

Dual-track Curriculum for **Group** study and for **Individual** study

# Journey Through the Torah Class Series

*Genesis: The Book of Foundations*



TORAH CLASS

The Old Testament  
Adult Bible Study Curriculum

## Textbook

# PRAISE FOR THE TORAH CLASS SERIES

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The Journey Through the Torah Class series by Tom Bradford is a real achievement. With each lesson, you will be introduced to new Scripture-based revelations. Tom Bradford's classes on the five books of Moses have formed an online institution that has attracted tens of thousands of participants from all around the nation and beyond. Tom's objective is to return to the original language. His insights are biblical, relevant, and inspiring. I am excited that he has now expanded these lessons to include a personal study guide. These will be great resources for teachers or small groups, challenging you to delve more deeply into the Holy Scriptures.

—DAVIS BUNN, BEST-SELLING AUTHOR

The Journey Through the Torah Class series provides a way for people of all ages to study the Old Testament, so often systematically neglected by Christians. These lessons, which began as transcripts of weekly Bible teaching by Tom Bradford, are an honest look at details of what the OT actually says, verse by verse.

Unique within this curriculum are several sets of questions designed for Bible students on the middle school and high school levels that encourage thinking and discussion as well as testing for comprehension of specific information. In preparing his popular teaching, Bradford goes deep into research to identify history and context of the text, and to explore difficult questions that arise and are typically passed over.

While being careful to avoid making the OT say things that aren't intended, proper place is given to parts that foreshadow Yeshua (or Jesus) the Messiah, and underlie the faith of those who accept him as Savior and Lord.

—JOHN KNAPP II, PHD, FORMER PROFESSOR, SUNY-OSWEGO

Tom Bradford is one of the few men that I know who ponders long and hard over passages that most would never consider teaching or preaching. Why does he do so? Because he knows that every passage of Scripture is given by G-d and inspired by the Holy Spirit and has relevance as much as any other. Tom is committed to using proper hermeneutical methods, so what he teaches he gets right. His teaching shows a proper understanding of the Living Word, the Messiah Yeshua, as well as the written Word.

Tom is a strong supporter of Israel, not because of some affinity through a denomination or particular tradition, but because of the clear admonition of the Word of G-d. His Torah study series will provide insight for every individual, regardless of whether they are a biblical scholar or a novice.

—R. BARUCH, PHD, DIRECTOR OF THE NICODEMUS INSTITUTE IN JERUSALEM. ADJUNCT INSTRUCTOR AT THE ISRAELI BIBLE COLLEGE. HIS AREA OF EXPERTISE IS COMPARATIVE STUDY BETWEEN THE GREEK SEPTUAGINT AND THE HEBREW PENTATEUCH.

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# GENESIS

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# GENESIS

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THE BOOK OF FOUNDATIONS

ADULT TEXTBOOK

TOM BRADFORD  
SEED OF ABRAHAM MINISTRIES

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## PREFACE

The Torah Class study series is a unique chapter-by-chapter commentary on the books of the Old Testament that has been organized as educational curriculum especially suitable for homeschool and Christian school use. The language is personal, friendly, and understandable. You have the textbook in your hands, which includes discussion questions for each lesson, but reviews and exams (and the answers) are also available in the homeschool Teacher's Guide. There are two study tracks contained in the Teacher's Guide, based on age and education level: middle school and high school. Periodically you'll see instructions to complete that week's review session.

### THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW

In this study we will go deep into the meaning of the Scriptures, at times looking at the Hebrew words of the original text. Many false assumptions about the Bible will be challenged, and we will incorporate understanding of ancient Jewish culture and mind-set into this study, because without it we lose much of the context and inherent meaning of God's Word to us.

Now, let me set up a few ground rules as the basis on which the Torah Class series will proceed. First, I am not here to persuade anyone about the truth of the Holy Scripture. While seekers are most welcome here, this is not a seekers' class whereby we attempt to prove that the Bible is the Word of God. Our assumption is that it is God's Word and that it is true—all of it. If the Bible is not true, then we might as well all pack up and go home, because we're wasting our time.

Second, we are going to read *every single word* of the Bible books that we study in the Torah Class series. We're not going to skip anything,

not a single verse. Before you start each lesson, you will be instructed to read the corresponding chapter in your Bible. This is an in-depth study that will teach you much, challenge your thinking, and build your faith. But if you skip over the Bible itself, you've missed the most important part of the lesson. Other than this book, a Bible is the only resource you'll need. However, we do have additional resources available for you on our website at [www.TorahClass.com](http://www.TorahClass.com)—including all the illustrations and audio files of these lessons.

Third, I recommend you read out of the Complete Jewish Bible, although it's not mandatory. One reason for this is that it is not the official Bible translation for any denomination that I'm aware of. That is intentional. This curriculum is not about teaching denominational traditions or doctrines. The Complete Jewish Bible is taken mostly from the Hebrew texts as opposed to many translations today that are taken from the Septuagint, a Greek translation of the Hebrew written more than two centuries before Christ was born. (If you don't have a copy of the CJB translation, you can purchase one at a discounted price at [www.bohylanmarketplace.com](http://www.bohylanmarketplace.com).)

Fourth, at times I will teach you certain words in Hebrew that add a great deal to our understanding. Oftentimes I've found that looking at the Hebrew is like going from a black-and-white TV to color; what you see in black-and-white is not wrong, it just doesn't give you the depth that color does. You'll soon learn that Hebrew has certain words that simply don't have nice, neat English equivalents. The word *Torah* is itself a good example of that, as is the common Hebrew expression *Shalom*. But those are just the tip of the iceberg. The other thing to realize is that just as many important Hebrew words in the Scriptures do not have a good

English equivalent, they also do not have a good Greek equivalent. So when the Bible was translated from Hebrew to Greek, then from Greek to Latin, then from Latin to English, much depth and understanding was lost. We're going to do our best to try to recover some of that depth.

Fifth, my goal is that we have continuity. When studied properly, the Old Testament (OT) flows like a beautiful river. Too often the OT is presented as a series of mildly interesting but unconnected stories, and it can be hard to put it together. Actually, the OT is fascinating, colorful, and very much (though not entirely) in chronological order. A good way to look at the OT is as God presenting Himself to us through the history of Israel. The OT is a history lesson of sorts, but it is also much more. It's the history of Israel and the Jews. And it is Christian history, because it is out of the Hebrew Bible, culture, and religion that Christianity came. Remember, Christ was a Jew. Born to Jewish parents, raised in the Holy Lands, He was an observant Jew in every way.

Sixth, we need to understand that the first section of the Old Testament, which is called the Torah, was given to us as a manual for living the life that God intended for mankind to live. The three million or so Israelites whom Moses was leading through the desert wilderness to the Promised Land had come from four centuries of life in Egypt. They were a rabble that had thoroughly opted for the ways of the Egyptians. By giving Moses the Torah (the

first five books of the Bible), God explained to Israel the beginning of everything: who He was, why the world had arrived at the corrupt place it had, and how to live a righteous life. What is a righteous life? It is *you* living in harmony with God. These things have not changed.

Seventh, the Torah Class series will not answer every question you have about God. There are many matters in the Bible that are simply left open-ended. Some matters are not addressed at all, and others are incomplete. I choose to let these mysteries remain mysteries for us. At times I'll speculate, but it will be presented as speculation or opinion, not as fact or absolute truth. Sometimes that speculation will be in the form of what the great Hebrew sages of ancient times thought about a particular subject; in fact, I'll incorporate that kind of information on a number of occasions because, if nothing else, it explains how the Hebrew mind operated during certain eras.

Thank you for choosing the Torah Class series to guide you through your studies of the Old Testament. I assure you that if you dedicate yourself to this study—as part of a life-long spiritual education process—you will be rewarded immensely as your knowledge and love for God increase.

Blessings and Shalom!  
Tom Bradford

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tom Bradford is the founder of Seed of Abraham Ministries and is the teacher and pastor of Torah Class, a nondenominational congregation of Gentile and Jewish believers in Christ located in Merritt Island, Florida.

Tom was educated at the University of California at Northridge, where he first studied Egyptology and Archaeology before settling on Urban Development and Business Management. Later he accomplished advanced course work at Harvard.

A lifelong Christian, Tom studied the Hebrew Bible under Jewish rabbis and scholars, both in Israel and in the United States of America. As the director of adult Sunday school at a Baptist megachurch, Tom began to hone his teaching skills and developed the technique of a multidiscipline approach to exegetical Bible study that he continues to use today.

Before his transition into the ministry, Tom was a senior executive for an S&P 500 corporation, running several hi-tech companies in the United States and Europe. After leaving the business world, Tom spent years studying countless volumes of the great works of Christian and Jewish scholars and historians, learning biblical Hebrew, writing seminars on Bible history, and teaching on the Middle East and Jewish/Christian history at a local college. It finally became clear that his new path was to devote himself full-time to teaching the Holy Scriptures, focusing on the Old Testament and the forgotten Hebrew nature and culture from which it came. He has traveled extensively, including in the Middle East and Egypt.

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## INTRODUCTION TO GENESIS

You are about to start on a journey through the Old Testament, a book that millions of Hebrews and Christians have studied over the last three thousand years. We are going to begin by studying the Torah, the first and oldest section of the original Hebrew Bible. *Torah* is a word that few Christians have ever heard of, and even fewer have any idea what it actually is. You'll read in more detail about the different understandings of the word *Torah* below, but let me begin with an analogy about the rather sloppy habit of applying the word *Torah* to any and every writing that refers to the Old Testament (OT).

More than one hundred years ago, a company in Atlanta, Georgia, wanted to join the new and growing market for flavored, nonalcoholic beverages. Instead of selling hard liquor, they formulated a tasty addition to the "soft" drink market. It was called Coca-Cola, and it was a hit. Although originally marketed as a stimulant, its real niche was simply that it was a great-tasting beverage. And as the United States began to enter a period of remarkable growth and prosperity, the demand for Coca-Cola skyrocketed. The rest, as they say, is history.

Coca-Cola so dominated the soft drink market that a curious thing happened: about fifty years after it was first sold, it began to garner the nickname Coke. In fact, the nickname became so commonly used that "Coke" no longer simply meant a specific brand of cola drink; it came to be a name applied generically to *all* soft drinks. A common conversation might sound something like this:

HUSBAND: "I'm thirsty, let's stop and get a Coke."

WIFE: "Okay! Sounds good to me."

HUSBAND: "Good, what type would you like?"

WIFE: "A root beer, please."

Sound familiar? Now, any American would perfectly understand that dialogue and not find it at all odd. We know full well that Coca-Cola and root beer are not the same thing. But we also understand that "Coke," in our modern vernacular, can simply mean any soft drink. The meaning is clear.

Within the Jewish religion, the word *Torah* has taken on a similar generic meaning; it has become a word that refers to all Hebrew religious writings, but it wasn't always that way. Let's take a look at what the Torah and its counterparts really are.

### THE TORAH

Torah is the Hebrew name for the first five books of our Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. In this study, we're going to take a good look at the Jewishness that has been removed over the last nineteen hundred years, because it is within the Hebrew/Jewish culture and language that the Torah was created, and it's *only* within that context that we gain proper understanding of what God is telling us.

The entire Bible, Old Testament (OT) and New Testament (NT), was written by Hebrews and therefore falls within the context of Hebrew culture. It was Moses, a Hebrew, who received the Torah from God on Mount Sinai, around 1400 BC. Although we typically think of Moses receiving only the two stone tablets of the Ten Commandments from God at this time, the Ten Commandments were, in fact, just a tiny piece of all that Moses received in those several trips up and down the mountain. Moses actually received much (but certainly

not all) of what now forms the first five books of the OT.

Originally, the Hebrews called the five books given to Moses "Torah." But as centuries passed, two other groups of Hebrew writings were created and deemed to be "of God" and, therefore, Scripture: the Prophets and the Writings. The Hebrews now had three separately defined groups of Scriptures—(1) *K'tuvim* (meaning "Writings"); (2) *Nevi'im* (meaning "Prophets"); and (3) Torah (Genesis through Deuteronomy)—but in common everyday conversation they began referring to any of the Holy Scriptures as *Torah*. So the original Scripture given to Moses was the Torah, and the newer Scripture added later began to be generically referred to as "Torah" also.

**THE PARTS OF THE TORAH**

Torah — Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy

Nevi'im (Prophets) — Joshua, Judges, 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi

K'tuvim (Writings) — Ruth, 1 & 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Lamentations, Daniel

Unfortunately, *Torah* is not a word you'll find in our modern Bible translations. In general, where the word *Torah* appeared in the ancient texts, our modern translations give us the word *law*. This is a somewhat intentional mistranslation, which first occurred when the Scriptures were translated to Greek. It was fostered by the desire of the early church to distance itself from the Jews.

*Torah* does not mean "law." In an overly simplistic sense, it means "teaching." Yet, in a curious irony, even the Jews themselves began to adopt the Christian suggestion that Torah



A page from the Talmud

was law. They began applying the term *Torah* to all manner of religious writings to the point that Judaism, in general, has become a religion based far more on the doctrines of men than on the Word of God.

### THE TALMUD

During the same time that the Torah, *K'tuvim*, and *Nevi'im* were created and being added to, another set of authoritative religious thought was being created by the rabbis of the faith, called *tradition*. (It was also known as oral law, oral tradition, or oral Torah—"oral" because, rather than being written down, for many years it was handed down verbally.) In common-day Christianese, we could equate Hebrew tradition with our church doctrine. In other words, tradition is not Scripture; it is denominational beliefs



and rulings and interpretations of Scripture. As time rolled along, the Hebrew doctrine, these oral traditions (or oral Torah), started carrying more and more weight among religious leaders. Over the centuries, the traditions that had been handed down by word of mouth were eventually formalized and written down. The best way to think of all these traditions is as commentary by religious leaders that consists of regulations and teachings and is constantly undergoing additions. The fully compiled works of tradition became what is now called the Talmud. There are two major competing versions of Talmud: the Babylonian Talmud and the Jerusalem Talmud. Each is an enormous work comprises many volumes. Eventually, in common conversation among Jews, the word *Torah* came to encompass the entire body of Scripture and the entire body of tradition, or Talmud; a rather unfortunate blurring of the original meaning, for sure.

The Hebrews of Christ's day, and those hundreds of years earlier, well understood what was meant when they discussed Torah among themselves. They knew by the context of the conversation when "Torah" meant the original Scripture given to Moses and when it meant any of the other religious literature and rulings. Unfortunately, we cannot overlook the fact that by Christ's day tradition had become more important than the Scripture, God's Word. Following Christ's death, the Gentiles, who were ignorant of the intricacies of Jewish culture and the Hebrew language, entered the picture and got confused about the true meaning of "Torah." Even though Bible scholars have somewhat straightened it out over the years, church leaders and teachers have been slow to understand and change their usage of the word.

## THE TANAKH

Today, what Christians call the Old Testament is what Jews call the *Tanakh*. *Tanakh* is an invented word: it takes the *T* from Torah, the *N* from Nevi'im, and the *K* from K'tuvim, adds a couple

of vowel sounds, and presto! Tanakh. The Tanakh and the OT are exactly the same thing, except in some cases the books are arranged in a slightly different order.

Let's review quickly before moving on:

- The Tanakh: sometimes called the Hebrew Bible, is simply another name for our current Old Testament.
- The Torah: the first five books of the Tanakh (OT)—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy.
- The Talmud: a huge gathering of Jewish religious commentary, *not* the Holy Scriptures at all.

## THE "TESTAMENTS"

One of the curious conditions of modern Christianity is that the OT has been all but forgotten. The common statement from the church today is: we are a NT church. In other words, the implication is that the OT is not for us, but for another people, namely the Jews. Or there's a belief that it's for a past time; in seminary talk it would be called a past dispensation. So the relationship set up between the OT and the NT is that the OT is obsolete—interesting but irrelevant history—and the NT is current and contemporary. Nothing could be further from the truth.

First of all, the title "Old Testament" is purely man-made, and is a relatively modern title given to that portion of the Bible. There is no such thing as the "Old Testament" as far as the Bible is concerned; the words *Old Testament* never appear in the Bible. The word *testament* means "covenant," so the idea behind the names as the two parts of the Bible is that the OT refers to the covenants made between God and Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses, and the NT refers to the covenants between God and mankind in general through Christ.

If one is inclined to think that way, it would be better to think of the biblical division in terms of earlier and later covenants, rather

than old and new. The newer covenants have not replaced the original covenants, but some of the older covenants have been transformed. Even Christ Himself, when asked if the Law (the Torah) was null and void now that He had come, answered in about as forceful a way as one can imagine. Look at Matthew 5:17–19:

*Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Therefore, anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commandments and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. (NIV)*

Christ did not come to do away with, or abolish, the Torah, He came to complete it. By *complete* he doesn't mean "to finish," nor *finish* in the sense of "end." In your Bibles, *fulfill* is probably the word used instead of *complete* in Matthew 5:17. The Greek used here is *pleroo*. Go and check any good concordance and it will tell you that *pleroo* means "to fill up, to accomplish." But in our modern English vernacular, *fulfill* connotes something that is ended. However, the true meaning of *fulfill* is to "fill full" or "fill up." *Pleroo* would be a good word to use when speaking to the attendant at the gas station—if there *were* such things anymore—because it has the sense of "fill 'er up." Christ came to fill the Torah full of meaning, or to bring it to its fullest extent. When you ask the gas station attendant to fill up your tank, you certainly don't want him to bring your tank to an end, do you? You mean for him to give you all he can. That gives you an idea of what the word *pleroo* (fulfill) means.

The two testaments, earlier and latter, OT and NT, work together. You cannot separate them, although it has been attempted for centuries. The OT is the foundation of the Bible. The OT sets the stage for the NT. The Old Testament lays down all the premises by which

we understand the New Testament. It's the Bible, Act One.

The NT is based on the OT; it's a continuation of the OT. It's the Bible, Act Two. In fact, about 50 percent of the statements in the NT are quoted directly from the OT. They are completely intertwined. It's pretty tough to read any book, see any play, or watch any movie by starting in the middle. We may well get something out of it, but we are likely to take the part we see in the wrong context or come to some conclusions that are several degrees off course. That's what we do when we attempt to understand the Bible by beginning with, and not going beyond, the NT.

## THE FOUNDATION OF THE BIBLE

Have you ever considered that the Bible that Jesus, the early disciples, the Gospel writers, Paul, and even John the Revelator studied and taught from was the Old Testament? Let that sink in for a moment. There was no NT when *any* writer of the Bible was alive. The only Bible that existed for these men . . . and for Christ . . . was the Hebrew Tanakh, our OT. Any and all references to "Holy Scripture" by Jesus or the apostles refer to the OT. The admonition that "all Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16 NASB) specifically referred to the Hebrew Bible because there was no such thing as a New Testament in that era. In fact, in its most correct application—and it would help us when reading the New Testament if we could grasp this—the word *Scripture* or *Holy Scripture*, biblically speaking, refers only to what we call the Old Testament. While we should certainly accept the NT as holy, inspired of God, and entirely belonging in our Bibles, that statement from Paul to Timothy did not refer to something that did not exist. It was not meant to be prophetic; Paul was not speaking to a future time. He was speaking about the Torah, the Writings, and the Prophets. We would gain far more

understanding of the Bible if we could dispense with the term *Old Testament* and call it what Jesus and all the apostles called it: the Scriptures. So our modern Bibles consist of two portions, both inspired and “of God”: the Scriptures and the New Testament.

While it has been the mode of the church for centuries to imply, if not outright state, that the OT is of no value to a modern believer and that the OT principles no longer apply since the advent of Christ, it would benefit us to remember that it was the OT that the original group of twelve disciples of Christ taught from. It was what Jesus Himself taught and quoted and venerated so highly. It was what the apostles taught the gospel message from, and that is because the gospel message is an OT message. That’s right; the complete gospel is spoken of in the OT. Jesus didn’t write a new gospel; He simply fulfilled that which was previously written . . . by the writers of the OT.

Listen to what Jesus says in John 5:46–47: “For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me, for he wrote about Me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?” (NASB). Saying “if you believed Moses” was just a common way of speaking in that day. It was an idiom; it meant “if you believe the Torah.” Moses, the Law, and the Torah were all interchangeable terms to the Jewish people. But the point is that Jesus says, “He [Moses] wrote about Me.” Christ was explaining that if we don’t believe or even know what *Moses* wrote—and it was Moses who wrote the Torah—how are we to comprehend what *Jesus* was saying?

Now, as the OT is the foundation of the NT, the Torah is the foundation of the entire Bible. Even someone who has never studied the Bible is aware that Genesis is the story of beginnings, of God creating the world. How do we start to study anything, let alone try to comprehend God, if we don’t begin at the beginning? And, that’s just what we’re going to do in this Torah Class series as we journey through the Old Testament.

## HOW TO READ AND STUDY THE TORAH

The Torah, like all of the Bible, is literal. It means what it says and it says what it means. But let me explain what *literal* means when dealing with the Bible. We occasionally use idioms or puns in our everyday conversations, sayings that only those in our common culture can understand. Take, for example, the expression “Go fly a kite.” When someone instructs you to do something you disagree with, and you respond, “Go fly a kite,” most Americans know what that means. In its most basic sense, you’re saying no. Further, it can mean that you have no interest at all in what they’re proposing and perhaps even question their sanity. But if you tell a Frenchman or a Brazilian to “go fly a kite,” they will be rather perplexed with your answer. It makes no sense to them. What does kite-flying have to do with anything they just asked you about? It’s the same way with many biblical Hebrew words and phrases. They carried a perfectly clear meaning at one time, but to our twenty-first-century ears, sometimes it doesn’t compute.

So *literal* does not necessarily mean “word-for-word.” If we took “Go fly a kite” word-for-word, we’d be in trouble. *Literal*, therefore, means the literal “meaning” intended within the context of the culture it was created. And in the case of the Bible, the culture was Hebrew, and that culture changed and evolved dramatically over the fifteen hundred years during which the Bible was written. That is to say, the Hebrew culture at the time of Abraham bore no resemblance to Hebrew culture in the time of Moses, and that bore no resemblance to Hebrew culture in the time of Christ. Most often, the literal meaning in the Bible *is* word-for-word. The trick is that one must understand the Hebrew culture in the various eras of the Bible to understand what is being communicated. And, of course, there is a certain amount of symbolism in the Bible. And there is poetry and there is straightforward history, and there are parables and several other

literary devices as well. But symbolism is generally pretty easy to identify. Here's what I'm getting at: modern Gentile Christianity tends to treat much of the really-hard-to-understand parts of the OT as allegorical statements, when in fact they are not allegory. There is allegory in the OT, but very little, and I'll identify it when we come across it. Generally speaking, the problem has been a total misunderstanding of what was being said, due to a reluctance to research and study ancient Hebrew culture. Rather, there's been a not-so-subtle attempt over the centuries to twist and turn the Bible into something that agrees with preconceived denominational doctrines. We're not going to do that here.

One other thing about the meaning of the term *literal*: many phrases in the Bible are *both*

literal and symbolic. That is, they mean exactly what they say, and on another level they are also symbolic of some larger concept. You'll find this rather inscrutable "duality" occurring with biblical prophecy because many prophecies happen, and then they happen again!

Now, get ready for one of the most intense and exciting rides of your life. A man who has been studying Torah Class lessons regularly for a long time, a man who is a longtime Christian and former missionary, told me recently that he has learned more about who God is in the last few months than at any time in his life. What you get from this is up to you. I hope you commit your coming journey into God's Torah to much prayer and personal dedication. I believe you'll find it to be not only educational but life-changing.

## GENESIS 1

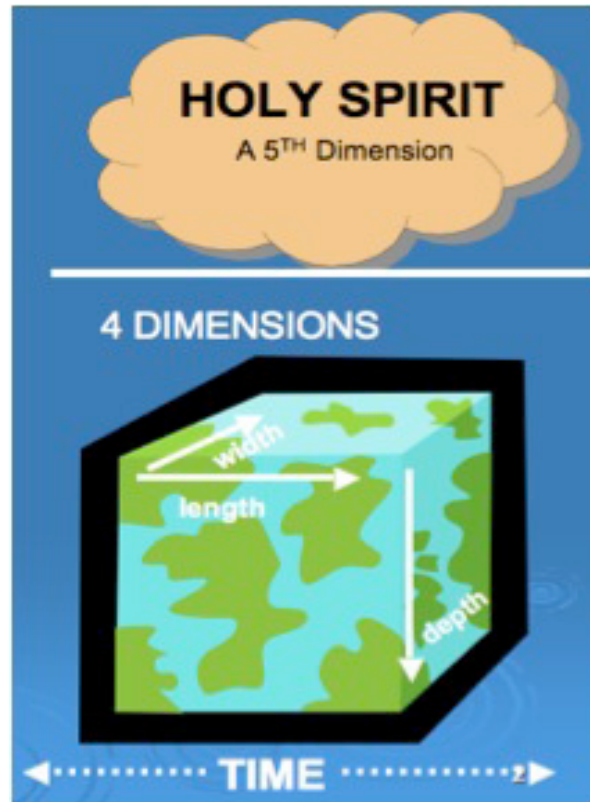
ASSIGNMENT: Read Genesis 1.

We could spend several weeks just in Genesis 1, but because the sequence of Creation—what was created first, second, third, and so on—is very straightforward, there’s no need for us to go into detail on those things. Instead, we’re going to focus on issues you might not have thought about before. We’re going to look mainly at spiritual principles and some important foundational fundamentals that I call God’s Governing Dynamics, which are laid out for us in Genesis 1. Here God established principles and dynamics that never change and are the basic building blocks upon which the Torah, then the Tanakh, and finally the NT are built.

Immediately in Genesis 1 we are given some of these fundamentals, and while these fundamentals are foundational and basic, they are hardly simple.

### FUNDAMENTAL #1: WHO IS GOD?

The first thing we must understand when studying the Torah is the word *God*, because there are two primary ways in which we can know God: by His name and by His characteristics. By means of the four dimensions that make up our physical universe—length, width, depth, and time (or, in the words of physicists, space-time)—we can know God only by His name and characteristics. Yet, by means of the Holy Spirit, we can also “know” God in another way, which is available (in our era) only to believers. This Holy Spirit way of knowing God incorporates an additional dimension, a fifth dimension of reality, which does not exist naturally



in the four-dimensional universe that we live in. (Note that we’re not using “fifth dimension” in the same sense that some scientists do when they advocate as many as ten dimensions that may have been present at Creation.) We’ll get into the subject of extra dimensions soon, because far from being a sci-fi concept or something only for intellectuals to contemplate, these dimensions are a significant key to framing some of the more difficult statements in the Bible.

In our day’s earnest cry for world peace, an interfaith movement has gained steam. And the basis for this movement is the concept that no matter the name used for a God/god (whether that is Buddha, Krishna, Brahma, Allah, or even Yahweh),<sup>1</sup> we’re all essentially speaking

of the same being, just from different cultural or language perspectives. This is not true. For not only are the meanings of the *names* of each of these various gods completely different, but also the characteristics and attributes of each of these gods are different. Therefore, it is impossible that they could be the same god.

## ELOHIM

The true God is introduced to us in the first verse of Genesis. In this passage, we are given the first of the many unchangeable and sometimes inscrutable characteristics and attributes of God. The Hebrew word that our Bibles translate as “God” is *Elohim*. First, we must understand that Elohim is not God’s name; we won’t be advised of God’s name until much later in the Torah. Rather, Elohim is a title. Let’s start with a basic Hebrew lesson: the letters “-im” ending a Hebrew word indicate that the word is plural (speaking of more than one). The “-im” at the end of the word *Elohim* makes it a masculine plural noun. But there is another usage in Hebrew of the “-im” ending, and it’s called the “plural of majesty.” In this case, adding the “-im” at the end of a word denotes greatness rather than plurality.

Therefore, Elohim is a plural title (plural as in more than one) indicating greatness.

With the introduction of this plural title for God, Elohim, instantly the door is opened to dealing with this incredible truth and paradigm: God is one, but He also is many. Elohim and its various usages are a complex matter that we are only going to barely touch upon, but what you need to know now is that *Elohim* is used in the Bible to refer to the one true God, and His majesty.<sup>2</sup>

Christians, rightfully so, understand the word *Elohim* to indicate both greatness and plurality, and from this eventually grew our uniquely Christian concept of the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—three Gods in one. Or better, a single God consisting of three persons, essences, or manifestations. The use of the word *Elohim* does not in and of itself prove

that God is plural; rather, there are several more critical pieces of evidence that we will study to prove that God is, indeed, a plurality, and we’ll get to those a little later in our study.

## FUNDAMENTAL #2: HOW LONG IS A DAY?

The next point of interest we should take notice of in Genesis 1 is the matter of the first day of Creation. There is ongoing debate among scientists and theologians as to just what is meant by the word *day* (i.e., How long was a day at the time of Creation?). The primary basis for this argument goes something like this: “How can God have created everything in just six days? And, furthermore, the Hebrews say that by counting the generations we find the earth to be nearing six thousand years of age, but all of our scientific data says the universe is billions of years old . . . around fifteen billion, in fact.” Well, if we take a close look at what is said in the opening words of Genesis, some of the matter seems to resolve itself, and we don’t have to engage in scientific and theological debates after all:

*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. (Gen. 1:1)*<sup>3</sup>

If you read carefully, you will see that the creation of heaven and the earth is not necessarily

### THE AGE OF THE EARTH

As of 2011, an overwhelming number of astronomers, both Bible believers and nonbelievers, agree that science indicates that the universe “began” (Bible believers would say “God created” it) 13.7 billion years ago. Reasons to Believe ([www.reasons.org](http://www.reasons.org)) is a good source for explaining why. Others vigorously dispute this conclusion, saying that the universe was created only six thousand to ten thousand years ago. The Institute for Creation Research ([www.icr.org](http://www.icr.org)) is a source for an explanation of this viewpoint. In no place does the Bible give a calendar date for Creation.

said to have occurred on the first day; rather, it occurred at “the beginning.” The first day of the Creation story may not have been the beginning; the first day could have been sometime later. If we take those opening words of Genesis literally, then the thing that occurred on the first day was the creation of light and its separation from darkness. The wording leaves open the distinct possibility that the heavens and earth were created sometime before the first day of what we have dubbed “Creation.” How long the heavens and the earth sat there lifeless, dark, and chaotic, we aren’t told. But at some point God decided to take the universe He had created and spark it with life and give it a new order. And He began that new process by creating light, and that’s when we encounter the first “day.”

Now there is absolutely no reason to try to defend the use of the word *day*. Often we hear people say, “But the Bible says that to God, one day is like a thousand years.”<sup>4</sup> That is simply an idiom that means God lives in a place without time, *not* that during Creation a *day* was a period of time of one thousand years. Currently, there is no proof that the first days of earth’s existence were meaningfully different in length of time from our current twenty-four hours. Oh, there is some proof that the earth’s rotation may have slowed a tad over the last several thousands of years, but a slower rotation of the earth today would make the days of eons ago *shorter* than a current day.<sup>5</sup> If the earth was spinning faster long ago, then days would have whizzed by quicker than today. Likewise, long ago the earth would have had to almost not rotate at all if one full rotation took what we would count as one thousand years.

## WHEN DOES A DAY BEGIN?

Hebrews, including today’s modern Jewish community, have always considered the day to begin at sunset, and end at the next sunset. That is, the new day begins in the evening. This, of course, is different from the modern calendar, which sets

12:00:01 a.m. as the start of each day and midnight as the end. It also contrasts the tradition that morning is the beginning of a day and nighttime, the ending. Now this difference in the definition and method of plotting time has caused all sorts of interesting problems in attempting to ascertain with any degree of accuracy *when* certain biblical events happened. What we need to grasp for the moment is that the modern method of timekeeping is done mechanically, and for all practical purposes it does not vary. There was an international agreement some years ago to have a central clock from which all clocks would harmonize. We don’t need to observe stars or the moon to determine what time it is any longer. We could be in a tunnel a mile underground, and if our watch is working, we can know precisely what time it is . . . indefinitely . . . without ever observing the sky.

But for the ancients, no such mechanized way of timekeeping was available. For people who lived during the Old Testament era, time was determined by viewing the skies—when the sun went up and down, when the moon appeared, when certain stars or star groupings appeared in the night sky. Using our mechanical system, we essentially divide the day into two equal parts: twelve hours of day and twelve hours of night. This varies according to season and latitude, as does the length of a Hebrew day and night, because the proportion of time between daylight and nighttime constantly shifts. Yet one full day was still twenty-four hours, and one week was still seven full days. But throughout the Bible, the Hebrew system of measuring days is being used, so whether studying Torah or the NT Gospels, we need to set aside our modern notion of timekeeping if we want to understand the timing of events.

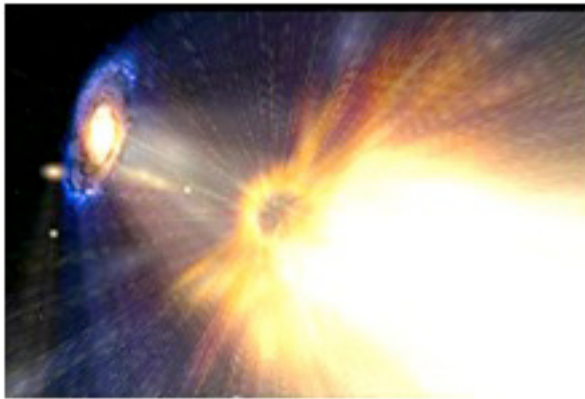
Where did the Hebrews get the idea of *starting* and ending their days at sunset? “So there was evening, and there was morning, one day” (Gen. 1:5). Evening came first; it marked the transition from one day to the next. There’s nothing wrong with the way we moderns determine the start and end of the day, but it can get confusing when comparing it to the Bible.

### FUNDAMENTAL #3: THE REALITY OF DUALITY

On the first day, God created light.<sup>6</sup> Yet it was on the *fourth* day that He created the sun, or as the Bible puts it, “the larger light to rule the day.”<sup>7</sup> Does that seem strange? How was there light without the sun? Have we found our first inconsistency this early in the Scriptures?

#### DEFINITIONS

*owr* – illumination, enlightenment  
*maorot* – objects that emit light



*Owr* is enlightenment.



*Maor* is an object that emits light.

### UNDERSTANDING *OWR* VERSUS *MAOROT*

This gets interesting: in verses 3 and 4, the Hebrew word meaning “light” is *owr*. This word does not mean an object that emits light, like the sun, the stars, or a lamp. Rather, it means “illumination, enlightenment.” When the Bible says “God is light,”<sup>8</sup> it says “Elohim is *owr*.” This word is closely associated with life and joy and goodness. In fact, when we read about the first day of Creation, notice something that the Hebrew sages have hung their hats on for millennia: it says God created the light [illumination], and saw that it was good [*tov*]. Then this light was separated from the darkness. Only the light is called good, the darkness is not.

Now let's move on to when lights are set in the sky to divide day and night, and when God says he created the larger light (the sun) to rule the day and the smaller light (the moon) to rule the night.<sup>9</sup> We see that a different word is used for “light” here. The Hebrew word is *maorot*. *Maor* means “an object that emits light”; *maorot* is plural, meaning “lights.” The luminaries (objects that illuminate) like the sun, stars, lamps, and of course, meteors are the intent of this word.

Since the state of the universe before day one of Creation was darkness (or at least it was darkness from the vantage point of planet Earth), it must have been that darkness was an unsatisfactory state; otherwise, God wouldn't have created light. Darkness was not capable of supporting life, and as we'll find as we get into the later parts of Exodus and Leviticus, things that go against, inhibit, or terminate life are considered to be “against God.” So when God created “light,” *owr* (singular), He created illumination and enlightenment, a basic requirement for life. When God created “the lights,” *maorot* (plural), He created objects that emitted light waves that allowed humans and animals to use their light sensors (their eyes) and allowed plants to engage in their method of sustaining life: photosynthesis.

In the book of Revelation we're told that when God destroys the old earth and creates a



## WHEN CREATION BEGAN

Many scientists come at this from different yet complementary points of view. Most astrophysicists who are devout Bible believers would say that the moment—not necessarily the day—Creation began was when God said, “Let there be light.”<sup>10</sup> At that point in time, He set in motion the singular events commonly referred to as the Big Bang, including the creating of time itself, followed by the days of Creation. Thus, if it could have been seen by an imaginary person floating in space, the spectacle of God’s work would have exploded outward in all directions. Abruptly after Genesis 1:3, the Torah tells us of God’s shaping the earth and creating life on its surface. From that point in the narrative on, our imaginary person has an earth-only point of view. And finally, with the creation of Adam, real eyes see things. Our purpose here, however, is not to explore the particulars of science but the declarations of Torah.

new one, there will no longer be *maorot* (light-emitting objects, e.g., a sun); instead, God will be our light, our illumination. It’s this same type of “godly light” that is being spoken of here in Genesis 1:3–4.

## LIGHT VERSUS DARKNESS

Let’s go back and contrast our new understanding of light with the word *darkness*. The Hebrew for this word in Genesis 1:3–4 is *chosbek*. In Hebrew, this word was used as the opposite of *owr*. *Chosbek* expresses a sense of blindness, misery, falsehood, and ignorance. It means “something that leads to death and destruction.” This word is not the opposite of “day.” It is not a word that describes the natural and good phenomenon of nighttime. In Hebrew, night is *layil*, an entirely different word than *chosek*. *Chosbek* is negative in its nature and it carries evil spiritual overtones with it. Night, *layil*, is simply the opposite of day. It is neutral; it carries no negative or spiritual sense to it, except in the odd case where it might be used metaphorically.

So let us be clear: In verses 3 and 4, what God created was illumination and enlightenment, of which He is the source. Then it was separated from its opposite: darkness, blindness, and falsehood. So what exactly was this illumination and enlightenment? It could well have been the primordial essence of God that we call the *shekinah* or shekinah glory, the mysterious illumination, or glory, of God (sometimes visible, sometimes not) that we read of in several places in the Bible. The illumination that this is speaking of is the kind that is suitable for us to see with our “spiritual eyes,” and it will come from God Himself rather than any kind of luminous object.

While I cannot be sure, I see no reason *not* to suggest that the light in the first day of Creation is the same light that will be in the first day of the *new* creation, as revealed in Revelation 21 and 22:<sup>11</sup>

*The city has no need for the sun or the moon to shine on it, because God’s Sh’kebinah gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. (Rev. 21:23–24)*

It is interesting that the spiritual counterpart of light (*owr*), which is darkness (*choshek*), will be absent in the new creation. In its purest spiritual sense, then, light is goodness and darkness is wickedness. In the new creation there will be *only* good; wickedness will no longer exist. In the new creation we find the complete absence of darkness; instead, there is only light. But as certain as I am that what I have told you is correct, I readily admit that there is some amount of speculation surrounding it.

## DEFINITIONS

*chosbek* – darkness, blindness, misery, ignorance  
*layil* – nighttime

## SO WHAT IS THE REALITY OF DUALITY?

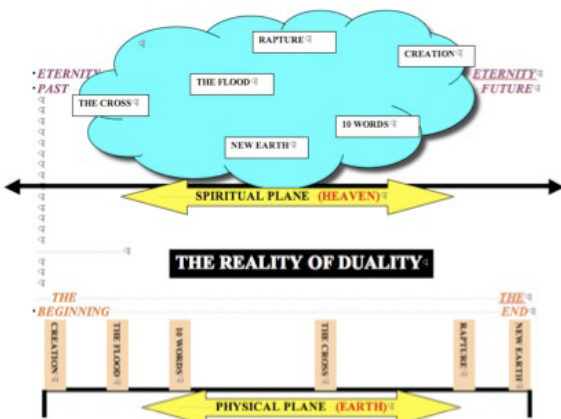
This expression of the nature of light is the first hint of a concept that is going to haunt us all through our studies of Torah, an abstract but real principle that is not easily grasped. So be prewarned that it takes some time and study before the concept that something can exist both spiritually and physically at the same time starts to become comfortable to us. I have given this concept a name: the Reality of Duality. Basically, the idea of the Reality of Duality is this: in the Scriptures and in the NT, the physical is often a shadow of something spiritual that already exists.

A shadow is an outline without the details filled in. A shadow is real; that is, it's not a mirage or an optical illusion. But it is less real than the object that casts the shadow. Example: I stand outside in the sun. I cast a shadow. I am real and the shadow is real. But as I am the source of the shadow, I am also the complete original and the shadow is but a representation of me that is incomplete. Further, the shadow has no animation or power in itself; the shadow does not have life and is stuck in absolute lock-step with me. The existence of my shadow is 100 percent dependent on my existence. If my shadow ceases to exist, I can still exist. But if I cease to exist, it is impossible for there to be a shadow of me. Therefore, I am preeminent; I am greater than my shadow; I am not a manifestation of my shadow, but my shadow is an

inferior manifestation of me. The shadow does not cause me; I cause the shadow.

When the physical and the spiritual attributes of a thing exist simultaneously, the spiritual existed first and is preeminent. The spiritual is almost unlimited in its attributes and operates in a number of dimensions. The physical is severely limited in its attributes (as compared with the spiritual) and can occur in no more than four dimensions, because our universe consists of only four dimensions: length, width, depth, and time. Therefore, the physical is inferior to the spiritual, and the physical can only partially mimic or reveal its spiritual original.

The creation of human beings is a fairly obvious example of this, because humans are creatures that simultaneously consist of the material and the immaterial, the physical and the spiritual. That is, we are four-dimensional beings; we are physical and visible (we have height, width, and depth) and are subject to time, but we also have an invisible property as well. The Bible calls this invisible property "soul" or "spirit." The ancient Hebrew sages pointed out that God formed Adam from the dust of the ground. God created the universe from nothing, but He created man from something—something physical (dirt) that He had already brought into existence. In addition, God put the breath of life into man, and put into him



### GOVERNING DYNAMICS OF THE REALITY OF DUALITY

*When the physical and spiritual reality of something exists simultaneously:*

1. The spiritual existed first.
2. The spiritual is preeminent.
3. The spiritual is almost unlimited in its attributes/dimensions.
4. The physical can occur in a maximum of four dimensions.
5. The physical is inferior to the spiritual.
6. The physical can only partially mimic or reveal its spiritual counterpart.

a soul and a spirit, which were *not* physical things but spiritual. So whether mankind admits it or not, we are a prime example of the Reality of Duality—we are both material and immaterial.

The creation of light and its attributes is another good example of this concept. No doubt the “light,” this *owr* made on the first day of Creation, was real physical light. Yet, mysteriously, it was light that did *not* come from a physical object, because no object that emitted light was created until the fourth day. Further, because light is the opposite of darkness and *owr* is characterized by God as good but *choshek* is not, we have a firm connection between the kind of light created here and its attribute of goodness. Good and evil are spiritual, not physical, attributes. So this light, this *owr*, has a dual reality to it: a very real physical quality and also a very real spiritual quality. Otherwise, the first few verses of Genesis are nonsensical.

Another example of the Reality of Duality is seen in the living creatures God created. In Genesis 1:20, God created swarming creatures in the water and birds flying in the air:

*God said, “Let the water swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth in the open dome of the sky.”*

The Lord populated the oceans with giant sea creatures and He proclaimed all of these creatures to be *good*. In verse 24, He goes on to speak of land creatures of all kinds (domestic and wild), even including crawling animals like lizards. He also declared *these* to be good. But later in the Torah, mainly in Leviticus, we’re going to find God declaring several of these same creatures as *unclean*. We’ll eventually see that the clean and unclean designations of created living things existed long before the Torah was given to Moses, but here we see that something can be both *good* and *unclean*. This is another example of the principle of the Reality of Duality.

#### FUNDAMENTAL #4: MAN MADE IN GOD’S IMAGE

Next we get a statement that has been pondered by the greatest and most brilliant minds for thousands of years, and there is little agreement as to exactly what it signifies: we, as human beings, are made in the image of God:

*So God created humankind in his own image; in the image of God he created him: male and female he created them. (Gen. 1:27)*

First, it says that God created humankind, and that He created both male and female. Second, it says that all humans were made in his image. If this biblical statement is true, then we cannot have evolved from chance or a mutation of nonliving substances. So we can immediately show Darwin and secular humanists the door! But what does it mean to be made in the image of God? It means that we have been given certain attributes that He has. We know that we don’t have all of His attributes because we are not gods. But God, who values all the many types of living creatures He created, made man unique among all these creatures. Only man has the capacity to know God. And this capacity comes by means of our spiritual component. Animals are physical—they have bodies and brains. They can even have something resembling emotions because many (but not all) animals have living souls,<sup>12</sup> the seat of emotion and intellect. But only humans among all of God’s living creatures have spirits. And it is our spirits that allow communion with the living God.

## GENESIS 2

ASSIGNMENT: Read Genesis 2.

In Genesis 2 we discover two more important fundamentals: (1) that God has blessed and made holy one day out of each week, the seventh; and (2) that He rested on that day so that all He had created could, itself, produce and reproduce.

### THE SABBATH REST

God created everything in six days. After this, it was complete. There was nothing more to create. As mentioned earlier, while most believe that the six days are literally twenty-four-hour days, some think they may instead be millions of years long. The Hebrew word for day is *yom*, and most scholars say that this word can be correctly used not only for twelve- or twenty-four-hour days, but also for a week<sup>13</sup> or even for vast periods of time. This allows for what modern science calls the Big Bang and Bible believers refer to as Old Earth Creationism. But while there is an interesting and ongoing debate on the length of a biblical Creation day, the important thing for us to know is that after these six days, Creation was a work 100 percent finished. Thus, the Lord declared the seventh day to be holy. He blessed that day, He separated it, He divided it, and He set it apart as different from the other days of the week.

You might find it interesting that the only day of the week to which the Hebrews assigned a name was the seventh day. They call it *Shabbat*, from which we get our word *Sabbath*. To other days of the week they assigned only numbers—first day, second day, third day, and so on.

### THE MEANING OF *SHABBAT*

The word *sabbath* is typically translated as “rest,” but it means “to cease, to stop, to desist (to quit working).” Rest might be a result of sabbath, but it’s not really the meaning of the word. What the Hebrew sages say it most points to is quitting your normal activities; it doesn’t mean that you necessarily stop doing everything.

There are several words in the Tanakh, the OT, that are translated as “rest,” but as with *day*, they each mean slightly different things. For instance, the Hebrew word *nachan* is usually translated “rest,” but it more specifically means “to comfort or console.”<sup>14</sup> Another word for rest is *sha’an*, which means “to lean against something.” Then there is *shamat*, which means “to throw down or lay down”; and there are others. But here in Genesis the word is *sabbath*, and it means “to cease because Creation was finished.” You see, up and through day six of Creation, the universe was a beehive of activity, God’s activity. However, God didn’t create something that had to constantly be re-created. His creation could produce and reproduce without further direct creative intervention.

This is a shadow of Jesus’s instruction to “rest in Him” upon salvation. When we are re-created as a new being in Him, we are 100 percent complete. We don’t have to undergo further re-creation. We are free to cease our human efforts to be acceptable to God, to be holy, because everything that needed to be done on our behalf to become acceptable to God was completed in Christ’s death on the cross, just as Creation itself was completed.

## THE SABBATH IS HOLY

God didn't simply commemorate the Sabbath as we would a street name or a statue of a dignitary. Shabbat is a very special day, a holy day, in which God takes special delight. God said that He *qadash* the seventh day; that is, He consecrated it for all of mankind. He set it completely apart from any other day.

There is only one authority who can consecrate or declare anything holy—God Almighty. Man tends to play fast and loose with the word *holy* and often makes it a word that simply denotes anything “of God” or that has special religious significance. Holiness is accomplished exclusively by God's fiat; it is by God's decision and declaration, and His alone. For mankind to believe that *we* can declare something as holy is chutzpah beyond the pale. Do you desire to know *exactly* what is holy? Only those things in Scripture that are specifically called holy, nothing else. Throwing the designation of “holy” on whatever suits us has watered down the impact of the word. *Holiness* has become a lost term. Later in our study we'll get a better picture of just how important and holy Shabbat is to God, and how critical its significance ought to be to us.

## WHEN IS THE SABBATH?

The Christian Church does not collectively observe the seventh-day Shabbat<sup>15</sup> because of the belief that the Sabbath was given to Israel and therefore is intended only for Israel. Or, they have classified it as part of the Law of Moses, those rules and ordinances God set down at

### WHO FIRST RECEIVED SHABBAT?

When did the Israelites first learn about Shabbat? It was *not* first given to them through Moses on Mount Sinai. Instead, we notice that here in Genesis 2, Shabbat is the actual name for a specific day of the week given to mankind, and its name embodies its purpose.

On March 7, AD 321, Emperor Constantine decreed: “Let all judges and townspeople, and the occupation of all trades rest on the venerable day of the Sun.”

The Council of Laodicea, in AD 364, declared, “Christians must not judaize by resting on the Sabbath, but must work on that day, rather than honoring the Lord's Day; and, if they can, resting as Christians. But if any shall be found to be judaizers, let them be anathema from Christ.”

Mount Sinai shortly after Israel departed Egypt. Around the late second century AD, it became a goal of the now Gentile-dominated church to abandon anything that seemed to apply to the Jewish people, such as Sabbath observance. Eventually, in the fourth century, the church officially abolished the Shabbat. Church documents from the several meetings of the ecumenical councils convened by Emperor Constantine verify this, specifically the Council of Laodicea document, Canon #29, as established in the middle part of the fourth century AD. In it you will find that the church explicitly declared the Sabbath to be a Jewish holy day and therefore the church should have no part in observing it. The council decided it would be better to end the practice of Sabbath observance altogether and begin a new observance.

This new observance was to take place on the day of the week that Jesus the Messiah arose: the first day of the week. Thus the Council of Laodicea declared that Sabbath observance and congregational worship on the seventh day, Saturday, Shabbat, would end. Instead, communal worship would occur on a *new* day, the first day of the week. This was already the standard day of meeting to worship the most widely accepted and politically correct god of the Roman Empire, the sun god. This is why the name for the first day of the week is Sun-day. And since this newly minted celebration needed a name to replace Sabbath, that new name was the Lord's Day. So, what the majority of the institutional church has been practicing for seventeen hundred years is *not* a Sabbath that simply has been moved by one

day from the seventh to the first day of the week. Instead, it is an entirely different celebration, established by the Roman Church at the Council of Laodicea in AD 364 at the direction of the emperor of Rome, Constantine.

This fact is not disputed by Christian scholars. The heads of religious governments of all the great Christian denominations (including Catholics, Protestants, Greek Orthodox, Anglican, and others) agree that this is factual and that the church long ago made a decision to stop observing the Sabbath, although a few do support the interpretation that what the Council of Laodicea did was declare that the Sabbath can be any day one chooses.



Mithras, the sun god

To sum it up, we find that God established the Sabbath immediately upon finishing His creation, long before there was even such a thing as an Israelite. Therefore, the Sabbath was *not* something given to and reserved for a specific group of people, namely Israel. It is historically and scripturally inaccurate to say that the Sabbath was first given to Israel. It was given to humanity in general immediately upon the completion of Creation.

## GOD REESTABLISHED THE SABBATH

After the Great Flood that purged the world of evil, mankind again became wicked and pagan and only a few humans remembered to honor God's Sabbath, so in time God found

it necessary to reestablish the validity of the Sabbath for mankind. In fact, God wanted to reestablish all of His principles that had always existed, and He chose to set apart a group of people, a chosen nation, that He would use to serve Him and to achieve this purpose. That nation was Israel.

One of the myriad things that God told Moses to do (as the leader of this recently emancipated nation of God, Israel) was to bring back Shabbat worship. Observing the Shabbat, the seventh day, was a sign that a person was a member of the congregation of those who gave their allegiance to God. Likewise, such observance also indicted those whom God declared sanctified and holy.

## THE ORIGIN OF LIFE

### THE GARDEN

In Genesis 2:8 God planted a garden in the east part of Eden.

Now pay close attention: The Garden of Eden is not the same thing as the land of Eden, or just Eden. The land of Eden was a large regional area, which had definite boundaries. The Garden of Eden was a specific and separate area (also with boundaries) located *within* the land of Eden. In fact, we're told that the Garden was placed somewhere in the *eastern* part of the land of Eden, and it was in the middle of the



Map of the region surrounding Eden

Garden that the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and the Tree of Life were planted. God told Adam that in this fabulous Garden, which would provide for Adam's every need, he was free to eat anything he wanted (likely an enormous variety). However, he was to regard the fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil as death itself. Note: Eve did not yet exist when this instruction was given. It was given to Adam, and he bore the responsibility to carry it out and see to it that she did so as well.

Adam was not created inside the Garden; he was created outside the Garden and then placed in it:

*Then the LORD God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it. (Gen. 2:15 NASB, emphasis mine)*

*Adam* is a Hebrew word that means "man" or "human." It also is the root for the color word *red* and for the word *earth* or *soil*. In Hebrew, the word for earth (that is, dirt, soil) is *Adam-ab*. Red is a very important color in Scripture; it represents royalty, majesty, and blood. Later you'll learn about the red heifer, a very special animal sacrifice used to ordain priests and to purify those who had been made impure by touching a dead body. We will eventually see the incredible connection between Adam, the color red, the red heifer, and the shedding of Christ's blood.

God created Adam outside the Garden, in the land of Eden, in a place that was more than adequate for his needs. But God called the Garden His own earthly home at this time, and He wanted man to be close to Him. Inside the

## EAST

Take special notice of the importance of the direction east. From here on in our study, I want a little bell to go off in your head whenever we encounter the word *east* in the Torah. *East* has great spiritual significance: it is almost always associated with holiness, and it is a key for us to gain deeper knowledge of God's truths.

## DEFINITIONS

*adam* – man  
*dam* – blood  
*adamah* – earth, soil  
*adom* – red, ruddy

Garden the Tree of Life resided. *Life*, as meant here, means the life God intended for man, a holy life, an eternal life. So God brought man from a good place (the *land* of Eden) into a better place (the perfect *Garden* of Eden), a place of very close relationship with Him. The Garden was a holy place; just like heaven, no imperfection could live there, no sin would be allowed to pollute it. And that's just what God wants to do with us; He wants to bring us from a place that often *seems* sufficient for our needs (at least outwardly) and to set us down upon a holy place. In fact, He wants a connection with us that is almost too fantastic to comprehend: He wants to dwell inside us.

The Garden of Eden was an earthly model of heaven, a physical shadow and pattern of the eternal, nonphysical, spiritual, true heavenly abode of God. We will see later in our study that the Garden of Eden eventually became the model of another future holy place: the wilderness tabernacle. It is another example of the Reality of Duality in the Scriptures.

## MAN'S ABILITY TO REPRODUCE

### THE LIFE IN ADAM

*Then ADONAI, God, formed a person [Hebrew: adam] from the dust of the ground [Hebrew: adamah] and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, so that he became a living being. (Gen. 2:7)*

In this passage, we see that God placed *chayyim* into Adam to give him animation. Adam at first was simply a body, an inanimate thing formed from the dust of the earth. In order to become

a living creature, and more specifically a *human* living creature, he had to be injected with life. And this life, *chayyim*, was accomplished by means of God's supernaturally breathing it into him.

In Genesis 2:7, the Hebrew word used for *breathed*<sup>16</sup> (or *breathing*) is *naphach*. Later in this verse, in English, we get the word *breath*, in "the breath of life." The Hebrew here is *neshemah*. And finally, at the end of the verse, we're told that as a result of God's having *naphach* into Adam the *neshemah* of life, Adam became a living being (in Hebrew a *chay nephesh*). Do you see the relationship between all these words: *naphach*, *neshemah*, and *nephesh*? They share the same root and carry a common meaning. The essence is that breath, breathing, and being (as in a living being) are ethereal. Something that comes from outside the physical realm, from outside the four-dimensional universe in which we exist, is the enabler of life. God is the source of life. In fact, life is in God; it is one of His attributes.

## MAN'S SOUL

Rocks exist. Water exists. Stars, the moon, and the sun exist, but they don't have life. On the other hand, lions and ants also exist and *live*.



The wilderness tabernacle

Hebrew is a language that is constructed using a system of root words. Each root word has offshoots that give it different words for different uses, and the different words of that root have a common thread in meaning.

## DEFINITIONS

*naphach* – breathed  
*neshemah* – breath  
*nephesh* – (living) being

Birds, cats, and giraffes have life—they are *living creatures*. So, to this point, life is not exclusive to humans. Life was put into all of God's living creatures, by God Himself, as an act of divine will.

One of the more common words we'll find in Scripture is *soul*. Interestingly, this word is translated from a Hebrew word we just learned: *nephesh*. We used this word to indicate the life inside a human being. The early Jewish and later Christian scholars all recognized that breath and being are supernatural and thus are inseparable; the condition of *life* comes from God.

In our era, we have Darwinism and other scientific theories that keep attempting to prove that breath and being do *not* have to be of God. These theories argue that things that are without life, if given enough time and the right set of circumstances, will erupt with life on their own without divine intervention. So far these scientists have had no luck in proving their theories of spontaneous life, and they never will because that's not how it works. According to Jonathan Wells: "The Darwinian proposition that matter *on its own* began to breathe, or respire, and become life, though hoped for by many, *has never been demonstrated to have occurred.*"<sup>17</sup> It is clear, then, that life, in the sense of what animates biblically defined living creatures (humans and animals), comes from outside our four-dimensional universe. Bacteria, viruses, and plants are not living creatures that needed God's breath of life. Living creatures are a cut above everything else God created, and humanity is yet another step above the animals. Scientists are constantly searching for the connection between animals and men, but the life force that is common between them has nothing to do with organic material



interacting with electrical fields. The common element is that life is from God.

Finally, Genesis 2:7 says that God breathed the breath of life into Adam, the *neshemah chayyim* (*neshemah*, breath; and *chayyim*, life). Note the structure of the word *chayyim*. The “-im” at the end of *chayyim* makes the word plural, just as it makes *Elohim* plural. The singular Hebrew word for life is *chay* (*chayyim* minus the -im). So why don’t we translate that phrase as “the breath of *lif-es*” (plural) instead of “breath of *life*” (singular)? Well, just as the use of *Elohim* hints at God being one but also more than one, so *chayyim* gives us a hint at there being more than one life being put into Adam. Hebrew scholars agree that this use of *chayyim* cannot possibly be one of those rare instances of the word structure called “the plural of majesty,” whereby the subject is singular but it is made plural simply to denote a sense of glory or of majesty, as in the case of a king.

This hints at the difficulty theologians have had for many centuries trying to decide if the soul (generally acknowledged as the seat or essence of life) is the same thing as spirit, or if spirit and soul are two different things. They are separate attributes, but both come from God, from a dimension outside of our universe. The Hebrews gave a name to an invisible essence within men that also happens to be an attribute of God; this name is entirely different from “soul” or “living being” or anything that denotes the mysterious force that causes and sustains life. This essence is *Ruach HaKodesh*. *Ruach* means “wind” or “breath,” but it refers to that special and unique essence that connects man to God. What separates man from the animals (both living creatures, both having *nepesh*), is our ability to commune with God, to know God, and to emulate God. That unique ability comes from the spirit-life, which is somewhat different from the soul-life. The soul-life is what gives animation, basic life. But God is spirit, and the way we commune with God is by means of the spirit. Man has a spirit that no other living creature does; this is because, although animals have soul-life, they do not commune with God.

That happens only through the spirit-life, and spirit-life is possessed only by human beings.

We see this word again when Jesus spoke of living water. Jesus told us that He is the Living Water that takes away all uncleanness. The Hebrew for living water is *mayyim chayyim*; there’s that word again, *chayyim*. *Mayyim chayyim* is the water that Hebrews bathe in to be spiritually purified from ritual impurity. On a physical level, *mayyim chayyim* was merely water taken from an artesian well or a river. It was from a source of water that moved (as opposed to water from a lake, a pond, or a well in which the water sat still). And since *mayyim chayyim* was water used for spiritual purposes, and it refers to a spiritual source of life, we can tie that back in with the very unique “breath of life,” *neshemah chayyim*, that animates mankind.

## PLANT LIFE

God did not create plants until He created man. In Genesis 2:5 we’re told that God had yet to create herbs or plants on earth. The reason was that there was no human created yet to till the ground:

*There was as yet no wild bush on the earth, and no wild plant had as yet sprung up; for ADONAI, God, had not caused it to rain on the earth, and there was no one to cultivate the ground. (Gen. 2:5)*

On the surface you could say that this was about the need for a gardener; until you have a gardener to care for the garden, you can’t have plants or they will not thrive. In fact, since I was a small child, this is how I was taught. But this places God in the position of depending on man, and God *never* depends on man.

## DEFINITIONS

*soul* – *nepesh*, gives basic life, animation

*spirit* – *ruach*, gives man a way to know God

Instead, we can see in this passage that plant life was created for man's benefit. Plants were to be man's sole food supply; man was to be a plant eater. Why have a garden if there wasn't a man to eat the produce? It would be a waste. Until there was a man who needed the benefit of the plant life (sustenance) there was no need for it. God doesn't eat, and neither do the angels. The garden wasn't for Him or His created spiritual beings.

## HYDRATING THE EARTH

Also in Genesis 2:5 we're told that the phenomenon of rain had not yet occurred. That might seem strange to us, but the reality is that God used an entirely different natural method to provide the needed moisture for plant life—mist that didn't come down from the sky but instead rolled upward from the ground. There was enough moisture in the ground at all times for the plant roots to grow, and that same moisture formed a mist, a low-hanging fog, that provided sufficient moisture for the plants that needed an intake of water through their leaves, as many species do.

Artisanal wells under the earth's surface bubbled up to form rivers, and one of the rivers, which was formed by water that had its source in the land of Eden, was Gihon. It was said to water the land of Cush. The problem is that the land of Cush is generally identified as being in northern Africa (areas that today form Egypt, Ethiopia, etc.). The idea that a river could flow all the way from somewhere in Turkey, Iraq, or Iran all the way to the African continent is very difficult to believe, but biblically it is not likely that any other place can be identified as the land of Cush except for northern Africa. Although Cush originally came from the area of Mesopotamia, little reference is made to his presence there except to say that Cushites, people from the tribe of Cush, lived there at one time. But territories were generally named by the most dominant tribe who lived there, and that tribe had to be dominant for an extended

period of time in order for the place to be named after them. If Cush was the dominant tribe in Mesopotamia, why would they move all the way to what is now northern Africa? But if you consider the important position that Egypt would hold in God's plan for His people (both in their past and in their future) it's not hard to see why God might give that place the privilege of being watered by a river from the land of Eden. But that is just my personal speculation.

## MAN CAN REPRODUCE

God determined that Adam needed a companion, and He created one for him. In Hebrew a female is called *ishah*, and a male is called *ish*. The ending "-ah" means "out of," so *ishah* literally means "a man (or better, a human) out of man." *Ishah* is also the word for "wife." In verse 24 the concept of marriage is introduced, and the most important principle of marriage is that a man and his wife are to be considered one flesh. In God's eyes they are organically and spiritually interconnected: "This is why a man is to leave his father and mother and stick with his wife, and they are to be one flesh" (Gen. 2:24).

Humans are not to remain bonded to parents; rather, we are to bond with a spouse in a way that goes beyond even the physical connection we had at one time with our mothers. This is God's plan. One male and one female are to bond together in marriage as one flesh; not one male with one male or one female with another female. Every attempt to say that the Bible doesn't speak to this matter is blinded by agenda and terribly deceived. And we don't have to go any farther than the second chapter of Genesis to understand this basic principle of God:

*The man said, "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." (Gen. 2:23 NASB)*

There is a reason that a male and a female should form a couple, not just any two people (such as two men or two women). It is stated

right here: the reason is she “is bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh” . . . taken out of man. Male and female human beings literally began life on earth as one flesh; the act of marriage reunites them and essentially acts out this God principle. A wife cannot be anything but a woman, because her very title, *ishah*, means “out of man.” Another male wasn’t produced from Adam’s rib; man didn’t come out of man. It was a female. End of story.

## GENESIS 3

ASSIGNMENT: Read Genesis 3.

The great Jewish rabbis and sages of long ago point to something rather interesting in Genesis 3:1: “Now the serpent was more crafty than any wild animal which ADONAI, God, had made.”

Look carefully at the wording of the verses. Our English-language, Western-culture minds tend to add the word *other*, making the verse read “than any *other* wild animal.” But that’s not what the Scriptures say. Instead, the verse says, “than any wild animal.” Apparently the serpent was not even *categorized* as a wild animal; he was not just craftier than the wild animals—this being could talk! The serpent was unique, a living being separate and distinct but in a very negative way.

Did the spirit of Satan overtake and possess a poor, unwitting snake? Or was the snake a new physical form that Satan took on, different and apparently appealing; a form willed by his own doing in order to be visible so that he might communicate with Adam and Eve? Satan is able to counterfeit anything, and many of the ancient sages agree that the serpent could well have been Satan’s attempt to mimic God by creating life . . . counterfeit life. Apparently at first the serpent was even able to get around on legs, because we see one of the consequences that God cursed the serpent with was that he would have to crawl on his belly from that point onward.

Notice that the serpent was located inside the Garden of Eden, a holy place. This is one more example of the Garden (a physical, four-dimensional place) being a parallel of heaven (a nonphysical, spiritual place outside of our

four-dimensional universe). Even what went on in the Garden is a parallel of what went on in heaven. We know that Satan was at one time in heaven; he was a special spiritual being, the most beautiful spiritual creature there ever was, second only to God Himself. I don’t want to call him an angel because there are many other varieties of heavenly spirit beings besides angels. Cherubim and seraphim are spiritual beings, but they are *not* angels; they are different and even more powerful spirit beings than angels. Satan, called *Lucifer* (this Latinized word for “morning star” or “shining one” used in older Bible versions is rarely used now) when he resided in heaven, rebelled against God and was cast down to earth for that rebellion.<sup>18</sup> In the story of the serpent’s expulsion from the Garden we have essentially the same plot, only instead of it taking place in a spiritual setting (heaven), it occurs in a physical setting (the Garden of Eden). We have the serpent, a very special creature—different from all the other living creatures—walking upright in the Garden, living in the presence of God. Then he rebelled and his form changed and he was expelled from the Garden. This is a complete parallel of Lucifer being cast out of heaven. The Reality of Duality at work.



Satan began his onslaught by telling Adam and Eve that God was a liar.<sup>19</sup> In verse 4, after God had instructed Adam that if he ate from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil he would die: “The serpent said to the woman, ‘It is not true that you will surely die.’” As a result of such blasphemy, the serpent was cast out of the Garden. More than that, he was cast into the dust so that he must crawl on his belly. Satan was first cast out of a spiritual realm, heaven, and exiled to the physical realm, earth.<sup>20</sup> Next the serpent was cast out of the Garden and cursed to crawl on his belly in the *adam-ab*, the dust of the ground. Here is another exact parallel and another demonstration of the Reality of Duality: this event of Adam and Eve’s unauthorized eating from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil is what Christianity calls the fall of man or the fall from grace, or simply the Fall. Very interestingly, the Jewish rabbis of old look at this event with a little different slant.



*The Fall*, Hugo Van Der Goes, ca. 1470

## CHRISTIAN VERSUS JEWISH PERSPECTIVE

Evangelical Christians see the Fall as the event whereby man’s relationship to God was broken, and evil came alive in a way that had physical consequences as well as spiritual ones. It was that moment when sin didn’t just enter into the world; it became part of our human nature, part of our fiber and perhaps even our genetic material. As a result of our sin natures we die, not just physically, but spiritually and, therefore, eternally. We need a Savior, One who will deliver and rescue and restore us to a condition equal to what Adam was *before* he sinned.

On the other hand, the Jews see what happened in the Garden as a sort of liberation. That is, man was then given the ability and responsibility to make choices. Prior to Adam and Eve’s act of rebellion they simply did what God said, almost robotically in the view of many of the sages, because there was no other choice. Why? Because there existed *for Adam and Eve* nothing but good, and good was a single pathway laid out by God with no alternative. When the serpent introduced evil, mankind gained a kind of freedom; we could now choose for ourselves whether to love God and obey Him or to follow our own deceived ways and infected hearts to do as we wished. To a degree mankind could even choose how to follow God; that is, each could work out their own “salvation.”

As a result of this view, Jews have not anticipated a Savior who will restore individuals to a right relationship with God, nor has it been about having our sin natures destroyed and our being re-created with a new nature. For the Hebrews, a Savior or Messiah has always been one who will make the Hebrews the dominant world culture. This is a culture defined by God, lived out as the kingdom of God, that revolves around the ways of the one true God that are taught in the Torah. Salvation is more or less a national issue, and the Savior will be the national leader of the cause. This Savior would necessarily be a human. In fact, he’d be an

offspring of the greatest warrior-king Israel ever had: King David. It's no wonder that relatively few Hebrews accept Yeshua as their Messiah, because He simply doesn't fit the mold *or the purpose* that the ancient sages built for the Messiah.

