with whom they had to deal. Joseph asked them to 'bring their brother down' to Egypt to remind them that this is what they had done to him, selling him to merchants who 'brought him down' to Egypt (Gen. 37:25; 39:1 s.w.). And the Lord likewise persistently works in our lives

to restimulate memories of past issues, that we might repent and move further.

Gen 43:8 *Judah said to Israel, his father, Send the boy with me, and we'll get up and go, so that we may live, and not die, both we, and you, and also our little ones-* "And not die" shows they were facing death unless they went to Egypt. And yet Joseph had threatened them with death if they returned and were not completely honest with him about their family situation (see on Gen. 42:18,20). This choice of death or death was to make them be completely honest about their family situation, which meant admitting what they had done to Joseph. All men in fact face this choice- and the logic of choosing repentance is so strong. Hence John the Baptist put before people the choice of fire or fire- unless they repented.

"The boy" means just that; but Benjamin was about 26, and already had ten sons and presumably daughters too (Gen. 46:21). Perhaps "the boy", 'kiddo', was the term he was known by. But he was even so smothered by his father; maybe his prolific fruitfulness had been because of multiple relationships, or a desire to prove himself independent from his father. Maybe Joseph guessed the psychological damage that Jacob's doting favouritism would have on a young man, and therefore wanted Benjamin to separate from Jacob for a while and to pass through some brief time of testing so that he might spiritually mature. For Joseph had been the spoilt child, and had matured only through being taken away from that whole scene.

Gen 43:9 *I'll be collateral for him. From my hand will you require him. If I don't bring him to you, and set him before you, then let me bear the blame forever-* "Blame" is literally 'the sin'. Judah was saying that if he did not let his younger brother return to Jacob, then this would be sin upon him forever. But the same word is used of how the brothers realized they had 'sinned' in this

way regarding Joseph (Gen. 42:22). Judah was being brought to realize that what he and his brothers had done to Joseph was indeed sin; for they had not allowed him to return to Jacob. And that sin was upon him "forever"; only by God's utter grace could it be reversed. And it was.

"Collateral" means a pledge. Judah gives a pledge in Gen. 38:17 in connection with his immorality. It cannot be incidental that he later offers his life as a pledge to his father to guarantee the return of Benjamin (Gen. 43:8-10). We are surely meant to detect Judah's spiritual growth between these two "pledge" incidents. We note Judah offers to "bear the blame / sin" if Benjamin doesn't return. He has matured from seeking to hide his blame / sin in his behaviour with Tamar. Likewise the Judah who had caused his father so much grief over the loss of Joseph, becomes the Judah who is so careful to avoid causing his father such grief over Benjamin.

Gen 43:10 *For if we hadn't delayed, surely we would have returned a second time by now-* The brothers delay in their return, doubtless because of the struggle with their conscience; never spoken of together, but operating on each man individually. Will there be a 'delay' in Israel's latter day repentance, and therefore in the full manifestation of Christ? Every Jew in the last days will go through the silent struggle of conscience about Christ.

Gen 43:11 *Their father, Israel, said to them, If it must be so, then do this. Take from the choice fruits of the land in your bags, and carry down a present for the man, a little balm, a little honey, spices and myrrh, nuts, and almonds-* "A little..." hints at their absolute poverty as they faced death by starvation. See on :2. "Balm" was what the merchants had been carrying, when they took Joseph into Egypt (Gen. 37:25). It was made from fragrant gum trees which grew in Canaan, called ladanum. The brothers were intended by the hand of providence to reflect that in going

to Egypt with such gum balm, they were retracing the steps of Joseph and those merchants.

The Lord Jesus likewise works in our lives so that we share something of His sufferings, which were required by our sins.

They took their humble presents in the sacks [s.w. "bags"]; and it was there that Joseph had placed their money, and where Joseph's cup would be placed. The paucity of what they could give was purposefully dwarfed by Joseph's generosity, in the same place- their sacks. It was to emphasize this that finally Joseph tells them to all come and live in Egypt and leave their sacks behind in Canaan (AV "your stuff", Gen. 45:20, s.w. "bags" here and "sacks" in Gen. 42:25). At every turn, we see grace poured out.

Gen 43:12 *And take double money in your hand, and take back the money that was returned in the mouth of your sacks. Perhaps it was an oversight-* "*And* take back..." suggests that the "double money" was not simply money for their grain and then the same again returned which had been placed in their sacks. The idea was that if things got tough for them, they could offer money for their release. But again, they were being taught that money and wealth cannot atone for sin against a brother; atonement is from God alone, by grace, in response to human repentance. Their money had been returned in their sacks; yet they failed to learn the lesson, that Joseph [cp. the Lord Jesus] doesn't need money, nor can silver [Heb.] achieve redemption from the abuse of our brethren. They thought they were being of integrity by returning the silver; but they were to learn that their supposed integrity was just on a far lower plane than what was required of them- a complete rejection of their own wealth and low level integrity, and rather a genuine repentance and acceptance of God's grace through Joseph's forgiveness. They were missing the point by thinking that the great grace in

returning their money was simply "an oversight", a technical error. It obviously wasn't. They had bought enough food to feed ten large families for an extended period, probably taking many donkeys with them to carry it all. The sum returned was significant. But they would rather imagine a technical error than accept Divine grace.

Effectively, Joseph became the firstborn of the family in a spiritual sense. The coat of many colours was the coat of the firstborn, and it was jealousy about this which had led the brothers to want to murder him. Dt. 21:15-17 says that the firstborn was to receive the double portion; so perhaps the brothers would later reflect that providence had led them to accept Joseph as the firstborn by giving him the double money.

Gen 43:13 *Take your brother also, get up, and return to the man-* "Get up" may suggest a similar hesitancy as noted on Gen. 42:1. It was not that they were lazy; rather again so we see the hints of bad conscience paralyzing their action. They were to specifically "return *to the man*", not simply 'to Egypt'. And *shub,* "return", often carries the idea of repentance, a turning back.

Gen 43:14 *May God Almighty give you mercy before the man, that he may release to you your other brother and Benjamin-* Jacob's perception of God was as very powerful, God Almighty, One who can give undeserved grace to men like Jacob's sinful sons. He uses a term he has not previously used: *El-Shaddai*, the Almighty El. Using new terms for God reveals a deepening of understanding of Him. We likewise will grow in our knowledge of Him through the trials of life. He felt that God's mightiness would be revealed through the mercy shown to them by Joseph; and indeed that came to pass. "Mercy" is effectively the same idea as grace, but the Hebrew word is the same used for "womb". The idea is the mercy and love which comes from being family. Jacob's

prayer was wonderfully answered; for "the man" was their loving brother Joseph.

If I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved- The word is the usual one for miscarriage, as if Jacob felt that it was possible that God's plan of giving him a numerous seed was now likely to misfire and be aborted. This all sounds more like depressive fatalism than firm faith in the promises that his seed would eternally fill the earth. In Gen. 35:11 God encourages Jacob, fearful he would lose all his family to attacks from neighbouring tribes, to "be fruitful and multiply; a nation... *shall* be of thee, and kings *shall* come out of thy loins". If he played his part, the promises would be fulfilled. But at this time it seems Jacob's depression had led him to a fatalism which is not of faith. "Bereaved" is the word used by Jacob's mother in Gen. 27:45, when thanks to Jacob's deceit she was too feared bereavement from the loss of both her sons- Jacob at Esau's hand, and Esau at the hands of the avengers of blood. Her feelings were Jacob's fault; and now years later he was being made to see how she felt, to fear her fears. Such bereavement of children was seen as a Divine curse for disobedience (s.w. Ex. 23:26; Lev. 26:22; Dt. 32:25; Jer. 15:7). Yet faced with this, Jacob seems prepared to just accept it, rather than be moved to repentance for his deceit.

Gen 43:15 *The men took that present, and they took double money in their hand, and Benjamin; and got up, went down to Egypt-* As noted on :12, no amount of money or presents could resolve this. The "double money" was not a reference to returning the silver placed in their sacks (see on :12). Jacob ought to have learnt this from his attempt to placate the advancing Esau with presents; he had been saved by God's grace alone, and not by his gifts.

And stood before Joseph- We rather expect to read of them bowing before him. But they are recorded as standing. They

probably did bow, but that is not mentioned. Perhaps the idea is that they had still not really bowed themselves before him as they needed to.

Gen 43:16 *When Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he said to the steward of his house, Bring the men into the house, and slay an animal, and make ready; for the men will dine with me at noon-* Joseph celebrates their repentance with a meal together, at which they sit in their proper places, looking forward to the marriage supper of the lamb, with each in his proper place (Lk. 14:10; 22:30; Rev. 19:9). "Slay and make ready" is the basis of the prodigal son parable (Gen. 45:14,15 = Lk. 15:20); the father = Christ; the prodigal = repentant Jews, wanting to be servants and nothing else. Only the upper classes in Egypt ate meat; and there was a severe famine at the time. Grace was being lavished upon these men, dirty and exhausted after the grueling desert journey from Canaan. But the brothers had not repented in so many words; yet their feeble heart stirrings of repentance were treated by Joseph as if they had. And this is one of the lessons of the story.

Gen 43:17 *The man did as Joseph commanded, and the man brought the men to Joseph's house-* "House" is really his personal home. He had a steward over it, just as he had been for Potiphar. To invite strangers into his personal home was really tantamount to saying that he treated them as family. It was yet another attempt to get them to join the dots and recognize him. It was only their lack of repentance that closed their eyes to perceiving him.

Gen 43:18 *The men were afraid, because they were brought to Joseph's house; and they said, Because of the money that was returned in our sacks at the first time, we're brought in; that he may seek occasion against us, attack us, and seize us as slaves, along with our donkeys-* The invitation into Joseph's personal home was

a sign of loving acceptance; but they feared that expression of grace. If indeed Joseph was going to accuse them of theft, he would hardly invite them into his private home. But they were still thinking in material terms; hence "along with our donkeys", which were probably their last dimension of material wealth which remained to them. Constantly, their fears were that Joseph was against them. Those fears surely reflect how we quite rightly fear the just condemnation which we deserve; and yet the whole story comes to a glorious close with the utter triumph of Joseph's love and grace, on behalf of God, which clinches their salvation and eternal wellbeing.

Gen 43:19 *They came near to the steward of Joseph's house, and they spoke to him at the door of the house-* They spoke apparently without an interpreter. Perhaps he too was from their extended family, another Hebrew slave whom Joseph had bought / redeemed and exalted just as he had been, in reflection of the grace shown him. They felt the need for a mediator between them and Joseph, and the story reflects how they still struggled to come close to him directly. This all speaks of our weakness of faith in the Lord's grace. They were unwilling to immediately accept Joseph's gracious invitation into his home, and paused at the door. This is so similar to our reticence to believe in the Lord's gracious welcome.

Gen 43:20 *And said, Oh my lord, we indeed came down the first time to buy food-* They are careful to recite the story truthfully and with attention to absolute accuracy. They were being prepared for the greatest truthfulness to themselves- the admission that they had cruelly abused their brother.

Gen 43:21 *When we came to the lodging place, we opened our sacks, and behold, each man's money was in the mouth of his sack, our money in full weight. We have brought it back in our hand- Full weight-* The whole experience succeeded in eliciting

hyper honesty from the brothers, which is what Joseph intended. They for some reason were dishonest with Jacob about this when they first returned to him; for they made out that only one of them opened his sack in the lodging, and that Jacob and the rest of them were seeing their money in their sacks for the first time when they returned to him (Gen. 42:27,35). But now as their repentance deepens and they are brought closer to being totally truthful, which is what repentance is about, they admit that each of them opened their sacks in the lodging and found their money. It was anyway psychologically unlikely that one of them would open his sack and find his money, and the other brothers wouldn't even bother checking their sacks.

They emphasize their technical, legal integrity- "full weight". This was to fade into insignificance when they were faced with the enormity of their sin and of Joseph's utter grace toward them.

Gen 43:22 *We have brought down other money in our hand to buy food. We don't know who put our money in our sacks-* They did know- it was someone acting on behalf of God. But they couldn't bring themselves to admit that. Joseph therefore verbalizes for them the answer they had unspoken in their consciences: "God" (:23). In fact it was God working through Joseph; if the steward received the money from Joseph but the money was returned to their sacks, then it must have been money from Joseph.

We can infer that Joseph asked them: "Who put the money in your sacks?", and the brothers say they don't know, and Joseph tells them that it was God working through him. But they had remarked about the money in Gen. 42:28 "What is this that God has done to us?". The God they privately sensed but would not openly accept was being revealed to them- through Joseph. God put the money in their sacks, but Joseph put the money in their sacks. That was the point Joseph was trying to make, the realization he was seeking to elicit in them. He was trying to get

them to admit what subconsciously they knew all along- that Joseph was alive in Egypt, God knew their sin, was working with them, and was leading them to repentance. In all this we see how God works- never forcing us, but strongly nudging us towards self realization, repentance and salvation. And all that involves accepting the truth of what we already subconsciously knew was true all along. Here we see them admitting that "God" had put the money in their sacks; but before Joseph they say they don't know who put the money in their sacks. And so Joseph then tries to join the dots for them- he tells them that it was God, through him, who put the money in their sacks.

Gen 43:23 *He said, Peace be to you. Don't be afraid-* "Peace" has connotations of the peace which comes from forgiveness. He was again trying to show to them that he alone of all human beings was in a possession to give them assurance of peace, with God and himself, and therefore freedom from fear; because he was Joseph, and had chosen to forgive them. But still they failed to join the dots. We recall how the brothers so hated Joseph that they could not speak *shalom* to him (Gen. 37:4). They were being assured of *shalom*, and the very Hebrew word was used which they had refused to use to Joseph. They would surely have reflected that they had not shown *shalom* to Joseph, but now they were having *shalom* spoken to them by grace. Again, this was a nudge towards recognizing they were dealing with Joseph, and would receive God's grace, as undeserved favour.

Your God, and the God of your father, has given you treasure in your sacks. I received your money- Joseph through his steward graciously recognizes that they have a relationship with God ["your God"] and that they were not simply living out the religion of their faith; "*and* the God of your father" highlights the separation. They were each personally responsible before their God. If Joseph had received / taken their payment and

yet the money had appeared again in their sacks- then that, the steward reasoned, must have only been from their God. As noted on :22, it would have been Joseph personally who paid this money. In Gen. 43:22 Joseph asked them "Who put the money in your sacks?", the brothers say they don't know, and now Joseph tells them that it was God working through him. But they had remarked about the money in Gen. 42:28 "What is this that God has done to us?". The God they privately sensed but would not openly accept was being revealed to them- through Joseph. That was the point Joseph was trying to make, the realization he was seeking to elicit in them. He was trying to get them to admit what subconsciously they knew all along- that Joseph was alive in Egypt, God knew their sin, and was leading them to repentance. In all this we see how God works- never forcing us, but strongly nudging us towards self realization, repentance and salvation.

He brought Simeon out to them- If they had loved their brother [Simeon], they would have returned sooner. The experience was to teach them to love their brother, a characteristic lacking in them- for the fate of Simeon never seems to enter their reasoning.

Gen 43:24 *The man brought the men into Joseph's house, and gave them water, and they washed their feet. He gave their donkeys fodder-* These were all signs of acceptance into a family; we recall the actions of Laban to Abraham's servant when he first arrived.

Gen 43:25 *They prepared the present for Joseph's coming at noon, for they heard that they should eat bread there- "For* Joseph's coming" is literally as AV "against". Their paltry present, of just "a little" (see on :11), is set "against" Joseph's coming to them with a huge meal and then great grace, unspeakable in its largesse. All this speaks of the dwarfing of all human strength and attempts to atone, compared to the total grace of the Father and Son.

Gen 43:26 *When Joseph came home-* The scene is so reminiscent of Potiphar's house; there is a steward, and a nervous waiting for the master of the house to return and consider a false accusation and throw Joseph to death or imprisonment. Perhaps Joseph wanted them to know how he had felt; for that is also why he had put them in prison for three days, so that they could come to know all the experiences which they had been responsible for. We could of course reason that it was not their fault that Joseph was cast into prison; the fault was with Potiphar's wife. But they are being taught, as we are, the various long term dimensions of our sins. We may do wrong against a person in our youth, a girl may unkindly jilt a boy or vice versa, which leads them to addictions and a life of suffering. The misfortunes and sufferings are in a sense the fault of others; but the path was set by the person who first forced them to it. Only God judges righteously, perceiving the implications and corollaries of human actions. But in this case, it seems Joseph on God's behalf wanted the brothers to perceive that Joseph's time in prison and his nervous wait for Potiphar's return home... was all stuff brought upon Joseph by the brothers' actions. They would have internally justified it all, by saying they hadn't killed him, it was the group, the others, "not me", it was hard to not go along the path chosen by the group... And yet clearly God through Joseph accepted none of that. They were "verily guilty" as they confessed in prison. Although to blame them for Joseph's time in prison and suffering due to Potiphar's wife might seem extreme- the grace and mercy shown to them was extraordinary.

They brought him the present which was in their hand into the house, and bowed themselves down to him to the earth- This was a primary fulfilment of Joseph's dream, where in the field they bowed to the earth, the soil- even though they were inside a house. They as tent dwellers would have been in awe of a

house such as Joseph had. They were starving to death, and their present of "a little" of the few nuts and bits of gum they could extract from their scorched vegetation must have seemed so paltry compared to the opulence of Joseph. "Present" is a word used for offering; their bloodless sacrifice is compared to Joseph slaying an animal for them (:16). The situation of Cain and Abel is recalled; Cain murdered Abel and brought a bloodless sacrifice.

Gen 43:27 *He asked them of their welfare, and said, Is your father well, the old man of whom you spoke? Is he yet alive?*- "Well" and "welfare" are both *shalom*, "peace", continue the assurance of :23; that Joseph wished them peace, with God and himself.

Gen 43:28 *They said, Your servant, our father, is well. He is still alive. They bowed down humbly*- This may have been to represent Jacob bowing to Joseph, with Jacob here called Joseph's servant. The double bowing (cp. :26) was a primary fulfilment of the double dreams Joseph had revealed, of their bowing to him. "Bowed down humbly" is literally 'bowed down to the earth / soil / ground', not to the 'floor'. It was as if they were on soil; whereas they were inside an opulent Egyptian home. This further emphasizes the similarity with Joseph's dream of his brothers in a field, on soil, bowing before him. But Rachel was not present; which is why I insist that this was but a primary fulfilment of the dream, which spoke ultimately of the resurrection and the Kingdom age.

Gen 43:29 *He lifted up his eyes, and saw Benjamin, his brother, his mother's son, and said, Is this your youngest brother, of whom you spoke to me? He said, God be gracious to you, my son*- The reference to one God was again a prod; an encouragement to perceive that he and they worshipped the same one God. And again the concept of grace is introduced, which was so strange for the brothers to accept.

Gen 43:30 *Joseph hurried-* He didn't want to reveal himself yet, and he knew that his tears would mean they recognized him. He wanted them to make the recognition, rather than him having to tell them. They never got there; but still he accepted them by grace. There is in fact no record of their repentance, no statement made. Joseph left that as unspoken; and we likewise may long for those who abused us to express regret in words, but it sometimes doesn't come. All we can hope is that they will accept our forgiveness of them, as Joseph did; and if we can persuade them of that, then the relationship is restored.

For his heart yearned over his brother; and he sought a place to weep. He entered into his room, and wept there- The evil heart of mankind troubled the heart of God (Gen. 6:5,6). This "heart to heart" between God and man is amazing. As Joseph's heart was 'warm' for his younger brother Benjamin, so the same word is used about how the heart of God is 'warm' in yearning for His ungrateful people (Hos. 11:8). Kneel down and pray; pray long and / or hard enough till you 'get the feeling' of heart to heart contact with God Almighty. Exactly because God is God and not man, He will not punish His people according to what He had said He would do. His “repentings were kindled together” (Hos. 11:8 AV), alluding through the same Hebrew words to how Joseph’s innermost being “ yearned over his brother”, in prophecy of how God would accept Israel in the last days.

We wonder why Joseph so yearned for his brother. Benjamin had been only four years old when Joseph disappeared, and Joseph was now 39 or 40. Ask a 40 year old if they have passionate feelings about their kid brother who they last saw when he was only four years old... and you won't get many who have such strong emotions as the Hebrew text here suggests. The fact Joseph felt like this indicates a love for his brothers and his family; when most men who suffered as he did would

have forgotten about them and moved on, developing their own family. So Joseph's passion for Benjamin is reflective of his passionate love for those who had so hurt and damaged him. It is a huge example to us, as well as a most encouraging window onto the love of the Lord Jesus for us.

Gen 43:31 *He washed his face, and came out. He controlled himself, and said, Serve the meal-* He "refrained himself" (AV). Both God and the Lord Jesus only delay, so that they might be the more gracious (Is. 30:18). Their passionate desire is to save and accept us anyway, without our expression of repentance; they only try to elicit it from us for our sakes, not because it satisfies their own personal desire for apology an the humiliation of those who did them wrong. For from the example of Joseph, it seems they have nothing of these things. The desire for repentance to be elicited and verbalized is purely for our eternal good and not to satisfy any need of theirs. Finally Joseph could not 'control himself' any longer (Gen. 45:1 s.w.). His desire to simply save them overrode his desire for their specific, verbalized repentance. And this should be our pattern; yet all too often, repentance is demanded before any love, care or forgiveness can be shown.

We clearly sense that Joseph wanted to just end the charade and reveal himself. He only brought about the further trial for the brothers because he wanted their spiritual growth. Or it could be that as with Esther's losing her nerve when she was supposed to ask the king for mercy towards the Jews, so with Joseph. In the sense that he, like Esther, had no very clearly defined game plan, and his emotions and humanity got in the way. And yet as with Esther, this was used by God to the advancement of His purpose, which was finally the repentance of the brothers. We may well enquire whether Joseph's intention was in fact achieved. Did they repent? There is never a word of

formal repentance from them. We are left to conclude that surely they did get there, but deep within their hearts and perhaps only as they themselves faced their graveplanks. And this becomes helpful to us, in not as it were waiting for formal repentance from others.

Gen 43:32 *They served him by himself, and them by themselves, and the Egyptians, that ate with him, by themselves, because the Egyptians don't eat bread with the Hebrews, for that is an abomination to the Egyptians-* Joseph was showing that that he was not an Egyptian, but he was also somehow separate from them his brethren. It was another enigma which he used to try to get them to join the dots and see him for who he was. Gen. 39:6 notes that Potiphar, who is specifically called an Egyptian, only concerned himself with his own food. This confirms what we later learn here, that Egyptians would not eat with Hebrews. The Biblical record meshes together perfectly.

The "abomination" of the Hebrews was that they were shepherds; "for all shepherds are an abomination to Egyptians" (Gen. 46:34) because of their association with the Hyksos / shepherd kings who had overrun Egypt a generation before. And this was why Joseph could not eat together with Hebrews, because they were an abomination to the Egyptians (Gen. 43:32). We find this confirmed in Ex. 8:22, where Moses tells Pharaoh that the Hebrews cannot do as he says and sacrifice in Egypt, because they would be attacked by the Egyptians when they saw the Hebrews offering bulls and calves to Yahweh. For these were symbols of Egyptian gods, and people who ate them were an abomination to them."Abomination" is a word which also means 'idols'. They ate abominations / idols, in that the animals they ate and sacrificed were seen as the gods of Egypt. For the Jacob family to be accepted into the best land of Egypt was therefore grace indeed. Just as is our salvation into God's

Kingdom, brought about by Joseph-Jesus. For with reputation as cattle herders ["shepherds"] and bull sacrificers, the Jacob family were going to be last on the list for getting food, let alone being allowed to emigrate to Egypt, let alone to be given land in Goshen, the favoured area. It was all of grace, as it is with us, all the way through.

We note that the Egyptian abomination of Hebrew shepherds is alluded to in the command to Israel: "You should not abhor [treat as an abomination] an Egyptian, for you were a stranger in his land" (Dt. 23:8). It is normal between peoples and individual persons that they treat each other as they were treated by that person or people. Here Yahweh is teaching that His people were to break that cycle. To not abhor those who abhor you. And this is really what the spirit of the Lord Jesus is about, breaking the cycles of human dysfunction and misbehaviour.

Joseph is such a detailed type of the Lord that one wonders whether his eating together with the brothers looks ahead to the breaking of bread meeting. The distance between Joseph and the brothers was on one hand, huge. The cultural differences, differing perceptions of food, social caste, ethnicity. There is the obvious distance between the Lord and us, a distance as great as that between Heaven and earth. But He looks across that at us, with a heart bursting with love, even if we don't quite perceive it. And He knows us, to our great surprise and wonder, just as He showed the brothers that He knew them by seating them in their birth order.

Joseph appeared neither Egyptian nor Hebrew. Just as the Lord appears to us. But His heart was clearly with the Hebrews and in the moment of glorious revelation, he revealed himself as totally their brother. The same will be at the Lord's return.

Benjamin was 16 years younger than Joseph. According to Genesis 46, he had ten sons when the family moved to Egypt.

If by 23, he had 10 sons, he likely had had 10 daughters as well. They would have been from a number of women. So we get the impression that he, the favoured spoilt son of the favourite wife Rachel, with a very wealthy father, became a playboy from a young age. Joseph knew this, or guessed it. For he too had once held the same status with Jacob. What he did to Benjamin was therefore to lead that young man to spiritual maturity. And yet Joseph did it whilst having assured him of his special love, giving him five times larger portions of food. And Benjamin was open to this leading. The names of his ten sons often reflect his obsession with his absent older brother, whom Jacob had clearly described to him in heroic terms. The rabbis offer the following definitions of their names in Gen. 46:21: Ahi, he was my brother; Bela, the one who disappeared, Rosh, my elder or leader; Becher, the firstborn of his mother (as Joseph was); Ashbel, sent by God to captivity; Gera, dweller in a foreign land; Ard, he went down amongst the nations.

Gen 43:33 *They sat before him, the firstborn according to his birthright-* Reuben had had the birthright removed from him even before Joseph left Canaan; but perhaps Joseph didn't recognize that, as he didn't consider birthrights to be significant. Or it could be read the other way; Judah, or whoever had been given the birthright, was placed by Joseph as the firstborn. Whatever, Joseph was seeking to demonstrate that although he ate with them at a distance, as the Lord does from us at His table, He is all the same very much with us and knows our situations intimately, both collectively and intimately. And in the case of Reuben's sin that led to losing the birthright, he as it were forgave it.

And the youngest according to his youth, and the men marvelled one with another- The Hebrew for "marvelled" is only ever used of people 'marvelling' in response to God's rebuke

or judgment of them (Job 26:11; Ps. 48:5; Is. 13:8; 29:9; Jer. 4:9; Hab. 1:5). But they had not received Divine judgment, but the grace of being accepted at Joseph's table. It was this grace poured out which functioned in the same way as Divine rebuke or judgment. And this has so often been observed; that showing grace to an offender reforms them in a similar but more profound way than rebuke or judgment would. Hence Paul says that coming to Corinth with a rod of punishment in his hand was the same as coming to them with a gentle, forgiving spirit of grace (see on 1 Cor. 4:21). This marvelling one with another recalls how in Gen. 42:1 they silently looked at each other rather than risk going to Egypt; and how when imprisoned the first time in Egypt, they all spoke to each other at the same time, confessing guilt over Joseph.

Gen 43:34 *He sent portions to them from before him, but Benjamin's portion was five times as much as any of theirs. They drank, and were merry with him-* The desperate desire of Joseph for them to relax with him and accept his forgiveness led him to make them drunk so as to ease their relationship (43:34 AVmg.). This otherwise unethical act reveals the earnestness of his desire for them to be relaxed with him and open themselves to him. The Lord will have the same basic desire with us at the judgment. It was usual for the host or master of the house to have portions five times those of the guests; even if he didn't eat all the food, it was a sign of his superiority. Joseph therefore wished to demonstrate that the youngest was as the master; he wanted them to realize that he had radically inverted all values.

One reason Joseph did this to the brothers may have been in order to test whether they would get jealous about a daughter of Rachel getting more blessing than them. And they apparently got through that test. All Joseph did to the brothers was to test and teach them and lead them to repentance.

GENESIS CHAPTER 44

Gen 44:1 *He commanded the steward of his house, saying, Fill the men's sacks with food, as much as they can carry, and put each man's money in his sack's mouth-* Again, Joseph [like the Lord Jesus] used every opportunity to shower them with grace; simply because he loved them, and yet also with the hope that as Paul puts it, the goodness of God would lead to repentance (Rom. 2:4). There was obviously a set price for grain, but he gave them more than what they had paid for, seeking to teach them that his grace was not proportionate to their works or what materially they could give him. They had tried to shrug off Joseph's previous grace to them concerning the money in the sacks' mouths by imagining it was "an oversight". But the fact it happened a second time was meant to underline to them Joseph's grace. Joseph showers them with grace and love before falsely accusing Benjamin over the cup. The Lord likewise operates with us, assuring us of His love at the same time as testing us.

Gen 44:2 *Put my cup, the silver cup, in the sack's mouth of the youngest, with his grain money. He did according to the word that Joseph had spoken-* "Silver" and "money" are the same word in Hebrew. Perhaps Joseph wanted to teach Benjamin and all of them about the fact that silver is so often the path to spiritual ruin. The brothers had sold Joseph for twenty pieces of silver, and there was probably far more than twenty pieces of silver in the sacks. I suggested on Gen. 37:26 that the attraction of silver was a significant factor in the decision to sell Joseph into slavery. He was repaying evil with good, in the same terms as it had been paid out to him, as it were. Silver was thus demonstrated by Joseph to be utterly immaterial compared to Divine grace, and the issues of life and death. For without Joseph's wisdom

and generosity, silver of itself could not save them from death by starvation.

It seemed that despite having been given their money back, and extra grain, they had abused Joseph's grace by stealing his cup. But as noted earlier, the false accusation of abusing his grace would have elicited the response: 'No we didn't... in this matter. But have we done so in the past? Will we do so in future?'.

Gen 44:3 *As soon as the morning was light, the men were sent away, they and their donkeys-* The Divine camera enables us to imagine them, leaving with donkeys laden down with a heavier load than intended ["as much as they can carry", :1], made heavier by the silver; we see the men and their donkeys silhouetted against the rising sin.

Gen 44:4 *When they had gone out of the city, and were not yet far off, Joseph said to his steward, Up, follow after the men. When you overtake them, ask them, 'Why have you rewarded evil for good?'-* See on :6. They would naturally feel 'But we didn't reward this man evil for good'. Indeed they had not, in the immediate context. But they had done evil to Joseph (Gen. 50:15,17,20 "You meant it for evil"). The purpose of false accusations is to provoke self examination and perhaps to reveal to us that in other contexts, those accusations against us are true in their essence. For as soon as they started to protest that they had not done evil to Joseph... they surely would realize deep in their subconscious that indeed they had done so. We can infer that Joseph had only done them "good" before they did him "evil". And the good he had done them was to attempt to be their spiritual leader, although he was only 17.

Gen 44:5 *Isn't this that from which my lord drinks, and by which he indeed divines?-* Joseph's steward was aware that Joseph knew a lot about these men. He set them to eat in order of their birth, etc. Joseph had to give some credible explanation

to his steward as to how he knew. So perhaps he just gave the impression that he had this knowledge through his cup which he used as a divining cup. But the use of such divination was strongly condemned by God (Lev. 19:26; Dt. 10:10 s.w.). So here we have another example of where Joseph appeared as an Egyptian when in his heart he was very different. Just as we appear on some external counts to be indistnguishable from the world, when our hearts are elsewhere. The brothers surely knew that the cup had been planted, and they were being falsely accused of doing "evil" in return for good. Likewise they would have probably disbelieved that this cup was the source of Joseph's knowledge about them. They didn't believe in "divination". So the question would have been provoked within them: "From where, then, does this man know all about us?". They were being led closer to the recognition that this man was Joseph their brother. God doesn't force us to repentance, but neither does He leave us totally to our own device. He nudges us, with a gentleness of the perfect force- not too hard so as to gaslight or railroad us, nor too soft so as to be unperceived. The nudging towards repentance can involve very round about methods, as we see here. And this explains our impression at times that life is very random and bizarre. It isn't, because what we see as so bizarre is in fact a leading or nudging of us to repentance.

They likely realized that all the myths of divination through cups were bunk; and yet this man with whom they had to do could indeed "divine" them, setting them according to their ages. So they would have realized that somehow their attitude to this cup incident was going to be how Joseph 'divined' them; but it was their response to it which was going to make the answer. Would they rally around their brother Benjamin, and be prepared to suffer for and with him, this son of Rachel [as Joseph was]- or would they seek to justify themselves and leave him

to his fate? Would they care about their father's grief, or not? Would the false accusation make them realize that although they had not stolen Joseph's cup whilst enjoying his huge grace to them over the meal table, they had in another context all rewarded evil for good?

And so the incident points forward to the table of the Lord Jesus, the grace of which we too have all in some way abused. Our spirit / attitude is the candle of the Lord, with which He searches us. Our thoughts when confronted by the cross reveal us to Him who died on it. Likewise Joseph (one of the most detailed types of the Lord) knew / discerned his brethren by his cup (Gen. 44:5). 1 Cor. 11:31,32 further suggests that our self-judgment at the breaking of bread is in fact the Lord's judgment of us; just as Joseph's discernment of them was really their discernment of themselves.

The divining may be a reference to his interpreting the butler's dream involving the cup; see on Gen. 40:11. The Hebrew for "divines" means literally 'to make trial'; their taking of the cup was their trial / judgment. Thus we drink either blessing or condemnation to ourselves by taking the cup. The word used by the LXX for "divines" in Gen. 44:5 occurs in the NT account of the breaking of bread service: 'everyone should *examine* himself, and then eat the bread and drink from the cup' (1 Cor. 11:28). The Lord examines us, as we examine ourselves. There is a mutuality here- the spirit of man is truly the candle of the Lord (Prov. 20:27). He searches us through our own self-examination. He knows all things, but there may still be methods that He uses to gather than information. Our hearts are revealed to God through our own self-examination. And is it mere co-incidence that the Hebrew words for "divination" and "snake" are virtually identical [*nahash*]? The snake lifted up on the pole [cp. the crucified Jesus] is the means of trial / divination. Through the

cross, the thoughts of many hearts are revealed (Lk. 2:35), just as they will be at the last day. Thus the breaking of bread ceremony is a means towards the sort of realistic self-examination which we find so hard to achieve in normal life.