## GOD'S PHYSICAL NATURE

Was God actually physically walking in the Garden of Eden? Better yet, does God have any of the physical human characteristics that allow Him to jump for joy, weep bitter tears, swing a sword, or complete any other actions that we recognize as needing a physical body to perform? What are we to make of words like these that are used so often in the Bible?

In general, Evangelical Christians have a ready answer every time a physical attribute of God is spoken of; we say it must have been Jesus. Perhaps, if one reads only the NT and ignores the OT, Jesus would be a logical, though not entirely satisfactory, answer.

The Jews have alternative points of view as to what these human emotions and physical characteristics ascribed to God indicate.<sup>21</sup> While there is no single Jewish point of view on much of anything (any more than there is a single Christian viewpoint), the following position is of general agreement among rabbis and Jewish sages, with only a minority of dissenters.

Maimonides was perhaps one of the greatest and most revered Jewish scholars of all time. He lived in the twelfth century AD. He proposed:

*Since matters concerning bodily experience are such, then all words connected to this mentioned in the Torah and the Prophets are all exemplary and figures of speech. Examples of this are: "He who sits in the heavens laughs," and ". . . that they provoked Me<sup>22</sup> to anger," and ". . . that as the Lord rejoiced," et cetera. The Sages said that the Torah is phrased in our terms. In Jeremiah 7:9 it says, "Do they provoke me to anger?," whereas in Malachi 3:6 it says, "For I am the Lord, I do not change." If God [really] was sometimes angry and sometimes joyful, then He would be changing. Such characteristics are found only in the dark and gloomy*

*[existence of having a] body, which lives in huts of mud and which was created from dust, but God is higher and raised above all this.<sup>23</sup>*

He continued in another commentary:

*These phrases are in line with the level of understanding of people [humans], who can only comprehend physical existence [the four dimensions of our universe], and the Torah speaks in terms that we can understand. . . . For example, when it says, "If I whet My glittering sword," does God really have a sword and does He really kill with one?! Such phrases are figurative.<sup>24</sup>*

I'll let you wrestle with that for yourselves. In doing this, let me emphasize that similes, metaphors, personification, hyperbole, and other figures of speech are important—and honest—ways of communicating real information, especially when descriptive word choices are limited. A clear example of this is when the Messiah told Nicodemus that he needed to be "born again," and the learned Pharisee was confused when he took the Messiah's words too literally.<sup>25</sup> Even so, we should be careful not to ascribe to God *our* human attributes. God is not a man; He is a spirit. Yet how else is a being so far above us, who operates outside of our realm of time and space, supposed to communicate with us if it's not in our terms?

## PHYSICAL REALITIES OF YESHUA

Yeshua, Jesus, was God, and He was certainly a physical being: that is, He was God with human attributes. But Jesus was also a real, flesh-and-blood man, born from a specific woman, Mary, who had come from the line of King David. Although Christ's Father was God, Christ was 100 percent human and 100 percent God. He wasn't part man and part God, nor was He sometimes man and at other times God. Even though this is something we can't quite get our minds to picture or comprehend, it's true. This is just one of those mysteries that are not explainable in terms that a human can

comprehend. It's a God thing, and the Bible is chock full of these difficult God things.

## OUR DESIRE FOR KNOWLEDGE

The Midrash Rabba (an ancient Jewish commentary on Scripture, not Scripture itself) makes a very interesting point in its connection between the words of King Solomon and the forbidden fruit in Genesis. In Ecclesiastes 1:18, Solomon warns us, "Because in much wisdom there is much grief, and increasing knowledge results in increasing pain" (NASB).

Likewise, In Genesis 3:6, Havah<sup>26</sup> discloses that there were three things about that tree that caused an irresistible urge to well up in her: (1) the fruit on it apparently looked delicious to eat, (2) the tree itself was beautiful, and (3) partaking of the tree would *make one wise*. That is, what she was seeking *most* was wisdom. Look at the name of the tree: the Tree of the *Knowledge* of Good and Evil. Her act was largely about acquiring knowledge. As we grow older, we find Solomon's statement to be true: the more you know, the more you wish you didn't know.

When we talk about seeing life through the eyes of a child, we mean that most children have not yet learned about the bad things of life. Children are idealistic, and they have not yet learned that people don't always do what they promise to do. Or that some people for no discernible reason will hurt you; some may even take your life and freedom from you. We call this the innocence of childhood. How is that innocence eventually taken from them? Knowledge. So knowledge and wisdom bring a set of problems, yet it is a human desire, one Eve had, to seek knowledge and wisdom.

Can we accept that all knowledge is not good for us? Apparently not, because humans seem to have an insatiable appetite for it. There is knowledge that humans (at least those humans who don't have God's spirit in them) cannot handle or properly discern. It is said that we are in the Information Age and have been for

at least twenty-five years. Is the world a better place because of all this knowledge? Or does all of this information, available at our fingertips, seem to produce as much evil as good? Are our lives more peaceful and meaningful because of this vast expansion of knowledge?

The Midrash Rabbah goes on to explain that there was another fundamental at work in the story of mankind's fall: Havah distorted God's instructions to her husband, Adam, or Adam added to God's command about not eating from the forbidden fruit when he instructed Havah. In Genesis 2:17, we see God say to Adam:

*But from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die. (NASB)*

But when the serpent asked Havah why it was she was prohibited from eating of that particular tree, she responded in Genesis 3:3 with:

*But from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, "You shall not eat from it or touch it, or you will die." (NASB, emphasis mine)*

Where did the notion of "you can't touch it" come from? Somebody (either Adam or Havah) added it to God's decree. In its commentary on Proverbs 30:6, the Midrash points out the dangers of adding to God's Word, quoting the Scriptures: "Do not add to His words or He will reprove you, and you will be proved a liar" (NASB). This is exactly the situation here with Eve, or both Adam and Eve, because some words were added and it proved them to be liars.

Man has a real tendency to add to God's Word even more than to subtract from it. And the old serpent knew the instant Havah (or perhaps Adam) lied by embellishing what God's instruction actually was that he had them in his grasp. It is really dicey to add to God's Word. The Hebrews did it and continue to do it. The church does it every day. And it has all come to no good.

## UNDERSTANDING GOD'S MESSAGE

In Genesis 3:15 we get a very prophetic, messianic (and if we're honest, also very vague) statement:

*And I will put enmity  
Between you and the woman,  
And between your seed and her seed;  
He shall bruise you on the head,  
And you shall bruise him on the heel. (NASB)*

Here we have, so very early in the Bible, just a peek at God's plan for restoring humanity to Himself. For those in Moses's or David's day, it would be difficult to see it as a messianic prophecy of deliverance; rather, it's likely they just saw it as confusing. It's significantly easier in hindsight, with Messiah having come and gone, to recognize these and other verses of the Old Testament for what they are: a prophecy of the coming of our Redeemer. Sometimes we like to criticize the early Hebrews for not understanding God's plan, but it is absolutely typical of man, then and now, to believe God only after the fact. No matter how many prophets God sent to Israel, few Israelites ever believed what those men had to say (and the consequences were terrible).

Look at Yeshua's church today. The Lord has told us unequivocally that when Israel returns as a nation and Jerusalem is retaken from the Gentiles (both events that have occurred recently, from a historical standpoint) that is the sign that we are living in the last of the last days. We are told that Jerusalem and the land of Israel will become a "cup of trembling"<sup>27</sup> for the whole world, and it most certainly has become exactly that. When in all of history was Jerusalem at any other time a cause for *anybody* but the Israelites to tremble in fear? Oh, the Jews aggravated the daylighters out of the Babylonians, the Greeks, the Egyptians, and the Romans, but never was Jerusalem the center of the world or a place in which events could destabilize the globe. But it most certainly has become that way in the last fifty years.



Common sights in the Holy Land

We are told that when we see all these things happening, we are to look up, for our salvation and the end of the world as we know it are near. We have watched these events unfold before our very eyes; we have been forewarned in our own Holy Scriptures that this time in history would come, and yet only a relative few within Christ's ecclesia have paid much attention. Let us vow not to be blind any longer to the incredible time in which we live, nor be oblivious to what it means, nor passive in how we should respond. In general, when we turn a blind or disinterested eye toward these events, we're behaving just like the Hebrews of old when YHWH (God) forewarned them of what was coming and they just sniffed at it and went on about their lives as usual. The results were devastating for millions of Israelites then, and they will be for us now if we continue to ignore the signs.

### THE NEED FOR COVERING REQUIRES THE SHEDDING OF BLOOD

In Genesis 3:24, God made animal-skin clothing for Adam and Eve. They had already made clothing out of vegetation that covered them, but apparently it wasn't good enough as far as God was concerned. This was because Adam and Eve made their own coverings, and not God. As this covering represented the spiritual covering we must receive from God, God was not satisfied because man cannot create his own covering for sin. This is the first blood sacrifice



in the Bible. It seems there had been no death in the Garden until then, and the animals whose skin was used to clothe Adam and Havah didn't die from old age; they had to be killed. This is another fundamental God principle that we *must* pay attention to: the only suitable payment for sin is the shedding of innocent blood. God had to let one of His own created and *innocent* creatures die to pay for Adam and Eve's rebellion. Living creatures, created from the same dust of the earth as humans, given animation and life from God's own breath, are now having to forfeit their lives in order to atone for the rebelliousness of human beings so that humans can have *some* relationship with God (although not to the extent that Adam and Havah originally did).



The covering of leaves was not sufficient in God's eyes.

### VEGETARIANS

In the context of the Garden of Eden vegetarian diets are implied. Therefore, previously single-celled life, plants, or even animal life had been part of the food cycle or experienced death on other parts of the planet. See, for example, Psalm 104, where a good God is praised for providing food for the carnivores, and animal death is mentioned and assumed to be part of God's natural way.

We hear the term *covering* in this vein: shed blood was a covering for man's sin. The notion of blood being a covering comes from those animals' skins that "covered" Adam's and Eve's nakedness, their sin of stealing from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

### WHERE DID SIN COME FROM?

When Havah lied (or repeated Adam's lie) and told the serpent that she was not allowed to even *touch* the tree, she had not yet eaten the fruit. She had not yet gained the knowledge of good and evil. Where did this notion to lie come from if the fall of man, the eating of that fruit, had not yet occurred?

The ancient Hebrew sages' take on this is that God created man with both a good and an evil side to him; they call it a good and an evil inclination. In Hebrew the phrases are *yetzer hatov* and *yetzer harah*—the good (tov) inclination and the evil (rah) inclination. So according to this view, Havah or Adam (or both) were just acting out their inherent evil inclinations when they (first) added to God's command by including the words "and not to touch it" and then (second) when they deliberately disobeyed His command by eating the fruit that God had unambiguously told them not to. Havah tried to defect blame and say the serpent "tricked her," but was that really the case? All the serpent did at first was ask a question, and Havah's response was not truth. Once she told a lie, the gate was open and the devil took her to the next step . . . disobedience.

This really stings most Christian doctrine on the subject of evil and the fall of man, but it is hard not to see that the Hebrew sages have a point at the least. After all, if God created everything, and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil was His creation (put by Him into the Garden that He created), then evil must have predated mankind. Did evil just self-generate? Did evil just appear from nowhere? Or was evil actually part of Creation? We're not going to debate that headache-producing subject today,

but we will look more closely at the subject of good and evil when we get to Genesis 6. If we are honest about what Scripture tells us (and what it does *not* tell us), then the preexistence of evil cannot be taken as a simple, cut-and-dried, easy-on-our-consciences, doctrinized matter.

## CONSEQUENCES OF EVIL

In Genesis 3:22 we get another piece to the puzzle of just who God is and what His attributes consist of:

*Then the LORD God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever." (NASB, emphasis mine)*

This statement corresponds with another back in Genesis 1:26:

*Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." (NASB, emphasis mine)<sup>28</sup>*

Adam and Eve have been removed from the holy Garden of Eden. Mankind was now separated from God, both physically and spiritually. God put an angelic guard on the approach to



the Tree of Life to keep Adam and Eve away from it since they had already proven that they were not trustworthy. God couldn't allow them near it; in fact, they couldn't even be allowed inside the Garden anymore. God cannot allow uncleanness and sin anywhere near His perfect holiness, so He placed his angelic guard at the eastern part of the Garden. Apparently there was an entrance into the Garden from the east. So we now have the Garden in the eastern part of the land of Eden, and the angel placed in the east end of the Garden. We'll see more about the east as we move along.

## GENESIS 4

ASSIGNMENT: Read Genesis 4.

Cain and Abel were the sons of Adam and Havah. Their story is the first recorded murder in the Bible. By now there were many inhabitants on earth, so this may not have been the first killing of a human, but it is the first in Scripture. Their feud started with sacrifices—one that God accepted (an animal) and one He rejected (food from the earth). Here again we see that God reinforces the fundamental idea that only innocent blood is suitable for atonement.

Hebrew names have great significance; the ancients tended to name their children after an event, attribute, or hope that was significant to the family. These names give us insight into the mind-set of the parents and the events that were shaping their lives. To be clear, Cain was not a Hebrew; it would be hundreds of years after the forthcoming Great Flood before the first “Hebrew” would come to exist. What we’re talking about here is the forerunner of the Hebrew *language* (Akkadian), not the Hebrew *race*.

*Kayin*, Hebrew for Cain, meant “acquired from God.” Kayin was probably Adam and Havah’s first child. Havah, Eve, appears to have concluded that her firstborn would fulfill the promise that her seed would bruise the head of the serpent because Kayin was a male, and because she gave him this name. There is one more piece of information given about Kayin, and that is that he was a farmer.

Next to be born was *Hevel*, Hebrew for Abel. Hevel was a shepherd. There is some disagreement as to the significance of this name. Some scholars say we can deduce no meaning from

it, but others suggest that *Abel* is taken from the Hebrew word *hebel*, which means “breath” or “vapor.” It carries with it a sense of being transitory—here for a moment and then gone. We are told precious little about either brother, but we do know that there was a time at which they were summoned by God to present a sacrifice, an offering, to Him. As there was no sense of surprise or unexpectedness in Genesis 4:3, bringing a sacrifice to the Lord was probably a regular event. This most definitely was *not* the first time a sacrifice for the Lord had taken place. It is likely the altar where the sacrifice occurred was located at the entry to the Garden of Eden, because they would not have been allowed into the area where God dwelled, the Garden.



Abel makes his sacrifice before God

We're told that God accepted the offering of a slain firstborn sheep from Abel, but He rejected the plants that Cain brought. The question here, of course, is why did God rebuff Kayin's offering? There are a couple of very likely possibilities: First, the particular *kind* of sacrifice being made was either a burnt offering or a purification offering (in Hebrew, an '*Olah* or *Hata'at* respectively). The only suitable offering before God for either of these two types of sacrifice was life, innocent animal life, which is exactly what we're told Hevel brought as his offering. The rituals and requirements for sacrificing established in later times in Leviticus were not involved; this was a simpler and more straightforward act. There is no mention of a mediator or a priest. Nevertheless, these two brothers would have known full well what God expected of them, for they had grown up with it. Long before these two were born God had given their parents that command and instruction by way of the animal skins He required Adam and Havah to wear for clothing, for a covering. They were reminded of it twenty-four hours a day.



The price of sin is always death.

The produce that Kayin brought from the field was ordinary. "In the course of time Kayin brought an offering to ADONAI from the produce of the soil" (Gen. 4:3). There is no mention of Kayin's sacrifice being firstfruits or the best of the field or anything that would set it apart from other produce, but Abel's sacrifice was the firstborn male animal, a more valuable gift. The sages don't fully agree on the nature of the defect of Kayin's offering: Some say he shouldn't have brought plant life at all, that it should have been an animal. Others say that the problem was the haughty, nonrepentant attitude he brought his offering with (which is not really described at all in the Scripture). Still others cite what we just discussed, that it was just ordinary produce and not the best, which is a must if it's to be offered to God.

Let's remember that at this time man was to eat only plants, not animals. Therefore, the purpose for sheep in this era was not for meat but only for sacrifice and clothing. The animals Hevel was producing could have served no other purpose than as a service to God and for wool or skins for clothing and perhaps tents. We can combine these two purposes under one title: "covering." Do you see this? The sheep, the lamb, was to provide covering (clothing) for man's physical nakedness, but it was also to provide covering (its own innocent blood) for man's spiritual nakedness, his sin. But it was not meant for man's nourishment.

## CONSEQUENCE OF SIN

The first humans and their first children at the very beginning of life on this planet were shown by God Himself that the consequence of sin carries a high price, and that price is death. In His great mercy, God decided to allow the blood of innocent animals to cover man's sins for a time. This was simply a cover because the sin was still there; it was just covered up in the same way that a garment covers the human form. In the end, our clothing is simply a means to disguise our nakedness. Under that disguise

of cloth, our nakedness, like our sin, is still there. For centuries God provided a divinely acceptable but contrived covering for the sin of those who placed their trust in Him, and this was the blood of animals. The blood would serve a spiritual purpose (atonement for sin), and the skin of the animal would serve a physical purpose (covering the naked bodies of humans). This provided a wonderful illustration of what was happening invisibly in the spiritual world to compensate for man's sinful behavior. The Reality of Duality is at work again! But in the course of time, as God allowed His plan of redemption to gestate, Christ would change all that. Unlike the blood of sacrificial animals, the Messiah's blood didn't simply cover sin, it nullified and erased its *eternal consequences*.

## BANISHMENT

At this time the earth's first family was still living in Eden—the land of Eden, not the Garden. Eden was a special place, made for God's people. God decided to banish Cain from Eden for shedding his brother's blood, and the Lord sent him to the east to a land called Nod.<sup>29</sup> Kayin married, had children, and many descendants followed over the years; he even built a city.



The red star indicates the location of Nod, west of the Garden of Eden.

After Kayin's crime, God put a sign on him to indicate that no one was to harm him:

*Kayin said to ADONAI, "My punishment is greater than I can bear. You are banning me today from the land and from your presence. I will be a fugitive wandering the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me." ADONAI answered him, "Therefore, whoever kills Kayin will receive vengeance sevenfold," and ADONAI put a sign on Kayin, so that no one who found him would kill him. (Gen. 4:13–15)*

There is some interesting commentary from the ancient sages about this. First, the word usually translated as "no one" or "anyone" is in Hebrew *Kol*. *Kol* can mean "anyone," but it just as often can mean "whatsoever," "anything," or "all things." So Kayin was not necessarily being protected from only humans. Some of the commentaries say that the animals might have been his greatest worry, but it is primarily those commentators who say that other than for Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, and probably an unmentioned sister or two, there were no other people on the earth yet. That is a pretty big stretch; there is little doubt that there were many people by now. You'll notice that we go quite a time before there is mention of another female besides Havah in the Bible, and this is simply because of the patriarchal nature of the Bible. Because all genealogy and family ties were tracked through relationship to the father, the listing of generations only rarely includes a female name. But then as now, there were undoubtedly more women born than men.

Another interesting perspective from an ancient rabbi concerning this passage is that it wasn't that a sign was put *onto* Kayin; it was that *he* was a sign. His life was a sign for all to see that anyone who committed "blood guilt" (in this case, murder) would be banished from the land and forced to go away to sanctuary. In fact, this concept of providing a place of sanctuary and protection for a person who killed someone justifiably or accidentally which God's people adopted when they entered Canaan, is said by

some scholars to have been modeled after the consequences that Kayin bore. This theory is not true; Kayin committed murder (unjustifiable homicide), and no sanctuary is permitted for that offense.

What we see as a result of this story is that from here on Cain (Kayin) will be associated with evil and wickedness. The symbolism here is clear. Verse 16 says: “So Kayin left the presence of ADONAI and lived in the land of Nod [wandering], east of ‘Eden.” This is an example of a statement in the Bible that is simultaneously literal *and* symbolic. Indeed, Cain was literally sent away from Eden and lived in a land called “wandering” or “restlessness”; he was sent away from the presence of God. When we are separated from God we find ourselves in a state of symbolic wandering and unrest. Apart from God, we live a hopeless and meaningless existence, in a constant directionless state. The only rest that exists for humanity is when we are in God’s presence.

### CAIN’S DESCENDANTS

Cain was the head of a line of wicked people who turned their backs on God. We are introduced to the fifth generation from Cain in a man named Lamech. Lamech was far removed from God, and he (as had Kayin and many others) broke God’s instruction about the institution of marriage—that a man and a woman should be joined as one flesh. Lamech was greedy and took *two* wives. And then the proud, rebellious man boasted to them:

*Lemekh said to his wives, “Adah and Tzilah, listen to me; wives of Lemekh, hear what I say: I killed a man for wounding me, a young man who injured me. If Kayin will be avenged sevenfold, then Lemekh seventy-sevenfold!” (Gen. 4:23–24)*

Lamech admits to murder. The line of Kayin (Cain) was thoroughly wicked, godless, and corrupted, and this in but a few generations after the first man was created. Not that long before humans were living in the Garden of Eden in the very presence of God. This same pattern emerged many years later after the Great Flood when Noah, the second Adam, repopulated the earth. Amazingly, wickedness reappeared almost immediately. Interestingly, that won’t be the last time history repeats itself in that way; when Christ comes the second time<sup>30</sup> and cleanses the whole world and sets up His perfect kingdom for a thousand years, toward the end of that millennium people will once again display wickedness and rebel against Messiah. And they will be destroyed completely, along with Satan, the entire evil spiritual world, and even evil itself. Only then will that pattern (that cycle of evil) finally be broken once and forever.

### THE BIRTH OF SHET

The all-merciful God then gave Eve another child who was, in her view, a replacement for the dead Abel. This new child was named *Shet*, Hebrew for Seth. *Shet* means “compensation” or “granted,” as in a prayer or hope that has been granted. As we move along in our study we will see that Shet was regarded as the line of good, as opposed to his banished brother Kayin, who represented the line of evil. Whereas Cain and his descendants wandered further and further away from God, we are told in verse 26 that through Seth “people began to call on the name of ADONAI” (*ADONAI* is Hebrew for “lord or master”). In other words, Seth led people to look to God for direction and they also offered Adonai their praise and worship. So the dynamic is now established: the descendants of Shet, or Seth, were the line of good, but the descendants of Kayin (Cain) were the line of evil.

## GENESIS 5

ASSIGNMENT: Read Genesis 5.

*Here is the genealogy of Adam. On the day that God created man he made him in the likeness of God; he created them male and female; he blessed them and called them Adam [humankind, man] on the day they were created. After Adam lived 130 years he fathered a son like himself and named him Shet. After Shet was born, Adam lived another 800 years and had both sons and daughters. In all, Adam lived 930 years, and then he died. Shet lived 105 years and fathered Enosh. After Enosh was born, Shet lived another 807 years and had sons and daughters. In all, Shet lived 912 years; then he died. . . . Metushelach lived 187 years and fathered Lemekh. After Lemekh was born, Metushelach lived 782 years and had sons and daughters. In all, Metushelach lived 969 years; then he died. Lemekh lived 182 years and fathered a son, whom he called Noah [restful]; for he said, "This one will comfort us in our labor, in the hard work we do with our hands [to get what comes] from the ground that ADONAI cursed." After Noah was born, Lemekh lived 595 years and had sons and daughters. In all, Lemekh lived 777 years; then he died. Noah was 500 years old; and Noah fathered Shem, Ham and Yefet. (Gen. 5:1–8, 25–32)*

This is the genealogy of Shet, or Seth. This was the line of good people, the people of faith. Adam was 130 years old when Shet was born. We don't know how old he was when Kayin was born, but likely he was quite young. Remember that Adam and Havah were created as physically mature humans who could have procreated almost immediately and likely did. In fact, even though Kayin was mentioned first, that doesn't necessarily indicate that he was Adam and Eve's very first child, but he probably was the

"firstborn." In biblical terms, *firstborn* denotes status, so the firstborn is *always* male. Think of a family with ten children: the first nine are girls and the tenth is a son. The son, as the first male child to be born in the family, would be given the status of "the firstborn." So Adam and Eve could have had girl children before Kayin was born, and, given the circumstances, it is likely they did.

Let's take a look at those "circumstances." Any farmer or rancher knows that the way to increase your flocks or herds is to have a large number of females to each male. One male can impregnate many females, but a female can only carry a small number of offspring (in humans, usually one) at a time. It is of little help to have a large number of males and a small number of females. It is logical and reasonable to consider that the number of female humans was likely several times that of male humans, especially early on. God was intent on man rapidly populating the earth, and since He was no longer creating humans one-by-one from the dust of the earth but instead was allowing the reproductive capabilities that He had built into them to do the job, many females would achieve a more rapid population growth.

So it is certain that Eve was a baby mill and that her daughters were baby mills and that their daughters were baby mills and so on. There is nothing in the Bible to indicate that the age of sexual maturity in women occurred any earlier than it does today, but there is every indication that for hundreds of years the age at which women were still giving birth was much older than today. Biblically it would appear that it was quite usual for a fifteen-year-old girl to be married and have her first child, even in Yeshua's day. So a new generation was starting

### REPETITION OF NAMES IN THE BIBLE

Notice that Noah (Noah) was in Shet's line. Notice also that Noah's father's name was Lamech. This is *not* the same Lamech who was the fifth in line from Cain. Just like today when there are thousands, if not millions, of people who have the same name (Fred, Rebecca, Kathy, Elizabeth), so it was then. Many people had the same name, so we have to be careful as we read the Bible not to mix up people simply because they bore the same name.

about every fifteen years. When we realize that Adam was 130 years old when Shet was born, it is probable that at least seven or eight generations of people already existed. By the time of Abraham, however, things had leveled out a bit and the human life span and the span of human reproductive capability was much the same as it is today.<sup>31</sup>

Finally, people lived much longer in the beginning of mankind than they do now. I have heard many fascinating scientific reasons why that was possible or why it was impossible and a fairy tale, but it doesn't matter. These are the stories of real people who actually lived that many hundreds of years. This is not symbolism;

it is literal. There may well be significance in the precise number of years that some people lived, that is, in the number itself. For instance, Enoch lived 365 years, the same number of days in a solar year. Noah's father lived 777 years, and we recognize seven as the number of completeness. As we go along we will see that there are several numbers that have special significance, many of which we are already familiar with: the number seven, the number twelve, and of course, the infamous six-six-six.

This chapter ends with the birth of the three sons of Noah, who would repopulate the earth after the Great Flood. Even though we're told that Noah was five hundred years old when he fathered these sons, he was probably not *precisely* five hundred years old, because unless these boys were triplets or came from three different mothers, they would have spanned at least twenty-seven months. But more important, Noah didn't have his first children on his five-hundredth birthday. He must have contributed greatly to the world's population by then; his own offspring accounted for a fair share of those people whom the Lord called thoroughly wicked. Yet God set these three sons apart—divided, elected, and separated them—from all of Noah's other offspring to become the surviving gene pool for all post-Flood humanity, including us.



## GENESIS 6

ASSIGNMENT: Read Genesis 6:1–14

The first few verses of this chapter contain some information that is among the most mysterious and troubling in the entire Old Testament:

*In time, when men began to multiply on earth, and daughters were born to them, the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were attractive; and they took wives for themselves, whomever they chose. (Gen. 6:1–2)*

## N'FILIM

It concerns the statement that the “sons of God” saw that the “daughters of men” were attractive, they took them as wives, and the children born of those unions were different, as were their fathers different, these sons of God. “Sons of God” in Hebrew is *Benei Elohim*, and we’ll see other references to these mysterious Benei Elohim in later parts of the Bible. They were some type of high-ranking spiritual being. They would not be classified as angels, but we are told that Benei Elohim were given charge over all the nations of the earth. We run into one of these Benei Elohim who is called the Prince of Persia in the book of Daniel. The Bible gives us a special name for the offspring of these hybrid people: *N’filim*.<sup>32</sup>

The King James Bible and many other Bible translations have translated *N’filim* to mean “giants” (as in “fee-fie-foe-fum” giants). The Greek Septuagint, developed in 250 BC, first took the Hebrew word *N’filim* and translated it to the Greek word *gigante*. In Hebrew, however, *N’filim* is a play on the root word *nephal*, which

means “fallen” or “to fall upon.” It certainly has no sense of beings of a very large size. Rather, the sense of the word is “to cease or to die,” “to be cast down into the earth (like a grave).” It was even used to describe abortion or to indicate that something was dead and rotting. Martin Luther described the N’filim as men of violence, tyrants. The N’filim were a race of something different and apart of anything else on earth, and it was an evil kind of difference. It is as though the N’filim were some type of mutants or aberrations that became endowed with power. They represented a joining together of the worst of the spiritual world with the worst of the physical world.



*Fall of the Rebel Angels,*  
artist unknown

## SONS OF GOD

So who were these “sons of God”? Many Bible scholars have taken this to mean fallen angels. It’s easy to see how that conclusion could be arrived at when “fallen” or “cast down” is one sense of the word describing their offspring, N’filim. Add to that the heavenly or spiritual sense of “sons of God,” and you get the idea that fallen angels took on human male form (complete with reproductive organs), mated with human women, and produced a race of giants called N’filim. The problem is, the ancient Hebrews never dreamed of this interpretation. Rather, they knew that “sons of God” was simply a designation that referred to the line of Seth—faithful, godly men. Conversely, the women (“daughters of men”) were representatives of the line of Cain, those who fell away from God.

According to the ancient Hebrew sages, up to this time the faithful line of Seth had stayed separate from the wicked line of Cain. But eventually, men from the line of Seth lusted after these beautiful women of Cain, and . . . there went the neighborhood! Now, the whole human race was fouled and polluted with evil.

This separation of the line of Cain from the line of Seth is seen by the Hebrew sages as a “type.” In other words, it’s one of the underlying fundamental principles we see played out over and over again in the Bible. A long time into the future, when God would take the Israelites out of Egypt, give them the Torah, and lead them through the desert wilderness, He did so with the instruction to be separated from the world.<sup>33</sup> He separated Israel from all other peoples of the world to be a nation of priests to Him, to be a faithful people to God. All the other peoples of the world, everyone other than Israelites, were given a title: *goyim*. Gentiles. The Israelites were a people holy to God; everyone else wasn’t. And in the same way so was the line of Cain separated from the line of Seth long before the Israelites ever existed.

Whether the N’filim were the result of the mixing of two lines of humans or the mixing

of humans with spiritual beings, the result of all this was that a race of people bedeviled their culture and were able, at times, to dominate at will. Apparently they were bigger, stronger, and smarter, and they were the subjects of many ancient pagan myths. Legends of fierce warriors and leaders who seemed to have superhuman qualities permeated this culture. Were they actually giants? Only by the most vague suggestion. More and more scholars are coming to the conclusion that these were a people who, in one way or another, turned themselves over to Satan and gained great power in doing so. When we read the descriptions of the Antichrist in the New Testament and get a picture of how this person will be incredibly charismatic, intelligent, cunning, and one step ahead of everybody else, we find out Satan is the source of his power.

No matter whether the N’filim’s existence came from fallen sons of God (Benei Elohim)<sup>34</sup> or from fallen man, the true source of their power was evil. Even the coming Flood would not be the end of it. I think we’re going to eventually see that while the N’filim were literal and real, they eventually came to represent a “type”; that is, before the Flood they were likely a real race of people, but after the Flood, when they no longer existed, N’filim was a name for other peoples with similar attributes. N’filim are mentioned later in Genesis after the Great Flood, again in Numbers, and also in Deuteronomy. These post-Flood “types” of N’filim are given a

### MODERN-DAY N’FILIM

Satan has, no doubt, been the source of power for many a world dictator. Hitler convinced an entire nation (that generally identified itself as Christian) that it was their duty to rule the world and to rid it of the Jews, “Christ killers” as he commonly labeled them. He confounded the world with his battle strategies, and we were within an eyelash of seeing him realize his evil dream. Hitler could well be categorized as a type of modern-day N’filim.

number of names, including the *R'phaim*, *Emim*, *Anakim*, *Horim*, and more. It is likely that the giant Goliath, who was slain by David, was of the Anakim because Goliath was from Gath, a village where the Anakim were reported to have ruled.<sup>35</sup> It is interesting that the Anakim and the Philistines occupied the same territory.

As time passes, a reality can become distorted and turned into legend. The language of the Bible is not immune to that phenomenon, because even though the Bible is divine truth, it is told through the lives and events of real people, and people can develop flawed mental pictures and misconceptions of what was at one time a very unambiguous truth. In the episodes in the Scriptures that took place hundreds of years after the original race of the N'filim died out, the name for these strange beings was used as a general term to describe someone—or some group of people—who had certain characteristics that were deemed evil. Maybe they were physically larger than others and therefore menacing, or they were the fiercest of warriors, and so on. For example, even in Christ's day, long after the Canaanites of old were gone, the term *Canaanite* was still used. That is, while no living Israelite knew a real Canaanite, they remembered the Canaanites to be idol worshippers and child sacrificers, everything that Israel detested. So *Canaanite* came to be used as a type of cussword, so to speak, usually referring to a person who was disapproved of. Often it was in reference to a merchant who cheated or a man who didn't practice his Judaism to the satisfaction of the more pious folks. I can recall the time when a person was called "a Communist" if you didn't like them. It wasn't that they *actually* belonged to the Communist Party; it was just kind of the politically current four-letter word of the day. Since Communism was public enemy number one all through the '50s, '60s, and into the '70s, *communist* was a generally derogatory term and a label that no one wanted. This same sense of usage occurred with the word *Canaanite* and likely with *N'filim*.

In contrast, Hebrew sages and rabbis wove the legends of the N'filim into their tradition

(the Talmud), particularly the traditions concerning angels and the world of evil spirits. So as far as they are concerned, these N'filim were real not only before the Flood but also after. According to them, the N'filim should always be taken in the most literal and real sense, not as types or as epithets.

## THE RUACH HAKODESH

Genesis 6:3 speaks about God's spirit, the Holy Spirit, the *Ruach HaKodesh* not striving with man forever: "ADONAI said, 'My Spirit will not live in human beings forever, for they too are flesh; therefore their life span is to be 120 years.'"

To the sages this was very straightforward: God is spirit, and so He is essentially speaking of Himself when He speaks of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is that component or person or attribute of God that we call Spirit. In Hebrew the word *ruach* (spirit) is the means that God uses to deal between Himself and man. What Genesis 6:3 alludes to is that God decided to give man 120 more years to straighten up and fly right before He would destroy him with a Great Flood. This was a warning.

Yet, in later times, many Hebrew and Christian scholars have insisted that the plain wording of these verses meant that men were going to be given an approximate maximum life span of 120 years. If they're correct, the number of *extreme* exceptions to that rule is significant. We're told in the Scriptures that after the Flood many generations of men (descendants of Noach) lived to be several hundreds of years old, so certainly man's life span was more than 120 years. And we also know from a historical standpoint that life spans varied from century to century, from culture to culture, and from circumstance to circumstance.

Since this remark about life span is a general statement that makes no distinction between righteous people and wicked people or between God's people and people that are not His, I think this statement about 120 years was a duality. It was not only about how long the human

body was designed to live, it was also about God pronouncing that the Flood would commence in 120 more years, wiping out all mankind . . . except Noah and his family.

## GOD PROTECTS THE GODLY

With this act, God established another fundamental that we all need to be *thrilled* about: He does not destroy the faithful and the godly along with the wicked and the godless. We should not confuse the concept of God pouring out His wrath with the phenomenon of bad things happening to good (or bad) people. God most certainly *does* allow this natural world to affect both the godly and the godless in helpful and harmful ways. God most certainly *does* allow the wickedness of evil men to befall the godly and the godless. God does not promise to *shelter* the godly from persecution by the godless or the wicked. But all these things come from the hand of man, not from Him. They are from the evil one or from man's own evil inclination.

God does promise not to shower *His own* wrath, His divine judgment, upon the godly right along with the godless. Do you see the difference? This is especially important to grasp as we consider end-time events, because the Tribulation is different from God's Wrath. Tribulation (or the Tribulation period) is when men will pour out evil upon other men at an unprecedented level. In contrast, God's wrath is divine calamity brought about supernaturally.

As an example of this, God had Noah build an ark—a God-designed safe haven for Noah and his family—so that the righteous would survive the supernatural wrath He was about to wreak on the whole planet. This ark would allow the righteous to live while the wicked perished. Noah must have been ridiculed for building this 450-foot-long monstrosity. To start with, there is no indication that Noah lived anywhere near a substantial body of water. What he did was similar to building an ocean liner behind a barn in the middle of the Nebraska wheat fields. Nevertheless: “This



The ark was a safe haven for God's righteous.

is what Noah did; he did all that God ordered him to do” (Gen. 6:22). And it saved his life . . . that, and the lives of all his family.

## GOD DESIRES HIS PEOPLE TO BE RIGHTEOUS

*Here is the history of Noah. In his generation, Noah was a man righteous [tzaddik] and wholehearted [tammim]; Noah walked with God. (Gen. 6:9)*

In Genesis 6:9 we're told that Noah was *tzaddik*, Hebrew for “righteous.” But even more, he was *tammim*, which is usually translated as “blameless” or “wholehearted.” While there is nothing wrong with that translation, it obscures something that is learned in a progressive way throughout the Torah. When we get to Leviticus, we're going to find out that much of what the Torah is teaching Israel is about holiness, and one of the chief attributes of holiness is wholeness. Completeness. Nothing lacking. What this verse is telling us is that Noah was *tzaddik* (righteous) and *tammim* (whole).

In contrast to Noah's righteousness, we see the condition of the rest of God's creation:

## SHEM'S LEGACY

Of Noah's three sons—Ham, Yefet, and Shem—Shem will soon be identified to us as a special set-apart line of people. *Shem* means “name.” Note that one of God's titles that is commonly used by Jews is *HaShem*, The Name. Hebrew tradition suggests that the mysterious biblical king and priest of Shalem called Melchizedek, whom Abraham would bow down and tithe to, was actually Shem. The timing is such that it certainly could have been, because Shem was still alive then. You'll learn more about that when we get to Melchizedek's story.

“God saw the earth, and, yes, it was corrupt; for all living beings had corrupted their ways on the earth” (Gen. 6:12).

This is one of the saddest verses in the entire Bible. The Hebrew word used here for “corrupt” is *shachath*. “Corrupt” is a decent translation, but the word *corrupt* in our modern vocabulary means “dishonest.” It sounds as though the point of God's concern was that men were not dealing fairly with one another and that they lied and stole. That is not the sense of this word: rather, “polluted to the point of ruin” better catches the sense of *shachath*. Only a few chapters earlier, “God saw everything that he had made, and indeed it was very good.”<sup>36</sup> God's creation decayed from perfection to utter ruin in relatively few generations.

## THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

Now let's look at what is being said, and omitted, in verse 13: “God said to Noah, “The end of all living beings has come before me, for because of them the earth is filled with violence. I will destroy them along with the earth.””

God said that the cause of the corruption was the living beings He created. Often the Hebrew word used here, *basar*, is translated as “flesh,”

which is a perfectly good translation. But here's the thing: neither *basar*, nor flesh, refers to man alone. It can, and often does, refer to animals, too. *Adam* means “man” or “mankind,” but that is not used here, so the idea at play is that *all* living flesh, everything to which God gave life, is at fault: both man and animal. Even more interesting is who God *doesn't* blame: Satan.

We need to take notice of that because it once again brings us back to the concept of the source or origination of evil. The Hebrews say a couple of important things about evil and sin that I think matches what Scripture says far more than some Christian doctrines on evil and sin. First and foremost is that man was originally created with both a good and an evil inclination. Adam was created with the capability of choosing one over the other.

The second viewpoint is perhaps even more difficult to deal with than the first: it is that if evil was there at the beginning, then God created both evil and good, although not necessarily in the sense that might immediately come to mind.

In order to discuss this dicey yet crucial subject we need look at several principles that, on the surface, don't appear to have much to do with it.

## HOW OUR UNIVERSE WORKS

We are subject to the laws, boundaries, and limitations of our universe. God made us to be integral pieces of this universe. In fact, the world's body of physicists have recently come to a general agreement that they have tried to avoid for decades: the universe was created by design.<sup>37</sup> It is not the happy result of a random series of chemical reactions. Chaos did not accidentally achieve order. This is not news to us believers in the God of Israel, nor to the billions on this planet who adhere to any religion that acknowledges a Creator (a being superior to humans). But the scientific community has been diametrically opposed to considering the existence of an overriding intelligent cosmic

force or being for the past two centuries, so we must ask what prompted this change within the scientific community.

The recent discovery (in a whole series of discoveries) that caused this great shift in their thinking is the mathematical evidence that at least ten dimensions, probably eleven, exist. This discovery is part of a whole new realm of physics, and chief among these is string theory.

## FOUR DIMENSIONS

What makes this notion of many dimensions a bit difficult to comprehend is that our universe consists of only four of those ten or eleven dimensions (height, width, length, and time). Height, width, and length are measurements of space, so scientists refer to our universe as a space-time universe. No matter how far into space our orbiting telescopes have peered and probed and measured, those same four dimensions are all they can observe. So where are those additional six or seven dimensions? They don't exist, *per se*, in our universe. Rather, they exist in some *other* universe (what these physicists call "parallel universes"). These parallel universes exist simultaneously with ours; they could actually exist within our universe (and we

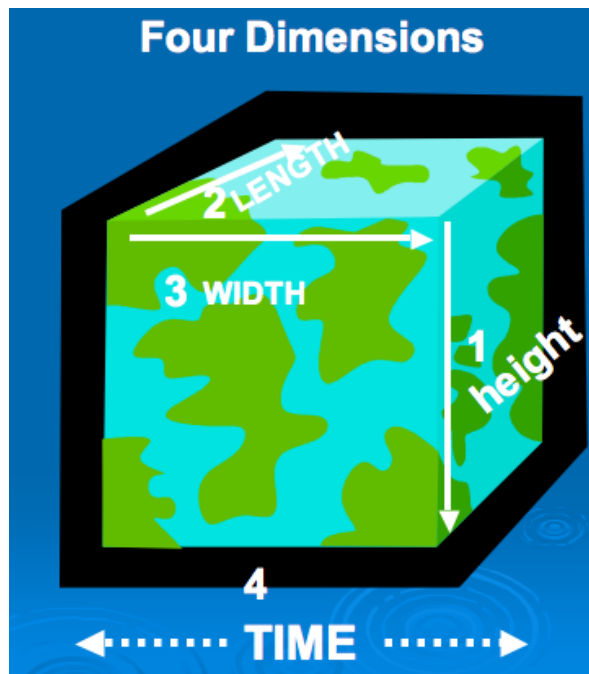
have no means to observe them), or they might exist completely outside our universe (or perhaps some combination of the two).

This may sound like futuristic science fiction, but if you read the writings of the ancient Hebrew sages, you'll find that some of them described multiple dimensions. Amazingly, these sages (some of whom lived well before Christ) even implied that the Scriptures reveal ten dimensions, plus one more, the eleventh dimension, which is God.

To help us get a mental picture of this concept, all we have to do is think of heaven as described in the Bible. Heaven doesn't obey the laws of physics found in our universe. This is seen most clearly in the fact that heaven exists outside of time. The Word says that God's heaven is eternal. *Eternal* means "timeless"; eternity is a state of existence that is without time. Eternity is not an expression of a really, really, really long time; rather, it is an expression of the existence of a realm in which the dimension of time (the fourth dimension in our universe) does not even exist.

The Scriptures do not imply or purport that heaven is part of our universe. After all, how would God have lived in our universe *before* He even created our universe? It is self-evident that He didn't live in our universe; He lived somewhere else. And that "somewhere else" is in one or more of those other dimensions that are beyond our four dimensions. Bottom line: heaven does not reside within our four-dimensional universe.

The dilemma, then, is how to detect, examine, or even comprehend things that are outside the four dimensions of our universe. How can we *visualize* things that our physical bodies can't detect with our sensory organs (eyes, ears, etc.)? The only means we have to observe additional dimensions is through mathematical proofs, or through the discovery of strange behaviors of physical objects. It is by these means that we now know that some force other than those common to our four-dimensional universe is at play. For instance, we notice anomalies in the way subatomic particles behave and how



the expansion of our universe takes place. But we can also observe this extra-dimensionality when we read about the Red Sea piling up to let the Israelites pass to safety, for instance.

Some of you may be saying, “Well, I understand that of those four dimensions, three make up the physical: length, width, and depth. But is time actually *physical*? How do I reach out and touch time? Do we have sensory organs that can detect time?”

Time is an integral part of the physical nature of our universe. We first measured time on earth by the movement of the heavenly bodies and connected this to the changing of seasons. God set up this dynamic when He readied planet Earth for life. We measure years by observing our sun, the position of the stars, and the regular cycle of seasons on earth. We measure months by observing the phases of the moon. We measure days and, until the last couple of hundred years, even hours and minutes by the movement of the sun across the sky. But what are we actually measuring when we say we are measuring time?

Let’s look to the most accurate clocks known to man for our answer: atomic clocks. Atomic clocks use the almost perfectly steady decay of radioactive materials as their standard. The key word here is *decay*. Just as meters or inches are the measurements of space, time is the measurement of the decay of the physical material that makes up our universe (you, me, rocks, grass, concrete, dust, the noble gases, all matter). Everything in our universe is deteriorating. It’s a scientific fact that is *the* underlying principle for all of physics. And the Bible is explicit on this matter as well.

## FIFTH DIMENSION

Yet beyond the physical nature of the world there is also a mysterious “thing” that exists outside those four dimensions, something that cannot be explained or measured by those dimensions, nor can it be detected by anything man has devised or ever will. It is what we call

*spirit*. How do we know spirit exists? Because in addition to the fact that the Bible says it does, we have experienced it in our lives.

Our spirits exist within us and sustain our very lives.<sup>38</sup> How did this spirit get into us? God put it there. Where does it reside? The Bible tells us that our spirits are in our *hearts*, a term that needs to be taken as a figure of speech. Astoundingly, if we trust God, He’ll even put His own spirit (His Holy Spirit) in us. The Holy Spirit is a spiritual substance that is somehow different from the kind of spirit (I call it the “life spirit”) that is the basic life force in all living beings (human and animal). Neither of these kinds of spirit—the kind that animates all organic animal life and the holy kind that permits communion between humans and God—are in any way connected to our four-dimensional universe, created by our four-dimensional universe, nor subject to its laws. Yet there they are. A good way to think of spirit is as a fifth dimension that is present *in* our universe, but it is not *from* our universe.

Part of the reason that we have so much trouble with the concept of spirit is because it is not detectable or knowable by our rational senses. God made man and animals out of the physical stuff of our universe: in man’s case, dirt. But in addition, He brought something from *outside* the confines of our universe and put it into His living creatures: life, or better, the spirit of life. Even more, the Lord put an aspect of Himself into humans (but not animals) and that is the ability to know Him and to commune with Him. This is what the Bible calls the human spirit.

When God made our universe, its natural state was *choshek* (which means “darkness, obscurity, falsehood, and blindness”).<sup>39</sup> You’ll remember that, from somewhere outside our universe, He then created *owr*, enlightenment. e.g. *Choshek* indicates a spirit of wickedness, a lack of spiritual enlightenment. So the first thing God created was a spirit of truth and of goodness, which in Hebrew is called *owr*.

## THE LAW OF OPPOSITES

We've seen that goodness (*owr*) and evil (*choshek*) existed when the universe began, but where did good and evil come from? Because of the strict laws of physics that govern our universe, everything in the universe must and *does* have an opposite. If *far* exists, there is necessarily a *near*. If *up* exists, there must be a *down*. If *short* exists, there must be a *tall*. A front always has a back. A coin must have two sides. It is impossible, in our universe, for anything to exist that does not have an opposite. This applies not only to the space dimensions (width, length, and height) but also to time. If there is a future, there *must* be a past and a present. No matter what phenomenon you can think of, there is an opposing phenomenon in the makeup of the four-dimensional universe in which we live.

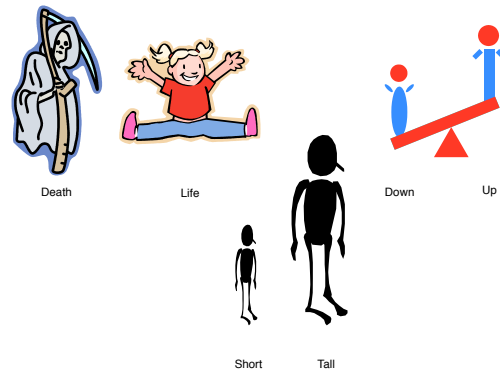
In following the principle of opposites, which is a God-ordained law for our universe, in order for good to exist *in our universe* then its opposite, evil, also must exist. Let me state that again: because *our universe* requires an opposite, good must exist alongside evil. You cannot have one without the other. However, outside of our universe (in heaven or in some other dimension) good may exist on its own without evil. In the new universe that God will create at the end of the period known as the millennial kingdom, there will be only good. Evil will not be present because the laws (as we know them) that govern our current universe will be abolished. Things operating in those other six or seven

dimensions outside of our four dimensions are not necessarily subject to the rules of opposites. Apparently in heaven no opposite is required.<sup>40</sup>

## WHO CAUSES EVIL?

*The One forming light and creating darkness,  
Causing well-being and creating calamity;  
I am the Lord who does all these. (Isa. 45:7 NASB)*

At first glance, this might not bother you too much. The LORD who created light and darkness also causes well-being and calamity. As much as we might wish Scripture didn't say that, we accept that rather readily. But it's not that simple.



The Principle of Opposites

The verse we just read above is from the New American Standard Bible. It employs a translation method called “dynamic translation.” Look now at that same verse in a more literal, direct, word-for-word translation:

*I form the light, and create darkness; I make peace, and create evil; I am HaShem, that doeth all these things. (Yisbeyah [Isa.] 45:7 JPS)*

This says bluntly that the Lord creates evil. Is that possible? Take a look at the KJV:

*I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things.*

### WHY ARE OPPOSITES NECESSARY?

Does it have to be this way? Yes, that's how God designed it. This is the mechanism He chose to use to accomplish His purposes. Could God have done it differently? Apparently so, as the existence of other dimensions is evidence that He had other choices.



There are four key Hebrew words in this verse: *owr*, *choshek*, *shalom*, and *rah*. So by mixing the Hebrew in with the English words, the verse reads: “I form the *owr* and create *choshek*; I make *shalom* and create *rah*.” We’ve studied the words *owr* and *choshek*, so we know they denote opposite categories of spiritual nature: good and evil. *Shalom*, in its very nature, is describing a sense of well-being, peace, good, godliness, prosperity, and grace that comes from the hand of God; it is a divine (and therefore spiritual) source that produces *shalom*. The Hebrew word *rah* has a similar but opposite sense. *Rah* means “evil” or “bad.” This verse, and many others, reflects the principle of opposites as it tells us that if God forms light, darkness also is created. If the Lord creates *shalom*, evil is also created. God is behind it all, controls it all, and uses it all for His divine purposes.

Don’t think this is an isolated use of the word *evil*. The idea that the Lord caused evil to exist and to happen is scattered throughout the OT.

- *Shall the horn be blown in a city, and the people not tremble? Shall evil befall a city, and HaShem hath not done it? (Amos 3:6 JPS)*
- *Out of the mouth of the Most High proceedeth not evil and good? (Lam. 3:38 JPS)*

#### WHY MODERN TRANSLATIONS AVOID THE WORD *EVIL*

In our more modern Bible translations, and only in these translations, we find the word *evil* replaced with words like *disaster* and *calamity* and *woe*. The Hebrew word *rah* means “evil.” Calamity and disaster and woe can result from evil, so those terms can be used in a dynamic way to explain a resulting action, but *rah* directly refers to the spiritual sense of evil. *Rah* is the opposite of *shalom*.

## HOW EVIL CAME INTO THE WORLD

When God designed our universe as a universe of opposites, evil came into existence as good’s natural opposite. This is a key concept in our lesson: God did not *create evil* in the sense that He manufactured evil. He didn’t turn to His right and create a mound of good and then turn to His left and create a mound of evil. Rather, evil was the *result* of His creating good. When He placed the spirit of good in our four-dimensional universe that requires opposites, the spirit of evil came into existence as well.

It may be easier to think about it this way: Evil is everything that God does *not* command or instruct. Evil is the opposite of what God calls good. Allow me to draw an admittedly imperfect (but I think reasonable) analogy for you. Imagine you go into a room and turn on a light; you flip a switch, electricity flows to a filament in a lightbulb, it glows, and by that action you have *added* light to the room. But when you turn the switch to OFF and the room goes dark, you did not *add* darkness to the room. The lightbulb did not reverse itself and emit darkness to the room, or suck the light out of it. Light was present. When light is absent, we need a name for that condition—darkness. Darkness is not something that is made; it is the absence of light. In the same way, evil is the absence of good.

## FREE WILL

When God created man, He gave us wills. There was never a time when we didn’t have wills. If humans did not have wills, we simply would be flesh-and-blood robots preprogrammed to a certain behavior pattern, literal slaves to our Creator.

So what is the purpose of and use for a will? A will enables a person to make choices of morality. Our wills are that part of us that gives us the knowledge that choices exist, and that we can make those choices. The ability to have choice was first created when God designed a

## SUMMARY OF THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

1. We live in a universe that consists of four dimensions: length, width, height, and time.
2. We now know with near certainty that there are more dimensions than four. There could be as many as eleven. These other dimensions are *not* part of the fabric of our universe. Therefore, there must be other universes that employ these dimensions as their attributes.
3. Spirit can be thought of as a dimension that is not *from* our universe but exists *within* our universe. It is a fifth dimension. We can't see it or directly observe it because it is outside of those four dimensions. The Bible tells us that God brought spirit from somewhere else and put it into us.
4. The principle of opposites is a key foundational law describing how our universe operates; it says that everything *must* have an opposite (no exceptions).
5. Due to the principle of opposites, evil exists *because* good exists.
6. Evil was not created by God in the sense of its being manufactured; rather, evil is the result of God creating good. All that is not defined by God as being good is therefore evil.

universe in which the overriding law is that everything has an opposite. That is the very nature of choice.

Your “will” is not a matter of selecting “preferences.” It is not that part of man that chooses strawberries over bananas, chocolate over vanilla, or blue over red—that’s preference. Instead, our wills are directed by the spirit. They are that part of us that makes *moral* choices, choices of the conscience, not the ego.

More than anything else, our wills give us the choice to love God or not to love God. This is expressed by our *choosing* the ways of God or rejecting them.

The mere fact that God gave humankind the ability to make moral choices means that man has the so-called *yetsar harah*, the evil inclination. If man had an inclination to do good (*yetsar hatov*), to obey and love God, then man also had to have an opposite inclination and ability to do evil, to not obey or love God. If there were no moral choices, if somehow there was nothing but good available to us, then having a will would be meaningless. It would be like an election where you can vote for one candidate, and one candidate only. You can't even choose *not* to vote. What meaning is there to the concept of an election in which there are no choices? It is the same for the human will—without moral choice, the will is null and void.

This principle is evident in the facts surrounding the Fall, that fateful moment when Adam and Eve disobeyed the Lord and ate from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. An interesting scenario unfolded: God created Adam and later Eve, complete with wills.<sup>41</sup> The world and all that was in it was good; there was no way to choose against God. Nothing they could do was immoral—except one thing. God gave them the rule that they were not to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. In other words, without the existence of this tree and the divine restriction against eating its fruit, there were no moral choices for Adam and Eve to make. Without the existence of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil (and God's command to not partake of it), there would have been no reason for Adam and Eve to have wills.

Did Adam and Eve have any concept of good and evil before the Fall? It appears not. They weren't required to consider obedience versus disobedience because there were no laws or rules. However, when God set the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil before them and told them not to eat of it, they had an opportunity to exercise their wills (so far as we know, it

was the first opportunity to do so). Now they could make a moral judgment. And by choosing to disobey God, they gained a knowledge of good and evil that they had never before encountered.

By means of Satan's deception and temptation, and at the decision and exercise of their own wills, Adam and Eve chose to go against God's only moral rule: not to eat of that tree. Thus the first transgression against God occurred, and from this Adam and Eve learned that there was such a thing as evil. We call a transgression against God "sin." Sin, a choice or act for evil, had entered the world.

Do you see this? Without choice there can be no sin. This has a direct correlation to a later time in Scripture when Moses was given the Torah on Mount Sinai. Read what Paul said about it, and think about the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil: "for the Law brings about wrath, but where there is no law, there also is no violation" (Rom. 4:15 NASB).

Remember that in the NT the word *Law* usually means "the Torah." Where there is no Torah (instruction from God), there cannot be violations against God. Now please catch this: the Torah Law gave to Israel what the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil gave to Adam and Eve. The primary difference was that Adam and Eve had only *one* regulation in their "Torah": don't eat that fruit! The Torah Law given to Israel on Mount Sinai had many more regulations, but with exactly the same effect. By means of those rules and commands, Israel gained a more intimate knowledge of good and evil.

Paul further explained this phenomenon about moral choice: "for until the Law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law" (Rom. 5:13 NASB). In other words, Paul said that certainly sin and evil existed before the Law, the Torah, was given to Moses on Mount Sinai. But until God announced His regulations for Israel, there were no regulations to break. In a manner of speaking, for a time Israel lived as Adam and Eve did; they were

created with wills, so then they needed choices set before them so that they might use their wills. Once God set down His rules, His Law, His Torah, Israel had a concrete set of moral choices that governed all phases of life, from relationships between humans, to relationships between humans and God. They could choose whether to love Him by means of obedience to His Torah, or they could choose not to love Him by means of disobeying His Torah.

Paul concluded: "Why the Law then? It was added because of transgressions, having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator, until the seed would come to whom the promise had been made" (Gal. 3:19 NASB).

This verse is often translated as, "Why the Law, then? It was added to *create* transgressions . . ." In a sense, that is so; if man has a will, he must have moral choices. The Law is what provides for those choices, and if we have choices, due to our evil inclinations and fallen natures, there *will* be transgressions.

## UNDERSTANDING NOAH IN LIGHT OF FREE WILL

Let's go full circle now, back to Genesis 6:13 and Noah to apply what we've learned. God didn't blame Satan for ruining the earth with evil; He blamed men and all living creatures. Were these men that He blamed 100 percent evil? No. No more than Noah and his sons were 100 percent good. This is a good way to look at *our* condition. It is an utter misreading of the Bible texts to say that men are 100 percent evil. We have good in us (*good* in the sense of the *yetser hatov*, the good inclination). But without the Holy Spirit in us to direct the use of that good, then even our motives will be impure and wrong, our application will be misdirected, and whatever good we possess can easily be turned into evil. How does that happen? When we use our good intentions in a manner that is *not* God's will. And that which is not God's will is, by definition, evil.

## UNDERSTANDING SATAN

What is Satan's role in all this? I've heard too many well-meaning pastors and Christian leaders say something to the effect of, "Why would we glorify Satan by talking about him?" That's like a general saying, "I don't want to glorify my enemy by discussing his tactics and strategy." Noble, perhaps, but foolish.

There really isn't much explained in the Bible about Satan. A lot of what we *think* we know about Satan is Christian and Jewish legend and tradition or denominational doctrine. In a nutshell, here's a summary of what we do know about Satan directly from Scripture.

He began as a heavenly being. Satan is commonly described as a "fallen angel." My only quibble with that description is that not all heavenly beings are angels. *Angel* derives from the use of a very specific Hebrew word (*malach*), and the Bible speaks of several kinds of heavenly beings other than angels, such as seraphim and cherubim.<sup>42</sup> We don't know very much about any of these creatures, but they were created and placed into a hierarchy of power, authority, and access to God. It appears that the cherubim who were not *malachim*, angels, were just below God. Ezekiel 28:12–15, which is well understood by Hebrew and Christian scholars alike as one of the most direct referrals to Satan in all the Bible, says:

*Human being, raise a lament for the king of Tzor, and tell him that Adonai ELOHIM says: "You put the seal on perfection; you were full of wisdom and perfect in beauty; you were in Eden, the garden of God; covered with all kinds of precious stones—carnelians, topaz, diamonds, beryl, onyx, jasper, sapphires, green feldspar, emeralds; your pendants and jewels were made of gold, prepared the day you were created. You were a keruv, protecting a large region; I placed you on God's holy mountain. You walked back and forth among stones of fire. You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created, until unrighteousness was found in you."<sup>43</sup>*

Satan was not an angel but probably one of the cherubim. He was the anointed cherub, a very high and trusted position. He was so high that he was allowed the closest access to God Himself. He was beautiful, he was powerful, and he was of the highest rank and order.

Satan fought against God and was cast to earth along with some angels over whom he was in charge. They apparently took his side against God.

*Next there was a battle in heaven—Mikha'el and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But it was not strong enough to win, so that there was no longer any place for them in heaven. The great dragon was thrown out, that ancient serpent, also known as the Devil and Satan [the Adversary], the deceiver of the whole world. He was hurled down to the earth, and his angels were hurled down with him. (Rev. 12:7–9)*

Here we see that Satan and the angels that took his side in open rebellion against God were kicked out of heaven and sent down to earth. That fabulous cherub and his angel followers were not strong enough to overcome Mikha'el (Michael) and the angels in his command, so they lost the war and the right to reside in heaven. Not only is Satan weaker than God, he's not even as strong as another cherub named Michael, so let's not overestimate Satan's power.

### DON'T BLAME SATAN

We need to get out of the habit of blaming Satan for every evil thought we have or wrong thing we do. Satan does *not* control our thoughts. We have wills, and we have the means to obtain a thorough understanding of what is good. It's by means of our wills, and through disregarding or willfully refusing to learn what God says is good and evil, that we often choose evil but declare it to be good. This is just as prevalent in the church as it is in secular society.

Satan was a deceiver. Yet he was, and is, under God's control. God has a purpose for Satan; it is to deceive and tempt people to do evil. So we see that God has a purpose for evil, which is to give people a moral choice. Without the actual and real opportunity to choose evil, we have no moral choice.

Satan is an unholy spirit. We know from the law of opposites that if there is a Holy Spirit present in our universe, then there must be an unholy spirit operating alongside it. Satan is this unholy spirit. Just as the Holy Spirit is the embodiment of the pure good and is, in fact,

God; Satan is the embodiment of pure evil and is, in fact, the anti-God. Just as God is real, Satan is real.

Let us also remember that though we have come to use Satan as a name for that prince of all evil, *Satan* is really a title. *Satan* is the Hebrew word for "adversary."

ASSIGNMENT: Read Genesis 6:14–22.

### SATAN'S IMPRISONMENT

One purpose for Satan's being locked away during the coming one-thousand-year reign of Christ is to demonstrate to those who will be living then that as long as we live within a four-dimensional universe, we will have an inclination within us to choose evil as well as good. It is *not* Satan who causes that evil inclination.

Think about it: Christ will come a second time as a warrior-king. He will defeat all who fight against God, and Satan will be barred from human contact, locked away in the Abyss where he cannot deceive or tempt man in any way. Every human on earth will be a believer, and Christ will sit visibly on His throne. The world will be at peace. Nothing but good will happen.

But at the end of that one-thousand-year reign, after many generations of men, that evil within humanity will begin to stir again. Satan will be released from where he's been imprisoned, and he will be given permission to entice men to follow him. Rebellion will break out. Man *still* has the remnants of that evil inclination within him; Satan offers a moral choice and man takes it. Here is *proof* that while Satan is certainly the spirit of evil, it is not all his doing that man has evil in him and that man makes evil choices. Satan is indeed a deceiver and a tempter, but man is not a robot that must oblige him. Man chooses.

We see an interesting God principle set down in the detailed instructions He gave to Noah for the ark: all Noah had to do was to accept God's means of salvation for him and his family by following God's prescription exactly. Here we also see that even salvation is (in a way) a cooperative effort between mankind and God. God's role is to provide it; mankind's role is to accept it by means of a moral choice of our will. But as much as salvation is by grace, there are obligations that we have to God, and some of them involve action on our part.

Noah and his family had to begin by believing what God told them: First, that mankind was wicked and God would soon destroy them. Second, that there was a way to escape the destruction. Third, that means of escape was designed by the Lord and *only* that means was available. Fourth, Noah would have to act in order for his deliverance to come about. So it took great faith on Noah's part to take God at His word when the current circumstances didn't seem to indicate that such a thing could possibly take place. And it took effort; it was not simply a passive acknowledgment or intellectual acquiescence.

In Hebrew the ark is called a *tevah*; it is the same term used for the basket that baby Moses would be placed in centuries later. A *tevah* is a boxlike craft that is not the same thing as a boat or a ship. It is simply a device that floats, rudderless, without a crew to operate it. The idea is that a *tevah* is guided only by God's hand; mankind is but a passenger.

The ark was to be made of gopher wood, a type of wood that is unknown today. It was to be enormous by any standard: 450 feet long, 75 feet wide, and almost five stories in height. Marine engineers calculate that it would have had a displacement of about 43,000 tons. It would hold its precious cargo of life on three decks, have a skylight, and apparently open at one entry ramp in its side.

Notice in verse 18 that four men with their wives were to enter the ark; this was the sum total of humanity that would be saved: “But I will establish my covenant with you; you will come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife and your sons’ wives with you.” The number of humans who had been elected and set apart to restart life on the planet totaled eight. Eight is a number of great significance in the Scriptures; eight is the number of redemption and will remain so throughout the entire Bible.

Notice that the entire sphere of animated life on land and in the air was to be brought on board, everything from lizards to birds. The entire matrix of life was to be saved as the catalyst for new life. Each species, or family, was represented by one male and one female. This was the basic biblical family unit. All else was unauthorized and was a perversion. The concept that two males or two females can bond

together in marriage into a family unit, and from that produce a new generation, is recent and, not only man-made, but rebellious. We see something else important: the divinely ideal family unit was defined and consisted of *one* male and *one* female; not *one* male and several females. So even in the narrative of Noah’s ark we get the God principle not only of marriage being a permanent bonding of male and female, but also of marriage being exclusive and monogamous.

## THE BLESSING OF FOOD

Food was a wedge issue between the church and the Jewish people, and it even caused severe dissension within the church itself. Genesis 1:29–30 explains what food was at that point in history:

*Then God said, “Here! Throughout the whole earth I am giving you as food every seed-bearing plant and every tree with seed-bearing fruit. And to every wild animal, bird in the air and creature crawling on the earth, in which there is a living soul, I am giving as food every kind of green plant.” And that is how it was.*

Food for mankind and animals was plants and plants alone. Now did that mean that some animals didn’t eat other animals and that man did not eat meat at this time? No, it meant that God defined *food* as plants, and therefore when animals or humans ate animals (or other things) they were eating things that were not “food.” Not even fish was for food as of this time.

Noah was told to bring food into the ark for his family and for the animals. *Food* is what is appropriate as a source of nutrition for our bodies. However, man soon decided he preferred something else to be added to his diet. The question that is larger, however, is: Who defines what is appropriate and what is not? What should be consumed as food contrasted with what might be (but ought not to be) consumed as food? To God’s way of thinking, humans (and apparently some animals) began to eat things that were forbidden because they were not food.



For example, can you eat dirt? Of course you can, and anyone who has a child or grandchild has probably watched in horror as they gulped down a mouthful of dirt before you could stop them. Do you know why they ate dirt? Because in some way it smelled and tasted good to them. Why would you want to stop them? Because dirt is not food; dirt is for *growing* food. Food, by God's definition, is not merely anything that you can manage to get into your mouth and swallow, or anything that might taste reasonably good.

That is the entire point of God's carefully defining what His people may and may not eat in the Law of Moses. God carefully defined what food is and what food is not. Eating food that is not kosher (so to speak) is to eat things that are not *food*. Now, of course, Hebrew tradition has created a lot of rules and regulations on the subject and much of it is of a very questionable nature. Rules have been created that seem to go well beyond the rather simple intent of what is proper eating as described in the Torah. But the bottom line is this: when the Bible uses the term *food*, it, by definition, means things that God has assigned for men to eat. Whether Old Testament or New, when a Hebrew speaks of

food it means *only* kosher food, because all else is not food. You'll never see in the Bible the word *kosher*, *authorized*, or *clean* used as a modifier to the word *food* because it would be redundant. Food is *only* things that are divinely authorized, and ritually clean, and meant to be eaten.

The important thing we should know about Noah and his response to God's direction is the simple statement that Noah did everything that God told him to do.