The implication could be that they thought Joseph had information about them because of this magic cup, and they had therefore stolen it. Because they thought this would stop him knowing about them. This was to probe their conscience. They of course denied the theft. But their conscience would have prodded them- they were indeed aware that Joseph strangely knew all about them, and they were indeed uncomfortable with that fact, and would do all in their power to keep him from knowing more about them. All this was again a nudge towards their acceptance of the simple truth; the vizier was indeed Joseph and he knew all about them. The implication was also that Joseph would have already divined through the cup that they were going to steal it. The message was: 'He knows your past and future. Any attempt to avoid that is desperate and can never work. Just accept He knows all about you'. And this is what every man is faced with who seeks to deny the Lord's total knowledge of him. And as we take His cup at the communion service, we are powerfully reminded of this and led towards self examination, knowing and seeing ourselves as He sees us.

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You have done evil in so doing'- They are falsely accused of doing evil. The accusation was false, but their psychological reaction was intended to lead them to realise that they had in fact done another evil, to Joseph (50:20).

Gen 44:6 *He overtook them, and he spoke these words to them-* Jacob's sons had been pursued and overtaken once before; the same word is used of Laban doing so to the Jacob family (Gen. 31:25). And Laban had likewise accused them of rewarding him evil for good, and he had made an accusation against them- that they had stolen his idols. That accusation was true, but it was turned into a false accusation by God's grace saving them from being "overtaken" and Rachel hiding the idols and lying to her father. And they would have been intended to make the connection; that they then had been saved by grace, they who were liars. And now they had been "overtaken" again, and a false accusation was made, that they had rewarded good with evil. But their consciences would have been pricked; for they had indeed done evil, and they would only be saved from this 'overtaking' by Divine grace. All these things were carefully planned to elicit their repentance. How many of the prods they felt and

responded to, we do not know; but somewhere in their deep subconscious, surely something was stirred.

Gen 44:7 *They said to him, Why does my lord speak such words as these? Far be it from your servants that they should do such a thing!-* As I have often mentioned, the Divine purpose of the experience of false accusation is in order to elicit from us the recognition that although we didn't do what we were accused of, we have in essence done the same in other areas. Whilst they had not stolen the cup, it was not so far from them to reward evil for good. But the brothers begin to show signs that they will not abandon Benjamin; for the pronouns vary: "*They* said... *My* Lord... *your servants*... that *they*...". So they are beginning to have a very different attitude to that which they had toward Joseph years earlier.

Gen 44:8 *Behold, the money, which we found in our sacks' mouths, we brought again to you out of the land of Canaan. How then should we steal silver or gold out of your lord's house?-* They begin however by parading their own righteousness and integrity. Yet the cup incident made them realize their guilt and made them acceptive of the judgment they deserved. And it made them quit their attempts at parading their own righteousness, no matter how valid it was in the immediate context. The cup made them realize their real status, and not just use empty words. Behold the contradiction in Gen. 44:9: "With whomsoever of thy servants it be found, both let him die, and we also will be my Lord's bondmen / servants". The Hebrew words translated "servants" and "bondmen" are the same. Their mere formal recognition that they were Joseph's servants was to be translated into reality. Thus they say that Joseph had "found out the iniquity of thy servants; behold, we *are* my Lord's servants". Describing themselves as His servants had been a mere formalism; now they wanted it in a meaningful reality. And the

Lord's cup can do the same to us. The way they were "searched" (Gen. 44:12) from the oldest to the youngest was surely the background for how the guilty men in Jn. 8 pined away in guilt from the Lord Jesus, from the eldest to the youngest. The whole experience would have elicited self-knowledge within them. The same word is found in Zech. 1:12, describing how God Himself would search out the sin of Jerusalem.

Joseph was trying to tell them: 'What you did to the cup, you did to me. That cup is a symbol of me'. And inevitably the mind flies to how the Lord solemnly took the cup and said that this was Him. Our attitude to those emblems is our attitude to Him. We have perhaps over-reacted against the Roman Catholic view that the wine turns into the very blood of Jesus. It doesn't, of course, but all the same the Lord did say that the wine *is* His blood, the bread *is* His body. Those emblems are effectively Him to us. They are symbols, but not mere symbols. If we take them with indifference, with minds focused on externalities, then this is our essential attitude to Him personally. This is why the memorial meeting ought to have an appropriate intensity about it- for it is a personal meeting with Jesus. "Here O my Lord, I see thee face to face". If it is indeed this, then the cup will be the means of eliciting within us our own realization of sin and subsequently, of our salvation in Jesus.

Gen 44:9 *With whoever of your servants it is found, let him die, and we also will be my lord's bondservants-* Their emotional words reflect a lack of sensitivity to their father Jacob's feelings. They ought at least to have excluded Benjamin from their promises. There is a strange repeat here of the situation with Rachel, the mother of Benjamin and Joseph. Her husband Jacob, their father, had rashly said that whoever had stolen Laban's idols should due. Now they make the same mistake. And Benjamin is found guilty of stealing and hiding the idolatrous valuable cup.

His mother had done the same, but been saved by grace. We wonder whether Joseph was trying to get his brother to see how their mother had sinned, and yet been saved by grace.

Here, being dead is paralleled with being a slave- that is the force of "die... we also will be bondservants". And there appears a parallel between being a bond slave and dying in :17. Indeed, Romans 6 draws the same parallel- death to sin is part of being a slave of Christ. The very fact we are baptized means we should not continue in sin, seeing we are dead to it (Rom. 6:2). This is one of the most basic implications of a first principle which we live in ignorance of most of our days. Baptism is a change of masters- but we are still bond slaves, not of sin, but of God. The implications of this figure may not be immediately apparent to the modern mind. We are totally committed to the Master- this is who we are, bond slaves.

Gen 44:10 *He said, Now also let it be according to your words: he with whom it is found will be my bondservant; and you will be blameless*- They should have sensed the grace shown in turning down their offer. Nobody would die, nor would they all become slaves. Yet the steward says that this is "according to your words". But his offer was *not* according to their words. The grace in it all is that their own self condemnation was turned around to something far more generous, and put back in their own mouths. They were intended to marvel at the grace, and to see that although there was going to be judgment, there was an extraordinary grace with the judge. We note too that this steward appears to have full authority to speak for Joseph, note "my bondservant". They would be blameless if only one of them had done it; the fact they plead a common, joint guilt ["the iniquity of your servants", :16] is therefore to be taken as not simply unity with their brother, but an expression of some other guilt, namely concerning Joseph.

The punishment for stealing the goblet of a man like Joseph was death, and the brothers offered this as the just desert. In the midst of their confusion, they are offered grace. They will not all be punished, as would be normal in such circumstances as they appeared jointly responsible. And the punishment for the guilty would not be death but servitude. They like us are being asked to see that the darkest clouds of circumstance are lined with amazing grace. If we perceive it. And they were being hereby encouraged to throw themselves upon that grace.

Gen 44:11 *Then they hurried, and each man took his sack down to the ground, and each man opened his sack-* Their speed was to demonstrate their eagerness to show themselves innocent. As they opened their sacks, they would have again found their money in the sack mouth. So as they prepared to face judgment, they did so knowing that there was an amazing grace in the man with whom they had to do.

Gen 44:12 *He searched, beginning with the eldest, and ending at the youngest. The cup was found in Benjamin's sack-* As noted on :12, Benjamin would have seen the cup nestled amongst his returned money. It was a powerful visual symbol of how judgment and guilt was to be covered with the message of grace and passionate love toward him, and all of them. Again they would have noticed that Joseph and his steward knew their ages (as when he sat them by birth order at the table); for the search was made from eldest to youngest. We recall how the Lord Jesus likewise convicted the Jews in John 8 from the eldest to the youngest. So the specter of judgment hanging over them was again ameliorated by the awareness that their judge knew them intimately.

Gen 44:13 *Then they tore their clothes, and each man loaded his donkey, and returned to the city-* "Each man..." signals that they all felt united with Benjamin; they didn't leave him to his fate.

They had indeed moved on a long way from their attitude to Joseph. The repetition of circumstance in our lives is not only to teach us, but to make sure that we learnt the lesson- for what teacher doesn't give pupils exercises to practice the theory they've learnt? It seems that Joseph, acting on God's behalf and as a type of Christ, manipulated circumstances so that his brothers would have *deja vu* experiences. Thus he sets things up to tempt them with freedom if they again betray their younger brother (Benjamin) and are thoughtless to their father's pain. The united, frank and open response of the brothers (:16,17) showed how they had indeed learnt their lesson.

Their tearing of clothes is what Jacob did because of their treatment of Joseph (Gen. 37:34). So it is not so much a case of measure for measure, but rather their being led by circumstance to appreciate what they had put their father through.

Gen 44:14 *Judah and his brothers came to Joseph's house, and he was still there-* Judah now takes the lead amongst the brothers. He comes over as responsible and genuine in his care for Benjamin.

They fell on the ground before him- Joseph's dream was having multiple primary fulfilments as they all bow to him. The fact the dreams are not presented as having one clear fulfilment [for they bow before him on several occasions] shows that all the recorded bowing of the brothers was only primary fulfilment; and in any case, Rachel was not present as required. And we wonder whether this bowing was anyway the fulfilment of the 'bowing before Joseph' of his dreams. Because to bow before someone has the sense of gratitude and thankfulness in Gen. 23:7,12, where Abraham bows to the sons of Heth in gratitude for a burial place for his wife. Perhaps that is the final fulfilment- bowing before Joseph, not in fear and subservience, but in gratitude. And it seems that is yet to come.

Gen 44:15 *Joseph said to them, What deed is this that you have done?-* "What deed is this?" was to elicit their memory of the deed done to Joseph. He addresses them in the plural- trying to elicit from them the recognition that they had all returned evil for good with respect to himself. The Hebrew for "deed" is not the word that would be used if Joseph simply meant 'What have you done?' or 'What thing have you done?'. It's the same word translated "occupation" or 'trade' in Gen. 46:33; 47:3. The idea is of trading, and he is trying to elicit from the memory of their trading of him for 20 pieces of silver. The "you" is "you" plural. He accuses them as a group of theft. And they had as a group stolen Joseph (Gen. 40:15).

The whole story of Joseph is one of the clearest types of Jesus in the Old Testament. The way His brethren come before His throne and are graciously accepted is one of the most gripping foretastes we have of the final judgment. The rather strange way Joseph behaves towards them was surely to elicit within them a true repentance. He sought to bring them to self-knowledge through His cup. Joseph stresses to the brethren that it is through his cup that he “divines" to find out their sin. He also emphasizes that by stealing the cup they had “done evil" (Gen. 44:4,5). And yet they didn’t actually steal the cup. The “evil" which they had done was to sell him into Egypt (Gen. 50:20). They had “stolen" him (Gen. 40:15) in the same way they had “stolen" the cup. This is why he says that “you" (you plural, not singular, as it would have been if he was referring merely to Benjamin’s supposed theft) had stolen it (Gen. 44:15). And the brethren in their consciences understood what Joseph was getting at- for instead of insisting that they hadn’t stolen the cup, they admit: “What shall we say unto my lord? What shall we speak? Or how shall we clear ourselves? God hath found out the iniquity of thy servants" (Gen. 44:16 AV). Clearly their

minds were on their treatment of Joseph, the sin which they had thought would not be found out. And this was why they were *all* willing to bear the punishment of becoming bondmen, rather than reasoning that since Benjamin had apparently committed the crime, well he alone must be punished.

Don't you know that such a man as I can indeed divine?- The idea was 'I know that you have committed a great, evil deed'- concerning Joseph. The divining may be a reference to his interpreting the butler's dream involving the cup; see on Gen. 40:11. But "divine" is translated "I have learned by experience" in Gen. 30:27. Joseph is saying that he has seen them, knows them, has experienced them. This is about the clearest statement so far that 'I am Joseph'. They never got to quite the point Joseph wanted, for in the end he has to spell it out for them, although they were surely 'there' in their subconscious.

"Such a man as I" may allude to his title Zaaphnath Paaneah, which can mean 'The knower of that which is secret'. This was the message all along, that Joseph like the Lord, knows all about us. And we are to come to that same realisation, to know even as we are known. Paul says that day is yet future, but we are led towards it now.

Gen 44:16 *Judah said, What will we tell my lord? What will we speak?-*

Joseph's brothers' words are exactly those of Daniel in Dan. 10:15-17, where in another death and resurrection experience, he feels just the same as he lays prostrate before the Angel. Our attitude to the Lord in the last day will be our attitude to Him at the breaking of bread- just as our "boldness" in prayer now will be our "boldness" in the day of judgment. In the same way as the brothers had to be reassured by Joseph of his loving acceptance, so the Lord will have to 'make us' sit down with Him, and encourage us to enter into His joy. There will be some sort of

disbelief at the extent of His grace in all those who are truly acceptable with Him ("When saw we thee...?"). The brothers grieved and were angry with themselves in the judgment presence of Joseph (Gen. 45:5)- they went through the very feelings of the rejected (cp. "weeping and gnashing of teeth" in self-hatred). And yet they were graciously accepted, until like Daniel they can eventually freely talk with their saviour Lord (Gen. 45:15). And so the sheep will feel rejected at the judgment, they will condemn themselves- in order to be saved ultimately. The same words occur in Neh. 8:10,11, when a repentant Israel standing before the judgment *bema* (LXX) are given the same assurance.

This spirit influenced David when he likewise says: "What can I say to you? For you Lord know your servant" (2 Sam. 7:20). Our awareness of our sinfulness at the day of judgment will doubtless have a like effect upon us. The moral desperation of the brethren ("how shall we clear ourselves?") will then be seen in us. Speechlessness is a characteristic of the rejected (Mt. 22:12); the brothers slunk away from Joseph's physical presence (45:4), as the rejected will (1 Jn. 2:28 Gk.). This all suggests that those accepted at the judgment seat will go through all the emotions of the rejected; they will realize that rejection is what they deserve. Those who judge (condemn) themselves now in their self-examination will not be condemned then.

In the Hebrew, the "What can we [do]?" is clearer. It is repeated three times: "What can we say... what can we speak... what can we say to justify ourselves?". This is everyman before the Lord Jesus, unable to justify ourselves, as Paul stresses in Romans. What can we say or do? Nothing, but cast ourselves upon His grace. Judah's recognition of their position is the more commendable because it was based upon his inner conscience of their sin with Joseph. For he stood falsely accused before Joseph,

and innocent of stealing the cup. This absolute contrition was therefore based upon repentance over the sin with Joseph, and not because of any sin regarding the cup, which they were falsely accused of. We can be sure Benjamin protested his innocence, but Judah doesn't go down the path of as it were demanding a retrial. Rather, he acts as genuinely guilty- because he knows that they are guilty of major sin against Joseph. This can help us cope with midjudgment; indeed we have been falsely accused and misjudged, but we are in fact utterly guilty of other sin before God and worthy only of death.

Or how will we clear ourselves?- This is the word usually translated "righteous". How can a man be just / right with God? This is the question of all the faithful, from the book of Job to Paul in Romans. Job uses precisely the same Hebrew phrase, translated "How shall a man be just [with God]?" (Job 9:2; 15:14; 25:4). These are the only other occurrences of the phrase, and so clearly Job was influenced by Judah's words. No words, no silver, no works. We each come to this point. We just have to accept that we have sinned and cast ourselves upon the Lord, being willing to die or be His eternal servants. This ideally is the attitude we should have at baptism and then throughout our lives.

God has found out the iniquity of your servants- They had agreed that with whomsoever the cup was "found", he should die (s.w. :9). And it had been "found" with Benjamin. But Judah says that all of them had sinned and their sin had been "found". He therefore has in mind their sin against Joseph. There is a direct parallel with their admission of this sin in Gen. 42:21 "We are verily guilty concerning our brother" Joseph. God and not Joseph nor his steward had found out this singular "iniquity" of them all; so Judah refers to the iniquity with Joseph and not of stealing the cup. So Judah is speaking on two levels; he is

saying what Joseph apparently wants to hear, that they are guilty. But Judah knew that actually they as a group were not guilty of stealing Benjamin's cup, as Benjamin had apparently acted alone in stealing it. But he makes the confession of guilt because of his now deep awareness of "the iniquity" of the brothers regaring Joseph earlier. They had “stolen" him (Gen. 40:15) in the same way they had “stolen" the cup. They were guilty of theft- but of Joseph, not of the cup. And Judah accepts this and therefore chooses not to argue back with Joseph that they were innocent of the accusation about stealing the cup. And this was why they were *all* willing to bear the punishment of becoming bondmen, rather than reasoning that since Benjamin had apparently committed the crime, well he alone must be punished. The cup was “found" and they realized that God had “found out" their joint iniquity (Gen. 44:10,12,16). The cup was perceived by them as their “iniquity" with Joseph. They had used the very same Hebrew words years before, in telling Jacob of Joseph’s garment: “This have we found..." (Gen. 37:32). So we see here that there was some repentance and spiritual growth in Judah and the brothers. It is shown for all time that reconcilliation can be based upon the pure grace of one party, even if the other parties can never bring themselves to express repentance and apology in so many words to the offended party. But, there was deep within them a recognition of their sin with Joseph. This may possibly be in some contexts a pattern for how we deal with false accusation; to let it go, because we are guilty of the essence of the sin of which we are falsely accused.

Behold, we are my lord’s bondservants, both we, and he also in whose hand the cup is found- Judah doesn't plead innocent about stealing the cup, but agrees that Joseph has rightly perceived that they have a great hidden sin. Judah speaks of them as "servants" in the plural who have sinned, rather than in the singular, which

he would've done if he only had Benjamin's behaviour in view. As noted on :10, the position was that they would all be held "blameless" if only one of them had stolen the cup. This joint plea was therefore a confession of some other joint sin- that concerning Joseph. This is why Judah says that despite the offer of only Benjamin being a slave, they would all accept this judgment.

The cup was “found" and they realized that God had “found out" their joint iniquity (Gen. 44:10,12,16). The cup was perceived by them as their “iniquity" with Joseph. They had used the very same Hebrew words years before, in telling Jacob of Joseph’s garment: “This have we found..." (Gen. 37:32).

They who had sold their brother into slavery in Egypt were now offering to become slaves in Egypt. Joseph's plan had worked, in that they were willing to experience what they had subjected him to. But still there never comes the specific statement of repentance and apology which we the story leads us to expect at the end.

Gen 44:17 *He said, Far be it from me that I should do so-* Evidence has been found that there was an Egyptian law which stated that if one of a group of men stole something from the ruling class, then the whole group were to be likewise punished. Judah has stated that they would all be slaves because of their "sin", which Judah understood as referring to their sin against Joseph and Jacob. Joseph reads his mind, and assures him that he will not "do so", even though that is Egyptian law. All he wants is that Benjamin remain with him. Later, the brothers would have rehearsed every word of Joseph, and understood he was speaking with the utmost grace and love. But at the time, his words and actions appeared so harsh. And so it shall be at the last day, when the Lord is no longer understood as a hard man at all, but we

shall know that He was always bursting with passionate love and grace and desire for us. We can make that realisation even now.

Joseph alludes to God's words and Abraham's plea regarding Sodom, that the righteous will not be destroyed with the wicked (Gen. 18:25). See on :18. Joseph is saying that they are now righteous. They have just said that there is no way they can be cleared or righteous (see on :16), but through this allusion, Joseph on God's behalf declares them righteous. This is an Old Testament version of Paul's teaching of imputed righteousness, by grace.

The man in whose hand the cup is found, he will be my bondservant; but as for you, go up in peace to your father- "Peace" carries the idea of peace with God. Joseph is saying that they are forgiven. Despite their statement that there is no way they can now be righteous and their confession of collective sin- with the sin against Joseph in their minds. Why then does Joseph want to keep Benjamin? Perhaps because Benjamin was the one who had not sinned against Joseph, and yet needed to be taught the same lessons of imputed righteousness. Or maybe Joseph wanted to see their response; he has said they are forgiven and at peace. Yet will they now abandon their brother? Have they learnt in practice what loyalty to your brother is all about? Will there be works appropriate to their faith in Joseph's forgiveness? And there will be.

Gen 44:18 *Then Judah came near to him-* The same word used of Abraham coming near to God to speak, continuing the allusion noted on :17.

And said, Oh, my lord, please let your servant speak a word in my lord's ears, and don't let your anger burn against your servant; for you are even as Pharaoh- Judah's recorded words in this chapter begin as broken sentences, and now become more lengthy and eloquent. This is psychologically as we would

expect; we can be sure that we are reading the actual words spoken, thousands of years ago. It's hard to know whether Judah feels Joseph's anger is already burning, or is asking that this not be the case. If the former, then we have the wonderful picture of men thinking that Joseph like God is burning with anger against them, when in fact He is full of passionate, saving love toward us. And many will learn that wonderful lesson at the day of judgment. But if Judah means ' Do not be provoked to anger by what I am going to beg of you', then we have yet another connection with Abraham's words in pleading for Sodom (Gen. 18:30).

"Don't let your anger burn" could imply that as the Hebrew says, Joseph's face was glowing with wrath. But that was in fact only a mask. Behind that apparent wrath, there was a heart bursting with love, tenderness and blanket forgiveness even when no repentance was proferred. And that, finally, at the end of all things, is how we shall understand our present apparent experience of God's wrath.

Gen 44:19 *My lord asked his servants, saying, 'Have you a father, or a brother?'*- The question "Do you have a brother?" was intended to elicit their memories of what they had done to Joseph. Although Joseph had kindly accepted their confession of sin in :16 as good enough for him to forgive them, it was not really complete. Because they had failed to openly confess their sin with Joseph. And here we have a powerful lesson in not demanding repentance according to our terms before we forgive, nor judging the quality of others' forgiveness. For it seems God's eagerness to forgive and save means that whilst He seeks total repentance, He apparently settles for less, as Joseph did.

Judah mentions his father a total of fourteen times in his speech. Perhaps this was because he correctly sensed in Joseph a fondness for this old man of whom they had previously spoken.

And perhaps on a deeply subconscious level, he knew he was talking with Joseph and that the feelings of their father would be the critical point at which Joseph might be persuaded.

Gen 44:20 *We said to my lord, 'We have a father, an old man, and a child of his old age, a little one; and his brother is dead, and he alone is left of his mother; and his father loves him'-* Benjamin was in his 20s and had ten sons at this point, and presumably daughters too (Gen. 46:21). Judah cites their previous words to Joseph, with Benjamin standing there- perhaps now he is admitting that they had exaggerated Benjamin's youth. And yet the lie about Joseph, that he had been killed, was so ingrained in Judah that now in this moment of ultimate truth he still repeats it: "He alone is left of his mother". This is the problem with lying- the lie really becomes perceived truth if it is repeated long enough, and takes a lodgment in our entire worldview and self-understanding. Even at this point, Judah could not admit what surely his subconscious was telling him- that Joseph was standing in front of him. And we see that Judah was still not totally truthful- he paints the picture of a family in perpetual mourning for the loss of a younger brother, lovingly united in care for their elderly, ever grieving and now hungry old father. That is so psychologically credible; the most dysfunctional of families can keep repeating positive narratives about themselves until they believe them to be true. So even here, Judah is still not completely truthful. And we never actually see the brothers confessing in detail what happened, neither to Jacob nor Joseph. And yet they were still accepted by Joseph even though their repentance was 'only' deeply internal, and not to the extent he hoped for. We have to accept the repentance of others when it is of a similar low quality; because so much of our repentance toward God is likewise of low quality. We again note that repentance or impenitence is not a binary state; like forgiveness,

it has many shades and hues. They didn't get to the depth of repentance they ought to have done, but Joseph just so loves them that he cuts short the entire attempt to educate them, and reveals himself to them. Just as the Lord will do at His return to an immature brotherhood.

Gen 44:21 *You said to your servants, 'Bring him down to me, that I may set my eyes on him'-* This Hebrew phrase to set eyes upon is used in Am. 9:4 ("for evil") and Jer. 24:6 ("for good"). It implies Joseph was going to do something with him, rather than just wanting to literally see him. The Hebrew could mean "I will keep my eye on him". And this was to elicit from the brothers the impression that this vizier of Egypt had a special interest in Benjamin. It was another nudge towards perceiving that this vizier was in fact Joseph, the only blood brother of Benjamin.

We note that in Judah's long speech here [long in the sense that few speeches of this length are recorded in Genesis], he is constantly quoting the words of others- of Joseph earlier, of his father, of his brothers to their father etc. Of the entire speech in :18-29, Judah says 42 words of his own and 84 words reporting the words of others. This is a window onto the extent to which they had carefully mulled over every word spoken and remembered it all. This was just as Joseph had intended- because that reflection on those words, over a period of time, was intended to elicit truthfulness and repentance and self understanding. Joseph, on God's behalf, was indeed the master psychologist.

Gen 44:22 *We said to my lord, 'The boy can't leave his father: for if he should leave his father, his father would die'-* As noted on :20, Benjamin was a man in his 20s with ten sons. Jacob was clearly psychologically obsessed with Benjamin; his love for Rachel and Joseph was all channeled into this man.

Gen 44:23 *You said to your servants, 'Unless your youngest brother comes down with you, you will see my face no more'-* Joseph could believe the reported obsession of Jacob with Benjamin, and perhaps that was why he wanted Benjamin and Jacob to individuate from each other. For he had suffered the same problem with Jacob, and now realized that in God's plan, he had had to separate from Jacob in order to stand on his own feet before God. Joseph had threatened that if they saw his face again without their brother, then they would die. This is exactly how Pharaoh later threatened Moses (Ex. 10:28). Moses had made this threat "even as Pharaoh" (:18). Moses would have seen the connection, and realized that God's providence would likewise make this threat of no final reality. This is the advantage of familiarity with the text of Scripture; we see that our situations are not unique and have Biblical precedent, which encourages our faith and helps us realize that we are not alone and no situation is unprecedented.

Gen 44:24 *It happened when we came up to your servant my father, we told him the words of my lord-* The continual emphasis upon Jacob as Joseph's servant and "lord" was all a primary fulfilment of Joseph's dreams.

Gen 44:25 *Our father said, 'Go again, buy us a little food'-* Judah is careful to report the conversations exactly as they were. Truthfulness was being elicited, but they still had not quite confessed as they needed to their sin with Joseph, the lie of their lives.

Gen 44:26 *We said, 'We can't go down. If our youngest brother is with us, then we will go down: for we may not see the man's face, unless our youngest brother is with us'-* Although as noted on :25 Judah is being strictly accurate in reporting the conversations, he omits the death threat Joseph had twice made to them. He obviously didn't want to remind Joseph of that; he therefore still

was not being totally open, and still hoping that by dint of his own word choice he might secure a slightly better deal for them all.

Gen 44:27 *Your servant, my father, said to us, 'You know that my wife bore me two sons-* Again, Judah is effectively bowing before Joseph in the name of Jacob, just as Joseph's dreams had required, by talking of "Your servant, my father".

Gen 44:28 *And the one went out from me-* True enough to any psychological reconstruction, Jacob remembered the last time he had seen Joseph, walking out of the family encampment with Jacob watching his receding figure as he went towards Dothan. The same words are used of how as a younger man, Jacob had gone out from *his* father Isaac (Gen. 27:30), never to see him for many years, apparently lost in Mesopotamia. The patterns in the life of Jacob are amazing, and they are too in our lives, if we perceive them.

And I said, Surely he is torn in pieces; and I haven't seen him since- This could be taken as meaning 'This is what I thought at the time, I was sure of it; although it's true that since then, I never saw him again'. As noted on Gen. 37:33, the story of Joseph's death begged many questions and Jacob would never have been satisfied as to what actually happened. At this point in Judah's speech, the brothers would all have internally hung their heads. Judah really ought to have said something like: 'This is what your servant our father thought, but actually it was because we lied to him and deceived him; although we didn't steal your cup, we committed a greater sin that this experience with you has reminded us of- we nearly killed our brother, and then sold him down here into Egypt as a slave. We are therefore sure that God has found out this sin and are willing to take whatever punishment He, through you, thinks appropriate'. But Judah didn't say that. He ought to have done, and he had been set up

now to say it- but he doesn't. And still Joseph loves them and accepts them. Our forgveness of others and personal repentance is likewise nearly always a case of "Yes... but...", and the quality of it is not always great.

Gen 44:29 *If you take this one also from me, and harm happens to him, you will bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to Sheol'*- The brothers taking this one also from Jacob suggests that he suspected they had killed Joseph, or were responsible for his disappearance. Judah faithfully reports Jacob's words; and again, as suggested on :28, he now had the chance to say in so many words what they had done. But he doesn't.

We recall that Judah had been terrified at the prospect of losing his own son Shelah, and that was why he wouldn't let him marry Tamar, whom he considered a *femme fatale*. But although Judah was spiritually weak at that time, he learned the lesson; and he therefore doesn't want his father to again go through the loss of a son, in this case Benjamin. So we do see great growth in Judah at this point, far beyond the self centered man of 22 years ago in Gen. 38. Then, he had separated or "gone down from" his brethren; now he leads them and is willing to effectively die for one of them.

Gen 44:30 *Now therefore when I come to your servant my father, and the boy is not with us; since his life is bound up in the boy's life*- The idea was that if Benjamin did not return, then Jacob would lose his life because he would assume that a son who had not returned, even if he was a slave and alive in Egypt, was effectively dead. This ought to have made the brothers realize that by selling Joseph into Egypt, so that he did not return to Jacob, they had effectively taken Joseph's life from him. They had murdered him, and their careful legalistic plan to not spill his blood themselves was not effective in taking away their guilt for his blood.

Gen 44:31 *It will happen, when he sees that the boy is no more, that he will die. Your servants will bring down the gray hairs of your servant, our father, with sorrow to Sheol-* See on :30. For a son to remain alive in Egypt as a slave was still tantamount, in Jacob's perception, to the son dying. The brothers had therefore effectively killed Joseph by selling him as a living slave into Egypt. This therefore was why Joseph raised the whole idea of Benjamin remaining as a slave in Egypt. He wanted the brothers to realize that this was effectively murder, a killing of Benjamin. And that is what they had done to Joseph. It is hard to find any other explanation as to what Joseph's intentions were by telling the brothers that Benjamin must remain as a slave in Egypt, and they were to return to their father. They didn't want that outcome, because, as Judah now explains, it would be effectively the death of Benjamin.

The jealousy of the brothers against Joseph was based around the fact that he was the favoured son of the favoured wife, Rachel. They earlier cared nothing for the pain of their father over the apparent loss of Joseph. But now we see that Joseph's efforts to retrain them have paid off. Because they are driven to play the card of their father's feelings as a desperate last ditch attempt to appeal for Joseph's understanding and mercy. And in fairness to the brothers, their love for their father is greater now than it was when they deceived him over the apparent gruesome death of his favourite son Joseph... their half brother. In their own way, they are presented as having repented in their hearts, and are desperately concerned for the feelings of their father, even though he apparently has not long left to live. And yet the point of the story is that they never say sorry in so many words. The entire Joseph novella leads us on to expect some famous final scene where they confess their sins, and Jacob and Joseph graciously forgive them and they live happily ever after. But that

scene, expected as it is by us, never comes. Instead we have these more subtle implications that they did in fact repent of what they had done, and they now really did love their old father. But they never said so in so many words. It is our wisdom to realize that we have people in our lives who are similar. And we are to perceive the unwisdom of treating repentance as a binary yes / no status, witnessed by external words and actions. For repentance is a re-thinking, it is a state of the heart. And that is why it is for us to forgive rather than seeking to judge whether or not a person is penitent. For only God sees the heart and He alone can judge penitence.

Gen 44:32 *For your servant became collateral for the boy to my father, saying, 'If I don't bring him to you, then I will bear the blame to my father forever'-* As explained on :30,31, to be a slave in Egypt was effectively death. Judah was willing to accept this 'death' for the sake of Benjamin his brother; and perhaps he was motivated by the realization that he deserved it anyway for having sold Joseph into this death. This was why all the brothers were willing to be slaves in Egypt. We note that Benjamin was also a son of Rachel, the favoured wife; and Judah as Leah's son had been jealous of Rachel's sons. But now he is willing to become a slave, even to die, for the sake of a son of Rachel. And yet Judah never in so many words repents nor apologizes to Joseph for his jealousy. Instead we have these more subtle implications that he did in fact repent of it; see on :31. So Joseph's very complex and roundabout test of the brothers revealed that now, they were willing to suffer for their brother and their father.

Judah gives a pledge in Gen. 38:17 in connection with his immorality. It cannot be incidental that he later offers his life as a pledge to his father to guarantee the return of Benjamin (Gen. 43:8-10). We are surely meant to detect Judah's spiritual growth

between these two "pledge" incidents. We note Judah offers to "bear the blame / sin" if Benjamin doesn't return (Gen. 43:9). He has matured from seeking to hide his blame / sin in his behaviour with Tamar. Likewise the Judah who had caused his father so much grief over the loss of Joseph, becomes the Judah who is so careful to avoid causing his father such grief over Benjamin.

Gen 44:33 *Now therefore, please let your servant stay instead of the boy, a bondservant to my lord; and let the boy go up with his brothers*- As noted on Gen. 38:1, Judah was somewhat separated from the other brothers and lived apart from them. But he is willing to accept a living death for the sake of one of his brothers. He was thereby coming closer to the spirit of Joseph, the one separate from his brothers who would sacrifice all to save them. But as when Moses later offered to eternally die instead of Israel, God doesn't accept substitutionary atonement in this sense. And here too, Joseph doesn't accept it.

Judah's spiritual growth is evident. He recognized he had made Joseph a slave in Egypt, and he was willing now to suffer the same fate, from love for his younger brother and a desire not to make his father suffer again as he had over Joseph. As discussed on Gen. 38, this transformation all began with his repentance concerning his bad attitude and sins concerning Tamar. We see too how Judah came very close to the spirit of the later atonement in Christ. He, the innocent [regarding the stealing of Joseph's cup], was willing to suffer for the sake of the guilty [Benjamin], for the sake of the Father's feelings. This willingness to suffer for the sake of others was perhaps what most impressed Joseph. For his life had been all about suffering for the sake of his brethren. Judah is also tacitly accepting his father's preference for the sons of Rachel. He knew that for Jacob, the loss of Judah would be less painful than the loss of Benjamin.

And so Judah was willing to spare his father that pain, even though it meant his effective death in prison.

Gen 44:34 *For how will I go up to my father, if the boy isn't with me? Lest I see the evil that will come on my father-* Again we see real spiritual progress from the time when Judah and the others didn't care for the evil that they had brought upon their father. At any time, they could've sat down with him and confessed and put him out of some of his misery. But they hadn't. Perhaps now Judah was vowing that if he ever saw his father again, he would tell him the truth about the Joseph incident. And so at this point, Joseph decides that they had all got as far as they were going to get in terms of confession and repentance, and calls an end to the process.

The brothers were now faced with the choice of once again returning to their father Jacob, bearing the news of the loss of one of his sons. They had done this 23 year previously; but now their conscience has developed. It was now something which Judah would rather die than do. So there is indeed a growth of care for Jacob, and a deepening of conscience; although it stops short at the full blooded, specific confession of sin to Jacob and Joseph which the novella sets us up to expect. And the powerful lesson is that some people don't get to that level of repentance they might or ought or we feel they should. But this is not to say they are impenitant or conscienceless.

GENESIS CHAPTER 45

Gen 45:1 *Then Joseph couldn't refrain himself before all those who stood before him, and he cried, Cause everyone to go out from me! No one else stood with him, while Joseph made himself known to his brothers-* "Then Joseph couldn't refrain himself..." implies he planned to drag out the process of spiritually refining his brothers, but his love for them caused him to cut it short- "For the elects sake the days shall be shortened" by Christ (Mt. 24:22).The same Hebrew word is used in Is. 42:14 about how God can no longer refrain Himself in the last days. We see Joseph's defence of his brothers in his desire that nobody else be present at this time; he suspected there may be confession and apology regarding what they had done to him, and he didn't want the world to know about it. This is the love that seeks to cover and save, whilst facing up to the issues.

"Refrain" is the word used of Joseph refraining himself before his brothers at their first meeting. The Hebrew means to force oneself, to force against one's own nature and will (s.w. 1 Sam. 13:12 "I forced myself and offered a burnt offering"). And this is how it is with the apparently harder side of God. Just as Joseph's actions towards his brothers were apparently harsh, so with God's harder side- the death of children, all the suffering in our lives, the cruel nature of life. But when God is finally revealed, we shall see that in fact this was His forcing Himself against His own nature. For His nature is "love". We get a glimpse of this at times, but only a fleeting glimpse. All too soon eclipsed by present realities and sufferings. We see it again when we truly reflect upon the cross, the gift of His Son for us. All the rest of our necessary suffering, incomprehensible and random as it appears to us, is in fact God pushing against His own nature. Finally like Joseph He will not refrain Himself any longer: "I

have long time held My peace... and refrained Myself. Now will I cry out like a travailing woman" (Is. 42:14). And we urge Him towards this: "Will You refrain Yourself, O Lord?" (Is. 64:12), asking Him whether His love is restrained (Is. 63:15). We have a choice- to consider God a "hard man" as the one talent man of the parable does. Or to see that His apparent hardness is only the same mask as Joseph wore to his brothers, talking another language, interlacing grace and love with apparently hard and unreasonable behaviour. But all that is to lead us to the final conclusion when God removes the mask and we understand what we now cannot: God is love and salvation itself. Those who see only the hard mask are failing to perceive the frequent glimpses behind it, which Joseph so often afforded the brothers [giving them their money back, dining them, not demanding they all die nor be punished for their theft of his cup etc.]. In this life, we behold both the goodness and severity of God. But that is what Paul says "we *behold*". And we see only in a darkened mirror, but then face to face. The message of the Joseph story is that actually behind what we see, God is pure goodness and love alone. But He forces Himself to act as Joseph did, in ways which appear random and cruel to us- in order to achieve the aim of His love, which is our eternal salvation.

Joseph as a type of Christ means that his brothers also have significance. The brethren meeting Joseph at the end has many echoes of the judgment seat of Christ. The whole purpose of the painful process which led up to that meeting was for the benefit of the brethren, to make them realize the enormity of their sin and the greatness of Joseph's grace. Likewise the judgment is for our benefit; the outcome is known to God beforehand. Does the (emphasized) emotionalism of Joseph at this time indicate anything about the Lord's attitude then?

We observe that one moment, the brothers were condemned, or at least Benjamin was. But that sentence was very suddenly commuted to amazing blessing. The suddeness of the change of 'fortune' was of course what Joseph had experienced; one moment imprisoned, the next, the second most powerful man on planet earth. He was perhaps seeking again to help them enter into his experiences, just as the Lord tries to get us to enter into His. That we might "know" Him, understand Him, enter relationship with Him.

Joseph's self revelation was through his meal with the brothers and then the drama with his cup. It looks forward to how the Lord Jesus revealed himself in the breaking of bread: "And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight. And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?" (Lk. 24:30-32). This is matched in how the hearts of Joseph's brothers "burned within them" when they were sat down at his table in order of birth (Gen. 43:33).

Gen 45:2 *He wept aloud. The Egyptians heard, and the house of Pharaoh heard-* The pressure release must have been huge. The implication could be that Pharaoh lived within Pharaoh's court, and his household heard the noise. This would mean that the opulence of everything would have been overpowering for the tent dwelling cattle herding brothers. That this powerful man could show such grace to them... was so hard to believe. And they are in exactly our position.

Gen 45:3 *Joseph said to his brothers, I am Joseph! Does my father still live?-* Joseph had twice asked them this. He asks again; perhaps indicating that whilst he accepted them and forgave them, he did so by grace and not because he thought they were now totally truthful or totally repentant.

His brothers couldn't answer him; for they were terrified at his presence- Literally, at his face, a face full of tearful passionate love and forgiveness. This reveals the deep human tendency to not believe in grace. They expected punishment, and were thinking only of how they could now cut the best deal for themselves. They make no confession, and Joseph doesn't need to verbalize his forgiveness because that is now so apparent.

Gen 45:4 *Joseph said to his brothers, Come near to me, please. They came near. He said, I am Joseph, your brother, whom you sold into Egypt-* Joseph's brothers slink away from him, and he has to encourage them: "Come near to me, please". They absolutely knew that they ought to be punished and killed by him, and they thought he would do it. They had moved away from him as if they felt they were condemned. This will be the feature of all those finally accepted by the Lord; they will know they are rightly condemned, and yet they are to be saved eternally. Even years later, Joseph wept in frustration at their lack of full acceptance of his total forgiveness (Gen. 50:17). These scenes are so evidently typical of the future judgment seat of Joseph / Jesus. There is even the suggestion in Rev. 7:15 that after the judgment process, the Lord will come down off His throne and mix with us, after the pattern of Joseph. Ps. 36:8 says that God will "make us" partake of the blessings of the Kingdom of God. It reminds me of how the Lord Jesus said that in His Kingdom, He will "make us" sit down at a table, and He will come and serve us (Lk. 12:37), knowing full well that he who sits at meat is greater than he who serves (Lk. 22:27). It isn't so difficult to imagine this scene: the Lord of glory wanting us to sit down to a meal, and then *He* comes and serves us. He *will* have to "make us" sit down and let ourselves be served. Perhaps "*Come*, you blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom" (Mt. 25:34) likewise suggests a hesitancy of the faithful to enter the Kingdom, seeing they have

had such doubt about salvation. Perhaps this is typified here by Joseph's revelation to his brethren; they slink away from him, and he has to encourage them: "Come near to me".

Gen 45:5 *Now don't be grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life-* The only other time this Hebrew phrase for "grieved and angry" occurs is again about the brothers, when they are grieved and angry for what was done to their sister Dinah (Gen. 34:7). But now they are grieved and angry for what had been done to their brother Joseph, and they are grieved with themselves as the perpetrators. They were seeing themselves from outside of themselves, angry with the side of them that had done such wrong to their brother. They were as bad as the Shechemites whom they had judged so harshly. This was indeed a move toward spiritual maturity.

The "life" that was preserved was primarily the lives of Israel- them and their families- so that the Abrahamic covenant with them might be fulfilled and they would not die out. The "life" that was preserved was primarily the lives of Israel- them and their families- so that the Abrahamic covenant with them might be fulfilled and they would not die out (:7). "Preserve life" is parallel with "preserve a remnant" (:7). The remnant, the minority of humanity whom God deals with, is the "life" He sees and has relationship with on earth.

Sin, both our own and the sins of others against us, is actually used by God in a wonderful way. Not that this of course justifies sin. But it is a fact that through our experience of the sin-repentance-forgiveness process, we grow hugely. Here we have the answer to those who cannot forgive themselves for past sins. God works out His plan of salvation actually through man's disobedience rather than his obedience. As Paul puts it again, we are concluded in unbelief, that God may have mercy (Rom.

11:32). It was and is the spirit of Joseph. And again, speaking about the sin of Israel in rejecting Christ: "Their trespass means riches for the [Gentile] world" (Rom. 11:12). The whole plan with the brothers resulted in the world's salvation. Or yet again, think of how Abraham's lie about Sarah and unfaithfulness to his marriage covenant with her became a source of God's blessing and the curing of Abimelech's wife from infertility (Gen. 20:17- I read her infertility as a state that existed prior to the incident with Abraham). The righteousness of God becomes available to us exactly because we have sinned and come short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23,24).

Judah's words and his brothers' feelings are exactly those of Daniel in Dan. 10:15-17, where in another death and resurrection experience, he feels just the same as he lays prostrate before the Angel. Our attitude to the Lord in the last day will be our attitude to Him at the breaking of bread- just as our "boldness" in prayer now will be our "boldness" in the day of judgment. In the same way as the brothers had to be reassured by Joseph of his loving acceptance, so the Lord will have to 'make us' sit down with Him, and encourage us to enter into His joy. There will be some sort of disbelief at the extent of His grace in all those who are truly acceptable with Him ("When saw we thee...?"). The brothers grieved and were angry with themselves in the judgment presence of Joseph (Gen. 45:5)- they went through the very feelings of the rejected (cp. "weeping and gnashing of teeth" in self-hatred). And yet they were graciously accepted, until like Daniel they can eventually freely talk with their saviour Lord (Gen. 45:15). And so the sheep will feel rejected at the judgment, they will condemn themselves- in order to be saved ultimately. The same words occur in Neh. 8:10,11, when a repentant Israel standing before the judgment *bema* (LXX) are given the same assurance.

It is significant that Joseph never formally pronounces forgiveness, but shows by his actions that he has forgiven. Likewise, the brothers never make a statement of repentance, nor even "sorry". But we are possibly left to deduce that they were sorry. We may have here an example of how human relationships and psychological interactions are often on the level of the unspoken. The whole story is so psychologically credible. So many petty domestic upsets go this way- there is no "sorry" in so many words, nor is there the grant of forgiveness in words. But all is to some extent "good" and the relationship continues.

Gen 45:6 *For these two years the famine has been in the land, and there are yet five years, in which there will be neither ploughing nor harvest-* Again we see Joseph's firm faith that prophetic dreams come true. Joseph stood before Pharaoh at 30 years old, so he was now 39. He had reached a spiritual maturity which few ever reach in their lives.

Joseph tells the Egyptians, "Here is seed for you, and you shall sow the land", and give a fifth of the harvest to Pharaoh (Gen. 47:23). But he comments in Gen. 45:6 that throughout the seven year famine, there would be neither ploughing nor harvest. We could read Gen. 47:23 as an agreement for the longer term future; but that appears disallowed by "Here is seed for you, and you shall sow the land". We could therefore conclude that Joseph knew God well enough to know that the seven year period of famine was negotiable; perhaps he was praying in faith that the days might be shortened. The Bible is full of such Divine accommodation to human prayers.

Gen 45:7 *God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant in the earth, and to save you alive by a great deliverance-* The "great deliverance" is alluded to in Heb. 2:3 "that great salvation". Israel saved, all the surrounding world also blessed with deliverance from the famine- Ditto for the last days; the nations around

Israel blessed materially to overcome the problems of the latter day judgments. These judgments are to make Israel repent, but in that time of trouble the whole world suffers. The "life" of :5 that was preserved was primarily the lives of Israel- them and their families- so that the Abrahamic covenant with them might be fulfilled and they would not die out. Joseph so often sees things in terms of the implications of the promises to the fathers, just as we should- for they are the basis of the new covenant we are also in. The Jacob family were nearly dying of starvation after only two years of the seven year famine; and they had money and transport to go to Egypt and buy food. Many others in Canaan must have died. For subsistence farmers cannot survive more than one failed harvest, let alone seven. God's plan was that they should be preserved as the remnant in the *eretz*, the land promised to Abraham. His intention therefore was that they should return from Egypt to Canaan once the famine ended. See on :10; Gen. 46:4,27; 47:1,4,15,18,20,27; 48:16,21. This was why the brothers stated that they only wanted to "sojourn" temporarily in Egypt during the famine (see on Gen. 47:4). But they remained in the soft life of Egypt, when they could have become the sole inheritors of Canaan. And so God's saving purpose was delayed by 430 years until they were forced to leave Egypt. The situation is directly analogous with Judah in captivity in Babylon, called to return, but preferring to remain there. They were "the remnant that escaped" (Ezra 9:8; Is. 10:20; Ez. 14:22; cp. Is. 37:31), where "escaped" is the same word here translated "deliverance". This explains why the remnant who returned are called "the remnant of Jacob" in allusion to his historical situation (Mic. 5:7,8), using the same word as here for "remnant". "The remnant of Israel [Jacob] shall not [on repentance] speak lies [any more]" (Zeph. 3:13). The "remnant of Israel and... survivors of the house of Jacob" (Is. 10:20) clearly refer to this

experience of a remnant being survivors: "to preserve for you a remnant... to make sure that you and your descendants survive" (GNB). Joseph's mixed up brothers, saved by his pure grace, therefore represent all the true remnant who shall be saved.

Gen 45:8 *So now it wasn't you who sent me here, but God-* 'Not this but that' in Semitic [and other] languages means 'Not *so much* this, as that'. Paul's statement that he had been sent not to baptize but to preach must be read like this. We have here for all time the wonderful proof that God works through human sin and dysfunction to His greater glory, rather than turning away in disgust from it and leaving us to our own devices and their consequences.

Joseph is clear that "You sold me into Egypt" (:4), but he repeatedly explains that "You sold me [but in fact] God sent me" into Egypt. You sold me, but God sent me. This is the key to coping with life, to perceive that what happens to us on one level is used by God on another. Likewise in Gen. 50:19,20: "You planned evil for me, but God planned it for good". We note too that reconciliation involves our own full recognition of the evil done to us by others, and not negotiating it down.

And He has made me a father to Pharaoh, lord of all his house, and ruler over all the land of Egypt- Lord of all Pharaoh's house- Joseph's experience of something similar in Potiphar's "house" and the prison house meant that he wouldn't have become proud because of it, and would've experienced it all thinking 'And this too, knowing my life, will likely soon come to an end. Worldly advantage comes and goes...'.

Joseph was 'father' to Pharaoh, and it has been commented that "There is no title "father to Pharaoh" in Egyptian; and the closest parallel *it-ncr*, "god's father", is something of an embarrassment... being an appellative granted... to the progenitor of a dynasty"- Donald Redford, *The Biblical Story of*

Joseph (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1970) p. 191. Thus the title "Father" used about the Lord Jesus shouldn't lead us to think that Jesus "is" God the Father. "Father" is used in Is. 9:6 ["everlasting father"] in a manner consistent with other Old Testament usage to denote a leader, a great one- but not God Himself in person.

Joseph's dreams had predicted that he was to "have dominion" (Gen. 37:8), and here the Hebrew word is used of how Joseph ruled over all Egypt and those who came to buy corn from him such as his brothers (Gen. 45:8,26). His words here are therefore not proud, but pointing out how his dreams had come true.

Gen 45:9 *Hurry, and go up to my father, and tell him, 'This is what your son Joseph says, God has made me lord of all Egypt. Come down to me. Don't wait-* The usage of "father" is in contrast to how he was "father to Pharaoh" (:8); but he considered Jacob his true father and senior to him. Joseph's love and respect for Jacob was immense; even though he had only lived with him until 17 years old, and Jacob's favouritism towards him had not really helped him in his early life. The twice expressed urgency (and again in :13) was not only because Joseph feared his father could die at any moment; but perhaps also because he sensed that the wonder of what had happened could wear off, and the brothers might cease to believe it. For believing in such wonderful grace is actually difficult. We would rather procrastinate, than accept it for what it is and act zealously on the implications of it.

Gen 45:10 *You shall dwell in the land of Goshen, and you will be near to me, you, your children, your children's children, your flocks, your herds, and all that you have-* "Near to me" connects with how Jacob had needed to urge his brothers to come near to him (:4). He wanted to live permanently with them with that same close relationship he had in that first moment when he

revealed himself, in the magnificence of his grace and saving love toward them. And so there will be no decline in intensity after we too meet our Lord at judgment day, in the greatness of all His passion toward us. We shall live eternally in the spirit of that moment. There will be no entropy, no fading of intensity. Everlasting joy shall be upon our heads. Goshen, "land of rain", was the only area of Egypt as it then was which experienced rain, rather than depending upon the flooding of the Nile for irrigation. It was near the border with Canaan, which confirms the suggestion made on :7 that they were intended to live there until the famine was over, and then return to Canaan.

Gen 45:11 *There I will nourish you; for there are yet five years of famine; lest you come to poverty, you, and your household, and all that you have'*- Joseph seems to have sensed that they might prefer not to believe his interpretation of dreams, and think that surely next year there will be a harvest... and therefore remain in Canaan, away from him and the challenge of living with his grace. There really is something within us which shies away from grace. Even by the time of Gen. 50:21, the brothers still feared that Joseph might not continue to "nourish" them. Faith in grace must continue; it is not the realization of a moment. To abide in grace is not so easy. Their tendency would be to return to Canaan, indeed awed by their brother's grace, but just get back on with their lives, living admittedly somewhat better than they had previously, but just doing their own thing. To engage continually with his grace would demand so much from them. And so he repeats that the famine is going to last another five years (:6). The Hebrew translated "poverty" really has the idea of being possessed by another, or being disinherited (s.w. Ex. 34:24; Lev. 25:46; Num. 14:12; 21:32; 32:21,39; 33:52-55; Dt. 2:12,21-24 etc.). All those passages speak of Israel dispossessing the land of Canaan; if Israel's sons now tried to remain in

Canaan, then they would be dispossessed and would fall out of the covenant promises. Again Joseph is reasoning in terms of the promises to the fathers. They would not be able to inherit the land as promised if they returned there without Joseph; they had to live in Egypt (the world) nourished by Joseph's bread of life, engaged continually with him and confronted by his grace, so that finally they could eternally inherit the land. This all speaks to us; for we likewise have the same promises made to us. We too might foolishly seek to grab "the land" for ourselves without the necessary confrontation with the Lord's grace and care for us, all of which provokes in us a continual awareness that we are far from worthy of such grace and have sinned grievously.

Gen 45:12 *Behold, your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin, that it is my mouth that speaks to you-* He now spoke without an interpreter (cp. Gen. 42:23). His accent and language were proof enough that he was indeed their brother; although he had not spoken Hebrew all his adult life, for the last 22 years. But his heart had always been with them, and so he remembered it. It was by his words and speech that he was known to them; and this is true of the convicting power of the Lord's word to us.

Gen 45:13 *You shall tell my father of all my glory in Egypt, and of all that you have seen. You shall hurry and bring my father down here-* Again the stress is on acting quickly, as twice in :9. This was not only because Joseph feared his father could die at any moment; but perhaps also because he sensed that the wonder of what had happened could wear off, and the brothers might cease to believe it. For believing in such wonderful grace is actually difficult. We would rather procrastinate, than accept it for what it is and act zealously on the implications of it.

There is no statement from the brothers. No confession of sin, no begging for forgiveness. Clearly the forgiveness had been granted. But as I noted throughout Gen. 44, they didn't fully

get to where they ought to have. The long speech from Joseph reminds us of the father of the prodigal, who was so consumed with his own joy at the prodigal's return that the sinner has hardly a chance to say anything.

Gen 45:14 *He fell on his brother Benjamin's neck, and wept, and Benjamin wept on his neck-* Only Benjamin is recorded as weeping on Joseph's neck (cp. :15). He was the one who had not sinned against Joseph; the other brothers seem to still be struggling to really believe in Joseph's grace, because prolific weeping would be the natural outcome of the pressure release which would have come from accepting that really, the past was scribbled, and they could be at peace- as Joseph had assured them as early as Gen. 44:17.

Gen 45:15 *He kissed all his brothers, and wept on them. After that his brothers talked with him-* Perhaps at this point they did confess sin, but if they did, it was only after Joseph had so strongly assured them of his total acceptance of them.

Gen 45:16 *The report of it was heard in Pharaoh's house, saying, Joseph's brothers have come. It pleased Pharaoh well, and his servants-* Again evidence that Joseph's house was nearby, or part of the palace complex. "Report" translates the same word as "aloud" in :2. The sound of joyful weeping was heard, and the reason was soon given- Joseph's brothers had come. I suggested earlier that Potiphar was somehow around in Joseph's life. He and his family would have recalled buying Joseph and may well have been aware of his background history from the merchants, even if Joseph had not told them his story. So it is likely that it was known that they had done him evil, and now he was rewarding them with good. And Pharaoh was eager to be part of that grace.

Gen 45:17 *Pharaoh said to Joseph, Tell your brothers, 'Do this. Load your animals, and go, travel to the land of Canaan-* Pharaoh

wants Joseph to tell the brothers what Joseph has already told them. Here we see the similarity between Pharaoh's thinking and that of Joseph. Their relationship enables us to understand how the Lord Jesus can function as God, taking His own initiatives, and yet thinking the same as God; whilst not being God Himself in a Trinitarian sense.

Gen 45:18 *Take your father and your households, and come to me, and I will give you the good of the land of Egypt, and you will eat the fat of the land'-* As noted on :17, this was exactly what Joseph had already told them. Dt. 6:11 promised the returning Israelites, who were the first audience of Genesis, that they would be given the good things (s.w.) of the land of Canaan; and the returning exiles were promised the same (Ezra 9:12). This again was all of grace; they would have felt awkward, as cattle farmers, eating what they had not worked to produce. It spoke of the grace of God's Kingdom.

Gen 45:19 *Now you are commanded: do this. Take wagons out of the land of Egypt for your little ones, and for your wives, and bring your father, and come-* There was not to be any reason for remaining in Canaan; wagons, which were perhaps unknown in Canaan and the highest transport technology in the world, were sent to Canaan. Absolutely no barrier was to be allowed to stand in the way of their entering a prefigurement of God's Kingdom. This all speaks of the passion of the Father and Son for our salvation, despite our sins.

Gen 45:20 *Also, don't concern yourselves about your belongings, for the good of all of the land of Egypt is yours-* The grace received meant that all petty materialism, all grasping on to what little they had and were fond of, was now dwarfed by the nature and extent of what they were to be given. The news that Joseph was alive and glorified was received rather like that of the Lord's resurrection: initial disbelief, but then the family

of Jacob who believed it rose up and left all they had to go to be with Joseph; Israel in AD70 and the last days are likewise bidden leave their stuff and go to be with Christ (cp. Lk. 17:31). "Concern" is literally 'to eye with pity'; they were not to take pity on their belongings, not allowing sentimentality and the human desire to just stick with the old and familiar to stop them from inheriting the grace of this new kingdom. So many people prefer to stay with the old and familiar, even if it means death. Again and again in the whole story we see the struggle to accept grace. Although Joseph urged them not to bring their belongings (Gen. 45:20), the record emphasizes that they did bring them (Gen. 46:1,6,7). The record stresses how Jacob and his sons all struggled to believe the good news of Joseph, they resisted grace, just as we do.

Gen 45:21 *The sons of Israel did so-* As just noted on :20, there was a strong tendency to remain in Canaan. So they are to be commended for accepting the challenge.

Joseph gave them wagons, according to the commandment of Pharaoh, and gave them provision for the way- As noted on :19, there was absolutely no excuse for them to not now accept the gracious salvation prepared for them. Food for the journey, wagons, clothes, everything was provided. As it is for us. We see again how circumstances repeated; the brothers had earlier brought an untrue report about Joseph to their father, with the blood stained coat as evidence. Now they bring another report to him about Joseph, again with evidence- the wagons. They were being led to repentance and truthfulness by this higher hand of God structuring their situations. And we experience the same.

Gen 45:22 *He gave each one of them changes of clothing, but to Benjamin he gave three hundred pieces of silver and five changes of clothing-* The wilderness generation were likewise provided with the wealth of Egypt, clothing and food for their journey in the

opposite direction- to inherit Canaan. They must have seen the similarities.

The gift of clothing was to replace the clothing they had torn in grief. Joseph is eager to assure them that his forgiveness has restored things. They had stolen and ripped his garment, but he now gives them garments. And yet, like us with the Lord Jesus, they struggled to believe assurance upon assurance.

The 300 shekels may allude to 30 shekels being the price of a slave as taught in the law of Moses. They had sold Joseph cheaply for 20. The ten brothers needed to redeem their brother, making a total of 300 shekels. But Joseph paid this for them. Just as we will note on :23 that he effectively did their repentance for them to Jacob, by sending him the gifts of penitence.

Gen 45:23 *He sent the following to his father: ten donkeys loaded with the good things of Egypt, and ten female donkeys loaded with grain and bread and provision for his father by the way-* This was to give a foretaste of the life in Egypt; just as we have a foretaste of the Kingdom life now. Jacob would have been met, as it were, by successions of caravans. The droves of gifts, then his sons, and then the wagons. It was all rather similar to what he had sent to Esau his brother. Yet again, Jacob was being enabled to enter into the feelings of others, and to feel how they felt at what he had done to them. And if we discern it, this happens to us too.

Joseph sent a massive gift carried by many donkeys. This was in order to remind his father of how he had sent a gift in a similar manner to his brother Esau. Jacob would have seen the similarity. Immediately he would have perceived that this was a request for grace, forgiveness and reconciliation. Who had sinned against Jacob? Not Joseph, but the brothers. The gift was therefore as if Joseph was doing the brothers' repentance for them. Just as the

Lord at times goes more than the extra mile in bringing us to repentance. We also get this sense when Joseph glosses over their sin by saying it had all been used by God.

Gen 45:24 *So he sent his brothers away, and they departed. He said to them, See that you don't quarrel on the way-* The brethren went forth on this journey to effectively inherit this new Kingdom by grace with the admonition not to fall out with each other by the way. The wonder of the grace received and that which was ahead of them should have made petty differences disappear. But although Joseph had forgiven them and knew they were to some extent repentant, he clearly perceived that they were not very spiritual, although he had accepted them. The self-sacrificial spirit of one for all, all for one which they had displayed before him... was, he realized, the devotion of a moment. On the long hard journey through the desert, that was likely to fade. All that is within us seems to struggle against grace. Twice Joseph pleads with his brothers not to be angry, after he had so graciously accepted them (Gen. 45:5, 24 Heb.). He imagines that they will be tempted to become angry (Heb.) as they travelled the long way home, reflecting inevitably upon the grace of Joseph. Their anger and bad conscience with themselves personally was likely to become transferred onto each other. Joseph was indeed the master psychologist. Joseph understood that having received such grace, the brothers were actually likely to become angry with each other, who had received it. The Lord foresaw this in His parable about the workers who become angry at His grace to those who worked little; and also in His matchless story about the elder brother who became angry at his younger brother's acceptance. In many families, the child grows up with the feeling that enjoyment is only legitimate if it is somehow merited, and is a reward for some form of 'work'. And the child within, in the person of the convert to Christ in later

life, then tends to view the Kingdom as a 'reward' which likewise somehow has to be merited. And yet we cry out with Paul, that the good which we would do, we somehow can't achieve. And so faith in being in the Kingdom becomes weak. And so instead we must try to recall our response as children, or view the response in children around us, to the receipt of unearned pleasures or gifts. These are the ones most joyfully received and appreciated and remembered. And this is how it is with salvation, the only thing which in our hearts any of us is truly worried about in any ultimate sense. A salvation that is so great, so free, given by a loving Father who rejoices in His children's happiness and squeals of delight.

Gen 45:25 T*hey went up out of Egypt, and came into the land of Canaan, to Jacob their father-* There is no mention that they explained to Jacob how they had lied to him, and what they had done to Joseph. This fits with how there is no record of any confession and apology to Joseph after he has revealed himself to them. Again we get the impression that although they were forgiven and accepted, and there were indeed some positive spiritual changes in their attitudes, they were far from being as repentant and spiritually minded as they might have been, and as Joseph had sought to elicit from them. This is comfort to all of us who feel that our response to the Lord's grace is too small and our transformation not as it might have been.

Gen 45:26 *They told him, saying, Joseph is still alive, and he is ruler over all the land of Egypt. His heart fainted, for he didn't believe them-* There is no record of them admitting their wrongdoing and deception; see on :25. It seems Joseph's heart stopped beating, and he fainted, only to revive when he sees the wagons arrive (:27). As they watched him lying there, perhaps for days until the wagons came, they would naturally have feared that he would die without seeing Joseph. And they would have

realized that this was all their fault. The lie of their lives, the sin of their soul, had effectively killed their father, whom they clearly loved and cared for. His bad medical reaction may have been used by the Father to try to provoke in them an open confession of their sin; but still we never read of it. Did all Joseph's efforts to bring the brothers to repentance actually succeed? We conclude that yes, but only in their deepest hearts. Words of repentance and contrition are never really recorded, and even what they say to Joseph after Jacob dies in Gen. 50 appears motivated by fear of consequence rather than contrition. We reflect that Jacob met his brother Esau after 20 years, and achieved a similar kind of reconcilliation between brothers; yes it was reconcilliation on one level, but not really on another. And now again in the Jacob family, brothers have been separated 20 years but their reconcilliation was never total. And they all went to their graveplanks in that state; and yet are all set to rise again in glory at the last day. And so it is with so many believing families.

Gen 45:27 *They told him all the words of Joseph, which he had said to them-* But again we note that they did not tell him what they had said, nor do we read of any confession or apology from them. The silence, repeatedly, at every point in the narrative when we would expect this... is quite deafening. We could translate this: "They told him all the words which Joseph had instructed them to say". In this case, we see his sensitivity in sparing making them tell their father what they had done to him earlier.

When he saw the wagons which Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of Jacob, their father, revived- It has been suggested that wagons / chariots were unknown in Canaan; and for desert dwellers like Jacob's family, there were no good roads for them to travel over. And there is the possibility that the manufacture of wheels was not well developed in Canaan. The sudden

appearance of Egyptian wagons was what persuaded Jacob; in terms of technology, it was perhaps similar to an airplane landing in a jungle amongst people who have never got close to one, even if they had seen them flying far overhead and heard of them.

Gen 45:28 *Israel said, It is enough. Joseph my son is still alive. I will go and see him before I die-* "It is enough" shows the triumph of the value of relationships over wealth- a lesson our world is ever failing to learn. The gifts and opulence were nothing compared to the simple fact that Joseph was still alive.

GENESIS CHAPTER 46

Gen 46:1 *Israel travelled with all that he had-* This could be read as disobedience to the commandment of Gen. 45:20 not to take their belongings with them because they would be given everything in Egypt. The power of petty materialism, clinging on to the old and familiar, is very strong, and with Jacob it got no easier with age. See on :6. Again and again in the whole story we see the struggle to accept grace. Although Joseph urged them not to bring their belongings (Gen. 45:20), the record emphasizes that they did bring them (Gen. 46:1,6,7). The record stresses how Jacob and his sons all struggled to believe the good news of Joseph, they resisted grace, just as we do.

And came to Beersheba, and offered sacrifices to the God of his father, Isaac- If these were in gratitude, then they were offered on the basis of faith in the word of Joseph. For he had not yet seen him himself. Jacob is still thinking in terms of God as being his father's God; only in his final blessing of his sons does he freely speak of this God as his personal God. We see therefore that the drive to spiritual maturity can take a lifetime, even a life as long as Jacob's. Those brought up believing in their parents' God may take a lifetime to make it real for themselves.

Gen 46:2 *God spoke to Israel in the visions of the night, and said, Jacob, Jacob! He said, Here I am-* Jacob's old name was used because this was still how Jacob perceived himself- a liar, a twister, a grabber, rather than a ruler with God. And although the inspired commentary mentions his name Israel from God's perspective, he was addressed as Jacob. And with us likewise, God wishes us to believe in and identify with the new name and identity which He by grace has given us. And yet He so seeks relationship with us that He relates to us in more immature terms if that is still where we are, rather like the Lord using the

language of demons in order to communicate with people. It's similar to Joseph's acceptance of his brethren despite them not quite getting there in terms of the repentance and spirituality which his plan had potentially enabled.

Gen 46:3- see on Gen. 31:54.

He said, I am God- This is in response to Jacob's "Here I am" (:2). We see here something of the mutuality between God and man. The human "I am here" is met with the Divine "I am".

The God of your father- Jacob is still thinking in terms of God as being his father's God; only in his final blessing of his sons does he freely speak of this God as his personal God. And yet as noted on :2, God relates to people in the immature terms and at the immature positions they are at. He could have said "I am your personal God, the God of Jacob", but He instead goes along with Jacob's immature perceptions. Or perhaps the idea is that Jacob had offered sacrifices to the God of his father, and God is trying to insist that He, the God of Jacob's father, was also Jacob's God.

Fear not to go down into Egypt, for there I will make of you a great nation- This continues a theme noted throughout Gen. 45- the wonderful good news was almost too good to believe and accept. The brothers were warned not to give in to the temptation to try to remain in Canaan, but to come to Egypt. It seems Jacob too struggled with the degree of grace and even feared it. This is why people disbelieve the good news of the Gospel of grace. It's in a way too good to believe.

Yet Jacob's nervousness of going down into Egypt was doubtless also due to his recollection of Abraham and Isaac's tales of spiritual woe concerning it. The double repetition of a name ["Jacob, Jacob"] is usually a rebuke; but for what? Possibly for still being influenced in his spirituality by the specter of his forefathers, rather than personally reflecting on the implications of God's word to Abraham, that his seed would have to live

in a Gentile land for a period before they could be led into the promised land (Gen. 15:13). He is here assured that the prophetic purpose contained in the Abrahamic covenant was going to come true in the end- even if Jacob left the promised land. But the large seed Jacob would ultimately sire (and the genealogy in this chapter shows it had already had primary fulfilment) would inherit the promised land; they would have to come up out of Egypt. It was apparent that Jacob would not live to see this in his life, and so again he was driven to the hope of bodily resurrection.

Gen 46:4 *I will go down with you into Egypt. I will also surely bring you up again-* It was an Angel who led Israel back from Egypt, and so it was an Angel who was speaking to Jacob at this point, assuring him that he would go with Jacob into Egypt. But the words may be true of Jacob on a personal level; he was to be taken into Egypt and back up out of it by the Angel. There could also be a hint here at resurrection, a bringing up again, so that the dream of Jacob and Rachel bowing before Joseph could finally be fulfilled. See on:30.

Joseph will close your eyes- The suggestion could be that Jacob would be brought back up again from Egypt to Canaan, and then he would close his eyes in death with Joseph next to him. But this didn't happen- because Israel chose to remain in Egypt, and suffered for it. See on Gen. 45:7; 47:4,15. So often potentials are enabled, but are not realized because of human dysfunction and conservatism. The possibility of restoration from Babylon and the building of a temple complex as outlined in such detail in Ez. 40-48 would be another example. This suggested explanation would give an appropriate flow to the argument- the death of Jacob would then be associated with the Angel leading him back to Canaan, rather than introducing Jacob's death out of context. The LXX here has "Joseph shall put his hands on thine

eyes", which was a form of blessing. This would be confirmation of the dream in which Jacob bowed before his son.