Vegetables and plants were considered food; animals were not.

## GENESIS 7

ASSIGNMENT: Read Genesis 7.

### SALVATION IS A GIFT

This chapter opens with an invitation, or for the Baptists and other Evangelicals, an altar call! God said, “Come into the ark, you and all your household” (Gen. 7:1). Noah may have built the ark, but God prepared it. And it wouldn’t be the last ark of refuge that God would prepare. This was a very exclusive invitation; only those whom God chose could come in. This invitation even included an RSVP; Noah had to respond, he had to act. Sitting and doing nothing was death. What was the dividing line between those who received the invitation and those who were denied, between those who were chosen and those who were not? The chosen were *tzaddik* (Hebrew for “righteous”). And God says that Noah was the only *tzaddik* man left on earth.

A few thousand years later, God prepared a final ark, Yeshua (Jesus Christ), as a safe haven for the righteous, the *tzaddik*, for that day when He pours out His wrath and ends the world as we know it . . . *again*. Joyfully I can tell you with full assurance that God does *not* destroy the good along with the wicked.<sup>44</sup>

It is often said that the biggest difference between the way of God of the OT and the way of God of the NT is that man had to *work* to attain his righteousness in the OT, and man received righteousness as a gift in the NT. Further, it is said that good works led a man to an undefined salvation in the OT, and grace through faith brought man to a well-defined salvation in the NT. Well, let’s look at what the truth really is.

Whether one reads the works (commentaries) of the most ancient Hebrew sages or the later rabbis, one generally finds that a great emphasis is placed on *doing* God’s commands. This is usually called “works” and “legalism” in the Christian culture. The *reason* for the Hebrews’ obsession with *doing*, their motivation, is not a matter of gaining something from their works, but a desire to obey out of overwhelming gratefulness for being one of God’s chosen people.

When we first become believers, and when we study the great Christian scholars, it is clear to us that grace is the key to our relationship with God. We are usually taught that grace is a NT-era dispensation that was not available prior to the birth of Christ, and that righteousness granted to the worshipper, completely unmerited and unearned, is a NT concept. Hence we get this false proposition constantly put forth to us in our houses of worship that we must choose either law or grace. The idea is that we can choose to attempt to follow the OT Law well enough to “earn” or “merit” our righteousness and therefore gain ourselves a place in heaven,<sup>45</sup> or we can choose to have faith in Christ, and through grace be 100 percent guaranteed a place in heaven.<sup>46</sup> Let me tell you something: never, never, never does God set that choice before us in the Bible. That dynamic simply doesn’t exist anywhere in the Holy Scriptures. It is a man-made doctrine attempting to paint Jews in a bad light so they will be separated from the Gentile church.

The fact is, the Hebrews did *not* believe they could “work their way to heaven.” They fully recognized that righteousness had to be a gift from God—that is, by grace—because even the best of men weren’t that different from the worst.



## RECOMMENDED READING

If you enjoy challenges, I recommend that you read a book by E. P. Sanders, considered one of the great mainstream Christian scholars of our day, called *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*. He conducts a groundbreaking study on what Judaism, and therefore, Paul, was all about and what he meant by what he said. It is a daunting book to study because he brings extensive quotes from the Mishna, Zohar, and Talmud to draw a picture of what he calls “Palestinian Judaism.” Though it is not the point of his book, he dispels many myths and ignorant accusations flung constantly against the religion of the Hebrews that usually accuse them of maintaining a legalistic, work-your-way-to-salvation faith.

## WHY WAS NOAH SAVED?

The Mishna Rabbah, an ancient Hebrew commentary, suggests why Noah was saved but the rest of the world wasn't. This is not the only Jewish view on the subject, but it is by far the most accepted. These are the writings of the same Hebrew men that Gentile Christian scholars say had no understanding of grace, since grace didn't even exist until after Jesus's advent. Interestingly, though, the very first use of the word *grace* in the Bible is not found in the NT Gospels, but in Genesis 6:8:

*But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord (VI, 8). He delivereth him that is innocent (i naki), yea, thou shalt be delivered through the cleanness of thy hands (Job XXII, 30). R. Hanina<sup>1</sup> said: Noah possessed less than an ounce (unkia)<sup>2</sup> [of merit]. If so, why was he delivered? Only “Through the cleanness of Thy hands.”<sup>3</sup> This agrees with what R. Abba b. Kahana said: For it repenteth Me that I have made them and Noah. But Noah was left only because he found grace; hence, but Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.<sup>47</sup>*

In other words, when the rabbi said that Noah was delivered only by the cleanness of *Thy* hands, the phrase “Thy hands” referred to God's hands, not Noah's. Further, where it says that Noah possessed only an ounce of merit, it is simply an expression that means Noah had very little merit in his life. So little that, according to these rabbis, God didn't just repent that He made all men except for Noah; He repented that He made all men *including* Noah. So it is somewhat of a mystery, the rabbis thought, why God saved Noah instead of another person or people. Their answer? Grace. Unmerited favor.

Were they wrong? Did God actually expect them to work their way to righteousness back in those ancient, pre-Jesus days? We are, after all, in the earliest part of the OT. These leaders of the Hebrews didn't think so. Genesis 15:6 supports this idea: “He believed in ADONAI, and he credited it to him as righteousness.”

Abraham trusted God, so God said He would consider that trust reason enough to *give* the designation of “righteous” to Abraham. That is *exactly* what happens when we trust in Jesus, but the word we use for this is *grace*. Noah didn't earn his righteousness and we don't earn ours; we simply receive grace. That part of the equation has never been any different, from the beginning of the world until today.

It is high time that the wrong-minded Christian tradition of demanding we choose the Law or grace be put to rest. The Lord never put that choice before us. The Law was never a salvation document. From the beginning, all throughout the OT and right on to Revelation, grace has always been the only way to a right relationship with the Lord. The Hebrews believed that, just as we believe it. This choice was promoted for the sole purpose of getting us to believe that, for the Christian, the Bible begins with the book of Matthew. That the OT is obsolete. That the Torah is now abolished. And that the Jews were ditched by God in favor of the Gentile church. None of which is so.

## THE ANIMALS ON THE ARK

*Of every clean animal you are to take seven couples, and of the animals that are not clean, one couple; also of the birds in the air take seven couples—in order to preserve their species throughout the earth. (Gen. 7:2–3)*

How often have we seen pictures in Bibles, church books, and even schoolbooks of the animals entering the ark two by two? That is only half the story. When we look carefully at Genesis 7:2, we see that, in fact, only *some* animals were to come in a single pair. Others were to come in sevens, that is, seven pairs, fourteen animals. Fourteen of each clean animal, but only two of each unclean animal were to be taken aboard the ark.

This is our first introduction to the concept of clean and unclean animals. In Hebrew *tabor* means “clean” and *tamei*, “unclean.” Now, in our modern, Gentile, Christian church, a church that was long ago stripped of all Jewish connections, this concept of clean and unclean

is foreign to our minds, and we typically assign all sorts of fanciful and erroneous meanings to it, or we just mentally bypass those words. In time we will carefully study the concepts of clean and unclean, and I promise you a wealth of understanding of God, the Bible, and how the spiritual and physical universe operates as a result.

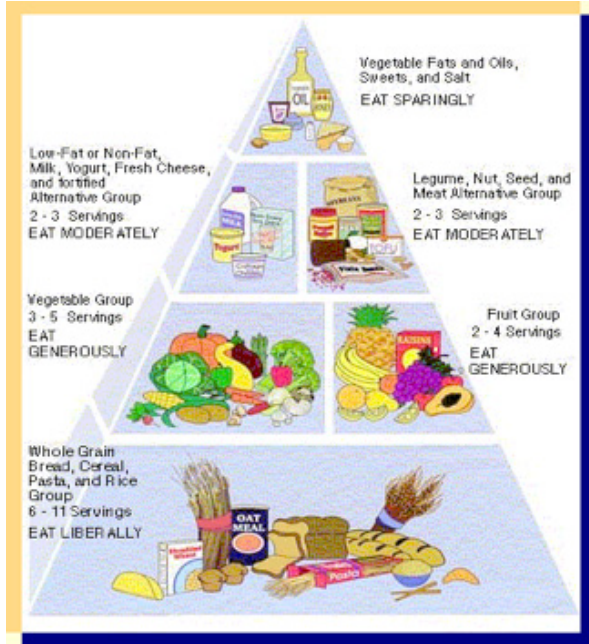
One example of our sad ignorance about clean and unclean is contained in the famous (and excellent, I might add) commentary by Henry Morris called *The Genesis Record*. There he explains that perhaps the clean animals were animals that God decided would be good for “domestication and fellowship with man,” and the unclean were not. This couldn’t be further from the truth. Any Orthodox Jewish child can tell you exactly what clean and unclean is: *clean* means “ritually pure” and *unclean* means “not ritually pure.” In the case of animal sacrifices to God, only clean animals may be used. In the case of food, only clean animals may be eaten—the common word we use for this today is *kosher*.

## CLEAN ANIMALS FOR FOOD?

Were these animals, or at least some of them, being loaded onto the ark for the purpose of being part of the food supply during their confinement in the ark? Food for human consumption? Well, up to now, the only suitable food for humans was plant life. Let me pause here for a moment and remind you of the principle from chapter 6 that the term *food* refers only to things that are authorized by God as edible. In other words, to give an extreme example, if we were discussing the benefits of dental floss, nobody would picture dental floss as a possible food source. Conversely, if we were discussing food, nobody would ever include dental floss as a possible member of our food triangle. For any of us, food is something that *can be eaten* and *is meant to be eaten*. So for a Hebrew, meat that is not kosher is not food. Ritually unclean meat is not “forbidden food,” it’s not food at all. So when the Bible speaks of food, it is referring only to the things



The animals entering the ark two by two



A chart of the items considered to be food in the Bible

REMEMBER: The Bible is a Hebrew document, written by Hebrews, in a Hebrew cultural setting. This is so from Genesis to Revelation.

God told man he could eat. In Noah’s case, prior to the Flood, *food* was only green plants. Animals weren’t any more likely to be considered food than a rock or a handful of dirt would have been. Noah and his children weren’t hungry for a nice juicy steak because meat wasn’t food; food was edible plants.

Man, at the time of the Flood and even back to Adam, had not been given the concept of eating other living creatures as a food source. There is little doubt that those in the evil line of Cain, as they grew ever more wicked, likely killed animals and ate their flesh, but it was absolutely akin to cannibalism. Because God called Noah a righteous man, we can be confident that Noah and his family were vegetarians. So, prior to the Flood, to Noah, *clean* and *unclean* simply meant animals that God had told him were suitable for sacrifice and those that weren’t—food wasn’t part of the equation.

## THE CLEAN ANIMALS

Now, which animals were clean, and which weren’t? We can’t be 100 percent certain. Many centuries into the future, God would give Moses a comprehensive list of clean and unclean animals. We know for sure only that sheep, specifically lambs, were clean in Noah’s day, because that’s the only animal mentioned as being sacrificed (by Abel).<sup>48</sup> It is reasonable to conclude that the classifications of clean and unclean stayed essentially the same until the era of Moses; at Mount Sinai, the list of those animals suitable for sacrifice became harmonized with those suitable for food.

<u>Clean Animals</u>	<u>Unclean Animals</u>
Sheep	Pigs
Cows	Camels
Goats	Horses
Fish	Rabbits
	Shellfish
	Insects

## GOD’S RIGHTEOUS WRATH

So the animals, Noah, his wife, their children, and their sons’ wives entered the ark. After they were all on board, there was a solemn pause. A seven-day break before God poured out His devastation upon the world. I don’t know if this was simply a matter of practicality, to give Noah time to accomplish some last few details, or if it was a time set aside for Noah and his family to contemplate what was about to happen. Perhaps it was time for those who were outside the ark to reconsider; those who watched the religious wacko and his kids build that enormous wooden vessel and then climb inside of it while nothing happened. Unfortunately, even those who may have reconsidered were too late. Some may well have received spiritual mercy from Adonai, but none would escape the horror of the deluge; they would have to watch everyone they loved drown, as they themselves also perished.



In the very near future, this will once again play out. God's people will suddenly be removed by means of our heavenly ark, Yeshua, and be tucked away for safekeeping. Then, as God pours His wrath out on the world for the final time, millions of nonbelieving people will realize that God is real and everything He forewarned us about was true. But it will be too late. Death will be upon them, and there will be no escape. Let's look at Christ's own words to verify that this is in no way allegory; it is literal and very straightforward:

*Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, all the tribes of the Land will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with tremendous power and glory. He will send out his angels with a great shofar; and they will gather together his chosen people from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. Now let the fig tree teach you its lesson: when its branches begin to sprout and leaves appear, you know that summer is approaching. In the same way, when you see all these things, you are to know that the time is near, right at the door. Yes! I tell you that this people will certainly not pass away before all these things happen.*

*Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away. But when that day and hour will come, no one knows—not the angels in heaven, not the Son, only the Father. For the Son of Man's coming will be just as it was in the days of Noah. Back then, before the Flood, people went on eating and drinking, taking wives and becoming wives, right up till the day Noah entered the ark; and they didn't know what was happening until the Flood came and swept them all away. It will be just like that when the Son of Man comes. Then there will be two men in a field—one will be taken and the other left behind. There will be two women grinding flour at the mill—one will be taken and the other left behind. So stay alert, because you don't know on what day your Lord will come. But you do know this: had the owner of the house known when the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore you too must always be ready, for the Son of Man will come when you are not expecting him. (Matt. 24:30–44)*

The end of mankind, or in the Hebrew, *kol yeyum* (which means, “all existence”), was just hours away as Noah and his family and that huge menagerie huddled together inside the ark. I'm not sure any of us can imagine what must have been going through Noah and his family's minds as they heard the frantic screams of their neighbors and friends and family, knowing they could not help them.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF NUMBERS

There really is very little detail about the Flood itself, yet there are a couple of things we should take notice of and tuck away for future reference. There is no doubt that numbers have great significance in the Bible; they can be literal or they can be symbolic, and usually they are both literal and symbolic at the same time (another aspect of the Reality of Duality).

Forty is the second-most-used number in the Bible.<sup>49</sup> It is usually used in reference to a trial or a test of some kind; it is also frequently used as a period of probation. It can mark a passing from one era into another. The Hebrews saw

forty as the age of wisdom. The Greeks saw forty as the pinnacle of life. And it was from the combination of these two views that Christian tradition considered a generation to equal forty years. Here in the Flood account, we'll find that it rained forty full days (that is, forty twenty-four-hour periods), and then another forty days passed before the tops of mountains appeared and the window in the ark was opened. Jacob, called Israel, was embalmed for forty days. Moses was on the mountain at Sinai without food for forty days. Jesus fasted in the wilderness for forty days before being tempted by the devil.<sup>50</sup> The twelve spies of the wandering horde of Israel, on their exodus from Egypt, went to scout out the inhabitants of the land of Canaan for forty days. In the book of Jonah, Ninevah was granted forty days of repentance to avoid obliteration. Forty days was the purification time required of a new mother when she gave birth to a male child.

Isaac was forty years old when he married Rivkah (Rebecca). Moses led Israel in the wilderness for forty years. Kings David and Solomon each ruled Israel for forty years.

We also see multiples of forty years used; this is common Hebrew symbology. Moses was said to be 120 years old when he died (3 x 40). A new mother was ritually impure for eighty days after birthing a girl child (2 x 40). There are many more examples, but perhaps you can now see the connection.

An item of interest, often overlooked, is that it was not simply forty days of rain (as we understand it—water falling from the sky) that caused the earth's oceans to overflow. We're also told in Genesis 7:11 that the "fountains of the great deep" burst open and water poured from them as well. This great underground cavern, or perhaps network of caverns, that up to then had been filled with water, now spewed out onto the surface.

## THE DATE OF THE FLOOD

*On the seventeenth day of the second month of the 600th year of Noah's life . . . (Gen. 7:11a)*

## THE GREAT DEEP

We've encountered the term *the great deep* before. Back in Genesis 1, we were told that darkness, spiritual darkness, hovered over *the great deep*. Could it be that this great deep, being emptied of its water to judge the world with a flood, was also being readied to judge Satan? For in Revelation we are told that just before we enter into the millennial kingdom period Satan is going to be thrown into the Abyss (the *abussos*), the same word used for *the great deep*. Could the source of the floodwater and the place where Satan will be chained up for one thousand years be the same? Yes, I think it is.

Noah was six hundred years old when the rain began. It was on the seventeenth day of the second month that the deluge started. Now, there have been many readings on exactly what was being said here, and Bible scholars have varying ideas of whether that verse was referring to the seventeenth day of the second month of the Hebrew year, or the seventeenth day of the second month of Noah's six-hundredth year of life. Well, it's both. Tradition states that Noah was born on the first day of the first month; in our terms, New Year's Day. Further, as we'll find in the next chapter, it was going to be the twenty-seventh day of the second month when the waters subsided sufficiently for Noah and his family to leave the ark—or, exactly one year. How can we say this was exactly one year? Keep one thing in mind: this was *not* a solar year, 365 days. This was a Hebrew lunar year. Twelve new moons plus eleven days, generally about 359 days. The beginning of the Hebrew year was originally in the fall, so it is likely that the Flood began in the first half of what we would call November.

Once Noah and his family—specifically, his three sons named Shem, Ham, and Yefet and all their wives—were on board, a seven-day period passed and then the skies opened up from above and water welled up from below. Then

a truly remarkable thing happened: God physically closed the door of the ark and shut them in. What better picture of God’s control over all things than He Himself closing that door and thus sealing the fate of all other inhabitants of the world to death, but giving Noah and his family life. These events show us the patterns that God operates by; they never change. If you want a much more satisfying way to understand the Torah and the whole Bible, cease asking why. Instead, look for the pattern, and that will explain God’s mind on the matter to the extent that He has chosen to reveal it to us.

### WHAT SURVIVED THE FLOOD?

*The water covered the mountains by more than twenty-two-and-a-half feet. All living beings that moved on the earth perished—birds, livestock, other animals, insects, and every human being, everything in whose nostrils was the breath of the spirit of life; whatever was on dry land died. He wiped out every living thing on the surface of the ground—not only human beings, but livestock, creeping animals and birds in the air. They were wiped out from the earth; only Noah was left, along with those who were with him in the ark. (Gen. 7:20–23)*

Verse 20 tells us that the water accumulated on the earth’s surface until the highest mountain-tops were fifteen cubits, or about twenty-five feet, under water. Now, let’s be very clear about what died and what lived through the Flood. Verses 21–23 are to be taken as a whole. Verse 21 gives us the broad categories of what perished, and verse 22 gives further details about verse 21. Verse 21 is not one category of things that perished, and verse 22 another. We’re told that all basar (flesh—animals and mankind) died; in addition,



birds and swarming things like mice and rats and lizards and snakes were drowned out. But this did not include fish or sea creatures. We know this because verse 22, particularly in the original Hebrew, is quite specific about this. It was all that had “the breath of life” in them that died. The *neshemah*, what I term “the life spirit” placed into living creatures, was what died. All plant life did *not* die out; plants don’t have *neshemah*. Further, it was those living beings that lived on *charabah*, dry ground, who perished. If it lived on dry land, it died. If it required an extended period of life on dry land, it died. Fish and other aquatic animals lived. Amphibians that could live in the water for extended periods of time lived.

The rain lasted for forty days and forty nights, but the water kept increasing for a total of 150 days, even after the rain stopped, for the Abyss had not yet emptied itself of water. The only life, the only *nephesh* (“living beings”) that remained on earth lay within the belly of the ark.

## GENESIS 8

ASSIGNMENT: Read Genesis 8.

### GOD'S LOVE FOR LIVING CREATURES

Just as chapter 7 began with the comforting words of God inviting the righteous family of Noah into the safety of the ark, chapter 8 tells us that God “remembered” Noah. But the verse doesn’t stop there; it says He also remembered all the living things that came into the ark with Noah:

*God remembered Noah, every living thing and all the livestock with him in the ark. (Gen. 8:1a)*

It cannot be stressed enough how important God’s living creatures, what we typically call animals, are to God. Man certainly has been placed above the animals, in dominion over animals, yet we’re made of the same stuff as the animals: the dust of the ground. God put that same *nesbimah*, spirit of life, into both animals and mankind. Animals were not throwaways; early in Genesis, when God had the animals parade by Adam as he named them, we must not forget that Adam was given the opportunity to select one of them as a companion. Not as a sexual partner, but as a friend. This shows us the place man has slightly above the animals, but it also reveals the loving importance God places on His living creatures.

To God, it was terrible the day He had to kill an animal or two to make animal-skin clothing to cover Adam and Eve; it grieved Him greatly. And it grieved Him when, for His own good reasons, it became necessary for animals

to be slain on a regular basis as blood sacrifice, to atone for humans’ sins. Finally, it must have grieved Him yet again, when the Father Creator instructed Noah and his descendants that they could now kill thousands, even millions, of His beloved living creatures for food. This was a *huge* matter. When we’re told that God *knows* when a sparrow falls from the sky, it’s because that sparrow is one of His living creatures who no longer lives. It was not “knowing the sparrow” in the sense that a single dollar is important to an accountant reconciling his books. Rather, it was because God put the life spirit into that creature, and now that life was extinguished. We too often look at that verse from the viewpoint of how important mankind is because it says that God numbers the hairs on our heads. But that’s not the entire point; it is that even a bird is important to Him. So, *long* before Yeshua came into the world to bear our punishment, God was watching His living creatures die on account of man’s sin.

The second half of Genesis 8:1 uses a word that is familiar to us. It says that God brought a “rushing wind”<sup>51</sup> across the earth, to push back the waters: “So God caused a wind to pass over the earth, and the water began to go down.” The Hebrew word used here is *ruach*. In Hebrew, Holy Spirit is *Ruach HaKodesh*. *Ruach* is commonly used in the OT as a word to describe God’s spirit, or sometimes “spirit” in general. So, this rushing wind was more than just a weather event; the wind was real and literal, but it also had a spiritual component as it was “of God.” Another example of the Reality of Duality.



## THE WATERS RECEDE

After 150 days of the water rising, the water receded for the next 150 days.

The *tevah*, that rudderless floating wooden ark, had bobbed around in the floodwaters until it came to rest upon the mountains of Ararat. This was not Mount Ararat, a specific peak; rather, it was somewhere on top of one of the mountains of the extensive Ararat mountain range that is in modern-day Turkey. We're told the precise day: the seventh month, the seventeenth day of the month. But it would be awhile before the family could disembark. Forty more days passed, and Noah sent out a raven, a scavenger bird, an *unclean* animal. It didn't come back, which indicated it had found food, likely dead animals, as well as a place to nest, likely in the now uncovered mountaintops. Next a dove, a *clean* animal, was sent out, but it returned, indicating that it had no food source or place to nest. A week later Noah sent out another dove, and this time it returned with a green, freshly picked leaf from an olive tree in its beak. Another week passed, and the dove didn't return, indicating that the water had receded to the tree line or below.<sup>52</sup>

## THE FLOOD AS SHADOW OF THE LIVING WATER

The selfsame Flood that destroyed the old would also purify and make way for the new. Death of the corrupted was needed in order to prepare for new life. This is a type and a shadow of what was to come. Messiah, called Living Water in the NT, is what this all pointed to. Our old natures die, and we are purified through the Living Water that purifies and purges away our unclean state as a result of our sin. And, it sets up the symbolic meaning of water baptism. Through death of the old life bound to sin, we are brought to new life bound to God.

For some reason, God wants us to know the exact month and the day that certain stages of the flooding and its receding occurred. For instance, we see that on the first day of the first month—that is, the first day of a new year (or as the Jews call it, Rosh Hoshanna)—it was safe to remove the covering over the ark. Finally, on the twenty-seventh day of the second month, the ground had dried up enough for the ark's inhabitants to set foot on it again, and God instructed Noah that he could now resume life on the earth's surface.

## NOACH'S SACRIFICE

Noah well understood by now the impact of what had just transpired. And, in an absolutely appropriate response, he built an altar and sacrificed *every* kind of *clean* animal to the Lord:

*Noah built an altar to GOD. He selected clean animals and birds from every species and offered them as burnt-offerings on the altar. (Gen. 8:20 The Message)*

The first act of the new order of mankind was to honor God. Yet, as we'll soon see, this newly purified world that began in righteousness and thoroughly understood sin and its



awful, destructive consequences would not stay clean for long.

## THE “CLEAN” AND “UNCLEAN” DESIGNATIONS

This sacrifice of Noah shows us at least one rather important reason that God ordered that fourteen (that is, seven pairs) of clean animals be brought on board the ark. If Noah was going to sacrifice from every single species of clean animal (which he did), this first sacrifice would have signaled the extinction of those species if there had been only one pair on board. By performing this series of sacrifices, Noah affirmed that he would take up the mantle of the line of Seth: the godly line of people.

But what were the unclean animals used for? Why were they even retained, instead of just being allowed to die out in the Flood? It seems the answer lies in practicality. Without getting too graphic, several of the unclean variety of animals live on a scavenger diet. The corpses of dead people and animals must have been strewn everywhere as the waters receded. These animals would have thrived on this huge “food” supply, and they certainly served the useful purpose of cleaning up the landscape, just as vultures and other scavengers do today. And, we should not forget the overriding principle of our universe: that *everything has an opposite*. If there was clean, there had to be unclean.

By no means are all unclean animals scavengers. In fact, there appears to be no behavior pattern or physical characteristic, no particular kind of diet or other trait that we can put our finger on to understand why God designated certain animals as unclean. There have been many theories put forth, but absolutely none hold water. We simply need to grasp that God is sovereign; He makes decisions and choices and usually doesn't reveal the reasoning behind them. The main thing to remember is that unclean animals are not a broad category of *bad* animals and clean animals are not *inherently* better than unclean animals. Unclean animals

are not *defective*, nor are they of *less importance* to God. Their status is neither more nor less than a sovereign choice made by the Creator for His own good reason. He has never shared the reasoning behind that choice with us.

## GOD'S RESPONSE TO NOACH'S SACRIFICE

Chapter 8 reveals a few important pieces of information about God's response to Noah's sacrifice:

*GOD smelled the sweet fragrance and thought to himself, “I'll never again curse the ground because of people. I know they have this bent toward evil from an early age, but I'll never again kill off everything living as I've just done. For as long as Earth lasts, planting and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never stop.” (Gen. 8:21–22 The Message)*

1. God accepted Noah's sacrifices; He found them pleasing.
2. God was never again going to destroy all land-inhabiting creatures in the way He had just done (with a deluge of water).

Note that God thought to Himself, “The human heart forms evil from an early age.” What could be a more direct admission by the Almighty than this: that man has a problem; we have evil in us. Once again there is no reference to Satan. Where does God pin the problem of evil in mankind on the devil? He doesn't. Don't get me wrong: Satan is real, and he entices men to do evil. But Satan did not create evil. Satan is a created being just like anything or anyone else, and he made a moral choice and became evil embodied to the fullest. By means of deception, he simply takes advantage of the evil inclination that is already within us.

The phrase “from an early age” is written as *mine'araw* in Hebrew. This literally means “from his awakening.” Perhaps a better rendering of that phrase would be: “I know they have this

bent toward evil *from their awakening*.” Rabbi Judah (one of the great ancient Jewish sages) explained that this refers to that moment when a human gains self-awareness. The sages argued whether this awareness took place in the womb, immediately upon birth, or very shortly thereafter. But, either way, the point is that *all* persons are born with hearts that form evil. That is what is being said here in verse 21.

However, this verse is *not* saying that a human heart is only evil, not at all. It is not saying that babies are automatically born with a 100 percent evil inclination. We are not born 100 percent evil. If you have no relationship with God, you still are not 100 percent evil. This important statement by God is simply acknowledging that everyone is born with an evil inclination; but, due to the principle of opposites, everyone is also born with a good inclination as well.

### WHEN DID GOD ABANDON THE GARDEN OF EDEN?

When did God abandon the Garden of Eden? Well, up to the Flood, apparently man looked toward the Garden when communicating with God. From here on in the Bible, post-Flood, we will see that God looks *downward* to man, and man *upward* to God. Along with the rest of the earth, the Garden was destroyed by the



The heart is neither 100 percent good nor 100 percent evil; it is a mixture of both.

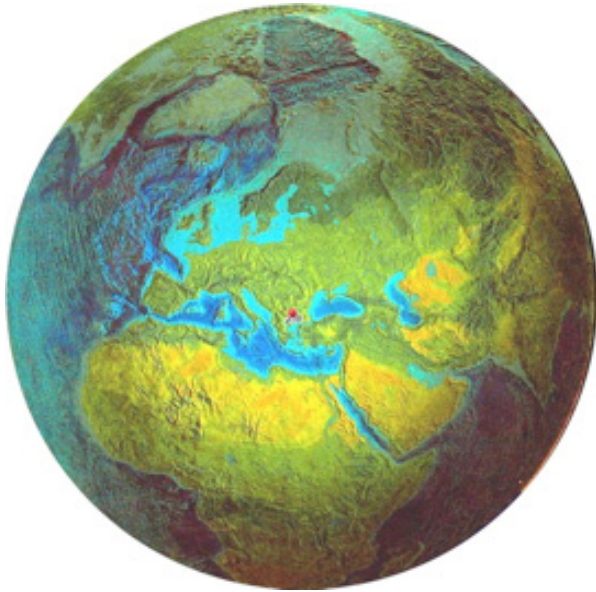
Flood; God then communicated with man from His heavenly realm. It would be a long time before He would reestablish a place where He would dwell with mankind, and it happened in Moses’s day with the building of the wilderness tabernacle.

### THE EARTH AFTER THE FLOOD

Immediately following the Flood, the earth was a very different place from what it had been just a few short months earlier. The oceans were more extensive, and therefore, there was less land surface than before the Flood. The land was nearly barren of vegetation and devoid of animal life. The mist that enveloped the air and watered the vegetation was gone. The formerly even and temperate world climate had more radical swings. Seasons became more pronounced, and as a result, the cycle of seasons made it all the more critical that humans have a plan for the growth of plants for food, which now depended on temperature, rainfall, and certain amounts of sunlight to be present. But the most dramatic change from only a few months earlier was that only eight people and a handful of animals were left to inhabit and repopulate the entire surface of the earth. Our planet was a rather lonely place for Noah and the living creatures that lived above our oceans.

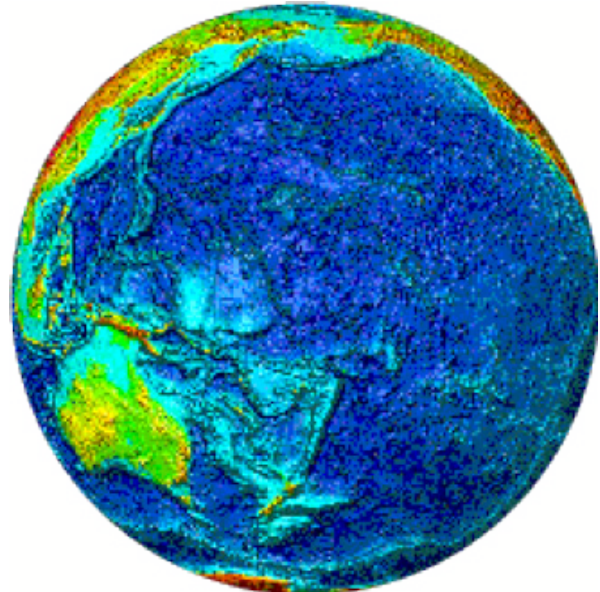
### CONCLUSION

Noah, indeed, was the new Adam. From him all future mankind would spring. You and I are related to Noah, even more closely related than we are to Adam. But Noah and Adam operated from very different paradigms. Their situations were quite opposite. Adam was created as perfection, in a world of absolute perfection. He was created in the image of God. Noah, however, was born into a world of imperfection. For although Noah was declared righteous in God’s eyes, Noah was born with a fallen nature into a fallen world. Just like us. Because Noah trusted and obeyed God, God declared Noah



The earth before the Flood

righteous; he certainly wasn't sinless. This most fundamental principle of salvation, trusting God and being credited (as opposed to earning) righteousness, is the same exact principle that we count on today, and it is present right here in the OT, in Genesis. As Adam was created in the image of God, so Noach was "created," so to speak, in the image of Adam. An old era had ended and a new one began. This universally



The earth after the Flood

sinful state of the world, of which Noach was the patriarch, represented the *new* basis of how God would deal with the post-Flood world and all its aspects—quite apart from how it was for Adam, quite apart from how it would be with the eventual advent of Christ, and still quite apart from how it will be someday in the not-too-distant future.

## GENESIS 9

ASSIGNMENT: Read Genesis 9.

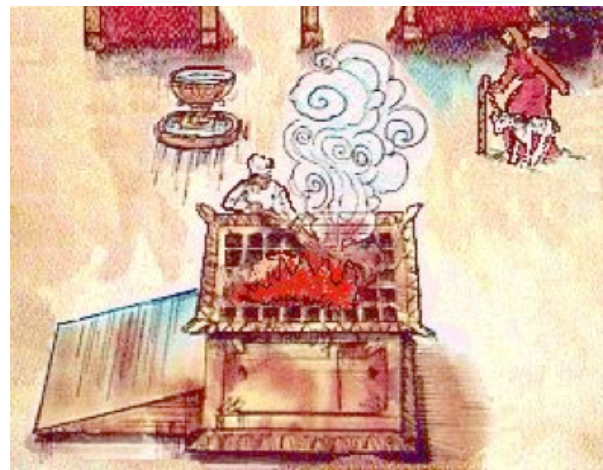
This begins the story of the regeneration and the reordering of society, and we immediately see the vast differences between the old world before the Flood and the new, post-Flood world.

The great changes in the governing dynamics of man's existence—in his relationship to his environment and in his responsibilities before God—are evident right away in verse 2. Whereas animals were once fearless, trusting, and in willing subjection to man before the Flood, now God ordained that man's dominion over animals would be by force if necessary. The very same animals that so docilely appeared before Adam to be named would now be terrified of man. Verse 3 tells us that meat was no longer prohibited as food for man. Animal flesh was now an approved source of nutrition, but it was not without restrictions. I've heard people ask how it was that Noah got all those "wild animals" to enter the ark; this verse makes it clear: before the Flood man had a different relationship with animals than he does now, after the Flood.

Verse 2 also gives us an opportunity to put a little common sense back into reading the Bible. Never think that the words written do not mean what they say. Yet remember that they mean what they mean within the Hebrew culture of that day, not necessarily within the culture of the twenty-first century. It says here that *all* animals would fear and dread man. Now, the fact is, we know full well that not 100 percent of all animals fear men; they never have. Many animals are quite comfortable with men because they have been domesticated and raised for that purpose, such as sheep, dogs, cats, and so on. Most rabbits and

Christian academics agree that when the Bible says *everything* or *every* or *all*, it means it in a general sense, not as an absolute. *All* does not mean 100 percent; rather, it means, "It is the general rule, but there are likely a handful of exceptions." This is not something determined by looking at the original language but at the cultural context of the expression. For example, 1 Samuel 13:5 refers to the Philistine army being as many as the sands on the seashore. We moderns think in terms of numerical precision, but the ancients didn't think that way. They were comfortable with generalizing numbers, so we have to be very careful not to read into the holy texts theological absolutes when none were intended.<sup>53</sup>

Although every living creature (again, that is, the vast majority) was okay for food, there was a very strict prohibition placed on the eating of animal flesh—man could not eat the blood. The reason? The blood was where the life was contained. Blood was to be used only for divine sacrifice and never for human consumption. Blood, the seat of life, was simply too holy for man to be allowed to partake of it.



Blood sacrifice is required as payment for sins.

The importance of blood is carried over from animals to humans. Thus murder, the taking of human blood, is specifically prohibited. Notice that in verse 5 God handed the duty of meting out justice for homicide over to mankind. Up to this point, God had dealt with it Himself, and He dealt with it very differently than humans are to deal with it. When Cain, or Kayin, killed his brother Abel, he was banished from the presence of God. God even placed a sign over Cain so that others would not be tempted to take matters into their own hands, and harm Cain in retribution. Mere separation from God had been considered as sufficient punishment, but no longer was that the case. In verse 6 God introduced the death penalty by instructing that any man who took another man's life would himself be killed by men.

What the ancient rabbis so brilliantly point out concerning these passages is that here we find God establishing the principle of earthly government. Civil law was created when the Lord delegated some of His authority to human beings. Later, in Leviticus, God went to great lengths to define something that we constantly try to rewrite, with little success: what justice is. We tend to call God's definition of justice "the Law."

These same rabbis and scribes also came to the conclusion that if God turned over to man the terrible matter of determining capital punishment, the right to take human life, then certainly lesser matters of life such as authority over wives, children, servants, property, land, and so on were also now in man's hands. From this came what were eventually called the seven Noachide Laws. The Noachide Laws were essentially the most fundamental principles of civil justice (perhaps as told by God to Noah), from which all other civil laws would be based. We don't actually see these seven laws specifically enumerated at this point in Scripture. Interestingly, though, thousands of years later, after Christ had come and gone, these Noachide Laws played a role in the determination of the Jerusalem Council of AD 49 as to the minimum

behavioral requirements for Gentiles who wanted to fellowship with, and worship alongside, Jews who had come to believe that Yeshua was their Messiah.

The Noachide Laws were:

1. Man was prohibited from idol worship.
2. Man was not to commit blasphemy (taking God's name in vain).
3. Man was not to murder.
4. Man was not to commit incest.
5. Man was not to rob or steal.
6. Man was not to eat blood, nor was he to eat the meat of animals that had been strangled (and therefore, not "drained of their blood").
7. Man was to submit to the authority of a human government.

## GOD'S COVENANT

In verse 8, God made a covenant. We'll learn a little more about the important nature of covenants when we study Abraham, but for now, recognize that this particular covenant was a contract in the form of a promise. In this case it was said to be between God and Noah, but it was also a promise from God to *all* living creatures. Noah was the representative agent of all new life on the planet. This particular covenant, or contract, was unilateral; the contract did *not* depend on man's response nor man's behavior. It was all on God.<sup>54</sup>

This is the first covenant between God and man mentioned in the Torah. There is a theological belief that this covenant with Noah was actually the second covenant with mankind. These scholars suggest that the first was between God and Adam; it was that if Adam didn't eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, man could stay in the Garden with God forever. This waters down the impact of the concept of covenant. Certainly God gave Adam an instruction not to eat of that tree, but the fact that if he disobeyed there would be a penalty does *not* raise that instruction to the level of a covenant.

God's promise, or covenant, to Noah was this: He would never again destroy the world

and everything in it . . . by flood. Of course, God did leave the door open to destroy the world by just about any other means, but that's another story. The sign of this covenant was the rainbow.

When God looked upon the rainbow, He said, "I will remember my covenant which is between myself and you and every living creature of any kind; and the water will never again become a flood to destroy all living beings" (Gen. 9:15). This reference to God's memory is a figurative statement. God is not a man, and He does not have human attributes. He is a wholly separate and different being than man. Man is not some type of lesser god. God doesn't need to have His memory jogged. He doesn't need an enormous notepad to remember what He has promised. But for many generations of Noah's descendants, as the flood was relatively fresh in the minds of Noah and his sons, each time it rained, there was most likely a sense of anxiousness as they waited for the rain to stop! How reassuring it must have been to look up through the parting clouds to see that brilliant rainbow in the sky and remember the promise that God had made. Maybe it would do us all good to remember that the rainbow that is so common to us is, in fact, meant as a sign from God. That hasn't changed just because a few thousand years have passed from Noah to our day.

### WAS THIS THE FIRST RAINBOW?

The unequivocal answer to this is . . . *maybe!* God set many physical things in the heavens (the sky) to be used as signs. He didn't necessarily come up with a new one each time He felt a sign was needed. The physics of light and its refraction as it passes through moisture is well understood. We know it is *not* necessary for actual rain to occur to see a rainbow; there just needs to be a sufficient amount of water content in the atmosphere. However, almost universally among ancient and modern biblical scholars, the conclusion is that this *was* the first rainbow, and there's really no reason to belabor the point or to dispute it.

## GOD'S PATTERNS

Just as Adam was the beginning of all mankind on earth, so it was with the new Adam . . . Noah. Because recognizing God's patterns helps us to understand His ways, we ought to look for patterns begun with Adam, from who all men would come, that carry over to Noah, the one from whom all men would come after the Flood. And, while we all relate the fall of Adam to the fall of man, we seldom remember that Noah also fell, and rather quickly I might add. Here are some of the attributes of this God pattern:

Adam	Noah
Adam was made dominant over all the creation.	Noah was made dominant over the entire purified new world.
Adam was blessed by God and instructed to be fruitful and multiply.	Noah was blessed by God and instructed to be fruitful and multiply.
Adam was placed in a garden, and his job was to till (that is, care) for the Garden as the world's first farmer.	Noah began as a gardener as well, for he was the first to plant a vineyard as the new world's first farmer.
Adam fell by means of eating of the fruit that grew in the Garden he tended.	Noah fell by means of eating (drinking) of the fruit (wine) in the Garden he tended.
Adam's nakedness was uncovered as a result of his sin of eating the fruit.	Noah's nakedness was uncovered as a result of his sin of eating (drinking) of the fruit.
Adam's sin resulted in a curse being placed on man.	Noah's sin resulted in a curse being placed on the entire line of Ham.
Adam had three sons, among whom one, Shet, was to be the line of righteousness through which the Messiah would come.	Noah had three sons, among whom one, Shem, was to be the line of righteousness, through which the Messiah would come.

There are several more parallels, but that is enough to illustrate how the patterns God

establishes repeat; because of these established patterns of God, history itself is cyclical.

## THE CHILDREN OF NOACH

We are introduced to the three distinct lines of descendants from which every human alive today comes—the three sons of Noah. We're told these are Ham, Shem, and Japheth (or in Hebrew, *Yefet*). Every person alive comes from one of these three sons of Noah; likely many of us have some of all three of them in us.

Ham is spoken of as “the father of Canaan [Kena'an].” It is a little unusual in the Hebrew culture for a father to have his familial identity wrapped up in his son. It's usually the other way around. But this time there's a reason for it. A story is told in Genesis 9:20–27; it is so emotionless and matter-of-fact that it seems almost trifling, unimportant, and not just a little difficult to understand. In several places in the OT we run across these odd scenes that seem almost out of place, and slightly out of context. But the problem is not with the verses, it's with our inability to connect them to the matters of grave importance they address.

This story is about Noah planting a vineyard, making wine, and getting drunk. He crawled inside his tent and fell asleep, naked as a jaybird. Yes, the great, godly man Noah got falling-down drunk on booze in this case it was wine.<sup>55</sup> Now, much argument over these verses has occurred over the centuries, mostly centered on whether or not Noah accidentally created wine and innocently drank it and had the world's first hangover. Not a chance; Noah undoubtedly knew the result of fermenting grapes and drinking the results. Noah was just a man. He had flaws, and the beauty of our Holy Scriptures is that they don't sanitize humans and make them perfect and infallible like the false religions do with their leaders and founders. Not even the greatest men of the Bible are mentioned without including some of their sins and disagreeable character traits. The reason for this is very straightforward: our righteousness

before God is not dependent on us; it's dependent on God. Always has been, always will be.

Ham entered the tent of Noah and discovered him drunk and naked. He went out of the tent and told his two brothers, Shem and Yefet. The brothers draped a cloak over their shoulders, walked backward into Noah's tent, and let the garment fall over their father's nakedness without having looked upon it.

When Noah woke up, he was offended and angry and took his wrath out not so much on Ham, but on Ham's son Canaan. He pronounced a curse upon Canaan. Yet, there was more to what was going on here than only a curse on Ham's line; there were also blessings pronounced upon Shem and Yefet.

Before we discuss those blessings, the logical question here is: What was Noah so upset about, and why did his grandson Canaan, who didn't appear to even be involved in this event, get the brunt of this curse? Ancient sages have come up with all sorts of reasons. Without going into detail, the thought is that Ham did far more than just to happen upon his father's nakedness. Ham committed some type of unnatural act upon Noah because Ham had become a wicked man. Virtually every competent Bible version uses words in verse 24 that say something like “And when Noah awoke he knew what his youngest son had *done* to him.” However, I no longer accept that Ham did any more to his father than see him naked and then run out and report what he saw to his brothers. After research on the writings of many of the ancient Hebrew sages, I see that there were likely two crimes committed here by Ham.

First was the crime of dishonoring his father. It was not the seeing of Noah drunk and naked that was the crime; it was what Ham did about it. Rather than show respect by covering his father and leaving without uttering a word, Ham dashed outside and tattled to his brothers. In so doing, Ham did *not* honor his father. The principle is this: Noah deserved to be honored because (a) he was Ham's father, and (b) God called Noah, of all men on earth, *tzaddik*, righteous, in His

sight. If God thought Noah righteous, that's the end of the matter. Ham should not have pointed out his father's sin to his brothers.

The second crime Ham may have committed was that called *lashon hara* in Hebrew.<sup>56</sup> Lashon hara is speaking evil of someone, usually in the form of malicious gossip or slander. Though it may not sound all that serious, if you study Leviticus and the condition called *tzara'at* (what is often mistakenly called "leprosy") you'll see that this disease was thought to be a punishment of God and that the crime, or sin, usually associated with contracting *tzara'at* was *lashon hara*, speaking evil of someone.

Noah's other two sons, Shem and Yefet, reacted to Noah's condition correctly; they discreetly and honorably covered their father's nakedness, making every effort to give their father their utmost respect.

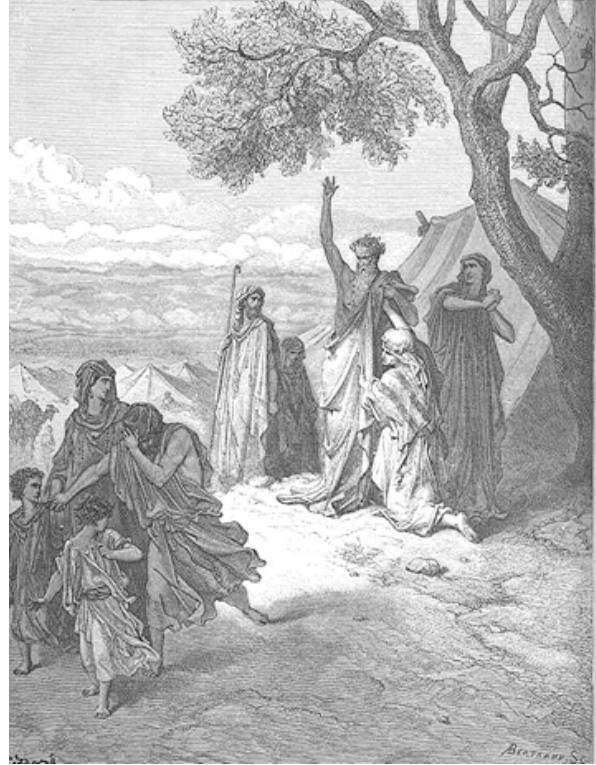
## NOACH'S CURSE

In Genesis 9:25–27, the futures and destinies of Noah's three sons, and the three lines of descent from which every human alive today is attached, were set in stone. In other words, what we have contained in these few words is a powerful prophecy for the future of the human race.

**CURSED BE KENA'AN; HE WILL BE A SERVANT OF SERVANTS TO HIS BROTHERS. (GEN. 9:25)**

Canaan, Ham's son, received a curse. Canaan was named as the accursed one likely because he would have more to do directly with Israel than any other descendant of Ham.<sup>57</sup> What is a curse? It's the opposite of a blessing. A blessing is a beneficial thing; a curse is a judgment. Just as people who were born into the line of blessing, the line of Shem, did nothing to merit such good fortune, so it was with people who were born into the line of the curse, the line of Ham; they did nothing to merit their misfortune.

The people that came from Ham's sons, primarily Canaan, became the races that occupied

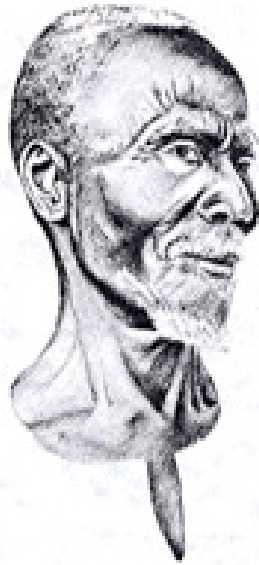


## MEANINGS OF NAMES

The name Shem means "glory" but can also mean "name," in the sense of someone making a name for himself, a powerful person, full of authority. *Ham* means "hot," "warm," or even "burning heat." The name Yefet means "enlargement" but can also indicate "beauty." Bear this in mind as you look at the curses and blessings that Noah pronounced on his children.

Africa, who have for centuries suffered the fate of subjugation. There was much more to this than just a lack of personal freedom, but the idea was that the descendants of Canaan would be subject to the descendants of Shem and Yefet. We must take note that if we look at *all* of Ham's descendants, they often represent enemies of Israel at one time or another in history. We'll repeatedly find Israel either conquering, or being conquered, by them. The people of Egypt come from Ham, and, interestingly, so do the Philistines.





Noah

*My People*

Noah's Son



Ham

Genesis 9:1

And God blessed Noah  
and his sons and said unto  
them, be fruitful and  
multiply and replenish the earth.

Ham's Sons



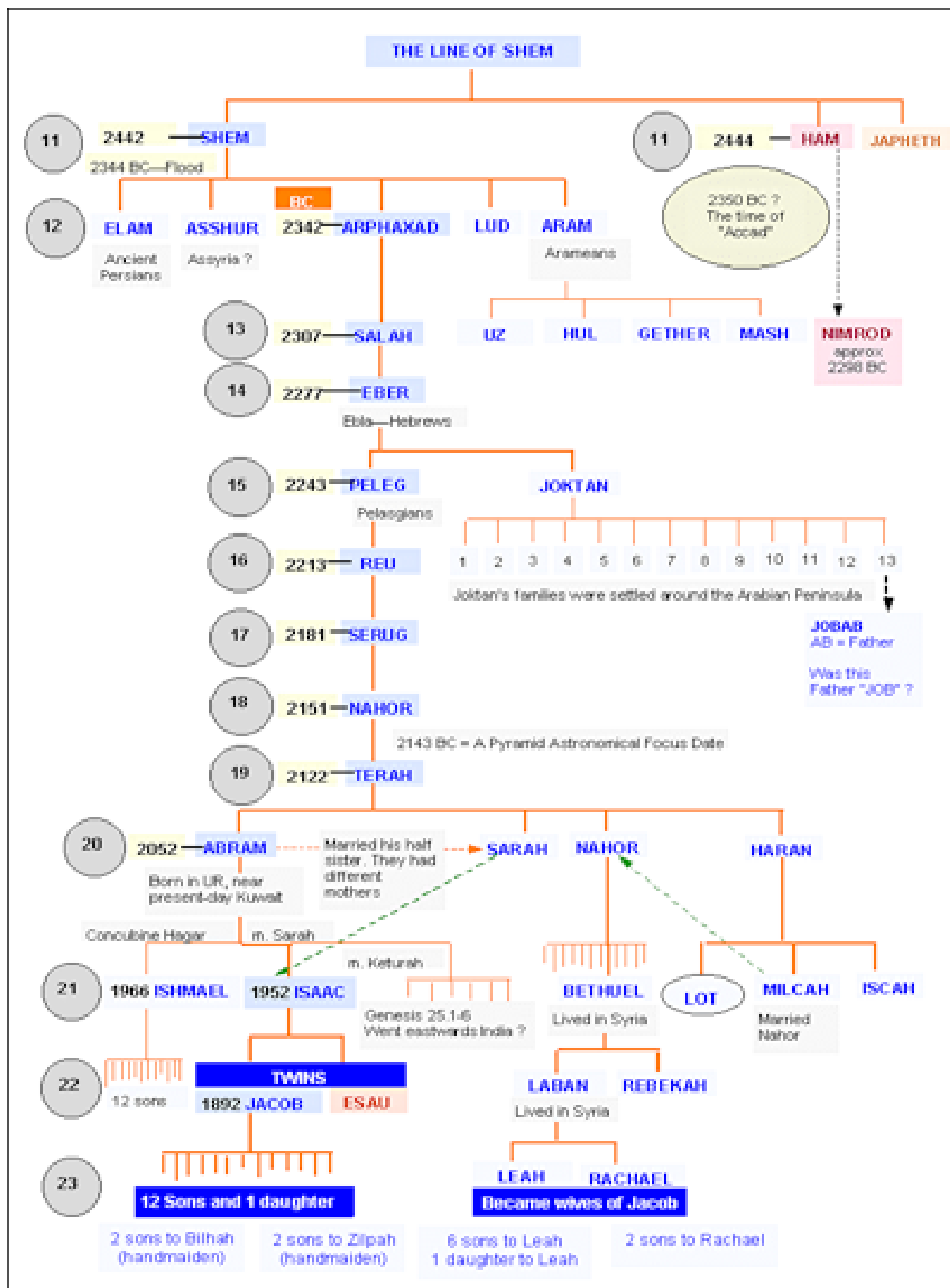
Cush  
Setled  
Ethiopia

Mizraim  
Setled  
Egypt

Phut  
Setled  
Libya

Canaan  
Setled  
Canaan

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Images of what descendants of Shem looked like then and now

**BLESSED BE ADONAI, THE GOD OF SHEM; KENA'AN WILL BE THEIR SERVANT. (GEN. 9:26)**

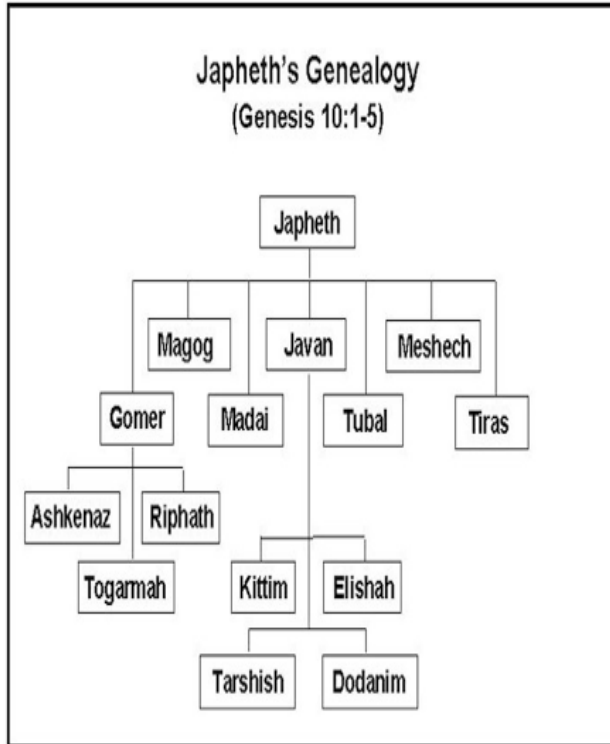
Here we have more proof that something went very wrong with Ham and his children, for it indicates that while Shem would follow the God of Israel, Ham's descendants would, in general, choose another direction. What we have here indicates that Shem's ancestors would carry the authority for Noah's family, which basically meant all mankind. Let me say that again: the rulership of mankind was within the line of Shem, because it was handed over to him by Noah in this blessing we are examining. Noah had every right to do that. Just as Adam was preminent over all other men for a long time, so was Noah in essence "the king of the world" immediately following the Great Flood. He was the head of the only family that

existed on planet Earth. His authority was absolute over men. And Noah chose to hand over that power to Shem. This was so because God, the only God, was called *Shem's God*, indicating a linkage, an allegiance, a relationship between Shem and Yahweh. This relationship with Yahweh was not associated with either Yefet or Ham. The line of Shem would go on to become the Hebrews, Arabs, and many of the Asian peoples.

**MAY GOD ENLARGE YEFET; HE WILL LIVE IN THE TENTS OF SHEM, BUT KENA'AN WILL BE THEIR SERVANT. (GEN. 9:27)**

This blessing bestowed upon Yefet was somewhat dependent on his relationship with Shem. The descendants of Yefet would benefit when they were in good relations with Shem





(which is the meaning of “will live in the tents of Shem”). Yefet was the branch of the family that would “enlarge,” that is, grow greatest in population and wealth. Yefet was the ancestor of the Romans, the Greeks, and most of the European peoples, who were the ancestors of the earliest American colonists. At no time in the history of the world has such wealth and fruitfulness been seen as in what happened first in Rome, then in Europe, and now in America, and it all has to do with the blessing of Yefet. Again, the descendants of Canaan (but in reality, Ham) were to be subject to Yefet’s offspring, just as they would be subject to Shem’s offspring.

In the last couple of chapters of Genesis this exact pattern of blessing and cursing is repeated, and it concerns the blessing that a dying Jacob pronounced on his twelve male children. When we arrive there, we will look extensively at this blessing, because it is every bit as monumental as Noah’s blessing upon his three sons. But here is a slight preview so that you can see the important relationship between the blessing of Noah, and then hundreds of years later, the blessing of Jacob.

## THE BLESSING OF THE FIRSTBORN

The firstborn blessing ceremony is like the reading of the family will at the death of the father. Only the firstborn blessing took place *before* the death of the father, because it was to be pronounced by the father. At some point, usually late in his life, the father would decide it was time for him to tell his boys what their inheritance would be upon the father’s eventual death. By tradition, it was the first male child born to a man (the “firstborn”) who received the bulk of everything the father owned. In addition, that son was then the patriarch or the ruler of that family or tribe. The firstborn was *never* a female.

The firstborn blessing consisted of two major components: first, the passing forward of the right to the family’s authority and power; and second, the passing forward of what came to be called the “double portion” of the family’s wealth. In theory, the double portion meant that the firstborn son got double the amount of inheritance given to any other son. So, for instance, if a man had four sons, he would divide all he had into five parts. His firstborn son would receive two of those five parts, and the remaining three sons each got one part. It wasn’t always that neat and clean, though, because it was not necessarily the giving of exactly double. It could have been almost everything, or it could have been just a tad more than the other sons; the father had great latitude in his decision.

By tradition, the firstborn son got all the power and the bulk of the family’s wealth. His siblings were then under the firstborn’s authority. What we see in Noah’s blessing was a type of firstborn blessing, before it was formalized and given that name. Of Noah’s three sons, two got blessings and one got a curse. In the typical firstborn blessing, the transfer of family authority and family fruitfulness (wealth) went to the same son. But in Noah’s firstborn blessing, those were split: Shem received the authority, and Yefet the fruitfulness and the wealth (the biblical term is *enlargement*). This was unusual compared to the typical firstborn blessing ceremonies.

Fast-forward several hundred years. Jacob, called Israel, was living in Egypt; he called his twelve sons to him as he lay on his deathbed. He knew his time was nearing, so he performed the all-important firstborn blessing (Gen. 49). Due to the indiscretions of the first three of his sons, Jacob wound up declaring Judah, his fourth son, the firstborn. That happened with some frequency, but Jacob went against all custom and tradition when he split the firstborn blessing: he gave the family's power and authority to Judah, but he gave the double portion, the family's wealth expressed as the blessing of enlargement and fruitfulness, to Joseph. This was *highly* unusual, yet it was exactly the same thing Noah had done centuries earlier. The impact of Noah's choice set the destinies of the peoples and nations of the world until history ends. But the impact of what Jacob did set the stage for the emergence of the Messiah, who would redeem mankind and put an end to history as we know it, through Judah's offspring. And it meant the

fruitfulness of the gospel would be spread to the whole world through Joseph's family. We will spend more time on this in chapter 48.

### CANAAN'S LEGACY

The accursed Canaan, son of Ham, was the founder and namesake of the land of Canaan, the land that God told Moses and then Joshua to take away from its inhabitants (Canaan's descendants). This was the land that God set aside for his chosen people, Israel, as they came up out of Egypt. The Canaanites, Ham's descendants, would eventually bow down to the Israelites, Shem's descendants. And Noah's prophetic blessing set all this into motion; it was experienced by the Canaanites as Israel overran them after leaving Egypt, and will culminate when Messiah comes in the near future.

Chapter 9 ends by informing us that Noah lived for another 350 years after the Great Flood, dying at the ripe old age of 950.

## GENESIS 10

ASSIGNMENT: Read Genesis 10.

Many people skip right over Genesis 10 because they feel it is about as interesting as reading a dictionary, a dictionary full of difficult names that have little bearing on much of anything except, perhaps, to Bible academics.

### THE TABLE OF NATIONS

This chapter includes what is often referred to as the Table of Nations. I think it's important to know which nations come from which family lines of Noah. One of the reasons this is important is because of the blessings and curses and destinies that God decided would follow each of these family lines. You see, we are tied to these destinies, like it or not, because we are tied to Noah's sons. So, when you find yourself

in one of these three lines of humans, don't scream at me about it; complain to God. These blessings, curses, and destinies have not ended; their true fulfillment is playing out in our time and will continue until Christ is on His throne, on earth.

To God, family lines are always significant. We've already seen this constant pattern of God dividing, electing, and separating; when Noah blessed his three sons the blessings created division. We saw this principle established early on when God divided light from dark, and good from evil. We saw it when He divided mankind into male and female. We saw it when Seth fathered the line of good and his brother, Cain, the line of evil. Now we see it with Shem fathering the line of good, Ham fathering the line of evil, and Yefet the line of fruitfulness. If we were to follow this theme all the way to the NT, we would find that Christ, the "seed of the woman," had to come from a specific family line that was divided from all other family lines. Let us remember that these lines of good are the paths from which the eventual "seed of the woman" (the woman being Havah Eve) would come. Knowing these details about family lines is key to understanding not just the OT, but the NT as well.

Since Noah's three sons populated the entire present world, it is only fitting that we would know something of those who came after them. Interestingly, although academics tend to scoff at the Bible, they grudgingly admit that Genesis 10 is the most accurate and complete document of its kind pertaining to the origination of the nations and races.

It would not be inaccurate to say that, generally speaking, Shem populated Asia, Ham populated Africa, and Yefet (Japheth) populated





Europe. Of course there are exceptions, and ongoing migration and significant intermixing among Noah’s descendants took place over the centuries, so the absolute purity of races and family lines tied to Noah long ago diminished or disappeared.

### THE DESCENDANTS OF YEFET

The descendants of Yefet became the Cymry, from Gomer, who were the first to settle the area of Wales and Brittany; the Scythians, from Magog, who formed the Russian people; the Medes, from Madai; the Greeks, from Yavan; and the Thracians, from Tiras, who became the Macedonians, from whom eventually came Alexander the Great. Yefet was also the father of the Germans, Celts, and Armenians. Tarshish, which is primarily modern-day Spain, was in his



ASSIGNMENT: Read Isaiah 60:1–12.

line as well. Some of you prophecy buffs will recognize the name Tarshish, for it was written in Isaiah twenty-seven hundred years ago and its fulfillment has begun in most of our lifetimes and is continuing as we speak.

If you don’t have a chill running down your spine, then you completely missed what I just read to you. *Our generation* is in the midst of this very event. This is about the Jews returning to Israel. But, even more, it is about *all Israelites* returning to Israel.

We’ll get into this more fully later, but for now know that the Jews represent only two of the twelve tribes of Israel. There are other Israelite tribes in existence in Asia, and they are in the process of returning to the land at this moment and their numbers will accelerate very soon. How do I know this? Not only is this prophecy in Isaiah, but it is even more specifically, and in more detail, spoken of in Ezekiel 37. In addition, the Israeli government officially acknowledged for the first time in March 2005 that, indeed, there have been found members of what has been termed the “lost tribes of Israel”; they are Israelites, but they are *not* Jews. That may be a little murky for you, but later it will be clear.

I have often heard Bible teachers and pastors speak of how ships will come from Tarshish to bring Jews back home to Israel in the last days. They suggest that Tarshish wasn’t literal; it was a word that symbolized faraway places. They must have been among the many who chose to skip over Genesis 10. For there we certainly see exactly who Tarshish was: a son of Gomer, who was a son of Yefet.

One of the largest sects of Jews in existence is the Sephardic Jews. Sephardic Jews are Jews who come, primarily but not entirely, from a large group of Hebrews who settled in Spain during the sixth, seventh, and eighth centuries. Many Sephardic Jews led the way back to the Holy

## NOAH'S CHILDREN

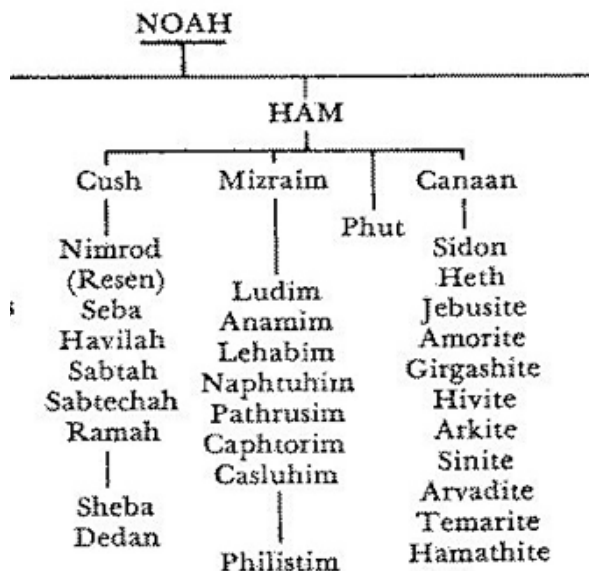
Remember: Shem, Ham, and Yefet were *not* the only sons Noach produced. They were the sons selected for reasons unknown to be included in the group of tzaddik, the eight righteous people who were allowed to live through the Flood for the purpose of repopulating the earth. Noach had many sons and daughters over the six hundred years he lived before the Flood began. And, I suspect, fathered more *after* the Flood. They were apparently unimportant to the purpose of the story, so they have not been recorded. Of course, Shem, Ham, and Yefet were the only *surviving* sons of Noach. All the rest—daughters, grand-daughters, grandsons, great-grandsons, and too many “greats” to speak of—all were deemed wicked by Yehoveh and were destroyed right along with everyone else in the deluge.

Land late in the nineteenth century, and then again after World War I and later after World War II. Remember it this way: Spain equals Sephardic equals Tarshish. This is neither speculation nor allegory, just simply historical fact.

## THE DESCENDANTS OF HAM

In Genesis 10:6 we follow the line of Ham, the accursed line of Ham. We need to pay close attention to these names, for they will play a prominent role in the Bible. Cush is Ethiopia. Mizraim is Egypt. Put is Libya, and Canaan is the founder of the land of Canaan, conquered by Joshua, which became Israel; those descendants of Canaan form many of the people of the Middle East and the Orient, some of which are often, mistakenly, called Arabs.<sup>58</sup>

We are told that Kush was the father of the infamous Nimrod. It might come as a surprise to you that Nimrod was a black man. This is not at all conjecture; many figurines, reliefs, and etchings of Nimrod have been found, going back thousands of years, and they all confirm his Negro features. It is perfectly logical that Nimrod should have been a black man, because in the



Bible whenever you see people called Kushites, that is, people who descended from Kush, you could, for your own frame of reference, call them Ethiopians (generically speaking, a race of black-skinned people). Further, it is ancient Jewish tradition that Ham was a black man.

We should not just mention Nimrod's name and then quickly move on. Ancient Assyrian tablets, found in large quantities, not only mention Nimrod, they also confirm the title for him that we see in Genesis 10:9: “mighty hunter.” But the Assyrian tablets explain that this was not because he was good at killing deer, fowl, rabbits, or wild boars. This expression means “a hunter of men,” a warrior. Being a fierce warrior, Nimrod became the very first empire builder and world tyrant. His empire was Bavel, the most ancient Babylon—not the Babylon of Nebuchadnezzar, which came many centuries later. During Nimrod's day, Bavel was located in the land of Shinar, an area a little west from where Abraham would come, located in modern-day Iraq. Nimrod is credited with being the builder of Bavel, as well as three other major cities in that area.

Next we're told that “Ashur” went forth and built Nineveh, the fabulous city at the heart of Assyria. Like Nimrod, this Ashur fellow built three more great cities in Assyria. Who was Ashur? *Ashur* is simply the Assyrian name for



*Nimrod* (a Babylonian name). So, verse 11 is still speaking about the same man, Nimrod, just using a different language.

Let me give you a little insight about biblical names: very often, you see the same person with as many as three or four different names, depending on which nation that person was residing in, in what era the biblical account was written versus when the recorded event actually occurred, and which culture was speaking of him. Because just like today where Rick or Ricky is an American nickname, Richard is the more formal English version, Ricardo is a Spanish variation, Hecardo is Brazilian . . . but all are the same name. The same thing happens concerning nations, regions, and cities: the names change over the years as cultures and languages change, but all still refer to the same person or place.

In verse 13, we're told something that has great impact on our current events: "Mitzrayim fathered the Ludim, the 'Anamim, the L'havim, the Naftuchim." Mitzrayim, son of Ham—the line of evil, cursed by God—fathered a people called the Kasluchim. From the Kasluchim descended the dreaded Philistines. And we need to remember that the modern word for *Philistine* is *Palestine*. The Palestinians of today claim to be descendants of the Philistines, who were descended from Ham, but that claim is not entirely true. Some, indeed, are Philistine descendants, but the bulk of the Palestinians whom we see fighting the Israeli Jews every night on TV are Arabs from various areas of the Middle East. Although many Arabs have come as immigrants to the Holy Land area over the last seventy-five to one hundred years seeking work on Jewish farms and in Jewish factories, Arabs are *not* from the line of Ham, they are from the line of Shem. That said, the fact is that many of these people have made a conscious decision, out of their hatred for Israel, to identify with the Philistines because the Philistines were Israel's archenemy. But they have unwittingly created an enormous problem for themselves. Just as a person of any descent can become an Israelite by formally identifying themselves with Israel (on a physical

level, by converting and becoming a Jew), so can a person become a Philistine by identifying with the Philistines. Many Palestinian Arabs have given up their heritage of the line of good (Shem) to join the line of evil (Ham). They have also given up the Semite God, Yahweh, for a false god, Allah, as have most Arabs. They will be judged for it, and we need to pray for them to wake up to this fact before it's too late.

In verses 15–18 we see a list of tribes spawned by Canaan. Later, during the exodus from Egypt, you'll see many of these names reappear as enemies of the Israelites who will try to keep them out of the Promised Land.

## DESCENDANTS OF SHEM

We now come to the blessed line of Shem, the line of good. The "line of good" and "line of evil" descriptions do not mean that all people in the one line turned out good and those from the other group are all evil. By no means are all people who come from Ham destined to be wicked or subjugated nor all people who come from Shem destined to be godly, prosperous, and free. Notice we come across the name Ashur as a son of Shem. This is *not* the Ashur who built Ninevah; that Ashur was simply the Assyrian name for Nimrod. This is another person named Ashur.

Let me sum up the most important aspect of the verses spelling out the line of Shem: You'll notice that Shem is referred to as the "father" or "ancestor" of the children or descendants of Ever, or Eber. This is key to Hebrew history because from the line of Eber would come another of God's divisions: Peleg and Yoktan. Dividing, electing, separating. Watch for this, for this is a major theme that points to a way God works His will throughout the Bible, and for that matter, in our own lives. Peleg and Yoktan were brothers, sons of Ever. Interestingly, *Peleg* means "division." For, from the line of Peleg came Abraham, from whom God's plan to rescue all of mankind, to restore fallen man to Himself, would come.

## GENESIS 11

ASSIGNMENT: Read Genesis 11.

### NIMROD MOVES EAST

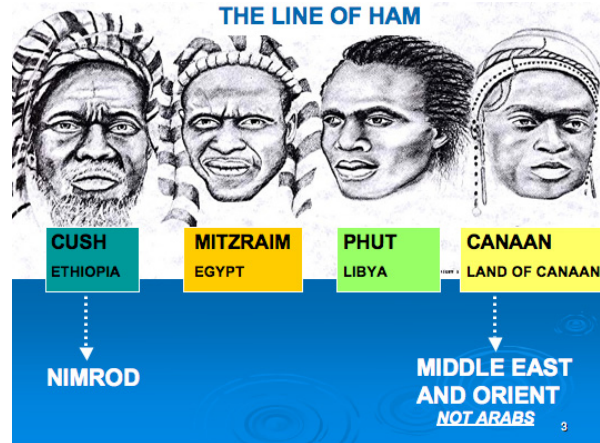
Up to the time of Nimrod every person in the whole world spoke the same language: “The whole earth used the same language, the same words” (Gen. 11:1). Apparently people were dispersing at a very measured rate, and they stayed quite linked to the common language because they didn’t *separate* themselves from one another, they just expanded like urban sprawl.

The direction toward which these people expanded was . . . east!

*It came about that as they traveled from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shin’ar and lived there. (Gen. 11:2)*

Here *east* has the greatest of meaning. Notice that the wording says they (the bulk of Noah’s descendants) came *from* the east to Shinar; they did not move *to* the east. That’s a tad confusing, because Shinar is south and east of where they came. Shinar is in modern-day Iraq, near the Persian Gulf, in an area dominated by the city of Basra. Shinar and Sumer are the same place; the names come from different languages.

The reason why we have the reference to moving from the east is that by going east from where God had placed them, they in essence moved away from God. We shouldn’t necessarily think of their moving as evil, per se. After all, they were accomplishing that which God had instructed, to repopulate the planet. Rather, the biblical designation that they were going “from



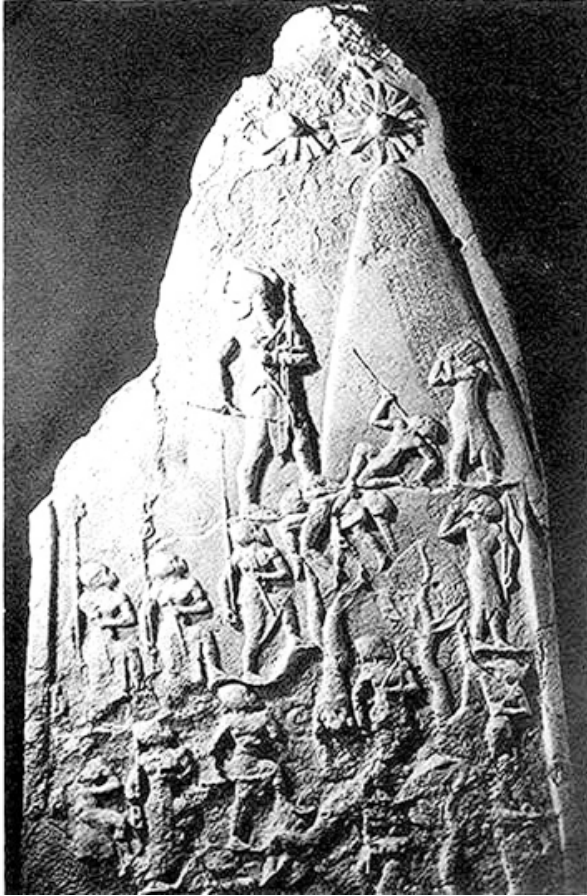
the east” was symbolic of their desire to gain independence from God, like a teenager who can’t wait to move off to college and away from the authority of his parents.

### THE FOUNDING OF BABYLON

We don’t know whether Nimrod founded the city of Bavel, which we now call Babylon, in the sense that he planted a stake in the ground and said, “Build here!” It’s probably more likely that he took over rulership at some point in the city’s early development—a common practice—and raised it to another level.<sup>59</sup> In time Bavel became a huge city. The most conservative estimates suggest that it was a square mile inside its walls, and more aggressive estimates place it at five times that size!

### THE TOWER OF BABEL

Technically, the Tower of Babel was a ziggurat, similar to a step pyramid. Several ancient ziggurats have been discovered in modern-day Iraq and Iran. This particular ziggurat was built for two stated purposes: (1) to reach up to heaven, so

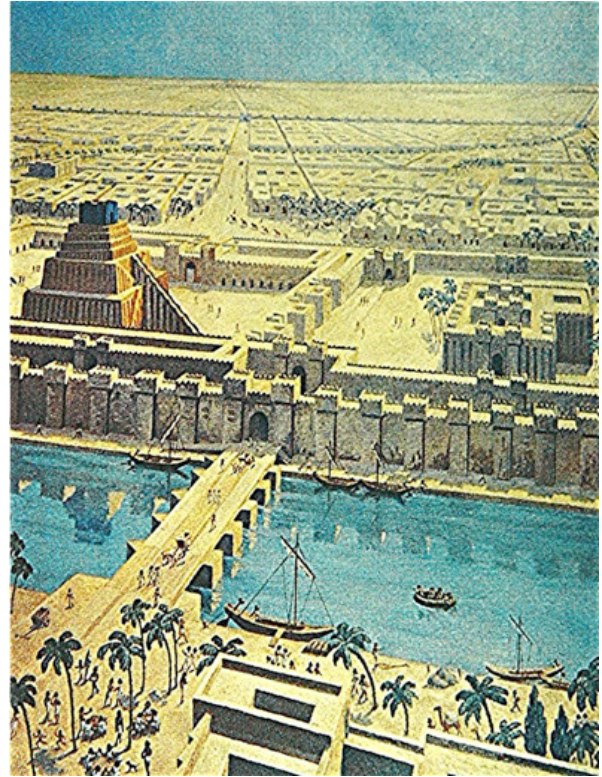


### WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Remember that the word *Shem* means “name”; *Shem* is used here when it refers to Nimrod’s followers wanting to make a *name* for themselves. But, recall that the word *name* is not referring to names like Bob or Elizabeth or Fred. This Hebrew word *shem* would be better translated as “reputation,” as it carries with it the sense of power and authority. For instance, *Nimrod* means “mighty hunter”; that was his reputation.

they could make *a name* for themselves, and (2) to make sure that they weren’t scattered. This was rebellion on an enormous scale.

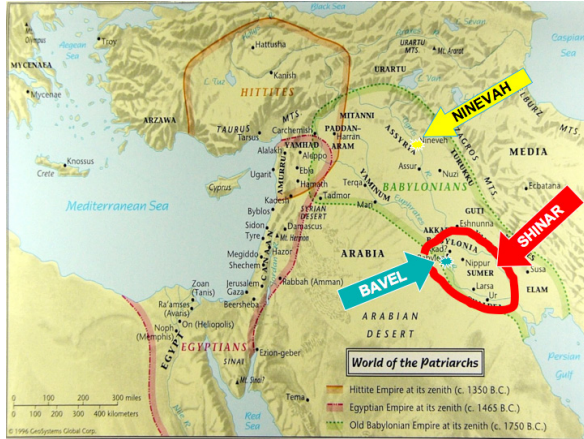
Nimrod’s followers built a tower up to the heavens to make a reputation of having power and authority *in themselves*. They wanted the reputation so they could show God that they were *not* going to be obedient to Him and scatter as



they fully understood they were to do. Anyone planning to be a dictator (such as Nimrod) must demonstrate that he is all-powerful so that the people will submit to him. That was what Nimrod was doing.

It is apparent from the wording that even from the days of Noah, man was to scatter, to disperse, to repopulate the whole world . . . those were God’s instructions.<sup>60</sup> Up to Nimrod’s time, those orders hadn’t been lost or forgotten; they had simply been ignored. But, now, under Nimrod’s leadership, mankind set out to openly *defy* God’s order to disperse. As it says in Genesis 11:4, “Come, let’s build ourselves a city with a tower that has its top reaching up into heaven, so that we can make a name for ourselves and not be scattered all over the earth.”

The idea in these early Babylonian brains was this: God lives in heaven? No big deal. We, man, with our wonderful intelligence, can invent a way to build a tower right up to heaven so we can live up there, too, if we wish. And, when we get there, we’re going to tell God that we have decided we like all the power, knowledge,



wealth, and comforts we have attained by staying together, by *not* scattering. That's just the way we're gonna keep it, and there's nothing you can do to stop it! When everybody else hears about this, we'll really make a reputation for ourselves and no one will ever want to come against us.

Is this that different from the position we take today as humankind? Isn't man currently saying: "God, Your ways are obsolete. We have amassed such superior knowledge that we can not only solve our own problems, but we can do it better than You can. In fact, You and those backward people who stay stuck to You and Your ways are just a hindrance to where we, mankind, want to go and *can* go . . . without any help from You, thank you very much. We don't need *Your* silly moral directives; we can make our own, as we need them, relevant to each situation. We can even produce life and manufacture it to *our* specifications. Marriage is what we want it to be. Only between male and female? That's a concept for times long past, not today." What Nimrod did was nothing different from what our secular humanistic culture is leading us to do today. It's rebellion, pure and simple.

### GOD'S RESPONSE TO REBELLION

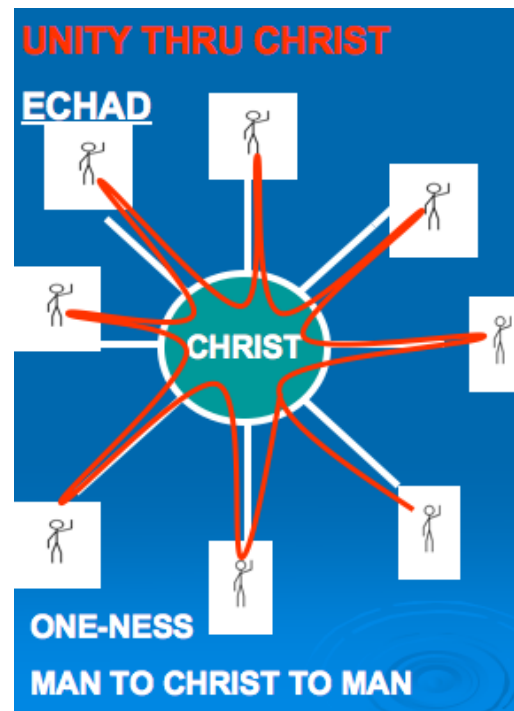
In Genesis 11:5 we come to another figurative expression: "ADONAI came down to see the city and the tower the people were building." God certainly didn't have to move to know what was happening. But God reacted to this

### SOURCE OF LANGUAGE

Paleo-linguists, scientists who research the history of language, have come to the conclusion recently that all language sprang from one source. They're working hard to discover which one, and from where. What a waste of time! All they have to do is read Genesis 11.

rebellion in a way that man clearly understood. In fact, He put down this rebellion in an absolutely brilliant stroke: He gave everybody a different language. Try putting together a team, building anything, when nobody speaks anybody else's language.

Genesis 11:6, in the Hebrew, gives us more insight. When God looked upon these people He saw unity. They were united, and they had a single language—they all spoke as one. In the Hebrew, the word for "unified" is *echad*, which is an attribute attached to God Himself. The people were organically connected, inseparable. God didn't like this.



What unity among men *through*  
*Christ* looks like



What unanimous agreement among men looks like

But what was so bad about their being united? Is this not the cry from every pulpit in every church in our land? Unity! Unity in the sense that mankind, and often the church, defines it is a false doctrine. In Babel the people had a leader, and they had a vision and a purpose that they thought was good. Since they *all* thought it and *all* wanted it, they had unity (much like we do today). Yet, when we examine the Scriptures, we don't see God unifying; we see God dividing, electing, and separating. In fact, later when Israel ends up in Egypt, and again in the laws of Leviticus, Yahweh constantly tells the people to separate themselves from unclean and unholy people, to separate pure and impure things like food, animals, and behavior. Separation was His intention for Nimrod and his followers.

Unity in itself is not a bad thing; the key is what or whom the unifying agent is. Consensus and compromise are man's kind of unity. It is the

kind that we see throughout Christendom and the world in general. It is men, holding hands, saying, "we are one." But God's unity is unity in Him. It is each individual holding Christ's hand. And, like the hub of a spoked wheel, Christ is the point of unity. It has nothing to do with consensus, compromise, or even majority rules.

We get a wonderful demonstration of this principle in the *opposite* happening thousands of years later. Remember our principle of opposites: everything in our universe has an opposite (or, for you scientists, "a reverse corollary"). In the story of the Tower of Babel, God demonstrated how He will divide and separate that which man wants to unify. The dividing mechanism He used on this occasion was language. In the book of Acts, however, we see man being unified through language, in God's way, at the day of Pentecost. In effect, God unified that which He had divided and separated more than two thousand years earlier.

ASSIGNMENT: Read Acts 2:1–21.

Do you see this fascinating connection between Pentecost and the Tower of Babel? At the Tower, God broke up man's type of unity by giving them different languages, so they couldn't communicate. Man's unity was undone and limited. The *human* spirit was driving mankind at the Tower of Babel, and the *human* spirit was defining unity. But at Pentecost, Shavuot, God put the Holy Spirit into the people and unified them through His Holy Spirit, not by means of human compromise and consensus. The unity was not physical; it was spiritual. He even gave them the ability to understand and speak languages they'd never understood or spoken before—the exact opposite of what happened at the Tower of Babel when He confused their languages.

## WHO WAS NIMROD?



Nimrod was a real, literal man, but he was also a type. He was the *first* of a type of man who wanted to rule the world, and he represented all the attributes of the man who will become the *last* man who wants to rule the world: the Antichrist. Nimrod was the “Man of Sin” who was fully possessed of Satan by the complete agreement of his own evil inclination. Many who came after Nimrod would be of the same type—Pharaoh, Antiochus Epiphanies, Nero, and Hitler, to name but a few. This type will culminate in the Lawless One, that Man of Sin, the Beast called the Antichrist. And, of course, he will oppose the man who is his exact opposite—Yeshua, Jesus the Christ, who is fully possessed by and is one with Yahweh.

Nimrod, of the cursed line of Ham, son of Cush, was credited with being the first empire

## THE MEANING OF *BAVEL*

In ancient times, the name of the city Nimrod first built, Bavel, had a different meaning than it does now. Notice the spelling of *Bav-el*. The “-el” indicates the word *god*, the highest god in the pantheon of gods. Originally, *Bav-el* meant “the city of god.” Eventually, its meaning was changed to reflect what happened there, and the word *Bavel* came to mean “confusion.”

builder in history. He was the first to want to dominate, not just the animals, but men. He was the first to build a walled city; this is a clue as to why he is thought to be the inventor of warfare. That is, there is only one reason to build a wall around where you live: self-protection. And, if you were the first to think of the idea, imagine how you could go out and raid and conquer others and retreat to safety behind the walls so that others could not do the same to you.

Nimrod married Semiramis. After he died, his wife, pregnant with his child, declared him



to be god. As the earthly wife of god, she made herself queen of heaven. They had a son named Tamuz. Tamuz was considered to be the rebirth or reincarnation of Nimrod. Tamuz, whose essence was Nimrod, was considered a man-god ruler. This formulation of god the father, queen of heaven mother, and a son whose essence was the rebirth of the father became the basis for all future false religions; those religions that God called “mystery Babylon” religions. They all had their starting point with Nimrod.

Ever since that time, both Nimrod and Semiramis (now deified as god and goddess) have appeared by different names, names that reflect the languages and cultures that adopted them. Semiramis, as the mother of all mothers, became the fertility goddess. In Egypt, her name was Isis. In India, Indrani. In Asia, Cyblle. And later, particularly in the Holy Land, she was called Ashteroth. Her oldest known name is Astarte.

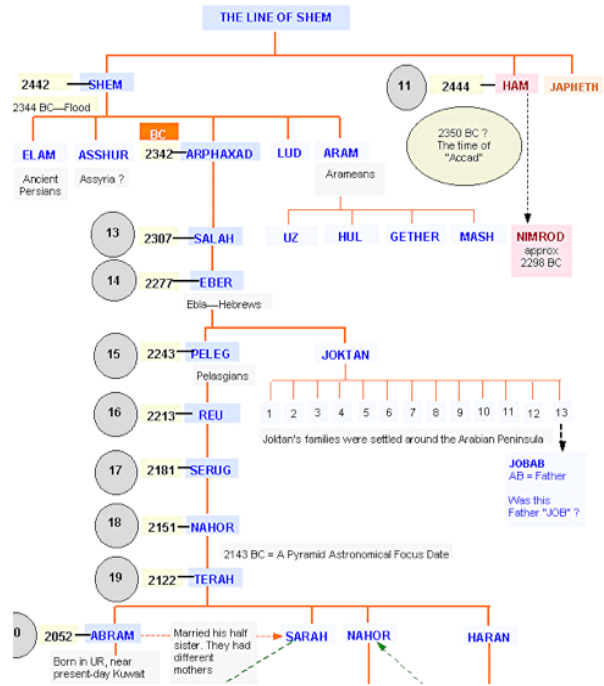
As for Nimrod, his god image became known as the biblical Ba'al, and as the god-man Ninus who built Ninevah. Later, Nimrod would also be known as Marduk, and then Molech.

I tell you this so you can see:

1. The tangle of evil that shows up in our Scriptures from beginning to end
2. What foundationally makes up the “mystery Babylon” religions and where it came from.
3. How the prophetic curse of the line of Ham, by Noach, is playing out. You can bet your boots that the Antichrist will be from the line of Ham.

### GOD WILL UNITE AGAIN

As a result of the confusion of languages, the city of Bavel, or Babylon, stopped its expansion. The people moved out; they began to repopulate far-flung places in the world at a much faster pace. Isn't it curious how, at that point in man's history, God judged man by confusing human language and forced him to disperse, but then at Pentecost, thousands of years later, God blessed man through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit



when God's truth could be understood by everyone, in every language. As marvelous as that event was, it was to point to *yet another* time in the future when the people of God, in all the nations of the world, will come back from their dispersion to unite in one spirit under our present and future king, Yeshua HaMashiach, Jesus Christ. We call this united kingdom of God the “millennial kingdom.”

But we need to be on our guard. Just like everything else he has planned, Satan is quickly working toward a counterfeit of this millennial kingdom in the form of his own one-world government. Today we are in the generation that is actively reincarnating what Nimrod tried to do, to bind all the world into one people, or *echad*, under one rule and one ruler, a man. Substantial segments of the church, sadly, are blindly leading the way by preaching tolerance, world harmony, peace at any price, and the end of Torah, suggesting that we should trust the goodness of our hearts instead of the Word of God.



## SHEM'S DESCENDANTS, INCLUDING ABRAHAM

From Genesis 11:10 to the end of the chapter, the lineage of Shem, beginning with him and taking us all the way to Avram,<sup>61</sup> is recounted. We are given some basic information about Avram and his family—for instance, his father was named Terach, and Avram had two brothers (at least two), and their names were Nachor

and Haran. Haran had a son named Lot, but Haran died. Avram married a woman named Sarai (we later find out that she was the daughter of another of his father's wives, so Sarai would have been Avram's half sister). For some reason, Sarai wasn't able to have children.

A curious thing, often overlooked, is in verse 31. It was initially Terach, not Avram, whom God *first* called to take his family and move to the land of Canaan. When Terach got that call, he and his family were living in the city of Ur of the Chaldees. The Chaldees was an ancient culture within the region of Sumer, and Ur was, in essence, the capital city. It was a very wicked place; in fact, it was the cultural center for the worship of the moon god Hurki, who is today known as Allah.

Terach *did* leave Ur, but instead of heading southwest to Canaan, he went northwest to Mesopotamia. When they arrived at a certain city, they decided to stay instead of going on to Canaan. Why, we're not told. But it was there that Avram's brother, Haran, died. And the city was named after him sometime later.



## GENESIS 12

ASSIGNMENT: Read Genesis 12:1–3.

### GOD'S COVENANT WITH AVRAM

God, Adonai (“Lord” or “Master”), made a covenant with Avram. This covenant occurred when Avram was residing in Haran, in Mesopotamia. God told Avram to leave Haran and go where God would guide him. God told him that his father and his father’s other relatives were not welcome to go along. Since Terach went part of the way and then decided against following God any farther, God chose to use a man who would go the whole nine yards—Avram. Partial obedience isn’t a little bit of obedience, it’s *disobedience*. Again God divides, elects, and separates; this time He was dividing, electing, and separating the faithful members of Avram’s family from the unfaithful.<sup>62</sup>



In this covenant, God gave Avram an instruction and He followed it up with a promise that consisted of several parts. He instructed that Avram leave the area he was in (Haran), go to a place God would show him, *and* separate himself from his father and brother. God then issued a set of promises.

### GOD WILL MAKE AVRAM AND HIS DESCENDANTS A GREAT NATION

Avram and his descendants are going to become a people—by definition, a separate nation, one that didn’t exist before this point in history. If that is to happen, Avram and his wife, Sarai, must have children, and their children must have children, and lots of descendants after them, to the point that at some time in the future there will be a sufficient number of these descendants, who remain identified with one another as having a common familial heritage, to be counted as a “nation.”

### GOD WILL BLESS AVRAM, AND AVRAM HIMSELF WILL BE A BLESSING

God is going to give Avram His favor. Avram is going to be considered special by God, and wonderful things that he doesn’t deserve are going to happen to him. God has chosen to do this. What God does for Avram is going to benefit more than just Avram. What Avram does in obedience to God is going to, *itself*, be a blessing to others.

## GOD WILL BLESS THOSE WHO BLESS AVRAM, AND GOD WILL CURSE THOSE WHO CURSE AVRAM

This is no set of idle words. This is not God being condescending to Avram, patting him on his head as we would a child, trying to make him feel good. This is a serious warning, not to Avram, but to all the peoples of the world. From that moment forward God expects people to recognize that Avram is chosen of God, and he is to be respected and honored. Conversely, God will take it personally if anyone should decide to be an enemy of Avram. That is, God will judge those who are against Avram.

In biblical language, God is not just referring to Avram himself. He is speaking of Avram's line, and even more specifically, He is speaking of the special nation that will come from Avram, his descendants. Who are the descendants who form that special nation? Israel.

Avram will eventually have many children, but only one will father the line that leads to Israel. Not all of Avram's descendants have this special blessing and warning attached. God already laid out the pattern for this concept: He divides, He elects, and He separates. Avram came from the line of Peleg, who was divided and elected from the line of Shem, who was divided and elected from the line of Noah, who was divided and elected from the line of Seth, who was divided and elected from the line of Adam. In time, as Avram has sons, we will see one particular son divided, elected, and separated from his brothers. The result of this God-pattern is what is often called "the line of promise." Typically this line of promise is considered to start with Avram, but the Bible shows us that, in reality, it goes all the way back to Seth.

## GOD WILL MAKE THE NAME OF AVRAM GREAT

Avram is going to be greatly rewarded. His name is going to be lifted high among men.

Remember, when we see the word *name*, we really ought to think "reputation." God will make the reputation of Avram great. Even in our time, four thousand years later, more than half the population of this planet is represented by the three great monotheistic religions—Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. Avram is the revered patriarch of each of these.

## GOD WILL USE AVRAM TO BLESS ALL THE FAMILIES OF THE EARTH

What God is going to do through Avram is going to bless not just Avram, nor just his descendants, nor just the special nation that will come from this blessing: Israel. This blessing, brought about through Avram's selection, is going to benefit *all* mankind.

## WHAT IS A COVENANT?

Of all the biblical principles, covenant is the one we need to understand best, because it is through the process of covenant that God's set-apart people (Israel) were created, and it is through covenant that, by trust in God, namely in Messiah Yeshua, we can be saved from eternal destruction.

*Merriam-Webster's Dictionary* defines *covenant* as "a binding agreement," and as "an agreement among church members to defend and maintain its doctrines." It also describes *covenant* as "a formal contract." Without doubt, these definitions express Western culture's twenty-first-century idea of just what a covenant is, and what we, as Christians, generally picture in our minds when the word *covenant* is used. But *Webster's* misses the mark substantially when describing a covenant in biblical terms and times—that is, what God means by "covenant." First and foremost, a covenant is sacred.

In Bible times, covenants between men were used to sell land, to make alliances, to make war and peace, and even to make provision for the use of a water well by someone other than its owner. A covenant could be by mutual

agreement, in which *both* parties had obligations to fulfill. Or, just as often, it signified an obligation upon only *one* party. That obligation could even be *imposed* upon someone by a more powerful person or nation, or by God Himself.

We tend to think of a covenant as a promise or a contract, and we consider its effect within the framework of our judicial system. Therefore, we picture covenants as human agreements, written by human hands, and enforced by human means. We know that time, people, or circumstances can cause oral promises and written contracts to terminate, change, or simply become obsolete.

Penalties for breaking a contract are usually small in our society and normally involve a monetary settlement. This happens every day. A court of law can invalidate or change a contract. Men and women break personal promises on a fairly consistent basis. Governments form constitutions (their contract with the people) then amend them or even throw them away and start all over. People can, mutually or unilaterally, change their minds and simply dissolve or disavow a contract or a promise, such as in the case of divorce, with relatively little penalty. None of this is possible within the biblical definition of a covenant.

## THE DEFINITION OF COVENANT

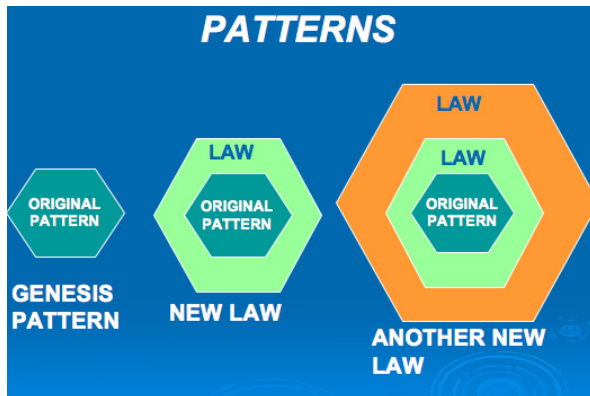
The Hebrew word for covenant is *b'rit*, which comes from the Hebrew root word *barab*, which means “to cut or divide.” The Greek word used in the Bible for covenant is *diatheke*. It misses the mark rather substantially as a translation of the word *b'rit*. Culture and language come as a package, and within any given culture there are a number of traditions, ideas, and basic societal concepts that are unique to that culture and therefore foreign to all others. Since that is the case, there are many uniquely Hebrew concepts, such as the concept embodied in the Hebrew words *b'rit* and *shalom* and *Messiah*, that don't always have parallels in other languages or cultures. Unless you're a language expert, it

isn't readily apparent that there are words in one language that don't directly correspond to a word in another language. We can't just make a list of Hebrew words then easily make a parallel list that represents their equivalents in English. As a matter of fact, it takes approximately one-third more English words than Hebrew words to express an idea. Put another way, a Hebrew Bible is only about two-thirds the length of an English Bible. That should give us a clue about translation difficulties.

Let's look at an example of the intricacies of translating Hebrew to English. Take the concept of *day*. Both English and Hebrew have a word that expresses the common and straightforward concept of a twenty-four-hour period of time, one full rotation of the earth: in Hebrew it is *yom*; in English it is *day*. In contrast, the Hebrew word *shalom* contains an overall concept that doesn't exist in either Greek- or English-speaking cultures. Therefore, there is no Greek or English equivalent for it. Bible translators try to communicate something very close to it, or they use a series of words to try to get the concept across to the reader. We often see the word *peace* or *grace* used in English to translate *shalom*. But *peace* and *grace* just scratch the surface of what *shalom* means to the Hebrew mind.

More troublesome, though, is what happens when a translator has no understanding of the culture behind the language he is translating. You don't need to be familiar with French culture to learn to speak French. Likewise, you don't need to be familiar with Hebrew culture to learn Hebrew. But when a translator fails to unite the understanding of the culture that is tied to the language, he understands only a word in the context of his *own* cultural sense, not the sense of the culture that created the word. That is the *main* problem we have with Bible translations; precious few translators have *any* depth of knowledge of ancient Hebrew culture and concepts.<sup>63</sup>

Many of us who have purchased small appliances or electronic widgets made in China often find the accompanying instructions odd or even funny. I once bought a riding toy for



one of my grandchildren. The assembly manual instructed me to tighten a certain screw until “it was happy.” In a dictionary, you’ll find that the words *happy* and *correct* have very similar meanings, but for Americans, *happy* is an emotion displayed by living beings; it is not a technical or mechanical term. The word *happy* may seem right to the Chinese translator, but the concept fails when it crosses cultural boundaries. This problem occurs in many places in the Bible, and often when attempting to understand the concept of a biblical covenant.

Because of the use of the Greek word *diatheke* in the NT, and also because the Hebrew concept of *b’rit* doesn’t have a direct parallel to either Greek- or English-speaking cultures, Christians have adopted the belief that what is being referred to is an equivalent to our concept of a will (in the sense of “last will and testament”). I have heard many sermons that seek to explain *covenant* in exactly those terms; they draw a direct parallel to the reading of a will at someone’s death. For this reason, we have come to use the English word *testament* (as in New Testament and Old Testament) to describe the two halves of the Bible. This is *way* off the mark. No modern, credible biblical scholar should defend the use of the Greek word *diatheke* or its English equivalent, *testament* (and especially not the word *will*), as a proper translation or understanding of *b’rit* (covenant). So, why do we continue to say Old Testament and New Testament instead of Old Covenant and New Covenant? It is habit, tradition, and an ignorance of what a real biblical covenant is.



## CHARACTERISTICS OF BIBLICAL COVENANTS

There are a number of defining characteristics of biblical covenants. A biblical covenant is a permanent thing unless God specifies that it is conditional.<sup>64</sup> A permanent covenant cannot be retracted; under certain circumstances a conditional covenant can be. The penalty for breaking a biblical covenant was usually severe, often death. But, most important, a God-made biblical covenant (as opposed to a covenant between men or even modern promises or contracts) literally becomes a physical law of the universe: such as gravity, the speed of light, or the laws of thermodynamics. In fact, the Hebrews themselves acknowledged this, because *b’rit*, their word for *covenant*, is also used to mean the “laws of nature.” When God makes a covenant with His creation, that covenant is woven into the very fabric of both space and time; it affects how the universe operates and has an effect in the spiritual realm, because the spiritual realm is the *source* of a God-made covenant. What happens first in the spiritual sphere does at times become present in the physical sphere of existence.



Here is a detailed example of the God principle of covenant: When God first made the universe, then mankind, we are told that there was no death. The laws of the universe (we might call them the laws of nature) were such that everything that was created was to exist forever. But somewhere along the line that changed. The Bible doesn't directly answer all of our questions about creation and death and decay, but we *are* told that death entered the world when Adam and Eve first sinned. Did that mean universal death? The death of everything? The death of all stars and planets and moons and the sun and the earth itself? I don't think so. The Bible uses the term *death* to mean "the end of the life." If there is no life, then there can be no death—in other words, only living things die. Stars and moons and planets exist, but they are not "alive." The death that the Bible is talking about in regard to the fall of man is the death *of living things*. So, if the fall of man didn't initiate the decay of the universe, what did? The answer may surprise you: the event that started the universe decaying is the very thing Adam's fall was patterned after—the fall of Lucifer, who came to be called Satan, the Adversary, the devil.

We know that Satan's fall occurred sometime *before* Adam's fall, because Satan was already exiled to planet Earth by the time Adam was created. Satan's crime (pride and rebellion)

against God occurred in the spiritual realm, not in the physical realm, but the Bible indicates that until Lucifer sinned against God, there was no evil in the spiritual realm. Yet, like so many spiritual matters, this one had its effects on the physical world as well.

Satan's fall initiated a change in the way the universe operated: everything would start to deteriorate and die, no exceptions. He brought sin with him when he was kicked out of heaven and sent to earth, where he lived in exile with his band of fallen angels. Adam and Eve were supernaturally brought forth onto a planet in a universe that was already decaying due to Satan's introduction of sin. Satan essentially infected them with sin by tempting them (and by their acceptance of that temptation), which now brought death to living creatures. Suddenly the *whole* universe, everything except the spirit realm, was decaying. Logic would lead one to conclude, then, that the dimension of time began at the point of Satan's rebellion, since time is essentially the measurement of decay. If there is no decay, then there is no time. When scientists speak of our universe aging, what they mean is that everything, right down to the atomic level, is deteriorating, winding down. *Everything* in the universe is aging. Wind and rain erode mountain chains

### GOD WORKS IN PATTERNS

Remember the concept of patterns. The common question we usually ask of any biblical event, law, instruction, principle, or decision is *Why?* We have been taught to seek and discover why by using the scientific method, which is a Greek way of thinking. But "why" is almost always the wrong question to ask about God-ordained things. You generally won't find answers to *why* in the Bible. Instead, God instructs us by showing us patterns. He describes and explains an event, and later a similar event will occur with a similar outcome. The later event occurred the way it did because it conformed to the pattern of the previous event. God explains by exposing patterns, not by explaining *why*.

and seashores. The sun has a finite amount of fuel, and it will eventually run out. Every physical thing is slowly but surely dissolving back toward its basic elemental makeup.

Spiritually, things also changed: evil was unleashed and it had to be dealt with because evil pollutes perfection; sin defiles God's personal holiness. A Savior had to be prepared to save man from complete annihilation. The Abyss had to be readied to imprison the leader of evil, Satan, at the appropriate time. Angels would eventually become warriors. Because sin had entered the world, death entered the world. First the fall of Satan initiated the decay of inanimate objects, then the fall of man initiated the decay of living creatures. Prior to that there would have been no need for a "line of promise," an immaculate conception, or a horrendous crucifixion. We, today, would not be preparing for a rapture while warning the unbelieving of Armageddon if not for the evil that began the death spiral of all things existing in our universe, living and inanimate.

Here's an example of the effect of breaking a biblical covenant: What would happen if God removed gravity as a physical law of the universe? Fortunately, at least until the new heaven and earth are created, gravity is a permanent law of nature; it has no conditions or time limit that we are aware of. Gravity is the physical phenomenon that causes the moon to revolve around the earth, and the earth to orbit around the sun. Our seasons, weather, and temperatures stay within an ideal range in order to afford life to survive; photosynthesis, the basis of plant life, depends on our connection and relation to the sun. Without gravity, that connection would be broken. We stay stuck to the earth because of gravity. When we drop a glass, it falls to the ground . . . always. What if God simply decided, one day, to abolish gravity? A chain reaction of monumental proportions would begin, wouldn't it? The way the universe operates would be entirely different.

Covenants are universal laws upon which most other aspects of nature and heaven

depend. If you change one, many others are affected because they all work together. None are accidental, nor do they operate independently. Everything about the universe changes to adapt to the new reality, spiritually *and* physically. When God makes a covenant, it's not like a person contracting to make payments on a car loan—the universe does not react when humans take out a mortgage, and it is not affected when those contracts and vows are broken. But when God makes a covenant, some parts, if not all, of the vast body of spiritual and physical laws of the universe are affected. This is not allegory, analogy, emotion, or exaggeration. When God makes a covenant, the spiritual and physical universes are never again the same.

## WHY GOD MAKES COVENANTS

If God is to communicate with man, it *must* be in terms that man can understand. So God has created a kind of covenant *system*—a visible, physical, tangible protocol by which man can recognize and understand the terms and impact of God's promises. In response, mankind has adopted a similar pattern for making agreements among ourselves.

In the Bible we see covenants made between humans, and we see covenants made by God. As expected, they are very similar in their format. The oldest, most primitive way of creating a covenant between two people was called "cutting a covenant," the Hebrew *b'rit*, which literally means "cutting or dividing." The earliest covenant-making protocol occurred when a representative of each side of a proposed covenant agreement cut his arm with a knife, then both held the bleeding wounds together to signify mixing the blood. In some cultures, blood was actually sucked from each other's wound and ingested by the opposite party. Solemn oaths were sworn, invoking the name of the god each participant worshipped, because a covenant was sacred. In all cases, blood and a god were at the center of the ceremony.

In time a different rite appeared, one that involved cutting animals instead of each other. Generally, this cutting meant not just slashing an animal to draw blood, but literally killing it and cutting it up—dividing it, either into halves or several pieces. The pieces would be laid out on the ground, organized, and separated into two groups. Then both participants of the covenant would walk between the pieces while swearing an oath in the name of their god.

Blood was integral in covenant making because covenants were deemed to be a life fellowship and life was in the blood. The covenant was life long, and the participants considered themselves to have been joined together, almost as one flesh, under whatever terms that covenant demanded. Hundreds of years before Avram was born, God told Adam that life was in the blood. Mankind had not forgotten. In the countless murders that had occurred by then, and with the slaughtering and eating of animals for food as a normal practice, it was self-evident that blood was central to life. Since blood was involved in making a covenant, it was understood that a covenant was a very serious matter, never to be entered into lightly. The usual penalty for breaking a covenant was death.

## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SALT

Covenants were so hallowed that they were established with pomp and ceremony. Salt, together with bread, was usually eaten as the final event of the covenant ceremony. The participants' eating a meal together upon completion of the covenant was a way of signifying that a new family-type relationship had been formed. Salt became so important to the transaction that the making of a covenant was sometimes called a "covenant of salt." In fact, in some cultures the simple act of exchanging salt was, at times, enough to conclude a covenant over an everyday matter; blood and all the other ritual wasn't necessary. We find this idea in both the OT and the NT.

Since salt was the final step of the covenant-making process, it is symbolic of closing the deal; salt became a symbol for peace. When the salt was partaken of, the covenanting process was completed, similar to the way we now shake hands after agreeing to a business deal.

After the arrival of Moses, his receiving of the Torah on Mount Sinai, and the institution of the sacrificial system, God instructed the Levite priests to always add salt to sacrifices. I mentioned earlier that when God made a covenant, it was forever. The Israelites clearly understood the awesome heaven- and earth-changing device that a covenant from God was. Since covenants were to be sealed with salt, the God-ordained practice of sprinkling salt on the sacrifices reminded Israel that the covenants between God and Israel were everlasting *and* that the covenants had a desired effect of making peace between God and Israel.

Often in the NT we see references to salt. These refer to crucial aspects of covenant making and sacrificial procedure, *not* cooking. In Mark 9:50, Jesus says, "Have salt in yourselves—that is, be at peace with each other." Christ also tells us, "You are salt for the Land" (Matt. 5:13). And Paul says, "Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt" (Col. 4:6 NASB). Here, salt is being recalled as the final element of a covenant or sacrifice, and therefore it is symbolic of peace and purity. In fact, by Yeshua's time, when someone used the phrase "covenant of salt" it indicated a holy, enduring covenant. And the "covenant of salt" also came to mean the specific covenant God made with Avram. Whenever you see the use of the word *salt* in the Scriptures, NT or OT, understand that the Hebrew author is referring to an issue of great holiness in relation to a covenant or sacrifice.

## GOD'S PERMANENT COVENANT WITH AVRAM

Armed with this understanding of covenants, let's go back to the terms of the covenant

that God made with Avram, understanding that this was not a *conditional* covenant, it was a *permanent* covenant. By definition, a covenant is *forever*.

In Genesis 12:1–3 we see God telling Avram that he would become a great nation, that Avram would be blessed and himself be a blessing, that Avram’s name would be great, that Avram would bless all the families of the earth, and, perhaps most important, that God would bless those who blessed Avram and curse those who cursed Avram. These promises were neither idle nor obsolete. Given in the form of a covenant, God’s promises became a law of the spiritual and physical universe, an unchangeable fact of life, the instant He pronounced them. To ignore this is the utmost folly. To fight against it leads to destruction, because the entire operation of the universe has been finely tuned to progress inexorably toward achieving the terms of this permanent covenant.

Israel—today that is primarily the Jews—are the descendants of that unbreakable covenant handed down through Isaac, then on to Jacob (who had his name changed by God to “Israel”), then to his sons who were the twelve tribes of Israel. Although there were other sons of Avram (many, in fact), the Bible only tells us about Isaac and Ishmael. This is another important division that took place concerning the covenant line of promise. The division determined which of Avram’s sons would inherit all the promises contained within the covenant God made with Avram—it was given specifically and explicitly to Isaac. It went from Isaac to his son Jacob, called Israel. Everything that was originally given to Avram was inherited by Israel.

We can and should be fair-minded in the matters we see happening in the Middle East, particularly as they concern Israel and the proposed Palestinian state. But the bottom line is, our support must always be of Israel. The part of that covenant that we ought to be greatly concerned with today says, “I will bless those who bless you, but I will curse anyone who curses you” (Gen. 12:3). Since Israel inherited



God’s covenant with Avram, the “you” in this covenant is Israel. That is just biblical fact, not politics. Those who stand with Israel will be blessed and favored by God; those who oppose Israel will be regarded lightly by God and will be judged for their disobedience.

Do you stand up for Israel and for the Jewish people? Do you pray for them, that God would protect them and bring peace to their homeland? We should also pray for the Palestinian people to have a better life, but that better life cannot include being given land that belongs to Israel.

Supporting Israel does not mean you agree with everything they do; they’re just people, and many of them are atheists. Often they’re not walking with God, which leads to terrible decision making by their government authorities. Supporting Israel does not mean worshipping the state of Israel; it does not mean worshipping the Jewish people, adopting Jewish tradition, or declaring them to be above reproach. Rather, we are to come alongside them, help them, comfort them, love them, and show them respect, encourage them to do what is right in God’s eyes, encourage them to return to Yehoveh, and remind them that those promises of God entitle them to that land inheritance and to retain their title as “God’s chosen people.”

A God-created covenant is nothing less than a new or modified law of nature. There is no other word we can come up with to express the unfathomable cosmic force of a covenant. A promise, a contract, a doctrine, a will and



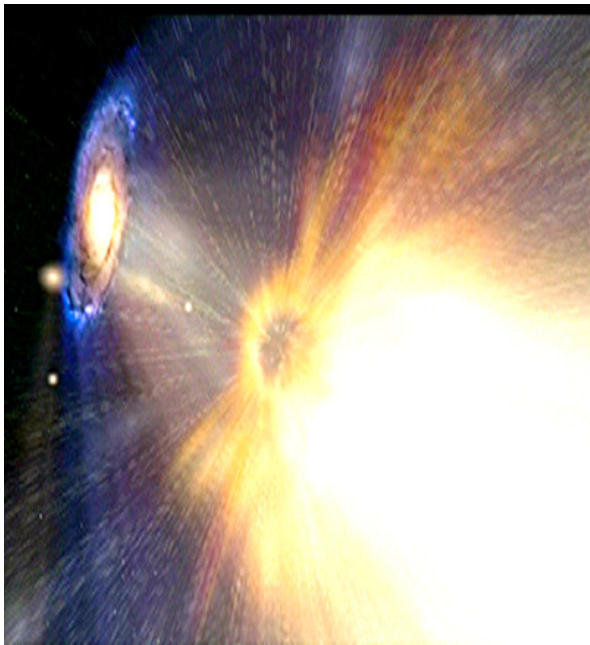
testament are all weak and inferior man-centered devices, as flawed and apt to break down as the humans who made them. A covenant of God has as its source the very spirit of God; therefore, we are certain that the purpose of that covenant will be carried out.

## THE PATRIARCHS

ASSIGNMENT: Read Genesis 12:4–20.

Avram is the first of a series of men called the patriarchs. Sometimes Noah is called a patriarch, but just as the judges, kings, and prophets of the Bible were not the *only* people who ever judged or ruled or prophesied, Noah does not fall into the technical, biblical classification of “patriarch.” Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—father, son, and grandson—were the three men who have always been referred to as the patriarchs.

If we were to read only the OT, we would not be sure exactly where Avram was when he received his marching orders directly from



A new covenant of God becomes a law of nature.



God Most High. Genesis 11 and 12 seem to say Avram was temporarily settled at Haran of Mesopotamia when he got his call. But Acts 7 in the NT tells us that *before* he got to Haran, presumably on the family’s trek from Ur of the Chaldees, God appeared to Avram. Some Jewish sages say Avram was actually summoned while *at* Ur. This is unlikely, because as long as Terach, Avram’s father, was still living he would have called the shots when it came to moving the family; it would not have been at the order of his son. Nevertheless, we know it was either during or immediately before Terach, Nahor, and Avram lived in Haran that God boldly approached Avram with a deal he couldn’t refuse.

It is clear that Avram’s family was just as pagan as the rest of the world at this time. It is unimaginable that prior to God’s calling Avram divorced himself from multiple-god worship; otherwise, he would have been at odds with his entire family. We would have found words in the Torah similar to those pronounced upon Noah—that he was different from all other men. In other words, Noah was judged to be the most righteous of all men on earth; we get no such reassurance in regard to Avram.

Further, implicit in God’s command for Avram to leave his country, his father, and his

family, is that *separation* was demanded. Avram could not accomplish his task by remaining among a people, including his own family, who were thoroughly dedicated to a false religion of nonexistent gods and goddesses.

This pattern of God dividing, electing, and separating continues, therefore, by declaring Avram as the founder of a new nation of people; a people who would be set apart just for God. It is unlikely that Avram took this instruction to leave everything he knew in exchange for simple *words* of promise, even if the words were from a recently introduced God, without much doubt and trepidation. It is equally as unthinkable that he simply accepted all that God said and carried it all out in absolute purity. One can be divided and elected like Avram, but that hardly means all ingrained thoughts of the previous seventy-five years of life, all the traditional and unquestioned behavior of worshipping gods, simply fled him. If it were that easy and matter-of-fact, the forced separation of Avram and those who would go with him would have been unnecessary.

### SEPARATION AS GOD'S DESIGN

It is man's habit that we hate to let go of the familiar things, even if those things are weighing us down or even destroying us. The security of the familiar present, no matter how terrible or hollow, is somehow better in our minds than the discomfort of facing an unknown future of change. Left to our own devices, we often pretend to move forward into renewal, while really staying latched to the rock of our past like an abalone. The pattern God shows us is not simply about division, nor only about election, nor even about division then election. That third, final, and indispensable part of the dynamic process of remolding all until His purposes are achieved must occur in concert with the first two; that third part is separation. Separation, in one way or another, is a prerequisite to serving God.

Does that mean separation from family? It certainly can, and interestingly that is the

example we see in Avram's life. It could be the death of a spouse or a parent that causes the separation. And while the Bible certainly does not encourage divorce, separation could happen that way. A bad decision on someone's part may result in a separation God will use to achieve good in ways we could never have contemplated. It could be, as it was with Avram, that for the purpose God has ordained for you, you cannot stay tied to the old, as painful as that separation might be.

Separation could also be from friends who simply do not share the values you know you must follow or from others who find you odd due to the wholeheartedness that you now have in following and serving Yahweh. Perhaps the separation must be from a church or a synagogue that has, over time, lost its first love and blindly chases after the world. This is nothing unusual, by the way, nor anything that should be all that unexpected given what we're told in Revelation.

This concept of separation is, of course, central to Christ's teachings, although it is not usually recognized as such. Several of our Savior's statements cause us much trouble. Here is one of the most troubling:

*If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father, his mother, his wife, his children, his brothers and his sisters, yes, and his own life besides, he cannot be my talmid. (Luke 14:26)*

This is all about separation, not hatred as we typically think of it. Jesus wants us to be prepared to be at odds with those closest to us, as Avram was with his family, once we are called by God. We must recognize that we can no longer remain tied to the past, particularly a wicked past, and that God's calling surpasses any other purpose for our existence.

Jesus says more on this subject:

*Don't suppose that I have come to bring peace to the Land. It is not peace I have come to bring, but a sword! For I have come to set a man against his father, a*

*daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law, so that a man's enemies will be the members of his own household. (Matt. 10:34–36)*

Many of the members of Avram's household became his enemies (in Bible-speak), because he was called by Yahweh to abandon everything they held dear and to become God's man for a special assignment. Christ came to divide and separate as perhaps no other before Him. The sword spoken of by Yeshua is not so much a symbol of killing as it is a symbol of dividing. He recognizes that, for some, the circumstances of their being set apart for Him are going to be heartbreaking. Therefore, He continues by saying:

*Everyone who has left houses, brothers, sisters, father, mother, children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times more, and he will obtain eternal life. (Matt. 19:29)*

Separation, which is often expressed in the Bible through words like *set apart*, *sanctified*, or *distinction*, must occur in one form or another if one is to be a believer. This is because the primary change in nature for a human, as a result of salvation, is that one becomes holy. And, by definition, *holy* means "to be set apart." So, by means of accepting the separation God insisted upon, in Genesis 12:4, Avram ratified the covenant God made with him. In other words, the act of going, of leaving Haran and his family and his nation and going to Canaan, fulfilled Avram's part of the deal. The entire remainder of the terms of the covenant, terms that would take centuries to be fulfilled, were on God. It was utterly impossible for Avram to fail and break the covenant, because it wasn't up to Avram to fulfill it. This is perhaps the best definition of what a permanent covenant is: it's all on God.

## CONDITIONAL COVENANTS

A quick biblical rule about covenants: if man or nature has to continue upholding some part of the covenant in order for it to remain valid, then it's a *conditional* covenant, which means it can be broken, and therefore a consequence will occur.

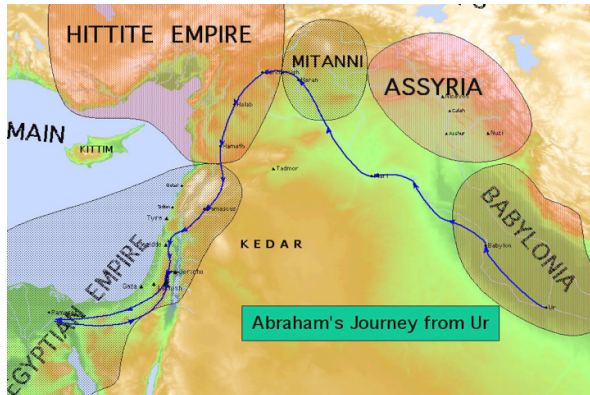
## MIGRATION TO THE LAND OF CANAAN

Genesis 12:4–5 tell us that Avram, Sarai (his wife), and Lot (his nephew, who was the son of Avram's deceased brother, Haran), along with a bunch of cousins and servants, headed south in the direction of the land of Canaan. Remember, Canaan was the son of Ham; Canaan was the grandson who had a curse placed on him by his angry grandfather Noah. So, Avram was headed to the area that Canaan and his tribe had migrated to many years earlier. The date is around 1975–2000 BC. By the biblical record, it was perhaps 350 years after the Great Flood, and scores of millions of people inhabited the earth.

We are told that the land God showed Avram was populated with Canaanites, those descendants of Ham and his son Canaan, and that God led Avram and his clan quite a distance through the land before they came to a specific spot: Shechem. Today Shechem is known as Nablus, one of the cities under Palestinian control in the West Bank.<sup>65</sup> There God actually appeared to Avram in an unspecified but visible form. God appearing to a man, from a biblical perspective, was rare. God did this to make a very clear point: this was the land He was giving to Avram and to all his descendants. Appropriately, Avram built an altar and sacrificed to Yahweh.

Apparently, either through God's choice or a preference left up to Avram, the clan moved on, farther south. They journeyed about twenty-five miles, likely only three or four days at most, and stopped for a time between what eventually

came to be called Bethel and Ai. Bethel and Ai were only a couple of miles apart. Avram built another altar there and sacrificed to Yahweh. Some undefined period later, he and his family



A map showing Shechem in the middle (called Nablus in the disputed West Bank today), Bethel and Ai slightly south of that, and the Negev at the southernmost part of the map

“traveled on, continuing toward the Negev” (Gen. 12:9). Avram’s clan is traveling even farther south, into the desert regions; we know this because *negev* is Hebrew for “south.”

We should understand that, without doubt, Avram’s travels had nothing to do with a sense of wanderlust. Moving was always dangerous and difficult. Instead, the first patriarch’s constant movements had more to do with the never-ending search for new water and pasture that an owner of herds and flocks must suffer.

### FAMINE DRIVES AVRAM TO EGYPT

We don’t know what period of time transpired from Avram’s entering the land of Canaan to his traveling to the southern end of it, but during that time conditions apparently worsened until there was a full-blown famine that threatened his family’s survival. In a decision he would soon regret, Avram went to Egypt to seek relief from the famine and ran headlong into Pharaoh, who took a fancy to Avram’s wife, Sarai. There is no mention of Yahweh directing Avram to leave and go to Egypt; it was Avram’s concern to survive that drove him there. This is a pattern that will be repeated by his grandson Jacob a couple of hundred years later. Yet it was common for people to turn to Egypt, the nation that had been known for many years as the granary for the region, in times of famine. It had become a rather standard place of refuge, particularly for the Bedouin desert wanderers of that era. Egypt was for those who lived at the southern end of the Middle East landmass, what Mesopotamia was for those who lived to the north—a region of fabulous and dependable fertility.

Avram, having made the decision to take his clan to Egypt until the hard times were over in Canaan, deceptively prepared for what he intuitively feared might happen. His wife was very beautiful, and he feared men might kill him to have her. So he told Sarai to say she was his sister, not his wife. Truth be told, she was actually both his wife and his half sister, the daughter of one of his father’s wives.



Sarai, new to Egypt, was immediately spotted by Pharaoh's men, and it was reported to him that she was an exceptional beauty. In Hollywood films about Avram and Sarai we'll see a lovely young woman being carted off to be part of Pharaoh's harem, but considering that it was most likely around ten years after Avram left Mesopotamia, he would have been about eighty-five at the time they entered Egypt. Sarai was only ten years younger, making her about seventy-five years old.

Avram's plan worked, and he prospered greatly from this deception. He received a great number of animals *and* servants from Pharaoh. All this would have been a customary gift, a bride's price, paid by Pharaoh to Avram for the hand of "his sister."

### TRAVEL IN AVRAM'S DAY

Notice how readily and ably people traveled in 2000 BC. There were many well-traveled routes that were easy to follow and marked with water wells, and though it was not an everyday occurrence, it was not at all uncommon for strangers to show up in foreign places. People of that era were well aware of other peoples and far-flung nations, and news traveled steadily by means of the trade routes that crisscrossed the Middle East and went as far as India and China by Avram's day.

Pharaoh figured out Sarai was actually Avram's wife, and probably due to some type of pagan practice, he became fearful that taking another man's wife would cause some type of supernatural disaster. He was right to be concerned; God struck Pharaoh and his household with plagues. Not all of Egypt was harmed, just Pharaoh's personal household. Pharaoh returned Sarai to Avram and ordered Avram and his family to leave Egypt, with all their possessions and people intact.

Here is one thing we should not overlook: beginning right here, there was a relationship created that would bring God's line of promise into contact and conflict with Egypt for centuries to come. This particular pharaoh of Egypt was wise enough to know better than to mess with Avram, but several hundred years later another pharaoh displayed a less-than-wise attitude toward God's people, and neither he nor Egypt was ever the same from that moment forward.

## GENESIS 13

**ASSIGNMENT:** Read Genesis 13.

### AVRAM LEAVES EGYPT

Due to his troubles with Pharaoh, Avram and his clan left Egypt and went back up to Canaan. We're told in Genesis 13:2, "Avram became wealthy, with much cattle, silver and gold." He profited quite a bit from his trip to Egypt. I can just picture Pharaoh loading Abraham up with all the gold, silver, precious jewels, livestock, anything he wanted—*just please get out of here, and take your God with you!*

As any owner of herds and flocks would do, Avram took his family and his livestock back to the areas he already knew were good for water and pasture: "As he went on his travels from the Negev, he came to Beit-El, to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Beit-El and 'Ai" (Gen. 13:3).

The newfound wealth that Avram received from his adventure in Egypt soon presented some unanticipated problems: Lot and Avram had so much livestock there was no longer

sufficient pasturelands or water to sustain them, so fights broke out among the herdsmen.

Avram made a decision: they must separate. In a generous and godly act, Avram told Lot that he could choose the land he wanted for himself, and Avram would take what was left. Lot took his wealth and went to the rich lands of the Jordan Valley and settled near Sodom and Gomorrah. Avram moved to the fields of Canaan, Lot to the cities of the valley; another division and separation had occurred. Avram was being further separated from the unrighteousness that was in Lot's soul. Sodom was a notoriously wicked place and Lot well knew that; that's *why* he chose it and was undoubtedly why he was drawn to it. I have little doubt that the elderly and much wiser Avram knew exactly what Lot would choose.

### GOD'S NEW COVENANT WITH AVRAM

After Avram separated himself from Lot, Yahweh spoke to Avram as if to reinforce the godliness and wisdom of his decision. God added some details to the terms of the covenant He'd already made with Avram, by telling him in verse 15 that all the land he saw, in every direction, would be his and his descendants'. It would be their land *ad 'olam*, the common Hebrew term meaning "forever, perpetual, never-ending." Those were God's own words.

A new law of the universe had just been decreed regarding the land and the number of Avram's descendants in the form of a permanent, *not* a conditional, covenant. God didn't say, "If you'll do this, I'll do that." There would be no amount of sin or rebellion that Avram or his descendants could commit that would cause God to rescind this covenant, and over

### BIBLICAL TYPES

For those of you who have read Exodus, you are thinking, *Hey, this sounds an awful lot like Moses leading the Israelites out of Egypt.* That is because this is another biblical type; this event set up the pattern for the events that would come several centuries later: Jacob's journey to Egypt and the subsequent Exodus from Egypt of Jacob's people, called Israelites.

and over again the prophets remind us of this in Scripture. Yet, for the last several hundred years, many within the church have said that this covenant no longer exists. They argue that God has disposed of His promise to Avram and turned it over to Gentile Christians, as the New Israel. This is nonsense. Yahweh warned that the people of Israel would be removed from that land *for a time* because of their lusting after other gods. But never was it going to be permanently taken from them by Yahweh, and that is made abundantly clear in the Bible.

### PROPHECY COMING TO PASS TODAY

It is profitable for us to understand the relevance the Torah has for us in our day and age, and to apply it to our lives. It has been said by many preachers and teachers that we, today, live in a very special time in history; we are eye-witnesses to age-old Bible prophecies coming to pass. This is true. Not every generation has witnessed prophetic events occurring, so one would think that when a prophecy of God did come to fruition, God's people would respond with excitement. Yet the church, along with most of the earth's Jewish population, has, for the most part, greeted two of the most important events in all prophetic history, the rebirth of Israel as a Jewish nation and the return of the control of Jerusalem to the Jewish people, with a disinterested yawn. I think that is primarily because we don't realize that fulfillments of prophecy don't happen every day.

In fact, with the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70, for all practical purposes the unfolding of biblically prophesied events went into hibernation for an extended period of time. For better than eighteen centuries not a single prophetic event that is outlined in the Bible came to pass. There was much going on in the world in preparation for the day when God once again set the prophetic clock ticking, counting down to the end of all things as we know them, but for almost nineteen hundred years God's people

had nothing from which to gauge just where we stood in Bible history. That is *not* the case for us living today. But if you look around you'd think that nothing out of the ordinary is happening.

After the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, the next prophesied event that was to occur was the return of those who had been dispersed and exiled, from what is called the Roman dispersion or Roman exile. Jewish people, believers and nonbelievers, kept their bags packed and waited expectantly for that return in the first few decades following the Roman destruction of Jerusalem, when they were outlawed from living in that city, but it didn't happen. The Gentile church and the Messianic Jews of the second century AD thought that certainly Christ would return at any moment. Likewise, traditional Jews thought the return to their homeland and rebuilding of their temple was imminent, but it didn't happen. Those worshipping the God of Israel and living in the third century were getting restless and very worried about what was taking so long for God to call His people back to their Holy Land, but their worries were not put to rest. In the fourth century the thoroughly Gentile church of Jesus Christ was still awaiting His return, and in every nation Jews who had emigrated away from Jerusalem wondered if maybe the time when they could go back home was finally near. This continued through the fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth centuries, right on up to the seventeenth century, when Christianity took a fateful turn and came to the conclusion that we must have been misreading those prophecies about the return of Israel to their homeland all along.

The church concluded that Israel was *not* going to return, or at least, there wasn't going to be a *Jewish* Israel. They suggested that the Israel the Bible spoke of, both the people and the land, was symbolic. Symbolic of what? The Gentile church. The new mainstream beliefs that arose, which dominate the Christian world today, began in the seventeenth century. These beliefs centered on the newly held conviction that:

- Israel has been *replaced* by the church.
- Israel has been thoroughly and permanently rejected by Yehoveh (YHWH, Yahweh) because they rejected His Son.
- All the promises of land and redemption that the Hebrews received through Abraham and Moses were taken from them and given to the Gentile church.
- The church now receives all the blessings promised to Abraham, including those promises we read about in the first few verses of chapter 12.
- Israel will receive all the curses that come from disobedience to the Laws of Moses.

Fast-forward to the twentieth century. In 1948 Israel finally did return to the exact location from which they were exiled; the Jewish nation was reborn just as prophesied. And, in 1967, Jerusalem was returned to the control of the Jewish people, just as predicted, and therefore ordained, by Messiah. The church has had little to no reaction to these staggering events. It is still teaching the same replacement theological positions developed with a lack of faith in God's Word by the seventeenth-century church leaders. This position is completely intertwined and imbedded within modern church doctrine worldwide. It's as though Israel's return to claim the promises made to Abraham never happened.

Christians have been taught from early childhood to express disappointment and shake our heads knowingly at those terrible Jews in Jesus's day who had the unimaginable privilege of witnessing the arrival of the long-awaited Messiah, but then were blinded by their Jewish traditions, so blinded that they encouraged the killing of the Son of God for claiming to be who He really was. Well, today, the church has witnessed that long-awaited day when Israel would be returned from their exile, reclaim their land inheritance, and be reborn as a nation. Television sets broadcasted images of the Israeli army defeating an alliance of five powerful Arab armies in a matter of only six days. In 1967 they reclaimed Jerusalem as their own Holy City for the first

time since AD 70. The prophecy has happened; the Jews are back; and for the most part, due to our Christian traditions, the church has been utterly blind to it. Interestingly, it was a little less than nineteen hundred years from the time God made His promises to Abraham until Yeshua the Messiah arrived, and was a little less than nineteen hundred years from the day God kicked His people out of the land with the promise that He would bring them back until the day that they came back to claim that promise once and for all. Maybe we ought to take notice.

### EZEKIEL'S PROPHECY

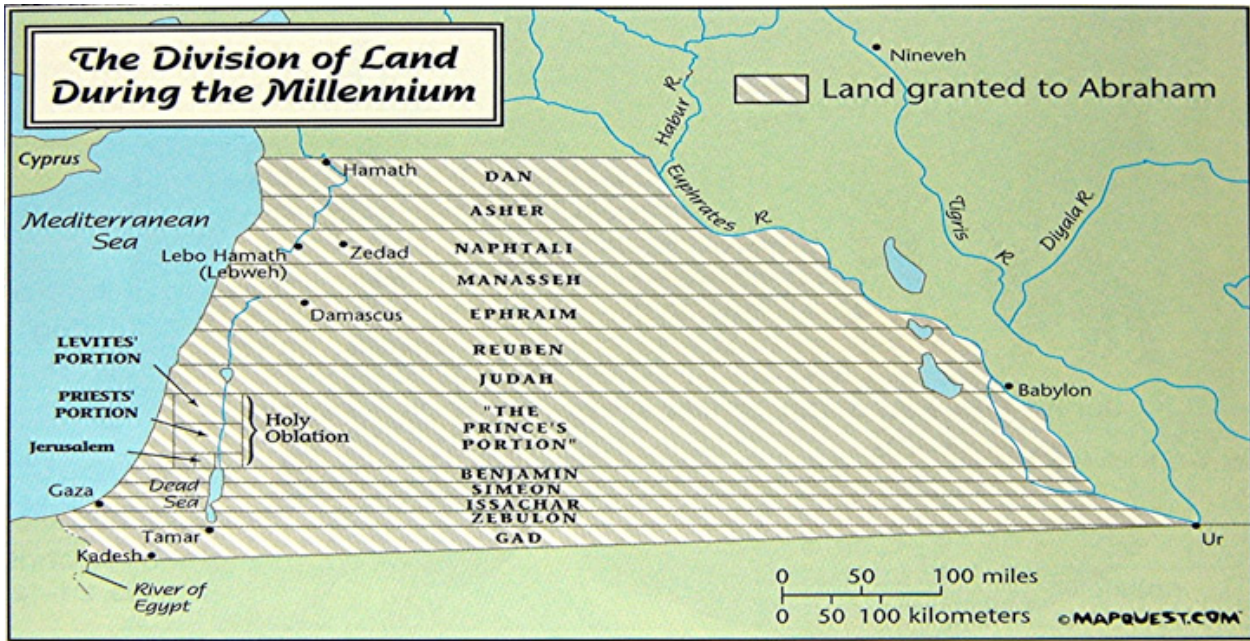
There are many mentions of these events scattered throughout the Bible, but none have the impact of those spoken by that really strange prophet of God, Ezekiel. Ezekiel was one of the Jews taken from his home in Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar and exiled to Babylon. This happened when the Babylonian Empire conquered Judah about 597 BC.

ASSIGNMENT: Read Ezekiel 36–37.

These two chapters sound like a scene from a George Lucas or Steven Spielberg movie! But let's connect the dots between this passage, Genesis 12–13, and the events of our time.