Gen 46:5 *Jacob rose up from Beersheba, and the sons of Israel carried Jacob, their father, their little ones, and their wives, in the wagons which Pharaoh had sent to carry him-* The impression is that it was Jacob who wanted to make a sacrifice at Beersheba, and when dad was done with his religious ritual, the rest of the family got him back in the wagon. This would be another indication of weakness in the brothers of Joseph, and evidence of their salvation and forgiveness by his grace alone. Perhaps there is significance in the idea that the wagons were sent to "carry him", but the rest of his family were carried in them; as if they were saved as Noah's family were, by association with the faithful, rather than necessarily being themselves very faithful. This impression is confirmed in :7 [see note there].

Their wives and little children, not just their sons but their daughters too, came into Egypt; further reason for thinking that the 66 or 70 counted as going down into Egypt refers to the heads of clans, large families, rather than being an exhaustive list of everyone who went down.

Gen 46:6 *They took their livestock, and their goods, which they had gotten in the land of Canaan, and came into Egypt—Jacob, and all his seed with him-* As noted on :1, they took "their goods" with them, in disobedience to the commandment of Gen. 45:20 not to take their belongings with them because they would be given everything in Egypt. They desperately wanted to cling on to what they "had gotten", rather than accept the grace of all things being given to them.

Gen 46:7 *His sons, and his sons' sons with him, his daughters, and his sons' daughters, and he brought all his seed with him into Egypt-* The mention of Jacob's daughters and granddaughters going with them confirms my comment on :26, that the list of

70 or 66 people here is not a total list but rather of those who later founded large family clans within their tribes. As noted on :5, the family were brought by Jacob into Egypt, they were saved by association with him, as Rahab's family were, rather than by their own faithfulness to the covenant. The large company were "all his seed" which had indeed become multitudinous, showing yet again that the promises which form the basis of the new covenant have a primary fulfilment.

Gen 46:8 *These are the names of the children of Israel, who came into Egypt, Jacob and his sons: Reuben, Jacob's firstborn-* We wonder why Reuben is still mentioned as the firstborn when it had been given to Joseph (1 Chron. 5:1), who wore the robe of the firstborn, the coat of many colours, which provoked so much jealousy. Perhaps this had been cancelled when Joseph disappeared. I have suggested at several points in this chapter that the list we now have is not of all who came into Egypt (see on :26,27) but of those who became heads of large family clans within the tribes.

Gen 46:9 *The sons of Reuben: Hanoch, Pallu, Hezron, and Carmi-* Hanoch [s.w. Enoch] was named after the son of Cain (Gen. 4:17) and means "initiated", rather hinting at unspirituality and paganism. At the time of Gen. 42:37, Reuben only had two sons. He may have produced two sons straight afterwards if he had other women in his life; but probably as noted on :18 and :21, there were unborn children included in this list because they were counted as still being "in the loins of" their ancestors.

Gen 46:10 *The sons of Simeon: Jemuel, Jamin, Ohad, Jachin, Zohar, and Shaul the son of a Canaanite woman-* "The sons of Simeon were Nemuel and Jamin... and Shaul" (1 Chron. 4:24); but Gen. 46:10 shows that Shaul was Simeon's son by a wrong, casual relationship. Yet this is not recorded in Chronicles, even

though so many other weaknesses are. Surely this is to demonstrate how if God imputes righteousness for a repented of sin, there really is no record of this kept by Him. This and other such lessons from Chronicles only come from digging under the surface. The fact Simeon's relationship with a local Canaanite is mentioned may be because this was the exception rather than the rule amongst Jacob's sons. In this case, we are left to conclude that they like Isaac and Jacob had taken their wives from the monotheists amongst Abraham's distant relatives in Mesopotamia, and the women had been expected to follow Rebekah's example and leave their land and come and live in the land of promise. "Shaul" means 'asked for' and so it could be that Simeon had some particular desire for that son, and for all his failures at Shechem, he had asked God for a child and received it, although through a less than ideal relationship.

It seems fair to assume that all the brothers married Canaanite women. So perhaps this is a reference to some child from a passing sexual encounter with a Canaanite woman, possibly implying she was a prostitute. See on :12. Or it could be that the brothers had all married women from Mesopotamia, repeating the weakness of Isaac and Jacob in refusing to break with Abraham's land of origin. But was that right? Abraham's seed were to separate from Abraham's homeland. Which meant that they should have taken local wives and converted them to Yahweh's ways. Instead, they took wives from pagan Mesopotamia, idolatrous women like Rachel.

Gen 46:11 *The sons of Levi: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari-* "Gershon" means 'expelled', maybe meaning that like Reuben he was expelled from the role of firstborn [he is mentioned first as if he was the firstborn]. This is a theme of the Genesis record. "Merari" means "bitter"; from these rather unpromising beginnings were to arise those who gave their lives to the service

of God and His people. And we see similar transformation in the lives of so many.

Gen 46:12 *The sons of Judah: Er, Onan, Shelah, Perez, and Zerah; but Er and Onan died in the land of Canaan-* "Shelah" means 'requested'; as observed with Shaul on :10, prayers for the child's existence were answered through a less than ideal relationship.

Here we have another impression of the kind of weakness discussed on :10, as Judah's sons Er and Onan are mentioned when they were already dead. Yet they are mentioned whilst writing a list of those who went down into Egypt. Seeing they were dead in Canaan (Num. 26:19 is specific about Er and Onan dying in Canaan), why mention them? I suggest it is all to build up an impression that this embryo people of God were indeed sinners saved by grace, at the initiative of God through Joseph. This all supports the argument that Israel needed to go into Egypt and multiply there as a singular people. As otherwise, their tendency to intermarriage and relations with Canaanites would mean they would never become a distinct people.

The sons of Perez were Hezron and Hamul- "Hamul" means 'The one who was spared', which rather suggests he too had sinned like Er and Onan, but was spared by grace. Again, we hardly get a very positive spiritual impression of Jacob's family. They were saved by grace. There is a chronological query as to whether Judah was old enough to have had these two grandchildren whilst still in Canaan. I have suggested on :18 and :21 that there were unborn children included in this list because they were counted as still being "in the loins of" their ancestors.

Gen 46:13 *The sons of Issachar: Tola, Puvah, Iob, and Shimron-* "Iob" is LXX "Jashub", as in Num. 26:24.

Gen 46:14 *The sons of Zebulun: Sered, Elon, and Jahleel-* "Elon" means "oak", and this surely had idolatrous connections.

Yet his brother Jahleel means "waiting upon God". So we have here an example of where spirituality can still flourish despite the culture, family and society of origin being unspiritual. Because spirituality is unique and the outcome of our personal relationship with God; we are not doomed to unspirituality because of our background or environment.

Gen 46:15 *These are the sons of Leah, whom she bore to Jacob in Paddan Aram, with his daughter Dinah. All the souls of his sons and his daughters were thirty-three-* 33 excluding Dinah, which raises the question as to why she is mentioned here at all. Maybe because she went on to have some special significance in the family, despite her sins and faults of youth at Shechem. Perhaps she took over as the matriarch of the family after the deaths of Rachel and Leah.

Gen 46:16 *The sons of Gad: Ziphion, Haggi, Shuni, Ezbon, Eri, Arodi, and Areli-* "Arodi" is "wild ass man", a similar idea to the description of Ishmael in Gen. 16:12, who chose to go away from covenant relationship with God. We simply do not get a great impression of the family; and that is the point.

Gen 46:17 *The sons of Asher: Imnah, Ishvah, Ishvi, Beriah, and Serah their sister. The sons of Beriah: Heber and Malchiel-* The mention of women in this list is unusual, and I have suggested that the names are of those who became heads of family clans within the tribes. So the mention of Serah would mean that she became a head of family; although rare or unknown in the world around them, this was not totally unheard of in the Jacob family and we see in this the respect of women amongst them.

Gen 46:18 *These are the sons of Zilpah, whom Laban gave to Leah, his daughter, and these she bore to Jacob, even sixteen souls-* Zilpah did not bear 16 children, but rather the grandchildren are counted to her, on the basis that a person is seen as existing "in

the loins of their father" even if they have no actual existence at that point; see on :21.

Gen 46:19 *The sons of Rachel, Jacob's wife: Joseph and Benjamin-* Again we have the fact that Joseph is mentioned in this list of those who came down with Jacob into Egypt, when Joseph was already there in Egypt. See on :20,21,26.

Gen 46:20 *To Joseph in the land of Egypt were born Manasseh and Ephraim, whom Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera, priest of On, bore to him-* The LXX adds: "There were sons born to Manasses, whom the Syrian concubine bore to him, even Machir. And Machir begat Galaad. And the sons of Ephraim the brother of Manasses, Sutalaam and Taam. And the sons of Sutalaam, Edom". This explains the LXX figure of 75 in :27 which Stephen quotes in Acts 7:14, so the LXX addition may be correct. However, we are left with the problem of how sons born in Egypt could be counted amongst those who came with Jacob into Egypt. I will suggest on :21 and :26 that we are not reading a literal list of everyone who came, but rather a list of those who developed into clans within the tribes. And some were counted as "in" those who came down into Egypt. This is what it is to be "in" a person; the person is counted as more than themselves personally. And this is the background for the idea of being "in" Christ by baptism into Him. We are counted as Him, and He as us.

Gen 46:21 *The sons of Benjamin: Bela, Becher, Ashbel, Gera, Naaman, Ehi, Rosh, Muppim, Huppim, and Ard-* As noted on Gen. 44, Benjamin was hardly a child when the brothers came to buy corn. He was in his 20s, and according to the Hebrew text he had ten sons already, and presumably some daughters; perhaps suggesting that his father's favouritism and obsession with him had not been helpful morally, and had resulted in him having multiple relationships from a young age. However, the LXX lists

only three sons, and makes the rest of the list the sons of Bela. And yet Benjamin would not have been old enough to have been a grandfather. So it could be that he had married a woman who had children of her own who became Benjamin's, or that he somehow adopted these children. There would have been a very large extended family around Jacob, and maybe these children were simply under the care of Benjamin. However, the genealogy in Num. 26:40 appears to support the LXX text here, with Ard and Naaman given as grandsons of Benjamin and not sons. We must remember that genealogies, numbers and dates are not used in Semitic languages in the strictly literalistic way in which they are in European languages. Heb. 7:10 can therefore argue that Melchizedek blessed Levi because he blessed Abraham, and Levi was a descendant of Abraham, "yet in the loins of his father". And this establishes Melchizedek as greater than Levi, and in turn, the priests descended from him. That argument may appear very stretched and even technically inaccurate to European ears. But it had absolute validity in Hebrew thought. And so the grandchildren of Benjamin, yet unborn, could be listed as being in existence when Benjamin went into Egypt, and even be numbered amongst the group at that time. This is why the grandchildren of the maids are counted as if they are the direct children of the maids; see on :9 and :18. We likewise read that Jacob brought his twelve sons out of Mesopotamia, including Benjamin (Gen. 35:24,26). But Benjamin was born later, in Canaan. But on this basis of being counted as "in the loins of" an ancestor, Benjamin could also be presented as having come out of Mesopotamia. If this kind of thing were better appreciated by Bible readers, it would be better understood that there was no personal pre-existence of the Lord Jesus in actuality, although He is spoken of as existing prior to His birth.

The simple truth is that Benjamin, the "little one" (Gen. 44:20), has more descendants listed to his name than any of the brothers. Is. 60:22 clearly alludes to this- "a little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation". It is the theme of the patriarchal family; the firstborns are deposed, the elder serves the younger, the weak become strong, the little one becomes mighty.

Benjamin was 16 years younger than Joseph. Benjamin had ten sons when the family moved to Egypt. If by 23, he had 10 sons, he likely had had 10 daughters as well. They would have been from a number of women. So we get the impression that he, the favoured spoilt son of the favourite wife Rachel, with a very wealthy father, became a playboy from a young age. Joseph knew this, or guessed it. For he too had once held the same status with Jacob. What he did to Benjamin was therefore to lead that young man to spiritual maturity. And yet Joseph did it whilst having assured him of his special love, giving him five times larger portions of food. And Benjamin was open to this leading.

The names of his ten sons often reflect his obsession with his absent older brother, whom Jacob had clearly described to him in heroic terms. The rabbis offer the following definitions of their names in Gen. 46:21: "Ahi, he was my brother; Bela, the one who disappeared, Rosh, my elder or leader; Becher, the firstborn of his mother (as Joseph was); Ashbel, sent by God to captivity; Gera, dweller in a foreign land; Ard, he went down amongst the nations". This obsession with his unknown, mysteriously disappeared older brother is absolutely psychologically credible. And for me, the psychological credibility of the Biblical record is one of the greatest reasons I believe it to be what it claims to be- the word of God.

Gen 46:22 *These are the sons of Rachel, who were born to Jacob: all the souls were fourteen-* Yet this includes Ephraim, Manasseh and Joseph, who were already in Egypt. This supports my suggestion on :26 that we do not have here a list of every individual who came from Canaan to Egypt, but rather a list of the family clans which would later develop.

Gen 46:23 *The son of Dan: Hushim-* "Hushim" means "hasty", not a particularly spiritual characteristic. As noted earlier, Hebrew names are not necessarily birth names, but the names by which people came to be known, reflective of their personalities or experiences. However he is called "Shusham" in Num. 26:42, "humble". So maybe his over hasty actions humbled him in due course.

Gen 46:24 *The sons of Naphtali: Jahzeel, Guni, Jezer, and Shillem-* "Jezer" means "image", "Guni" means "painted with colours", both suggestive of idolatry, bearing in mind as noted on :23 that Hebrew names are how the person came to be known according to his personal history.

Gen 46:25 *These are the sons of Bilhah, whom Laban gave to Rachel, his daughter, and these she bore to Jacob: all the souls were seven-* The Biblical record is very careful to draw a distinction between Jacob's proper wives, and Bilhah and Leah, even though they were understood as his wives even by Rachel and Leah, as well as society (Gen. 30:4,9). Jacob cared for them, had children by them, and had a lifelong relationship with them. But still the inspired record sees a difference between that, and marriage. We need to bear that in mind as we consider what Biblical marriage means in our world.

Gen 46:26 *All the souls who came with Jacob into Egypt, who were his direct descendants, besides Jacob's sons' wives, all the souls were sixty-six-* The manuscripts differ, from 66 to 70 to 75. Some of this can be accounted for by various inclusive or exclusive

reckonings of the wives, or the LXX adding in some children of Manasseh to the list in :20, which Stephen quotes in Acts 7:14. However, "all the souls" is clearly not a literal reference to 'all the people' because nearly all of the people mentioned are males, and we know from:7 that Jacob's daughters and granddaughters came with them too. We therefore conclude that those listed are those who went on to have independent families, which in turn became clans within the tribes of Israel.

"His direct descendants" is literally as AV "who came out of his loins", or his thigh. This is the same word used of how Jacob was touched and wounded in his thigh the night he wrestled with the Angel, and therefore he limped on his thigh (Gen. 32:25,31,32). And here we have the consistent paradox developed in this whole record- out of weakness and inferiority comes blessedness. The blessing of a large seed were fulfilled through many children as it were coming out of his injured loin- a reminder for the rest of his life of God's grace and his weakness. All the attempts to count up the direct descendants of Jacob and make them match 66 are in my view failing to see the more essential point- that they all came from his injured, delicate thigh.

Gen 46:27 *The sons of Joseph, who were born to him in Egypt, were two souls. All the souls of the house of Jacob, who came into Egypt, were seventy-* See on :20; if the LXX addition in :20 is accepted then we have 75; Stephen in Acts 7:14 and the LXX say 75. This could also be because the 75 includes the wives of Jacob's sons. Judah's wife was dead (Gen. 38:12). Joseph was already in Egypt, making 65 who went into Egypt "besides Jacob's sons' wives" (:26). This plus ten wives would make 75. Again we note that these children of Joseph were not those who came with Jacob into Egypt- for they were born in Egypt. But they appear to be counted within the various figures of 66,70 or 75. Because

of the principle of being "in" someone meaning that that person's actions and status were counted to all "in" him. Which is how we are to understand being "in Christ".

The figure of 70 is not, it seems to me, strictly literal. It is to match the 70 Gentile nations of the *eretz* listed in Gen. 10; their bounds were set according to the number of Israel's children (Dt. 32:8). The potential plan at this time was that they would all die out during the famine, and be replaced by the 70 clans of Jacob's family; who having been miraculously preserved from death in Egypt would then re-enter Canaan and possess it. See on Gen. 45:7,10.

Gen 46:28 *He sent Judah before him to Joseph, to show the way before him to Goshen, and they came into the land of Goshen-* We wonder why this was necessary, seeing that Judah and the brothers had twice made this journey. Why the need to as it were send a herald before him? It rather recalls how Jacob had sent such messengers before him to make peace with Esau. We wonder if Jacob feared meeting Joseph, seeing he had disbelieved his dreams, and insisted he would never bow down to him. Indeed almost his last words to Joseph had been of rebuke concerning his dreams. This unnecessary fear of Joseph is quite a theme of the record; it reflects the difficulty we have in believing in grace, forgiveness and salvation. This is the essential, subconscious reason why people do not believe the Gospel of grace; not because of any real intellectual barriers. Such barriers are but excuses, a making respectable of our inner lack of faith and barrier against grace, our pride in refusing to resign our trust in our strength and works as a basis for salvation.

Gen 46:29 *Joseph prepared his chariot, and went up to meet Israel, his father, in Goshen. He presented himself to him, and fell on his neck, and wept on his neck a good while-* We note that Jacob doesn't weep on Joseph's neck, just as the brothers also

didn't when Joseph wept upon them. And again we sense the difficulty in believing Joseph's grace. For Jacob's last words to Joseph had been of rebuke for his dreams. But Jacob is never recorded as apologizing to Joseph for this, nor does he bow to Joseph in fulfilment of the dreams as we might like to see; as with the brothers, his repentance is implicit but not explicit, and therefore of a rather low grade. At the end, Jacob as it were had come to repentance. Joseph falls on his neck and weeps for him, just as the Father does to the repentant prodigal. Jacob's neck had once been covered with animal skin in the deceit of his father Isaac (Gen. 27:16), and Esau too had wept on that same neck, the neck which had been used to deceive and rob Esau (Gen. 33:4). And now Joseph weeps upon it too, after Jacob has again sent an ambassage ahead of him to Joseph as he did to Esau (see on :28). These otherwise strange connections with Jacob's neck would have served to show him that through his acceptance of the spiritual seniority of his great son Joseph, he had indeed been forgiven of all this miserable past.

Gen 46:30 *Israel said to Joseph, Now let me die, since I have seen your face-* Jacob's desire to die at that point is rather a denial of the possibility presented in :4 [see note there] that Jacob could survive the famine in Egypt and then return to Canaan to die. Jacob was focused upon Joseph and now he had seen him, he felt prepared to die in peace, rather than from a broken heart as he had imagined he would earlier. His attitudes to death were governed by the status of Joseph. If Joseph was dead or consumed by a wild animal, he would die broken hearted; but if Joseph were alive, as he demonstrably was, he would die in peace. Whether or not his other sons fessed up to him about their sins was not relevant to him, compared to his focus upon the 'resurrection' of Joseph. And our hang ups over whether others have or have not fully repented and set the record straight is

utterly obscured by the joy of knowing and seeing the risen Lord Jesus. Jacob at this point and in this sense represents us all. He feels that "I never thought I would see your face, and behold, God has let me see your seed also" (Gen. 48:11). Paul seems to allude here by saying that God does for *us* exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think; making Jacob representative of every believer.

That you are still alive- It may be that Jacob considered Joseph to be the special Messianic seed (which he was, in type), and this would explain his profound joy on seeing Joseph alive *and his children*, for this would have meant that the promises concerning the seed, as he understood them, had been proved true (46:30; Gen. 48:11). See on Heb. 11:21. There are many *echoes* of Christ which seem to have no specific purpose apart from to confirm us in our enthusiasm to constantly see the spirit of Christ in this record (here with Lk. 2:29,30).

The brothers had told Jacob that Joseph was "still alive", but he disbelieved them until he had seen Joseph himself. He clearly doubted their integrity. Joseph likewise had been told by the brothers that their father was still alive, but when he makes himself known to them, he immediately asks as to whether his father *really* is still alive. Likewise Jacob clearly suspects them of potential foul play with Benjamin, and accuses them of having bereaved him of Joseph. They were known for their lack of integrity- as the massacre at Shechem revealed. This all leads to the significance of our suggestion on :34 that the brothers now devoted themselves to absolute truthfulness. Although at the end, they seem to falsely claim that Jacob had asked Joseph to forgive them and not punish them. Their struggle to be honest was not, therefore, totally won. Basic honesty, with ourselves and others, is a natural outflow of feeling ultimately secure in the knowledge of God's love and our future salvation.

Gen 46:31 *Joseph said to his brothers, and to his father's house, I will go up, and speak with Pharaoh, and will tell him-* "Tell" is better 'to disclose / tell him frankly and openly'; and the information in view was that of :32, that the family were the shepherds whom Egypt despised.

'My brothers, and my father's house, who were in the land of Canaan, have come to me- "Come [to me]" is the same word used by Jacob in objecting to the interpretation of Joseph's dream as meaning that he must "come" to his son and bow before him (Gen. 37:10). There is no record of Jacob bowing to Joseph, although indeed he does "come" to him; perhaps here Jacob didn't do quite as he should have done. Or maybe Joseph's weeping on his neck made it impossible for him to immediately do so. See on Gen. 47:5.

Gen 46:32 *These men are shepherds, for they have been keepers of livestock, and they have brought their flocks, and their herds, and all that they have'-* As noted on :31, Joseph was advocating absolute honesty about the awkward situation in front of Pharaoh. The shepherds had a reputation for dishonesty and being of the lowest caste, according to Egyptologists. But Joseph thinks that total honesty to Pharaoah personally about this is best. And that was the policy he had sought to elicit from his brothers, through all his questions to them about their family. The Egyptians considered goats and sheep to be divine animals and unfit for sacrifice; hence Moses later says that the Hebrews can't sacrifice sheep within Egypt lest the Egyptians will stone them. Shepherds were an "abomination" to them, a word often used about idolatry. The sheep were seen as symbols of the idols which Egypt worshipped. Yet Jacob's large family were coming with herds of these very things, appearing for all the world some reincarnation of the Hyksos shepherd kings who had entered Egypt by the same route in a previous generation. Shepherds

were in any case culturally despised by Egyptians. Again, the Pharaoh was being asked to invert all his former prejudices and religious beliefs, and accept these newcomers. And he does so, to his credit, and even asks these despised people from the lowest Egyptian caste to be the managers of his cattle. It seems Joseph privately told Pharaoh that his brothers were shepherds, but at the formal audience with Pharaoh, where other Egyptians would be present, Joseph advises them to describe themselves more vaguely as 'cattle men'.

Gen 46:33 *It will happen, when Pharaoh summons you, and will say, 'What is your occupation?'*- Just as Joseph had fired questions at his brothers when they first came to Egypt, so it would be normal for the king to ask them such questions. The similarity between this and their earlier interviews with Joseph was to give them a chance to demonstrate that they had indeed learnt the lesson- of the need for absolute truthfulness, however much it might seem to risk upsetting our material and secular intentions.

Gen 46:34 *That you shall say, 'Your servants have been keepers of livestock from our youth even until now, both we, and our fathers:' that you may dwell in the land of Goshen-* Joseph can see that out of apparent evil, again, good would come. If they were truthful- and the very existence of their flocks of sheep and goats would mean that truth would out in the end anyway- then they would be allowed to live in Goshen, which was somehow separate from the rest of Egypt.

We naturally enquire why the brothers chose to honestly tell Pharaoh that they were herdsmen rather than shepherds. Could it be that they were now so totally devoted to the doctrine of absolute honesty that they chose to disobey him and just tell the truth, rather than play with words as Joseph had suggested they do? Total honesty with ourselves, "speaking the truth in

your heart", with others and with God is a litmus test of true spirituality. The Lord Jesus placed radical, total honesty high up in His Kingdom message in Mt. 5:37: "But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the evil one". Perhaps the Divine execution of Ananias and Sapphira was in order to emphasize the need for total honesty in spiritual matters. It is this radical honesty which will be so unusual in our world that we thereby commend *God's* truth to others: "But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God" (2 Cor. 4:2-4). Paul seems to argue that indeed "every man is a liar" and only putting on the new man in Christ will empower us to be honest: "Put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness. Therefore, putting away lying, 'Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor,' for we are members of one another" (Eph. 4:24,25). Such honesty only comes from having put on Christ, who is the ultimate truth: "Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, 10 and have

put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him" (Col. 3:9,10). This is why lying is grouped together with what may appear to be more major sins in Rev. 21:8: "But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and

all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone". This is why Yahhweh said He would condemn Jerusalem in Jeremiah's time, because He could not find even one person who spoke and lived "truth" (Jer. 5:1). It is a total commitment to the principle of absolute honestly which will

guide our life path: "The integrity of the upright guides them" (Prov. 11:3). It is that principle which will automatically mean we come out with truthful words. Hence the otherwise apparently 'obvious' statement of Prov. 12:17, "A truthful witness gives honest testimony, but a false witness tells lies". Someone who is committed to the principle of total honesty will come out with true words. This is what it is, to be a Christian. It is to be real, to be honest about our own position before God, our utter desperation, and to believe, to be true, to the ultimate truth- that we really will be saved. We really are forgiven. This is the ultimate truth to live by.

For every shepherd is an abomination to the Egyptians- This may have been a reaction against the Hyksos invaders, or shepherd kings, who had come like Jacob from the north and done much damage to Egypt in the previous generation. But shepherds were in any case culturally despised by Egyptians. Seeing one tended to be born and raised in or for a certain occupation, this was a significant factor in how society defined people in the ancient world. People were stereotyped according to occupation. Remember how the sailors asked of Jonah: "What is your occupation? And whence do you come? What is your country? Of what people are you?" (Jonah 1:8). Hence it is recorded that *every* shepherd was despised by the Egyptians. Silversmiths and tent makers (leather workers?) tended to club together in community (Acts 18:3; 19:24-27). In the first century Mediterranean, shepherds were especially despised- and again, this stereotype was overturned by shepherds being chosen to receive news of the birth of God's Son and being the first to come and offer homage; Jesus describing Himself as the good shepherd, in a society where no shepherd could be "good"; and the leaders of the early church being described as spiritual

"shepherds". Pharaoh came to learn this; for he is eventually keen to make these despised "shepherds" the pastors of his own flocks.

The "abomination" of the Hebrews was that they were shepherds; "for all shepherds are an abomination to Egyptians" (Gen. 46:34). And this was why Joseph could not eat together with Hebrews, because they were an abomination to the Egyptians (Gen. 43:32). We find this confirmed in Ex. 8:22, where Moses tells Pharaoh that the Hebrews cannot do as he says and sacrifice in Egypt, because they would be attacked by the Egyptians when they saw the Hebrews offering bulls and calves to Yahweh. For these were symbols of Egyptian gods, and people who ate them were an abomination to them."Abomination" is a word which also means 'idols'. They ate abominations / idols, in that the animals they ate and sacrificed were seen as the gods of Egypt. For the Jacob family to be accepted into the best land of Egypt was therefore grace indeed. Just as is our salvation into God's Kingdom, brought about by Joseph-Jesus. For with reputation as cattle herders ["shepherds"] and bull sacrificers, the Jacob family were going to be last on the list for getting food, let alone being allowed to emigrate to Egypt, let alone to be given land in Goshen, the favoured area. It was all of grace, as it is with us, all the way through.

We note that the Egyptian abomination of Hebrew shepherds is alluded to in the command to Israel: "You should not abhor an Egyptian, for you were a stranger in his land" (Dt. 23:8). It is normal between peoples and individual persons that they treat each other as they were treated by that person or people. Here Yahweh is teaching that His people were to break that cycle. To not abhor those who abhor you. And this is really what the spirit of the Lord Jesus is about, breaking the cycles of human dysfunction and misbehaviour.

The brothers were later made herdsmen over Pharaoh's cattle in Goshen because this was the priestly land, where such cattle were bred and kept only for sacrifice; and the brothers, having experience with those animals, were put in charge of them.

GENESIS CHAPTER 47

Gen 47:1 *Then Joseph went in and told Pharaoh, and said, My father and my brothers, with their flocks, their herds, and all that they own, have come out of the land of Canaan; and behold, they are in the land of Goshen-* Joseph was clearly setting things up so that Israel remained just over the border of Canaan, in Goshen. This worked well for everyone. They were shepherds with herds of sheep, which were abomination to the Egyptians; so it was a good thing that they were located in a limited area. This would also keep them more spiritually separate from Egypt, if they just lived alone. Joseph would have supported the idea of Israel returning to Canaan as soon as the famine was over, having been amazingly blessed by God during the famine years with fertility and increase (see on Gen. 45:7). God's plan was that they should be preserved as the remnant in the *eretz*, the land promised to Abraham (Gen. 45:7). His intention therefore was that they should return from Egypt to Canaan once the famine ended. See on :10; Gen. 46:4,27; 47:1,4,15,18,20,27; 48:16,21. This was why the brothers stated that they only wanted to "sojourn" temporarily in Egypt during the famine (see on Gen. 47:4). But they remained in the soft life of Egypt, when they could have become the sole inheritors of Canaan. And so God's saving purpose was delayed by 430 years until they were forced to leave Egypt.

As Goshen was just across the border, this was the best place for them to be. And it happened, under God's providence, that Goshen was the best land in Egypt.

Gen 47:2 *From among his brothers he took five men, and presented them to Pharaoh-* We think of the Lord Jesus presenting us faultless before the presence of God's glory (Jude 24). But "presented" can be translated 'left with' (Gen. 33:15; Ex. 10:24),

and carries the idea of establishing or setting up. Egypt was governed by a politburo of five ministers. So it could be that Pharaoh wanted to replace his five top ministers with Joseph's brothers- men who were shepherds, of the lowest caste, and foreigners. Pharaoh was indeed inverting all the expectations and norms of Egypt, realizing that it was by doing so that they had all been saved. This makes good sense of why Joseph took five of his brothers; otherwise the number seems arbitrary, and we wonder why the other brothers were not also presented. I suggest this verse is a summary of what happened, and now :3-6 will explain how it came about, leading to the point in :6 when Pharaoh asks: "If you know any able men among them, then put them in charge of my livestock". This is what led to the situation of the five viziers or leaders of Egypt being Joseph's brothers.

Gen 47:3 *Pharaoh said to his brothers, What is your occupation? They said to Pharaoh, Your servants are shepherds, both we, and our fathers-* They had been warned by Joseph to be totally honest in saying who they were, just as he had tried to teach them this lesson when they first came to Egypt. He had warned them that shepherds are abominable to Egyptians, and yet encouraged them to accept they were in one sense the lowest of the low, to not hide the fact nor place some more acceptable gloss upon it; see on Gen. 46:32-34. And they were hugely blessed for this by Pharaoh exalting them; see on :2 and :6.

We naturally enquire why the brothers chose to honestly tell Pharaoh that they were herdsmen rather than shepherds. Could it be that they were now so totally devoted to the doctrine of absolute honesty that they chose to disobey him and just tell the truth, rather than play with words as Joseph had suggested they do? We must remember that they were men fully used to twisting things and being dishonest.

Gen 47:4 *They said to Pharaoh, We have come to live as foreigners in the land, for there is no pasture for your servants' flocks. For the famine is severe in the land of Canaan. Now therefore, please let your servants dwell in the land of Goshen-* They applied to "sojourn", "to live as foreigners", temporarily. This was in line with God's intended plan that Israel stay in Egypt until the famine was over, and then return to Canaan along with Jacob, who would die there (see on Gen. 46:4) and experience further fulfilment of the promises to Abraham there. I explained on Gen. 45:7 that this plan was set up to come true potentially, but as with Judah in Babylon, they preferred the soft life of Egypt, the kingdom now, and remained in Egypt, with Jacob dying there rather than back in Canaan as intended. Even if their words here in :4 mean that they wanted to live permanently in Goshen, which bordered Canaan and was arguably part of the *eretz* promised to Abraham, we note that they saw even permanent dwelling as 'sojourning', living "as foreigners", just passing through- which should be the spirit of our lives, even if we live in the same house or location all our days.

Gen 47:5 *Pharaoh spoke to Joseph, saying, Your father and your brothers have come to you-* This may appear to be stating the obvious. But the significance is in the phrase "come to you". I noted on Gen. 46:31 that "Come [to me]" is the same word used by Jacob in objecting to the interpretation of Joseph's dream as meaning that he must "come" to his son and bow before him (Gen. 37:10). Perhaps Joseph had shared his dreams with Pharaoh, who now perceived their wonderful fulfilment, and may well have come very close to Israel's God himself. Pharaoh had been told of Joseph's dreams and is saying that they have now been fulfilled. Pharaoh was surely a believer by now in Israel's God. We see how the most unlikely of men are called and can respond. Not many mighty are called, but a few are.

We note the brothers came to Joseph, but they had been invited to come to Pharaoh. Just as the Lord Jesus works on God's behalf.

Gen 47:6 *The land of Egypt is before you. Make your father and your brothers dwell in the best of the land. Let them dwell in the land of Goshen. If you know any able men among them, then put them in charge of my livestock-* I suggested on :2 that :3-6 are an explanation of how the situation in :2 came about, that five of the brothers became senior officials in Egypt. The climax of :3-6 is therefore this invitation to Joseph's brothers to become managers of Pharaoh's own cattle. The interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams was a radical affront to the Egyptian belief system, as I noted many times on Gen. 40 and 41. But Pharaoh had the humility to accept this. And he is being tested again here; his whole culture was geared to despise shepherds, to consider sheep and goats as unworthy even to be sacrificed, and to stereotype shepherds as the lowest of the low. There is no lack of evidence for this provided by Egyptologists. But faced with an influx of people who would have reminded him and his people of the hated Hyksos shepherd kings, he welcomes them, and their flocks, and gives them the best of his land. And his humility and rejection of stereotypes is displayed yet more profoundly in that he invites those whom he once despised to be in charge of his own cattle, which presumably meant replacing his local staff with these despised Hebrew shepherds.

The brothers were made herdsmen over Pharaoh's cattle in Goshen because this was the priestly land, where such cattle were bred and kept only for sacrifice; and the brothers, having experience with those animals, were put in charge of them. See on Gen. 46:34.

Gen 47:7 *Joseph brought in Jacob, his father, and set him before Pharaoh, and Jacob blessed Pharaoh-* He does so again in

:10. Pharaoh had learnt from his own double dream that a think happening twice meant that God really intended it. Again, the promises had a primary fulfilment, in that Abraham's seed were a blessing to the Gentile world.