The event talked about in Ezekiel is *not* the return of the Jews from Babylon. The phrase *the whole house of Israel*<sup>66</sup> is also at times translated as "both houses of Israel" or "all Israel." The words of Ezekiel were written over a span of approximately twenty-five years, beginning around the time Babylon conquered Judah in 597 BC, and this particular part was written in the later years. About 130 years earlier, the Hebrews were a divided nation; a ten-tribe confederacy in the northern area of the Holy Lands, and a two-tribe group in the south. The northern area was a kingdom all its own, separate from the southern area; each area was ruled





A division of the Holy Land during the Millennium

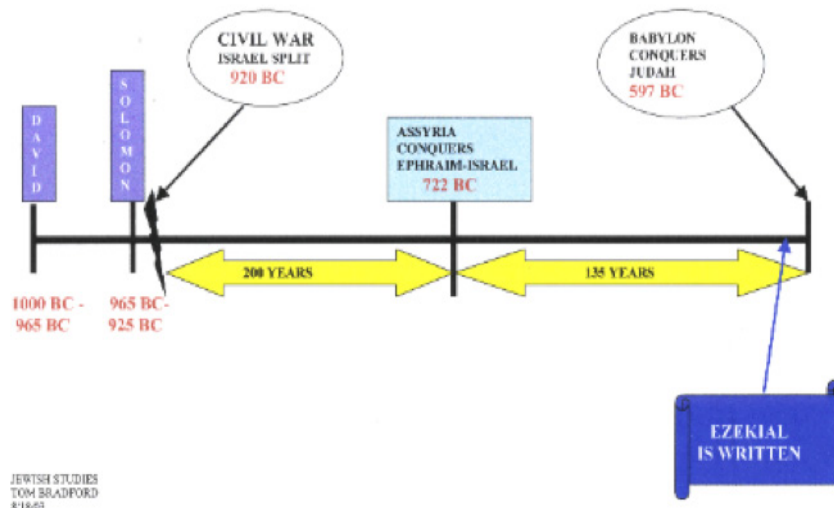
by its own king. The unified kingdom of Israel, ruled by David and later Solomon, was divided by means of civil war.

The northern area went by several names: the Northern Kingdom, the kingdom of Israel, and some documents even refer to it as the Kingdom of Joseph. But for the most part, as was typical for that era, it was named after the tribe that was dominant in the region: the tribe of Ephraim. From about 900 BC to the time of Ezekiel (ca. 590 BC), the northern region

was called the Kingdom of Ephraim or the House of Ephraim, names that most of us are not familiar with. (Ephraim was a grandson of Jacob. He was adopted away from his father, Joseph, by Jacob, then given a great prophetic blessing.)

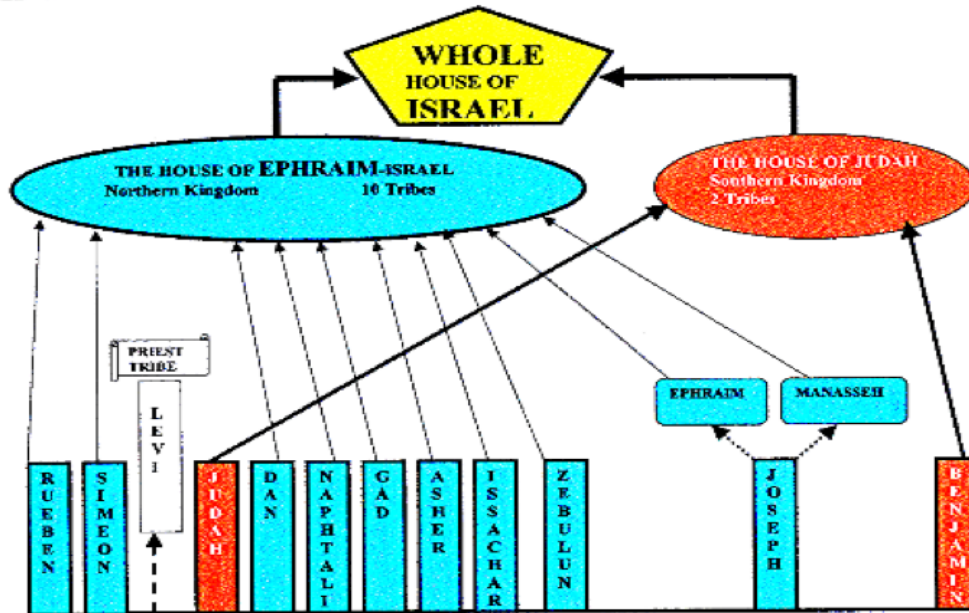
The Southern Kingdom was called Judah or the House of Judah. These two “houses,” the House of Ephraim and the House of Judah, together made up what the Bible calls the *whole* house of Israel. Almost all Bibles say “House of

**TIMELINE: FROM KING DAVID to BABYLON**



JEWISH STUDIES  
TOM BRADFORD  
8/18/02

### HOW THE 12 TRIBES MAKE UP THE WHOLE HOUSE OF ISRAEL



Israel” instead of “House of Ephraim,” which is confusing. Indeed, “House of Israel” was a term used for a few years immediately following the civil war to denote the Northern Kingdom, but it quickly fell out of use.

Until recently, only one of the two houses of Israel had returned to their homeland: Judah. Judah is made up of what, today, we call the Jews. That other house of Israel, the one that comprised ten of the twelve tribes of Israel, was not recognized by Israel for who they were and were generally prohibited from returning home. But that has now changed and the remnants of the ten lost tribes are returning in an ever-increasing flow.

There will be a time when *both* houses of Israel will return to the Holy Lands and be reunited:

#### WHO ARE THE JEWS?

*Jews* are only people from the tribe or kingdom of Judah, which basically represents the tribes of Benjamin and Judah. Ephraim represents the other ten tribes (long assumed to be lost and unidentifiable), and they are *not* Jews, but they certainly are Israelites.

*The word of ADONAI came to me: “You, human being, take one stick and write on it, ‘For Y’budah and those joined with him [among] the people of Isra’el.’ Next, take another stick and write on it, ‘For Yosef, the stick of Efrayim, and all the house of Isra’el who are joined with him.’ Finally, bring them together into a single stick, so that they become one in your hand.” (Ezek. 37:15–17)*

But until recently, only *one* house, the house of Judah, had come back. The common question is: Isn’t Ezekiel really about the return of all the Hebrews from their Babylonian exile? No. That exile was *only* the exile of Judah; the other house of Israel, Ephraim, had long ago been conquered



by Assyria. The people were deported and scattered throughout the 120 nations that formed the Assyrian Empire. This happened almost one and a half centuries before Ezekiel's time, and basically Ephraim had ceased to exist as an identifiable people. So the events spoken of in Ezekiel 36 and 37 could not have been about the return from Babylon but about events that were to come later.

The return of Ephraim is happening as you read this! In March 2005, the Israeli government officially sanctioned the return to the Holy Lands of people who say they are *not* Jews but *are* Israel. That is, people now seeking to migrate to Israel are some of those ten long-lost tribes of Israel, the second house of Israel, Ephraim. So the events that we just read about in Ezekiel 36 and 37 are in visible process. Why doesn't the church pay more attention to this?

### WHERE DO YOU STAND ON ISRAEL?

Today, we are in the throes of a severe argument over the land that the Jews have returned to, and to which Ephraim is also coming back. That argument will someday throw the world into a final war, which is where the chapters that follow in Ezekiel would take us if we were to read them today. Some will argue over the precise boundaries of the land God gave to Avram for all time, but at the very *least* it includes every inch of the land that the Palestinians now claim as theirs. You see, the area in which Avram stood at the moment God made him that promise was right in the heart of what is commonly called the West Bank, or, in the most misleading of terms, the occupied territory.

I cannot begin to tell you the downright sense of dread I have for America every time I hear our president or our secretary of state talk about severing the West Bank from the possession of Israel through tremendous political pressure, and giving that land to the Palestinians as their own sovereign nation—and that in the hope of peace. There is even a large coalition of churches demanding the



very same thing borne out of a doctrine of love, tolerance, fairness, and mercy for the Arabs and the Palestinians. Love and mercy for one group over the other is not the issue. This is precisely the land God gave to Avram and set aside for his descendants for all time. God has warned that for those who go against his descendants (those who curse Avram), He will come against and judge (they will be cursed).

Every indication, biblically, is that indeed someone is going to force upon Israel the decision to surrender a portion of that land that is at the center of the Abrahamic covenant. At the moment, sadly, it appears the United States government will play a major role in forcing it in order to attain the so-called two-state solution.

The peace that the world longs for in our time will occur for a *very* brief time, but the problem is that in this context peace with the world automatically means war with God. God's pattern of dividing, electing, and separating has never ended; we are living in one of those defining and dividing moments of this God principle. Part of that dividing and separating process is based on each individual's answer to a single question: Where do you stand on Israel? Like it or not, we must choose one side or the other. We can choose to obey God and honor His covenants and have peace with Him, or we can stand with the world. Standing with Israel *is* standing with God. Not standing with Israel is standing with the world, against God.



ASSIGNMENT: Reread Genesis 13:14–18.

You have seen that the words of these verses are *still* in effect, and will be until the end of all things. The land God showed Avram is to be *unconditionally* Israel's forever. Now, where exactly was Avram when he was to look around in every compass direction to see all that was to belong to his descendants? The Genesis Apocryphon places him on Ramath-Hazor (*ramath* means "high hill"), which is about five miles northeast of Bethel. It is the highest spot in central Israel, with an altitude of almost 3,300 feet. From this spot, even today, one can see the Mediterranean Sea to the west, and well into the kingdom of Jordan to the east.

In Genesis 13:17, God said, "Get up and walk through the length and breadth of the land, because I will give it to you." What exactly does that mean? Was Avram literally to stop what he was doing and visit every area of the

land? Or was this just symbolic of something, a Hebrew idiom? The Targum Jonathan (an early Hebrew commentary) says that in this passage Abraham was doing *chazakah*. Chazakah was a widespread legal custom of that era, and well before, and used throughout the various tribes and peoples of the Middle East. It was known by the Egyptians as well as the Hittites, and it was attested to in their ancient documents. The concept was that when a piece of property was acquired, the new owner had to walk the perimeter of the entire property, which was symbolic of marking his territory, if you would. Until the new owner had done this, the transfer of ownership was not complete. Some cultures even required the king or ruler to walk the perimeter of his kingdom from time to time to reestablish his sovereignty over that territory.

Why would God make Avram do this? It was for Avram's sake, and for the sake of the many who likely asked, "Why are you doing chazakah?" I have no doubt that Abraham did *not* make friends as a result of this procedure. For within the outline of the territory he marked, *many* already established kingdoms and city-states existed. They were most likely none too pleased by this foreigner's symbolic declaration of his ownership of their land.

But there is another reason as well: we're going to see all throughout the Torah, the remainder of the OT, and the entire Bible in general, that where man-made governmental systems exist, God tends to allow the people involved to use the laws, ordinances, and customs of their system when transactions between God and men occur. Avram would have been completely familiar and comfortable with Yahweh's telling him to go and walk the land because that's how things were done then. In fact, it probably would have been very disquieting, and left much doubt in Avram if God had *not* ordered it. It would be as though a man went in to buy a car, filled out all the paperwork, laid a check on the table, and the dealer said, "No need for you or me to sign anything, just take the car and go and we'll just take each other's

word for it.” Most buyers would be uncomfortable doing that, primarily because it isn’t customary in our culture. Signing the paperwork finishes the process of transferring ownership and makes the transaction legal. Avram’s situation was similar; in the custom of that day, walking the perimeter of the land legally completed the transfer of the property and thereby

left both parties feeling a full sense of closure on the transaction.

Genesis 13 ends with Avram moving to Hebron and building an altar there. Building an altar was customary to declare one god or another’s authority over that territory, so we see Avram acknowledging God’s authority in his new land.

## GENESIS 14

### UNDERSTANDING BIBLICAL REDACTION

Before we get into the text of Genesis 14, we need to look at a term you're going to hear with some regularity throughout the Torah Class series; the word is *redaction* (or *redacted*), and it simply means "edited." Over the centuries, the original Scriptures have been edited to the version we have in our Bibles today—a fact that bothers a lot of Christians but need not. These revisions, particularly the ones made to the OT, were generally minor.

### THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS

This was proven with the finding of the Dead Sea Scrolls, copies of the ancient Scriptures that were written down by the Essenes over a period of time stretching from around 50 BC to just before AD 70, about 120 years. Before the discovery of these scrolls, the *oldest* Old Testament documents written in Hebrew were copies from the late AD 900s—just before the time of the Crusaders. The finding of the Dead Sea Scrolls took us back almost one thousand years earlier from that time. We have been able to compare the words of the Hebrew OT Scriptures found among those Dead Sea documents with what we were using for centuries, and they are close to identical. Only some minor spelling variations were found, and perhaps a phrase here and there was added or dropped or modified, usually by adding, deleting, or changing a person's name or a city to its more modern equivalent due to language evolution. None of these variations had any significant effect on the meaning or principle being addressed. So to see that virtually no meaningful changes had occurred

over one thousand years attests to the dedication of the hundreds and thousands of Jews and Gentiles who had copied the Hebrew Bible by hand for further use and distribution over that ten-century period. What we are reading in the Torah and the Old Testament is very accurate, at least in the original Hebrew as it existed during the time Christ was living.

### PROBLEMS IN THE TRANSLATION PROCESS

Problems arise when we begin the process of translation from Hebrew to other languages. The first translation of the OT from Hebrew to another language was to Greek, and that was accomplished about two hundred years before the Dead Sea Scrolls were created, around 250 BC. The Greek-language version of the OT, called the "Septuagint," has also proven to have been faithfully copied and handed down over the centuries, so it, too, is a most useful and accurate document. However, there are very real challenges in translating the *thoughts* of one culture and its associated language into the language of another culture. Hebrew thought and Greek thought were then, and remain to this day, miles apart. There are many words and thoughts in Hebrew that have no parallel in Greek. So something close, or at least similar, had to be chosen when translating.

This problem is even more troublesome with the NT, because the oldest NT documents we possess are all written in Greek. Yet, it is obvious and unchallenged that the writers of the NT were Jews; they were Jews thoroughly immersed in Hebrew culture and Hebrew thought. We can compare the Greek Septuagint against the ancient Hebrew OT and fairly easily find where

the translation problems lie, but it is somewhat different for the NT because we have relatively few passages of NT writings in Hebrew, and those we do have appear to have been translated back into Hebrew from the Greek.

### THE MODERN HEBREW NEW TESTAMENT

Recently, a group of Jewish scholars translated a complete Hebrew NT, using their deep understanding of Hebrew culture in the days of Yeshua. This gives us a much better understanding of the first-century church. The Modern Hebrew New Testament is written by the Bible Society of Israel, and it is a fully parallel NT in English and Hebrew, a very valuable tool for any serious student of the Bible.

Translation problems are multiplied when you take a Hebrew thought, attempt to translate it to a foreign language, such as Greek, and then translate from the Greek into yet another language, such as English. Yet this is what our modern New Testaments are—translations of translations. And even more difficult is the fact that language is evolving—words within a particular language take on different meanings over time. What an English word meant when the first King James Bible was written, as compared to its meaning today, can be quite different.

The mere translation of a document is, by its very nature, a redaction, an editing. The process of translating the Hebrew to Greek and then that Greek to English adds variations and opinions. Why else do you suppose we have an absolutely endless supply of Bible versions in English? And don't forget, the Bible has also been translated into literally hundreds of other languages, and a substantial amount of those are taken from the English!

Let me give you a little tip for studying the Bible, especially the NT. Compare NT verses with their OT counterparts. Does that sound

odd? What verses from the Old might be in the New? At least 50 percent of the NT is direct OT quotations. A good study Bible will show you exactly which NT verses are OT quotations, and even provide the OT reference.<sup>67</sup>

Don't just make a mental note that a particular NT verse or paragraph is an OT quotation: stop, look up that OT passage, and read it. Mentally insert that OT portion, just as it reads in the OT, into the NT. Depending on your Bible version, more often than not the OT words written in the NT will not actually be the same as those you read in the parallel OT passage. Let that sink in for just a moment. Why, if the translator fully recognizes that the NT author is directly quoting an Old Testament passage, do the words not match exactly? Often it is because the OT was translated from Hebrew into English, but the NT is being translated from Greek translations into English. The Greek meaning often is a couple of degrees off from the Hebrew meaning. When you add in *further* translation from Greek to English and Hebrew to English, it complicates the issue even further.

Frustratingly, there are even more problems of translation. Every Christian denomination today, of which there are nearly three thousand, has a set of doctrines and a creed that it goes by. In general, the Bible translators, either consciously or subconsciously, fastidiously adhere to the doctrines and creeds of one or another of these denominations. So, when the opportunity comes to translate a word, but what is written in the original doesn't seem to match their preconceived doctrines, they will substitute a word or phrase that is out of context but keeps the meaning of the verse within the boundaries of the doctrinal beliefs they hold so dear. Translation often has the translator's agenda buried within it.

This is why it is so necessary to use several Bible versions to study from. Better yet, gain an understanding of Hebrew language and culture. I recommend that everyone have a Hebrew Bible to correlate the English translation with, because even if you don't have any proficiency

in Hebrew, you can rather easily tell when two words in Hebrew are similar, but two very distant English words might be used to translate that same Hebrew word. In that case, one should be suspicious and do a thorough Hebrew word study to see exactly what that word means to the Hebrew writer.

The Bible was not written in a vacuum. All the thoughts and phrases and word meanings were written within the context of the Hebrew culture of that era. Our goal, then, is to find out what those words and phrases meant to the original authors, because they should be taken to mean exactly the same thing to us. Otherwise, we turn the Bible into a living document, one that evolves with the times.

In summary, there are two main things to remember: (1) there is much more variation in the NT translations than the OT, and (2) this is primarily because the NT is where the various Christians doctrines find their foundation and where doctrinal arguments are made to defend or criticize denominational beliefs.

## PROGRESS IS BEING MADE

Over the last twenty years, with many Jewish scholars either coming to believe in Messiah or having a more open approach to studying and considering the NT, some great work is being done in adjusting the NT translations to come back in line with the Hebrew culture and thought patterns of the first century AD. With the discovery of the community documents of the Dead Sea Scrolls, we are finding that an astounding number of phrases and theological tenets in the NT that we had thought to be unique to Jesus and His disciples were already under development. The phrases were already in use, especially among the Essene separatists out in the wilderness of Judah and living in Qumran.

So, as we study the connections between the Torah and the NT, we're also occasionally going to correlate some of the Dead Sea documents with it as well, so as to help us better understand what certain things meant to the minds

of the NT authors, and what certain words and phrases meant to the vast audiences Jesus spoke to. That has become more possible within the last few decades than ever before in history.

Let me assure you, you have nothing to fear. Your faith in Christ will grow and be even further validated as we study Torah and the Dead Sea Scrolls. Some of the mysterious and confusing things of the NT that we have so much difficulty understanding become more clear and understandable and *real* with the help of the Dead Sea Scrolls and the comparison with the OT.

ASSIGNMENT: Read Genesis 14.

## K'DORLA'OMER'S ALLIANCE

Lot had gone to live in the Jordan Valley, an area that extended all the way to the Dead Sea and included the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. It was, in essence, part of a district controlled by a king named K'dorla'omer (often translated as Chedorlaomer), and K'dorla'omer apparently had some type of mutual protection treaty with a small group of nations and kings mentioned in Genesis 14:1: "Amrafel was king of Shin'ar, Aryokh king of Elasar, K'dorla'omer king of 'Elam and Tid'al king of Goyim." Not all the names of these various kingdoms can be translated into a specific area on a modern map, but some can. Elasar is almost certainly Ashur, one of several ancient cities built by Nimrod, which eventually was called Assyria. Amrafel lived





HOW THE WORD *GOYIM* EVOLVED

DATE	EVENT	WORD	MEANING
2000 BC	Abraham living in Ur	Goyim	All nations, all people, nations at large
1950 BC	God declares Abraham the first Hebrew	Goyim	Non-Hebrew nations, non-Hebrew people
1850 BC	God changes Jacob's name to Israel	Goyim	Non-Israelite nations, non-Israelite people
1800 BC	Jacob fathers the twelve tribes of Israel	Goyim	Non-Israelite nations, non-Israelite people
500 BC	Jews (tribe of Judah) return from Babylon	Goyim	Non-Jewish nations, non-Jewish people
AD 1948 to today	Jews (remnant of Israel) return to Holy Land	Goyim	All nations except Israel, Gentiles, all non-Jews

way up north, in an area called Shinar, the same place Nimrod had called home, and also where Ur, Avram's hometown, was located.

The place called Elam, which was K'dorla'omer's kingdom (or better, city-state), is also known by another biblical name, Shushan (which we find in the book of Esther). Today, it is called Khuzistan. Remember, we're going to find that many names for people and places in the Bible change over the centuries, both as a result of changing languages and political take-overs. Elam, Shushan, and Khuzistan are all the same place; today this place is located in south-western Iran, just a few miles from Ur. Shinar and Elam likely shared a border.

King Tidal is known to have been a king of the Hittites, so his territory that was called Goyim covered the areas of western Turkey and Syria. *Goyim* means "nations," but it also means "Gentiles." Prior to Avram, *goyim* was a very generic word that meant "nation" in a general sense, just as we use the word *nation* today. But once God separated Avram and designated him as the first "Hebrew," which set him apart as a special and unique nation of people for God's purpose, the word *goyim* took on a slightly different tone. It then meant "all the *other* nations

and peoples of the world except Avram and his people." So by about 1900 BC, *goyim* meant "Gentile nations" or "Gentile people." It is very likely that the last person to redact this chapter of Genesis in antiquity was simply showing that in the original scriptural documents the kingdom that King Tidal reigned over was not written down and named, so he simply inserted the rather generic word *goyim*, indicating that Tidal was indeed a king of some nation or another.

It is through fairly new archaeological evidence that we know with certainty that King Tidal ruled over a people called the Hittites. The Hittites were an enormous, dominant, and very advanced culture of that era. I suspect that when Genesis was first written down, it was not necessary to explain what people group King Tidal ruled over, no more than it would need to be explained today, to most any literate culture in the modern world, who the president of the United States is. It is simply common knowledge.

The common element among the territories of these allied kings who were heading down into the Middle East to make war was that they all resided in what we call Mesopotamia, and the territories they held were substantial.

## K'DORLA'OMER'S ENEMIES

*They made war together against Bera king of S'dom and against Birsha king of 'Amora, Shin'av king of Admah, Shem'ever king of Tz'voyim, and the king of Bela (which is the same as Tz'o'ar). (Gen. 14:2)*

This district that had rebelled had its own rulers, and we are given their names: Bera, Birsha, Shin'av (or Shinab), Shem'ever (or Shem-eber), and an unnamed ruler of Bela (also called Zoar). We're told that they had paid tribute to K'dorla'omer for twelve years as part of a peace treaty. Every one of these minor kings ruled over relatively small armies and very limited areas compared to those four Mesopotamian kings. In the thirteenth year after the treaty was made, these rulers rebelled. They grew tired of paying tribute to these absentee landlords up in Mesopotamia, and refused to pay any more. So, a year later, K'dorla'omer and his allies marched south and attacked the rebelling district.

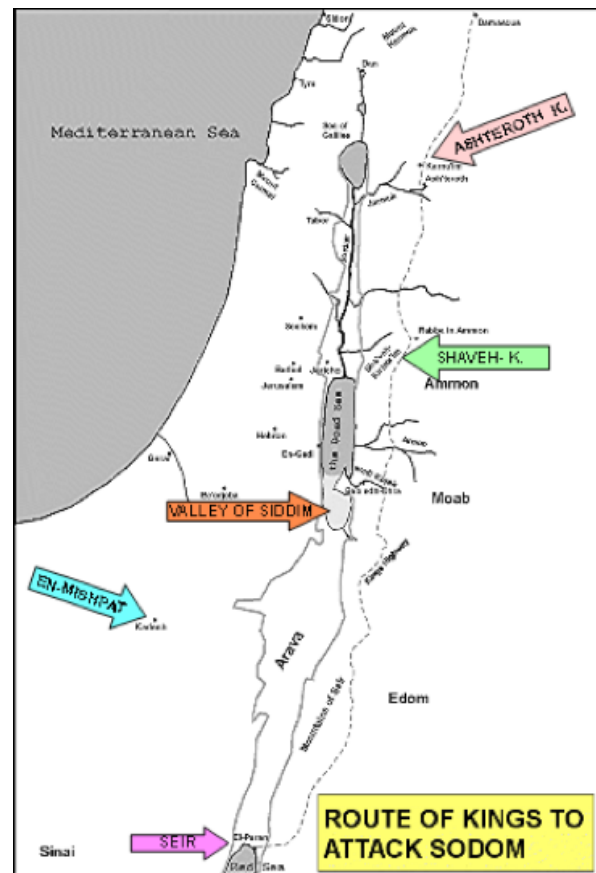
The allied armies met up in the valley of Siddim; a valley that no longer exists because it is now part of the Dead Sea. Here is one of those places in the Bible where redaction took place. Because when this event happened and was written down, the valley of Siddim did exist. Later, when a scribe was copying the text, he added the words "now the Dead Sea." Otherwise, nobody would have known what or where the now inundated Siddim Valley was. Even more, the words that editor actually wrote were not "Dead Sea" but "Salt Sea." And even later, when the name Salt Sea fell out of use and was replaced with Dead Sea, the scribes began using the new name, Dead Sea, instead of the old, Salt Sea. None of this represents substantive changes, nor does it change the location or meaning. All it does is clarify and bring forward facts that would otherwise have become obscure and lost. This is the most typical kind of biblical redaction.

Geography buffs might like to know that the Dead Sea is made up of two parts: the northern and the southern. The northern is what existed

in Avram's day; it was very deep, approximately thirteen hundred feet deep. The southern part did not exist until after Avram's time, and it was the result of the northern part filling up and then overflowing into the valley of Siddim that was adjacent and to the south. It became a relatively shallow part of the newly expanded Dead Sea.

## LOT'S CAPTURE AND RESCUE

The route that the kings from Mesopotamia took was the already well-marked King's Highway that extended from Damascus in the north all the way to Egypt in the south. They attacked and defeated the Rephaim at a place called Ashteroth-Karnaim, the Zuzim at Ham,<sup>68</sup> the Emim at Shaveh-Kirathaim, and finally, far in the south, the Horites in the area of Seir. Then they headed back north and defeated the Amalekites at Kadesh, which is also called En-Mishpat.



The route the kings took to attack Sodom

The people called Rephaim, Zuzim, and Emim are difficult to identify. The other names mentioned—the Horites, Amalekites, and Amorites—are well-attested-to ancient Middle Eastern tribes. It is thought by many sages that the Rephaim, Zuzim, and Emim may well be a kind of post-Flood N’filim, that race of giants or powerful and tyrannical men spoken of before the Flood, supposedly the result of fallen angels mating with human females. The Rephaim, Zuzim, and Emim don’t seem to be known anywhere as a tribe, so this appears to be a description; their names reflect the language and culture of the region each is found in. But this is conjecture; it is not at all clear who these three groups of people were.

The rebellious kings knew they had to react to the armies that were approaching them, so they gathered together and met the armies of King K’dorla’omer in the valley of Siddim. The various rulers of this rebellious district came out to battle against K’dorla’omer and his men, and they got creamed, as one might have expected. K’dorla’omer’s allied army took all the district’s food supply, their possessions of value, and even some people to use as slaves—this was normal battle protocol in those days. Among those taken as slaves were Lot and his family, who were living in Sodom when the attack occurred.

Avram received the news that Lot had been kidnapped while he was living among some of the Canannite peoples, with whom he had apparently entered into a formal alliance by means of treaty. Avram elected not to call on these Canaanites for help, but instead he took 318 men from his own household, men who were loyal to Avram, since many had been born into his clan and trained in warfare, and he set out to rescue Lot.

This gives us some idea of the size of the nation Avram had become in a rather short period of time. Avram was not the biological father of all these men. Almost certainly these were the children of many servants and slaves, people purchased as slaves, of which Avram owned many, and were considered part of the family.

### SLAVERY IN AVRAM’S TIME

Because of the familiar history of the brutal and ungodly African slave trade that supplied so many of the fieldworkers in early America, we get a distorted idea of what slavery among the biblical Hebrews amounted to. Slavery among the Hebrews was not that distant a concept from modern-day adoption, where someone pays a mother for the right to adopt her child, or at least pays for her medical expenses during pregnancy and delivery, plus a stipend. Avram’s direct children certainly had authority and rights of inheritance above these slaves but slaves were not maltreated; they were usually valuable and beloved members of the clan, and generally given respect.

Avram and his warriors pursued these kings all the way to the area eventually known as Damascus, Syria—a long way. Notice that Genesis 14:14 says they went “as far as Dan.” This is another redaction; Dan was named after one of the sons of Jacob, one of the twelve tribes of Israel. Dan was Avram’s great-grandson, and this land was an eventual location of the tribe of Dan after the Exodus. The area called Dan would not be settled for at least six hundred years after the events of Genesis 14 occurred.

Avram and his men pulled off a nighttime surprise attack on K’dorla’omer’s exhausted army, and they achieved victory. All the booty was recovered and Lot and his family were freed. Upon their return, Avram and his men were given a rousing greeting by the grateful rebellious rulers and the residents of the now restored district who got most of their belongings back.

### MELCHIZEDEK

In verses 18–20 we are treated to a fascinating but brief story of one of the most mysterious characters in the Bible: Melchizedek, king of Shalem:

*Malki-Tzedek king of Shalem brought out bread and wine. He was cohen of El ‘Elyon [God Most High], so he blessed him with these words: “Blessed be Avram*



by El 'Elyon, maker of heaven of earth, and blessed be El 'Elyon, who handed your enemies over to you." Avram gave him a tenth of everything. (Gen. 14:18–20)

In addition to being a king, Melchizedek was also a high priest, and he worshipped El 'Elyon, the God Most High. Melchizedek came out to greet Avram, brought bread and wine, and blessed Avram. Avram then presented him with a tenth of everything that was recovered.

An interesting play is set up here: two rulers came to greet Avram—the king of Sodom, the ruler of an evil place; and Melchizedek, the ruler of a righteous place. A truly important pattern is established in this story, and it continues on into chapter 15. When we come across these odd scenes, it's best to look at them carefully . . . for something of great significance is always occurring, and it's no different here.

## WHO WAS MELCHIZEDEK?

*Melchizedek* is not a personal name; it's a title. We're not told exactly *who* this person was. As an example, President Lincoln's name was not *president*; it was Abraham Lincoln. President is the title of the office he held. This is also true of all the so-called "names of God" that we have run into up to now in Genesis. In fact, the title used for God in this story, El 'Elyon (God Most High), is also not a name in the way we typically think of it. Just like *president* is the title of the office Abraham Lincoln held, so are these various titles of God indicative of the office and the authority that God holds. Melchizedek's use of this title indicates that he was a believer in the God of the Bible and that he was perhaps one of the few monotheists, those who worshipped only one god, who existed.

Further, we need to keep in mind that when the Bible refers to El Elyon, El Shaddai, and several more titles of god as "names," it means



A rendering of Melchizedek and Avram

“reputation.” So God’s name, his reputation, has great variety: He is the God Most High, God of the Heavenly Hosts, the God Who Hides Me, the Lord Who Provides, the Lord Who Heals, and so on. It won’t be until the time of Moses that God actually divulges His formal and personal name, YHWH, which *is* like Tom or Becky or Jerry. YHWH is *not* a reputation or a title.

Returning to the *title* Melchizedek, *Melchi* means “king” and *tzedek* means “righteous” or “righteousness.” It’s a title that, translated to English, means “my king is righteous” or “the king of righteousness.” And it’s a *name* in the sense of its being this unnamed man’s *reputation*.

There are precious few words spoken about this intriguing fellow. But we need to glean as much as we can from this, because he is referred to in a powerful way in the NT, which means that even nineteen hundred years after Avram met Melchizedek, apparently much more was known and remembered about him than was written down. Melchizedek was seen by the writer of Hebrews as a very special part of Israel’s history and, perhaps, Israel’s spiritual future.

Let’s look at this key section of the NT, and make some connections between the Torah and the NT book of Hebrews.

ASSIGNMENT: Read Hebrews 7:1–17.

The ancient Hebrew sages and scholars had some interesting things to say about this mysterious fellow that Saint Paul and others obviously relied on and believed as truth, or Melchizedek would not have been used to draw some important parallels with Yeshua HaMashiach (Jesus Christ). First, Melchizedek was real; he was not a symbol or a metaphor. Even Josephus, the Jewish Roman historian of Christ’s era, verified that Melchizedek was a real person. We find, for instance, in the passages we just read, that he was king and priest over a city called Shalem. There is some evidence that *before* that city was

called Shalem, it was called both Tzedek and Jebus. This place either was, or was adjacent to, the Jerusalem that would come later. We also have recently discovered that the City of David adjacent to Jerusalem was known as Zion before David conquered it.

Some of the ancient scribes said that Melchizedek was actually Shem, the son of Noach. Now, you may ask, does that mean he was a second coming of Shem, a Shem-like individual, or maybe even a descendant of Shem? No, these scribes meant that Melchizedek was the actual, real, literal Shem. This is entirely possible because Shem, by biblical records and chronologies, was still alive at this time. Of course, Shem was destined to be the line of good that extended from Noach, and if anyone alive at this time was completely loyal to the one God, it would have been Shem, who rode out the Great Flood with his family of eight individuals.

It’s amazing what becomes clear when we put the Jewishness that was removed from the Bible back into the Bible, and a prime example is the story of Avram and Melchizedek. The traditional Roman and Western church’s answer to “Who is Melchizedek?” has been that he was Jesus.<sup>69</sup>

Long ago, the great Hebrew scholar Maimonides stated what is obvious if one will simply read the Scriptures: all human-like descriptions of Yehoveh’s thoughts and actions are figurative, not literal. Yehoveh doesn’t jump with joy, because He has no physical legs. He doesn’t swing a glittering sword over His head, because He has no physical hand or arm. He doesn’t “come down” to earth to see what’s happening, and then travel back up to heaven to ponder it, because He’s omnipresent. God does not have emotions the way we think of them: He doesn’t get angry, then sad; He isn’t happy one moment, and unhappy the next. He doesn’t seek pleasure. He doesn’t need to be reminded of anything. God is spirit. He is not a man that He should change.<sup>70</sup> The reason those figurative words are used is because there is simply no other

way for us to communicate about Him. Words as we think of words, and communication as we think of communication, are strictly products of the physical and material world. There are no “spirit words” that exist for a human to speak or communicate to another human being (at least, not on a human level). Everything that we use to describe the attributes of God is insultingly inadequate. But we must use something.

The same goes for ascribing the figurative statements about God to Yeshua just because an essence of the supreme Spirit Being called Yehoveh was made into flesh and blood and placed on planet Earth at a momentous time in the history of the world. If we insist that every manifestation of God in human form that has occurred throughout the biblical period was Jesus, then that waters down the significance of the fact that the Messiah, Jesus, had to come from the line of David and be born of a virgin. As concerns the errant belief that Yeshua was Melchizedek, Melchizedek fit none of these parameters. If Jesus and Melchizedek were actually one and the same, the rather lengthy homily in Hebrews would have been a perfect place to explain that the parallels drawn between the two were because they were the same guy! But no such thing is said.

Consider this: the shekinah was a physical manifestation of sorts, for it was sometimes visible in the form of a cloud or a pillar of fire. Are we to assume that the shekinah was also Jesus because it had some physical properties? What about those other visible manifestations that the Bible calls “the angel of the Lord”? Yet, when that term is used, the angel of the Lord is never a messenger or a go-between (which is the typical occupation of an angel), but rather he seems to be the very presence of God with full power and divine authority and refers to himself as God. So, is the angel of the Lord also Jesus? How about the visible finger of God that wrote the stone tablets for Moses, and said His name was YHWH? Was that not quite the truth? Was it actually Yeshua’s finger? How about the burning bush itself, on Mount Sinai—that was



The fact that the cloud of God’s shekinah glory had physical attributes does not mean that it was a manifestation of Yeshua.

tangible and visible, so was that Yeshua, too? You get the point.

We should not run around ascribing the name and person of Yeshua to every divine manifestation that has human or material characteristics ascribed to it. Jesus, Yeshua, was the name given to a specific man, born at a precise time in history, in a precise set of circumstances, for a precise purpose . . . to be Savior. That this man, Jesus of Nazareth, is also the Son of God, and is God and Messiah, is solid biblical truth. However, there are no biblical texts to support the idea that Jesus came at some number of earlier times in a myriad of other forms. This is a somewhat pained defense of a long-held Gentile church tradition that tends to oversimplify complex and infinite spiritual realities that go well beyond human abilities to comprehend. It desires that these things are packaged neatly and cleanly so there can be no gray areas. In fact, the Scriptures that emphatically state that the Messiah will come for a second time in and of

themselves completely refute the notion that He appeared several other times in the past. In order to come a second time, He could only have been here once before. Otherwise, His return is nothing but the culmination of a long series of visits.

So, without necessarily advocating that Shem was Melchizedek, it certainly would make a lot of sense and on the whole is a much better guess than that he was Jesus. First, Shem was still alive. In fact, he outlived Avram. Second, the land of Canaan, which was where Shalem was located, was a very pagan place. And, yet, in the midst of this, here was this man who spoke of the God Most High, the God that even Avram was just beginning to get to know. Melchizedek seemed to speak with deep understanding of the one true God, yet never did he make himself to be God. In fact he was called the priest of El 'Elyon long before there was a Levitical priesthood. Third, Avram seemed to know who this man was (as did the pagan king of Sodom), and they had the deepest reverence for him. In fact, Melchizedek's presence seemed matter-of-fact and expected. Without any explanation at all, Avram gave one-tenth of all the recovered property to this man.<sup>71</sup>

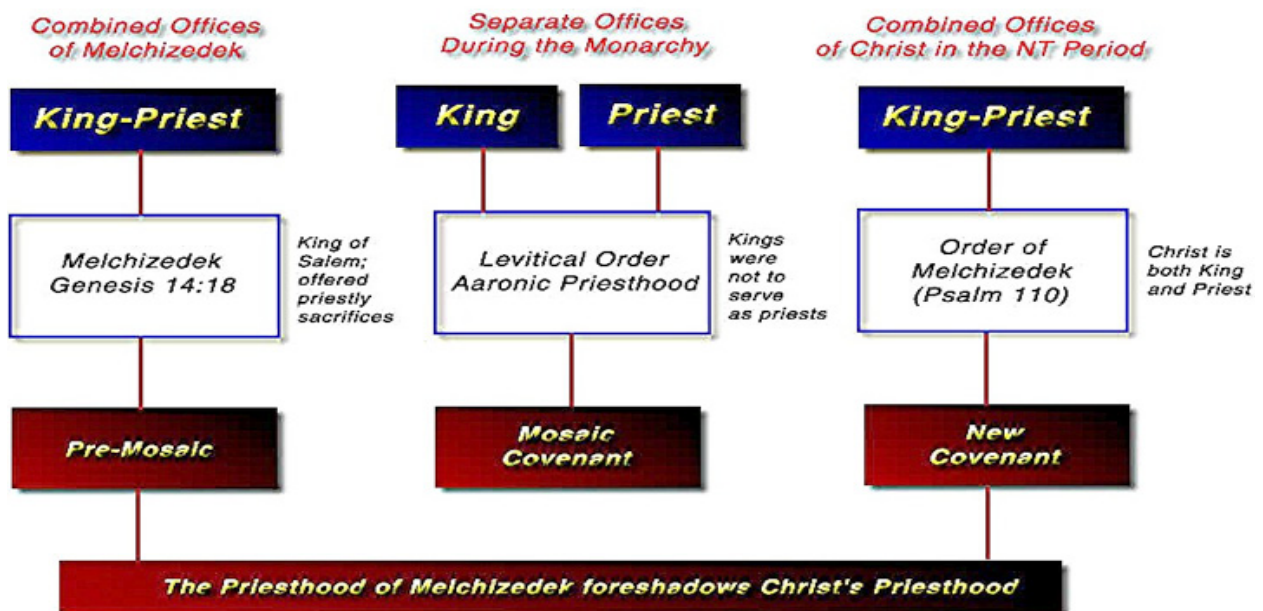
Let's bring some other scriptural mention of Melchizedek into play and follow that line of inquiry. The next mention of Melchizedek after Genesis is in Psalm 110, which is accepted by Jew and Christian alike as a prophetic, messianic psalm.

ASSIGNMENT: Read Psalm 110:1-4.

Here, in an OT Scripture, we see this reference to the future Messiah as being of the "order of," or in other versions "compared to," Melchizedek.<sup>72</sup> What does that mean? The word translated as "order of" is, in Hebrew, *dibrah*. It has the sense of "in the manner of," or "similar in intent." So the Messiah, being of the "manner of" Melchizedek, means the Messiah would be both a high priest and a king, just as was Melchizedek, something that was rare, but not unheard of, in Bible times. But it also likely meant there was a genealogical connection.

We have the original story of Melchizedek in Genesis 14; we have a follow-up in the Psalms, about nine hundred years later; and then in the

## Priesthood of Melchizedek



NT, in Hebrews 7, about nineteen hundred years later, more of Melchizedek's attributes are brought out. And they all connect.

The order of, or the manner of Melchizedek was all about a very special priestly system that would be higher than the Levite priesthood, because this priest would also be a king. As of the time of this story in Genesis 14, there was no Levite priesthood because there weren't any Levites yet. The Levite clan would not exist for at least two hundred more years. Then, at least four hundred years after that, the Levite priesthood was established with Aharon (Aaron), brother of Moses, the first high priest of Israel. No earthly priest was to be higher than the high priest of Israel. It was the high priest alone who could enter the holy of holies in the temple, and only once per year, to meet God. But the priesthood that Melchizedek represented was of a type higher than the Levitical high priesthood. It was representative of the type of priesthood that the Messiah Himself would have before God, perpetual and including kingship.

What can we say in conclusion about Melchizedek? He was a real man, the high priest and king of the city of Shalem, which possibly became Jerusalem. He was a type of Christ, but he was *not* Christ. He was a shadow of the Messiah who was to come. And, very possibly, he was Shem, son of Noah.

ASSIGNMENT: Reread Genesis 14:17–24.

Melchizedek was either delusional or he actually bore great authority and understanding of just who God was because he pronounced that Avram was blessed by El Elyon, and that El Elyon was to be blessed. Avram offered no response that was written in Scripture, as he seemed to know to whom he was submitting. Then Avram gave Melchizedek a tenth of everything.

The king, the ruler of Sodom, essentially said to Avram, "Give me the people; you keep the loot." Why would he say such a thing? First, the king of Sodom had authority over

the recovered loot. It was his to keep or to give away. Yet, it is obvious that in some way or another Melchizedek had even greater authority than the king, because Avram gave part of that 10 percent to Melchizedek, and it consisted of things that belonged to the king of Sodom. The king didn't protest one whit.

The king of Sodom was the king over perhaps the most wicked city in all of Canaan, if not the world. This guy was evil, and under the control of evil. The king of Sodom was a type of Satan or antichrist, just as Melchizedek was righteous, under the control of righteousness, and was a type of Christ. This scene is reminiscent of Jesus's encounter with Satan when Satan said, "Just bow down to me, and I have the authority to give you incomparable material wealth."<sup>73</sup> Just as Avram never challenged the king of Sodom's authority and possession of the recovered wealth, neither did Yeshua challenge Satan's authority over the material wealth of the world. Neither Avram nor Jesus said, "It's not yours to give," for indeed it was the Prince of Evil's to give. Notice also that Satan was eager to give away as much wealth as it took to get Yeshua to, in essence, not redeem humanity and instead allow the devil to have them. This is parallel to the king of Sodom saying to Avram, "Keep all the wealth you recovered, just give me the people you have saved."

We've talked a lot about God principles, but here we see a Satan principle: Satan could care less about material possessions; he wants to own your soul. In the end, the battle between Satan and Yehoveh (YHWH, Yahweh) is over people, not things.

Avram rebuffed the king of Sodom, understanding whom he was dealing with, and told him no thanks. "Besides," said Avram, "I don't want you (as a representative of the evil one) to ever to be able to say that my abundance had anything to do with you. Whatever I have, be it little or much, comes from God, and I don't want whatever it is you can offer me." This is a wise lesson for all of us: the most important characteristic of anything is not what it is, but the *source* it comes from.



## GENESIS 15

**ASSIGNMENT:** Read Genesis 15.

Often, after we have visited a victorious spiritual “mountaintop,” we can easily slide into the valley of despair below. Avram, sometime after his great victory over K’dorla’omer, allowed his fears to surface. He was back in Canaan, a wicked land, and outnumbered thousands to one. He realized that even though he had a substantial and growing family, it was primarily the result of his female slaves’ having so many children. In addition, his hold on the land was tenuous at best. How was Avram going to have all these descendants inherit the Promised Land if he didn’t even have children? Avram wondered in verse 2 if his purchased servant, Eli’ezer (whom we’re told was from Damascus), was going to wind up as the sole inheritor of all he owned when Avram died.

### GOD CALMS AVRAM’S FEARS

Verse 1 begins with the words “Some time later,” so we don’t know exactly how long it was after the battle with the kings from Mesopotamia and the rescue of Lot that this episode took place. However, it would appear that it was not long at all. “Don’t be afraid,” God said to Avram. What was the fear Avram was experiencing? Had he not just flexed his muscles and defeated those northern armies? Could it be that he was afraid those kings would come back to take retribution? It was not only a humiliating defeat for these powerful kings of the north, but the guy who beat them wasn’t even harmed by what they had done. They had not come to make war with Avram, and they had done nothing to Avram

except to unknowingly capture a relative who lived far away.

God, knowing Avram’s fears, went on to explain that He would protect him and even reward Avram for refusing to be enriched by the evil king of Sodom, for choosing to place his faith in Melchizedek’s God. Avram seemed to be rethinking his idealistic and principled refusal to accept *all* that he had liberated from K’dorla’omer and returned to the king of Sodom . . . except for the 10 percent he gave to Melchizedek. Avram instantly would have been an even wealthier man if he had accepted the ruler of Sodom’s most generous offer.

### THE PROMISE OF AN HEIR

But the worrywart continued to wring his hands, and in a revealing and unflattering dialogue, Avram started pouring out his fears and suspicions and anxieties to Yehoveh. He didn’t easily accept God’s promises. Avram may have been God’s man, but he was still just a man. So, after assuring Avram that He would protect him from the evil kings of the north, and then further assuring him that his prosperity would be increased, God promised Avram the thing he was most worried about: an heir. In the modern Western world we don’t grasp the importance of a *son* as an heir in that era. It was not just a matter of passing on wealth and landholdings; the belief held by Avram and most all humans of the known civilizations of his time was that man lived on *through* his heir. This was not so much a reincarnation as it was a belief that the ethereal substance that is invisible and unknowable, that which makes each person a unique individual, and the life force that contains the bloodlines of a family, was carried forward

through human reproduction. In some mysterious, undefined way, the fundamental nature of the father lived on in his son.

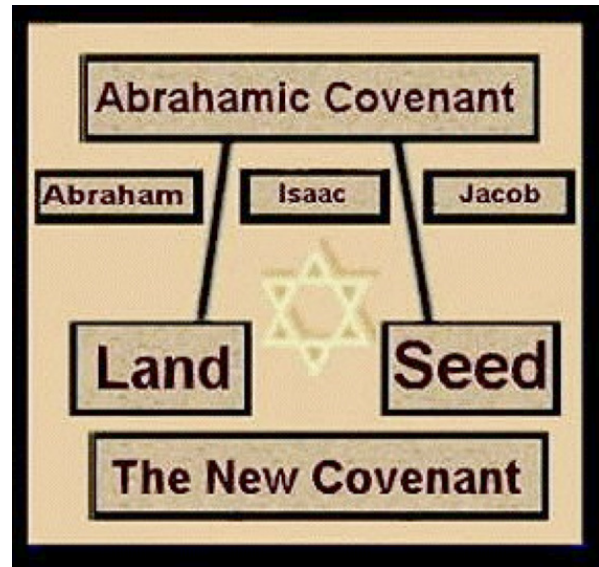
For a man to die without an heir meant an end to his family line, and therefore an end to his own human essence. It was most shameful for a woman to be unable to give a son to her husband; her primary reason for existence as a human female was to produce an heir. To fail was tantamount to being useless. The people of Avram's day had no concept of dying and going to heaven and living with God for eternity. A son was Avram's only hope of seeing all of God's promises realized, and he was well aware of it.

Yehoveh told Avram that he *would* be a father; Eli'ezer would not inherit the family wealth. Avram was encouraged when God told him to look up into the night sky and count the stars because that was how numerous his descendants would be. And then, in verse 6, we are told something that so many modern believers are sure is only a NT promise, one brought by Jesus: "He believed in ADONAI, and he credited it to him as righteousness." Here was the essence of God's plan of salvation: trust God, and God will credit it to us as righteousness. This is the very meaning of grace. Grace was Adam's hope, it was Noach's, and it was Avram's. Grace was the foundation of the Torah given to Moses and is the foundation of the new covenant in Yeshua; it is precisely our hope today. It has never changed.

## THE PROMISE OF LAND

Once the matter of Avram's heir had been addressed, or at least Avram thought it had, God brought up the matter of the Promised Land in verse 7: "Then he said to him, 'I am ADONAI, who brought you out from Ur-Kasdim to give you this land as your possession.'" In other words, "Don't you get it yet? What do you think this has all been about? You're going to get the land; nothing can prevent it because I've decided it."

Avram asked a curious question that smacked of the highest skepticism, if not



The promise of land is Israel *the place*; the promise of seed is Israel *the people*.

downright distrust: "ADONAI, God, how am I to know that I will possess it?" (Gen. 15:8). I say the question was curious because God had already promised the land to Avram; did Avram not believe Yehoveh? Did he just not get it? The fact is, Avram's faith was wavering a bit. He knew, in his spirit, that God had spoken to him, but time went by and there was no visible, tangible confirmation of the promise. So he began to wonder if his imagination was working overtime or if God *really* spoke to him. We've all been there, too, and we will be again.

The fact is, by all customs and traditions in Avram's era, promises that were real had structure. That shouldn't be surprising to us; our promises today also have structure—it's called a contract. In our society there is precious little we will accept as legitimate or trustworthy from another person unless it is put to paper, made to fit the laws of our civil code, and then signed by all involved parties; that's just how we do it. It was the same in Avram's day. There was a procedure when a promise was made, and that procedure had not yet been carried out in God's promise to Avram.

We may not realize it, but we expect to deal with God in our own cultural terms. What good is it to give us Americans a word that only a

Japanese person would fully understand? It would mean nothing to us. Likewise, a person living in the Sudan needs words from God that he understands, concepts that are normal and customary in his Sudanese society, not something that may seem normal to an American. Avram was waiting for the promise of God to be put into a structure that he recognized as valid.

### GOD'S COVENANT WITH AVRAM

God is merciful, so He enacted a *visible* covenant-making procedure, using the cultural norms for the time, for Avram. Avram could actually see it with his own eyes, and he recognized it for what it was. When God makes a promise, it already is a covenant far superior to anything that can be written down or sealed via ritual. The fabric of space and time is altered when God makes a covenant; the entire universe is reshaped and focused around that covenant. That is not metaphorical; it is absolute reality. No human procedure needs to be performed in order for His promise to become a legal covenant.

Nevertheless, Yehoveh did this to give Avram peace about it. In His graciousness, He lowered Himself and performed the standard human covenant ritual as a sign to Avram of the validity of His promises of land and blessing, of a son and descendants.

In verses 9–10 we see a typical covenant ceremony performed. It revolved around the use of animals as agents for the promise. These animals, *clean* animals, were killed, cut into pieces, and separated into two groups.<sup>74</sup>

This covenant ceremony was *not* a sacrifice. There was no altar; there was no burning up of the animals. This was *not* a presentation of a gift, the seeking of acceptance, or a plea for atonement to God by Avram. Rather, this was God's gift to Avram. It was as if God raised His right hand and swore upon Himself to be true to His oath. This was 100 percent God's action; Avram's only participation was as the *recipient* of the promise. God promised a national identity to a people who didn't even exist yet,

a people who, at first, would be called Hebrew, then eventually Israel. Ancient records of various Middle and Far Eastern peoples are full of covenant ceremonies essentially like the one we are witness to in these passages, but nowhere else is there a record or even a tradition of a god promising land and a title that is irrevocable as long as time exists.

### SATAN ATTEMPTS TO THWART GOD'S PROMISE

Suddenly, in verse 11, birds of prey appeared and tried to escape with the carcasses of the dead animals. Avram drove them away. What is the meaning of these few words about these birds? Birds of prey—vultures, scavenger birds—are symbolic of death and evil. This was Satan's attempt to disrupt or stop the covenant because he knew well what it was going to lead to. We are often warned in the Scriptures that when God promises us good things, Satan will attack. He will either try to steal the gift itself, or he will try to take our faith and trust in God's promise, or even just our shalom. Satan wants you to have what *he* has to offer you, not what God has already given to you.

As those birds swooped down, Avram could have simply sat there and thought, *Well, easy come, easy go*, and not fought the evil. Or, more in tune with the modern church attitude, he could have been completely passive and decided, *Well, if God wants the promise to go forth, He will have to do battle with that vulture, the devil*. Wrong: we are Yehoveh's warriors on earth. We are going to have to get our hands dirty and put ourselves at risk. Prayer does not replace action; prayer prepares us for action. Avram's driving those birds away was the Torah's equivalent to James's famous NT saying: "Resist the devil and he will flee from you" (James 4:7 NASB).

### GOD'S OATH

Next God recited an oath, always central to the covenant-making protocol. But before He

did, a deep sleep came upon Avram. This does not mean that Avram fell asleep because he got tired. We see several OT and NT equivalents to this in phrases like “visions within dreams,” or even of “being taken in the spirit.” A great sense of dread overcame Avram in his sleep; it was a “horror and great darkness,”<sup>75</sup> the Bible says. In Hebrew, the word for great darkness is *chasbekah*. This word ought to sound familiar to us, for its root is the word *chosbek*. And *chosbek* simply means “darkness,” but as we learned back in Genesis 1, it doesn’t mean “nighttime.” It is a spiritual term; it means “dread, evil, death, blindness.” Likewise, *chasbekah* is a negative term, and it indicates that its source is from the spirit world.

What follows helps us to understand the disturbing nature of what Avram saw. In verse 13 Yehoveh scared the pants off Avram: “Know this for certain: your descendants will be foreigners in a land that is not theirs. They will be slaves and held in oppression there four hundred years.” Slaves, to Avram, were simply purchased family members. That is how we know the word *oppression* was not simply thrown in; it has significance. Avram’s offspring were going to be subjugated and they were going to be badly treated. They would not be enslaved in Canaan; Yehoveh said it would be in “a land that is not theirs.”

God promised to punish that foreign land, and Avram’s descendants would be released. In fact, they would leave with great wealth. Of course, with the benefit of hindsight, we now know that Egypt was that foreign place, and that a succession of pharaohs were the oppressors. We even know that the Israelites *did*, indeed, leave with much of Egypt’s wealth. Yehoveh also told Avram that he would live to a ripe old age, and that his clan was going to leave this place, not to return until the fourth generation from Avram.

## THE LENGTH OF ISRAEL’S OPPRESSION

*Only in the fourth generation will your descendants come back here, because only then will the Emori be ripe for punishment. (Gen. 15:16)*

The Hebrew word for *generation* is *dor*. This term is not all that concrete. It has three possible meanings:

1. The length of time separating the birth of children from the birth of their parents (our modern understanding of *generation*);
2. the average human life span (about one hundred years); or
3. the people who lived during a certain event (for example, in Numbers, the word *dor* is used to refer to all those who left Egypt in the Exodus).

Avram was told his descendants would be slaves for four generations. Honest scholarship reveals that we cannot easily say this is four centuries and just leave it at that. Some suggest that in Avram’s day, a generation was a length of time equaling about one hundred years, yet Exodus 12:40 says the Israelites’ time in Egypt was 430 years. Further, we know that there was a time, before the death of Joseph, during which Israel was an honored guest of Egypt, not under subjugation, but there is no solid information on the time that elapsed between the death of Joseph and the beginning of Israel’s oppression.

Generally speaking, rabbinical tradition is that the four-hundred-year period began with the birth of Isaac, and the 430-year figure began on the day this covenant with Avram was made official. We are told in the Bible that 190 years passed from the birth of Isaac until Jacob took his small family down to Egypt. So, if the rabbis are right, Israel was not *in Egypt* 400 years, but only 210 (190 + 210 = 400). To explain this problem, the rabbis say that being in a foreign land included some of the time spent in Canaan before moving to Egypt. If we look in the



Septuagint (the Greek translation of the OT), or the Samaritan version of the Torah called the *Chumash*, we'll find that those manuscripts specifically state that the period of 430 years included the time in Canaan before Jacob went down to Egypt.

Obviously we have a problem ascertaining the actual amount of time Israel spent in Egypt, but there is *no* disagreement that they indeed did go to Egypt, were there a very long time, and were subjugated and oppressed.

This is another example of redaction, editing. Problems most often occur when the Torah is translated into a foreign language, which is itself a redaction. Yet we also know that until the invention of the printing press in the AD 1400s, all copying of books, and therefore Bibles, was done by hand. Without doubt, some type of numerical error was introduced either through innocent mistake, or, more likely in my opinion, a misguided soul who attempted to reconcile what seemed to him to be chronological conflicts. Once that happens, it's hard to recover the original until an earlier version is found, and the most reasonable course of action is to adhere to the teaching that Israel spent four hundred years in Egypt until something *proves* it incorrect.

## THE INIQUITY OF THE AMORITES

Finally, what does that statement at the end of verse 16 (“only then will the Emori be

ripe for punishment”) mean? First, Amorites (Emori) was another name for the Canaanites. The Amorite culture became the dominant culture in the land of Canaan, and so the general term for those folks living in Canaan became, for a time, Amorites. Israel would not return to take the land of Canaan until the residents of Canaan finally crossed over a line of evil that only God knew—their wicked ways had become too much and Yehoveh was ready to have them driven out of their land in divine judgment for that wickedness, displaced by Israel.

This is an interesting clue about how Yehoveh operates. In some intricate way that is beyond human understanding, God uses the acts of the wicked to achieve His purposes, to the ultimate benefit of His people. Further, this also indicates God's absolute foreknowledge of all things. He knew in advance when this wickedness of the Amorites would reach a critical mass. At the same time, He knew in advance when His people, Israel, would be ready to leave Egypt. He knew when the pharaohs of Egypt would have oppressed His people too much, so that God would be justified in smiting them. All these events converged at a precise moment in history so that the Exodus occurred, and then a little later, Joshua led Israel to conquer the land of Canaan and make it theirs.

## ANCIENT UNDERSTANDING OF AFTERLIFE

As you have learned, there was no concept of dying and going to heaven in Avram's era; in fact, that concept is nowhere to be found in the entire OT. Rather, the general belief was that life ended at the grave, the typical Hebrew word being *sheol*. What existed after bodily death is very hazy in the OT, and the number of references to death and the varied descriptions of what death amounted to make it clear that, at least for the Hebrews, they had *no* clear doctrine of an afterlife. In the era of the patriarchs, and therefore the era of the Torah, the most common phrase used was "going to your fathers in peace," or some variation of it. What, exactly, did that mean? It's not explained, and there is no ancient source that gives us any confidence that the people of that day knew what it meant beyond a *very* general sense.

Today, when *someone we love* dies, we say they have "passed away." I emphasize "someone we love," because when we're speaking of a wicked person we do not use these words. When Osama bin Laden was shot at his compound in Pakistan, it wasn't reported that he "passed away." It seems to me that "going to your fathers in peace" was the gentler and less onerous way of talking about death in Avram's day.

In general, living to a ripe old age and then going to meet your fathers in peace was the best anyone hoped for in the Bible era. It simply indicated that they had lived out a full life span, and that they died more or less naturally of old age. We can compare this to the phrase "cut off," which meant a person died early, was murdered or executed for a crime, or received death as a judgment from the Lord for a transgression.

Finally, did these men and women actually expect to meet their ancestors in some form or another when they died? I think, in a vague way, perhaps they did. It was a hope. It was about the best outcome one could expect from the always-unwelcome end of life. So, in this passage Avram was promised three things about his death: (1)

that he would live out a very full life span, (2) that his death would be of old age, and (3) that he would die in peace with God, not from judgment or wrath or violence at the hands of another.

## GOD COMPLETES THE COVENANT

In Genesis 15:17, the most important part of this covenant ceremony took place: the maker of the covenant passed, as was customary, between the separated animal pieces. But we're told what actually passed between the animal pieces was a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch. Smoke and fire usually represent the presence of God in the Bible. God walked between the pieces signifying His agreement and promise to keep the terms of the covenant. Avram did *not* walk between the pieces. This was a unilateral covenant, not a two-way deal. God made the promises and He had obligations; Avram did not! Everything promised in this covenant was up to God to make happen.

In verses 18–20, as Yehoveh passed amid the separated piles of animal flesh, He recited the terms of the covenant, including the calling out of the boundaries of the land He gave to Avram and his descendants for all time. While the exact location of these boundaries can be disputed to a small degree, the fact is that they extend well beyond what Israel, Avram's descendants, have ever occupied . . . to this day. Israel was at its peak in territorial size during the time of Kings David and Solomon, and their territory was significantly larger than Israel is today. Even then it didn't reach the proportions enumerated in this passage. Sometime in the near future, Israel will be even larger than it ever has been, despite attempts by the Palestinians and the world at large to shrink it.

Some believe the Bible doesn't specify which landmass constitutes the Promised Land or that this covenant has ended, but the covenant terms are very clear:

*On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your descendants I have given this*

land, from the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates: the Kenite and the Kenizzite and the Kadmonite and the Hittite and the Perizzite and the Rephaim and the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Girgashite and the Jebusite.” (Gen. 15:18–21 NASB)

To the south, the boundary is the “river of Egypt.” This is *not* the Nile. Rather, it is identified with the Wadi el-Arish, in the Sinai. The northern border is “the great river.” This has long been an epithet for the Euphrates River, which flows from modern-day Syria into Iraq. The eastern and western boundaries are a little less explicit; the location is referenced by certain tribes that occupied the area. However, we can determine that the western boundary is the Mediterranean Sea, because that is the end of the landmass occupied by Canaan. To the east, these tribes occupied land to the east of the Jordan River, into the current Kingdom of Jordan and probably a minor part of western Saudi Arabia.



The kingdom of Israel under David and Solomon's rule

## GENESIS 16

**ASSIGNMENT:** Read Genesis 16.

Ten years had passed since Avram left his father and brother in Haran of Mesopotamia to journey south to the Promised Land. A lot had happened in those ten years; Avram and his family were forced to sojourn for a time in Egypt because the land of Canaan suffered a famine. While in Egypt, Avram's wife, Sarai, was taken by Pharaoh to be part of his harem, but later she was returned when Pharaoh found out that Sarai was not only Avram's sister, as Avram and Sarai implied, but also Avram's wife.

Avram and his family were kicked out of Egypt, so they went back up to Canaan as much wealthier people. They parted company with his nephew Lot and Lot's family when the herds and flocks of their animals grew so large that they outstripped the pastureland they shared, which created trouble among the herdsmen.

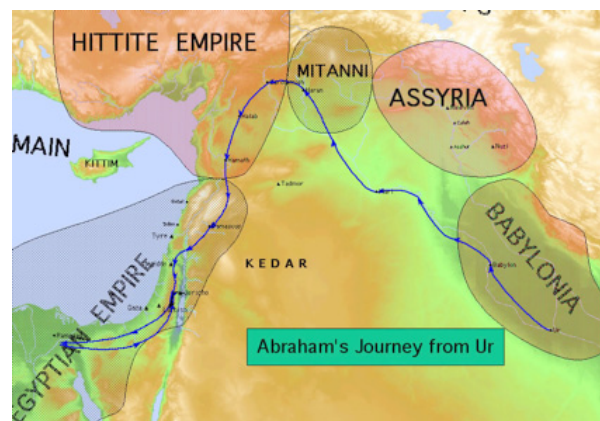
Lot moved to Sodom, near the Dead Sea. Some time later, several allied kings came from the north with their armies to put down a tax rebellion in the district where Lot lived. Lot

and his family were kidnapped in the process, and, as captives on their way back up north to become permanent slaves to these kings from Mesopotamia, they were rescued by Avram and 318 men from Avram's clan.

Upon his triumphant return from freeing Lot, Avram met the mysterious Melchizedek. Shortly thereafter, Yehoveh, using the customary Middle Eastern covenant ceremony, confirmed His covenant with Avram, promising Avram protection, wealth, land, and an heir—by definition, a son. But to this point, Avram's wife, Sarai, had been barren; she hadn't produced any children.

### SARAI GIVES AVRAM HER MAIDSERVANT

Sarai decided she needed to solve the problem of being childless her own way. Sarai had a servant girl, an Egyptian named Hagar. Hebrew tradition affirms that Hagar was a gift from Pharaoh when Avram had his little excursion in Egypt some years earlier. In fact, she is believed to have been a princess from Pharaoh's own household. Following a completely normal tradition for their day, Sarai decided to offer Hagar to Avram as





a substitute. Scripture does *not* say that Avram married Hagar; it says Sarai gave her to him *as*, or *in the manner of*, a wife. In other words, she was a wife substitute, a concubine. She was a baby-making machine. There was no formal marriage, which was not only the ancient Hebrew view but also makes sense within the context of the passage.<sup>76</sup> She continued to be a handmaiden to Sarai, as Avram affirmed in verse 6 and the angel of the Lord affirmed in verse 9. Hagar would bear Avram's child, but as per the tradition of the era, the child would belong to Avram and *Sarai*. If Hagar were a true wife, she would no longer have been under Sarai, she would have become an equal; she would have belonged to Avram, and the child would have been hers.

The Bible does not give much detail about how all the concubine/wife/substitute-child-bearer relationship worked, but it is clear from records of other Middle Eastern cultures of Avram's time that what we read in this story adheres to those customs and traditions. The law codes of Ur-Nammu, which date back to 2100 BC, dealt with this issue quite specifically, as did the Law of Hammurabi from around 1800 BC. These laws made it clear that the barren wife—Sarai, in this case—who took the serious step of making her servant a concubine for her husband, would lose social position in the eyes of the people in her community. Legally nothing changed—the concubine did not gain extra rights, nor did she legally achieve equality with, or supplant the authority of, the barren wife. Nevertheless, this tradition must have created all kinds of problems. The law code

of Ur-Nammu addressed such issues when it stated, "If the servant, comparing herself to her mistress, speaks insolently to her . . ." Doesn't that sound exactly like what happened between Sarai and Hagar?

### SARAI DRIVES HAGAR AWAY

Hagar did as she was told and ended up pregnant by Avram. Her condition of being with child, coupled with the loss of social status that Sarai must have suffered, motivated Hagar's attempt to behave as an equal to Sarai. This behavior prompted Sarai to literally drive Hagar away, an action perfectly within Sarai's legal and social jurisdiction. So, in verse 6 when Sarai went to Avram, as angry as a hornet, and told him she was not happy with this situation, Avram replied, "Look, she's your slave-girl. Deal with her as you think fit." Sarai didn't go to Avram seeking permission, nor did Avram at that moment give Hagar to Sarai. Sarai just wanted to gripe. She was informing Avram of what she was about to do. It was her right and personal privilege to send Hagar away, with or without Avram's okay.

Sarai banished Hagar, and she went away, until the angel of the Lord found her and told her to return under Sarai's authority. Verses 11 and 12 say that Hagar was told she'd have a boy child, and that this child would produce an enormous number of descendants. *Ishmael*, meaning "God pays attention," or "God has given heed," was to be the child's name.

Then God pronounced the child's destiny. Of course, this referred not only to the child but also to the child's descendants. The angel told Hagar that Ishmael was going to be a wild donkey of a man, going against everyone, and that he would live in the presence of his kinsmen. Ishmael was the patriarch of several races and lines, most famously the Arabs. And, isn't it interesting that the land of the Arabs, Arabia, eventually came to be located *east* of Israel.

#### HAGAR'S OWNER

It was customary that the handmaiden of a wife belonged solely to the wife. She was the wife's property, not the husband's. This is important to understand our story. When the wife, Sarai, said, "I want this servant girl out of here," that was that. She didn't need her husband's approval to make this decision.

### THE ARAB-ISRAELITE RELATIONSHIP

It's important to remember today, in our time, that Avram was the *true* father of both the Arabs and the Israelites, or as I enjoy calling them, the Ishmaelites and the Israelites. Both the Arab peoples *and* the Israelites are from the line of Shem, meaning they are both Semites.<sup>77</sup> The people that the evening TV news anchors call Arabs rarely actually are. Most of these supposed "Arabs" are actually Persians, Egyptians, or others from the line of Ham—totally different from *true* Arabs, who are from the line of Shem. The news tends to identify every Muslim (which is a religion) or speaker of an Arabic dialect as an Arab (which is a specific family line). This is completely incorrect.

### THE ANGEL OF THE LORD

Angels, let alone "the angel of the Lord," are a difficult concept and a thorny theological issue, for there are many reasonable people who disagree on what this term means. But, as is always the case, studying the original Hebrew helps to cut through all the fantasy and rabbit trails.

### THE HEBREW TRANSLATION

The Hebrew word that many translate as "angel" is *mal'ach*. The term *mal'ach* simply means "messenger." Used alone, it refers to any kind of messenger or agent, usually human, and in the Bible it is often used that way. However, when the term *Adonai* or *Yehoveh* is added to the word, as in *mal'ach Adonai* or *mal'ach Yehoveh*, the word *mal'ach* no longer means messenger in the human sense, but rather an angel in the spiritual sense. In other words, by associating a name or title of God (such as *Adonai*) with the word *messenger* (*mal'ach*), we get the indication of an angel, a spirit-messenger from God. Any other translation of *mal'ach* to "angel" is a mistranslation.

### THE GREEK TRANSLATION

In Greek the word for angel is *angelos*, which, as in the Hebrew, technically means "messenger." And, just like in Hebrew, *angeloi* (plural) can mean any kind of messenger, not necessarily a *heavenly* one. As happens with words over the centuries, meaning and usage can change. With the advent of Gentile Christianity, the scriptural use of *angelos* came to be understood, *in every case*, as a "messenger from God"—an angel. The problem here is that there are several places where our English Bibles read "angel," but within the cultural context, "angel" is probably not meant at all. The writer was simply referring to a human messenger or agent, albeit a potentially mysterious one.

#### THE HEBREW

*mal'ach*—messenger (usually human)  
*mal'ach Adonai/Yehoveh*—angel (messenger from God)

#### THE GREEK

*mal'ach* becomes *angeloi*—angel  
*mal'ach Adonai/Yehoveh*—Angel of the Lord (a superior angel)

### THE PROBLEM WITH THE GREEK

As a result of allegory, hyperbole, fantasy, and just plain error, Christian writers have taken every instance of the word *mal'ach* in Scripture and translated it as "an angel," which in many cases it is not. As a result of that misguided approach, the words *mal'ach Yehoveh* gained an inappropriate significance, and the words were taken to mean some kind of very high or special angel or even a manifestation of God Himself.

Actually, as a general rule, the only time the word *angel* (meaning a spirit being sent from God) should appear in our Bibles is when the words “angel of the Lord” are written. In reality, angels are barely even mentioned in Scripture; it’s our traditions that have multiplied their presence, amplified their purpose, and humanized their form. The elusive angel of the Lord is a red herring, and the search for it is futile.

This is why the angel of the Lord has proven to be such a source of disagreement and scholarly argument. Going back to before the time of Christ, the Pharisees had worked out an elaborate hierarchy of angels, little of which comes from Scripture and therefore is mostly tradition. The Sadducees, contemporaries of the Pharisees,

didn’t even believe angels existed. The Essenes had their own understanding of angels, quite different from the Pharisees’. Essene theology became the basis for the Christian angelology system we have today.

We don’t exactly know what this angel of the Lord was—whether it was a special kind of angel; a manifestation of God, like the Logos, or the Holy Spirit; a specific angel that God set aside for certain tasks; or even God taking on the form of an angel. One thing, however, is certain: the being that spoke to Hagar was a spirit being and *not* a human messenger. Other than that slim fact, the rest I’ll leave for you to wrestle with.<sup>78</sup>

## GENESIS 17

**ASSIGNMENT:** Read Genesis 17:1–14.

In the very beginning of chapter 17, we are given a time stamp: Avram was ninety-nine years old when God appeared to him yet again. Thirteen years had passed between the final words of chapter 16 and the first words of chapter 17. The events of that thirteen-year period have been kept from us.

We do have some information, though:

- Hagar had her son, Ishmael, and he was about thirteen years old.
- Sarai was *still* without child. She was not just barren of a male child, but of any children whatsoever.
- The clan was still living in Canaan.
- Very likely, there had been no contact between God and Avram during that period.
- The first covenant Yehoveh made with Avram remained intact.

In this appearance, God added a covenant to the earlier one He had already made with Avram, by declaring that Avram would be the father of many nations. This did not necessarily mean only Hebrew nations; likewise, and even more important, these nations would not necessarily be of the line of the covenant promise.

### THE FATHER OF NATIONS

The Hebrew word used for nations is *goyim*. The usage of the word *goyim* has changed a little over time, but it has held basically the same meaning: “nations or people that are *not* of Hebrew descent.” It can also have the generic meaning

of “any nation, Hebrew or not”; the context is the key. Today, the most common usage of *goyim* applies to a person who is Gentile—a non-Hebrew, a non-Jew.

Avram did not take the word *goyim* to mean “non-Hebrew people.” Remember: Avram was at this moment becoming the first Hebrew. To Avram, this simply meant that, not only would his offspring be many, but also they would separate into several people groups and become distinct and separate nations. We have the benefit of looking back four thousand years and seeing that, indeed, Avram fathered both Hebrews *and* non-Hebrews. He fathered the Jewish people as well as a number of Gentile people groups.

### AVRAM BECOMES AVRAHAM

*Your name will no longer be Avram [exalted father], but your name will be Abraham [father of many], because I have made you the father of many nations. (Gen. 17:5)*

In verse 5, God changed Avram’s name, and it’s not the last time a person’s name is changed in the Bible! His name was changed from Avram to Abraham (or more familiarly to us, Abraham). That is, he was no longer called “exalted father,” but “father of many” or, a better translation, “father of multitudes.” This was the point at which Abraham became a Hebrew.

We don’t know exactly what point in time Abraham started calling himself and certain offspring “Hebrew.” In fact, there is even disagreement over what *Hebrew* means. It’s generally accepted in the Bible scholar community to mean “one who crossed over.” Bible anthropologists and archaeologists, however, will tell

you it is probable that the word *Hebrew* did not appear until much later than this moment. They suggest it came from an Asian word, *Ipuru*. *Ipuru* was used in Canaan and other nearby areas as a term simply meaning “foreigners” or “wanderers who had no specific nation they could be identified with.” Certainly, at the point in history we are talking about, Abraham and his clan were betwixt and between. Although they came from Ur, they no longer considered themselves Ur-Chasdim—home was no longer Ur of Chaldea in Mesopotamia. Yet Abraham’s clan certainly had not yet established a separate identity, nor could they point to a place in Canaan that they belonged to. Although God promised them the land of Canaan, they had yet to claim that inheritance.

### THE UNCONDITIONAL COVENANT—GOD WILL GIVE ABRAHAM THE LAND

But here in verses 6–8 God offered Abraham another unconditional covenant; all Abraham could do was be blessed by it, for he had no real obligations within the covenant:

*I will cause you to be very fruitful. I will make nations of you, kings will descend from you. . . . I will give you and your descendants after you the land in which you are now foreigners, all the land of Kena’an, as a permanent possession; and I will be their God.*

There is a difference between Israel *having been given* the land and Israel *living in* the land. The Bible term that usually refers to Israel living in the land is “possess.” *Possess* doesn’t mean quite what we usually think it does; *possess* means “to occupy.” It doesn’t denote ownership. Think of it this way: You buy a car. The local bank finances it. Until you fully pay for it, they own the car. It is *not* legally your car; you are just using it. So, the bank owns the car, but it is put into your possession until you pay it off or default on the loan. If you fail to pay, the bank repossesses the car; they have always owned it,

but they now take it from you and back into their possession.

Likewise, from the moment God made the covenant with Abraham, the land belonged to the Hebrews, but the time hadn’t come for them to possess it. Israel even owned the land of Canaan during the four hundred years they spent in Egypt; they just didn’t possess it, they didn’t occupy it. People tend to confuse the matter by saying that Israel lost ownership of the land when God removed them to Babylon for their sins. And yet again, when the Romans gained control and destroyed Jerusalem in AD 70. Not so. The ownership remained with Israel. God simply refused to allow Israel to occupy the land, to possess it, for an extended time. Despite not possessing or occupying it at times, Israel has never stopped owning the Promised Land. They are the only God-authorized tenants of that place.

God further clarifies His promise in verse 7, whereby the covenant will continue between God and Abraham “and your offspring to come, as an everlasting covenant” (JPS). This was pure legal terminology. Law codes from that era have been found, and it was understood that there were limitations as to how property could be handed down before it reverted to a king or prince who laid claim to that area. By inclusion of the words “and your offspring to come, as an everlasting covenant” it *legally* meant that Abraham’s descendants kept that property and could continue to hand it down without restriction. So understand, this was legal terminology, not hyperbole.

### THE CONDITIONAL COVENANT—CIRCUMCISION

God was about to make another covenant with Abraham; it was permanent and perpetual, but it was also most definitely conditional. It was bilateral, not unilateral—that is, Abraham and his descendants had obligations to perform in order to keep this covenant intact:

*Here is my covenant, which you are to keep, between me and you, along with your descendants after you: every male among you is to be circumcised. You are to be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin; this will be the sign of the covenant between me and you. (Gen. 17:10–11)*

This covenant was individual; each person of Abraham's line had the responsibility to accept this covenant for himself, or not. In other words, the person who broke the covenant would only affect the provisions of the covenant *as it pertained to himself*; the covenant would remain in effect for each individual who chose to accept it. The Jews call this covenant *b'rit milah*; we call it circumcision.



A modern b'rit milah ceremony

In the first covenant with Abraham, which God said remained fully intact, Abraham was just a passive participant. He didn't have to do anything. But in the new covenant, meant for Abraham's offspring, there *was* an obligation: circumcision as a sign that they chose to participate in the Abrahamic covenant, which meant they gave their loyalty to the God of Abraham.<sup>79</sup> Each male following Abraham who expected to partake in the blessings of the covenants that God gave to Abraham must, as an obligation, be circumcised. That is, *active* participation was required.

The procedure of removing the male's genital foreskin is a common practice today in many societies, and thus is common knowledge.

Usually it is done by non-Jewish families simply for medical reasons, although the need for that is disputed. Jews, to this day, have a *bris*, a circumcision ceremony, for each male child on the eighth day after his birth.

The practice of male circumcision existed long before this instruction from God to Abraham. It was not a new invention, no more than the format of the covenant ceremony God participated in with Abraham. Rather, it had been employed in many cultures of that day as either part of the marriage ceremony, or more typically, as a sign of entrance into puberty. God changed this process and took the trauma out of it by having it performed not on a young teenage boy, but on an eight-day-old baby. In addition, God employed this existing rite as a sort of loyalty oath, and He added great meaning to it. As He did with the rainbow, God once again used something from nature when He chose to create a sign for His own good purposes. After all, every one of these natural things owed its very existence to God; sadly, many then, as now, attached their own misguided meanings, such as astrology, to the things God made.

## GOD'S PATTERN IN CIRCUMCISION

God's standard covenant protocol required shedding of blood (typically animal blood), the cutting of flesh (typically animal flesh), and the separating of that flesh into two groups. In circumcision, the covenant procedure occurred using the male body as the sacrificial flesh; the flesh was cut, blood shed, and the cut-up flesh separated—one part buried in the ground, the other remaining on the body. Quite literally, Abraham and his male descendants wore the covenant and were the covenant. The penalty for refusing the circumcision covenant was stern: you were to be cut off from your people. This was both spiritual and literal. When a male descendant of Abraham refused the circumcision, or when a parent refused to have their boy child have a b'rit milah on the eighth day after birth, they were physically separated from the

clan and they were spiritually separated from God. They were no longer Hebrews and could claim no right to any of God's promises.

This is why God, through Paul, explained that what He really wanted was circumcised hearts, not circumcised flesh. Circumcised flesh is intended as an outward symbol of a circumcised heart. God wanted our hearts to accept and wear the covenant that came to us at so great a price. By accepting Christ, Paul said, we have our hearts circumcised: we are very literally accepting God's covenant protocol upon ourselves. And, since the advent of Yeshua and the new covenant He established, we find ourselves in the same position as Abraham: either we are circumcised by accepting the new covenant, which is the blood of Christ, or we refuse it. If we accept it, we are perpetually a part of the chosen of God. If we refuse, we are cut off, separated from God's people and from God Himself. While that may startle some of you, Paul's words probably knocked his Jewish audience to their knees. They well understood all the ins and outs of covenant ceremony and symbolism. But because the church has, for so long, turned our backs on the Jewish nature of the Bible, the impact of things like the act of covenant making has not been properly understood.

## FOREIGNERS GRAFTED IN

In verse 12 we see the principle and pattern that it was *not* just those from Abraham's gene pool who could become part of this covenant. The home-born slave or purchased slave of a Hebrew—that is, a foreigner—could be included in the covenant by being circumcised. Understand, by law a purchased slave became a family member. They had almost all rights of a family member—almost, but not quite. Likewise, a baby born to a purchased slave also became a family member. This is so foreign to the usual picture we have of what slavery amounted to in Bible times among the Hebrews. The foreign slaves of Hebrews weren't generally mistreated . . . because they were family! The

concept of slave ownership among Hebrews was *very* close to our modern concept of adoption. Do not confuse slave ownership to indentured servitude. Being a bond servant, someone who was your servant only for a period of time while they repaid a debt owed to you, did *not* qualify that person to be a family member. Only a purchased slave was eligible, which is reversed from what might seem logical to us.

Nevertheless, we see that very early on the idea that genetics, bloodlines, wasn't the sole determining factor for membership in the holy community. Beginning with Abraham, a foreigner who was willing to follow the Hebrew ways and the Hebrew God could be given full citizenship as a Hebrew and with it all the covenant rights that any natural-born Hebrew would have. This is the same principle that Gentiles rely on by being grafted into the covenants given through Abraham, Moses, and Yeshua—covenants that were given to Israel and no one else.

**ASSIGNMENT:** Read Genesis 17:15–27.

This is the basis for the hostility that is going to sooner or later lead the world into global conflict. In verses 15–16, God conveyed to Abraham that Sarah, his wife, was miraculously going to give birth to a child. Why was it miraculous? She had a dead womb. She was incapable of producing children, which was why she gave her handmaiden Hagar to Abraham—so she could have a child in her stead. Even if her body had been functioning properly, she was well beyond childbearing years, as Abraham himself attested; at this time, Sarah was ninety years old.

When God told Abraham that Sarah was going to give him a son, Abraham responded with these infamous words: “If only Yishma'el could live in your presence!” (Gen. 17:18). I hope you all hear the pain, shock, and desperation

with which Abraham uttered this plea. Abraham was happy with Ishmael. He loved Ishmael. He considered Ishmael his firstborn son. He never even remotely thought of Ishmael as anything other than his legitimate and much-loved heir. But even before God issued His answer, Abraham knew what was coming. In verse 19, God said no to Abraham's plea. Yehoveh said that the child Sarah was about to produce would be Abraham's heir, and further, this boy-child would be the one whom God would establish and continue His covenant with. This child's name would be *Yitz'chak* (Isaac), meaning "laughter," because both Abraham and Sarah had laughed at the astounding notion that they, at their advanced age, would have a child.

God emphatically rejected Ishmael as the one to carry on the line of the covenant promise that God had made with Abraham. This is not conjecture. Isaac, or Yitz'chak, would be the one to receive the covenant. Today, Muslims claim that Scripture has been modified in order to reflect Isaac as the favored son, when it should

have been Ishmael. This is another division by God that began with an election and ended with a separation. Isaac would be grandfather of the Israelites, who would eventually bring the Savior into the world; Ishmael would be grandfather to the Arabs.<sup>80</sup>

### GOD'S BLESSING ON ISHMAEL

We tend to overlook what God said to Abraham in verse 20: "But as for Yishma'el, I have heard you. I have blessed him.<sup>81</sup> I will make him fruitful and give him many descendants. He will father twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation." Isaac was the line of promise; Ishmael was also blessed, but that blessing didn't include continuing in the line of promise. In fact, it is noteworthy that just as Israel would consist of twelve princes (the twelve tribes), so would the descendants of Ishmael be made up of twelve tribes.

It's important to remember that not only was Abraham the true father of the Arabs, just as he was the true father of Israel, but that Shem, the blessed line of good, was the forefather of both Arabs and Jews. Both of these people groups are Semites.

Has Ishmael been blessed? The Arabs have grown into an enormous population, far surpassing the number of Israelites. One hundred years ago the Middle East was looked upon as perhaps the most worthless expanse of land on the entire planet. Yet, there, under the dry desert sand, they have discovered about half of the earth's oil reserves, which have made the Arabs among the wealthiest people in the world. Unfortunately, the Arab culture has remained tribal, so only a few of the most powerful among them benefit from this vast wealth.

In any case, Ishmael, thirteen years old at the time of this blessing, was circumcised along with Abraham and every male, free or slave, in Abraham's household.



A rendering of Isaac and Ishmael as children



GENESIS 18

ASSIGNMENT: Read Genesis 18

This chapter is a good reminder of the character and essence of the entire book of Genesis; it is the book of beginnings. It is the book of foundations, principles, types, and laws of God. We could speed through this chapter, but we'd miss the beginnings of several God principles set down for us. These principles will form the basis for how the whole Bible will play out.

The scene we witness in this chapter took place in the hills of Hebron, from where one had a beautiful view of practically the whole of the Dead Sea. Immediately we are presented with a mystery that we likely cannot answer. Verse 1 says that “the LORD” appeared to Abraham.<sup>82</sup> The word *Adonai* is a Hebrew word, and it translates to “Lord” or “Master,” which is what we



Hebron, City of the Patriarchs  
by Baruch Nachedon



have in our translations. There’s just one problem: that’s not the word used in the original Hebrew OT manuscripts. The word is actually *Yud-Heb-Vav-Heb* in the Hebrew alphabet, or *YHWH* in the English alphabet. We typically translate this to *Jehovah*, or in Hebrew we would say *Yahveh* or *Yehoveh*.

REVERENCE FOR GOD’S NAME

The reason we see *Adonai* (or Lord) in our Bibles is due to a tradition among the Jews that it is forbidden to say the name of God. It has evolved to the point that among most observant Jews, you also can’t say the word *God* or even spell it. Quite often, if you read something

concerning God written by a Jew, *God* will be spelled G–d.

Let's be clear: nowhere in the Holy Scriptures is there a prohibition against saying God's name, Yehoveh, except when using it in vain. That said, Jewish tradition says that the simple act of pronouncing God's name is using it in vain. If God did not want us to pronounce His name, why give it to us? Why are we told to call upon the name of the Lord, if that is sin? On the other hand, some Jews feel it is not so much a matter of trespassing against God to use His holy name as it is a matter of showing respect by refraining from using it. Our best practice would be to do as Paul advised: be sensitive to the actions that offend others, even if you cannot fully understand why or even disagree with them. Therefore, since practically all religious Jews find the use of the word *God* or *Yehoveh* offensive, I do my best to say *HaShem* or *the Lord* in their presence, out of respect to them. When I go to Israel, I am particularly careful. It is certainly *not* offensive to us who find no fault in using God's name to hear Him called *HaShem* or *the Lord*, so it's not a difficult trade-off. Nevertheless, in this series, we will use many names for God: God, Jehovah, Adonai, Yehoveh. Likewise, there are many names for Jesus: Christ, Jesus, Yeshua, Yeshua HaMashiach, Lord, Savior, and a few more. This series has a varied audience, and further, most Bibles use those names. The use of unfamiliar code words for God and for Jesus would impede the teaching. So know that I respect your views and mean no offense.

### ABRAHAM'S VISITORS

One of the three so-called "men" who appeared to Abraham in Genesis 18:2 seems to actually have been Yehoveh, Jehovah, Himself. Scripture tells us it was some manifestation of God Almighty. It says Yud-Heh-Vav-Heh, Yehoveh, appeared to Abraham. On the other hand, we are told insistently that no man can look upon God the Father and live.<sup>83</sup> Not even



Moses was permitted this honor, though he asked for it.

We are often told that this "man" called Yehoveh was Jesus. The common explanation is that God, in any kind of visible form with physical characteristics, is Jesus. But the Bible does not refer to Yeshua by the Father's personal name, Yehoveh. Certainly we regularly call him "the Lord," which could be one translation of *Adonai*, but again, in the original Hebrew, the word used in Genesis 18:1 is *Yehoveh*, not *Adonai*. In verse 3, however, after we're told that Abraham looked up and saw three men, we do encounter the word *Adonai*.

*Adonai* is plural; *Adon* is singular. *Adonai* is sometimes used to refer to God, and it is a plural of majesty. In other words, when *Adonai* is referring to God it's not denoting more than one, it's simply denoting greatness. Here, however, the context indicates that Abraham addressed three so-called men, and therefore verse 3 should likely read: "Abraham said, 'My lords, if it please you, do not go on past your servant.'" This is further complicated by the fact that in verse 2, where it says, "there in front of him stood three men," the Hebrew word used for men is *enosh*, which specifically means "human men"; sometimes it is used to indicate mankind in general. But *never* does the word *enosh* refer to spirit beings. The rabbis and

sages are fairly evenly divided on this issue; some think that one of the “men” is a manifestation of God and the other two are just humans. Others think that one is a manifestation of God and the other two are angels.

There is another factor to consider: all the bowing and scraping Abraham did in calling them lords, telling his wife to hurry and bring food, bathing their feet, and so on is just typical, traditional Middle Eastern hospitality of that era—to some degree it exists even today. Nothing Abraham did was out of the ordinary for greeting much-welcomed guests, so his actions don’t help us determine who these three individuals actually were.

Sarai did as Abraham instructed her; she brought food and water, milk and curds, even some meat. And in verse 8 it says, “Then he took curds, milk and the calf which he had prepared, and set it all before the men; and he stood by them under the tree *as they ate*” (emphasis mine). Not only is it difficult to imagine Yehoveh eating food, it is equally difficult for us to envision angels eating food. Josephus, the Targum Jonathan, and the Talmud simply cannot accept that this is a scene in which both God and angels ate bread, meat, and milk. They assert that the three individuals gave the appearance of eating, but they really didn’t consume the food.

It is very difficult to know what to make of all this, yet it is undeniable that something



supernatural was occurring here because we are told directly and undeniably that this was an appearance of Yehoveh, and that these three individuals had authority and knew things they would not have otherwise known, such as Sarah’s name and the fact that she was barren.

## THE THEORY OF THE TRINITY

Could it be that the strange visitation of these three individuals was as a model of the three-part Godhead? Maybe. But that raises a lot of questions about the traditional Christian concept of the Trinity. For instance, when have we ever heard of the Holy Spirit assuming *any* physical form? Christian tradition has held that *all* physical forms of God are Jesus. Certainly we didn’t have three Yeshuas standing before Abraham!

Consider the other appearances of God that we have studied or will encounter in the upcoming chapters: the burning bush, the shekinah, the cloud that led Israel through the wilderness, the angel of the Lord who identified Himself as God Almighty to Hagar, the being who wrestled with Jacob, and these three nondescript men who were somehow at least partially an appearance of Yehoveh Himself. I think we do a great disservice to ourselves when we attempt to artificially limit the possible *manifestations* of God to three, so that it makes a nice and tidy Roman Christian doctrine. It is utter foolishness to believe that we can honestly subject God to any limits of His nature. He exists in a way we cannot fathom, in a dimension we cannot enter. We comprehend but the tiniest fraction of who God is, and sometimes we need to be comfortable with that and leave some mysteries as mysteries.

God gave some prophets visions of things far into the future, or glimpses of heaven, such as the Apostle John. Even they found these things impossibly difficult to describe and communicate to others. They had no choice but to use descriptive words of things they were familiar with—animals, precious stones and metals,

fire, stars and the moon; what else would they use? Yet what they were seeing was either spiritual in nature and therefore human words would *never* be able to capture it, or they were seeing so far into the future that words had not yet been invented to describe those things.

Clearly, there was some kind of God thing going on in this situation with Abraham's visitors, but there were simply no words to properly describe it. So the writer did the best he could. You can be sure that some future scribe probably tried to help the situation through the process of redaction, yet has made it all the more difficult for us now. I doubt that Abraham could make heads or tails out of what was really going on either. But we know that it happened; they said what they said. And most important, the words of those men came true. And that is that.

### THE REASON FOR RHETORICAL QUESTIONS

Verse 9 is an example of a kind of statement we see often in the Bible; in this example the words came from God's mouth or the mouth of an angel. One of the three individuals said to Abraham, "Where is your wife, Sarah?" This is a rhetorical question, simply a nice way to open a conversation about Sarah. It's not that these men didn't know the answer. The fact is, spirit beings, particularly God, must dumb things down significantly to communicate with humans. That's why you see so many rhetorical and figurative statements ascribed to God and angels. There's no need to attach actual human attributes, frailties, imperfections, or weaknesses to angels or God because of these statements.

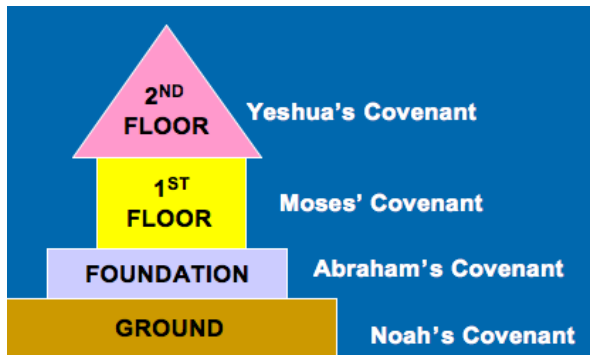
### THE PATTERN OF BUILDING UPON PREVIOUS COVENANTS

In verse 10, one of the three visitors informed Abraham that he was coming back in a year. By that time, he said, Sarah would have given birth to a son. Yehoveh's promise of a son had been

a step-by-step process for Abraham. In Genesis 12:2, God first told Abraham that He'd make him into a great nation, which meant he would have many children. Second, in Genesis 15:4, Abraham was promised an heir, a natural-born son. Third, in Genesis 17:16–21, Abraham was assured that his wife, Sarah, would give him this son. And here in 18:10, Abraham discovered the time had come to fulfill all those promises.

Notice how each of God's promises built upon earlier promises, and each covenant is built upon the foundation of the earlier covenants—this is another basic and elegantly simple God principle in action. A new covenant doesn't replace or countermand an earlier one; it simply takes the sum of the earlier ones to the next level. When a builder sets out to build a house, he starts by preparing the ground. On that prepared ground a foundation is built. One can no longer see the ground under the foundation, but it's still there. Upon that foundation the first floor is built. One can no longer see the foundation, but it's still there. Upon the first floor, the second floor is built, and so on. One layer built upon the earlier. Without the prepared ground, you can't have a foundation; without the firm foundation, you can't have the first floor; without the correctly designed first floor, you can't have the second. Yet, if one could somehow remove the prepared ground from under the foundation, the entire building would collapse. If you could remove the foundation from under the first floor, everything built upon it would fall, and so on. Each portion of the structure of the house is dependent on the other; leave one out or remove one, and the house is destroyed.

This is how God's covenants work. The new covenant, the covenant of Messiah, is not a covenant that replaces the earlier ones, nor does it stand alone. The new covenant is dependent on all the earlier ones, and it is the fulfillment of all the earlier ones . . . each covenant built upon the ones preceding it. The promises of God to Abraham in bringing about an heir set up this pattern of bringing about His will in stages.



## SARAH'S LAUGHTER

Sarah was curious about these three guys, as anybody would have been. She decided she would listen through the tent walls, which was not very hard to do, and she heard what was promised. She nearly dropped over from trying to stifle the laughter that burst out of her. This was not excited laughter, as in, *Oh, boy! I can hardly wait for the baby to come.* Instead, this was her thinking, *Who are these yo-yos, and have they got one good brain between 'em all?* In other words, Sarah laughed in ridicule. So when Yehoveh asked why Sarah laughed, she was busted. God made it clear that Sarah *would* have a son . . . because He'd decided it. And it was going to happen within a year. Naturally, Sarah denied that she laughed; in turn, God said, "Oh yes you did."

## SODOM AND GOMORRAH

As odd as this encounter was, even ending with Yehoveh's having a slight argument with Sarah, it continued in yet another bizarre direction. From Abraham's tent, the three men set out for the wicked city of Sodom, and Abraham accompanied them for a short distance. In verses 17–19, we get a glimpse into something that we rarely see in Holy Scripture: we are given *the reasoning* behind a decision of God. We've studied that we're not to seek the answer to *Why?* in the Scriptures, but rather to seek out patterns. But here we are told why. And the why is about God's treatment of Sodom and Gomorrah,

and whether or not Abraham should have foreknowledge of God's plans.

One thing we learn here is that God does not keep His plans for mankind a secret. He does not keep the reasons for His judgment on people and nations to Himself. He does not keep the motivations for blessing a person or a nation a secret either. The second thing we see is that God will reveal and bring about His purposes almost exclusively through His Hebrew people, beginning right here with Abraham, the first Hebrew.

When Abraham found out God's plan to devastate Sodom, well aware that his nephew Lot was living there, he went into a typical Middle Eastern bargaining session with God. This conversation reveals many things. First, Abraham cared about more than himself. Second, God has a clear definition of justice and righteousness. Third, God will sometimes show mercy when justice or retribution seems to be appropriate. And finally, repentance does *not* play a role in the story of Sodom any more than it played a role in the Flood story of Noah.

## THE CONCEPT OF REPENTANCE

Just as the notion of dying and going to heaven is nowhere to be found in the Old Testament, the *concept* of repentance is also nowhere to be found yet in Genesis. It will be some time before we see it develop. The only factor in God's justice system, thus far revealed, is whether or not that person is righteous in God's eyes. The wicked remain wicked, and the righteous remain righteous. Noah did not plead with the wicked to repent, and neither did Abraham. In Abraham's pleadings to Yehoveh, he was not concerned about whether the people who were doing wrong might repent and turn from their evil; his only thought was whether those who were not doing wrong would be judged along with those who were doing wrong.

Long before Moses and the Law of Mount Sinai, God applied some universal standard to all human behavior. The Hebrews refer to this

### FIVE-CITY ALLIANCE

Sodom was the primary city and government seat of a five-city district under common rule. Gomorrah was also one of those five cities. So when only the name Sodom is mentioned, Sodom is representative of the entire district. When destruction was finally poured out, it was upon all five cities.

standard as the seven Noachide Laws. In this chapter, we see that Sodom had crossed over a line of wickedness that violated that standard, and God would no longer tolerate it. Since that line had been crossed, the *only* possible outcome was for God's wrath to be visited upon them. The specifics of Sodom's sins can be, and regularly are, argued over, but what is clear is that they were moral—or rather, immoral—in nature. Later, when Lot entered the picture again, some specific sins were mentioned, such as sodomy and homosexuality. But we never get a laundry list of all Sodom's evil acts.

There have been all manner of allegorical sermons and teachings about the purpose of this verbal wrestling match between God and Abraham. But here's the most important point: God does not destroy the righteous along with the wicked. That is not to say that, when God allows a conquering army to discipline and punish His people, righteous people don't get killed, too. But when God pours out His supernatural, divine wrath, as He did during the Flood and when He sent down fire upon on Sodom and Gomorrah, He doesn't allow the righteous to die along with the wicked.

There is a major difference between God pouring out His supernatural wrath and His permitting bad things to happen, by which all are affected. For instance, let's say that "the big one" hits San Francisco; a 9.0 earthquake utterly devastates the city and thousands are killed. Many consider San Francisco to be a kind of modern-day Sodom and Gomorrah. Are we to take this hypothetical 9.0 earthquake as an outpouring of God's wrath on that city? No. That



the earthquake occurred, in a way, was allowed by Yehoveh, but it was probably not an *act of* Yehoveh. The good will be killed along with the wicked in any cataclysmic event that happens when both are present. The earthquake fault that runs through San Francisco has existed for millions of years, and earthquakes of that size have occurred before along that fault line—it is expected, at some level.

The outpouring of God's wrath occurs when God *sends* an unexpected, unnatural catastrophe. It is unique. Its scope is far beyond what nature could normally do, and it occurs at God's command. The Flood is one example. The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is another. At the end of the world, the earth's population will see phenomena never before experienced by man, and the Bible clearly states that God is actively sending these catastrophes as divine judgment.

Further, an outpouring of God's wrath is preceded by ample warning. It's not sudden and unannounced; in fact, His people ought to be expecting it. And the pattern we have seen is that when calamity is the product of God's destructive wrath, the good are divided away

from the wicked. Again, the Flood and Sodom and Gomorrah are our examples. We will see the same pattern when we read Revelation; those who are in Christ will be protected while the wicked are singled out for destruction. These followers of Christ will not necessarily be protected from men's evil (such as Hitler or the Antichrist) or natural disaster, but we will be protected from God's direct wrath.

### WHY THE WICKED PROSPER

There is another pattern that has baffled the prophets and the sages. Why, they have often asked, does God allow the wicked to prosper? Though mysterious in most ways, the answer is that a stage in God's plan is being fulfilled by means of that wicked activity, or some benefit comes to His people by means of the actions of the wicked (though it is most certainly not the intention of the wicked for God's people to benefit). So even though Yehoveh allows bad things to happen to good people, we can be certain that God is not going to let His people die when He pours out His wrath on the wicked

in supernatural destruction; that is simply not what God does. It is not within His character. The purpose of the Rapture is to whisk His chosen away to safety as the wicked are crushed under His divine judgment.

### THE NUMBER OF RIGHTEOUS MEN GOD REQUIRES

The final number Abraham and God bargained to was ten innocent people, not one. We'll find in later books of the Bible that ten is a common minimum number required for a useful congregation size. To this day, Jews generally will not conduct a service, or even pray in a group of less than ten individuals; in Hebrew this is called a *minyan*. So Yehoveh said that providing there was a minyan in the midst of the wicked population, He would stay His hand of judgment.

Once the bargaining session ended, "the Lord" departed (verse 33). Actually, the original Hebrew says, "Yehoveh departed." This is something to keep in mind as we begin the next chapter.

## GENESIS 19

**ASSIGNMENT:** Read Genesis 19:1–14.

In chapter 18 we raised the question: Who were the three men who came to Abraham? We know at least one was God Himself because His personal name, Yud-Heh-Vav-Heh (also YHWH, Yahweh, or Yehoveh), is the word used in the original Hebrew text. In Genesis 19:1, we are told that the other two “men” were messengers. The Hebrew word used here, *malach*, does not mean “angel.” It means “messenger” and is most often used in the Bible to refer to a human messenger. But we can deduce from the context—because these messengers supernaturally blinded the men of Sodom and performed other unearthly feats—that they were actually heavenly messengers, or angels.

### WARNING!

Over the next couple of lessons we are going to get into some pretty difficult territory. Some doctrines that have been taken as truth for centuries will be challenged. As so many doctrines of men are, these often bear little relation to what is said in the Holy Scriptures and instead they fulfill human agendas.

### SPIRIT BEINGS

So what can we learn about Yehoveh and His angels from this event? For one thing, angels have the ability to take on physical dimensions. In fact, one concrete thing we know about angels from Scripture is that they usually

take on human form when they interact with humans. Generally speaking, the humans in the Bible story don’t realize at first that these “men” they’re seeing and talking to aren’t really men at all, but angels. Often, once the humans realize that these “men” are angels, fear sets in, and the humans fall on their faces in worship or literally faint from fright, which is most likely the main reason the angels take on human form in the first place.



Angels



Cherubim



The church has had the tendency to call all spiritual servants of God angels, but that is not really accurate. Angels are messengers, or *malach*; they are somewhat lower spirit beings who don't always have free will in the same way as we do. They are sent from heaven to do specific tasks under specific orders from Yehoveh. They have no latitude or option to exercise their personal wills in the matter (at least none that we're aware of). That is why they are, indeed, messengers. They don't create the message; they simply transport it. The message can be in the form of destruction, of which they have almost unlimited force at their disposal to accomplish. Nevertheless, they seem to be at the lower end of the spectrum of spirit beings.

At the upper end of the spectrum are the cherubim. These beings are literally God's closest servants. They protect God's holiness; they are the ones Ezekiel speaks of, with multiple faces and several wings. Cherubs are not angels. They are higher than angels, and serve a different purpose than angels. Cherubim are protectors, not messengers. Cherubim are like the royal court, the inner circle, the personal bodyguards to the king.<sup>84</sup>

When we think of spirit beings, we must be clear that they are not all one class of angels. Rather, angels are just one type of spirit beings, of which there are several types.

### COMPARISON TO THE INCARNATION OF YESHUA

In this story of Abraham and Sarah, Yehoveh had a similar human form as the angels? Is this the same thing that happened when Yeshua took on human likeness? The implication here is that the "man" form that God took on was not a real man in the sense that he did not start life in the womb of a woman, was not born as an infant, did not grow and mature, only to eventually become "possessed" or "employed" by God's spirit. This was not a man in its truest sense, some unsuspecting flesh-and-blood man who was simply going along in a normal life

when God suddenly entered and took over the use of his body so that Yehoveh could appear to Abraham. This was an apparition of a man, a man who otherwise had not existed. Not a ghost, and yet not a man who came from the womb; it was a flesh-and-blood apparition.

Yeshua, on the other hand, was born of a woman, grew and matured as any normal child, was part of Jewish society, and eventually became an adult Jewish male. He was a singular and unique human person, as each human being is. There is only one Yeshua of Nazareth, Messiah, who has ever been born or ever will be. Yeshua was *not* an apparition of a man, like the form of God that appeared to Abraham, nor was Yeshua a *regular* man, like you or I, whose physical form suddenly became a usable vessel for God Almighty. Yeshua did not have a human father; Miriam's (Mary's) egg was not fertilized by the sperm of a human male. God's own pure essence substituted for what normally should have been a human male's seed, and that pure essence of Yehoveh impregnated Miriam. The result was this composite being that we call Jesus; His Hebrew name was Yeshua, or even more correctly, Yahshua. He was a composite being because His Father was God and His mother was human. Yahshua was as unique as it gets.

### WHO APPEARED TO ABRAHAM?

Our modern construct of the Holy Trinity, one that is entirely absent from the earliest days of the church, has created problems for us in understanding this passage about Abraham, Yehovah, and the two angels. In an effort to explain God, the modern church says that God is composed of three persons. This three-persons concept tends to create in our minds a vision of a God who has all the characteristics of a science-fiction movie in which a mother ship (or in our case, a father ship) remains stationed at a distance from earth. A couple of very powerful but smaller vessels who are kind of an organic part of that mother ship, can, when

needed, detach and go and do the bidding of the intellect that controls the whole entity. The smaller vessels are subservient to the mother ship, even though they are part of it, so they bring the presence and power and authority of the alien mother ship into contact with various life-forms, mainly humans. Of course, there are also times that the mother ship—all the parts of it—chooses to come as a whole to deal with men.

I don't think this sort of understanding of God is very helpful.

Our basic problem is that our thinking is restricted to the four dimensions, so we think of God in pieces that we tend to call "persons." These various pieces form the whole, the sum of the parts. We cannot envision how something can be one, and also more than one. Yet, that is exactly what the Torah says God is. How can Yeshua be a man and be God at the same time? How can Yeshua be God on earth and God in heaven at the same time? How can Jesus be subservient to Yehoveh, yet be able to say that "if you've seen me, you've seen the Father"?<sup>85</sup> Consider the enormity of that statement: Yeshua is saying, "If you've seen the part, you've seen the whole."

To clarify: I am *not* challenging the idea of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. What I'm challenging is the way this idea has been generally presented to us and the way it has been structured. In order to preserve that particular presentation, or doctrine, some things have been done to the translations of the Bible from Hebrew into all the other languages, and this perpetuates some notions that simply do not jibe with Scripture. Perhaps the greatest lapse concerns the use of God's name.

## TRANSLATING THE NAMES OF GOD

In the Old Testament, God's formal name, YHWH, Yehoveh, is used more than six thousand times.<sup>86</sup> But today, if you open your Bible and start counting the times the word *Yehoveh* (or *Jehovah*) is used, it is but a handful. Some

Bible versions use God's name less than ten times! Others may approach one hundred, but that's about it. So, what happened to the other fifty-nine-hundred times God's name was used in the original Hebrew Scriptures? The word *Lord* or *God* was substituted for God's name.



One of the effects of these changes is that we've lost a sense of who or what is Yehoveh. Is Yehoveh God the Father, in the sense that the Godhead consists of the three elements we call the Holy Spirit, Yeshua the Messiah, and Yehoveh the Father? Or is Yehoveh the name for the total Godhead, the sum of the parts? And what about the many other names for God in addition to Yehoveh, El Shaddai being the earliest?

On the surface this doesn't really appear to be much of a problem when God's name is replaced in our Bibles by the less specific word *Lord* or *God*. When Yehoveh is called Lord, and when Jesus is also called Lord, the distinctions between God and the Messiah disappear. Therefore, when our New Testaments refer to Jesus as Lord, and then we go back and look at an Old Testament prophecy that seems to be about the Messiah and it also uses the word *Lord*, it's easy to assume that we can simply stuff Jesus's name in its place and all the pieces come together. That's exactly what has been done for

centuries. But instead of helping us, I think it has obscured God's nature and given us some false impressions about end-time prophecies.

### WHAT IS THE NATURE AND ESSENCE OF GOD?

Although we will never be able to come up with a fully adequate answer to this question, that does not mean we should accept questionable doctrines that are easy, traditional, or comfortable. It was not until the fourth century AD, not until the church was thoroughly Romanized and Gentile-ized, that the three-persons concept of the Trinity was created. The earliest known record of the three-persons concept used as doctrine comes from what is called the Athanasian Creed:

*We worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity . . . for there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, another of the Holy Ghost is all one . . . they are not three gods, but one God . . . the whole three persons are co-eternal and co-equal . . . be therefore that will be saved must thus think of the Trinity . . .*

The early church—in fact, the church fathers and the church as it existed for the first two hundred years after Christ's crucifixion—knew nothing of the concept of God being a conglomerate of three persons. They knew full well that the Lord God was one Lord, not three Lords. The Shema, contained in Deuteronomy, expresses this: "Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!" (6:4 NASB). The NT repeats it from the very mouth of our Savior: "Jesus answered, 'The foremost is, "Hear, O Israel! The LORD our God is one LORD" ' " (Mark 12:29 NASB). While we cannot fully untangle all this mystery surrounding the nature of God, we can shed some light on it. One of the ways we can do this is by reestablishing the name or names of God in our Bibles. I am convinced that so many of the questionable doctrines and concepts that we are just now beginning to unearth and face head-on are the

result of God's name being set aside in favor of rather generic terms like *God* and *Lord*.<sup>87</sup>

Gentiles are not alone in this; the Jewish people themselves began this practice around three hundred years before the birth of Christ. Fortunately, although they substituted the words *Lord* and *God* when they read the Scriptures aloud and when they wrote in commentary, they did not tamper with the copies of the original Scripture. God's name—YHWH—was left intact.

You see, 99 percent of the time that our OT Bible translations say "Lord," that is *not* what the original Hebrew said. The original Hebrew didn't say *Lord* and it didn't say *God*; it didn't say *Adonai*, which is just the Hebrew word for *Lord*; it said *Yehoveh*. This is not disputed among scholars, Christian or Hebrew. With the finding of the Dead Sea Scrolls, we now have copies of most books of the OT dating to the birth of Christ, and these also use the name YHWH.

Let's look again at the Shema of Deuteronomy, in Hebrew this time:

*šūma` yiSrā`el ybhwh `ēlohē`nū ybhwh `eHād*

Hear, O Israel, Yehoveh is our God, Yehoveh is one! (Deut. 6:4)

It is *not* the scriptural but the traditional Jewish way of saying the Shema to declare:

*šūma` yiSrā`el `ādōnāy `ēlohē`nū `ādōnāy`eHād*

It is well documented why the Jews stopped using God's name and substituted *HaShem*, *Adonai*, and several other general terms. The church has inexplicably also chosen to follow this Jewish tradition and ignore the original written texts, yet at the same time it has thrown out practically every other Jewish element of the Scriptures that it could unearth. Reinserting God's name, Yehoveh, back into the Shema doesn't cause the church any particular doctrinal problems. But allow me to give you an example of the problem that reinserting God's name into Scripture *can* create. The general conclusion by

Christian scholars and church authority is that Yahshua is going to return, of course. The NT, in Acts 1:11, tells us that when He returns He will come in the manner in which He left. That *manner* is generally considered to mean: (1) in the form in which He left, meaning the God/Man we identify as Jesus, Yeshua; (2) from the place He left, the Mount of Olives, from where He ascended; and (3) in the way He left, that is, up and into the clouds of the sky (meaning He will come back from the clouds in the sky).

One of the great and dramatic elements of the story of Christ's return is that when He returns, He will first touch planet Earth again on the summit of the Mount of Olives. And when He does, a violent cataclysm will take place. The mountain will split, the fault line running east to west. You might think that if one wanted to find the Bible reference for this particular event we would look in Revelation, or at least somewhere in the NT. In fact, Messiah's return to the Mount of Olives is *not* found in the NT but rather in the OT, in the book of Zechariah. It is generally assumed that this passage refers to the end times and the coming of the Lord, a trustworthy stance.

ASSIGNMENT: Read Zechariah 14:1–9 in an English translation.

Now, read it as the original Hebrew gave it to us, literally:

*Lo, a day of Yehoveh is coming when your spoil shall be divided in your very midst! For I will gather all the nations to Jerusalem for war: The city shall be captured, the houses plundered, and the women violated; and a part of the city shall go into exile. But the rest of the population shall not be uprooted from the city. Then Yehoveh will come forth and make war on those nations as He is wont to make war on a day of battle.*

*On that day, He will set His feet on the Mount of*

*Olives, near Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives shall split across from east to west, and one part of the Mount shall shift to the north and the other to the south, a huge gorge. And the Valley in the Hills shall be stopped up, for the Valley of the Hills shall reach only to Azal; it shall be stopped up as it was stopped up as a result of the earthquake in the days of King Uzziyah of Judah.—And Yehoveh my God, with all the holy beings, will come to you.*

*In that day, there shall be neither sunlight nor cold moonlight, but there shall be a continuous day—only Yehoveh knows when—of neither day nor night, and there shall be light at eventide. In that day, fresh water shall flow from Jerusalem, part of it to the Eastern Sea and part to the Western Sea, throughout the summer and winter. And Yehoveh shall be king over all the earth; in that day there shall be one Yehoveh with one name.*

This complicates things, doesn't it? Since we know who the Messiah is, we have always assumed we could just insert the name Jesus or Yahshua here in these verses, tying up loose ends and making it all nice and neat and comfortable. But it seems we cannot, because the original Hebrew says it is Yehoveh, YHWH, who will touch down on the Mount of Olives. In fact, verse 9 says that it is Yehoveh, and His name is *echad*, one. This, my friends, is a description reserved for the totality of the Godhead—from the traditional point of view, the sum of the Holy Spirit, the Father, and the Son—which we often refer to simply as “God.”

So what are we to do with this? First, even if we cannot fully comprehend this or explain it, we must acknowledge that it is so, and not just turn our minds off to it. If we do, we are preferring to be comfortable and unbothered rather than interested in knowing the truth. These verses specifically say that Yehoveh will descend on the Mount of Olives. Second, we must recognize the supreme importance of having God's name reinserted into our Bibles; without it, we miss so much of the context of the verses and the identity of who is being discussed. Third, we need to reexamine some of our cherished end-time assumptions. So much of the modern

church doctrine about end-time events is just that—doctrine and speculation. Fourth, we probably are going to have to acknowledge that our standard “three persons” description of Yehoveh is not an ideal one, and that, in fact, it is based on the human-created church doctrine of the Trinity and needs to be revisited and a better solution for communicating this awesome mystery of God’s nature found.

### THE PROBLEM WITH THE THREE-PERSONS CONCEPT

I am not challenging the nature of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but rather the *conclusions* that the modern church has come to about the nature of God, as well as the structure they’ve assigned it. From that structure they have formed a doctrine that has been named the doctrine of the Trinity. I am not challenging the deity of Christ, nor the fact that Yeshua is God. *I am not.*



The concept of a three-distinct-persons Trinity

The problem is that we have created a nice, tidy doctrine whereby we *separate* the persons of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. We can even separate their *functions*. The separation between these that we ascribe cannot easily be justified. If we take the three-persons concept to its logical extreme, then while Christ roamed the Holy Lands, only two-thirds of God was in heaven. That is, God in heaven was incomplete; a piece of Him was in another place (Israel). The Bible goes to great length to stress that Yehoveh is echad; He is one. So, unless He is performing self-amputation, our three-persons concept has some fundamental flaws.

### A BETTER VIEW OF THE TRINITY

In the Bible, God is often described according to His attributes. Using my dear wife, Becky, as an example of this, I could refer to Becky as:

- Becky, wife of Tom
- Becky, mother of children
- Becky, grandmother of grandchildren
- Becky, who comforts me
- Becky, who walks beside me
- Becky, who is in charge of our household
- Becky, compassionate and friend to many

I’m basically describing several of the many *attributes* of Becky. Can I take any one of these attributes and discuss it separately from all the rest? Of course. But can I somehow *physically* identify a certain part of Becky as that attribute? Can a surgeon go into her body, find the part of Becky that is the wife of Tom, and examine it? Can we look with an X-ray and take a picture of the part of Becky that is the friend to many? Of course not. Yet all those attributes of Becky exist, they have names, and together they form all of who Becky is. I can *speak* of each of these attributes separately, yet I cannot separate or remove any one of those attributes from her and allow the rest to remain. I don’t have a whole bunch of Beckys running around, each with a

single function—there is just one Becky with many attributes.

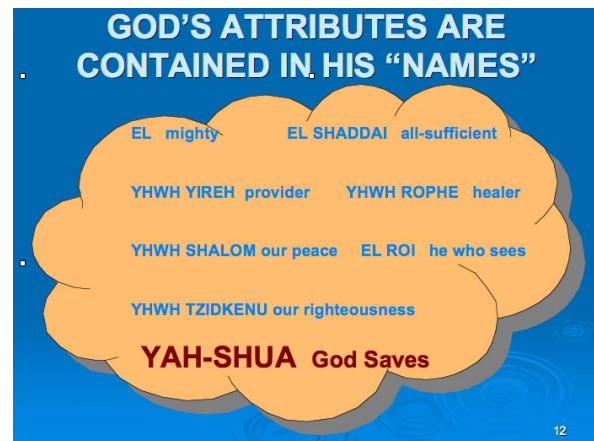
How do we apply this to our challenge of envisioning God? Well, we can begin by envisioning Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as *attributes* of Yehoveh rather than as separate *pieces* of Yehoveh that we label as persons. As a way of demonstrating these attributes rather quickly, we can express the function of each attribute in a simplistic fashion. This is a very primitive and admittedly incomplete illustration; for Yehoveh is spirit and not a physical being, like Becky. In a nutshell, we can boil down the basic functions of the Godhead this way: The Father is the grand author of the divine plan; the Holy Spirit is the container and messenger of the divine plan; and the Son (also called the Word) is the grand executor of the divine plan. And yet, just as we can talk about Becky's various attributes and their functions separately but can't physically identify them or separate them from Becky, so it is with God's attributes and functions.

Let me make a further analogy: Becky has a soul, which is the grand author of her plans. She has mind and intellect, which are the grand container and messenger of her plans. And she has a body that executes those plans. Her soul, which, depending on what part of the Bible one reads, is either synonymous with her spirit or is the place where her spirit resides, is fully spiritual in nature. Her soul is the eternal part of Becky, and it has no physical substance to it whatsoever. Her soul is where the spiritual part of the universe connects with her, and it is that part of every human being that separates us from all other living creatures.

Becky's body is the attribute of her that can carry out plans. Our bodies are our direct connection with the physical world, just as our souls are our direct connection to the spiritual world. Becky can be full of ideas, but without a way to bring those ideas to fruition, having an idea is useless if not meaningless—at least it is in our universe.

Becky's mind connects her soul to her body; it is the messenger and container that brings the ideas from her spiritual soul to her physical body so that the ideas can be carried out. Our souls do *not* have a direct connection to our bodies; our minds function to provide a sort of bridge between the spiritual soul and our physical bodies. These three functions are organically connected. I cannot send her mind to Miami, her soul to Orlando, and her body to Jacksonville. Further, if any of these attributes and their functions were to cease to exist, Becky would not be Becky any longer. It is similar with God.

God's attributes are identified to us in the Bible as His names. Each of God's names represents an attribute of God—God Almighty, the God Who Heals, the King of Heavenly Hosts, the God Who Protects, and so on. Therefore, when we speak of Yeshua we need to realize that this is but the name of yet another attribute of God, and this attribute means "God saves." Yeshua is the saving attribute of God.



### YESHUA'S RELATIONSHIP WITH YEHOVEH

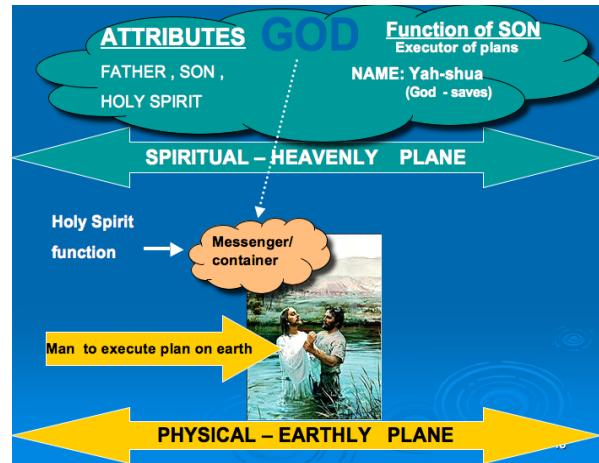
Before we explore this conundrum, we must understand two things: First, whatever explanation we arrive at is going to be terribly inadequate. Second, Yehoveh is completely unrestrained and unlimited; He operates in a number of dimensions, the existence of which we have only recently been able to establish with some certainty.

Yahshua,<sup>88</sup> the Hebrew name of Jesus, means “God saves.” While Yahshua is a name and an attribute of God, it is also a function and a purpose of God. Jesus the man, who was typical of God’s attribute of saving and salvation, played out His saving function and purpose on earth. Yeshua carried out *physically*, on earth, God’s plan of salvation. The Son, that spiritual attribute of God who is also called the Word, is the spiritual executor of all God’s plans in heaven. Yehoveh, the Father, came up with the plan of salvation. The function of the Son-attribute, which is to implement the Father-attribute’s plans, executed them on earth by putting that attribute of Himself into a real human: Jesus of Nazareth.

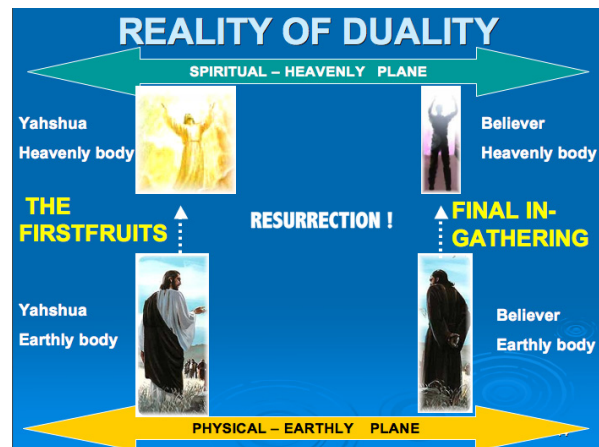
The container and messenger of the plan, that attribute called the Holy Spirit, came into Christ on the day He was baptized by John, the day His earthly execution of the salvation plan was to begin. We are told consistently that His earthly ministry did not begin until the Holy Spirit, the container and messenger of the Father’s plan, was put into Him. Without doubt, Jesus the man did not know what was ahead of Him, nor did He know what to do or when to do it, until the Holy Spirit attribute was placed in Him. Even after the receiving of the Holy Spirit, it is plain that while He had *some* knowledge of what would happen and what He was to do, it was not immediately complete.

How can Yahshua say, “if you’ve seen Me, you’ve seen the Father”? Because if you’ve witnessed the execution of the plan in absolute perfection, as established by the planner, you’ve seen the author of the plan. General George Patton once said that because he had witnessed the tactics and strategies of the brilliant German general Rommel, he also knew the man well.

Yahshua, Jesus the Christ, the One born in Beit-lechem and raised in Nazareth, is the physical earthly aspect of the Reality of Duality, the heavenly spiritual Son. What we saw when He arose is similar to the transformation we will go through in our resurrection: our bodies will transform from the physical, earthly kind to the



spiritual, heavenly kind. Just as His spirit, which departed from Him on the cross, was rejoined to Him upon His resurrection, so it will be with us. Our spirits, which will have left our bodies and gone on ahead of us, will be rejoined to new, incorruptible bodies upon our resurrection. Yahshua was at one time on the physical-earthly plane but with a divine, holy spiritual nature in Him, but He was transformed into the fully spiritual-heavenly plane upon His resurrection and now lives in heaven. So it will be for us after the resurrection. He was the Firstfruits; we are the final ingathering. The Reality of Duality.



God does not consist of three separable pieces called persons; He is, as the Torah says, *echad* (one). The words we use to describe Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are debatable, and reasonable people can differ on how to express them. I have chosen to use the word *attributes*, knowing that it is not fully adequate either, in

hopes of stimulating your own searching of the Scriptures and your striving with God to know Him and understand Him better.

### LOT MEETS THE ANGELS AT THE GATE

In Genesis 19:1 Lot fell on his face before the two angels. Lot didn't necessarily know they were angels. At that time, in the Orient, visitors and guests were treated with utmost honor. Bowing low was a customary greeting to a visitor, as was inviting them into your home to stay. The angels' answer to Lot's offer—that no, they'd stay in the square, the area near the front gate—was also a typical Oriental response to the initial offer of hospitality. It's similar to a Southern woman saying, "Oh, no, I could never impose on you to . . ." The host was expected to insist that they stay, and, of course, the visitors eventually accepted. This cordial Middle Eastern dance between host and guest has stayed generally unchanged even to modern times.

As we move through Torah, we'll find several mentions of someone "sitting in the gate," which is where we find Lot when the angels arrive. The gate was the way into a walled city. If a city had a wall, then the city was substantial in size and population. A gate typically had a tower and some guardrooms, and a person was required to walk through a couple of rooms, making some quick turns, to get from the outside to the inside. This made it more difficult for a group of bandits or an army to suddenly rush through the gateway into the city. The gate area doubled as the town square. It was a general meeting place where official business occurred. Trials might even occur there. The idea was that whatever business was occurring was public and had witnesses.

I'd like you to notice in verse 3 that Lot prepared his guests a meal with *matzah*, which is the Hebrew word for unleavened bread—a flatbread made without yeast. This is done when meal preparation has to be hurried, when no

time is available for the bread to rise. Why is this pointed out here? Because we soon find out they *were* in a hurried situation, as they were about to flee. We will see similar scenes in a number of places in the OT, but perhaps the most famous is the exodus from Egypt, where God instructed the Israelites to eat a final meal of unleavened bread so they could leave immediately! This preparation of unleavened bread is another of the many patterns and types that we find throughout the Scriptures.

Next we see the event that so many of us first learned in children's Sunday school: the men of Sodom wanted to harm Lot's two guests, who were actually angels, and Lot tried to stop them. What we probably didn't hear in Sunday school was that the perverted and wicked men of Sodom wanted to commit unspeakable sexual acts on these men, and Lot offered these evil men his own daughters if they'd leave the two angels alone! It is unimaginable to us that Lot would offer his own daughters up for rape, rather than let something happen to two male strangers, but once again, this is a completely typical cultural situation for that time. It was considered the duty of a family to care for their guests *above* themselves. They were to give up their own lives to protect their guests, if necessary. And that's what happened here.

In this passage we are seeing, for the first time, the horrendous wickedness of Sodom. It is so wicked that Yehoveh has determined to eradicate the place and its people. Sexually immoral wickedness, as we will learn in Leviticus, ranks as the worst of the worst human sins before God. The exhibited sin here revolves around homosexuality: these men lusted after other men to the point that when Lot offered his virgin daughters, they declined.

### THE CHRISTIAN'S STANCE ON HOMOSEXUALITY

Despite most of the world's highest cultures now taking all social stigma off of homosexuality and, in doing so, glorifying sexual



perversion, Yehoveh's opinion of it in Genesis 19 is clear; He destroyed all involved with it. Notice that the Bible doesn't say that the people of Sodom committed idolatry, nor that they cheated one another, nor that they practiced injustice; the only sin mentioned was homosexuality. No doubt, these other sinful things occurred, but that is not what was recorded for us to read almost four thousand years later. We must fight with every means we have to prevent our nation from going in this direction. That many of us have children or grandchildren who are gay is a certainty. That we still love them is a certainty. That they are committing a sin of the highest order is a certainty. That they are wrong is a certainty. That we have Christian churches that now ordain homosexuals is perhaps even more disturbing. Will we ever rid our American society of this immorality? Not likely. But following Yehoveh is not about taking polls, nor is it a matter of majority rules or following the crowd. Standing against such things is our duty, no matter how unpopular it may be.

It turns out these two men (angels) Lot thought he was protecting were actually protecting Lot. They did so by first supernaturally blinding the men who tried to batter down

the door to get to them, and then by insisting that Lot and his family leave quickly before the divine destruction began.

ASSIGNMENT: Reread Genesis 19:13–29.

In verses 13 and 14, the original Hebrew word used for God is *Yud-Heb-Vav-Heb*, YHWH or Yehoveh. The Lord God Almighty is being referred to by His actual personal name, as the two angels explained that Yehoveh sent them and Yehoveh had instructed them to destroy the city. A preincarnate Jesus didn't instruct them; the Holy Spirit did not instruct them; God the Father, Yehoveh, instructed them.

So verse 13 actually reads, "*Yehoveh* has become aware of the great outcry against them, and Yehoveh has sent us to destroy it." The word *Yehoveh*—the Hebrew letters YHWH—are actually and literally in the ancient manuscripts. This is not speculation; this is not doctrine or tradition; this is not substitution, nor do we find it in *some* ancient Hebrew manuscripts and not in others. The word *Yehoveh* is in *all* original Hebrew manuscripts, while our Bibles say *Lord* or *God*.

Then, in verse 18, Lot responded to the angels who were telling him to leave by saying, "Please, no, my lord!" Did Lot think he was talking to Yehoveh or was he now aware that these men were not men but angels? The word used in this verse for "lord" is *Adonai*. As we've seen before, *Adonai* can be used to refer to God, or it can simply mean a generic lord or master of any sort, human or spiritual. The original text for verse 18 is "Please, no, *Adonai*." Within the context, it does not refer to God; it refers to the generic form of *Adonai*. Lot responded to the angels by calling them *Adonai*, lords, masters. It was a way of speaking that demonstrated a sign of respect and courtesy, and in this case it also recognized their power and authority.

#### A NOTE ON THE COMPLETE JEWISH BIBLE TRANSLATION

We have talked from time to time about the importance of bringing the Jewishness and the Hebrew language and culture back into Christianity and our basic understanding of the Holy Scriptures. The translator and writer of the Complete Jewish Bible is a Messianic Jew. So, while he brings the Jewishness back into the Scriptures, he also brings some tradition with him that can swing the translation from having the typical over-weighted Gentile bent that we're used to reading in our English Bibles, to having a somewhat over-weighted traditional Jewish bent. And it shows up here, because his Jewish background causes him to not use God's name (Yehoveh) but instead substitute the word *Adonai*, or its English translation, "Lord." We'll find that throughout the CJB.

The translation we have in our Bibles is not necessarily wrong, but when we look at the expanded meaning that the Hebrew gives us, we understand what is going on so much more clearly. We can know more precisely which manifestation of God is speaking in chapter 19. This is important because these bits and pieces are put together so we can understand the Scriptures more *accurately*. Remember: at least half of the NT is OT quotes, and the book of Revelation is primarily a compilation of OT prophecies in chronological order. So if we really want to understand what is happening in the NT, we need to get the OT right first.

### LOT FLEES WITH HIS DAUGHTERS

Lot left, taking his wife and two unmarried daughters with him, but his so-called “sons-in-law” wouldn’t go. They simply didn’t believe what the angels said. Bad idea. Angels are messengers from God—that’s their purpose—so it’s best if we heed them. The sons-in-law didn’t survive their skepticism, and neither did Lot’s wife.

These so-called “sons-in-law” are a bit of mystery, mainly because the Hebrew is not clear.



Lot and his family leaving Sodom

That term could mean men to whom Lot’s two daughters were engaged, or, more than likely, it was that these were husbands of Lot’s *other* daughters. In either case, they would have been men from Sodom . . . pagans. Here’s a little clue when reading the Bible: if you see only one or two children mentioned, it is probable that the couple had *other* children as well but there just was not reason to speak of them. In the biblical era, for someone to only have two or three children would have indicated either the deaths of other of their children, that they were very young and just starting a family, or that there was something medically wrong with either the husband or the wife. A minimum of five or six children would have been the norm. Due to disease and other hazards, it was usual and expected for some children to die at a young age. You can draw your own conclusions about whether or not Lot had more children than the two daughters mentioned.

Apparently even Lot still didn’t recognize the nature of the danger or the imminence of what was about to occur. The angels told Lot to hurry up and leave, but he just didn’t get it. He took his time, packing up and making sure he didn’t forget anything of importance. One of the angels intervened and literally grabbed him by his hand, then grabbed his daughters’ hands, and dragged them outside the city walls.

The angels instructed Lot to flee to the safety of the nearby hills, but the ever-reticent Lot said no, he’d rather go to a city. Lot liked

#### THE TYPE OF UNLEAVENED BREAD

A type is being established once again. Recall that upon the angels’ arrival only a few hours earlier Lot made *matzah*, unleavened bread, for them to eat. And here, he had to hurry to leave. Most certainly, the food he took with him was that unleavened bread. This type or pattern is carried forward several centuries later to the making of unleavened bread before Israel hurriedly left Egypt.

his comforts. Recall that when he and Abraham parted ways, Abraham gave Lot the choice of what part of the land he preferred for himself and his flocks. He chose Sodom. The next thing we see is Lot living in a city. Lot obviously didn't enjoy the life of a nomad or a shepherd. He wanted to reside in a more refined atmosphere with the comfort and security and ease of life that it afforded him. The fact that he was living in Sodom makes it clear that he had turned his back on his heritage and way of life in favor of the way of the pagans. In many ways, Lot was a shadow of the tribes of the Northern Kingdom of Ephraim-Israel, who turned their backs on their own heritage in favor of taking on the lifestyle of their Gentile neighbors.

Keep in mind, though, that nowhere do we see Lot renouncing his faith in the God of Israel; Lot was not a bad man. It's just that Lot was weak and prone to succumbing to the everyday temptations of the world. Lot's life is a good illustration of what we refer to today as a "carnal Christian." As weak as Lot's faith was, and as apparently unusable as he was for God's good purposes, God still saved Lot—he was, after all, one of His first Hebrews. Nevertheless, what a sad epitaph Lot's existence on earth left.

Lot asked to be sent to a small, nearby city. In fact, the city was so small that its name was Tzo'ar, which in Hebrew means "small." This



city was originally known as Bela but its name was changed to Tzo'ar. Lot and his family arrived there, and not long after their arrival the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were obliterated. The smoke was so thick and it rose so high that Abraham, standing on a hill in far-off Hebron, was able to see it.

## THE DESTRUCTION OF SODOM AND GOMORRAH

One would expect a long and agonizingly detailed account of this cataclysm, one so horrific that we would pay very close attention and do what we could to avoid the same fate, but in reality we have but four or five total verses! To say detail is lacking is an enormous understatement. All we're told is that the destruction came from the sky; it came down like a rain of fire and brimstone (burning sulfur). It is an interesting choice of words: for burning sulfur was used to destroy the garbage dumps located just outside the walls of ancient cities. Once lit, sulfur burns with a high heat and emits such a strong and definite odor that it could mask the foulest of other common odors. And, of course, the fire purged pests and diseases. We're also aware that fire, in the Bible, is symbolic of purging evil and refining precious metals. God destroyed what He saw as a garbage heap of perverted humanity, using a method sure to be understood by all who witnessed it.

Rather than focus on the horror and death and divine retribution, the Bible story of Sodom and Gomorrah focuses on the moral aspects that *caused* the destruction; the means of destruction is almost incidental.