It was a principle of the times that the lesser was blessed by the greater, a principle repeated in Heb. 7:7. But here, the most powerful man on earth is blessed by Jacob, the head of a very small tribe of 70 people. It has been observed: "the irony is impossible to miss. The hope for the world comes from Israel and not from Egypt. Blessing comes from a decrepit and broken Israel and not from a dominant and strong Egypt". I suggest Jacob only did this on the basis that he felt as the seed of Abraham, he was now being a blessing to the Gentile nations. We too, insignificant as we are in secular terms, have the Abrahamic covenant, and on account of this we are to bless the mighty of this world.

Gen 47:8 *Pharaoh said to Jacob, How many are the days of the years of your life?-* The idea is that every day had been significant. It was a question of how many days had been lived; and so it is for us too, even though there are periods of life when it seems every day is the same old scene.

Gen 47:9 *Jacob said to Pharaoh, The days of the years of my pilgrimage are one hundred thirty years. Few and evil have been the days of the years of my life, and they have not attained to the days of the years of the life of my fathers-* At 130, Jacob seems to have felt that the fact he had not lived as long as his father and grandfather had, indicated that he had not received so much blessing as they had; he saw length of years *in this life* as being significant, rather than allowing the prospect of future eternity make present longevity fade into insignificance. And yet in his final 17 years, he grew quickly; he was not spiritually idle in those last 17 years of retirement. For at the very end he could say

that his blessings had exceeded "the blessings of my progenitors" (Gen. 49:26).

Jacob presents as ungrateful for his long life. Instead of just answering the question about his age, he seems to be saying that he looked very old only because of his awfully hard life. There is no sense in him that much of that hardness had been from his own bad decision making. He complained that he had not lived as long as his father Isaac who died at 180. Jacob was to die 33 years younger than Isaac, and his speech here contains 33 words in Hebrew. It's as if he was punished for saying this, a year off his lifespan for every complaining, ungrateful word he spoke. He had received his children Dinah and Joseph back from apparent death, had been saved by grace from Laban and Esau, and his favourite wife Rachel saved by grace from death for stealing the teraphim. And he had been given the Abrahamic blessings. We see here how looking at the glass half empty is displeasing to the God who has blessed us with so much so that our cup overflows with blessing. We take the cup of blessing at the communion service to remind and warn us against the cup half empty worldview. Which is the Spirit of our ever dissatisfied and complaining age. "That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God" (Eph.3:14-19). And we are in fact overflowing, not just half full. This cuts right across the idea that some are simply wired to be half full or half empty. It is the Spirit which makes us 'full' in mentality. We have all things and abound. "I have come so that they may have life and have it in abundance" (Jn. 10:10). "You

prepare a feast for me in the presence of my enemies [a projected allusion to the breaking of bread service?]. You honor me by anointing my head with oil. My cup overflows with blessings. Surely your goodness and unfailing love will pursue me all the days of my life, and I will live in the house of the LORD forever" (Ps. 23:5,6).

In the days of their pilgrimage- At the close of his life, Jacob was still emotionally attached, consciously and unconsciously, to his father and grandfather (consider the way he unconsciously imitates his father by feeling he is about to die years before he does, Gen. 47:9 cp. 28 cp. 27:2 cp. 35:28). But he had made their faith his own. We note that Isaac still had a "pilgrimage" although he was the only one of the patriarchs who was born in the land of promise and spent the vast majority of his life there and died in it. Even if a man never travels more than 10 miles from his birthplace, life with the Lord is still a pilgrimage, a journey.

Jacob speaks of his life as a "pilgrimage", using the same word used about Abraham and Isaac (Gen. 17:8; 28:4; 36:7; 37:1). Thus he showed his connection with them; they became *in spiritual not just emotional terms* the centre of his thinking. See on Gen. 49:31. Jacob speaking of how his life had been a "pilgrimage" shows that he realized that this life was only a series of temporary abodes. The same word is translated "stranger" with reference to the patriarchs' separation from the tribes around them (Gen. 17:8; 28:4; 36:7; 37:1). Jacob's attitude that the things of this life were only temporary, that we are only passing through, is identified in Heb. 11:10-16 as an indicator that Jacob shared the faith of Abraham and Isaac. The commentary of Heb. 11:14 upon this word of Jacob's is clear: "Now they who say such things declare plainly that they seek a country—that they long for a better country".

Gen 47:10 *Jacob blessed Pharaoh, and went out from the presence of Pharaoh-* Again, the promises had a primary fulfilment, in that Abraham's seed were a blessing to the Gentile world. We must be on the look out for such primary fulfilments in our lives too.

Gen 47:11 *Joseph placed his father and his brothers, and gave them a possession in the land of Egypt, in the best of the land, in the land of Raamses, as Pharaoh had commanded-* Raamses was built later, by the Hebrews when they were enslaved (Ex. 1:11). But Moses is reporting this history well after the event, and is seeking to explain to Israel the historical background to their experiences in Egypt. It was "the best of the land", the same word used when God had earlier promised Jacob that quite simply, "I will do you *good*", literally, 'the best' (Gen. 32:12). As Jacob lay friendless and ashamed with a stone for his pillow in the desert scrub near Bethel that lonely night, he would have had no idea how extensively this promise was going to be fulfilled even in his lifetime. He was going to live in Goshen, the best of the land of opulent Egypt, at a time when the rest of Canaan and Egypt was on their knees facing starvation. Truly God knows the plans He has for us, to bless us and do us good at our latter end.

Joseph gave his brothers freehold possessions of land in the best of Egypt, which could be passed on after death. Whereas the Egyptians lost their land. Perhaps this is one of Joseph's few mistakes. His family should have left Egypt when the famine finished. But he set them up in such a strong position that they remained. And inevitably this caused jealousy from the landless Egyptians in the longer term, resulting in the Egyptians wanting to enslave the Hebrews just as Joseph the Hebrew had enslaved them and taken their land from them.

Gen 47:12 *Joseph nourished his father, his brothers, and all of his father's household, with bread, according to their families-* I

suggested throughout Gen. 46 that the list of those who came with Jacob are in fact those who were heads of families. This was how they were organized, and "bread" would have been given to them on a family basis. The idea of nourishing suggests that Joseph was a fatherly figure to the rest of his family, although they were older than him. This was all implied in his dreams.

Gen 47:13 *There was no bread in all the land; for the famine was very severe, so that the land of Egypt and the land of Canaan fainted by reason of the famine-* The fact Joseph gave them bread (:12) therefore points up the fact he was literally their saviour. Without his grace, the seed of Abraham would have died out in their current form, and God would have made the promises to Abraham come true through the seed of Joseph. Joseph must have thought about this possibility but rejected it; for after all, his brothers were worthy to die for what they had done, and were in any case not wholly committed to Yahweh. Moses was placed in a similar position, when God wished to destroy Israel and make of him a new nation, and thereby fulfil the Abrahamic promises through him as the channel chosen. But Moses had learnt the grace of Joseph, and refused this scenario. God accepted Joseph's grace toward his brothers, and therefore promised them that "I will there make of you a great nation" (Gen. 46:3). He says the same words to Moses: "I [will] consume them, and make of you [Moses] a great nation" (Ex. 32:10; Num. 14:12; Dt. 9:14). And Moses is effectively asking God to treat Israel with the same grace Joseph had done, and make of *them* and not him personally "a great nation". This was just as Joseph had wished and enabled to happen, rather than the great nation being made just from him.

Joseph's policies with regard to the famine would have not been without their critics. The obvious objection of the Egyptian people would have been: 'This is our grain. We stored it. If we

give or sell it to foreigners, there will be none left for us! Who knows how many years this famine will continue!'. Joseph was operating according to a policy which expected there to be seven years of famine, and then a planting of seed, and then a harvest. But this was structured according to faith in the dreams, in God's prophetic word. Like us, he was surrounded by secular people who only saw the immediate and reasoned from selfish motives.

Gen 47:14 *Joseph gathered up all the money that was found in the land of Egypt, and in the land of Canaan, for the grain which they bought: and Joseph brought the money into Pharaoh's house*- "Money" is literally "silver". Egyptians had bought Joseph for pieces of silver, and now all the silver in the land was being given to Joseph, who with integrity gave it to Pharaoh, who turned his own personal house into the bank vault. Joseph "gathered" it up, the word for gleaning grain after the harvest (s.w. Lev. 19:9; 23:22). They got the grain, and all their money was just as the gleaning of it. The play of ideas is to demonstrate how little money was worth compared to corn. It was merely the few dropped grains compared to the full harvest. All those in Canaan gave Joseph their money, as well as all the Egyptians, until nobody in Canaan had any money left, it "failed" or 'was ended' (:16). And Joseph then gave it to Pharaoh. Jacob and his sons had worried about money, and I suggested that there was a strong financial motive in wanting to sell Joseph into Egypt. But now, in this situation which clearly points forward to the things of the Lord Jesus, money was no longer significant; all that was important was the bread of life given by Joseph. Even Pharaoh could do little with the silver, because nobody had much left to sell any more.

Gen 47:15 *When the money was all spent in the land of Egypt, and in the land of Canaan, all the Egyptians came to Joseph, and said, Give us bread, for why should we die in your presence? For*

our money fails- As explained on :14, in this situation, money lost its meaning, and they had none left now (:16). What was all important for the Canaanites was the bread of life given by Joseph. They would have heard the story, surely; the descendants of the Shechemites whose men had been massacred, the Canaanites who were aware of how Judah slept with their prostitutes... would now coming bowing to Joseph, throwing themselves upon his grace in order to live. For the bread of life was all important now, and not money. They were desperate; they felt they would die in his presence if he didn't give them food. Their money was finished (:16) and had lost meaning anyway. The whole situation was potentially set up for the Canaanites to praise Israel's God for the grace and saving wisdom of his wonderful son. If Israel had returned to Canaan once the famine ended, they could have set up something similar to the Kingdom of God on earth. See on :18 and Gen. 45:7.

Gen 47:16 *Joseph said, Give me your livestock; and I will give you food for your livestock, if your money is gone-* The animals may have remained with the people; the idea was that they had no legal title to them any more. "Give me your livestock" is an example of Joseph speaking on behalf of Pharaoh, very intensely manifesting him, and functioning as him. This is all valid insight into the relationship between the Father and Son.

Gen 47:17 *They brought their livestock to Joseph, and Joseph gave them bread in exchange for the horses, and for the flocks, and for the herds, and for the donkeys; and he fed them with bread in exchange for all their livestock for that year-* There was a progressive surrender of self and all wealth to Joseph and Pharaoh, just as there is for all those who accept the bread of life from the Lord Jesus. Even if they as it were maintained the usage of the things they had, such as their land, animals and bodies, they recognized that they owned nothing now, all was Joseph's.

And this is exactly the picture of how we should be before the Lord Jesus.

Gen 47:18 *When that year was ended, they came to him the second year, and said to him, We will not hide from my lord how our money is all spent, and the herds of livestock are my lord's. There is nothing left in the sight of my lord, but our bodies, and our lands-* Remember that the people in view are those of Canaan as well as Egypt. They were totally open before him, hiding nothing, which is how Joseph had wished his brothers to be before him. They openly admitted their desperation. And this is what is so necessary for us too if we are to partake in that great deliverance / salvation which is in the Lord. The Canaanites were willing to give their lands to Joseph, and to give him their bodies as slaves. If Israel had returned to Canaan after the famine as God intended (see on Gen. 45:7), the whole land could have been theirs. But they were too short term in their vision, and preferred the soft life of Egypt which they had become familiar with. This is the awful power of conservatism in human nature.

Gen 47:19 *Why should we die before your eyes, both we and our land? Buy us and our land for bread, and we and our land will be servants to Pharaoh. Give us seed, that we may live, and not die, and that the land won't be desolate-* Death before Joseph's eyes meant that if he didn't feed them, then they would die there and then. Joseph had been trained for this by having his brothers equally desperate before him, knowing they were facing the death sentence, desperate for his grace. Likewise he had been trained by the experiences of running things in Potiphar's household and then in the prison, in order to manage the affairs of all Egypt and Canaan. "That we may live and not die" was precisely the attitude of Israel in Canaan as they faced the implications of the famine (Gen. 42:2; 43:8). Now all the peoples of Canaan and Egypt were being led through that same

process, to the end that potentially they too might throw themselves upon Israel's God. The only occurrence of the Hebrew phrase here translated "the land [soil]... desolate" is in Ez. 12:19, where the land / soil of Israel is to be desolate "because of the violence of all them that dwell in it". In God's complex ecology, the land of Canaan was made desolate because of the violence of the brothers against their brother, against Shechem and perhaps others too. Ezekiel's word for "violence" is that used about what the brothers did to Shechem (Gen. 49:5).

Their request for seed to sow ["give us seed"] could reflect their total belief in Joseph's prophecy that the famine would last seven years.

Gen 47:20 *So Joseph bought all the land of Egypt for Pharaoh, for every man of the Egyptians sold his field, because the famine was severe on them, and the land became Pharaoh's-* The desperate people coming before Joseph were from Canaan as well as Egypt (:14,15). Yet here we read that Joseph only bought the land of Egypt for Pharaoh. Did he accept the offer of the Canaanites for himself? This would have meant that he as Abraham's seed ended up effectively inheriting the land of Canaan. This is why Israel ought to have returned from Egypt after the famine to the land which the Canaanites had already deeded over to Joseph; see on Gen. 45:7. All this was great encouragement for the wilderness generation to focus upon going into Canaan with faith, believing that likewise it had all been providentially arranged for them to inherit it.

Gen 47:21 *As for the people, he moved them to the cities from one end of the border of Egypt even to the other end of it-* These cities were the store cities where Joseph had stored the grain. The population was moved to be in those areas so that they could be fed. They had to abandon their land for the sake of being near the bread of life.

Gen 47:22 *Only he didn't buy the land of the priests, for the priests had a portion from Pharaoh, and ate their portion which Pharaoh gave them. That is why they didn't sell their land-* The fact Joseph was married to the daughter of a priest may have been relevant to this decision. The people were given their portion of food by Joseph, and yet he acts on Pharaoh's behalf, functioning as him. And we have here an insight into the way the Lord Jesus functions as God without being God Himself in a Trinitarian sense. See on :23.

Gen 47:23 *Then Joseph said to the people, Behold, I have bought you and your land today for Pharaoh. Behold, here is seed for you, and you shall sow the land-* Joseph like the Lord Jesus bought / redeemed the people *so that* they might go forth and sow the seed (cp. the Gospel; Gen. 47:23 cp. 1 Cor. 6:20; 7:19). If we are properly responding to our great salvation, we will be playing our part in bringing forth the next generation of harvest. As noted on :22, Joseph does everything "for Pharaoh", functioning as him without being him personally; exactly as the Lord Jesus is functionally as God, without being God. Function and essential nature or identity are different ideas. Joseph and now all Egypt were confident that the dreams of Pharaoh really were of God and would come true; therefore in this last year of the famine, when the stored grain was depleted, they did what was counter-instinctive because of their faith in the prophetic word: they sowed seed in the parched ground which had not seen water for seven years. This would have been the harder to do knowing that their grain stocks were seriously depleted.

Joseph tells the Egyptians, "Here is seed for you, and you shall sow the land", and give a fifth of the harvest to Pharaoh (Gen. 47:23). But he comments in Gen. 45:6 that throughout the seven year famine, there would be neither ploughing nor harvest. We could read Gen. 47:23 as an agreement for the

longer term future; but that appears disallowed by "Here is seed for you, and you shall sow the land". We could therefore conclude that Joseph knew God well enough to know that the seven year period of famine was negotiable; perhaps he was praying in faith that the days might be shortened. The Bible is full of such Divine accommodation to human prayers.

Gen 47:24 *It will happen at the harvests, that you shall give a fifth to Pharaoh, and four parts will be your own, for seed of the field, for your food, for them of your households, and for food for your little ones-* A fifth is a double tithe. It was usual to give a tenth to the ruler, but the Egyptians were to be doubly generous to Pharaoh over the subsequent generations, in memory of how he through Joseph had saved their lives. And this should be a motivation for our generosity too. Joseph speaks again with calm confidence that "harvests" would be coming regularly. The Egyptians likely felt that the end of their world had come, and probably came up with all kinds of paganic explanations for this within their cosmology; and as in every primitive society, there would have been all manner of conspiracy theories as to who was to blame for the catastrophe, and what rituals should be performed to end it. But the Divine prophetic word took them far above such speculations. Harvests would surely come; and Joseph was so sure of this that he even commands them how to manage their domestic affairs once the harvests come, explaining how they were to use a fifth of their harvest for future planting, etc.

Gen 47:25 *They said, You have saved our lives! Let us find favour in the sight of my lord, and we will be Pharaoh's servants-* To be servants of such a King was felt to be grace or favour. Their desire to be servants was motivated by the reality of personal salvation. Because he had saved their lives, they eagerly agreed to be servants. Our response to the great salvation / deliverance in

the Lord Jesus is to be the same; motivation for true servanthood arises from gratitude for salvation, and not because we think so lowly of ourselves that we consider servanthood is all we are worthy of.

Critics like to claim that Joseph manipulated the Egyptians to lose firstly all their money, then all their animals, then their properties, and then they were sold into slavery and agreed to be taxed heavily going forward. But having lost all things, the people were happy and deeply grateful to Joseph. This is the significance of "You have saved our lives!" and their willing entry into servitude. And so it is with all under the authority of the Lord Jesus. We progressively "suffer the loss of all things" and find His service is joy.

Gen 47:26 *Joseph made it a statute concerning the land of Egypt to this day, that Pharaoh should have the fifth. Only the land of the priests alone didn't become Pharaoh's-* "To this day" would refer to when Moses wrote Genesis. The wilderness generation had lived in Egypt, and would have been aware of the social structure and taxation system there; and Moses was now explaining to them so that they understood, perhaps for the first time, how it had originated. The Mosaic law was to teach that Yahweh's priests had no land inheritance and that they must tithe what was given to them; which was in sharp contrast to the cushy life of the Egyptian priests, who kept their land as their own and apparently didn't have to pay a fifth of their harvest to Pharaoh.

Gen 47:27 *Israel lived in the land of Egypt, in the land of Goshen; and they got themselves possessions therein, and were fruitful, and multiplied exceedingly-* The birth rate amongst the general population would have dropped sharply after years of this kind of intense famine. But the promises to Abraham and Jacob of a multitudinous seed surged forward in their primary

fulfilment, in the face of every reason to think that they could not. The promise to make Israel a great nation was fulfilled during the famine; it was the Divine intention that once the famine was over, they should return to Canaan (see on Gen. 45:7). But they wanted their kingdom in Egypt rather than Canaan, and not to be disturbed from what they had become accustomed to. This power of conservatism is so dominant in the human psyche. It is only careful and sensitive attention to the implications of the promises that can make us rise above it.

Gen 47:28 *Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years. So the days of Jacob, the years of his life, were one hundred forty-seven years-* Israel were intended to return to Canaan once the famine ended. There were five years of famine after they entered, and during those five years they increased greatly and Joseph was given the property deeds to the land of Canaan (see on :18,20; Gen. 45:7). So the final 12 years of Jacob's life were intended to be lived back in Canaan. But as so often happens, although believers will be ultimately saved, they don't actualize in this life the potentials possible for them.

Jacob cared for Joseph for the first 17 years of his life, and now Joseph cares for Jacob for the last 17 years of his life. Clearly some are intended to requite their parents, motivated by realising that old age is a return to childhood, a time for repaying them for what they did for us as children. This is a humbling process for all concerned.

Gen 47:29 *The time drew near that Israel must die, and he called his son Joseph, and said to him, If now I have found favour in your sight-* The way Jacob recognizes the greatness of Joseph (as representative of the future Messianic seed, the Lord Jesus Christ) reflects a maturing of attitude since the day when he refused to accept that he would ever bow down to Joseph (Gen. 37:10). The way he speaks to Joseph at the end shows his deeper

respect of him: "If now I have found favour / grace in your sight" was the same way in which he had addressed Esau, when crawling before him in Gen. 33:8,10,15. His appreciation of the greatness of Joseph reflected his appreciation of the greatness of the future Christ, and his salvation by grace.

Please put your hand under my thigh- This was the thigh which had been wounded by the Angel and was so weak, the thigh upon which Jacob limped, the reminder to him of his salvation by God's grace (Gen. 32:25 s.w.). In response to that grace, Jacob didn't want to be buried in Egypt but to identify with the things of the Kingdom and the hope of resurrection.

And deal kindly and truly with me- The phrase often refers to the promises to Abraham and the fathers; "mercy and truth" is to be performed to Abraham and Jacob at the resurrection (Mic. 7:20). The implication of them was that Jacob didn't want to be identified with Egypt but with the patriarchs and the things of God's Kingdom. So the receipt of this "truth", the true promises, elicited action in practice. Truth is not therefore merely a set of doctrines; it refers to an obedient and responsive life. The LXX uses the phrase 'to do truth', which John uses in the New Testament, in passages like Is. 26:10 and 2 Chron. 31:20 (about Hezekiah's obedience to commandments), or here in Gen. 47:29 to describe arranging a burial in faith. The fact truth must be *done* indicates it is *not* merely correct academic interpretation of doctrine. To commit violence to others' persons is to live a lie (Hos. 12:1), and 'to truth' is to live in love to others.

*Please don't bury me in Egyp*t- Despite the opulence and easy life, Jacob wanted to use even his own death to demonstrate that this was not to be the resting place for God's true people.

Gen 47:30 *But when I sleep with my fathers, you shall carry me out of Egypt, and bury me in their burying place. He said, I will do as you have said-* Jacob's heart was in the land of promise,

despite living in Egypt in opulence compared to his tent dwelling, cattle rancher life. Our hearts too must be in the things of the Kingdom rather than in the passing comforts of this life. Jacob's desire to be buried with his fathers may well imply his hope of resurrection, although burial place is irrelevant to experience of resurrection. God had promised Jacob that he would come up out of Egypt (Gen. 46:4), and he seems to have never quite lost his tendency to try to bring about God's promises by his own device; for he asks Joseph to ensure that he is carried up from Egypt when he dies. God had promised Jacob that "*I* will bring you up", but Jacob wanted to as it were ensure this would happen within his own strength. More generously to Jacob, it could be argued that the promises of salvation do require us to play our part in them.

Jacob spoke of sleeping with his fathers, and then his body being taken to Canaan. So he doesn't refer to being buried in the same tombs as his fathers. Just as David slept with his fathers, but was buried in Jerusalem- whereas his literal fathers were buried elsewhere. Rather did he see death in Egypt as all the same sleeping with his fathers. Because his heart was with them and not with the world / Egypt around him. For all his weakness, it is clear what his essential self identification was and where his heart was.

Gen 47:31 *He said, Swear to me, and he swore to him*-As explained on :30, God had promised or sworn to Jacob that *He* would bring up Jacob from Egypt (Gen. 46:4). Jacob making Joseph swear to do this is therefore somewhat lacking in faith in God's swearing to him. Even at the end of our lives, we like Jacob will not have developed spiritually as we might have done, and yet even though we die in spiritual weakness, we shall be raised in power by His grace (see on 1 Cor. 15:43).

Israel bowed himself on the bed's head- LXX: "And Israel worshipped leaning on the top of his staff", which is how the New Testament quotes it in Heb. 11:21. "Staff" and "bed" are the same consonants, and would easily have been confused before vowel points were added in Hebrew. This is one of many reasons to reject the "King James only" school; the translators simply do not always have it right, as the New Testament quotations from the LXX make clear. Heb. 11:21 is part of the wider argument in Hebrews 11, which appeals for Hebrew faith in Jesus and the Kingdom because all the Old Testament heroes had this same faith in Jesus and the Kingdom. So we are invited to imagine Jacob praising God for the things of the Lord Jesus, his future seed so strongly typified in Joseph; and the things of the Kingdom.

One translation is "He bowed upon the cushion of the bed", seeing that beds in those times didn't have head boards. That "head of the bed" may therefore have been the stone which he used as a cushion for his head at Bethel. The LXX of Gen. 28:22 suggests "This stone... shall be a divine house to me". It was as if Jacob had taken that stone with him, or perhaps gone and recovered it at some point. Instead of building a temple at Bethel, he had taken that stone with him and worshipped God upon it, even placing it at the had of his bed. In this case we see the triumph of personal spirituality, the praise and worship of a bedridden man in his thoughts and quiet words, over mere religion- the idea of building a shrine on a literal foundation stone.

I noted earlier that Jacob had some reticence about actually meeting Joseph, sending a messenger ahead of him to meet Joseph just as he had done in meeting Esau. I suggested that this was because almost his last words to Joseph at 17 had been rebuke for his dreams, and a refusal to accept he would ever bow

to his son. We are set up to expect Jacob bowing to Joseph and apologizing, but he never does. Perhaps now, facing death, he finally gets there- bowing before Joseph in an act of worship, thus fulfilling the dream he had so struggled with. And perhaps this is why Heb. 11:21 focuses upon this incident as an act of faith by Jacob, as he perhaps looked ahead to the day when that dream would be fulfilled when Rachel too would be resurrected and would also bow down to Joseph. And we note that it was only at the very end of his life that Jacob really got there. We are all works in progress, and must cut a lot of slack to each others' immaturities.

GENESIS CHAPTER 48

Gen 48:1 *It happened after these things, that someone said to Joseph, Behold, your father is sick. He took with him his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim-* The implication could be that Joseph and his sons weren't living near to Jacob. This just possibly might be a factor in Jacob apparently not recognizing the sons; but see on :8. The implication seems to be that it was not the brothers who told Joseph that their father was on his death bed. We could translate "someone or other told Joseph...". There is no record of any communication between Joseph and his brothers in the 17 years they were in Goshen before Jacob died. And we note in Gen. 50 how after Jacob's death, they send a message to Joseph claiming their father had said things to them outside of Joseph's presence. But Joseph's dream had been that the brothers and Jacob would come to Egypt and live near him. Likewise when he reveals himself to them, he begs them to come near him. The impression is that his dream for reconcilliation in this life was never realized. And so many live and die with a dream for reconcilliation unfulfilled. Be it unrequited love, a desperate desire to be understood by those you are unreconciled with, unity within a church or denomination... unrequited desire for reconcilliation and, in a word, relationship... is the stuff of every man's life path. "Please understand me, please accept me" is written large on every man, and we die like it. And really that is a reflection of God's largely unfulfilled desire for intimacy with His creatures now. This approach explains why the dreams of Joseph's brothers and parents bowing down to him await a yet future fulfilment- not least because his mother was dead before his brothers bowed before him. And there is no time when the brothers and Jacob bow together before Joseph. We must be realistic and hopeful enough to realize that ultimate

reconcilliation will only be in the Kingdom, and that is one of the many joys ahead of us.

Gen 48:2 *Someone told Jacob, and said, Behold, your son Joseph comes to you, and Israel strengthened himself, and sat on the bed*- This blessing on the bed was given in faith (Heb. 11:21); on the surface, it seemed that Israel were established and prosperous in Egypt. Yet by faith Jacob envisaged the fulfilment of the Abrahamic covenant in Joseph's sons in a quite different context of time and place. And by faith we too must see beyond the immediate to the things of the new covenant, remembering that the promises to Abraham are that new covenant with us too.

Gen 48:3 *Jacob said to Joseph, God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan, and blessed me*- The next verse quotes from Gen. 35, so out of the two appearances of God to Jacob at Luz, it seems the second one is in view. Jacob's perception of the power of God, this one Almighty *El*, is growing. Ex. 6:3 says that Yahweh appeared to Jacob "by the name of God Almighty", so presumably this Name was declared to Jacob at the vision in Bethel; for this, Jacob says, was when God primarily "appeared" to him. And yet he is only recorded as using this name 50 years later. It took 50 years for the fact that God really is *all* mighty to sink in, and for him to come out with this publicly. And yet despite having arrived at this correct theoretical understanding, Jacob now goes on to try to fulfil God's promises of fruitfulness, of El Shaddai, the God of fruitfulness [*shad* = breast], God Almighty, in his own strength- by forcibly adopting Joseph's sons as his own sons, to increase his number of children.

Gen 48:4 *And said to me, 'Behold, I will make you fruitful, and multiply you, and I will make of you a company of peoples, and will give this land to your seed after you for an everlasting possession'*- Jacob's *personal* grasp of the wonder of the promises

at the end is revealed here. God never actually said all this to Jacob; Jacob is quoting the promise to Abraham of Gen. 17:8 *and applying it to himself*. And with us too, a personal grasp of the wonder of it all, that it really applies to *me*, is a mark of that final maturity we fain would achieve.

He seems to have perceived the spiritual danger his children were in, living in the luxury of Egypt. The promises of being fruitful and being given a land were being fulfilled, in a primary sense, in Israel's experience in Egypt (cp. Gen. 47:27). Joseph was *given* the *land* of Egypt (Gen. 41:41), using the same words as in Gen. 45:18; 48:4 concerning how the true *land* -of Canaan- had been *given* to Abraham's children. Jacob's children were given a *possession* in Egypt (Gen. 47:11), and therefore Jacob emphasized that their *real* possession was the eternal inheritance of Canaan, not Egypt (Gen. 49:30; 50:13). Thus Jacob at the end realized the importance of warning God's people against the world, against the temptation of feeling that God's present material blessing of us with a foretaste of His Kingdom means that in fact we lose our enthusiasm for the *true* Kingdom, in its real, material sense. Like Paul in his final flourish of 2 Timothy, Jacob saw the need to warn God's people, to point them away from the world, and towards the future Kingdom. Jacob saw that his people, like him in his earlier life, would be tempted to see God's promises on an altogether too human and material level.

Jacob didn't want them to think that their multiplication and prosperity in Goshen was the total fulfilment of the promises. It was only a primary fulfilment, a foretaste of so much to come. "A company of peoples", *laqahal amim*, has the idea of a company or *ecclesia* gathered out of the peoples, or as in Gen. 35:11 "a company / *ecclesia* of gentiles". The true Israel was going to incorporate gentiles; they were to share their blessings with them, and be a light to the gentile world, welcoming believers

into the covenant, sharing it with them. But in this Israel failed miserably, and do to this day. The 70 families who went down with Jacob into Egypt were supposed to represent the 70 nations of the *eretz* listed in Gen. 10 (cp. Dt. 32:8). And the inheritance was to be "an everlasting possession", understood in the New Testament as implying eternal life on an individual level. But we all tend to be like Israel, satisfied with what we have, and not looking to these longer term implications of the covenant.

But more negatively, it seems that Jacob justifies claiming Joseph's sons as his own on the basis that God had promised to multiply him. For this is the context of his comments about the promises. So he is still trying to fulfil God's promises for Him in his own strength and not perceiving the grace implicit in God's promises. And yet God worked through this- because Ephraim and Manasseh did indeed become part of the Israel of God.

Gen 48:5 *Now your two sons, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you into Egypt, are mine; Ephraim and Manasseh, even as Reuben and Simeon, will be mine-* He carefully mentions Ephraim first, because he intended to make him the firstborn although he was the youngest. Reuben and Simeon were Jacob's first two sons, and he is saying that they are to be replaced by Joseph's sons. At the very end, Jacob's blessing of Joseph's sons as the firstborn is seen as an act of faith (48:5; Heb. 11:21). Yet on another level, Jacob was taking the blessings away from the firstborn [Reuben] who was the son of the wife he disliked, and giving those blessings to Joseph (via his sons) the son of his favourite wife, who was not the firstborn. This was quite contrary to the will of God as expressed in Dt. 21:17. At best we can say that God allowed one principle to be broken to keep another (although what other?). At worst, Jacob was simply showing rank favouritism, and yet at the same time he foresaw in faith the Messianic suggestions in Joseph's experience, and

therefore made Joseph's sons the firstborn. God saw the good in Jacob at this time, and counted this to him, and recognized and worked with Joseph's decision to make "the son of the hated" the firstborn (1 Chron. 5:1,2), even though this may have been contrary to God's highest intentions. Likewise God worked through Jacob's paganic use of poplar rods and mandrakes. The way Jacob insisted on blessing Ephraim as the firstborn again seems to show some kind of favouritism and a desire to see his grandson living out his own experience, i.e. the younger son who fought his way up and received the blessings as opposed to the rightful heir. Ephraim becomes a code-name for apostate Israel throughout the prophets. And yet God accepted Jacob's preferential blessing of Ephraim and repeated this in Dt. 33:17.

It seems that the sons of Rachael, Jacob's favourite wife, were favoured by Jacob. Ephraim and Manasseh [the sons of Joseph, counted as Jacob's personal sons] and Benjamin marched in front of the ark (hence Ps. 80:2), and these three tribes were represented in the second row of the breastplate by the three most precious stones. Could it be that God so identified with Jacob even in his weakness, that He too reflected this perspective of Jacob's, in treating these three sons as somehow especially favoured? Such was and is the extent of God's identity with His wayward children.

"Even as Reuben..." would suggest that Jacob was confirming that Reuben, his biological firstborn, had indeed been removed from firstborn status, and he was now giving this not to Judah nor Joseph, as he had previously attempted, but to Ephraim, with Manasseh after him. The confusion is reflected in 1 Chron. 5:1-3: "The sons of Reuben the firstborn of Israel (for he was the firstborn; but, because he defiled his father's bed, his birthright was given to the sons of Joseph the son of Israel; and the genealogy is not to be reckoned after the birthright. For Judah

prevailed above his brothers, and of him came the prince; but the birthright was Joseph's. The sons of Reuben the firstborn of Israel..."(Reuben is also called this in Num. 26:5). This choice of Ephraim was however done by Jacob on a quite arbitrary whim, as there is no evidence for Ephraim's qualification. We see him obsessed, still, with birthright and firstborn status- when he ought to have learned from the night of wrestling in Genesis 32 that these things are nothing. There is no very clear Divine comment on whom He considered Jacob's firstborn- because the issue is totally irrelevant in spiritual terms. Jacob had grasped all this so clearly in Gen.32, but he returns to his old obsessions and human weakness. Just as we shall all come to our graveplanks imperfect, having learnt some lessons but failed to retain them to the end.

The firstborn inherited a double portion. Clearly Jacob wanted Joseph to be his firstborn, although he was only firstborn of Rachel, not Jacob's absolute firstborn. By demoting Reuben from firstborn status and adopting Joseph's two sons, it worked out that Joseph received a double portion- because each of his sons received one portion. So the whole things seems to me to be Jacob cunningly trying to make Joseph inherit the firstborn's double portion, through giving a portion to each of Joseph's children, whom Jacob adopts as his sons. So the blessing upon Joseph, which is ostensibly what Jacob is doing here, involves Jacob adopting Joseph's two sons as his own. He blesses Joseph with a double portion through adopting Joseph's two sons as his own. Although God works through this, and accepts Ephraim and Mannaseh as inheritors of land and tribes of Israel / Jacob, I suggest Jacob's initial reasoning and motivation was completely human. And a total failure to learn the lessons from his experience with Esau over the firstborn. The way he just tells Joseph that his two sons are now his... hardly comes over as very

spiritual, and seems manipulative and domineering over the son whom he was supposed to fall down and worship and respect as his saviour. Yet God graciously works through these things. And I would like to add that here again, we have an example of the absolute psychological credibility of the Biblical pictures of people; an old man, suffering from Anno Domini, but absolutely mentally sharp, cunning and acute as he had ever been.