In verse 26, Lot's wife was turned into a pillar of salt because she looked back as she was fleeing. The Hebrew phrase "look back" is an idiom; it simply means "to dally" or "to hesitate." What actually happened was that Lot's wife didn't heed the warnings and she lagged behind. The angels pulled her, along with Lot and the two daughters who were still living at home, outside the city, but she must



have stopped just outside the walls. The indication is that *immediately* upon Lot and his family stepping outside the city walls, the destruction began. Lot's wife suffered the same fate as the other inhabitants of the district.

It has long been thought that this tradition about her becoming a pillar of salt was a redaction sometime after the Jewish exile to Babylon. The oldest traditions did not seem to acknowledge this part of the story. We'll not linger here, because it's a riddle that is not likely to be answered.

In verse 27, Abraham was brought back into the continuing Torah saga. He awakened, stood on a high place, and saw the smoke of the district of Sodom rising far off into the distance, "like smoke from a furnace,"<sup>89</sup> it says. We're not told whether Abraham had faith that God would save Lot from this now complete destruction. Abraham had bargained with God that if ten righteous people remained in that wicked place, God would not destroy Sodom. Lot was never mentioned by name. We can safely assume that Abraham was bargaining for Lot's sake, but can we so confidently assume that Abraham felt certain Lot would be saved? Doubtful. Yet in verse 29 we find out exactly why God saved Lot—Abraham had asked him to. Righteous Abraham had pleaded for the life of Lot. This is something we parents, aunts, uncles, brothers, and sisters need to keep in mind. The prayers

of a righteous person<sup>90</sup> can lead to salvation for the unsaved, or even to the rescue for the saved but weak. Abraham's hope was that *if* Lot had remained "righteous," something he would not have known for sure, God would spare Lot and his family. Abraham was just a man; that morning as he saw the smoke rising in the distance, he must have wondered if Lot had died in the destruction or escaped to the hills.

### THE BIRTHS OF MOAB AND AMMON

The ever-weak Lot wasn't satisfied with his safe haven in Tzo'ar. Behaving as a carnal believer in yet another moment of bad judgment, Lot left the place God had prepared for him, taking his two daughters with him, and they moved into a cave up in the hill country. Lot, because of his fears and lack of obedience, discipline, and faith, put his daughters in a terrible predicament. They were now in a remote location far from any prospects for husbands. ArchAeology has shown that the area to which Lot and his two daughters migrated was utterly barren and without population centers during this era.

We know from the narrative that Lot was an older man. Some time had passed, and the two daughters of Lot were becoming concerned that they would not be able to fulfill the purpose that women of that era believed they were put onto this earth for: to give birth to the next generation.

In verse 31 we see that "the firstborn said to the younger, 'Our father is old, and there isn't a man on earth to come in to us in the manner customary in the world.'" This family was convinced that they were, as Noah and his small family were, the only people left on planet Earth as a result of God's judgment on the world. The two girls did not understand that what happened to Sodom and Gomorrah was but a localized disaster; it would seem that Lot didn't either.

We have watched Lot become more and more fearful, less interested in facing the world,

and more interested in assuming there was little left to do but eke out a meager existence and die when it was his time. Quite literally, Lot and his daughters thought they had witnessed the end of the world. Does faith bring fears of this kind? Heavens, no! Are you living in a constantly fearful state? I can assure you that fear is not from God, nor does it have anything to do with being God-fearing.

The two daughters plied their father with wine, got him drunk, and then had sex with him in order to get pregnant. The older daughter was the first to bear a child whom she named Moab; then the younger produced a son named Ammon. These verses and others in Deuteronomy and the Psalms attest to the kinship of the people of Moab and Ammon to Lot. Sometimes Moab and Ammon are referred to as brothers, but that was just a common way of speaking, as Christians speak of one another as brothers and sisters in Christ even though we do not have direct familial bonds. In Deuteronomy, two nations are singled out as being those with whom Israelites may not intermarry: Moab and Ammon. Archaeology reveals that Moab and Ammon were well-established nations long before the Exodus. Today, Amman, the capital of Jordan, is just the Arabic pronunciation of the ancient territory of Ammon, which the Kingdom of Jordan today occupies.

What an inglorious epitaph is written for Lot! What an unsavory final chapter of his life is left for posterity! How long he lived, we don't know. What he did from this point forward, we don't know. We only know that he lived anything but a victorious life, and he produced descendants that the Lord wanted to keep separate from His chosen people, who were produced through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.



Here is another pattern to notice: Abraham and Lot went their separate ways because their herds and flocks grew too large and there was constant hostility between the two groups. Lot chose the way of the world and went to live with people he obviously preferred and identified with in Sodom. Abraham chose to stay identified to Yehoveh and to stay separate and remain in the Promised Land. Division, election, and separation. And thus when Lot produced heirs and descendants (by means of family incest), primarily the nations of Ammon and Moab, we find that those heirs and descendants of his were divinely ordained to remain divided and separated from God's chosen.

## GENESIS 20

ASSIGNMENT: Read Genesis 20

After the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham again becomes the focus. Here we find him on the move to find fresh water and grazing land for his flocks and herds, because those resources had been depleted in his previous location. The Bible has given us every indication that he had stayed in the hill country of Hebron until this moment.

Understanding the geography in a Bible passage helps us understand the associated event. The passage tells us that “Avraham traveled from there toward the Negev and lived between Kadesh and Shur” (Gen. 20:1). The Kadesh mentioned here is the same place as Kadesh-Barnea. It was a cult site located a short distance into the barren Sinai; it had good water and was undoubtedly a place where Bedouins came from time to time to trade, worship their gods, get supplies, and so on. The place called Shur is actually in Egypt; *Shur* is the Hebrew form of the Aramaic word *Shur-a*, which means “a wall.” Centuries before Abraham, the Egyptians had built a fortification wall roughly along the line of the modern-day Suez Canal. Its purpose was protection against those hordes of Asians to the north who constantly pestered Egypt. As we’ll see in a few chapters, those Asians would eventually overrun Egypt and rule Egypt for more than a century.

There is reasonable evidence that the wall existed about four hundred years before Abraham. In ancient Egyptian archives there is a document that scholars have dubbed the “Prophecy of Neferti” dated to that time. In that document, there is talk of the Wall of the Ruler that was built so that the Asians could not come into Egypt.



There was a trade route that wound its way from Kadesh to Shur, and it ran through Gerar, which later would be part of Philistia. The city of Gerar is on the eastern edge of the modern-day Gaza Strip; it is an area that, at one time, was ruled by King Abimelech. The king was almost certainly an early Philistine settler. The modern-era Gaza Strip makes up a goodly portion of what was, in biblical days, Philistia, the nation of the Philistines. The Philistines are probably Israel’s most consistent and noteworthy enemies in all Bible history (with Amalek

### BIBLICAL TRAVEL ROUTES

It’s easy to get the idea that all these Bible figures were ancient Lewis and Clarks, blazing trails to new destinations where people had never been before. That was not the case at all. All of our Bible heroes moved to known places, traveling long-established trade routes.



An artist's rendering of Abimelech and Sarah

being the most dangerous and worthy of extinction, according to Yehoveh). It is amazing to see that the first encounter with a Philistine in the Bible, though peaceful, occurred very nearly four thousand years ago, and that Israel's arch-enemy today is still the Philistines. How so? Because those people we see attacking Israel at every opportunity, seeking to ultimately destroy her, we call the Palestinians. *Palestinian* is the Greek word for *Philistine*.

Abraham was up to his old tricks. Once again in a place that he had some trepidation about, he returned to the old habit of referring to his wife, Sarah, as his sister. As far as Abraham was concerned, why not? In Egypt he came out smelling like a rose when Pharaoh took Sarah then gave her back, along with a king's ransom, just to stop the plagues that God visited on the pharaoh.

In this new land, Abraham encountered a king the Bible calls Abimelech, and the Egypt affair happened all over again. Abimelech was

a fairly common name for that era, kind of a combination title and name. It means "my father is king" (*Abba*, father; *melech*, king). We'll find another Abimelech in the Bible during the time of the Israelites in Canaan, a few hundred years into the future, so don't let it confuse you. Abimelech took Sarah, who was ninety years old at the time. What in the world was this king thinking? The rabbis deduced that she must have retained all that beauty that attracted the pharaoh many years earlier, and I suppose that's possible. More likely, though, the king wanted to make an alliance with Abraham, and the custom of that era was to marry a family member of the hoped-for ally. It's obvious from the story that there was mutual respect and peaceful intentions; this was not a kidnapping. There is no indication of force.

After Abimelech took Sarah, God visited him in a dream and an interesting little dialogue

occurred between Abimelech and God. God came right to the point: “Abimelech, I’m going to kill you because you have taken this married woman.” Abimelech argued in his defense that he had not yet had sexual relations with her, and besides, he had no idea she was a married woman. God acknowledged that Abimelech was telling the truth, but then He went on to say that it was divine power that kept Abimelech from touching Sarah, because if he had, no excuse would have sufficed: death would have been the penalty.

God ordered Abimelech to give Sarah back, saying that Abraham would intercede for him. If he did that, he would live. If not, that would be the end of Abimelech’s line.

### DID ABIMELECH KNOW TO WHOM HE WAS TALKING?

This encounter occurred in a dream. A dream was a standard (although somewhat rare) way of communicating with God in that era, and we’re told that in the last days, it will once again become a tool for men to interface with God. Perhaps we should not so easily dismiss dreams as a communication channel between man and God. Abimelech was a pagan, yet God communicated with him. Often it is implied among pastors and Bible teachers, if not outright stated, that the Lord God Almighty communicates only with His people. Well, the Bible simply doesn’t support that teaching. God is sovereign and all-powerful, and while God does not often move a man against his will, He will do so when it serves His purposes. Yehoveh has absolute control over all things, humans included. It doesn’t matter whether that human is a believer, an adherent of a false god or a nongod, or even an atheist.

Two things show us that Abimelech did realize he was talking to God. First, he accepted the instruction of a God he did not seem to know. If there is anything more personally disastrous than a person placing his or her faith in a false god, it is acknowledging no god whatsoever.

### COMMONALITY OF BELIEF IN A GOD

Throughout history there has been no society or tribe, at any era, which did not believe in spirit beings or a higher authority, a god of one ilk or another. It was not until that era dubbed “the Enlightenment” during the AD 1700s (an oxymoron if ever there was one) that man finally reached a point of such depravity that he confidently declared himself the highest of all beings of any kind. The Enlightenment was the birth of atheism and secular humanism.

Abimelech, although a pagan, had no problem dealing with the spiritual world or with a power higher than himself. A person who is convinced that nothing is higher than himself is, by definition, almost entirely closed to God.

Second, more than 99 percent of the time in the OT when we find the word *Lord* in our Bibles, it was actually God’s personal name, Yehoveh, that was used in the original. But here we find the word *Adonai* in the original; *Adonai* means “Lord.” Abimelech was well aware he was talking to a god, but he didn’t know which one other than that He was a protector of Abraham.

### ABRAHAM AS INTERCESSOR

God invoked Abraham as an intercessor, an intermediary between God and Abimelech. The idea was that Abraham would plead on Abimelech’s behalf, and since Abraham was a righteous man, God would listen. This was not the first time Yehoveh had positioned Abraham as mediator between Him and mankind; Abraham pleaded for the hypothetical “righteous” people who lived in the city of Sodom before God obliterated it. In actuality, Abraham was interceding for Lot. We have in these actions a type and pattern of Moses being developed for us.

As we get into verse 8, we find that Abimelech was a tad put off; Abraham’s deceit nearly cost Abimelech his life! Abraham whined



that, in a certain sense, Sarah really was his sister. Of course, it was true that she was also his wife. Sarah and Abraham had the same father, but different mothers. He confessed that he was afraid of Abimelech, and he figured this was the best solution—sorry about that!

Unlike the situation down in Egypt, Abimelech did not kick Abraham out of his country. Rather, he added further wealth to Abraham's clan, and asked him to stay.

We read at the end of this chapter that God “restored” Abimelech and his household. In this context, it means that for some unspecified amount of time, none of Abimelech's wives or concubines produced any children for him. This story must have played out over several months at the least, but it is not unusual that a Bible story only a couple of verses long could cover a much longer period of time.

## GENESIS 21

Before you read this chapter, think back to Genesis 12, when Yehoveh made a list of promises to Abraham, among which was the promise that from his descendants all the nations of the earth would be blessed. Naturally, the implication was that Abraham would have children, but until now, *twenty-five years later*, not one child had been born to Abraham's wife, Sarah. Abraham did have a qualified heir—a son, Ishmael, who had been born to Sarah's handmaiden, Hagar. But the Lord God never does things halfway.

Our mistake in trying to understand God's

ASSIGNMENT: Read Genesis 21.

prophecies is not that we cannot find a way to relate the fulfillment to the original pronouncement, but that we do not take God's prophecies literally enough. All of Yehoveh's promises to Abraham were literal, and they were literally fulfilled. Abraham *would* have a son, not a kind-of son, not a good-enough heir who played with the edges of the Law, but a true son and heir, regardless of what the earthly human circumstances might seem to dictate as possible.

Because of the times in which we live, let me say it again: all of God's prophecies should be taken most literally. Things may be looking dark for Israel (around which all Bible prophecies revolve) right now, but we can be assured that though the whole world continues to line up against them, even if Israel finally tells the US government that they can't stand much more of our supposed help and friendship, the Jewish people will *not* be expelled from the

land. We know this because the prophecies tell us that once they return<sup>91</sup>—after Egypt, after Assyria, after Babylon, and after the Romans—they'll not be leaving. It doesn't matter how reckless or how ungrateful they are to the One who brought them home; this is a promise from Yehoveh. It is a one-way deal. We can count on it, quite literally.

God kept his promise as He always does, and Sarai had a child: Yitz'chak (Isaac). *Isaac* means "he laughs." The promise, twenty-five years in the making, was for a child of destiny. Or better, a child of promise. We'll examine shortly the eerie parallels between Isaac and Yahshua.

At the set time—set by God—Isaac was born to Sarah. As had been instructed, Abraham circumcised Isaac on the eighth day after his birth. The elderly couple was overjoyed; Abraham had just turned one hundred years old and Sarah ninety when Isaac was produced. It was miracle enough that Abraham could sire a son at that age, or that Sarah who had never, even as a young girl, had a womb that could produce life, could give birth several decades after menopause, but it was also a miracle that such an aged woman could even survive the birthing process. And, as Genesis 21:6–7 shows, they were as astonished and dumbfounded as the hundreds of people who formed their clan would have been as well.

In verse 8, Isaac was weaned (probably at around three or four years old), and Abraham held a great celebration. But trouble was brewing. Ishmael, still a much-loved son of Abraham, was about fifteen or sixteen years old and apparently constantly taunting the toddler Isaac. No doubt Hagar also gave Sarah a hard time as she felt the effect of her diminished standing in the

## GOD'S APPOINTED TIMES

God's timing is as important an element to any prophetic happening as the details and purpose of the happening itself. This is why we see the phrase "God's set times," or "God's appointed times," over and over again throughout the Torah, and repeatedly in Genesis 21. In a few months we will study God's "appointed feasts," all of which have exact appointed times on the Hebrew calendar. Those appointed times are woven into the fabric of the universe and are unchangeable. Man has no authority to change them. Yet one of the most basic tenets of church doctrine is that we indeed have given our religious leaders the authority and ability to change or abolish God's appointed times, including the very first one that God declared, which affected how our planet was formed, molded, and given the ability to sustain life:

*Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, along with everything in them. On the seventh day God was finished with his work which he had made, so he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. God blessed the seventh day and separated it as holy; because on that day God rested from all his work which he had created, so that it itself could produce. (Gen. 2:1-3)*

This, of course, marks the seventh-day Sabbath—called in Hebrew the *Shabbat*—one of God's appointed times. In fact, it is regarded among Jews as the most important and holy of all appointed times. As we come across these "appointed or fixed times," we'll find something that they all have in common: they have been designated by Yehoveh as sanctified, holy. We'll also soon begin to understand that it is God and God alone who declares that which is holy. Mankind has no authority to declare anything holy just because a date, event, place, activity, or human seems to be unusually significant. It is by Yehoveh's declaration that we who trust His Son have become holy to Him, and so it is with all things. We have only to discover from Holy Scripture what His appointed times are, and then observe them. We have no authority to change them, abolish them, make substitutions, or to create new ones.

family, which began with the birth of Isaac. However, Sarah would have none of it, and she insisted to Abraham that Hagar and Ishmael be banished from the clan. To say that Abraham was troubled would be an understatement. But Sarah was simply carrying out God's will; God had told Abraham to do it and not to be concerned for the boy's welfare because He would bless Ishmael and keep him safe. Besides, God said, Isaac was the one who would bear the covenant promise. Here we have another in a long line of divisions, elections, and separations of God: Ishmael and Isaac were separated.

There was very good reason why God promised Abraham that Ishmael would be divinely blessed and would divinely prosper. Law codes of this era and area have been discovered, and this exact case is discussed. Known as the law of Lipit-Ishtar, here's how it worked: Abraham had the right to accept or deny Ishmael as an heir to his estate, because Ishmael was born to a slave woman. By all accounts, Ishmael had been accepted by Abraham as the heir apparent of the clan. Ishmael was to have been given the firstborn's share of Abraham's very substantial wealth; by this, Hagar, Ishmael's mother, would also have benefited.

However, because Hagar was a slave, the slave's owner had, at all times, the right to grant freedom to the slave. Hagar legally belonged to Sarah. When Sarah went to Abraham and told him to cast out Hagar and Ishmael, it was Sarah's legal right to do so. However, when a slave woman was released, it was the choice of the father of her children if those children were to be released along with her. Sarah could not legally order Ishmael out, although she could banish Hagar. Abraham's decision to order Hagar out was not his to make, but his decision to follow Sarah's desire for Ishmael to also leave was entirely up to Abraham. When Abraham agreed to do as Sarah asked, Ishmael's inheritance vanished. Ishmael and Hagar, in a moment, went from being wealthy and having authority to being penniless and homeless.

This was not some vague legal situation that caught Abraham or anyone else in their clan by surprise; the entire scenario was based on their understanding of this law. To comfort Abraham, God graciously promised to supply the earthly portion of the blessing that had just been taken from Ishmael. Therefore, we find that just as Isaac would produce twelve grandsons—twelve princes called the twelve tribes of Israel—so Ishmael would also be blessed with an equal number of tribal princes and much wealth. Ishmael received, by God’s provision, every bit as much as Isaac, and perhaps even more. But the one thing Ishmael could not have was God’s blessing to be the promised son. The heir to the covenant promise was to be Isaac.

Abraham obeyed Yehoveh, and sent Hagar and Ishmael away. How this must have hurt Abraham. He loved Ishmael; he had counted on Ishmael as his only begotten son for thirteen years. I don’t know how he did it.

### HAGAR AND ISHMAEL IN EXILE

Hagar was on the verge of dying of thirst, but in verse 17 *mal’ach Elohim* called out to Hagar.<sup>92</sup> In this case, this was either an angelic messenger or it was God Himself. This messenger did not appear before Hagar, he simply called out to Hagar from up in heaven. There is nothing that speaks of an appearance. The messenger of God said that God had heard the boy (not the mother), and in the next verse said, “I will make a great nation of him.”

As with the three visitors who came to Abraham a couple of chapters ago, the nature of this encounter was mysterious. Was this an angel or was this God? Angels usually make it clear that they are doing the bidding of God, but this messenger said, “I will make Ishmael a great nation.” We can’t know for certain, but my opinion is that this was indeed a manifestation of God—but in what form it is difficult to ascertain.

Hagar opened her eyes, swollen from dust, sand, and tears, and saw a water well that had



miraculously appeared. Mother and son were saved. A promise was made from God that Ishmael would father a great nation. This was a reminder of a previous commitment to Ishmael, undoubtedly for Hagar’s sake. Notice that there was no promise of land, just a nation—in Bible terms, nations are not about land or territory but about people groups.

After the dramatic rescue and promise, the narrative skips to Hagar and Ishmael becoming desert dwellers. They lived in the Paran desert, an area lying roughly between the southern end of the Dead Sea to about halfway into the Sinai Peninsula, and eastward into the area that would someday be known as Midian, or more generally, the Arabian Peninsula. Of course, this is the area that would soon become the root of the Arab nations, but the people who lived in Paran would be what we now call Bedouins, an Arab people.

### PARALLELS BETWEEN ISAAC AND THE MESSIAH

There was a very lengthy time between the promise of Isaac and his birth. Same for the Messiah. The births of Isaac and Yahshua were both miraculous: Isaac’s because of his mother’s

age and dead womb, Yahshua's because Mary was a virgin. Isaac's name was decided by God before he was born, and so was Yahshua's. God set a precise, appointed time for Isaac's birth, just as He did for Jesus. There are others that we'll come to shortly.

### ABRAHAM AND ABIMELECH

In verse 20 we see Abraham was living in Abimelech's territory, which had been offered to Abraham by Abimelech some years earlier. Abraham was more determined and stronger from this point forward. Apparently with the birth of Isaac, Abraham was more confident in the ability of the Lord to protect him and keep His promises, and he was more satisfied that

if something befell him and he should die, he had his all-important heir in Isaac. He knew the family would move forward with the promises and blessings of God.

There was a dispute going on between Abraham's clan and Abimelech's people over some water wells. The wise Abimelech, aware that Abraham had a friend in the highest place, simply wanted to settle the issue before God threatened him again. The negotiations ended successfully with the traditional *b'rit* (covenant) ceremony, and Abimelech and his military commander, who came with him, went back home to Gerar. We're told that Abraham stayed in that area, known as the land of the Philistines, for a long time.

## GENESIS 22

**ASSIGNMENT:** Read Genesis 22.

*After these things, God tested Avraham. He said to him, “Avraham!” and he answered, “Here I am.” (Gen. 22:1)*

“After these things” is a Hebrew expression meaning “eventually.” It describes an undefined period of time having passed, but usually it is a substantial amount of time. In some places in the Bible the time is so long and the circumstances and conditions have evolved so far that one era ended and another began. So it is likely that at least a score of years had passed since Abraham’s dealings with Abimelech at the end of Genesis 21.

In Genesis 22 we have reached the narrow and lofty peak at the end of a long journey, yet, as with most things in life, it is not the arrival but the journey that carries with it so much historic significance. Therefore, the story recounted to us in Genesis 22 is relatively short and to the point.

This chapter shows us a writing style that is unique to the Bible. Eloquence is spent in setting the stage, but the eventual seminal event is usually told with little emotion or detail. This is so nontypical of human writing and prose of that era, or any era for that matter, when dealing with the earth-shattering events that have shaped human civilization. The great writings of the past, taken from the five-thousand-year-old tombs of Egyptian royalty, the vast cuneiform records of the Assyrians and the Babylonians, and the epic sagas of the Persian, Greek and Roman era, do exactly the opposite; those stories spend all their time aggrandizing and hallowing the kings and military leaders, telling an elaborate

and exaggerated tale of the day of a great victory or the culmination of a grand vision.

For example, look at all the time spent telling about the events leading up to the Flood, explaining why mankind had turned against God. But few and precious words are recorded about the Flood itself. There is no long diatribe about people screaming for their lives, of the earth awash with the bloated corpses of drowning victims. Neither do we have a scene in which Noah and his family gloat over their survival and all others’ demise, nor of Yehoveh celebrating the death of the wicked.

Likewise, with Abraham we have had chapter after chapter explaining his life and purpose, the trials of his journey, his weaknesses revealed and his strengths, his spiritual defeats, and his spiritual victories. And then, in Genesis 22, a couple of paragraphs quietly and almost introvertedly tell us of his crowing achievement.

This event of Genesis 22 is the peak of Abraham’s life; it is in some ways the purpose for which everything he had experienced before this moment had prepared him. This was also a day, which, though so magnificently important in itself, was really but a shadow of things to come—a type. So important is this event to Judaism that the story has been given a title: the Akedah. *Akedah* means “to bind” or “the binding.” And, of course, it refers to the binding of Isaac as he was placed on the altar of burnt offering.

It should be noticed that this chapter is fully intertwined with the previous one. In chapter 21, we saw Abraham being instructed to give up and send away the son he loved and had put all of his hope in, Ishmael. The boy who seemed to Abraham to be his firstborn son, the heir to the promise, was suddenly to be sent away to an

uncertain future. Then, as Ishmael was out in the desert and near death, Yehoveh or His angel called out from heaven and rescued the young man. A water well miraculously appeared and Ishmael was saved.

In this chapter, Abraham was called on to give up his remaining son, Isaac; the son God considered to be the firstborn, and by then, so did Abraham. This promised son was to be removed from Abraham by his own hand. But just moments before Isaac's death, Yehoveh or His angel called out from heaven and rescued the young man. A ram miraculously appeared, its horns caught in a thicket, and Isaac was saved.

Verse 1 reveals the purpose of this event: God was putting Abraham to the test. "After these things, God tested Avraham" (Gen. 22:1). This is a piece of information we have, but Abraham didn't. This is important, because the reason for telling us at the very beginning this was a test, is so we won't fret or wonder if Yehoveh actually sanctions human sacrifice as we read about it. In other words, we know from the beginning that Isaac is going to survive.

It was apparent to the ancient sages and scholars that God's instructions to Abraham to offer Isaac as a burnt offering came at night, during a dream or a vision. They make this assertion because we're told that "Avraham got up early in the morning" (Gen. 22:3) after receiving this devastating command during the night, and he set about to obey.

## THE 'OLAH OFFERING

The Hebrew word used for "burnt offering" is *'Olah*. There were five primary kinds of sacrificial burnt offerings, and the *'Olah* is just one, the chief of them all. Every one of the five kinds of sacrificial offerings were burned up as they were all *burnt* offerings. *'Olah* doesn't just mean any kind of offering that is burned up on a fire; rather, *'Olah* is a specific kind of burnt offering with a specific meaning.

Additionally, there are two elements that separate each of the five types of sacrifices from

one another: (1) What the sacrificial offerings consisted of, and (2) the divine purpose and function of that particular sacrificial offering and associated ritual.

## MOUNT MORIAH

Abraham was directed to take Isaac to the "land of Moriah," to a hilltop that God Himself would point out, for this ceremonial sacrifice. This was where the tradition of Mount Moriah was developed. Today, it is not doubted that Mount Moriah is in Jerusalem. However, Jews believe that Mount Moriah is where the temple used to, and will again someday, exist. That place today is called the Temple Mount, where the huge golden dome of an Islamic shrine dedicated to Muhammad dominates the skyline.

Most Gentile Christian scholars, however, will tell you that Mount Moriah is the mount of crucifixion, the place where Yahshua was executed by the Romans. Generally speaking, there are two locations in Jerusalem where people argue that momentous event occurred. Neither is in the vicinity of the Temple Mount.



A view from Mount Moriah in modern-day Israel

The Temple Mount does not cover the whole of Mount Moriah. In fact, Mount Moriah was not even part of the original Jerusalem, known as the City of David. Rather, the City of David was located down the slope of a large hill, and Mount Moriah represented the uppermost part of that hill. One of the locations chosen as the

crucifixion site is, technically, probably a part of Mount Moriah, whereas the other absolutely is not.<sup>93</sup>

## ABRAHAM AND ISAAC'S JOURNEY

When Abraham was given instructions to journey to Moriah, he and his family were in Be'er-Sheva, a location about fifty miles south-southwest of Jerusalem, bordering the Sinai Peninsula. So it was a lengthy journey that lay ahead of him; he had lots of time to think and back out of the agonizing purpose of this trip.



We're given a couple of intriguing bits of information in verse 3: Abraham took two servants with him, and they chopped wood for the fire that would be necessary on the altar, and took it along on the journey.

In the last lesson we looked at several parallels between Isaac and Yahshua; some commentators say that the action of Abraham taking two servants with him coincides with the two criminals hanging on their respective crosses

next to Jesus. Other than the number two, I'm afraid the similarities end there unless a pretty fair amount of allegory is injected. In reality, a person of Abraham's stature would never have traveled without servants. The minimum traditional number of servants a person in this day would bring on a journey was two; the entourage of two signified that Abraham was an important person.

The fact that they brought the wood along with them, however, does mirror Yeshua's experience. In verse 6, we are told, "Avraham took the wood for the burnt offering and laid it on Yitz'chak his son." Isaac would haul the very wood that would become the means of his death and sacrifice up the hill to the place of the altar. This is a perfect parallel to Yahshua's being required to bear upon His back the wooden cross that would become the means of His death, a sacrificial death.

There is no discernible reason why they needed to transport heavy wood with them for the entire fifty miles from Be'er-Sheva. In fact, they started their journey in a place where wood was sparse and headed to a place where it was relatively plentiful; there was no shortage of heavy shrubs and small trees in the mountains surrounding Jerusalem.

The journey lasted three days. When they arrived, Abraham told the servants that they could not go with him and Isaac up to the altar, but that they would return to them shortly. Was Abraham lying to the servants in an attempt to not cause Isaac or the servants to panic at the knowledge of what lay ahead, the apparent human sacrifice of Isaac? Or is it possible that this also prefigured Christ's telling His servants, the disciples, that He was leaving and where He was going no one could follow . . . yet. But that He *was* going to return to them, which is known to us as the Second Coming.

## THE UNITY OF YAHWEH

There is amazing symbolism in the Father and the Son going together to the sacrificial altar;



obviously, both were necessary. The father couldn't perform a sacrifice without a sacrificial offering, his son, and the son couldn't be sacrificed without the impetus of his father.

We have looked at the essence and nature of God, which is what the doctrine of the Trinity is all about, and have seen that we cannot easily separate God into three identifiable pieces or persons, taking Him apart and putting Him back together at our wills. We have also seen that many of the messianic prophecies of the Old Testament—the ones Jesus came to fulfill—plainly say that YHWH will be pierced, and YHWH will return on the Mount of Olives. Well, with the God-in-three-pieces doctrine, Yehoveh is one person and Yahshua is another. So is it Yehoveh or Jesus that is going to touch down on the Mount of Olives? The unity of the Godhead is so complete that we cannot separate it into three pieces, but we can, of course, speak of His many attributes, one of those being salvation. And the salvation attribute was to take place within the context of a larger attribute of God that we call the Son.

Because God is one, the Father attribute and the Son attribute act together in fullest unity at all times. Yehoveh hung on the cross just as surely as Yahshua did. And, here we see in Abraham and Isaac, the father and the son, these two attributes arriving together at the altar of sacrifice, each with their necessary roles. The son attribute, Isaac, was to *be* the sacrifice, and the father attribute, Abraham, was to initiate and accept the sacrifice. When Yahshua died, it was the human aspect of Him that died; the divine lived on. When Yahshua died, it was the Son attribute that was the sacrifice, and it was the Father attribute that initiated and accepted that sacrifice.

## YEHOVEH RESCUES ISAAC

In verse 7, an uneasy silence was broken when Isaac finally asked the obvious: "I see the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" This was no naive question from an



innocent child; scholars agree that Isaac was an adult at this time. The ancient Jewish writings say that Isaac was thirty-seven years old; Josephus, who lived at the time of Christ, said that Isaac was over twenty-five years old at this point. Isaac was a fully mature man. The idea that Isaac was a grade-school-age boy at this time is strictly a modern Gentile Christian invention that makes for cute pictures and the idea of a pitiful, helpless child being forced into something from which there was no escape.

We can only wonder what was going through Abraham's mind when he moved to offer his son as a burnt offering. Yet, to Abraham, this command would not have seemed strange; human sacrifice was part of the regular pagan worship practices of his Canaanite neighbors. As Isaac was being bound, he became silent; he knew full well what was about to happen to him. He didn't fight the situation; he didn't demand his rights or an explanation or wonder out loud: "Why me?" And of course, neither did the one whom Isaac prefigured, the Messiah, offer up resistance or attempt to

bypass the sacrificial death that only the promised Son could accomplish.

Yet Isaac was no Messiah. The appointed time for the Messiah, the time that Yehoveh alone knew because Yehoveh alone had set that time, had not yet come. As we now know, that time would be eighteen centuries later. Isaac was to be a lesson and demonstration of a spiritual principle, not the Anointed One. Isaac was just a man, and therefore could never qualify as the sacrifice God required for eternal redemption. To have Isaac die in this manner would have been human sacrifice. Yehoveh stopped it once the picture of what the cost to God was going to be became clear: God would sacrifice *Himself* for men.

### PARALLELS BETWEEN ISAAC AND YESHUA

This chapter is overwhelming in presenting a type of Messiah and His crucifixion, is it not? Let's review the "types" represented in this story, and then look at the parallel as it applied to Yahshua:

Verse 2: Abraham was to sacrifice his only son. God sacrificed His only Son.

Verse 3: Three days after Isaac was "condemned" to death, he arose from the altar, alive. Christ arose from the dead three days after He was condemned.

Verse 6: Isaac was required to carry the wood up to the hilltop that would be the very device used for his own death. Christ was required to carry His own wooden cross, the instrument of His own death, to the hilltop where He would be fastened to it and die.

Verses 7–8: Isaac wanted to know where the lamb was for the sacrifice, and Abraham told him that God would provide it. God provided the sacrificial lamb, His very own Son, as the sacrifice for all mankind.

Verse 13: A ram, a male sheep, was provided to Abraham (replacing Isaac) as the sacrifice. Christ, a male sacrificial lamb, was the provision who replaced our rightful place of judgment at Calvary.

Verse 14: The place where the sacrifice was to occur was commemorated as *Yehoveh Jireh* (or *Jehovah Jirah*), meaning, "Yehoveh provides." Yehoveh provided the sacrifice, for no other would do. This sacrifice was Jesus, God in the flesh.

This is most certainly not allegory. What Isaac was subjected to was a shadow of what was going to happen to Christ approximately eighteen hundred years in the future.

### THE MAL'ACH YEHOVAH

Toward the end of this ordeal, we are told that twice "the angel of the Lord" called out to Abraham from heaven—first to stop the sacrifice, and second to embellish the covenants previously given to Abraham. Since we've done a word study on the phrase "angel of the Lord," you'll appreciate that *this* time it's a different Hebrew phrase than what we've previously seen.

First, notice that this angel of the Lord was in heaven. I wonder why this angel wasn't on earth or appearing before Abraham instead of speaking to him from heaven? Maybe we do have a clue for this, though, if we look a little closer. Remember that the Hebrew for "angel of the Lord" is *mal'ach* (meaning "messenger") *Adonai* (meaning "Lord"). But this time the wording is *mal'ach Yehoveh* (Yehoveh being God Almighty's personal name). So this translates literally to "angel of Yehoveh."

This angel of Yehoveh, who was speaking from heaven, said, "I have sworn by *myself*." Typically, when something is identified as "an" or "the" angel of the Lord, the being says, "The Lord told me to say this," or "God told me to do that," thereby making a definite distinction between God and the angel. But that is not the case here. This angel of Yehoveh spoke with the same authority and person as Yehoveh, God Almighty. He said, "I" say this. So, when we see a *mal'ach Adonai* speak as one who is doing God's will, versus a *mal'ach Yehoveh* speaking of His own will, then we have to consider the probability that we are talking about two

different beings. We can be sure that this is significant or God's personal name wouldn't be invoked.

We must be very cautious in accepting the rather rigid Christian doctrines that have been developed, beginning with the edicts of the Council of Nicea in the early fourth century AD, concerning how the God of the universe manifests Himself. Doctrines were created, and continue to be created, that are nowhere present in Scripture, tradition, or even practice up to that point. These are doctrines that the first two hundred years of the early church knew nothing of. I've commented on numerous occasions that for us to intellectually force all possible dimensions of God, or even just the ones alluded to in Holy Scripture, into one of three separate boxes that we call Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is a dangerous undertaking. It compels us to limit He who is without limits. Who or what was this messenger of Yehoveh who twice showed up in conjunction with this climactic story of Abraham and Isaac and spoke of Yehoveh in the first person? Of that, we cannot know. But, perhaps this is our opportunity to once again

acknowledge that it is simply not possible for mankind to know God's mind or imagine all of who He is. Perhaps we need to grow more comfortable in knowing that God is not a human being, nor even a superhuman being. He is a whole other being, and our duty, in some cases, is simply to accept that which we cannot experience or explain. Isn't that the definition of faith in the first place?

## IN CONCLUSION

Abraham and Isaac returned home, and we're given some genealogy concerning Abraham's brother, Nahor, who was still living in Mesopotamia. The first thing that ought to strike us is that twelve sons of Nahor are named, just as Ishmael was to have twelve sons, and eventually Jacob would have twelve sons. However, unlike the twelve sons of Jacob who would form the nation of Israel, each playing an important role, several of the sons of Nahor we will never encounter again in the Bible. We only know they even existed because of this listing at the end of Genesis 22.

## GENESIS 23

**ASSIGNMENT:** Read Genesis 23.

Just as Genesis 22 was the climax of Abraham's life and divine purpose, so chapter 23 pulls loose ends together and transitions from Abraham to Isaac.

The first loose end is to bring closure to the life of the very first Hebrew matriarch, Sarah. She was 127 years old when she died. Hebrew tradition asserts that the trauma she suffered over her only son Isaac's experience on Mount Moriah destroyed the health of this aged woman. Try to imagine what Sarah experienced. She had been unable to have children, and God finally gave her a son in her old age. Then her husband informed her that God had asked for her child's life. All Sarah could do was sit and grieve as the days went by waiting for her husband to return without her cherished son. Hebrew tradition also says Abraham was 138 years old when his beloved Sarah died.

From a scholarly viewpoint, Sarah's death is important because it provides details of the very first death and burial of a Hebrew. Abraham and Sarah were living in Hebron when she expired, so it is natural that Abraham would want to entomb her there. It is key to remember that as of this point in time God's promise of a land set aside for Abraham had not come to fruition, nor would it for another five or six centuries. Abraham used the land of others; he lived in a land governed by others and didn't possess any territory of his own. It is ironic that the only piece of real estate Abraham would ever be able to call his own was a cave used as a tomb for his wife, later himself, and eventually his children and a grandchild—Jacob—as well.

The three great patriarchs of the Bible are all buried in Hebron, now a territory given over to Israel's enemy, the Palestinians. I strongly suspect that David's choice of Hebron as his first capital city when he became king of Judah had much to do with the awesome reverence associated with the burial place of the founders of the nation of Israel.

### ABRAHAM AND EPHRON'S NEGOTIATION

The bargaining session between Abraham and Ephron seems quaint if not humorous. Ephron was a leader among the Hittites, the people who ruled over this area. Ancient records reveal good legal reasons why Abraham's negotiations for the cave of Machpelah as a tomb for he and his wife took the course they did.

Abraham and his clan were resident aliens in Canaan. In that day foreigners typically could not purchase land. Land was everything; for a family to lose its land was a catastrophe. For a family to sell its land to a foreigner was an abomination. Yet it did occur and it was legal. However, the way in which the land was acquired was very important.

If Abraham had accepted it as a gift, not only would that have been insulting to the Hittites, but it likely would have been challenged in the years to come if someone were to claim that it was wrong to give land to a resident alien in the first place. So, Abraham could not accept Ephron's offer of the cave as a gift.

Yet Abraham also had to be very careful in his bargaining, because if he bought it at a price that did not seem fair to later generations, that was reason enough to take the land back. Therefore, Abraham dickered so that

Ephron set a price before Abraham was forced to make an offer. The price, four hundred shekels of silver, was high. But, by Abraham graciously insisting that he was happy to pay full price, he took away most legal challenges that could have led to having that land taken away from him or his descendants sometime in the future.

Burial spots were terribly important to the ancients, and, I dare say, burial sites still bear enormous significance even among our own modern societies. That's why this process took place before many of the town's citizens—Hittite citizens. It was so they would be witnesses to the transfer of ownership from Ephron to Abraham.

## GENESIS 24

**ASSIGNMENT:** Read Genesis 24.

Abraham needed children for the covenants of promise to be carried on, and so did Isaac. Of course, the first step toward that end was finding a suitable wife. Abraham knew that the choice of a wife for Isaac was all-important. He used his highest, best, and most trustworthy servant to go find Isaac a wife, but in a manner carefully prescribed by Abraham. The first matter was, the choice must not be a Canaanite woman. After all, if Abraham and his descendants were to possess the land, it would not be well for Isaac to enter into an alliance via marriage with one whose family might soon be dispossessed of their land. Besides, Abraham did not want a woman raised in the Canaanite religions to raise the children of the promise. Second, in the unlikely event the servant was unsuccessful in persuading the chosen wife to come down to Canaan, the servant was not to take Isaac to Mesopotamia for the marriage.

So the servant was sent north, back to Abraham's homeland, Mesopotamia. He was to find a family member for Isaac to marry. Abraham's brother's genealogy in Genesis 22



is making a reappearance here, for Abraham was hopeful Isaac's future bride would be from among these.

Abraham was not worried, for he knew God was preparing the way for this. The worried party was the servant. The fact that Abraham made the servant recite an oath, plus the fact that Abraham was very old and fully aware that his last breath could come at any moment, means that Abraham suspected he might not live to see the day his son Isaac would obtain a wife. Since he might not be around to examine and give his blessing to the proposed wife, he gave all the requirements and restrictions to his servant to carry out in his stead.

### THE SERVANT'S OATH

Abraham required his servant to put his hand under Abraham's thigh. It was normal then and now for people to gesture when they swear an oath—modern Western custom is for a person to raise their right hand. But what does “hand under the thigh” mean? It was a Hebrew idiom referring to Abraham's genitals. Now, as weird and just plain icky as that might sound, there is a meaning to this that the ancient rabbis have spoken of. It does make sense, but the validity of it is uncertain.

The sign of the covenant with Yahweh, circumcision, is located in the male genitals: “You are to be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin; this will be the sign of the covenant between me and you” (Gen. 17:11). Later in Genesis, we will find Jacob, Abraham's grandson, requiring the same exact “hand under the thigh” gesture when Joseph swore an oath. Somehow this odd action was seen as invoking the power and presence of God as the One who created the covenant of

circumcision, and also the One who guaranteed the oath. This exact gesture has not appeared in any other culture at any time. And these are the only two mentions of it in the Bible; both involve the patriarchs and the carrying out of the provisions of the covenant.

The words of instruction Abraham gave to his servant are his last recorded words in the Bible. And the transition Abraham made from some of his first recorded statements to what we read here is striking. Here, his faith was firm; there was no worry because all was in God's hands and he completely trusted that Yahweh would bring about all that He promised to Abraham. Earlier he asked, "How will I know that I will possess the land?" He lied about Sarah being his wife. He wanted to know how he would have descendants if Sarah was barren, and so on. Years and years of walking with God brought maturity in his faith. It doesn't happen fast.

### ELIEZER ENCOUNTERS RIVKAH

This trusted servant, probably Eliezer of Damascus, who was spoken of in earlier chapters, had been much affected by Abraham. He journeyed back to Mesopotamia, Abraham's birthplace, and as he arrived in the city of Nahor, he prayed that God's will would be done. Although some Bible versions show Eliezer as

calling God Adonai or Lord, in the original Hebrew he calls God Yahweh. He uses God's personal name.

Next we see something we'll encounter often in the Bible: a woman, or women, coming to the well to fetch water. This is not a romantic notion or literary device; women of the Middle East in that era stayed separate from men for the most part. There were certain times of the day when it was understood that women would go to the water well, a spring, or a river to draw water. This was a standard task for women and usually men were not around. It was an issue of traditional modesty that, in particular, applied to unmarried girls and young women. That is why when we read a narrative about a male Bible character encountering a woman at a well or spring, there is often a sense of surprise—the girl is startled at the sight or voice of a man. This tradition is still prevalent in many parts of the world today.

### ABRAHAM'S CAMELS

In verse 10, Abraham's servant took ten camels with him on his wife-hunting trek to the north. Most archaeologists will say that this cannot be because camels were unknown to the region at this time, around 1850–1900 BC. Some fairly recent findings, though, shed light on this matter.



A camel



A dromedary

Records found in southern Mesopotamia from the Old Babylonian Kingdom era (around 2000 BC) mention drinking camel's milk. Further, some Sumerian and Akkadian writings from that same era make mention of a creature used for transportation that was literally called "a donkey-of-the-sea-land." Alongside those writings were pictographs of dromedaries, animals we erroneously call "one-hump camels." In fact, a dromedary is not a camel. A dromedary is a one-humped creature and a camel is a two-humped creature. It seems as though the original habitat of the camel was Mesopotamia and the Far East, while the original habitat of the dromedary was the Arabian Peninsula, far to the south. That Abraham might have had dromedaries makes all kinds of sense; he roamed the southern regions and constantly dealt with Semite tribes of the south. The idea that Genesis 24 is a much later addition or redaction doesn't hold water.

### ELIEZER'S PURPOSE

Eliezer went to the well at the time of day he did because he knew that was when he'd find eligible females. This was not a fortuitous coincidence. In the Middle East, if you wanted to find a young girl, this was the place. He saw some girls coming and proceeded to set up a test for God so that he could be sure the woman he picked for Isaac was the woman God intended. Before he could even finish speaking to God, the answer to his prayers arrived in the form of Rivkah (Rebecca), daughter of B'tu'el.

B'tu'el was Abraham's nephew; he was the son of Abraham's brother, Nahor. So B'tu'el, Rivkah's father, would have been Isaac's first cousin. Rivkah, as a daughter of Isaac's first cousin, was basically a second cousin. Isaac and Rivkah shared a blood relationship, but not a close one. Because Rivkah spoke the exact words Eliezer had set out as a test, Eliezer knew he was on the right track. Nevertheless, he kept silent, for he wanted to see how this would all play out; he wanted to be sure. Rivkah kept drawing water until all ten camels were fully

satisfied. This was probably pretty impressive to Eliezer, so he took the next step.

Eliezer gave Rebecca gifts of significant value including, yes, a nose ring. This was not at all an unusual piece of jewelry for that day. Rebecca raced home and told her mother and the other female clan members what had just happened. When Rebecca's brother, Laban, who will play an important role in the biblical story some time in the future, saw the expensive jewelry worn by his sister, he ran to meet this man who gave her these things. While meeting a stranger, a guest, was always a big occasion back in that day, the fact that this was a *wealthy* stranger excited Laban. Laying on the schmooze, Laban even invoked the name of Yahweh in greeting Eliezer. We shouldn't be too impressed or draw too much from this: later we will find out that Laban possessed many gods, so he was just being cordial in using the name of the God that Eliezer's master worshipped.

Eliezer was invited to stay with the family but to first have a meal. First things first! Eliezer was a loyal servant and he was on a mission, so



Eliezer chooses Rivkah



he wanted to know if he was just wasting his time. He stated straightaway for the record who his master was and what his goal was. Then, so everyone could be certain that the girl's modesty was not violated, that she had committed nothing untoward in speaking with a male, and that all intentions were honorable, he restated all that was told to him, how he carried out his duty, and how it led him to Rivkah.

In the fashion of customary Eastern hospitality, Rebecca's father and brother said that it was far from them to go against God's will for their daughter. We can be sure that they were not so much anxious to get rid of Rebecca as they were ready to receive the customary gifts in exchange for the giving of her hand. They had seen the expensive jewelry Rivkah was wearing and knew that their gifts would also be coming from a wealthy man, likely a king's ransom.<sup>94</sup> And so it was. After a little more bartering, Rebecca, along with the woman who cared for her as a child, accompanied Eliezer back to Canaan.

### RIVKAH'S FATHER

It's interesting how little the father, B'tu'el, was involved in all this. Laban, Rivkah's brother, was the dominant player from Rivkah's side of the family. This was unusual. The only explanation would be that B'tu'el was feeble from age or sickness, and, as would have been customary, Laban (probably B'tu'el's firstborn) took over the duties as guardian of the clan's unmarried females.

Thus, in verses 54–55, when Eliezer asked for leave to take Rivkah and go, it was her mother and brother, not her father, who requested that she stay longer. A little more dickering followed, then Rivkah stated that she was ready to go; permission to leave was granted. The Scriptures tell us that Rivkah's "nurse" accompanied her on the journey. Apparently this nurse was a much-loved family member who could well have been Rivkah's wet nurse when she was an infant, then eventually became a sort of companion and guardian of Rivkah. In fact, the Hebrew word translated "nurse" here is *meneket*, which

means "wet nurse." Of course, Rivkah was well beyond that stage of life, so it likely indicates that this personal nurse began her stay with the family as Rivkah's wet nurse and continued on from there.

As Rivkah, her nurse, and several handmaidens mounted the camels and got ready to leave for Canaan, a benediction was pronounced over Rivkah. This was not a standard pronouncement given in that era over a young girl traveling to enter into marriage. Rather, this was a divine prophecy that I'm sure her family had no idea they were speaking; it concerned her producing a large number of descendants and that those descendants would have victory over their enemies. This, of course, fit in perfectly with the covenant Yahweh had made with Abraham, the covenant that now would be inherited by Rivkah's future husband, Isaac.

### RIVKAH ARRIVES AT ISAAC'S TENT

The caravan arrived back from its journey, and Isaac and Rebecca laid eyes on each other for the first time. The covering of her face with the veil is kind of interesting because Hebrew women didn't wear veils. There is no mention of Sarah ever wearing a veil. And it was not Mesopotamian custom to wear veils as a show of modesty. There was some use of veils in that part of the world, in that era, as kind of a decoration, even as a show of wealth.

The only customary use of a veil among Israelites, Canaanites, Mesopotamians, Sumerians, and so on had to do with wedding and betrothal procedures. It was customary for the bride to be married with her veil down. The groom was not allowed to see her without that veil for some amount of time before the wedding ceremony.<sup>95</sup> Rivkah was likely letting Isaac know that (a) she was the one his father had chosen for him, and (b) that she had consented to be his wife—in fact, the betrothal period had already been entered into.

Isaac was forty years old when he married Rebecca. The father and mother for the next



A modern example of what Rivkah's veil might have looked like

generation of the line of promise were now in place. Isaac and Rebecca went into the tent of Isaac's departed mother, and it became theirs. In this era the men and the women generally stayed separate, even after marriage. Husbands and wives, particularly if they were wealthy or the heads of large clans, slept in separate quarters. The fact that this bride and groom entered Sarah's tent was symbolic of Rivkah's assuming the position of matriarch that Sarah had held until her death. Sarah's tent had been maintained just for this ceremonial purpose, until a bride for Isaac had been chosen.

Scripture states that Isaac found great comfort, finally, in the loss of his mother by marrying Rivkah. Obviously, up until Rivkah, Sarah had been Isaac's primary contact with the female world. He must have been quite close to his mother.

## GENESIS 25

ASSIGNMENT: Read Genesis 25.

Chapter 25 is more or less divided into three parts: The first third consists of the final important details of Abraham's life, the second third consists of calling out the descendants of Ishmael and giving some information about where they settled, and the final third charts the end of Isaac's story and the beginning of his son Jacob's.

### THE FINAL DETAILS OF ABRAHAM'S LIFE

Prior to 1948 and the absolutely unthinkable fulfillment of the prophecy that Israel would be reborn as a nation of Jews, this listing of tribes coming from Abraham would have been relatively unimportant except to librarians and historians. But now that Israel has returned to their homeland and with the happenings in the Middle East that are shaking the whole earth like never before, these genealogical listings and the birth of Isaac's twin sons, Jacob and Esau, take on a more important tone for the church.

#### ABRAHAM AND KETURAH

We are coming to the end of the story of Abraham and Ishmael. We are given some final information about Abraham that we should make mental note of. First, Abraham took another wife, a woman named Keturah, of whom we know next to nothing. Bible scholars are not even totally clear whether or not Abraham was married to Sarah at the same time as Keturah. That said, after further



An artist's interpretation of what Keturah would have looked like

study and research, it is clear that we should not assume that Abraham's taking Keturah "as a wife" was in chronological sequence with the previous chapter of Genesis. In other words, Keturah and Sarah *may have* both been Abraham's wives at the same time. The Torah commonly employs a literary device whereby there is an interruption to the sequence of events; the story goes back a few years and adds new information about someone or something. This is not unusual for the Bible or writings from other cultures in that era, and even eras well before and after that.

One possibility concerning the timing of Keturah stands out above all the rest to me: these sons of Abraham, born through Keturah,

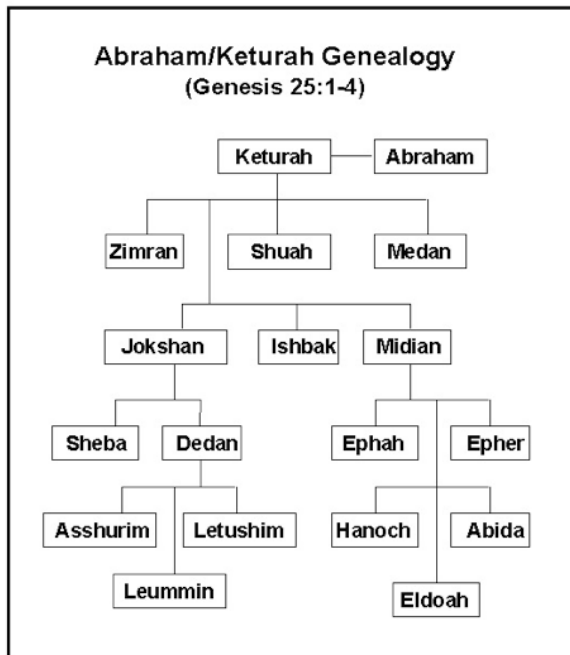
could have been born to Abraham before Isaac. This is because Abraham was far past the age when men typically have the ability to sire a child when Isaac was conceived. Therefore, unless these sons from Keturah were “miraculous conceptions,” which is unlikely, they had to have come well *before* Sarah bore the miracle baby, Isaac. One could argue that upon God’s making Abraham capable of siring Isaac, Abraham regained fertility for an extended period of time. Several scholars choose that approach. Nevertheless, it’s nearly impossible to nail down exactly when Abraham took Keturah as a wife, when these other children were born, and whether these sons came before or after Isaac.

We’re told that Keturah gave Abraham several children, of which six are mentioned. We have no idea who Keturah was or who her ancestors were. However, it is clear that the etymology of Keturah’s name is the Hebrew word *ketoret*, which means “spices.” In fact, certain tribes that have long been suspected as being descendants of Abraham and Keturah were associated with the spice trade in ancient times. It is also helpful for us to know that the prime spice-producing region for the Middle East at that time, and for many centuries to come,

was an area of southern Arabia today known as Yemen. This shows just how extensive and regular trade and travel was among these ancient peoples so very long ago.

As is customary in the Bible, only Keturah’s male children are mentioned, but it’s unthinkable that Keturah didn’t give Abraham several daughters as well. We will run into several of these named children of Keturah later on in Scripture, and yet others will never be heard of again, so let me point out one son in particular because the territory he settled played a large role in Moses’s life: that son is named Midian. True to his mother’s name, the Midianites were known as spice traders, particularly of the highly valued frankincense. Their territory was located on the Arabian Peninsula, bordered by the eastern edge of the Red Sea, today called the Gulf of Aqaba. This is the same region where Moses fled from Egypt, where God came to Moses in a burning bush, and where Moses found a Midianite wife. In fact, the Gulf of Aqaba is most likely the biblical Red Sea that Moses led the Israelites through to safety when they were fleeing from the armies of Pharaoh.

These six sons of Keturah, along with Ishmael, the son of Hagar the Egyptian girl, formed what we can loosely call the Arab peoples, people who populated the Middle East and northern Africa. However, the term *arab* wasn’t in use until some time after the reign of King David; that is, there was no such identifiable or named people group called “Arabs” or “Arabians” until probably at least 900 BC, some nine centuries after the time we’re currently studying.



The descendants of Ishmael and of Keturah populate the Middle East and Asia.

## ISAAC'S INHERITANCE

We are told in verse 5 that “Avraham gave everything he owned to Yitz’chak,” which would have made Isaac a very wealthy and powerful man. This gift also set the stage for enormous jealousy and strife between Isaac and his large cadre of half brothers and sisters, especially Ishmael. That strife and jealousy continues to this very day. With all those brothers and sisters—dozens at the least—Abraham had to do something to assure that Isaac was decisively and without opposition elevated above all the rest and given a clear path to continue along the road of covenant promise that Yahweh had ordained. This is another dramatic example of the ongoing God principle of dividing, electing, and separating; this time, the subject of the division and separation was Isaac.

## GIFTS TO ABRAHAM'S OTHER SONS

Upon his death, Abraham gave everything to Isaac, but we're told that he also gave gifts *before* he died to the sons of his *concubines*. Although most Bibles say that Abraham took Keturah as a wife, and Hagar as well, they were not technically his wives as Sarah was. They were concubines—a different class of wife. These so-called wives would not have been given a *ketubah*, a marriage contract. There would not have been a marriage ceremony. Rather, there would have been a simple declaration by Abraham that they were to be included in his household as legitimate mothers of his children. These concubines were well-treated and respected, and they enjoyed the status of being joined to Abraham's clan. They did not, however, have the exalted status of a legal wife, and their children had lesser rights of inheritance than the sons of the legal wife. In fact, the law of that era was that it was entirely up to the father to choose which, if any, of his children from concubines would gain inheritance. While Isaac got all of the inheritance and family authority, the other sons of Abraham, by means of his concubines,

got gifts—likely fairly substantial gifts because Abraham was so wealthy.<sup>96</sup>

Abraham sent these sons away to other territories, another example of how dividing and electing always leads to separating. This parallels God's permitting circumstances to unfold that led to the necessary separation of Abraham from his nephew Lot. Notice that once again they were sent to the east!

## THE DEATH OF ABRAHAM

In verse 7, Abraham died at the ripe old age of 175 years. What a life Abraham lived! Oh, that each of us could have such a close and intertwined relationship with the Lord, and that His purpose would be played out through us. We are told that Abraham was gathered to his people. This is a term far different from “dying,” “being buried in the ground,” or “going down to Sheol.” Rather, it implies a sort of reunion with those, likely from the line of Seth, Noah, and Shem, who had come before him. It also speaks to a belief that death is not the end, a concept that will from here forward be built upon only slightly in the OT Scriptures, but will take on a greater meaning with the advent of Christ in the NT. Nevertheless, while there is a hint of something beyond death in the statement “gathered to his people,” there is no mention of going to heaven. What lay beyond the grave—an afterlife, if you would—is not discussed with any depth in the OT; it seems from the varying terms for death and dying, all of them being vague and general, that the concept of an afterlife was very fuzzy in the minds of the people of the OT. For some Hebrews, it is obvious in Scripture that dying without a son to carry on the family name spelled the end of their own essence as well, something they greatly feared. In some unexplained way, they believed that a father lived on through his son—not in a sense of reincarnation, and maybe not even with any consciousness at all. The idea of the human spirit as a vessel of existence after death is not well defined in the OT. The thought that

somehow a human would live in heaven with God simply didn't exist, at least not until the close of the OT at about 400 BC.

Ishmael and Isaac came together to bury their father, and as would have been customary when possible, the husband was buried with his wife. Abraham was buried in the same tomb as Sarah—the cave of Machpelah at Hebron. Later Isaac and Rebecca would join them in that same location, as would Jacob eventually.

## ISAAC: THE SON OF THE PROMISE

In verse 11, God makes it clear to any who might doubt where the line of promise led: “After Avraham died, God blessed Yitz’chak his son, and Yitz’chak lived near Be’er-Lachai-Ro’i.” The handing of the torch from Abraham to Isaac was complete. Isaac was the new patriarch of the Hebrews, and Abraham was but a memory.

Generally speaking, the sons of Keturah formed tribal confederations, and along with Ishmael, they made up the various Arab peoples of today. Unlike the Israelites, who very much tended to stay closely identified with their individual tribes (Reuben, Simeon, Ephraim, Judah, Benjamin, and so on), the sons of Keturah quickly became less identified with their individual tribes and banded together to have staying power and influence. In fact, most of the names of the sons of Keturah have been lost in history, and we really can't follow their progress at all. The one that does have a biblical impact is the tribe of Midian, who lived on the western end of the Arabian Peninsula, with the Gulf of Aqaba as one of their boundary lines. This is the same Midian that Moses fled to from Egypt after he had killed that Egyptian soldier; it is the same Midian where he found a wife and lived for forty years as a shepherd.

Verses 12–18 record the line of Ishmael. Ishmael was the dispossessed “firstborn” of Abraham and the Egyptian handmaiden Hagar. Recall that Ishmael was a teenager by the time Isaac was born. Also recall that until Abraham's

only legal wife, Sarah, bore him Isaac, Abraham had declared Ishmael to be his firstborn son. Ishmael, as far as Abraham was concerned, was the son of promise, the son who would carry on the covenant that Yehoveh had made with Abraham. It is no coincidence that the genealogy of Ishmael immediately follows this reminder that God blessed Isaac, and not Ishmael. It was a reminder that Yehoveh had rejected Ishmael as the son of promise. The son of promise was the one God Himself had caused to be born in a miraculous way, by means of the dead womb of Sarah and the dead seed of Abraham. The son of promise was Isaac.

## THE DESCENDANTS OF ISHMAEL

Ishmael was a Semite, just as Isaac was, and of course, Abraham. Semites are the descendants of Noah's son Shem. Actually, the word should be *Shemite*, not *Semite*. The error is a rather typical Gentile Christian one because the Hebrew alphabet character that we transliterate as an *S* can be used in one of two ways: as the letter “sheen” שׁ or as “seen” שֵׁ. Moving the little dot located above the character to the far right makes it a Sheen, which gives us a “sh” sound as in “she” or “shoot” or “Sharon.” Moving the little dot to the far left makes the same character a Seen, giving us the “s” sound, as in “Sam” or “Seattle” or “seaside.” The word *Shem* is spelled with a Sheen, not a Seen.

Since Isaac and Ishmael had the same father and he was a descendant of Shem, *both* of those children were Semites. In fact, all the children Abraham sired were Semites. The Arabs and the Jewish people are very much related; they're all Semites. That's what makes the term *anti-Semitic* such an oxymoron. *Anti-Semitic* is technically a term that means “against Semites,” against the descendants of Shem. Yet the way that term has always been used is to declare bigotry against the *Jewish* people. Interestingly, it is the Arab peoples who are usually most accused of being anti-Semitic. Arab Semites being called anti-Semitic. Just another of those mindless phrases

and terms that are regularly used but no one seems to have any idea what they're actually saying.

## WAS ISHMAEL CURSED?

Just because Ishmael was rejected by God as the son of promise does not mean that Ishmael was cursed by God. Ishmael was not punished or judged; he simply could not be the son of promise because Yehoveh had determined that another, Isaac, was to be that son. In fact, to sort of make up for Ishmael's being dispossessed of the firstborn status that he held until Isaac was born, Ishmael was given an almost equal physical inheritance as Isaac. It's just that while Abraham would provide Isaac's wealth and prosperity, Yehoveh would provide for Ishmael's. So, in our age, while the Arab peoples are generally Israel's enemy, they are in no way an accursed people any more than we are just because the leaders of our nation have come against Israel by forcing them to divide their land. Oh, the Arabs have been and will continue to be disciplined severely by Yehoveh for coming against His set-apart people, just as we Americans (as a nation) will continue to be severely disciplined by God for forcing Israel to turn over some of their land to their enemies. But whereas the descendants of Noah's son Ham are a line of people who did have a curse put on them, that is not the case with the descendants of Shem—Arabs as well as Hebrews—or of Japheth, for that matter.

## ARABS: A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

For all practical purposes, we could say that the descendants of Ishmael, together with the descendants of Keturah, form the modern-day Arab peoples. These descendants of Ishmael and Keturah began commingling very early on. We find mention in Isaiah 60 of Midian, Ephah, and Sheba, who were tribes from Keturah, living side by side with Kedar and Nebaioth, who were sons of Ishmael.

ASSIGNMENT: Read Isaiah 60:1–7.

This is an end-time prophecy about what has been happening and is continuing to happen with Israel, mostly right before our eyes. It's about the return of the Jews to their homeland. And, of course, the modern era return of the Israelites to their God-given land is an ongoing process that has been occurring since the 1940s.

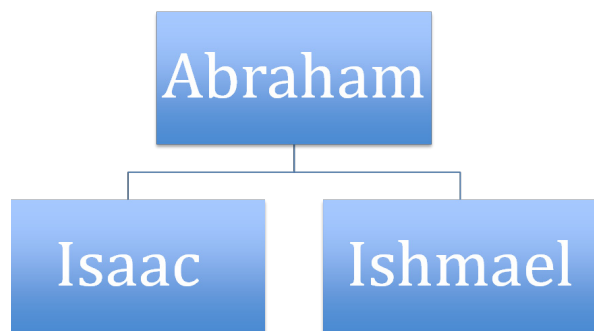
And in Isaiah 60:6–7 we see the names of those five tribes, the Arab tribes of Midian, Ephah, Sheba, Kedar, and Nebaioth. These names also appear in Genesis 25. What is being said here is that Arab peoples will eventually become friends and servants of Israel and bring them wealth and prosperity. More pointedly, Arab peoples will come to worship Messiah in Israel. So this is not about what is happening today, but what will happen sometime in the near future. Hordes of Arabs will bow down to the Hebrew Messiah.

We must very careful how we disciples of Yahshua view the Arab peoples. Yes, today, most Arabs are on the wrong side of the issue with Israel.<sup>97</sup> They have even chosen to abandon the God of their forefather Abraham to take on a false-god, a nongod called Allah. They have chosen to be outright enemies of Christians and Jews.

The Arab Muslims who believe in Allah are *no more* deceived than our families, friends, and neighbors who believe in no god at all! So while we must stand beside Israel, knowing that will set us against most of the world, because it is our duty and call before God, that does not mean we should hate Arabs or Muslims. We can hate what they believe, and we can hate what they do when they're wrong. We're no more wrong to destroy those who try to destroy us or Israel than we were to fight Hitler's armies in World War II. But we shouldn't revel in it or have joy in the doing.<sup>98</sup>

## SOME THOUGHTS ON ISLAM

Islam claims that Ishmael is the true founder of Islam. This is willful ignorance and an agenda-driven fantasy about the simple history of the matter of Islam and Ishmael. Ishmael is not the father of Islam. He's not even the father of all the Arab peoples, just some of them.



Isaac and Ishmael are a distinct fork in the road: Jews and Christians down one path, Arabs down the other. The differences between the Judeo-Christian world and the Islamic world are irreconcilable. There is no halfway point; there is no compromise. Islam claims that the words from Allah (their god) and the people of the promise of the covenants with Abraham descended through Ishmael and are recorded in the Koran. Of course, Jews and Christians believe that the promise of the covenants is passed down through Isaac and is recorded in the Holy Scriptures, the Bible.

We have just finished reading several chapters in Genesis that explicitly state that the son of promise and the line of the covenant is Isaac, not Ishmael. Interestingly, the Muslims also acknowledge that is what the Bible says, but they say the Bible texts have been corrupted and changed by Jews and Christians. They say that, in fact, the Bible should say that it was *Isaac* who was rejected and that *Ishmael* was the real son of promise.

Let's look at a couple of facts that make that claim utter nonsense:

1. The religion of Islam didn't come into existence until the Prophet Muhammad formed it; Muslims fully agree with that.

2. Muhammad wasn't born until almost six hundred years after the time of Jesus Christ.

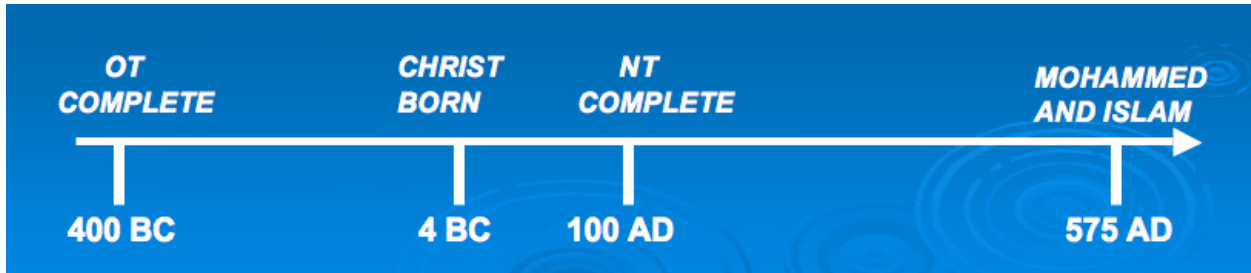
3. The last book of the OT was written one thousand years before Muhammad was born. The last book of the NT was written five centuries before Muhammad was born.<sup>99</sup>

### MUHAMMAD'S CLAIM THAT THE BIBLE HAS IT WRONG

Upon reading the Bible, Muhammad, the founder of Islam, basically said, "Oh, all those writings were corrupted by the Jews just to pervert what I'm telling you." Imagine if someone today stood up and said, "Hey, the Constitution that is under glass in Washington, DC, the original one that was written 250 years ago . . . it's wrong. I just wrote the correct one. The original is corrupted, and it was corrupted by our founding fathers and this is so you wouldn't believe that I just wrote down the right one!" Isn't that about the most illogical, silliest thing you've ever heard? But that is precisely what Islam claims about the Holy Scriptures today.