Gen 48:6 *Your issue, whom you become the father of after them, will be yours. They will be called after the name of their brothers in their inheritance-* If Joseph was to have any more sons, they would not become separate tribes, but numbered amongst Ephraim and Manasseh.

Gen 48:7 *As for me, when I came from Paddan, Rachel died by me-* Literally, 'upon me', as if she died in his arms. But the plain meaning of the text is that she died by or on account of Jacob. Jacob's cursing of whoever had taken the idols actually came true (Gen. 31:32). For Rachel died soon afterwards. Hence Jacob later reflects that Rachel died by or because of him. This is one of many Biblical warnings that what we say, especially in wishing evil, has a way of coming true. We think of David's cursing of Saul and Absalom in his Psalms, and how bitterly he wept when his cursings came true. Again we see the importance of life and living, and the significance of words, even if said in anger. We enquire why Jacob raises this issue in the context of telling Joseph that Jacob is going to count Joseph's sons as his personal sons. It could be that he is reasoning that the fruitfulness promised to him in Gen. 35:11 had not happened because of this sin, and that was why he was taking Joseph's sons as his own sons, seeing they were in the line of Rachel. But that would reflect a very poor understanding of the promise of fruitfulness; it referred to his seed multiplying in Egypt, and in the future seed, the Lord Jesus. But Jacob apparently understood it as meaning simply that

he would have many more children, which didn't come true after that point. And so he felt he must force the fulfilment of it by taking Joseph's sons as his own. Again, we see him trying to force through the fulfilment of [his perception of] God's promises, in his own strength.

In the land of Canaan in the way, when there was still some distance to come to Ephrath, and I buried her there in the way to Ephrath (the same is Bethlehem)- Jacob's tendency to have an over-physical view of the promises was still with him at the end. He seems to speak as if he saw the fact that Rachel was buried in Canaan as a proof that therefore in that sense he had possessed the land of Canaan. Yet the NT says that the fact Jacob *didn't* own the land meant that he hadn't received the fulfillment of the promises, but would do so in the future.

Another possible weakness of Jacob is that to his deathbed, he continued his obsession with the unspiritual Rachel. Although he didn't realize the significance of it at the time, he stresses that she didn't make it to Bethlehem, the Lord's birthplace.

Gen 48:8 *Israel saw Joseph's sons, and said, Who are these?-* Or, "whose". He knew who and whose they were- although see on :1. This is part of a way of saying 'You think they are such and such, that they belong to this one; but I am telling you that they are now such and such and belong to me'. It could be that Jacob literally could not see them because of his blindness (:10), and yet we are told that he indeed "saw Joseph's sons". Jacob was surely aware that he was now in the position of his blind father Isaac whom he had deceived. And he was determined that by his own wit he would not be likewise deceived, and wished to emphasize that unlike Isaac, he understood exactly what he was doing.

Gen 48:9 *Joseph said to his father, They are my sons, whom God has given me here. He said, Please bring them to me, and I*

will bless them- There was a unity, a mutuality, between Jacob and God at the end. No longer did he see God as someone else's God, not even just his father's God. The lessons of Jacob's name change were finally learnt. Thus he asks Joseph to bring his sons to him, so that *he* may bless them; but when he gives the blessing, he states that this is God blessing them (48:8,9,15,16); he saw God working through him. See on Gen. 49:33.

Gen 48:10 *Now the eyes of Israel were dim for age, so that he couldn't see. He brought them near to him; and he kissed them, and embraced them-* Gen. 27:26 has the same scene, when Jacob deceitfully 'came near' to his father Isaac to fraudulently obtain the blessing of the firstborn. That sin of Jacob was to be remembered by him to his very deathbed. Not that it wasn't forgiven; but we are providentially enabled to understand how others feel, whom we sinned against.

Gen 48:11 *Israel said to Joseph, I never thought I would see your face, and behold, God has let me see your seed also-* see on Gen. 49:8. This is Jacob's final appreciation of God's grace, the way He does far above what our works should deserve. "Thought" is 74 times translated "pray", and only once "thought" ; the idea is surely: 'I never prayed to see you again, I didn't therefore have the faith in the resurrection which I should have done, just as I didn't believe your mother could be resurrected when you spoke of her coming to bow before you (Gen. 37:10); but God in His grace has done exceeding abundantly above all I asked or didn't ask for, and shewed me not only your face in this life, but also your children'.

There seems an allusion to this scene in the Kingdom prophecy of Is. 49:21: "Then shalt thou say in thine heart, Who hath begotten me these seeing I have lost my children, and am desolate, a captive, and removing to and fro? and who hath

brought up these? Behold, I was left alone; these, where had they been?" (AV).

Paul seems to allude here by saying that God does for *us* exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think; making Jacob representative of every believer. Jacob was focused upon Joseph and now he had seen him, he felt prepared to die in peace, rather than from a broken heart as he had imagined he would earlier. His attitudes to death were governed by the status of Joseph. If Joseph was dead or consumed by a wild animal, he would die broken hearted; but if Joseph were alive, as he demonstrably was, he would die in peace. Whether or not his other sons fessed up to him about their sins was not relevant to him, compared to his focus upon the 'resurrection' of Joseph. And our hang ups over whether others have or have not fully repented and set the record straight is utterly obscured by the joy of knowing and seeing the risen Lord Jesus. Jacob at this point and in this sense represents us all.

Gen 48:12 *Joseph brought them out from between his knees-* They would have been around 18 and 20 years old. To come out from between the knees was a euphemism for giving birth, although usually applied to women rather than men (Gen. 30:3). However the same idiom is used for Joseph's grandchildren being raised upon his knees (Gen. 50:23), as if to emphasize that they were 'his'. So the idea may not be of toddlers hiding shyly between daddy's knees, but rather that these sons who were really biologically Joseph's... were now to become Jacob's.

And he bowed himself with his face to the earth- The grammar is unclear as to whom bowed to whom. We are inclined to think that Jacob was bowing to Joseph, in fulfilment of the dream which he had so objected to in Gen. 37:10. At the end of our spiritual paths we may come to accept some realities which we have struggled against all our lives. The man who rejects his gay

son as a brother in Christ comes to accept him, the forgiveness which was unthinkable to grant is given, and the impossible reconciliations achieved. We think of how Paul accepted John Mark as his co-worker, when Paul was on his death bed (see on 2 Tim. 4:11).

Gen 48:13 *Joseph took them both, Ephraim in his right hand toward Israel's left hand, and Manasseh in his left hand toward Israel's right hand, and brought them near to him-* Jacob himself was the younger who had been more blessed than his elder sibling Esau. But whilst on one hand he was correct to continue the theme of the second born being as the first born, he also was missing the point- that all this angst about the blessing of the firstborn was irrelevant. He had himself recognized that at the acme of his spiritual perception when he met Esau again, as he effectively handed back to him the blessing of the birthright, feeling that being in receipt of God's grace was the only blessing worth anything (see on Gen. 33:11). But what we may grasp at one point in our lives, we sadly don't always take with us. And even on his deathbed, Jacob was still wanting to play games over this issue of the blessing of the firstborn. He apparently paid no attention to how Manasseh was going to feel and subsequently carry with him in life, stripped of the coveted status of firstborn by the apparent caprice of a cranky old grandfather. And Joseph also might have learnt the lesson and not been concerned about the issue. I suggest Jacob's highest level response to the boys coming to him for blessing would have been to say to the effect: 'All that blessing of the firstborn stuff... I got over that years ago. Focus on getting the blessing of God's grace, that's all you need, boys. And Joseph, you too, don't sweat all that stuff, you too like me should know better by now'. And reviewing the subsequent history of Israel's sons, the whole issue of which son had the

birthright was insignificant. It was only an item in their minds and cultural patterns at the time. See on :14.

In Gen. 32 and 33, Jacob resigned his material blessing, and gave up his struggle to be the firstborn. He collapsed upon grace. "Blessing" (brkh), "firstborn" (bekhor) and "birthright" (bekhora) are all related words. But despite that peak of appreciation, which having slipped from he apparently reached again in Gen. 35 (see notes there), even on his grave planks, Jacob was still conniving in his own strength about blessings and firstborns. And yet he will be saved ultimately; along with all of us who likewise are still immature at the end of our mortal path.

Gen 48:14 *Israel stretched out his right hand, and laid it on Ephraim's head, who was the younger, and his left hand on Manasseh's head, guiding his hands knowingly, for Manasseh was the firstborn-* Ps. 78:67 comments that God did not chose Ephraim- whereas Jacob did. The implication could well be that even at the end of his life, Jacob's choice of Ephraim over Manasseh reflected some sort of weakness, a being out of step with God. This attitude that *he* could bring about the fulfillment of God's promises through his own efforts was the outcome of Jacob's self-righteousness. See on :13. The firstborn was known as the son of the right hand. I note on :19 that Jacob had changed the firstborn several times, and had even named Benjamin "son of my right hand", effectively shifting the firstborn to his youngest son. Jacob was quite obsessed with the issue of who was the firstborn; at different times Reuben, Joseph, Benjamin and Judah had it, and now he wants Ephraim to have it. Even at the end of his days, he had not quite learnt the lesson taught him earlier, that it is God's blessing of grace and not being the firstborn which is the important thing.

Gen 48:15 *He blessed Joseph, and said, The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has fed me*

all my life long to this day- At age 130, Jacob had mumbled to Pharaoh: "Few and *evil* have the days of the years of my life been", as if every day had dragged (Gen. 47:9). But at the very end, 17 years later, he more positively speaks of the Angel that had redeemed him from all *evil* (48:15). He felt that he was but a sheep, and God had "fed" or 'shepherded' him. He says this fully aware of the Egyptian way of despising sheep and shepherds, and yet he states here that God Himself is Israel's shepherd, despised of men, but clearly perceived by His people. If we read this as meaning 'fed' in a literal sense, Jacob's all too physical view of the promises is suggested. He wanted to make Yahweh his God because He had fed him all his life long. Earlier he had promised to do this, if Yahweh would indeed provide him with daily food (Gen. 28:20). That bargain he struck with God would surely have been best repented of rather than carried through.

Jacob's reference to how Abraham and Isaac 'walked before' his God is a reference back to Gen. 17:1; 24:40. Jacob had meditated upon these records, in whatever form they were preserved, and now bubbled out with reference to them. Those same promises concerning the Lord Jesus and his Kingdom should become the centre of our thought as we reach spiritual maturity. "Let my name be named upon them (Joseph's children), and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac" (48:16) indicates that he saw an equivalence between Abraham and Isaac and himself; he saw they were "heirs of the same promise" (Heb. 11:9). Jacob finally came to graduate from mere Sunday School Christianity, the faith of mum and dad, to realize that those promises made to them were the very basis of *his* faith too, as well as theirs, and he knew therefore that he would be resurrected with them into the glory of God's Kingdom. And so he wanted to be buried with them; he didn't reject them, but he

came to understand that the promises were gloriously true for him on a personal level.

Almost on his deathbed, Jacob speaks of how the God of Abraham and Isaac is his God (48:15,16); he speaks of being gathered to his people, to them, just as they too had been gathered to their people (Gen. 49:29 cp. Gen. 25:8; 35:29). He really stresses his desire to be buried in Canaan along with Abraham and Isaac (Gen. 47:29,30; 49:29; 50:5,6), alongside his dad and grandfather, remembering how they had lived together in the same tents in his childhood (Heb. 11), speaking together of the promises. The fact he had prepared his grave there years before shows that this was not only the sentimental feeling of a dying man. This repeated emphasis on his connection with Abraham and Isaac shows that at the end, Jacob saw the supreme importance of being a member of God's people. He didn't just fix on his own personal hope, but on the fact he was connected with all the heirs of the promise. Paul also focused on this aspect when he came to his time of departing. And so with us, we will come to see (if we haven't already) that our association with Christianity is not just a part of our social structure. We aren't just Christians because of parental expectation. Our association with God's people is eternal, the consequences of being baptized into the body of Christ (the believers) are related to our salvation. Thus the believers are joint-heirs together of the same Abrahamic promises (Rom. 8:17; 1 Pet. 3:7), just as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob lived together as joint heirs of the same promises (Heb. 11:9).

Gen 48:16 *The Angel who has ever redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads, and let my name be named on them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac-*

The Angel who redeemed Jacob from evil may specifically refer to the Angel with whom Jacob wrestled, who then blessed

Jacob in response to his begging for blessing. And he wishes that blessing of grace upon his grandsons. Yet Jacob appears to see that gracious blessing of him as ongoing, because his wrestling with the Angel for blessing and grace was a cameo of his entire life.

See on Ex. 23:27. It is so easy to under-estimate the amount of work the Angels are doing in our lives; Jacob recognized that his Angel physically fed / shepherded him all his days, and that it was not just at the crises in his life that the Angel had been present; he describes the Angel as "ever redeeming me" (Heb.), as if the whole process of life is one continual redeeming process by the Angel, as He designs trials for us which will perfect us in order to gain redemption, as well as physically redeeming us more times than we realize. Subsequent generations were to take comfort in the fact that God had redeemed Jacob / Israel; Isaiah is full of this idea, encouraging the Jews of the restoration, and all of us, that the same God who redeemed Jacob is our God, to no lesser an extent. Jacob had primarily in view his deliverance from Esau and Laban by the Angel with whom he wrestled; but he realized that those incidents were but examples of an ongoing redemption which was ongoing even as he spoke.

At the end, Jacob spoke of God as his redeemer, which is the first Biblical reference to the concept of redemption. Joseph was the one who had redeemed Jacob from all evil, but Jacob realizes that it was ultimately God working through this great seed of Abraham, and thereby he looks ahead to the Messianic seed, who was the ultimate redeemer (Gal. 3:11; Tit. 2:14; 1 Pet. 1:18). This was not the only area in which Jacob was a paradigm breaker (consider how he coined the word *abiyr* to describe God's mightiness). The Hebrew for "redeem" is taken from the idea of the nearest kinsman. Jacob at the end of his days is surely saying that now he saw God as closer than his family.

We really have a lot to learn here. God comes before family- although increasingly this isn't appreciated by Anglo-Saxon believers. The new convert who sacrifices family ties for allegiance to Christ realizes this full well. But in my observation, second and third generation believers aren't so committed. The majority of the divisions and bitterness which plague the body of Christ are largely a result of believers wanting to stay with their family, rather than follow Divine principles. Time and again brethren and sisters change fellowships, with all the disruption this causes, simply because of family, not for any genuine Biblical conviction. Effectively they will throw others out of fellowship, throw new converts into turmoil and disillusion, just to stick with a dogmatic family member, even though they may not share his or her convictions. And so God's Truth becomes a social and family affair rather than a candlestick burning with the fire of the Spirit. Christians tend to follow parental expectation and the norms of their social network rather than God's word.

Let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth- The "land" in view was that promised to Abraham. Jacob's dying wish was that his children would hurry up and return to Canaan as originally intended and made potentially possible at the end of the famine (see on Gen. 45:7); and *there* and not in Egypt would they become a multitude, in fulfilment of the promises given to Abraham and Jacob.

Gen 48:17 *When Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand on the head of Ephraim, it displeased him. He held up his father's hand, to remove it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's head-* As noted on :13, Joseph ought to have learnt from history, that this whole angst about the blessing of the firstborn was irrelevant. It is true that Genesis has repeatedly recorded how the second born or younger was more blessed than the older: Abel, Seth, Shem, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph; and the Old Testament history

continues the theme, with Moses over Aaron, David over his brothers etc. But that blessing was not by human device, but by Divine blessing and the operation of His Spirit in human life.

Gen 48:18 *Joseph said to his father, Not so, my father; for this is the firstborn; put your right hand on his head-* See on Gen. 17:18. Joseph was wrong to have so much angst about who got the blessing of the firstborn; see on :13 and :17.

Gen 48:19 *His father refused, and said, I know, my son, I know. He also will become a people, and he also will be great. However, his younger brother will be greater than he, and his seed will become a multitude of nations-* Although Jacob maybe favoured Judah on a human level, he certainly favoured Joseph spiritually. It seems that he made up his mind that Messiah would come from Joseph (when in fact Christ came through Judah). He said that Ephraim's seed would become a multitude of nations (48:19)- he was applying the Messianic promise to Ephraim. Likewise he stated that from Joseph (Ephraim's father) would come the Shepherd / Stone / Messiah (see on Gen. 49:24); presumably, Jacob thought, through Ephraim. Yet Jacob was wrong in this. Thus whilst Jacob showed his spiritual maturity by an enthusiasm for the Lord Jesus Christ, even right at the very end of his life, he still had an old flaw: a desire to fulfill God's promises in the way *he* wanted them fulfilled, a desire to turn God's word round to fit in with *his* preferred way of thinking (in this case, that Messiah would come through Joseph / Ephraim). The way the prophets continually describe sinful Israel as "Ephraim" is perhaps God's way of showing that Jacob's way was not His way.

And yet despite these wrong perceptions by Jacob, it is true that at the first census in the wilderness, Ephraim numbered 40,500 and Manasseh only 32,000; and later, when in the land, Ephraim became the most numerous tribe in the ten tribe

kingdom, to the point that it was often called "Ephraim" just as the two tribe kingdom was called "Judah". Jacob was almost repeating the prophetic word spoken about himself (Gen. 25:23). It is natural to want our own experience to be replicated in others, especially our offspring. But although Jacob was not completely mature in his reasoning about this whole blessing of the firstborn, God still worked through it. He had removed Reuben from being firstborn (1 Chron. 5:1), replaced him with Joseph, and then when he disappeared, he decided that Benjamin should be the firstborn, renaming him "Son of my right hand", another title of the firstborn; again wanting the youngest to be as the eldest. And now Joseph is back on the scene, he seems to want to change things around so that Ephraim and Manasseh become his adopted sons, and out of them, Ephraim [the youngest] is as it were his firstborn; the very youngest of his 'sons' treated as the eldest. But all this chopping and changing about the firstborn had no ultimate meaning in Israel's subsequent history.

"Will become a multitude of nations" alludes to the promises to Abraham (Gen. 17:6,20). It was as if Jacob in his immaturity wanted the line of Abrahamic descent to go specifically through Ephraim. But there is no evidence God respected that. Rather, all who showed themselves to be the seed of Abraham through faith, receive an equal share in the Abrahamic blessings. Again we see Jacob's stubborn immaturity even at the end of his days.

Gen 48:20 *He blessed them that day, saying, In you will Israel bless, saying, 'God make you as Ephraim and as Manasseh'. He set Ephraim before Manasseh-* "Bless" is literally 'to bow the knee'. "In you" is you singular, and refers to Joseph. Jacob is accepting what at the time he had refused to- that the dreams of Joseph would indeed come true, and his brothers ["Israel"] would bless or bow to him.

Gen 48:21 *Israel said to Joseph, Behold, I am dying, but God will be with you, and bring you again to the land of your fathers-* As explained on Gen. 45:7 and elsewhere, the people were supposed to return to Canaan once the famine finished; see on :16. Jacob wished they had done that whilst he was still alive; but he knew that God would work in their experiences so that He would bring them back to the land. They should have returned there themselves; but God would "bring" them there, just as Abraham ought to have left Ur for Canaan and broken with his family immediately, but he didn't, and so God brought him there and made him separate from his father's house (see on Gen. 20:13). Jacob sensed an analogous situation was going to happen to get them out of Egypt; and the same was to occur centuries later in getting them to leave Babylon. In our days too, we don't make the moves we are supposed to make, or to the extent intended; and God's Spirit works to bring about those moves. This is His saving grace. And Joseph quotes these words of his father on his own deathbed (Gen. 50:25), as he too retained the perspective that Israel out to leave Egypt and return to Canaan, but he believed that if they didn't, then God would structure situations to ensure that they did- by His grace.

Gen 48:22 *Moreover I have given to you Shechem, one portion above your brothers, which I took out of the hand of the Amorite with my sword and with my bow-* This indicates that Jacob's old self-reliance was still not totally gone; his sense that through his own effort he could bring about the fulfillment of God's promises for him. He appears to be referring to some unrecorded military conflict in which he captured Shechem; perhaps he refers specifically to the burial ground which Abraham had bought in the area, which perhaps he had had to forcibly recapture (Gen. 33:19). And he wanted the family tomb to specifically be Joseph's inheritance, as he more than any

appreciated the significance of resurrection to fulfil the Abrahamic covenant. But the reference to having taken it by how own strength shows that the weakness of Jacob remained, in thinking that his own strength was so significant. These very words are alluded to in Josh. 24:12 and Ps. 44:1-6, where the Spirit says that the land was given to Israel *not* on account of their bow and sword. The more closely we analyze the Bible heroes, the more apparent it is that they were shot through with weakness; and some of those weaknesses it seems they unsuccessfully battled with until the day of their death. Jacob, right at the end of his life, still hadn't completely overcome that besetting weakness of self-reliance. This is, of course, a dangerous road to go down. In no way can we be complacent about our urgent need for spiritual growth. But on the other hand, we will never reach the stature of Christ without righteousness being imputed to us. In this sense, true Christian believers aren't good people, but people who know and believe in God's grace.

It seems on balance that Jacob was referring to how his sons Simeon and levi had massacred the men of Shechem; and it seems Jacob joined in with his sword and bow. He later criticizes his sons for having done this, and he and his tribe only survived revenge from the surrounding tribes by God's grace. And yet, so true to human thought and behaviour, he now later glories in his part in the massacre, whilst later cursing his sons for their part in it. God destroyed the Amorite before Israel, Am. 2:9, but He worked through their quite wrong behaviour towards the Shechemites. Jacob seems proud of capturing Shechem when he ought to have been ashamed of how it was done, and had forgotten that he was saved from the consequences by grace alone.

However it could be that just as "I have given" is a prophetic perfect, speaking of the future [he means 'I will give'] as if it has

happened because of his faith, so he speaks of taking Shechem as already having been achieved by him when it was yet future. Yet another alternative is that Jacob is again showing weakness by recalling the massacre at Shechem and proudly claiming that this was his victory, and he wanted Shechem to be Joseph's. And another option is that the inheritance at Shechem was the parcel of land bought by the patriarchs for burials, which Jacob gave to Joseph (Jn. 4:5), and where Joseph's bones were buried. But in this case, we enquire how Jacob took that land from the hand of the Amorite with sword and bow.

GENESIS CHAPTER 49

Gen 49:1 *Jacob called to his sons, and said: Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you that which will happen to you in the days to come-* This follows right on from the blessing of Joseph, in which Jacob had attempted to give the blessing of the firstborn to Ephraim as his son. I commented throughout Gen. 48 that he might have better learnt from his earlier handing back of Isaac's paternal blessing (see on Gen. 33:11). On the acme of spiritual perception, he confessed that paternal blessings are not worth anything compared to the blessings of God's grace. But now Jacob is still thinking in human terms, concerned about final blessings of children, when he should have realized that these are meaningless. And so we find that as many of the paternal blessings uttered by his father never came particularly true, so not everything he says here to his sons had fulfilment.

The order of the blessings is not strictly according to birth order. But it is according to how the tribes were geographically located in Israel, from the South to the North. He has the same time in view when he speaks of Levi being scattered in Israel, and Judah being the kingly tribe. So although there are elements in these blessings which appear to be Jacob reasoning as a cranky old man, clearly the higher hand of Divine inspiration was also present working through his weakness. And that is the story of how God works with all men through His Spirit. But the structure of the blessings is poetic in form, and Joseph is clearly at the center of the poetry. Many of the sons leave their father's deathbed with no real blessing, some only with a curse. But they were all blessed, each son individually had a blessing (:28). Blessed on account of the blessing upon Joseph, which is why he and his blessings, which were their blessings, are at the center of the poetry. For the men would have departed from their father's

deathbed bewildered; Joseph and Judah got the blessings, and the three first born sons were cursed not blessed, with the remaining sons getting vague and abstract blessings usually mixed with some negative predictions about them. Reuben would have naturally speaking been irrate that he was cursed for his sexual misbehaviour, whereas Judah's sexual misbehaviour was apparently overlooked and he was blessed. The whole episode appears bizarre, until we realize that Jacob was doing this intentionally- to highlight that their blessings were through the blessings to be shared with them from Joseph and to some extent Judah.

In fact, blessing within curses is the theme with which Genesis starts in Gen. 3, especially because it led to the promise of the Saviour and His victory in Gen. 3:15. The woman is cursed, but "she shall be saved through the childbearing" (1 Tim. 2:15). Adam was cursed with sweat and toil in labour, but there is some blessing within those things ("In all labour there is profit", Prov. 14:23; "that every man should eat and drink, and enjoy the good of all his labour, it is the gift of God... to rejoice in his labour; this is the gift of God", Ecc. 3:13; 5:19). Even the curse of death can be seen as a blessing, as it provides rest from a meaningless life, under the sun. And as 1 Cor. 15 explains, unless we die we cannot rise again to new and glorious eternal life. Even the curse on Cain has some blessing in it: "And the LORD put a mark on Cain, lest any who found him should attack him" (Gen. 4:15). Or as Paul put it during the shipwreck, "You have *gained* this harm and *loss*". Loss is gain, in the spiritual ecosystem. In talking about his own death, Paul could say that "to live is Christ, and to die is gain". It's win-win. We can't lose, in Christ. Death is swallowed up in victory.

And another theme of Genesis is that the blessing of one person brings blessing upon another; hence the Gospel is all

about the blessing given to Abraham's seed through whom many will be blessed. And so the 'curses' given some sons in place of blessings do not mean that those sons are without blessings; because they share in the blessings of Joseph and Judah, both looking ahead to the Lord Jesus. In this sense, all the sons were "blessed" (:28) because of the blessings upon Joseph and Judah, even though their own behaviour led to them being cursed, or at least, not having much blessing of their own. As the sons crowded around their father on his deathbed, they would have all expected blessing. How he spoke was most unusual, and only the reflective would have understood that they went away blessed- because of the blessing upon Joseph.

Gen 49:2 *Assemble yourselves, and hear, you sons of Jacob. Listen to Israel, your father-* He parallels his old and new names, in order to demonstrate that he has accepted God's grace in changing his name. The gathering of his sons may point forward to the last judgment.

Gen 49:3 *Reuben, you are my firstborn, my might, and the beginning of my strength; excelling in dignity, and excelling in power-* The way Jacob rebukes and effectively rejects Reuben, Simeon and Levi, the sons who had flaunted their natural strength and prowess, reflects the right perspectives which Jacob attained at the end. The language here sounds as if Jacob associated his natural strength with Reuben, and yet now he rejected it. Doubtless these men gathered round their father expecting to hear some sweet fatherly blessing mixed with a few gentle reproofs for past behaviour. The whole process of Israel's sons being "gathered" to him and receiving their blessing and judgment is typical of the final judgment, showing how Jacob was a type of Christ at this time. The surprise of the sons we are

left to imagine, but it would point forward quite accurately to the surprise which will be a feature of the rejected (Mt. 25:44).

Gen 49:4 *Boiling over as water, you shall not excel; because you went up to your father's bed, then defiled it. He went up to my couch-* The evident problem the Abraham family had with women is emphasized in the record. One man, one woman was the declared standard of God at this time. Adam, Noah, Noah's sons, Aaron, Moses were all one man: one woman cases. The patriarchs having more than one wife at a time sticks out. Abraham's apparently casual relationship with Hagar, Judah's use of a harlot (apparently the sort of thing he often did), Esau's many carnal wives, Dinah's love affair, Reuben's incest... all this creates a certain impression of weakness in this area. Joseph's evil report regarding his brothers may well have featured news of their playboy escapades while far away from usual family life (Gen. 37:2 = 1 Sam. 2:23,24). The repeated way in which they lied about their wives also indicates that they didn't take their marital responsibilities as they should have (Gen. 12:13; 20:3,13; 26:7).

AV "unstable as water" may mean that just as water goes downhill naturally and apparently irresistibly, so Reuben had given in to sexual temptation as if it were irresistible. Whereas Jacob has said that Reuben was the beginning of his strength, his firstborn, perhaps claiking to have been sexually self controlled until be made his wife conceive his first child. The argument that sin is irresistible looms large in our minds in the moments of decision as we face temptation. Sin is not inevitible, although in reality there is none who sins not, apart from the Lord.

But we note that Reuben's sexual sin is maximized by Jacob, whereas Judah is blessed despite having sinned concerning Tamar over a protracted period. This would've seemed "unfair" to the men who stood around the deathbed. But the point is, that

although some are more blessed than others in this life, the real blessing is through the work and blessing of Joseph / Jesus. We can contrast Jacob's attitude here with how King David would not punish Amnon for his incest "because he loved him for he was his firstborn (2 Sam. 13:21, LXX).

Reuben's incest, twice lamented, meant that he was stripped of the title of firstborn (1 Chron. 5:1,2). I suggested on Gen. 35:22 that the incest may not have been due to simple lust, but rather anger. So the statement that he had boiled over like water would refer to his anger problem rather than sexual lust. He 'went up' to his father's bed and bedroom, perhaps suggesting that he wanted to become the head of the family in place of Jacob. He had 'excelled in dignity' (:4), but now he did not 'excel'. The two words are related in Hebrew as they are in English. And yet despite all this, Reuben is presented as having more genuine concern for Joseph and Jacob than most of the other brothers. But clearly even on his deathbed, Jacob couldn't forgive Reuben for what he had done. He offers no blessing, only a statement that he remembers Reuben's sin and abiding shame.

Gen 49:5 *Simeon and Levi are brothers. Their swords are weapons of violence-* The reference is to their massacre of the Shechemites. Jacob seems to speak as if this is not forgiven, for he says that their swords *are*, not "were", weapons used to do violence to others. Jacob again offers them no blessing, but just wants them to know he remembers what they did and retains his sense of separation from them. In Christian terms, of forgiveness and grace, Jacob seems remarkably lacking, despite all the grace shown to him. He died not quite 'getting it'; and yet will be saved. And we noted on Gen. 48:22 that it seems Jacob himself joined in the violence against Shechem. The sword is of course a "weapon of violence" so perhaps they used their circumcision knives as weapons of slaughter- the classic case of religious abuse.

Jacob leaves no possibility for future blessing for Levi for doing this; and yet God used Levi's seed, as the priestly tribe, to do countless circumcisions. The words of curse are in fact later described as a blessing. God is kinder than man, and has a far greater future Hope for people than we tend to. We tend like Jacob to judge people for what they did in the past and refuse to move on from that.

Gen 49:6 *My soul, don't come into their council. My glory, don't be united to their multitude; for in their anger they killed men. In their self-will they hamstrung cattle-* Although Jacob's seed had become a "multitude" as promised, he says that he refuses to unite himself with the "multitude" of Simeon and Levi, as if he now saw this physical fulfilment of the promises in his lifetime as worth little. His appreciation of the promises absolutely fills his thinking at the end. The promised Kingdom was "the pride of Jacob" (Ps. 47:4 NIV; Am. 6:8; Nah. 2:2), his chiefest joy. There are aspects of Jacob's blessings of his sons which evidently have not been fulfilled. Presumably they will be fulfilled in the Kingdom, which shows how Jacob's mind was not dwelling on his children receiving physical blessings from God in the short term (cp. how Isaac blessed his sons), but rather the promised eternal blessings of the Kingdom. It is quite likely that the sons, in their humanity, expected blessings of a more immediate sort, such as a dying father of those times would have shared out between his sons. But instead, Jacob's talk is not of the things of this brief life, but of the Kingdom. And yet Jacob does come over as bitter, refusing to associate his honour ["glory"] with their extended families, their "council" [group] or "multitude" or AV "assembly", their community. It is really a deathbed disassociation from his own sons, when he himself had many sins which had been dealt with by grace alone.

Jacob's reflection on Joseph's sufferings gave him a clearer picture of those of the future Messiah. His complaint that they "hamstrung cattle" can be understood as prophetic of the murder of God's son. It can be translated in the singular, as if referring to one individual, namely Joseph: "houghing the ox" (RV), or bullock (Concordant Version), i.e. the Lord Jesus Christ (Dt. 33:17 RV), the bullock of the sin offering (Heb. 13:11-13). Gen. 49:6 can also be rendered 'murdering the prince' (Adam Clarke's Translation), referring initially to the murder of Shechem but looking ahead to that of the Lord Jesus. The Roman historian Hippolytus says that "From Simeon came the Scribes, and from Levi the priests"; it was these groups who murdered the Lord, and Jacob seems to have foreseen this, through his reflection on their hatred of Joseph. He may mean that they took counsel against Joseph, as the scribes and priests would do against Christ (Ps. 2:2).

The conspiracy or counsel was in their counselling the men of Shechem to also be circumcised- so that they could attack and slay them whilst they were incapacitated after the circumcision procedure. "May my soul not enter their conspiracy" is surely hypocritical when Jacob had earlier boasted in Gen. 48:22 of taking Shechem with his own sword and bow. "Hamstrung cattle" can be "and at their pleasure they destroyed leading citizens".

Gen 49:7 *Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel. I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel-* Several times at the very end of his life (Gen. 49:2,7,24) Jacob mentions his old and new names ('Jacob' and 'Israel') together, as if to show that now he finally accepted and believed the wondrous change that God had wrought in him. First of all, he doesn't seem to have accepted his name change, and needed God to remind him of it again (Gen. 32:28; 35:10).

To accept, really accept, the Name we called upon ourselves at baptism (Acts 2:21; 9:14; 22:16; Rom. 10:12-14) is difficult. To believe that God really does see us as His people, bearing His Name, with all the moral glory this implies... it took Jacob no less than 50 years to realize the implications of Jacob's name change (Jacob's name was changed when he was 97, and he only uses it freely of himself just before his death at 147). It's unusual for a man to repeatedly mention his own name when talking to others; and yet this is exactly what Jacob did in Gen. 48:20; 49:2,7,24; it was as if he was playing with a new toy, reflecting his grasp of that basic, wondrous truth he had been taught 50 years ago; that in *God's* eyes, his name had changed. In God's eyes, he was not the Jacob, the liar, the supplanter, the deceiver; but Israel, the prince with God. But it took 50 years for the wonder of it all to come home to him.

And yet the immediate meaning of his words here are to call his sons for the expected deathbed blessing, and then curse them. When Jacob himself closed his eyes covered by grace for many failures in his life; his repeated recollection of their massacre of the Shechemites decades previously is perhaps because it did him shame, and he could never quite live it down.

Jacob's desire to "divide" them uses a word which can mean to divide out a portion with others; it is thus used in :27, and frequently about the dividing up of spoil or the promised land. The idea could be that their part of the inheritance Jacob wished to be taken by others, or divided up between the other sons. His idea of 'scattering' them in Israel can too easily be applied to the scattering of the Levites throughout Israel; but this is uttered as a curse, and it was intended to affect both Simeon and Levi. Scattering throughout the *eretz* is the language of judgment upon the Babel builders (Gen. 11:9 s.w.) and Israel's scattering among the nations is associated with God disinheriting them of

their land (Dt. 28:64; Jer. 9:16; 18:17 s.w.). It may be that this is what Jacob intended; that they would be scattered amongst the other tribes and their share of the inheritance was to be divided amongst them. There is no record of this happening; and God turned the curse into a blessing in that the scattering of the Levites around Israel was to be a blessing for all. And in a strange way, the curse upon Simeon had at least some fulfilment. Simeon became the smallest of the twelve tribes (Num. 26:14); it is given no blessing by Moses in Dt. 33; and is given no independent territory in Canaan, just a few cities within the borders of Judah (Josh. 19:1-9); and eventually Simeon was absorbed into Judah.

Gen 49:8 *Judah, your brothers will praise you. Your hand will be on the neck of your enemies. Your father's sons will bow down before you-* see on Gen. 37:10. Joseph's dreams had clearly stated that all the brothers would bow to him. And Jacob had come to see that and accept it, despite his initial dislike of the idea. But now his very last words seem an attempt to make those dreams apply to Judah and not Joseph. "Judah" was so named in order that others would "Praise Yah"; but Jacob turns this around to Judah himself being praised. It seems to indicate that Jacob died somewhat bitter and without having grasped that the grace shown to him ought to have been reflected by him to others. And yet he shall be saved, as with so many believers who end their days likewise.

The three older brothers of Judah have just been as it were trashed by Jacob in his preceding discussion of Reuben, Simeon and Levi. He overlooks Judah's disgraceful behaviour with Tamar, but focuses upon that of Reuben. We get the impression that he has made his mind up to present positively those whom he once wished to be his firstborn. Judah was blessed that his brothers would bow down to him. But they were all acutely aware that God had blessed Joseph with this blessing. The idea

may therefore be that Judah would be blessed only in that some of Joseph's blessing would come to him. Which is the basis upon which all the brothers were to be blessed (:28).

"May your father's sons bow down to you" is the same phrase as used in the blessing of Isaac upon Jacob (Gen. 27:29), which blessing Jacob had stolen from Esau. Likewise the blessings of Gen. 27:28 are now given by Jacob to Joseph ["May God give you of

heaven's dew and of earth's richness—an abundance of grain and new wine"]. In Gen. 32, Jacob had resigned all interest in that blessing; but in this final deathbed moment, he has returned to an obsession with such blessings of the father. Like us, he died imperfect, returning to weaknesses he had once momentarily overcome. The art of spiritual growth is to retain the level we reach at some intense moment of need, rather than slouch back into our previous ways.

Gen 49:9 *Judah is a lion's cub-* Jacob saw himself as the lion, and Judah as his cub. But likening himself to a lion hardly seems appropriate humility in a man who had been forgiven so much and who was now facing his grave planks. But still he will be saved, by grace.

From the prey, my son, you have gone up- This could be a reference to some unrecorded military conflict Judah had been involved in; there may be another reference to such a conflict in Gen. 48:22. But "the prey" is literally 'the tearing', and is the same word used by Jacob when he thought that Jacob was without doubt torn in pieces. "Gone up" is also translated 'depart'. And quite legitimately we could translate this: 'From the torn in pieces son of mine [Joseph], you departed'. This would then reference Judah's refusal to be associated with the plan to kill Joseph, urged the brothers to save his life, and later was the clear leader in the plans to save Benjamin's life. Judah was like the

young lion who refused to close in on the kill of the torn prey, allowed it to live, and then grew up to become a truly mighty lion. Jacob is here recognizing Judah's growth in responsibility from the days of his sin to Tamar to his lengthy and persuasive speech before Joseph.

He stooped down, he crouched as a lion, as a lioness. Who will rouse him up?- Jacob may be using the prophetic perfect here, talking about future things as if they have happened, and having in mind a great Messianic descendant of Judah, the Lord Jesus. Jacob twice describes this Messianic descendant as devouring the prey in the morning of the second coming (49:9, 27); he foresaw an aggressive tension between Messiah and other beasts, i.e. the nations of the surrounding world, which would end in the glorious victory of Christ's coming in glory. This image of devouring the prey after the battle against the world in this life is the basis of other latter day prophecies (Ez. 39:18-20; Rev. 19:17-20). The faithful will eat the carcass of the beast at Christ's coming (Mt. 24:28 cp. Rev. 19:17-20), sharing in the victory of the lion of Judah who has slain his prey and now devours it. This was all foreseen by Jacob, although he would have seen the beasts which the Messiah / lion devoured as the nations surrounding his people (Jer. 15:3; Jer. 28:14; Ez. 5:17 and many others).

Gen 49:10 *The sceptre will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs. To him will the obedience of the peoples be-* This could be a reference to Judah's great Messianic descendant, the one to whom the Kingdom belongs, and that is how these words are alluded to in Ez. 21:25-27. The alternative reading, "until Shiloh comes", would then name Messiah as "Shiloh", 'the sent one (cp. Is. 8:6; Jn. 9:7). The nations would be obedient to this figure, as Egypt and the neighbouring peoples had been to Joseph. The preaching of the Gospel is a gathering together of God's people

to Christ (Gen. 49:10; Mt. 12:30). We are now being gathered together, and yet the final gathering together will be at the day of judgment; therefore our response to the calling together of the Gospel now, is a foretaste of the gathering unto the day of judgment (Mt. 3:12 cp. 13:30).

But Jacob envisaged Judah as having an unbroken line of descendants ["from between his feet", an idiom for childbirth] who would be the kingly rulers [with sceptre and staff] until the Messiah figure came. But this didn't come true. And Ez. 21:25-27 clearly alludes to this passage and adjusts it, saying that the kingly dynasty of Judah had been overthrown and would remain so "until he comes whose right it is". It could be that Jacob was uttering a conditional prophecy, what could have been true, but Judah's later failure precluded it. Or maybe whilst the inspired record of these last words is accurate, the fact that Jacob's predictions didn't come true (as Ez. 21:25-27 seems to emphasize) is in demonstration of the fact that he had failed to learn the lesson that paternal blessings and cursings were not that important. Rather should the emphasis be upon God's blessing and cursing, which is all anyway about grace (see on Gen. 33:11).

The alternative rendering "Until Shiloh come", or "Until he come to Shiloh" could connect with the Divine intention that Israel leave Egypt and return to Canaan, to establish His Kingdom. I have explained this idea on Gen. 45:7. In this case we would have here a prophecy of what could potentially have happened; Judah was to be the kingly ruler, until he led Israel out of Egypt to Canaan and they arrived at Shiloh, where the tabernacle was later established. There a king in the line of Judah would be established, and the Gentiles would be obedient to him.

I suggest that the events predicted by Ahijah the Shilonite (the family of David and the tribe of Judah losing kingship over

all Israel) are the fulfilment of Gen. 49:10 "The scepter will not depart from Judah" [he will not be banished from his kingdom] "until he comes to Shiloh". When Judah came to Shiloh to crown Rehoboam there, and there the "peoples [of Israel] will gather to him" to crown him, there the kingship or scepter over the ten tribes was lost. Shechem and Shiloh are close to each other and mentioned together twice: "Behold, there is a sacrifice before the Lord in Shiloh... on the east side of the highway that goes up from Beth-El to Shechem" (Jud. 21:19). Likewise in Jer. 41:5: "from Shechem (and) from Shiloh". The one who comes to Shiloh, the one from Shiloh, may refer not to Messiah but to Ahijah the Shilonite, the one from Shiloh, who prophesied how the kingship would depart from Judah. Ahijah is called "the Shilonite", the man from Shiloh, five times in the record. Quite some emphasis. If "until Shiloh come" refers to the Lord Jesus, it is hard to understand how the kingship departs from Judah when He comes, seeing He Himself is the lion from Judah. And it is hard to understand why He should be called "Shiloh" and the passage never apparently applied to Him in later scripture. The diadem / sceptre did depart from Judah, as Ezekiel 21:25-27 makes clear- and well before the Lord Jesus came. So to make "Shiloh" simply equal to Messiah just doesn't work.

Gen 49:11 *Binding his foal to the vine, his donkey's colt to the choice vine*- Literally, "the vine of Sorek", a valley in Canaan (Jud. 6:4). Jacob's thoughts were back in Canaan, envisaging an ideal situation of peace being enjoyed in the land once Judah had led Israel back there from Goshen.

He has washed his garments in wine, his robes in the blood of grapes- He saw Judah's great Messianic descendant as being associated with the ass, the Hebrew for which essentially means 'patience'; he foresaw the Lord's patient endurance in the struggle, and even foresaw his garments as dipped in blood (cp.

Rev. 14:18), eyes bloodshot with the struggle, and yet with teeth white as milk from a true assimilation of God's teaching (49:12 cp. Is. 55:1); through his personal experience and extensive reflection on the basic need of man and the promised blessing of forgiveness, Jacob really went deeply and accurately into a personal knowledge of the future Christ. Blind as he was (Gen. 48:10), Jacob meditated upon the Lord Jesus. His mind was filled with him. He perhaps contrasted his own dim eyes with the burning, bloodshot eyes of his zealous Lord, visualizing the suffering which he knew He would endure for his sake. The blessings of Gen. 49 are in well planned poetic form; it may be that Jacob composed these poems about the Lord Jesus as the crystallization of his extended reflection on the Lord. Would that we would rise up to the Messianic perception of the blind poet Jacob. Likewise David foresaw the Lord Jesus always before his face, and therefore his heart was never ruffled. Jacob evidently saw in Joseph's experience a type of Christ's future sufferings and resurrection (49:11,23).

The Lord's death is described as His washing "his garments in wine, and his vesture in the blood of grapes" (Gen. 49:11 RV). Treading out the grapes is a Hebraism for judgment, and yet it is used here and in Is. 63:1-3 regarding the Lord's treading of the winepress alone in His death. Indeed, the Isaiah passage is clearly applicable to both the crucifixion and the final judgment of the Lord Jesus. The reason being, that in His death was the judgment of this world.

But despite all these cryptic references to the future Messiah, we must remember that Jacob spoke these words to Judah. Judah had deceived Jacob by washing Joseph's clothes in blood to make it appear that he had been slain by a wild animal. But now, in allusion to that, Jacob graciously projects this image as part of a Messianic prophecy of Judah's final greatness. But Jacob is far less

gracious to some of his other sons, whose sins he remembers with bitterness and curses them concerning them.

Gen 49:12 *His eyes will be red with wine, his teeth white with milk-* See on :11. Whilst this blessing can be understood as prophetic of Messiah, the Lord Jesus, we must remember that it was also in its first instance the blessing of the man Judah who stood in front of Jacob at this time. Isaac had blessed his firstborn, as he thought, with "plenty of corn and wine" (Gen. 27:28), as well as dominance over his brother. Jacob messed up his life by desperately trying to win this paternal blessing; when he got it, it never really came true for him, and he handed it back to Esau because he then considered that the blessing of God's grace was all sufficient (see on Gen. 33:11). But now Jacob seems to have taken a step backwards, and is expressing this blessing in the same kind of terms, to Judah- who was not the firstborn, but the favourite of a moment, it seems. He has just tried to declare Ephraim as his firstborn, the son of his right hand, in Gen. 48. "Eyes... red with wine" seems a crude way of wishing Judah much wine, for this is the language of drunkenness (GNB "His eyes are bloodshot from drinking wine"); the whole feeling of these last words of Jacob is that he was not at his spiritual best, and much of what he said never really came true.

The idea seems to be that good wine makes eyes go red, and milk gives you white teeth. Milk doesn't make teeth white; but as with the language of demons in the New Testament, we have here an example of where wrong ideas are recorded as true, with no footnote pointing this out; because the Bible is written for people at their time, and some issues God doesn't see necessary to correct at the time.

Gen 49:13 *Zebulun will dwell at the haven of the sea. He will be for a haven of ships. His border will be on Sidon-* If we insist that Jacob's words all were to come true, then this appears an

unreconciled expositional problem. Zebulun was to dwell along the sea coast (LXX), where ships unload [a "haven"], "beside the sea" (GNB), until Sidon. But this wasn't the case. The canton of Zebulun even in Ezekiel's prophecy of the restored Kingdom was to be nowhere near Sidon, and Zebulun never had a border unto Sidon. According to Josephus (Ant. 19:10,16), Zebulun was never even bounded by the sea, being cut off by Asher. Could it be that at times Jacob's enthusiasm carried him away, and what he said was more his own wishing than the direct revelation of God? Until a satisfactory explanation can be come up with, it seems this is what we must accept. In this case, we see that even in this flurry of faith in the future Kingdom and Messiah, Jacob's interest in the physical aspect of the promises still remained with him, and carried him away in a way which God refused to work with. Perhaps this is why his old name "Jacob" and his new name "Israel" are used together so much at the time of his death, because he was still not totally transformed; and yet shall be saved, by grace. David's spiritual enthusiasm for Solomon needs to be read in a similar light; he makes statements concerning him which reflect a Messianic zeal, but also a desire to see his physical son more blessed than he was worthy of.

Gen 49:14 *Issachar is a strong donkey, lying down between the saddlebags*- "Issachar has desired that which is good; (i.e.) resting between the inheritance. And having seen the resting place that it was good... he subjected his shoulder to labour" (49:14 LXX). The Apostle alludes to this Greek text in Heb. 4:1: "Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest". Jacob imputed righteousness to his son Issachar at the end. Imputing righteousness to others, seeing the good and the potential in them, was something Jacob only reached at the end; he saw Issachar as seeing the future Kingdom, and devoting himself to labour now to attain that

future rest. And the writer to the Hebrews bids us follow that man's example. Jacob's judgment of his Issachar was with regard to how keenly he perceived the future rest of the Kingdom, and laboured now to attain it. For this reason, Jacob commended him; he judged Issachar according to how keenly he desired the Kingdom.

Jacob's achievement of a true humility is evident in his last words. The way he blessed his sons in Gen. 49 indicates this; note how he saw Issachar's greatness in the fact he was a humble servant (49:14). He learnt the lesson of that night of wrestling; his natural strength was not to be gloried in, neither was this to be his true greatness. And yet in Jacob's words to some of his other sons at this time, and in Gen. 48:22, he is back to his old pride and trust in human strength. This is why the old name "Jacob" is juxtaposed with "Israel" at this time. And yet he died in faith and hope of salvation.

And again, we can read these words to Issachar more negatively; because to compare someone to a donkey was an insult and not seen as a compliment. Hence GNB: "Issachar is no better than a donkey". And it was a lazy donkey, who collapsed under its load. This fits with the generally terse and negative attitude which Jacob has to several of his sons. It's so sad that a man who had been shown such grace, and realized it, could not show it to others by the end of his life.

Gen 49:15 *He saw a resting place, that it was good, the land, that it was pleasant. He bows his shoulder to the burden, and becomes a servant doing forced labour-* Jacob may have particularly remembered Issachar's donkeys loaded with the good things of Egypt, coming in to the pleasant land of Goshen. But Jacob was prophetically aware that Issachar, along with all Israel, would end up "doing forced labour" in that pleasant land, which is what happened after new Pharaohs arose. We may enquire what was

the "blessing" in this (:28). It is as ever a case of a curse having a silver lining; for one of the great themes of the Bible is that we must humble ourselves to be exalted. And perhaps that is the implication here; that the good land would be his resting place, exactly because he became a servant. And this happened on a national level- the Hebrews did "forced labour" in Egypt to prepare them to inherit the "rest" of Canaan, the good and pleasant land.

Gen 49:16 *Dan will judge his people, as one of the tribes of Israel-* The idea may be that Dan would be independent of the other tribes, and would judge / lead his own tribe. Or the idea could be that Dan would be the judge of all Israel- but this never happened.

We note that the sons of Jacob's slave women [whom we now read of] are blessed on the same level as the sons by his wives. He recognized on one hand the equality of all his children; and yet on the other, he still retains his obsession with blessing the second born in the way he treats Joseph's sons.

Gen 49:17 *Dan will be a serpent in the way, an adder in the path, That bites the horse's heels, so that his rider falls backward-* Again we have the theme of blessing out of curse. Dan was called a serpent- but he would thereby come to victory. This is to be connected with Zech. 10:5, which speaks of how in the last days, the invaders of Israel will be toppled from their horses by the men of Israel / Jacob. Again, Jacob's mind was on the far distant glory of his sons in the day of the Kingdom. There is also reference here to Gen. 3:15, but with an unexpected twist; Dan as the snake (not the woman) would bite his enemies, and thereby subdue them. Is there a hint here that Jacob had so meditated on the Lord Jesus, the future Messiah, that he realized that he must have our sinful, snake-like, Jacob-like nature, and yet through that very fact the final victory against sin would

be won? 'Jacob' meaning 'heel-catcher' associates him with the seed of the snake, who would bruise the seed of the woman in the heel. He saw how he would somehow be rescued from his own 'Jacob-ness', saved from himself, by the Saviour to come. It turned out that Jacob, who in some ways was the seed of the snake, became the seed of the woman. And yet his Messianic blessing of Dan indicates that he saw these two aspects in his Saviour Lord; he was the one who had the appearance of the seed of the snake (cp. how the bronze snake symbolized him), and yet was in fact the seed of the woman. I really believe that Jacob had so deeply reflected on his own life and sinfulness, on the promise in Eden, and on the promises of Abraham's saviour-seed, that he came to as fine an appreciation of the representative nature of Christ's sacrifice as any believer has today. Thus a lifetime of reflection on the promises (rather than thinking 'Yes, we know all about them') and sustained self-examination will lead to a deep grasp of the fact that Christ really represented *you*, he had exactly your nature, and thereby he is your very own saviour.

Gen 49:18 *I have waited for Your salvation, Yahweh-* Jacob's hope of Messiah was the hope of his life; "I have waited for Your salvation", 'Your Jesus', he commented, perhaps in desperation at the way his sons generally did not perceive this. This is commented upon by the Jerusalem Targum with the suggestion that Jacob was expressing a very definite Messianic expectation: "My soul waiteth not for the deliverance of Gideon, the son of Joash, for it was only temporal; nor for that of Samson, for it was but transient; but for the redemption by the Messiah, the Son of David, which in thy word thou hast promised to send to thy people, the children of Israel; for this, thy salvation, my soul waiteth"

Yahweh is a saviour God, not just a provider of children, cattle and land for the present; and now, at long last, Jacob

associates Yahweh with himself; Yahweh has become his God, as he promised 70 years before. Ex. 6:3 says that Jacob knew the Yahweh Name from the time God appeared to him; but it took him a lifetime to make Yahweh his very own God.

Gen 49:19 *A troop will press on Gad, but he will press on their heel-* This continues the idea that apparent curses are in fact blessings (:28), once the silver lining is perceived and believed. The principle of Gen. 3:15 is recalled through the reference to "their heel"- blessing out of curse.

Or as AV, Gad "shall overcome *at the last*", which reflects how Jacob's mind was focused on the final victory of his people, "at the last" . Again the idea is of temporary defeat or curse, leading to long term blessing. At the end of his life, Jacob had come to terms with his earlier idolatry. 'Gad' was the name of a Babylonish deity which presided over chance; Israel were condemned for believing in him in Is. 65:11 AVmg. Leah using this name reflected the sentiment of 'Good fortune at the hand of the god Gad'. The way she effectively accuses Jacob's God of treating her like a prostitute who gave her "hire" because she let her maid sleep with her husband... doesn't indicate that she was a great believer in Yahweh. Yet when Jacob blessed Gad, he seems to change this: "Gad, a troop (Heb. *gedud*, not *gad*) shall overcome (*guwd*, related to *gad*) him: but he shall overcome". These word plays would suggest that the god Gad would be overcome, would be 'Gad-ed', by the troop of warriors that would come from the tribe of Gad.

Gen 49:20 *Asher's food will be rich. He will yield royal dainties-* Asher "shall yield royal dainties", or 'dainties fit for a king' suggests Jacob imagining how in the Kingdom, the Lord Jesus would eat food grown in Asher? In the restored Kingdom, the tribes of Israel would each bring their royal dainties to the Messiah (Ez. 45:16). But in the shorter term, it seems Jacob

envisioned Israel as being led by a king who came from Judah; and Asher would be supportive of that king. Yet it was not God's will that His people should have a human king. So again we see how Jacob even at his end was not completely in step with the Father; and yet shall be saved.

Gen 49:21 *Naphtali is a doe set free, who bears beautiful fawns-* Or as AV "a hind let loose: he giveth goodly (lit. 'gracious') words"; this is another Messianic hint. Ps. 22 (title) likens the Lord to a hind at the time of his death; and again, Jacob's appreciation of the quality of grace as it would be manifested in Christ comes out. The LXX says that Naphtali is "a tree trunk let loose". With all the other Messianic insights in Jacob's words, this cannot be accidental. Jacob even foresaw something of the physical manner of the Lord's death. The idea of being let loose has day of atonement connections (Lev. 16:21). Did Jacob see that far ahead? One Chaldee text reads for this verse: "Naphtali is a swift messenger like a hind that runneth on the tops of the mountains bringing glad tidings".

GNB gives "Naphtali is a deer that runs free, who bears lovely fawns". This would imply Naphtali was to be captured, but would break free afterwards. Which fits the theme of cursings having a silver lining of blessing in the end, rather like :19 "Gad will be attacked by a band of robbers, but he will turn and pursue them" (GNB).

Gen 49:22 *Joseph is a fruitful vine, a fruitful vine by a spring. His branches run over the wall-* This speaks of the descendant of Joseph as a fruitful vine, with branches. The Lord Jesus seems to have quarried his description of himself as a vine with branches from this very passage (Jn. 15:5). Joseph is only recorded as having two sons, so he was not so fruitful in his lifetime; but Jacob spoke by faith, anticipating how Ephraim would become very fruitful and the largest tribe in the ten tribe kingdom. I

have noted above that most of the sons are not much blessed and some are cursed, yet they are all blessed (:28). I suggest this was because the huge blessings upon Joseph, the blessings promised to Abraham in the covenant (:26), would be shared by Joseph. And this is intimated by this statement that his branches run over the wall, i.e. his fruitful vine branches bring fruit and blessing to people outside his own house. This is confirmed by :26 LXX; the huge blessings of the covenant, the blessings given to the fathers, "shall be upon the head of Joseph, and upon the head of the brothers of whom he took the lead". This means that the blessings upon Joseph would be mediated to the brothers. It was because of his exaltation over them, which they had so resisted when his dreams first described it, that they would also be blessed.

But the Hebrew is difficult here. The GNB offers: "Joseph is like a wild donkey by a spring, A wild colt on a hillside". The image then would be of Joseph's loneliness, separate from his brothers, silhouetted alone on a hillside. "A fruitful bough" (AV) is literally 'son of a fruit tree', thereby again elevating Jacob's own importance; he was the tree, and Joseph a branch only. When Jacob was to bow to Joseph, according to the dreams. It's rather like Jacob praising Judah as a cub- suggesting Jacob was the great lion.

Gen 49:23 *The archers have severely grieved him, shot at him, and persecuted him-* The figure of archery seems slightly inappropriate compared to what the brothers did to Joseph. Perhaps the brothers never reached the ideal level of repentance in telling Jacob what really happened; and Joseph didn't tell Jacob because he had forgiven the brothers. The brothers' abuse of Joseph "severely grieved him", he took it very much to heart. There were likely serious incidents against Joseph before he was finally put in the pit, and Jacob may be alluding to them.

However, Genesis 49 is poetry, and perhaps we are to interpret their arrows as their words, which is common enough symbology in the Bible (Jer. 9:7). Joseph was deeply hurt by their words, but (:24), God placed His hands upon those of Joseph so that the arrows he shot back, the words he spoke in response, were of grace. Jacob was marvelling at this, as we also do.

The ecclesia in the time of Amos "chant to the sound of the viol, and invent to themselves instruments of musick, like David; That drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the chief ointments: but they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph" (Am. 6:5,6). They drunk wine and anointed their faces with oil-rejoicing in Gods blessings. They looked back to the heritage of their spiritual ancestors (David), and on a surface level appeared to follow them. They chanted the temple songs, and yet there was no grief within them for the affliction of Gods people. The archers were to surely grieve Joseph, but they chose to ignore the terrible import of those prophecies of Messiahs suffering. There was the appearance of religion and worship, but no grief nor passion for the tragedy of Messiahs forthcoming death, no grieving for the tragedy of Gods people, who were about to be afflicted for their sins. And in this we must take our warning.

Gen 49:24 *But his bow remained strong-* As in :23, Jacob is using the imagery of archery. But he is also handing out blessings which sound very similar to those given to him by Isaac. Those blessings were supposed to have been received because the firstborn had taken his bow and arrows and caught wild game (Gen. 27:3 s.w.). All this allusion to human strength, and Jacob himself boasts of how he used his bow to take Shechem (Gen. 48:22), is quite inappropriate for a man made to limp so as not to trust in his own strength. And he had earlier resigned the blessing of the firstborn which he had received, awed instead by the blessing of God's grace (see on Gen. 33:11). But now he

returns to the scene of Isaac his father blessing him and Esau, and he starts to make conscious and unconscious allusion to it. Hence this imagery of bows and arrows.

The arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob- The archery allusion continues. The idea is that Joseph placed his hands on a bow, and God placed His hands on Joseph's hands, so that he was able to pull the string back further and take perfect aim. David uses this analogy about himself in 2 Sam. 22:35, and it is precisely acted out in 2 Kings 13:15-17. The idea is that God would be behind whatever Joseph did. But bows and arrows also speak of children, and the thought may be that God would make Ephraim and Manasseh go far, perhaps leading up to a Messiah figure, "the shepherd". So we could translate: "The masters of archery hated him. But his bow remained in strength, and the arms of his hands were agile by the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob".

Jacob coins a new name for God: the *abiyr*, translated here "the mighty [God]". This word occurs only in five other places, and each time it is in the phrase "the mighty one (*abiyr*) of Jacob" (Ps. 132:2,5; Is. 1:24; 49:26; 60:16). Likewise, the Lord used new titles of God in his time of ultimate spiritual maturity as he faced death (Jn. 17:11,25). Many of the Messianic Psalms refer to God as " my God" , and it was one of the phrases in the Lord's mind in His final, glorious maturity (Mt. 27:46). Moses in his final speech of Deuteronomy often encouraged Israel that God was *thy* (singular, personal) God. Jacob knew God's mightiness for himself in a very special way; he knew His gentle forgiveness of all his pride and self-will, that mighty forgiveness, that mighty patience with him, that Almighty salvation of him which had been made possible. In the same way we will each be given the name of God, and yet this Name will be known only to us (Rev. 2:17; 3:12; 14:1); it will be God's Name, but in a form entirely

personal to us. In dim foreshadowing of that glorious relationship with God, Jacob reached something of this even in his mortal life.

From there is the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel- This describes "the mighty one of *Jacob*" as the shepherd and rock of *Israel*. Again Jacob is finally acceptant of the name change. Jacob recognizes that God through His Angel had shepherded him all along (Gen. 48:15), and He would do likewise to Joseph's seed. The references in Deuteronomy to God being the rock that Israel forsook therefore refer to the Angel (Dt. 32:15,18). It is worth noting that the shepherd and rock ("stone" of Gen. 49:24) are both clear titles of Christ- implying that this Angel specifically represented Jesus? Hence "that rock (Angel) was Christ" (1 Cor. 10:4).

Jacob describes the future Messianic seed as "the stone of Jacob / Israel". Jacob's physical stone had been overturned, rested upon, set up and anointed (Gen. 28:13-15); perhaps now at the end, Jacob thought back to that incident and saw in that stone a prophecy of the death and resurrection of the Lord. Perhaps he even saw that the anointing, the 'Christ-ing' of the Stone would be after its raising up; he foresaw that the Lord Jesus would be made the Christ, the anointed, in the fullest sense by the resurrection (Acts 2:36). "The hope of Israel", or (see modern versions), "he for whom Israel / Jacob hopes" is another title of Christ (Acts 28:20 cp. Jer. 14:8; 17:13; Joel 3:16); he was the one for whom Jacob / Israel hoped. And his hope is the hallmark of all the Israel of God.

Jacob's reflection on the Lord Jesus must have been deep indeed, for he reaches some quite advanced and deep conclusions concerning him. Thus he describes God as the God from whom is "the shepherd, the stone of Israel / Jacob", both evidently Messianic titles. Yet "the rock of Israel" is later

understood to be a reference to the God of Jacob (2 Sam. 23:3). Therefore we may conclude that Jacob saw his God as manifest in the future Messiah, who would come out of the Father, i.e. be the Son of God. To understand God manifestation in Christ and the necessity for his Divine Sonship could have come from direct Divine revelation, but my sense is that it came instead from his deep appreciation of the promised blessing of forgiveness through Abraham's Messianic seed. Jacob's ever deepening appreciation of this and his progressive appreciation of God's grace led him to deeply meditate on the Lord's role. Jacob himself was a shepherd (Gen. 46:34; Hos. 12:12), and yet he gave the Christ the title of "*the* shepherd", as if he recognized that although the Lord Jesus would come out of God, he would also be exactly like Jacob, of his nature. He saw on a completely personal level the way in which Christ truly was his very own representative. He therefore saw in himself a type of Christ, indicated by the way in which he asks his sons to gather themselves unto him, and then goes on to say that ultimately, his people will gather themselves together unto Messiah (Gen. 49:1,2 cp. 10). See on 1 Cor. 10:4; Gen. 48:19.

Moses' hands being upheld by the hands of others can be seen as a type of the Lord Jesus being sustained by Angelic hands on the cross, connecting with this Messianic prophecy concerning the hands of Messiah being strengthened for His mediation by the hands of God. Throughout Scripture, God's hands are associated with His creative work in the natural creation (e.g. Ps. 8:6; 95:5; Heb. 1:10)- work which was and is performed through the Angels. The Lord Jesus was aware of the Angels in His final agony; He was painfully aware that they were at His command to lessen the physical torment (Mt. 26:53).

Jacob stated that from Joseph (Ephraim's father) would come the Shepherd / Stone / Messiah (49:24); presumably, Jacob

thought, through Ephraim. Yet Jacob was wrong in this; indeed, he uses Messianic imagery about Judah's seed as well. Thus whilst Jacob showed his spiritual maturity by an enthusiasm for the Lord Jesus Christ, even right at the very end of his life, he still had an old flaw: a desire to fulfill God's promises in the way *he* wanted them fulfilled, a desire to turn God's word round to fit in with *his* preferred way of thinking (in this case, that Messiah would come through Joseph / Ephraim). The way the prophets continually describe sinful Israel as "Ephraim" is perhaps God's way of showing that Jacob's way was not His way. See on Gen. 48:19.

Gen 49:25 *Even by the God of your father, who will help you; by the Almighty, who will bless you, with blessings of the sky above, blessings of the deep that lies below, blessings of the breasts, and of the womb- Finally*, at long last, Jacob got there. In this section, he says three times the same thing; God is my God, Yahweh-Messiah will be the my rock, my stone, yes, He is the God of your father Jacob, He is ALL-MIGHTY to save. That promise to make Yahweh his God, made 70 years previously in semi-belief, he had now fulfilled. He had made Yahweh his God. He was not only the God of his father and grandfather. The God who can do all things, not only physically but more importantly (as Jacob now realized) *spiritually*, was with his very own God. No wonder he dies repeating this three times over. And remember, he's our pattern.

The word "help" used here frequently occurs in the context of military help. Again Jacob's thoughts seem to be circling around the material and physical, when his whole life's lesson was surely that the spiritual must dominate over the material. The blessings he wishes Joseph again recall those uttered by Isaac, Jacob's father (Gen. 27:28); and God had taught Jacob that His spiritual blessings are far more important than these kinds of material

blessings. In a moment of spiritual desperation and perception, Jacob had grasped this, and handed them all to Esau (see on Gen. 33:11); but as with us, over the years, that perspective had become eroded.

We note that Jacob blesses Joseph with blessings of the heaven and the deep, or, the earth. This was exactly the blessing which Isaac had given Jacob when he stole the birthright blessings from Esau. Jacob had been taught many times that these blessings were immaterial, and had at one point in Gen. 32 resigned them back to Esau. But here he considers such blessings significant- he has still not learned that these material paternal blessings are irrelevant. His behaviour with Ephraim and Manasseh likewise reflects his failure to have really learned his lessons about the irrelevancies of being the firstborn. He thus died imperfect spiritually, like all of us, and yet secure in God's salvation.

Gen 49:26 *The blessings of your father have prevailed above the blessings of your ancestors, above the boundaries of the ancient hills*- Jacob had lamented that he had not been blessed with as long a life as his ancestors Isaac and Abraham (see on Gen. 47:9). But he finally feels he has been blessed far more than them. He certainly had more children, but materially it would seem they had more. So the "blessings" he perceives are spiritual rather than material; even though, as pointed out throughout this commentary, he still had the material and the spiritual too mixed up in his perceptions.

And he now realizes that the huge blessings of the covenant have all been placed upon Joseph, and have as it were run off from his head onto the heads of his brothers (see LXX). This implies they were kneeling before him with heads bowed, exactly what Joseph had dreamed at 17.

Jacob's progression from perceiving the promises as concerning physical blessing to seeing their essential relevance to forgiveness and future salvation is made explicit here: "The blessings of thy father have prevailed above the blessings of the ancient mountains, the delight, glory or loveliness of the hills of eternity" (this rendition is supported by the LXX, Gesenius, RVmg.). Remember that in the wrestling incident, Jacob realized that the blessing of God essentially refers to His forgiveness, and he had therefore given away his material blessing because he was so thrilled with his spiritual blessing (see on Gen. 33:11). This connection between blessing and forgiveness / salvation is widespread throughout Scripture: Dt. 33:23; Ps. 5:12 (blessing = grace) Dt. 30:19; Ps. 3:8; 24:5; 28:9; 133:3 (= salvation); Ex. 12:32; 32:29; Num. 24:1; 2 Sam. 21:3; Ps. 67:1 (cp. context); Lk. 6:28 (cp.) Acts 3:26; Rom. 4:7,8; 1 Cor. 10:16; Gal. 3:14 (= forgiveness). Surrounded by his sons clamouring, one can imagine, for physical, immediate blessings, just as he did in the first half of his life, Jacob says that the spiritual blessings he had received, the grace, the forgiveness, the salvation, were infinitely higher than the blessings of rock-solid hills and mountains, things which seemed so permanent and tangible. His intangible blessings were, he finally realized,. much higher than his intangible ones.

Jacob no longer saw the promised blessings as solely referring to him personally having a prosperous time in the promised land; he joyfully looked forward to the future Kingdom. He says that he now realizes that his blessings (of forgiveness and the subsequent hope of the Kingdom) are greater than the blessings of the everlasting mountains (49:26 RV mg.); he saw the spiritual side of his blessings as more significant than the material aspect. Despite the fact that the promises were primarily fulfilled in the peace and prosperity he and his seed enjoyed at the end

(Gen. 48:4 "multitude" s.w. 47:27; 35:11; 28:3), Jacob doesn't emphasize this fact as he could have done; instead, he looks to the future, ultimate fulfilments. He looked back on his life as a "pilgrimage", a series of temporary abodes on the way to something permanent, i.e. the future Kingdom (Gen. 47:9).

They will be on the head of Joseph, on the crown of the head of him who was separated from his brothers- This may not simply be a statement to the effect that Joseph was separate from his brothers. He was literally 'Nazirited', consecrated, from among his brothers; this could be a reference to how he was the family priest, wearing the coat of many colours; and how he was clearly consecrated by God as well to be the family's saviour.

LXX "shall be upon the head of Joseph, and upon the head of the brothers of whom he took the lead". As discussed on :22, the idea is that the brothers were each individually blessed (:28) because they partook in the blessings upon Joseph. Even though many of them were 'blessed' with curses.

Gen 49:27 *Benjamin is a ravenous wolf. In the morning he will devour the prey. At evening he will divide the spoil-* "In the morning he shall devour the prey" (49:27) connects with the promises that Messiah's second coming would be the true morning (Is. 60:1; Mal. 4:1,2); this was the day when Benjamin would have his true blessing. Many of Jacob's blessings of his sons contain some reference to Christ's future work, e.g. "he shall divide the spoil" (49:27); "he whom thy brethren shall praise" (49:8 = Rev. 5:5). Jacob describes Judah's Messianic descendant as "my son"; he eagerly looked ahead to the Lord Jesus as fulfilment of the promised Messianic seed. He perhaps saw that the multitudinous seed he had been promised was in fact an intensive plural, referring to the one great Messianic seed.

Or perhaps Jacob was angry with Benjamin, the 'son of my right hand' who had become firstborn after Joseph disappeared.

The GNB translates more bluntly: "Benjamin is like a vicious wolf. Morning and evening he kills and devours". Maybe this is some reference to an unrecorded military encounter (as in :9 and Gen. 48:22) where Benjamin, although young, had acted with great brutality. Jacob would be raising this issue as a reason for not now seeing him as the firstborn.

Gen 49:28 *All these are the twelve tribes of Israel, and this is what their father spoke to them and blessed them. He blessed everyone according to his blessing*- GNB has it about right: "These are the twelve tribes of Israel, and this is what their father said as he spoke a suitable word of farewell to each son". And yet only Judah and Joseph got any real blessing; Jacob's attitude with most of the other sons was to raise issues from the past and curse them because of them, being quite insolent to some of them, e.g. "Issachar is no better than a donkey". And he tells Simeon and Levi that he is nothing to do with them. What was intended to be a time of blessing, he turned into cursing. When God had graciously turned his cursings into blessings for him, and Jacob himself realizes that he has been so amazingly blessed himself. It was a sad end, and yet Jacob still shall be saved, and God is still the God of Jacob. None of us will attain moral perfection by the time we die, and so in essence we are like Jacob, dying in hope of grace, in immaturity, not having got as far as we ought to have done.

Or perhaps we are to understand that in the curses and noted consequences for disobedience, there is a silver lining. There is blessing, for those who respond and humble themselves; judgment and consequence become a magnificent defeat. Thus the scattering of Levi was fulfilled through their becoming the

priestly tribe, intended to bring blessing to the rest of Israel through their scattering.

Gen 49:29 *He instructed them, and said to them, I am to be gathered to my people. Bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite-* Although the rather rambling, bitter and bizarre statements so far in this chapter could give us the impression that Jacob had dementia, he speaks of his funeral and the location of the burial cave with great accuracy. His heart was truly on the things of the Kingdom and the promises. We note that he saw his fathers as lying in the grave; if he had believed in an immortal soul, surely he would have spoken otherwise.

Gen 49:30 *In the cave that is in the field of Machpelah, which is before Mamre, in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought with the field from Ephron the Hittite as a burial place-* That this spot was bought, when it was their eternal inheritance, is cited as an example of the faith of the patriarchs (Acts 7:5). They had not inherited the land eternally, yet God keeps His promises- and therefore they were forced to look ahead in faith to the day of resurrection and eternal inheritance.

Gen 49:31 *There they buried Abraham and Sarah, his wife. There they buried Isaac and Rebekah, his wife, and there I buried Leah-* In his penultimate sentence, Jacob makes the perhaps strange comment that "they buried Isaac" (his father; 49:31). The "they" meant him and Esau (Gen. 35:29), but perhaps Jacob wanted to show his separation from Esau by describing the funeral in this way. Separation from the world is thus an aspect of spiritual maturity, and also a result of sustained appreciation of the covenant promises.

It seems that Jacob came to see his beloved parents in spiritual, not emotional terms, at the end. Consider the pronouns he uses: "There they buried Abraham and Sarah his

wife; there they (i.e. he and his brother, Gen. 35:29) buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife; and there I buried Leah" (49:3 AV1). He doesn't talk in the first person about "my father" or "I" buried. He sees himself as their friend in faith, more than their son. These words were said in Jacob's last breath. It shows to me how at last he had won this battle, he had shed the crutch of his father's faith, he stood alone before *his* God, at the very end he wasn't leaning on his parents spiritually any more, all the scaffolding had been removed, and he stood alone, on his own deep foundation. His final words are full of conscious and unconscious reference to the fathers and the promises. See on Gen. 47:9; 48:15.

Gen 49:32 *The field and the cave that is therein, which was purchased from the children of Heth-* Jacob's final words reflect his resentment against the children of Heth; he saw that they were the world, the children of this world which now possess the land of promise, covenanted to be God's Kingdom, not theirs. He realized that the time was not yet ripe, and his very last words were a reminder of this. His mind was centred on the promises and the future ownership of the land, and on his connection with Abraham and Isaac; the fact that the land was not inherited during the patriarch's lifetimes (the land had to be bought from the children of Heth) is seen by the Spirit as an indication that the Kingdom had not yet come, but surely would do (Acts 7:5). And Jacob died with exactly the same perception. In doing so, he was reflecting the view of his dear mother, who detested the ways of the Godless children of Heth (Gen. 27:46). So in his time of dying, Jacob was not divided from the spiritual views of his parents. Their Hope was his Hope, but he had made it his own. He was not just living out their expectations of him. The way he got there in the end is just marvellous to behold.

Gen 49:33 *When Jacob made an end of charging his sons, he gathered up his feet into the bed, and yielded up the spirit, and was gathered to his people-* At the very end, Jacob gathered himself up into his bed to die, and then God gathered him up (this comes out very clearly in the Hebrew text). That desire of God for mutuality with His servant Jacob had always been there. See on Gen. 48:8.

The idiom of Jacob being "gathered to his people" is used, despite the fact that many Bible readers will misunderstand this as meaning that he therefore joined them in some disembodied existence. The idiom is used but not corrected. God is not so primitive as to keep on as it were tripping over Himself to defend and define what He has said and the way He has chosen to say it. He speaks to us in our language, and at various times over history has dealt with men in terms they can cope with.

GENESIS CHAPTER 50

Gen 50:1 *Joseph fell on his father's face, wept on him, and kissed him-* As noted through Gen. 49, Jacob cursed rather than blessed many of his sons. It is Joseph who comes over as the most affectionate for Jacob, and is in charge of his burial; see on :10. To fall on the face was a sign of inferiority; Joseph did so knowing that the next time he would see Jacob, in the resurrection, Jacob and Rachel would fall before him. So he did this realizing that it was in the flesh, as part of this fallen state. The same phrase "wept on and kissed" is used of what Joseph did to his brothers, to assure them that all was forgiven (Gen. 45:15). We wonder if Joseph felt he had things to forgive Jacob for; not least Jacob's reprimand of Joseph for his dreams, and never apologizing about it later. Jacob's favouritism towards Joseph had been the root of so many problems for Joseph. In the end, we all have to come to forgiving others, and we may as well do it immediately rather than needing time to do it. And perhaps the way Jacob had removed Joseph from being the firstborn and effectively given it to Benjamin, then Ephraim and then Judah... all felt like it was something he had to forgive, as he finally accepted that all this talk about the paternal blessing was really nothing.

We note that only Joseph is recorded as weeping over his dead father. The brothers are not mentioned as doing so, when we would rather expect them to. This perhaps indicates again that the human ending of the

story of Joseph was not ideal. The brothers realized they had deceived their father over Joseph and made him suffer terribly. But they never once admitted it nor apologized to him for it. And when he dies, they do not weep over him. Joseph's dream of restored relationships between them, on account of his great wisdom and grace, was unfulfilled. But his dreams will have their fulfilment in the Kingdom, when Rachel his mother shall also arise to bow before him as he prophesied. For this was never fulfilled in the story fo Joseph in this life.

Gen 50:2 *Joseph commanded his servants, the physicians, to embalm his father; and the physicians embalmed Israel-* The Hebrew for "physicians" is literally the healers, those who make whole. It was not the job of physicians to embalm. But Joseph makes them do it, perhaps to teach them that all their Egyptian myths about prolonging life were incorrect. They had not kept his father alive, and so he made them embalm him, dealing personally with the body which they had failed to cure or keep alive. This fits in with a wider theme in the Joseph story- that the ways of the true God demonstrated the errors of Egyptian thinking.

Gen 50:3 *Forty days were fulfilled for him, for that is how many the days it takes to embalm. The Egyptians wept for him for seventy days-* Jacob's sons wept for a shorter period (:10), perhaps again demonstrating (as noted on :2) that the Egyptian ways were inferior to those of the Hebrews; for such lengthy weeping was but a formalism compared to the true grief of

the family. We note that Jacob was embalmed; the body was not divided into parts, perhaps in reflection of the hope of resurrection by Joseph. Hence Joseph commands the servants specifically to embalm the body. And the word translated "embalm" also means "to ripen". Death is as Paul explains, the sowing of a seed, which then ripens into the resurrection body.

Gen 50:4 *When the days of weeping for him were past, Joseph spoke to the house of Pharaoh, saying, If now I have found favour in your eyes, please speak in the ears of Pharaoh, saying-* We wonder why Joseph did not directly speak to Pharaoh. Perhaps a new Pharaoh had arisen, and already there was a distance between Joseph and the new ruler. For the rigours of famine were now 12 years in the past. There may be far more implied in the statement "If now I have found favour in *your* eyes".

Gen 50:5 *'My father made me swear, saying, Behold, I am dying. Bury me in my grave which I have dug for myself in the land of Canaan. Now therefore, please let me go up and bury my father, and I will come again'-* The burial place was therefore not simply a cave, from where bodies could be stolen, but involved digging. This was unusual for the Egyptians, who preferred to build structures over the bodies and keep the bodies above the ground; but we can understand it given the Hebrew hope in resurrection. It is not clear when exactly Jacob had this grave "dug"; perhaps he did it when leaving Canaan, so distinct was his sense of association with the promised land. Yet Jacob himself, despite so often asking to be buried in Canaan, had

never spoken of having dug a grave. We wonder if Joseph threw this in at the last moment to underline the need to do it.

Gen 50:6 *Pharaoh said, Go up, and bury your father, just like he made you swear-* Joseph now needs Pharaoh's permission to leave Egypt. This is different to the relationship he had with the Pharaoh earlier, when he could do what he wanted. And the record is pregnant with connection with how Israel were to ask a later Pharaoh to leave Egypt and were not allowed to. The winds of change were already blowing, and the tide of history was turning against Israel in Egypt.

Gen 50:7 *Joseph went up to bury his father; and with him went up all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his house, all the elders of the land of Egypt-* Clearly the elderly Jacob had become a senior figure in Egypt in the 17 years he lived there. These "elders" of Egypt were those to whom Joseph had taught "wisdom" (Ps. 105:22 s.w. "senators"). Perhaps they had come to share the hope of Israel.

Gen 50:8 *All the house of Joseph, his brothers, and his father's house. Only their little ones, their flocks, and their herds, they left in the land of Goshen-* Again this points us forward to how a later Pharaoh insisted that Israel's flocks must remain in Goshen if they wanted to leave (Ex. 10:24). And Ex. 10:10 could imply that Pharaoh had tried to bargain that Israel could temporarily leave Egypt to sacrifice in the desert, but their "little ones" must remain. We are being prepared

for the Pharaohs getting more controlling and demanding of the Hebrews.

Gen 50:9 *There went up with him both chariots and horsemen. It was a very great company-* I explained on Gen. 45:7 that it was the Divine intention that Israel leave Egypt and return to Canaan once the famine ended; Jacob was intended to die in Canaan with Joseph next to him, and the blessings on the tribes in Gen. 49 would have had their primary fulfilment in the land of Canaan at that time. Israel were to become a great company in the land of Egypt during the famine, and then return to Canaan. And now indeed they were a great company, and were returning to Canaan- but temporarily. They ought to have gone permanently. We too face so many problems in our lives because we do not follow the Plan A which God intended for us. It's not that He rejects us for not following it; but the other plans involve so much suffering for us which would be otherwise needless, and so much human damage.

Gen 50:10 *They came to the threshing floor of Atad, which is beyond the Jordan-* That they crossed the Jordan is twice mentioned (:11). We wonder why they took the more circuitous route to Mamre from Goshen; for there was a direct highway, that didn't require them to cross the Jordan river. Whatever the reason, it was perhaps to help Israel in the wilderness (the first audience of the book of Genesis) to see that their route was not in fact without precedent. And this is the whole purpose of Biblical history; to help us see that man is not alone, no situation is essentially

unique, others have passed this way before. With God's grace ever with them.

And there they lamented with a very great and severe lamentation. He mourned for his father seven days- We notice a separation between "they [the other sons] lamented", and Joseph's mourning ["he mourned"]. They wept in different ways. Joseph clearly led the funeral but we get the impression that the brothers were still not OK with their father at his burial, whereas Joseph was because he had forgiven him. The last words many of the sons had heard from their father were his ranting at them and effective cursing of them when he was supposed to be giving them a blessing. So perhaps they forgave this, or humbled themselves to accept that although he was unreasonable to them in his demented state, yet indeed they had done wrong and deserved his words. For otherwise it is hard to understand how they could apparently so genuinely mourn their father's passing. Perhaps they now 'got it'; that their blessing, given to each of them (Gen. 49:28), was on account of their connection with Joseph.

Gen 50:11 *When the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, saw the mourning in the floor of Atad, they said, This is a grievous mourning by the Egyptians. Therefore its name was called Abel Mizraim, which is beyond the Jordan-* The Hebrews appeared as Egyptians, just as Moses was later to appear as an Egyptian. We too may be perceived as the people of this world, our Egypt; we look the same, wear the same clothes, pass through the same general

experiences, speak the same language. And in moments of weakness, this can lead us to think that perhaps there is really nothing of substance to our religion. But we are different; circumcision is of the heart, in the hidden, inner man, as the New Testament describes it. For the significance of them taking the route over the Jordan, see on :10.

Gen 50:12 *His sons did to him just as he commanded them-* This is laboured (:13). The record wishes all to see how "Israel" were centred around identity with the promises made to the patriarchs, with the patriarchs personally, and with the associated hope of the resurrection of the body. And that is just as true for the new Israel; for the new covenant was expressed in the promises made to the patriarchs.

Gen 50:13 *For his sons carried him into the land of Canaan, and buried him in the cave of the field of Machpelah, which Abraham bought with the field, for a possession of a burial site, from Ephron the Hittite, before Mamre-* Again the point is repeated, that the patriarchs had to buy land in which to bury their dead, when God had promised them the land as an eternal inheritance. They had to buy a possession; whereas God had *given* them the land as an eternal possession. God keeps His promises, and thus is necessitated the resurrection of the dead and the establishment of God's eternal Kingdom in the land promised.

Gen 50:14 *Joseph returned into Egypt - he, and his brothers, and all that went up with him to bury his*

father - after he had buried his father- As noted on :9, there is a tragedy to this. They ought to have taken their children and flocks, and remained in Canaan. But it is emphasized that not one of them remained in Canaan; they all returned to what seemed the softer life.

Gen 50:15 *When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said-* As always with the inspired record, this has the ring of psychological credibility. The 'seeing' or perception of another's death sinks in some time after the burial.

It may be that Joseph will hate us, and will fully pay us back for all of the evil which we did to him- "It may be" can as well be translated "certainly". They were sure Joseph was now going to punish them. Likewise there are some convinced of their certain condemnation who will have an eternal surprise. Why did they have this fear of him, when all the evidence was of his utter love, grace and forgiveness? It is the same question as to why God's people today doubt their acceptance with the Lord Jesus. Perhaps they had been subconsciously pricked in their conscience by passing by the pit into which they had thrown Joseph so long ago. For there was only one main route from Canaan to Egypt. And they had Joseph with them on this journey, indeed he is presented as leading the return procession. They had not fully believed his forgiveness and salvation of them . Just as we too doubt it. And so when the memory if past failure is restimulated, we too can fall into a spiritual panic attack. We are reminded in the communion service

of the utter certainty of our salvation and His love. And we are to meet all our restimulations calm in that knowledge.

They recognized that the apparently single act of selling Joseph into Egypt had led to "all of the evil" which had come upon Joseph. He had clearly explained to them what had happened. And they accepted, as we should, that one bad act spawns many others for which we are responsible. The man who abuses a young child has some blame for the life of theft, drug addiction and self harm which resulted from actions which may have summed up to "just" a few hours. This is the nature of all sin- it has rolling consequences. See on :17.

The brothers still needed education in their faith in grace. The same word is used of how they had "hated" Joseph (Gen. 49:23). So they proceeded to tell a lie, to show a lack of faith, on the basis of a 'What if...' logic. And it is 'What if...?' which drives so much of our lack of faith. It drives the need to undermine others, to pursue ever more wealth, to be untruthful. God does at times pay back evil- the same words are used of Him doing this elsewhere (Jud. 9:56,57; 1 Sam. 25:39; Ps. 54:5 etc.). Joseph does not just gloss over their evil; he agrees with them that they had done evil (:20), but he tells them that he is not God (:19; although that is possible of an alternative explanation). It will not be for him to have any part in any possible repayment of them for the evil done. He doesn't rule out the possibility of God doing so; but it is for him to show grace and to only repay evil with

good. This is a profound lesson which Christians have struggled to learn over the centuries.

Gen 50:16 *They sent a message to Joseph, saying, Your father commanded before he died, saying-* As noted on :15, this was a lie, told on the basis of fear of possible futures. It is those same fears which lead us to so much poor behaviour. The Hebrew word for "message" can mean either a message or a messenger- hence Gen. 50:16 AV "messenger", RV "message". In the Divine thinking which is so often reflected in the Hebrew language, the man is his message, the messenger is the message. "What the Soviet cosmonaut wanted when he looked for God in the dark void outside his spacecraft window is... the hungering desire of our age. We want proof, evidence, a personal appearance, so that the God we have heard about becomes the God we see" (Philip Yancey, *Disappointment With God* (Zondervan, 1997) p. 46). And the only evidence is in you and me. People are interested, they are hungering and searching for Him; and the evidence they seek is in our radically transformed lives. They won't get a voice out of a whirlwind or sight of a Heavenly form; they just get a glimpse of you and me. In this sense the [human] medium *is* the [Divine] message. The word is to be made flesh in us, as it was in the Lord.

Gen 50:17 *'You shall tell Joseph, Now please forgive the disobedience of your brothers, and their sin, because they did evil to you'. Now, please forgive the disobedience of the servants of the God of your father-* We wonder why the emphasis upon "disobedience". The sin of selling

Joseph into Egypt was the summation of much "disobedience"; and they recognized that this apparently single act of selling Joseph ["their sin"] had much more to it (see on :15). They did it because they were disobedient to Joseph as the family priest, and were disobedient to the implications of his dreams. This would be why they go on to say that they are indeed his servants, as shown in the dreams by their bowing before him. We note that they like their father Jacob are still talking about the God of their father, rather than their personal God. This is the closest we get to any famous final scene of repentance. We are set up to long for and expect some amazing human breakthrough in relationship and dramatic moment of transformation. It doesn't come, or at least, not very dramatically. And even this confession from the brothers is a very long time coming, and as noted earlier, the brothers clearly did repent in their hearts and re-think their past actions and attitudes. But only now, years after Joseph had accepted them anyway, do they move to a formal statement of repentance. And even then, it is expressed in general terms and is not specific, nor is there any specific acceptance that his dreams had come true. And it seems motivated by fear of him rather than being from the heart. And there is never any word of repentance from them to their father for lying to him and distressing him over what they did to him and Joseph. We are left wondering why exactly Joseph wept on hearing these words. This is one of those intentionally open questions which we are left to think about. Was it from joy that all his efforts to lead them to repentance had worked?

Or was it from sorrow that they had still not really got there and their words were rooted in fear of him, a fear based on still misunderstanding and not accepting the greatness of his grace and patience?

Joseph wept when they spoke to him- He wept as God must weep, at the slowness of men to believe His wonderful grace. The good news of the Gospel is disbelieved so often because it is in fact too good news.

Joseph's brothers had slink away from him, and he had had to encourage them: "Come near to me, I pray you" (Gen. 45:4). They absolutely knew that they ought to be punished and killed by him, and they obviously thought he would do it. And now even years later, Joseph wept in frustration at their lack of full acceptance of his total forgiveness. These scenes are so evidently typical of the future judgment seat of Joseph / Jesus. There is even the suggestion in Rev. 7:15 that after the judgment process, the Lord will come down off His throne and mix with us, after the pattern of Joseph. See on Gen. 45:4.

Gen 50:18 *His brothers also went and fell down before his face-* They recognized that they had been disobedient to the implication of Joseph's dreams (see on :17), and so again they fall down before him.

And they said, Behold, we are your servants- In :18 they say that they are servants of God; here, that they are Joseph's servants. They perceived Joseph as God manifest, hence his comment in :19 "Am I in the place

of God?". Or it could be that Joseph is encouraging them that he is indeed in the place of God (the Hebrew can be translated "I am in the place of God"); and he could therefore assure them that his grace towards them was indeed a reflection of God's grace to them. And God to this day arranges things and encounters in our lives to elicit repentance from us, and to help us perceive that others' grace to us is indeed God's grace to us reflected through them. "We are your servants" is what they had said to Joseph around 20 years before (Gen. 44:16). They had not moved on from this attitude to experiencing open fellowship, friendship and communion with Joseph. And this is indeed a level of relationship with the Lord Jesus which is beyond simply accepting him as our Master. For He wishes to call us friends, not servants.

Gen 50:19 *Joseph said to them, Don't be afraid, for am I in the place of God?*- Joseph doesn't point out their lie; he doesn't say 'I don't believe you, it makes no sense to say this, surely he would've told me himself as I am the one to do the forgiveness; see, again, you are back to your dishonest ways'. Rather he doesn't confront them but lets his own example of grace speak for itself, setting us a great example. See on Gen. 40:8. He might be saying that indeed "I am in the place of God" (Heb.), not acting according to my own gut feelings; and God is full of grace and forgiveness, so they need not fear him, as he was manifesting God's saving grace to them. I noted on Gen. 41:19 that Joseph was an

intense manifestation of God, and the vehicle through whom God was working.

Perhaps there is a purposeful ambiguity in the Hebrew, implying both "I am in the place of God" and "Am I in the place of God?", implying he was not. So this could also be read as Joseph telling them not to fear him, because evil is repaid only by God and not himself; see on :15. 'God manifestation' doesn't mean playing God. Joseph held himself back from being vindictive against his brothers by saying that he could not do so, because if he did, he would be acting 'in God's place'. His fear of 'playing God' meant that he wouldn't presume to judge them. All too easily, a too simplistic view of 'God manifestation' can lead us to assume that we are to judge and condemn others, thus arrogating to ourselves what is only and rightly God's personal prerogative.

This can as well be translated "Fear not, for I am in God's place". Because they had just described themselves as God's servants and now they say they are Joseph's servants. His reasoning is that because he has forgiven them, so has God. Or because God has forgiven them, so has he and he will therefore not punish them. This is how what is bound on earth by us is bound in Heaven. Of course God can forgive us whether or not man forgives us, but the point is that if we forgive then God is eager to match that with His forgiveness. This gives us great power over those who abuse us. In this sense we hold the keys of the Kingdom. And this is the huge significance with which our forgiveness is freighted.

Gen 50:20 *As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring to pass, as it is this day-* When Paul wrote that all things work together for our "good" (Rom. 8:28), he was echoing how in all the grief of Joseph's life, the rejection by his brethren, the cruel twists of fate [as they seemed at the time]... *God meant it for good*. This same wonderful process will come true in our lives- for they too are equally directed by a loving Father. Joseph is clear that "You sold me into Egypt" (Gen. 45:4), but he repeatedly explains that "You sold me [but in fact] God sent me" into Egypt. You sold me, but God sent me (Gen. 45:8). This is the key to coping with life, to perceive that what happens to us on one level is used by God on another.

The wonder of it all is not simply that good triumphs over evil, but that good triumphs /through /evil. And this is finally the message of the Gospel, of the cross of Christ, of the Kingdom, that even death itself becomes a magnificent defeat. Christus Viktor, Jesus Christ as victor, Lord, Master and Saviour. And this is the message we take to a world where evil appears to triumph over good, and where even children's fairytales seem to have evil triumphing. And we have a part in the cross; the Lord's victory there is ours, ultimate and eternal good shall triumph through the evil we experience now.

"To bring it to pass" is vague. What is the referrent of the "it"? Perhaps Joseph's dreams, seeing that Joseph may have seen those double dreams as he did Pharaoh's double dreams, as being "one". He was

explaining that they were not about his power over his brethren, but rather their gratitude to him for grace and salvation.

Joseph held no grudge against his brethren, and would not be vindictive to them, because he understood something of predestination: "You *meant* evil against me; but God *meant* it for good". And because he understood that God's good intentions were worked out through the evil intentions of others, Joseph was content to leave all in God's hands, and on *this basis* he assures his brothers that given his understanding of this 'predestination', he wouldn't hit back at them for what they'd done to him. This can be a helpful perspective for us in our struggles to forgive. "Meant" is literally to weave, to fabricate. Their weaving of evil plans and lies were more than matched by God's incredible weaving through the whole situation to bring about good from evil- He doesn't just walk away from evil and sin, but weaves through it. It is the word used of the "cunning work" of the tabernacle tapestry and the breastplate of judgment, where the threads of colours representing God are woven through the scarlet threads of human sin (Ex. 26:1,31; 28:15). The cherubim were made likewise; through all this, God's absolute glory shines (Ex. 36:35).

The same words and ideas of good and evil are found in 1 Sam. 20:17, where Saul does David evil, but David repays that evil with good. David was inspired by Joseph; as we should be. So often he laments that Saul and his men 'mean evil' ["devise... my hurt"], and

yet God will preserve him as He did Joseph, for good (Ps. 35:4; 41:7 etc.). For these records are for our learning, that we too like David might slot ourselves into Joseph's place.

This verse is clearly alluded to in Rom. 8:28: "We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose." We therefore have a part in all this. This is not mere history, but an actual pattern for us, and the living word speaking to us personally.

To save many people alive- God's abundant grace is revealed in the way that they devised evil against one man, and yet God through that devised good not for one man, Joseph, but to save not only him but "many people". They devised death; but through that God devised life. Paul catches this spirit when he draws up the contrasts between the death which came from the one man Adam, and the life which comes through the Lord Jesus.

Gen 50:21 *Now therefore don't be afraid. I will nourish you and your little ones. He comforted them, and spoke kindly to them-* Joseph alludes to his words of 17 years before, when he had first promised to "nourish" his brothers and their families in Egypt (Gen. 45:11; 47:12 s.w.). He assures them yet again that he is a man of his word, no matter how long the consequences of that word go on for. He was in this sense manifesting God to them (see on :19). The 'comfort' he gave them was really comfort in their slowness to believe in his grace. The same words are found in the prophecy of

how the Elijah ministry will speak to the heart ["comfortably", s.w.] of latter day Israel, assuring them that their sin is past and forgiven (Is. 40:2).

He "spoke to their heart" (Heb.), so perhaps the story does have a happy ending in that they did finally believe in his love, forgiveness and salvation. And their names will be inscribed eternally upon the new Jerusalem, so we can assume they will indeed be saved by Joseph's grace.

However we would be mistaken if we were to conclude that this is a story of forgiveness and reconcilliation. Joseph indeed forgave his brothers and did so on God's behalf. But there is no blissful picture of reconcilliation, with the brothers and Joseph living happily together. Just as there is rarely any truly happy ending in this life. Forgiveness may be granted, and we may avoid judging those who sinned against us, and our grace may indeed lead to the final salvation of those who sinned against us. But as with Joseph and his brothers, there is often no happy reconciliation in this life; that is one of the joys of the Kingdom which awaits us all. The final fulfilment of Joseph's dream of his brothers and parents bowing *together* before him in gratitude will only then be fulfilled. And we therefore are wise not to join the vast majority who live and die in unfulfilled hope that there will be such interpersonal reconciliations in this life. People, even believers, live and die divided and distrusting of each other. But the final reconcilliation will come, if we on our part truly forgive. In all these situations, somebody around here has to be the

Christian, and that person happens to be you. And really this is the spirit of all God's dealings with us. He forgives and saves, right now. But that doesn't achieve the intimacy with us which it should and could and ought to. But it will, finally, in the Kingdom.

Gen 50:22 *Joseph lived in Egypt, he, and his father's house. Joseph lived one hundred ten years-* After the flood, lifespans slowly decreased. We have quite a lot of data in the Bible regarding this; my friend Dr. John Thatcher once analyzed it and found that the recorded ages decline precisely in line with the decay function of entropy.

Gen 50:23 *Joseph saw Ephraim's children to the third generation. The children also of Machir, the son of Manasseh, were born on Joseph's knees-* Ephraim and Manasseh themselves had been taken from Joseph's knees and made the sons of Jacob. But these children of Machir and thence Manasseh, the rejected firstborn, were counted to him; see on Gen. 48:12. If he died at 110 he would have presumably seen many grandchildren and great grandchildren, but these of Machir are mentioned as born on his knees because they were counted as his. He may have wanted this to as it were compensate for his "loss" of his sons Ephraim and Manasseh, who were adopted by his father Jacob. Or maybe as he too faced his death, Joseph was acting in the same way as his father Jacob; even though in this issue of adopting grandsons as his own children, there are a range of moral and ethical problems. Joseph clearly alludes to his father's death bed scene when he commands his bones to be buried

in Canaan and not Egypt (:24). The same idiom is used for Bilhah bearing children on the knees of Rachel, making them effectively Rachel's children. But it could be that because Machir's mother was a concubine as well as a Syrian and therefore non-Hebrew (1 Chron. 7:14; Gen. 46:20 LXX), Joseph wanted to ensure that the children with non-Hebrew or non-standard associations were still counted as his children. For he himself had married a non-Hebrew. And in this case we again see Joseph's grace and desire to include the rejected.

Gen 50:24 *Joseph said to his brothers, I am dying, but God will surely visit you, and bring you up out of this land to the land which he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob-* In his time of dying, Joseph speaks and wishes just like his father Jacob in his time of death; and he said these words in faith, seeing the future as if it is now (Heb. 11:22). The implications of the promises which comprised the covenant were identical for every man, as they are for us this day. He emphasizes three times (:25 also) that Egypt, this world, is not the resting place of God's people Israel. They should have returned to Canaan of their own volition (Gen. 45:7); but they did not, and so God would 'bring them up', taking the initiative to bring about the fulfilment of the Gospel's promises- by His grace, rather than just abandoning them to their own choice, which at the time was Egypt over Canaan. Earlier, the brothers had been 'brought up out of' Egypt to Canaan when Joseph had released them from the burden of their sins by his grace (Gen. 45:25

uses the same Hebrew phrase). And on a collective level, Israel were to be brought to the same level of desperation and repentance before they could be brought up from Egypt to Canaan. But like the brothers, it seemed they never really got to the required level of repentance; but they were saved by grace all the same.

Gen 50:25 *Joseph took an oath of the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here-* Like Jacob, Joseph's heart was in the land of promise. Joseph's bones were 'carried up' with them when Israel left Egypt. The Hebrew word here is elsewhere translated 'to rise up', 'lift up', 'spring up', clearly hinting of the resurrection which will come at the Lord's return. I explained on Gen. 45:7 that it was God's intention that Israel leave Goshen and return to Canaan; and they had failed to do so. Joseph probably wanted to do so, but his brothers didn't. He perhaps envisaged that the generation contemporary with him would do so, as he asks them to take his bones with them. So he foresaw a special intervention of God in Israel's collective life, God 'visiting' then, so that they would leave Egypt. That could all have been avoided if they had been obedient and quit the soft life and returned to Canaan immediately.

These words were fulfilled in Ex. 13:19: "Moses took the bones of Joseph with him, for he had made the children of Israel swear, saying, God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones away from here with you". And so we enquire whether Joseph's words were prophecy, or command. We have the same

question about the prophecy / command to rebuild the temple in Ez. 40-48. Ex. 13:19 seems to present the carrying up of Joseph's bones as a fulfilment of Joseph's prophecy. But Moses and Israel had the freewill choice as to whether to take his bones with them. There was surely an inconvenience factor in locating, preparing and transporting Joseph's bones as they fled Egypt "in haste" on Passover night. So the 'prophecy' was in this sense dependent upon man to fulfil it, and in the case of human failure to obey, then the 'prophecy' would have been rescheduled or reinterpreted into some other form of fulfilment, or not fulfilled at all. And this is a principle applicable to various apparent prophecies which are in fact more command than prophecy, and obedience to command depends upon human freewill.

This could imply Joseph expected his brothers to leave Egypt very soon, and so he asked them to take his bones with them. If they had done this as God intended, the sufferings of Israel in Egypt could have been avoided. We note too that here he emulated his father's attitude, focusing upon the positives in his father rather than the negative.

We note that Joseph's bones were finally buried in Shechem (Josh. 24:32), the specific inheritance given to him by Jacob. Yet it was from Shechem that the 17 year old Joseph had gone to "seek" his brothers. And finally he returns there. It's as if his amazing work in seeking and saving his brothers was finally fulfilled; for their names will be written on the new Jerusalem, and we can assume that his work in seeking and saving

them, through so much hurt, grace, wisdom, patience and forgiveness, was finally done and achieved.

Gen 50:26 *So Joseph died, being one hundred and ten years old, and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt-* To remain in power for 80 years in the cut throat politics of Egypt was a huge testament to his integrity. We note again that he was embalmed and put in a coffin; the body was kept intact in reflection of the hope of resurrection. See on :2,3. 'Embalm' also means 'to ripen'. Death is as Paul explains, the sowing of a seed, which then ripens into the resurrection body.

About the Author

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