By the time Islam was even invented by Muhammad, the Roman Catholic Church was dominant throughout Europe and Asia. Constantine, who declared the new Gentile form of Christianity to be the state religion of the Roman Empire, had already been dead for more than two hundred years by the time Muhammad was born. It doesn't even matter that the Dead Sea Scrolls, which are the oldest actual, original scriptural writings of the Hebrews from before the time Christ was born and on display in Jerusalem for any and all to see, fully agree with the Old Testaments we have today. This clearly proves that no corruption or change has occurred, at least not after about 100 BC, if ever. Yet Islam claimed in the AD 600s that Genesis should have said Ishmael was the chosen one and Isaac was the rejected one.





**FALSE CLAIMS THAT ALLAH IS JUST ANOTHER NAME FOR YAHWEH**

There are two ways and only two to know who a god is: by his name and by his attributes.

**ISLAM’S NAME FOR GOD**

There are scholars who say that *Allah* is just Arabic for “god.” While in the most general sense this is true, the only name of god in Islam is Allah. Muslims reject all biblical names for God, even when those names are Arabized. YHWH, El Shaddai, or any other biblical name or title for the God of the universe is wrong, according to Islam. It is clear that the god of Islam (Allah) has an entirely different name than the God of the Bible.

**ATTRIBUTES OF ISLAM’S GOD**

The god of Islam glorifies death. The God of the Bible glorifies life. The god of Islam says that Muslims are to win converts to Islam by means of the sword. The God of the Bible says that His believers are to win converts by means of love and faith. The god of Islam says that a Muslim’s behavior determines his eternal future. The God of the Bible says the condition of one’s heart determines his eternal future. The god of Islam has no Messiah for salvation. The God of the Bible says there must be salvation by means of a Messiah. The god of Islam is a war god. The God of the Bible is a shalom God. The contradictions go on and on and on. The attributes, character, and instruction of the god of Islam as found in the Koran are the *exact opposite* of the attributes, character, and instruction of the

<u>ALLAH</u>	<u>YHWH, EL SHADDAI</u>
Loves death	Loves life
Converts by the sword	Converts by love
Behavior	Condition of the heart
No Messiah	Messiah
God of war	God of shalom

God of the Bible. And yet, many Christian and other religious leaders tell us that Christians and Muslims worship the same God.

**IRRECONCILABLE DIFFERENCES**

I have heard many well-meaning pastors say that the best way to approach a Muslim is to tell them that you respect that they are worshipping God, they just don’t know that the God they are worshipping is Jesus! The Hebrew Yeshua! This is insanity! It is blasphemy of the worst kind, and it is teaching God’s people to believe that worshipping any god is fine, no matter his name or characteristics, because any god is really just the God of Israel. Well, that’s not what Yehoveh has been telling us, is it?

Please. If you love the people of the church or synagogue you attend, take this information with you and tell them the truth. Do you realize what happened to the Israelites who worshipped both Yehoveh and the gods of other nations? Those who tried to be politically correct and tolerant by the standards of their era? Those who declared that Yehoveh and Ba’al were one? They were scattered to the four winds and millions were destroyed. There is *no difference* between what they did and what we do today, right in our places of worship, when we declare that Yehoveh, Messiah, and Allah are one. God didn’t deal with them on a person-by-person or

family-by-family basis. He placed *a national* judgment upon them, and the exact same thing is prophesied in our time. Not personally believing or accepting this blasphemy as truth doesn't exempt you or your family from suffering along with others in a nation under God's terrible discipline. Oh, certainly, you are saved, and your eternal future is secure. But is that really all that matters? Not for me, and I think not for you.

## THE TRIBES OF ISHMAEL

Nebaioth was the firstborn son of Ishmael. His tribe was the people referred to as the Nabaiati, who are mentioned in Assyrian accounts of their empire's battles against the people of the Arabian Peninsula, only a few decades prior to Judah's being taken captive in Babylon. We know

these people as the Nabateans, and even more recently as the Jordanians of Petra.

Kedar is spoken of in the Bible many centuries after Genesis, and they formed some kind of association with the Edomite people (the descendants of Esau). These are people who wandered about as shepherds and goat herders throughout the Arabian and Sinai Peninsulas. Without doubt, they form at least part of the modern-day Bedouins.

Adbe'el is known in Assyrian historical records as Idiba'il; they were conquered by Tiglath-Pileser, the same man who was instrumental in conquering the Northern Kingdom of Ephraim-Israel, and sent to guard the Egyptian-Assyrian border.

Dumah's tribe shows up again in Isaiah 21. They occupied a territory just above Midian



The tribes of Ishmael



along the Gulf of Aqaba on the Arabian Peninsula.

The tribe of Tema dwelled around a well-known oasis northeast of Dedan because it was located on a very well-traveled caravan route that connected the southern part of the Arabian Peninsula with the lower reaches of Mesopotamia.

Jetur and Naphish appear to have merged into a single tribe and are described later in the Bible, in 1 Chronicles 5, as the Hagrites, a contraction for Hagar-ites, descendants of Hagar.

For all practical purposes, nothing is known beyond pure speculation about the remaining twelve sons of Ishmael, so we won't go there.



### ARAB CULTURE OF THEFT

Genesis 25:16 tells us that the descendants of Ishmael lived in villages (camps): “These are the sons of Yishma’el, and these are their names, according to their settlements and camps, twelve tribal rulers.” In other words, these tribes didn’t build and reside in walled cities. They were rural, farmers and herders, and some were desert wanderers and traders. This accounts for the lifestyle the Arabs developed in which they constantly attacked one another in hopes of gaining for themselves, by taking from another, because they lived in unfortified towns. This mentality is still at work today. Part of what fundamental Islam is fighting against is a way of life that produces things, as opposed to their traditional way of life that takes what others have produced. The traditional Arab tribal ways revolved around one tribe seeking to take wealth and power and people from another tribe. Even Muhammad, the founder of Islam, gained his reputation as a leader by attacking other Arab tribes and winning. The goal was always the same: spoils of war.

Why is it that those Arab/Muslim strongholds of the world are also the most poverty-stricken, undeveloped places in the world? Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, Egypt, and so on. Generally speaking, the people there have little concept of working, producing, fundamental fairness, or technological progress (at least from the Western viewpoint). When Islam attacked Europe in AD

711, it was the European wealth that they were after, not a European way of life or European technology. They wanted to take what Europe had produced. That is exactly what they want today. The war on terror is indeed a fight about a way of life. But, the way of life they want is: “You produce it; we’ll take it.” They don’t even know how, nor do they want to know how, to produce or share.

## ISHMAEL’S DEATH

In verse 17 we are told, “This is how long Yishma’el lived: 137 years. Then he breathed his last, died and was gathered to his people.” Here again, we find no reference to what that “gathered to his people” means. Was this an afterlife? If so, what did it consist of? We’ll never find out in the Torah, and very little detail is given in the whole of the OT. Rather, this is just a nice way of saying he lived out a good life peacefully, probably of natural causes. His “people” were undoubtedly his descendants as opposed to his ancestors. He had been divided and separated away from his father, so he was the start of a new line. Being gathered to his kin, I feel certain, refers to his immediate family, who would not be known as Arab for several more centuries.

## ISHMAEL’S TERRITORY

The general territorial boundary where Ishmael’s descendants lived started at the border of the Sinai Peninsula with Egypt (*Shur*, which means “wall”) and then went north to the Assyrians of Mesopotamia. The location of Havilah is not known, as there are many locations in the Middle East that went by this name or variations of it. The inference is that the descendants of Ishmael tended to stay among themselves; for it says they camped alongside their kinsmen. They didn’t seem to mix with the Mesopotamians, Egyptians, Nubians, or other non-Semitic peoples of the earth. Generally speaking, the descendants of Ishmael occupied areas to the north, south, and east of the land of Canaan.



ASSIGNMENT: Read Genesis 25:19–34.

## FROM ISAAC TO JACOB

Here in the final third of Genesis 25, we begin to chart the end of Isaac’s story and the beginning of his son Jacob’s story: the torch was being prepared to be passed yet again.

In the Torah, Isaac is spoken of only sparingly as compared to his son Jacob and his father, Abraham. For instance, we are told at the end of Genesis 24 that Isaac married Rivkah, but then there is no information given to us about the first twenty years of their marriage. We do know that unlike Abraham, Isaac seemed to have stayed closer to home. The known stories about Isaac center around Be’er Sheva; as far as anyone knows, he didn’t live in Hebron as his father did, except near the end of his life. But, like his father, he was an owner of flocks and herds.

In verse 21, we find that, much in the same way as it was for Abraham and Sarah, Isaac’s beloved wife Rivkah was unable to bear

## THE PROGRESS OF THE PATRIARCHS

Let's pause and put the progress of the patriarchs in perspective. Abraham, Jacob's grandfather, began life as a pagan. The world at the time of Abraham's birth consisted of only one kind of people: the human race. Other than genealogical and social divisions, all humans were about the same in Yehoveh's eyes; the one exception being that the line of Ham, one of Noah's three sons, was an accursed line.<sup>100</sup> As of Abraham's time there was no division of humanity, there were no set-apart people.

Once God called Abraham to leave his country and his immediate family, He began the process of a divine dividing of the world into two groups of people: His people and everybody else. The name we give to "God's people," the name we find in the Bible, is *Hebrew*. When Abraham obeyed God and moved to the land of Canaan, by declaration God divided mankind into Hebrews on the one hand and everyone else on the other. Decisions by Abraham and a declaration by God were the sole factors in making Abraham and his descendants different in God's eyes from all other human beings.

## BIRTHRIGHT VERSUS DECLARATION FROM GOD

Isaac, son of Abraham, represents the next step in the evolution of the Hebrew people. Isaac was the firstborn Hebrew. Purely by *declaration* was Abraham a Hebrew, but Isaac was a Hebrew by *birth*. Yet, even then, a declaration of God was still involved; for Abraham had another son, Ishmael, whom he thought to be his firstborn and therefore the one to carry on the covenants God had made with Abraham. As far as Abraham was concerned, Ishmael was a Hebrew. And in the strictest sense, Ishmael was a Hebrew until something changed. A time came when Yehoveh said to Abraham, "Not so fast! Just as I divided you away from your father and brother, I'm going to divide Ishmael away from his father and brother." Ishmael was to be divided and separated away from his father, Abraham, and his brother, Isaac. The effect was that Ishmael was not to continue being Hebrew, but Isaac was.

If Ishmael and Isaac *both* had a Hebrew father (Abraham), why is only the one, Isaac, considered a Hebrew today? Why isn't Ishmael just another branch of Hebrews? Why don't we think of Ishmael and all of his descendants—the ones we refer to as Arabs—as Hebrews, too? This is an important principle: while birthright (that is, genealogy, your physical bloodlines) establishes your physical identity, it is the election and declaration of the Lord that establishes your spiritual identity. Your physical identity and your spiritual identity are two different matters, are they not? So the term *Hebrew* began by denoting much more than simple physical identity; Hebrew also defined a spiritual identity.

By God's design, *Hebrew* was meant to be a term that described a *combination* of physical and spiritual attributes of a person. The life of a Hebrew, physically and spiritually, was to operate under a set of laws and promises that God made with the first Hebrew, Abraham. A Hebrew's earthly life was to revolve around his spiritual life. We call these laws and promises that define the overall life of a Hebrew the Abrahamic covenant, and later they were expanded and given to Moses and are now called Torah.

Even though Isaac was physically of the right stock to be a Hebrew, it still took an act of God, an election of God, for him to be *declared* a Hebrew. Ishmael was also of the right physical stock to be a Hebrew, but God did not grant Ishmael the necessary spiritual status to be a Hebrew. Therefore, the election of Isaac and the rejection of Ishmael create an enormous fork in the road. One direction led to the Hebrews, the other away from the Hebrews.

him an heir for a long time. Further, she was barren, meaning she had given Isaac no children at all, not even girls. As did Abraham, Isaac went before Yehoveh and Yehoveh granted his request for a son. Rivkah became pregnant. While there of course are great similarities between the situations of Abraham and Sarah and Isaac and Rivkah conceiving, there are also great differences. For instance, neither Isaac nor Rivkah was beyond child-bearing years. Secondly, Isaac didn't turn to any concubines, and Rivkah didn't offer a handmaiden



or slave girl to bear a child in her stead. There appear to have been no plans to do anything but live with the situation of childlessness until Yehoveh decided to do something.

Did the Lord wait for Isaac to approach Him before allowing him children? Was the Lord constrained by Isaac, in that Isaac's *prayers* were necessary before God could allow Rebecca to become fertile? This is the substance of many fascinating arguments among spiritual leaders: Does God need our prayers in order to act?

I think not. But God does want to teach us. He also wants a relationship with us; yet, what relationship is possible without communication? While oral speech is the traditional human-to-human way of communicating, prayer is the God-ordained method for human-to-God communication. God does not need prayer, but He does want prayer. Conversely, Christians need to pray. I cannot think of a way that builds a stronger faith than communicating my needs, or the needs of another, to God and then marveling over His response.

This much-longed-for pregnancy of Rivkah's almost immediately became uncomfortable for

her. These apparently very active twin sons within her womb caused her to inquire of God just what was going on. Let's be clear: this pregnancy worried Rivkah. The activity within her womb was not normal. Even an unusual Hebrew word is chosen to describe the goings-on—the word *va-yitrotsetsu*, which is usually translated as “struggled.” This verb has the sense of crushing, thrusting, and smashing; it is pretty violent.

The battle within Rivkah's womb between Isaac's twin sons, Jacob and Esau, highlights the principle that God declares some to be chosen and others not, even though they both come from the same physical stock. The issue of who would be chosen as inheritor of the rights of the covenant given to Abraham was at the core of their dissension. Both Jacob and Esau were, by all physical evidence, born from their Hebrew father, Isaac. By birth, if one went purely by physical definition, it would seem that both were Hebrews. And, in a sense, they both were. But, God would again, by declaration, elect and *divide*.

Let us remember that while we could see some physical and genealogical differences between Isaac and Ishmael—after all, they had different mothers of different nationalities—it was entirely different for Jacob and Esau because they, of course, had the same mother and father. Jacob and Esau were twins; physically and genealogically there was no difference between Jacob and Esau. So, how is it that Jacob was elected to be a Hebrew and Esau not? It was by declaration alone, God's sovereign decision to choose Jacob over Esau. Jacob would be a Hebrew; Esau was stripped of his right to be called Hebrew. The only difference between Jacob and Esau was spiritual, and that was brought about purely by the declaration of Yehoveh.

## DEFINITION OF A HEBREW

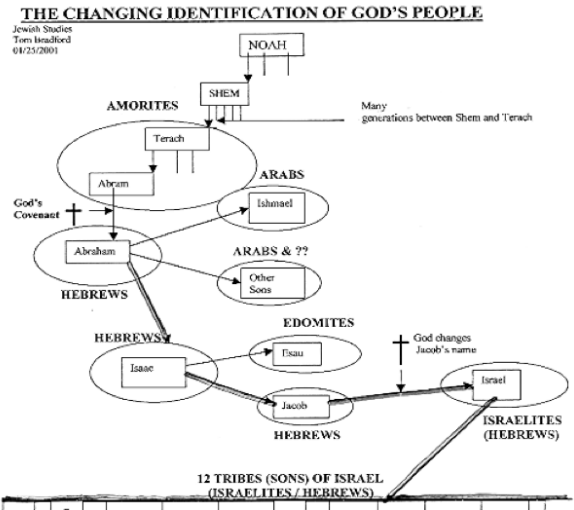
A Hebrew is one who has been made a descendant in the line of covenant promises given to Abraham. A Hebrew is an *inheritor* of the covenant promises as given to Abraham. If

a person is an inheritor of the covenant promises, then that person is part of God’s set-apart people. Thus the world was, upon God’s covenants with Abraham, divided into two groups: Hebrews and all others. Abraham established the line of covenant promise at the declaration of God; Abraham’s father and brother were excluded. Abraham’s son Isaac continued the line of covenant promise at the declaration of God; Abraham’s other son, Ishmael, was excluded. Isaac’s son Jacob would continue the line of covenant promise at the declaration of God; Isaac’s other son, Esau, would be excluded.

But from Jacob forward all descendants of Jacob would be called Hebrew—no more exclusions and no more election by declaration of God. Beginning with Jacob’s offspring, one was a Hebrew by law. If one was physically born to a Hebrew, that person was a Hebrew. Period. Even more, if one who was not born a Hebrew (that is, a Gentile) wanted to become part of the Hebrew people, it was allowed by means of rules and laws that had been set down by Yehoveh.

THE NEW COVENANT

So how one comes to be called part of God’s set-apart people, the Hebrews, occurs by means of a number of sequential forks in the road. It started with the Abraham fork, then the Isaac fork, and then the Jacob fork. And it stayed that way for about eighteen hundred years. Eighteen centuries after Jacob we find yet another fork in



the road; it’s called the new covenant. The new covenant is the fulfillment of an Old Testament prophecy about a time when the physical covenants and laws of the Hebrews, called the Torah, would be written, spiritually, on certain men’s hearts. Not all men’s hearts, just those who were elected and declared by God to be His. This would happen by means of a Messiah. This new fork in the road brings us full circle; this fork brings to fruition that promise of the Abrahamic covenant that “all the families of the earth will blessed” in you, Abraham. *All* doesn’t mean Gentiles and not Jews. It also doesn’t mean Jews and not Gentiles. *All* means “all.” Those who are included under the covenants of the Hebrews involve God’s election and declaration, and the key to all this is the Messiah.

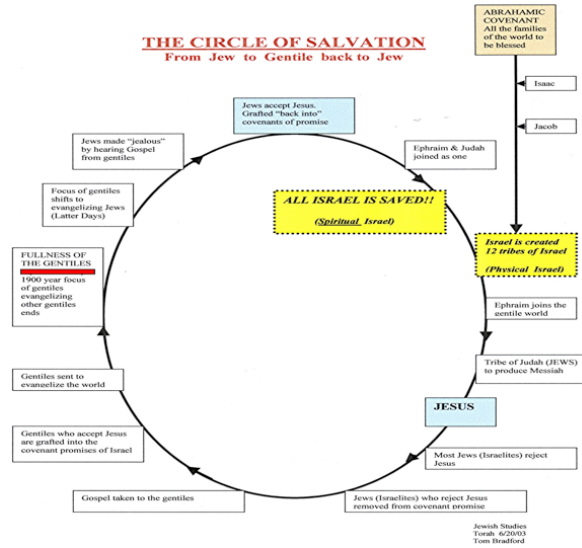
Genesis 25 is the story of a crucial division, election, and separation by the God of Israel. It is one that has many wonderful nuances and establishes many messianic principles.

ASSIGNMENT: Read Genesis 25:19–34.

IRRECONCILABLE DIFFERENCES	
ISLAM	JUDEO-CHRISTIANITY
<b>OPPOSITES</b>	
<b>ALLAH</b>	<b>Y-H-W-H, EL SHADDAI</b>
<b>LOVES DEATH</b>	<b>LOVES LIFE</b>
<b>CONVERT BY SWORD</b>	<b>CONVERT BY LOVE</b>
<b>BEHAVIOR</b>	<b>CONDITION OF HEART</b>
<b>NO MESSIAH</b>	<b>MESSIAH</b>
<b>GOD OF WAR</b>	<b>GOD OF SHALOM</b>

THE BATTLE IN RIVKAH’S WOMB

Rivkah, wife of Isaac, was worried. Her womb was in absolutely violent upheaval. What



was going on in there was not normal. These may have been her first children, but she had undoubtedly witnessed scores of pregnancies and assisted in not just a few births; that's part of what women did. So she sought Yehoveh for reassurance and to calm her fears. God gave her His answer: two nations lived within her, and what she was feeling was a struggle for dominance. Even more, He told Rebecca that the first one out of the birth canal should not be given the rights and honor of the firstborn—in Hebrew, *bekhor*—as was customary; rather, it should go to the second one born. This is a theme that is ongoing in the Bible, a theme that separates what seems to be in a physical-earthly sense from what actually is in a spiritual-heavenly sense. In a physical sense, it seemed to Abraham that Ishmael, the son of his concubine Hagar, was his firstborn son, the son of promise. But in a spiritual sense, it was Isaac, born miraculously by Sarah, who was to have the firstborn rights and be the all-important son of promise.

Rivka was carrying twins. The law was that the first one to be born was the firstborn, the *bekhor*; and the second one to be born was more or less subservient to the first. The fact that a firstborn was a twin meant little. They didn't divide the inheritance; they didn't each get a share of the firstborn inheritance. One was chosen and the other was not. This violent

struggle in Rivka's womb foretold the coming struggle over which child would dominate the other. Even more, we find that God had predetermined the outcome; neither Isaac nor Rivkah was involved in the decision.

In verse 23, Rivkah was told that “the older will serve the younger.” In other words, the *physical* firstborn would not receive the usual customary rights of the *bekhor*. Instead, the second would be given that right. The eternal importance of this matter was that the *physical* firstborn, Esau, was not going to be the inheritor of the covenant promises; instead, the *physical* second-born, Jacob, was going to be the inheritor. Jacob was the *bekhor* on a *spiritual* level; he was the firstborn based on divine declaration. These two separate nations, one being Jacob and other Esau, would have enmity for each other. That is part of the meaning of the phrase “the older shall *serve* the younger.”

The physical firstborn of Isaac, Esau, is parallel to Ishmael, the *physical* firstborn of Abraham. The *spiritual* firstborn of Isaac, Jacob, is parallel to Isaac, the *spiritual* firstborn of Abraham and the future carrier of the covenant promises. This is an ongoing principle and pattern of the Reality of Duality: there is a spiritual reality and a physical reality that exist simultaneously.

## ISAAC'S TWINS

The twins were born. The first one to be born was Esau; he was of red or ruddy complexion and very hairy—a lovable little fuzzi-ball. The Hebrew word for “hairy” (as used here in this verse) is *se'ar*. We'll find out later in Genesis that Esau moved away from Jacob and established his nation in the district called Mount Seir. This is a wordplay; Mount Seir (literally meaning “hairy mountain”) got its name from Esau's being born very *se'ar*, or hairy.

During the birth process, Jacob was holding on to Esau's heel; Jacob was trying to keep Esau from being born first.

Now, to better help explain what comes next, we should understand that Rebecca would



not have kept the information Yehoveh gave her about the destinies of her twin sons to herself; that would have been disloyal and disrespectful to her husband. Rather she would have told him posthaste that God declared whichever of the twins came out first was not to be declared *bekhor*, firstborn; rather it was the second to emerge who would have that designation. There was little more important in a family of that era than who would succeed the father in authority over the clan, that successor being the *bekhor*, the firstborn.

Likewise, you can be sure Rebecca informed her twin sons, Esau and Jacob, of God's determination that Jacob, not Esau, would be *bekhor*. How cruel it would have been to wait until their maturity to inform them of this all-important decree, a decree that mother and father were aware of before these children were born. So, it is with this understanding of the family's awareness of the younger, Jacob, being destined to have the birthright above the older, Esau, that we must view what happens next.

## ESAU GIVES AWAY HIS BIRTHRIGHT

As the story unfolds, we find that, as is common within families, parents have their favorites. Isaac preferred Esau. He was apparently impetuous, brave, skillful with a bow, quite macho—things dads typically admire in their sons. Jacob was quieter and introspective, more sensitive—things mothers typically prefer. Notice our parallel once again with Ishmael and Isaac. Ishmael was a favorite of Abraham; Isaac was a favorite with his mother. When Yehoveh told Abraham that it was to be the second-born, Isaac, who would obtain the firstborn position, Abraham cried out to God, “Oh, if only Ishmael could live in your presence!” Abraham determined he wanted Ishmael as the firstborn; Isaac determined he wanted Esau as the firstborn. Neither would get what they wanted.

So the day arrived when Esau came in from a hunt, famished, and saw that Jacob had prepared a pot of lentils, or more literally translated, red

stew. Jacob, apparently never having been entirely comfortable with having the rights of the firstborn assigned to himself, decided he was going to help God out: he would get Esau to openly and finally sell his traditional birthright to Jacob.

The impulsive Esau said “since [he was] about to die” he might as well give his birthright to Jacob, and sealed the deal with an oath. “I’m about to die” is not literal; it was just a saying, something akin to “Who cares?” Of course, since God had long ago settled the issue, in reality Esau had no birthright to sell, for it already belong to Jacob. And Jacob had no need to resort to treachery to obtain the birthright, because the Lord had already assigned it to him: but neither Jacob nor Esau had the faith to accept it as fact.

We’re also given here a small piece of information we will find useful in the chapters ahead: Esau is given a nickname—Edom. *Edom* means “red,” and it not only refers to his ruddy, hairy body features, but also to this infamous incident at the stewpot that just transpired. For future reference, remember that Edom and Esau are the same. The future nation of Edom, so prevalent from here on in the Bible as an ongoing enemy of Israel, will also play a role in end times. The people of Edom, the Edomites, are simply the descendants of Esau.

In verse 34, we’re told that Esau despised his birthright, a very serious biblical condemnation of Esau. I have little doubt that Rivkah told Esau, as she undoubtedly did Jacob, that despite the chronological order of birth, it was Jacob who was to have the firstborn rights. What a hurtful thing for Esau; knowing that, from his point of view, his own mother was telling him, the *bekhor*, that he would not be recognized as the firstborn. How else could he have felt than that his mother was siding with Jacob? This had to have shaped much of Esau’s life, making him somewhat bitter, untrusting, and cynical. His father, Isaac, was not a poor man. To think that Esau had no interest in having all the rights and powers of the firstborn, frankly, doesn’t make any sense. He probably saw his losing the firstborn rights as inevitable,

though grossly unfair, and behaved as though it didn't matter in the first place.

## A DEATH IN THE FAMILY

Does it seem odd that we have a male, Jacob, doing the cooking here? Clearly, the Scriptures say that Jacob cooked the stew. Cooking was a woman's task, particularly when they were camped or living in villages. Certainly, men who were away from home did some cooking for survival, but it was traditional and would have been shameful under normal circumstances for a young man to be cooking. Was Jacob a sissy? Had his mother's favoritism turned him into a mama's boy?

When we understand ancient Hebrew culture, much of which has carried over into modern Hebrew traditions, we can recognize when something out of the ordinary is happening, like this scene with Jacob and Esau. It is not usual that Jacob would have been doing the cooking. It just wasn't done. So, what's going on here? The answer may lie in one of those beautiful Hebrew traditions that is part of every observant Jewish family today; it is a tradition that goes back to the beginning of time and is called "sitting Shiva." It is part of the rites of mourning the dead. The ancient Hebrew sages are near unanimous that the context for what was playing out between Esau and Jacob was that there had been a death in the family. And the one who died was Abraham.

What's the point of the Holy Scripture specifying that this was a red stew, and then identifying it as "lentils" in verse 34? How does it add anything to the context? What difference does it make that the soup was lentil? Lentil stew, or lentil soup, is called the meal of mourning. Lentil soup is a traditional food eaten during the seven-day period of mourning that is called "sitting Shiva." Any good Jew knows that this is indicative of a period of mourning.

Members of the immediate family were not to cook during that seven-day period. Other family members, or friends, were to provide



food for those seven days; additionally, foods preprepared (cooked and preserved before the death of the family member) could be eaten. The definition of who makes up the immediate family is important: one's father and mother, sister and brother, son and daughter, and spouse are immediate family members. Grandchildren are not immediate family members for the purpose of this part of the mourning rites. Rivkah, who normally cooked for the family, would have been prohibited from cooking. Jacob, Abraham's grandchild, was permitted to cook; he was outside that circle of immediate family. Perhaps that's why it was *he* who was cooking the meal of mourning, lentil stew.

So it appears that Abraham had just died and Jacob was preparing the meal of mourning when Esau showed up from the hunt. He didn't return to the surprise that his grandfather Abraham had died; he was well aware before he went out. Rather than be with the family and do his duty to be a mourner and a comforter, to his father in particular, he did what it pleased him to do—hunt game.

It is no coincidence that when Jacob approached Esau with the offer to trade Esau's

birthright for lentil stew, Esau responded with the morbid words: “Look, I’m about to die, what use is my right of the bekhor?” This was, at least in part, graveyard humor done at a most inappropriate time.

Let’s remember, at this point Esau was in his mid to late teens, and *angry*. His words weren’t mature or well thought out; they were impetuous and foolish. Yet it shows us just what he thought about his exalted position as the bekhor, the firstborn. And the answer is, not much.

When we study the rights of the firstborn, which include getting a double portion of the family’s wealth and the right to rule over the clan, it’s easy to forget the *responsibility* that went hand in hand with those rights. Any straight-thinking

parent knows what I’m speaking about. Any executive or manager or leader knows what I’m talking about. Yes, there are rewards and honors that come with the position: but there are duties that, if carried out properly, rise above any amount of reward or personal benefit. Esau knew his grandfather Abraham well and was equally aware of the great and terrible burden he carried. Esau, of course, knew his father, Isaac, well, and the tremendous burden of responsibility for the covenants of God that he carried. Esau wanted no part of it. Without doubt, like many teens, Esau wanted all the perks of power—telling people what to do, nobody telling him what to do, possessing the best place at the table, being wealthy, and so on—but he did not want the responsibilities and duties that went with those perks.

The great sage Rashi says that another lesson of this incident is how a righteous person views life in general versus how a wicked person does the same. Jacob’s view of life was, “What am I here to accomplish? What are my duties and my goals?” This is the righteous view. Esau’s view was “Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we may die.” This is the wicked view. Esau was thinking, after contemplating the death of his grandfather, that he didn’t want to be tied to all the duties of the firstborn and family patriarch when his father, Isaac, died. He just wanted to enjoy life as much as he could, and to get all he could. Responsibility was for suckers.

Jacob chose that very moment to challenge Esau, because no one knows another person better, perhaps, than one twin knows another. Jacob knew that Esau was ready to give up his birthright and all the burdensome duties it came with. The death of his grandfather and the thinking we tend to do about our own lives when someone near to us dies drove him over the edge. The divinely ordained duties that Isaac and Abraham must have talked about incessantly were nothing Esau wanted, but so great was the importance of carrying on with the line of covenant promise that nothing could be put above it.

### WHY LENTILS?

Lentils and eggs were considered foods suitable for mourning. What these two food items have in common is that they are round. The roundness illustrates the circular nature of life, the cycle of being conceived from nothing and returning to nothing—physically speaking, of course. And, it also speaks of one generation dying off, and the next beginning in an unending pattern.

The Bible and the Hebrew thought that comes from it show us that history is circular; it repeats itself. Over and over we see these same patterns that God ordained, established, and wove into the fabric of the universe repeating. Naturally, it is secular humanism and its proud son Darwinian evolutionism that says, “No, no; history is a straight line. It starts from some unknown place in the past, and randomly proceeds to some unknowable future. Every moment of every day is new and there is nothing in the past to compare it to. There are no patterns. Morality evolves and adapts. The old becomes obsolete, and the new becomes pre-eminent. The old becomes replaced by something that destroys the prior pattern and establishes a new one.”

The illustration of the lentil and the egg says otherwise. We humans need physical illustrations of God’s spiritual principles. When we put them aside or think we no longer need them, the result is deception and error.

## THE CHARACTER OF THE TWINS

Much is contained in verse 27 to inform us of the character of each young man: “The boys grew; and Esau became a skillful hunter, an outdoorsman; while Ya’akov was a quiet man who stayed in the tents.”

Only in two places in the Holy Scriptures is a man called a hunter, a *tsayid*. The first man to be labeled as a hunter as a means of identifying his character was Nimrod; the only other is Esau. As the Bible uses it, *tsayid* is a negative term, it really means a stone-cold killer. A guy who kills animals for the love of killing and has little if any conscience in killing a man.

Jacob, on the other hand, is called a “quiet man” in some Bibles, a “plain man” in others,

and a “peaceful man” in still others. The Hebrew word that is being translated is *tam*. While “peaceful” or “plain” is not necessarily incorrect, it misses the point: Jacob and Esau are being contrasted. They are being compared as opposites. *Tam* means blameless, or not having guilt; it is implied that this is blamelessness before God. It is another way of saying “righteous.” The contrast here is about one who loves killing versus one who loves life. One who wanders aimlessly versus one who stays near. One who slaughters the flock versus the one who shepherds the flock.

The last verse sums up this entire episode: “Thus Esau showed how little he valued his birthright.”

## GENESIS 26

We've talked about patterns quite a bit in this series because they are crucial in understanding Scripture. God has created a universe and system of life that emulates Himself, so it is, of course, orderly and not chaotic. Secular humanists know instinctively that if our universe and the system of life on our planet are not chaotic and random, then by definition something caused that order. And, if it has order, who or what created it?

Relatively new theories of physics, which are now the generally accepted theories, have shown that (1) many more dimensions of existence than the four we are familiar with (length, width, height, and time) are a mathematical reality; and (2) our universe and system of life is orderly and not random or chaotic. It is full of patterns and cycles that seem to repeat infinitely. Scientists are faced with the inevitable conclusion that if the universe has been ordered, there must be a central Orderer. Yet the same scientific community that subscribes to these new theories cannot bring themselves to use the term *God*, so they have coined the term "intelligent design" while refusing to discuss just who the Intelligent Designer might be. They would far prefer that it be some sort of space alien than a divine Creator.

However, using the rather detached and neutral terminology of "intelligent design" has not allowed the scientific community to avoid the controversy their findings have caused. A school in Pennsylvania has been teaching its students about the discovery of the intelligent design of the universe in its science classes, along with the obligatory theory of evolution, of course; the result is ongoing court battles over whether public school students can even be told of the intelligent design discoveries.

Keep an eye on these battles and read what you can about them. You will be astounded at the twisted claims and mental gymnastics of those who bring the lawsuits. You will be astounded at the institutions and people you might never have associated with atheism or vehement secular humanism. Even more, you will learn just how much of a minority you (as a believer) are in our nation and our world, and to what extent the spirit of the antichrist now dominates mankind's thinking.

I point this out because most of us have been taught to read and study the Bible using secular humanist methods; we just don't realize it. We have been taught that for every lesson, principle, law, or event in Scripture, we must ask *why*? And we are required to draw our conclusions based on the scientific method; otherwise, we are dishonest or simply ignorant. If there are not good and largely complete answers as to why, the biblical lesson, principle, law, or event is discarded as legend.

The Bible is not a secular humanist document, and it does not present the material in a scientific way. The search for why when studying Scripture can lead us down dead-end trails, in the same way that the field of physics called quantum mechanics has often led scientists down a road to a dead end. The quantum mechanics approach to physics is to try to rationalize chaos, to try to find mathematical formulas able to predict the unpredictable and to explain how randomness can eventually produce order. The theoretical principles of chaos and randomness are also the foundation of atheism and secular humanism. And more than four decades after its introduction, the quantum mechanics approach to the operation of the universe has not proved to be the holy grail of physics as some predicted.

# Observation



# Hypothesis



# Experiment



# Conclusion

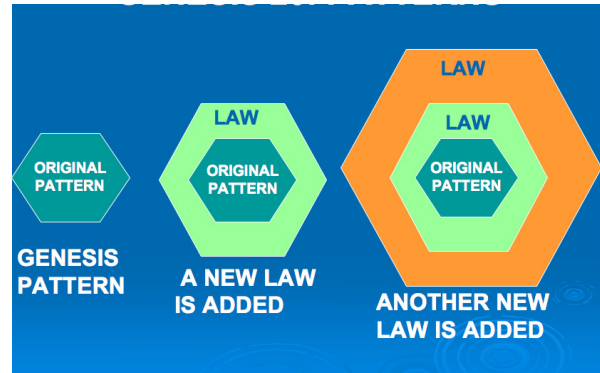
The scientific method, a secular-humanist system

Our universe and life system has patterns because our universe and life system has order; we see patterns because God's principles of order are rock-solid and they never change. They don't get old and they don't deteriorate. This produces repetitions and predictable cycles, which we call biblical repetitions, or God patterns.

In Genesis 26 we'll uncover more patterns and watch history, even at this early date, repeat itself.

**ASSIGNMENT:** Read Genesis 26.

The fickle weather of Canaan had once again plunged the land into a state of hunger such that Isaac was forced to move. Apparently remembering his father Abraham's similar



plight and resulting sojourn into Egypt, Isaac planned to do the same. The well-established trade route between Canaan and Egypt ran directly through the Philistines' land. As verse 1 states, "Yitz'chak went to G'rar, to Avimelekh king of the P'lishtim." The royal city of Gerar was a known "store city"; it was a place where the king resided, so the city had warehouses with food storage facilities. It was common practice throughout the known world in that era to have both emergency and regular food warehouses in the city where the king of that region lived, obviously so the king could keep his eye on them and have first shot at the best food as he wanted it.

This system of store cities and warehouses existed primarily because the taxes every king extracted from his people came, for the most part, in the form of grain or some other kind of produce. Huge amounts of wheat and barley brought in as taxes had to be stored and





Ancient grain warehouses in Egypt

controlled by the king's men, under the king's watchful eye. The result was the need for enormous warehouses and underground silos for safekeeping the king's property.

In Gerar, Yehoveh appeared to Isaac and told him not to go down to Egypt but rather to stay right where he was! In other words, despite what his eyes told him, despite the fact that all his human instincts told him they must go elsewhere or perish from starvation, God told him to stay in the land God had set aside for Abraham and his descendants. God would take him through the trouble, not out of it. How often we choose to do just what Isaac was about to do—cut and run, instead of listening to and trusting God to take us through the hard times and challenges of our lives.

This was no easy decision for Isaac; he was an owner of flocks and herds. He, by now, had an enormous clan to oversee and care for. To choose to stay in an area that was now under a famine was a most serious one; it could mean the end of his clan. One can only imagine the shock and disbelief of his clan members at this decision. This was to be a test of faith in his father's God.

### WHEN DID THIS HAPPEN

The timing of Genesis 26 necessarily occurs before Genesis 25, as illogical as it may seem.

The twins Esau and Jacob had not yet been born to Isaac's wife, Rivkah. We know this because there is no mention of them. Second, the king of the Philistines never would have inquired about Rivkah if he knew she was married, and children would be a dead giveaway that she was married.

### THE LORD APPEARS TO ISAAC

The first words of verse 2 say, "The Lord<sup>101</sup> appeared to him . . .," referring to Isaac. Does this indicate a theophany? Did God make a physical appearance before Isaac?

The Hebrew word used here and normally translated as "appearance" is *va-yerah'*; this word is indicative of divine revelation. Another Hebrew word for a kind of divine intervention is very similar: *va-yomer*. *Va-yomer* invariably refers only to divine speech—words, something audible. *Va-yerah* is most commonly used in the Bible in reference to the patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It is indicative of a more direct and intense receiving of communication from God. It is a communication with the Lord that is not questioned. Visions, another form of communication with Yehoveh, are often questioned; was it God or just a dream? Do I understand correctly what He said? What does it all mean? The word form *va-yerah'*, on the other hand, indicates an unquestionable, unmistakable contact with God that includes a crystal clear message that could, but does not necessarily, include a visual experience. So the word *appearance* should not be taken to mean that the Lord, in some way, made Himself visible; it's more of an expression of nearness of a human to God's presence.

#### DEFINITIONS

*va-yerah*—an unmistakable communication with God that could (but isn't necessarily) a visible one

*va-yomer*—a message in the form of divine speech only

## WHO WAS ABIMELECH?

The Abimelech we see here is not the same Abimelech that Abraham encountered. *Abimelech* means “father-king,” or “my father the king.” It is an epithet and a title. It was probably a name that many Philistine kings chose for themselves. We shouldn’t have to wonder about this: modern Catholic popes choose the names of past popes for themselves regularly. Kings of England and France do the same thing: Henry VIII was called that because there were seven royal Henrys before him. The same idea applies here.

## GOD RENEWS HIS PROMISES

Beginning in verse 3, God renewed to Isaac the covenant promises He had made with Abraham. Let us never forget: all the Bible characters were real human beings. Isaac would naturally wonder over extended periods of time if God was still with him. He’d look at his circumstances, as we all do, and question whether he fully understood what God had told him, because few of those covenant promises seemed to be coming to pass. The one promise that was so valuable to a clan in that era—land—certainly hadn’t materialized. Isaac needed the reaffirmation from the Lord, so he got it.

We must not quickly skip by what is said toward the end of verse 4, though it seems we have heard it before. In fact, the form of the promise “so that all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by your heirs” adds a small nuance from the earlier promise that “all the nations of the earth will be blessed by you.” The idea is that all humanity will have their hopes and well-being organically connected to Israel (the name for Abraham’s descendants). General mankind’s fate is dependent on Israel’s fate and our relationship with them.

Even though we are far enough along in the process of God’s plan of redemption that we have a greater picture and understanding than those who came before us as to how this

is all playing out, much of it is still to come and therefore much is still a mystery. When we get to Genesis 48; 49; and 50, more information is added that both sheds light and adds to the mystery of just how all the nations of the earth will be blessed by Abraham’s descendants. Remember, the word *nations*, in Bible-speak, refers more to people than to territory. Don’t necessarily equate the words *nation* and *country*. In our modern vocabulary, we use those words interchangeably, but that is not the case in the Bible. *Nations*, for the most part, indicates definable groups of people along with their governments and their leaders. It does not necessarily indicate a definable territory with boundaries.

## ISAAC’S OBEDIENCE AND DISOBEDIENCE

Isaac obeyed; like his father, Abraham, he listened to God and did what he was told to do. But Isaac carried in him a trait familiar to his father: fear. In the midst of famine, and residing with a people he didn’t particularly trust, he felt insecure. As a result, Isaac fell into *another* familiar family trait—a problem with being truthful, especially when it came to his wife. No doubt Isaac had heard the tales of his father Abraham’s trip into Egypt, so he mimicked Abraham’s behavior by telling the city folk of G’rar that Rivkah was his sister. At least with Abraham there was an element of truth to that claim!

Problems arose when, one day, Abimelech looked out his window and spotted Isaac caressing his lovely wife, Rebecca. Having heard the scuttlebutt that Rivkah was Isaac’s sister, Abimelech figured out the deceit because what he witnessed said otherwise, so he confronted Isaac. Isaac admitted his lie, and the furious Abimelech warned his people that nobody was to touch her or they’d die. A lesson he had likely learned from *his* father.

Although there are many obvious patterns from Abraham’s experience here, the outcomes are quite different. Abraham encountered famine,



determined to go to Egypt to ride it out, and did so. Isaac encountered famine, determined to go to Egypt to ride it out, but did not go.

The king of the Philistines spotted Abraham's wife, Sarah, was told she was Abraham's sister, and more or less kidnapped her for his harem. The king of the Philistines spotted Isaac's wife, Rivkah, was told she was his sister, but realized that she obviously was not and so did not take her. In fact, he warned his people against doing anything to Rivkah.

### ISAAC'S FRUITFUL CROPS

The extended famine caused Isaac to decide to plant crops to supplement, and likely to feed, his herds, flocks, and family. Verse 12 tells us, "Yitz'chak planted crops in that land and reaped that year a hundred times as much as he had sowed. ADONAI had blessed him." Ancient historical records prove the truth of this. Keepers of flocks and herds would plant the equivalent of a large garden so as to have grain and herbs for their families. There is record of shepherds growing crops to supplement their food supply in hard times, so this act of Isaac doing so is completely consistent with both his culture and profession; in no way does planting crops indicate an intent to settle down and stay in a spot permanently.

God blessed Isaac for trusting Him to stay in Canaan by causing the crops to produce one

hundred times what was sowed. In that day, planting methods were primitive and the yield of the seed was small; generally, something on the order of twenty-five times the amount of seed sown became harvestable. A great year was fifty times, and seventy-five was extraordinary. A one-hundred-times yield was only possible supernaturally. We're told in verse 13 that Isaac's wealth kept compounding, and the local Philistines became bitterly jealous. From Abimelech's instructions to Isaac, we also understand that there was fear coupled with that jealousy on the part of the Philistine people of both Isaac's God and of the already sizable number of people that formed Isaac's clan. Isaac was a threat as the Philistines saw it.

This is a scenario that will be played out time and time again with the Israelites, and then the Jews, as God's blessing upon them with plentiful food, longevity, fertility, and wealth also served as a cause for envy and persecution by whatever peoples they lived among. The P'lishtim, the Philistines, showed their anger and frustration by filling in the water wells that were so vital to Isaac's clan's well-being. Abraham had dug these wells years earlier.

Eventually, Isaac's clan had grown so large and powerful that they represented a threat to the Philistines and Abimelech asked them to leave his land. This was the weaker asking the stronger to leave. Isaac could have refused, and a war might have resulted with Isaac as the likely winner. Abimelech, knowing that he could not have defeated Isaac, would have made some type of power- and wealth-sharing pact with Isaac. Isaac would have anticipated this, but he chose to comply, gathered his clan, and left, moving to the bank of the G'rar River.<sup>102</sup> There he began unclogging some of the water wells that had been filled with dirt by the Philistines. When the water began flowing again, the Philistines claimed it was their water, and the conflict started anew. So Isaac took his tribe and moved farther away to Be'er-Sheva. Abimelech, an able politician, knew it was wise to try to mend fences with this growing clan

#### THE PHILISTINES KNEW YAHWEH'S NAME

It is quite interesting that whenever this king of the Philistines made reference to Isaac's God, he called Him by name. The original Hebrew doesn't have Abimelech referring to Isaac's God as "Lord," as most of our Bibles do; rather, each time *YHWH* is present. Abimelech obviously had familiarity with Isaac's God and had fear and respect for Him. In fact, it was the fear of the God of the Hebrews that drove Abimelech's decisions in the way he dealt with Isaac and his clan.



that could, if it wished, come back and overrun his land. He renewed the pact that his father had made so many years earlier with Abraham.

*Beer-Sheva* means “well of the seven.” It was a place well known to Isaac, because it was where Abraham moved after Isaac had his near-death experience on the altar at Mount Moriah. Isaac was simply going back to a place of comfortable familiarity. This was little more than an oasis. There was no city there. It would be far into the future before a city was established at that spot, and the city’s name was taken from the ancient name Abraham had given it.

### GOD APPEARS TO ISAAC AGAIN

Beginning in verse 23, after Isaac took his large clan to Be’er-Sheva, God again came to Isaac. The text says YHWH “appeared” to Isaac, and it uses the same Hebrew word *va-yera’* that is common in describing many of the patriarchs’ communications with the Lord. Isaac had just come through a pretty troubling time. He may have felt like he failed because he left an area of land God said would go to Abraham’s descendants without putting up a fight. Yehoveh came to Isaac as a comforter; He said, “Fear not.” Why “fear not”? Because Isaac was fearful.

### ABIMELECH VISITS ISAAC

Emulating his father, Isaac built an altar, sacrificed to Yehoveh, and had his men start digging a new well; something he was sure to need. During the process of digging the well, Abimelech showed up along with his chief of staff, Ahuzzath, and the general of his army, Phicol. Isaac was annoyed. His statement to Abimelech was something on the order of, “What now?! I did everything you asked in order to maintain peace between us, and here you are again.”

But Abimelech did not come to make trouble; he was coming with his hat in hand. He wanted a peace treaty with Isaac. Isaac was setting up shop right on the border of Abimelech’s influence. He felt he had pushed Isaac as far away as he could, but he still felt insecure. I suspect that Isaac knew why Abimelech was there, simply by who came with him. If Abimelech had been there to make war, he would not have had his civilian chief of staff with him. No, this was the usual entourage necessary for two nations to make a pact.

The nature of the pact is spelled out in verses 28–30: they would live side by side peaceably. The pact was concluded in the usual manner, with a ceremonial meal and some oaths in the name of the gods/God each worshipped. Abimelech and his men departed. The same day, the men who were digging the well struck water. This was always interpreted as a good sign, a sign of blessing, and that was exactly as God intended it.

Peace, prosperity, and room to grow were now Isaac’s. Life was good, but trouble was brewing. His unwise, petulant son Esau did the very thing Isaac and Rebecca most dreaded: he took two Hittite women as his wives. God knew what He was doing when, forty years earlier, He assigned the firstborn birthright to Esau’s twin brother, Jacob, while they both were yet in their mother’s womb.

## GENESIS 27

ASSIGNMENT: Read Genesis 27.

The great nineteenth-century Jewish Christian scholar Alfred Edersheim said:

*If there is any point on which we should anxiously be on our guard, it is that of “tempting God.” We do so tempt the Lord when, listening to our own inclinations, we put once more to question that which He has already clearly settled. Where God has decided, never let us doubt, nor lag behind.*

How often have we all suffered from clearly seeing God’s requirement of us but asking Him for another and different decision that better suits our personal agenda or our view of what ought to be. This is what Isaac did, and it created nothing but trouble.

### ISAAC PLANS TO GIVE ESAU HIS BLESSING

Genesis 27 begins with the old, blind, and sickly Isaac telling Esau to go hunt for some meat as part of a commemorative meal that would be part and parcel with the blessing Isaac wanted to bestow upon Esau. This, of course, was not what God had told Isaac, through his wife Rebecca, was to occur. Had Isaac simply decided to ignore what his wife had told him all those years ago, perhaps skeptical of it? Had he formed such a bond with Esau that he could not bear the thought of taking away this all-important blessing from his beloved son, knowing it would humiliate and crush him? Or did he think that perhaps God would allow him to simply go his own way, rebel, and bless Esau

anyway? After all, isn’t God a God of love and mercy? Surely God wouldn’t want to make anybody feel bad about themselves, would He?

### BIRTHRIGHT VERSUS BLESSING

After several years of study, and reading the wonderful works of some of the great Hebrew sages of old, my conclusion on this issue has changed over time. It is interesting, is it not, that the matter of the birthright—that is, who would be *bebkor*, the firstborn—is really never the issue in this narrative. Some of you may be scratching your heads, thinking, *Then what is this all about? Or better yet, My Bible seems to make this all about the birthright!* Well, we’ll deal with that as we go, but let me show you something that might ease your minds just a bit:

*Esau said, “His name, Ya’akov [he supplants], really suits him—because he has supplanted me these two times: he took away my birthright, and here, now he has taken away my blessing!” Then he asked, “Haven’t you saved a blessing for me?” (Gen. 27:36, emphasis mine)*

By this time, the issue of the birthright had apparently already been resolved. Reluctantly, Isaac had accepted it at some point before this scene, and Esau was most aware that was the case.

Birthright and blessings aren’t necessarily connected. The matter of the birthright, for the most part, was settled automatically at the birth of the first male child. Certainly, if that child should die, then it muddied the waters, but invariably the second male child would gain the right his deceased brother held, and so on. There would be no ceremony or ritual attached; this idea of succession was so thoroughly imbedded

in both the law and tradition of that era that ceremony was unnecessary. However, the traditional blessings bestowed upon the family near the end of the patriarch's<sup>103</sup> life meant something else. It wasn't so much that at the end of the patriarch's life everyone waited breathlessly to see who would be the new family leader (who would be designated the *bekhor*). It was more like the way that we stereotypically picture greedy family members sitting in a circle, staring in great anticipation at a lawyer as he prepares to read the will of a deceased family patriarch—like children staring at the gifts under a Christmas tree, hoping but not at all certain of what awaits them.



This occurred because the firstborn didn't get *everything*, just the largest portion; the Bible calls it the double portion. Along with that double portion, he got the right of leadership over the clan. What amounted to a double portion undoubtedly varied depending on the situation. *Double* didn't necessarily mean that the firstborn son received precisely double what all his brothers received. This didn't necessarily mean that an exact inventory of wealth was done to make sure each got exactly their proper share. It could, and probably did, happen that way in later eras. More often, these portions were approximates; a double portion could have been anything from a little bit more than the others' to practically everything of value. It was all up to Dad.

So this scene with Isaac and Esau was about the *blessing*, not a final decision about who was *bekhor*. The blessing in this case was the division

of Isaac's wealth. It is typical for inheriting children to generally feel that if one gets more than the others that means one was more loved than the others. Or if one gets less than the others, then it means he or she is less valued than the others.

We're told in verse 1 that Isaac was very old when he decided to perform the blessing. He was nearly blind as well. Was he near death? He probably thought so, though it didn't prove to be the case. He was 137 years old at this time. Stop and think for a minute what that infers as to the ages of Jacob and Esau. They were born, we're told, when Isaac was about sixty. So, these "boys" were in their mid- to late seventies! That sure destroys the wonderful mental pictures we have of a couple of virile young men being led around by their sly mother, or of an athletic Esau out killing game for this blessing at a moment's notice! It also indicates that the time that had passed since Esau sold his blessing to Jacob for a bowl of lentil stew was probably more than half of a century!

## RIVKAH'S PLAN

Rebecca, the mother of these twin boys, overheard Isaac's instructions to the obviously delighted Esau, and she conspired to overturn Isaac's intentions. Esau was continuing to prove his unfitness to carry on the divine line that God had begun with Abraham. Rebecca was likely thinking that if her doddering old husband refused to carry out God's will, she would, no matter what it took—including deception. After all, doesn't the end, as ordained by God, justify whatever means it took to achieve it? Wouldn't God rather have His plan accomplished, even if wrong was done to make it happen? This must be one of the most difficult parts of a believer's walk with God: putting our full trust in Him to accomplish His will, even if at the moment all of our intellect and senses and logic and sense of fairness and life experience tell us it can't happen within the circumstances at hand so we're going to have to give it a nudge, our way.

Rebecca told Jacob what was happening in his father's tent, and he joined with her plan: Jacob would impersonate Esau. Jacob was a bit reluctant, not because he thought what they were doing might be wrong, but because they might be discovered and have to bear the consequences. Going so far as to put on Esau's clothing, even attaching goatskins to his arms and neck to imitate Esau's naturally hairy body, Jacob went into his father's tent. Skeptical at first, Isaac's senses told him something might not be quite right. But Isaac was eventually convinced that this was indeed Esau before him, so he pronounced the blessing upon Jacob. The Hebrew word used here for blessing is *berakhah*, and it is a very common Hebrew word we'll find throughout the OT.

### ISAAC'S BLESSING

Let's read now the words of the *berakhah*, the blessing that Isaac pronounced upon Jacob while thinking he was Esau:

*So may God give you dew from heaven, the richness of the earth, and grain and wine in abundance. May peoples serve you and nations bow down to you. May you be lord over your kinsmen, let your mother's descendants bow down to you. Cursed be everyone who curses you, and blessed be everyone who blesses you! (Gen. 27:28–29)*

Without doubt, this blessing included certain words and terms that rightly confer blessing on the *bekhor*; for instance, "be a master over your brothers." So while Isaac was not arguing over the technical aspect of who was designated as firstborn, he was using his prerogative to decide exactly who got what. It was more or less his intention to give Esau much of what the *bekhor* should have traditionally received.

A modern example of this occurred after World War II, when President Truman relieved General MacArthur of his command. General MacArthur didn't stop being a five-star general, nor a man of great power and position in the military. President Truman just made it so that

MacArthur had nothing and no one to exercise his power over. Isaac didn't say that Jacob wasn't the firstborn, he just tried to take most of the rights that usually go to the firstborn away from Jacob and give them to Esau.

It seems that most times the *berakhah*, the blessing, is pronounced, it is more or less making official that which was, by tradition, long ago settled. For instance, a rich man sets up a will, signs a power of attorney that the will is *never* to be changed under any circumstances by anyone including himself, and then inconveniently lives another ten years. The matters have all been decided and written in stone; how much each inheritor is to receive is predetermined and not changeable, but nothing takes effect until he dies and the will is read. This blessing, this *berakhah*, is similar to the reading of the will, in that although things have long been decided, no actual transfer of wealth or authority has yet taken place.

### JACOB'S SUCCESSFUL DECEPTION

Jacob received the blessing God intended for him, he held on to the birthright God told his mother he'd have, and he received the authority to lead the clan. But Jacob probably did not feel any of the inner joy or sense of humility before God that should have been present after being anointed as the bearer of the divinely established line of covenant promise that was so important to the future of all mankind. Jacob did wrong in obtaining it; his deception was sin against God, and his conscience probably troubled him for the rest of his life. It's amazing: Jacob went through all these deceptions only to receive that which *never* could have been denied him anyway because the Lord had already determined it. All Jacob did was taint that which could have been pure.

### ESAU RETURNS

But then the other shoe dropped: Esau arrived back from his successful hunt, prepared the meat, and went into his father's tent ready and

eager to receive his inheritance. A surprised Isaac knew immediately that he'd been duped, and although he felt for Esau, there was nothing that could be done for a blessing of this sort. Once given, it was not reversible for any reason. Esau was distraught and begged for some type of blessing. Remember the words of verse 36, in which Esau spoke of *two* things that had been taken from him: his birthright and his blessings. He spoke of the firstborn birthright loss as a thing of the past, but the loss of the blessing meant for him was a thing happening “now.” Esau did not go into the tent expecting to be named the bekhkor. Esau simply wanted lots of wealth and power. He didn't want the hassles and burdens associated with being the bekhkor, he just wanted the material rewards that the bekhkor was entitled to.

Isaac did bless Esau; however, he was limited in what he could offer him. The blessing Isaac gives him takes place in verses 39–40. These verses have been scrutinized by scholars for many years, and I'd like you to pay very close attention to something that has led followers of Yehoveh, both Jewish and Christian, into trouble time and again. It is that we attempt to resolve what seems like a contradiction in the Bible, but it winds up becoming dubious doctrine and tradition. That doctrine and tradition lead us down pathways that blind us to scriptural truth.

### THE MISTRANSLATION OF GENESIS 27:39

Tradition renders verse 39 as, “Your home will be the richness of the earth and the dew of heaven from above.” Sometimes it will say “fatness” instead of “richness.” Yet, literally the verse reads, “Behold, *away* from the richness of the earth and *away* from the dew of heaven will be your home.” Why the obvious difference? Why would even the Hebrews read over the “away” part and rationalize it out of existence? Why would Gentile Christians follow suit? There does not seem to be a clear-cut reason that one could hang his hat on, and there certainly

seems to be no conspiracy involved. The NASB changed decades ago to reflect this literal translation of “away from.” Alfred Edersheim stated more than one hundred years ago that this verse had been mistranslated when it showed Esau going to a fertile and lovely place complete with ample rains.

There seems to be a long-standing effort to tie Isaac's blessing on Esau in verse 39 to his blessing on Jacob in verse 28, because they are very similar. It was supposedly a blessing Isaac gave to Esau in an attempt to inject fairness and to make up for the injustice done to Esau by Jacob. But taking one look at the original Hebrew makes that purpose unlikely, as entirely different words are used to describe the nature of the blessing to Jacob and the nature of the blessing to Esau.

In verse 28 the Hebrew shows God, through Isaac, actively giving richness of land to Jacob, but in verse 39 it shows in the Hebrew that Isaac told Esau he would be *held away* from richness of land. When one realizes that Edom, the land of Esau, is located at the south end of the Dead Sea, stretching a short distance into the Arabian Peninsula, which was throughout all Bible times an arid and inhospitable land, it is puzzling why this verse was *ever* translated incorrectly, showing Esau being blessed to live in a lovely fertile place.

One begins to suspect that long ago there was sympathy for Esau and his plight, and indeed the ancient rabbis and scribes seem to have felt sorry for Esau to varying degrees. When we step back and think about this whole episode, can't we find good reason for compassion for Esau? After all, his destiny seemed to have been set even before his birth. Jacob was hardly on the up-and-up in this whole matter; plus, it is certain that Esau's mother openly favored and sided with Jacob. Was it God's intention to curse Esau or merely to not bless him with all the rights of the firstborn? These are the questions the ancient scribes and sages wrestled with.

Rashi, a highly regarded Hebrew sage who was greatly influential on modern Judaism, lived

during the time of the First Crusade, in the eleventh century AD. He had much to say about Esau, and in an obvious attempt to validate the earlier sages' sympathetic views on Esau, Rashi wrote that he saw Esau as a "type." He equated Esau to Italy and Rome of Rashi's day, and Jacob to Israel and Jerusalem. That makes sense for his day and time, because "the church" was the Roman Catholic Church based in Rome, Italy. The Catholic Church had, for centuries, been the primary persecutor of the Jewish people. During the First Crusade, which Rashi personally witnessed, thousands upon thousands of Jews were forcibly converted to Christianity by the Crusaders, many more thousands were martyred simply for being Jews, and thousands were put to the sword when the Crusaders reached Jerusalem. Rashi went so far as to explain that the blessing we see in Genesis 27:39 that speaks of the fatness and the richness of the land refers to the wonderfully rich volcanic soils of Italy and Rome. Further, because it was well understood by all the sages that Esau was destined to become an enemy of Israel, Esau represented the Roman Catholic Church, or as he saw it in those days, simply "the church."

This traditional Hebrew view of Esau shows both sympathy at his plight as well as acknowledgement of his destiny as an enemy of Israel;



it shows up in an attempt to mush the words of verse 39 around to indicate that Esau at least received some favor from God, through his father, Isaac. But history indicates that the reality is quite different.

There have been more recent attempts to rationalize the rather obvious mistranslation of verse 39 by saying that "fatness" is really just another way of saying "oily"—in other words, fat equates to oil. This explains how it is that the Bible says Esau, who would found a territory called Edom, was destined to live in a place of richness, which, by definition, would lead him to prosperity, when in fact Edom has always been a desert wasteland where eking out a living was tough. By changing the word *fatness* to *oiliness*, voilà!, we see how rich the Arab sheiks are because of their oil reserves, and this fixes the whole problem. Wrong! Even if that horribly strained argument of changing "fat" to "oil" was workable, which it isn't because in the Hebrew language fat is not oil, the part of the Arabian Peninsula that was included in the territory of Edom has no oil. The southern part of Jordan is where most of Edom used to be, and Jordan has practically no oil at all. South of Jordan, where the remainder of Edom was located, is nowhere near the Saudi Arabian oil fields. The phrase "fat of the earth" is just another standard and easily recognized Hebrew expression; it means "the finest fruits and produce from the earth."

### A CORRECT UNDERSTANDING OF ISAAC'S BLESSING ON ESAU

When one correctly translates the first part of Esau's blessing—that Esau and his descendants will be held away from fertile lands—the final part of it and Esau's response make a lot more sense. His blessing more resembled a curse. Had Esau been happily blessed, and thereby destined that he would reside in a wonderful place, living off the richness of the land, would he have been so determined to kill his twin brother, Jacob? It's pretty hard to imagine. But being cursed to reside away from the fat of the land, cursed

to live in a desolate place where it didn't often rain, one could see why he would burn with homicidal anger and envy toward his conniving brother. This curse to be separated from rich lands, combined with the blessings given to Jacob, served to set Esau<sup>104</sup> against Jacob<sup>105</sup> for all time. That is certainly what we have seen played out in history.

Even in the time of Jesus, some eighteen hundred years after this blessing of Isaac upon his twin sons, the hated King Herod was himself a result of this curse on Esau: for at the time of Jesus, the name of the land of Edom was known in the Greek language as Idumea. Edom was King Herod's people, heritage, and homeland. That evil and bloodthirsty King Herod, the King Herod who sold out to Rome and became their puppet, was a descendant of Esau.

The Bible shows that Esau mixed with the descendants of another group of people who would have had very good reason, at least in their minds, for hating Israel eternally—the descendants of Ishmael. Much, though by no means all, of the Arab world carries with them the genes of Esau. In particular, a large segment of the Turkish population is related to Esau, as are most Syrians and the Kurdish people of Iraq. The Ottoman Empire, which ruled the Middle East for many centuries from about AD 1300 to just after World War I, was a dominant tribe in the nation of Turkey and they were descendants of Esau. Of course, these Turks are Muslim, and we know from Bible prophecy that the Turks are going to play a primary role in the events of Revelation as enemies of Israel.

The majority of Muslims in the world are related to Esau, even the ones in Afghanistan. This enmity that occurred between the twin brothers Jacob and Esau almost four thousand years ago has everything to do with the condition of the world now, what led up to our current situation, and how it will all play out leading up to, and through, the Great Tribulation.

## ESAU WOULD LIVE “BY THE SWORD”

Violence and pillaging would be Esau's primary way of gaining wealth and prosperity. As we have seen on a number of occasions, these prophetic blessings have more effect on the person's future descendants than on the person who originally received the blessing. This is what we find to be true as we follow the progress of Esau's line as well. Esau's descendants didn't become shepherds; they became conquerors and bands of robbers who descended on caravans that passed through their lands. War was their way of life, and war is at the heart of their current religion, Islam.

## ESAU WOULD “SERVE HIS BROTHER” BUT WOULD “BREAK THE YOKE FROM HIS NECK”

King David was the first descendant of Jacob to rule over the descendants of Esau, as prophesied in the blessing of Isaac. Edom wore the yoke of Israeli domination on their neck from about 1000 BC to about 735 BC, a longer period of time than the United States has been a nation. It was King Ahaz of Judah who lost control of the Edomite nation, and not since then have the descendants of Esau admitted to being under the control of an Israelite. This helps to explain the determination of the so-called Palestinians today to be free of any control of the reborn nation of Israel—most Palestinians recognize that they are connected with Esau.

## RIVKAH TRIES TO SAVE JACOB

At the end of this chapter, Rebecca insisted that Jacob leave, immediately, to escape Esau's wrath. She told him he should go back up north to Mesopotamia, to her family—specifically, to her brother Laban's home. She approached



Isaac with this idea and convinced him it was a prudent course of action, not by suggesting to Isaac that Esau might kill Jacob, but rather by appealing to Isaac's hatred of the pagan tribes that surrounded them. Esau had, some time earlier, married two Canaanite women, Hittites to be specific, and this tormented Isaac and Rivkah. Rivkah told Isaac they needed to send Jacob away lest he did the same thing, and he most certainly agreed. Remember, though, this was not a couple of parents sending their wide-eyed child off to fend for himself: Jacob was in his seventies at this time.



Jacob was sent to his mother's family in Haran.

## GENESIS 28

ASSIGNMENT: Read Genesis 28.

Isaac, having agreed with Rebecca that the last thing the family needed was more Canaanite women added to the clan through marriage, instructed Jacob to take a wife from his mother's family in Mesopotamia. Let me remind you once again that the term *enmeshed family* doesn't go nearly far enough in explaining the societal structure of that era; Isaac was demanding this of a son who was in his late seventies.

### ISAAC'S BLESSING UPON JACOB

Isaac blessed Jacob before he departed:

*May El Shaddai bless you, make you fruitful and increase your descendants, until they become a whole assembly of peoples. And may he give you the blessing which he gave Abraham, you and your descendants with you, so that you will possess the land you will travel through, the land God gave to Abraham. (Gen. 28:3–4)*

Let's not hurry by this blessing. If God has shown me one thing about the OT, it's that you always want to look closely when a blessing or curse is pronounced. We tend to read them as little more than quaint, sometimes puzzling sayings of a long-extinct culture, but they are always prophetic. We will eventually find a link to each blessing or curse in later parts of the OT, or sometimes in the NT.

Back in Genesis 27:27–29, we saw the blessing Isaac gave to Jacob, the blessing Esau assumed he had been cheated out of. What we notice if we look closely is that it contained only some of the elements of the covenant promise

that God had originally made to Abraham, which was handed off to Isaac in its entirety. Why? Because Isaac was in the middle of a real battle in his faith. We can safely assume that Isaac was not entirely convinced that the one he gave the blessing to was Esau (which, of course, it was not) and that he wasn't exactly enamored with the character of either of his twin sons. So, either he gave the blessing halfheartedly because he was unconvinced his son would actually carry it forward, or he was withholding part of it until he sensed the time was right.

### THE MEANING OF *GOY*

Many years earlier, when Abraham was given the covenant promise by God, one of the elements of the covenant was that Abraham would be the father of a great nation. If you look back at Genesis 12:2, perhaps you will remember that the Hebrew word used for "nation" was *goy*. When *goy* was used it usually meant "Gentile nations." However, let me parse that just a little bit more: In Abraham's time, taking the word *goy* to mean strictly non-Hebrew nations would have had no meaning, because until Isaac was born there was no distinction between Hebrew and non-Hebrew nations produced by Abraham. That is, though Abraham was called the first Hebrew, it was upon the birth of his sons Ishmael and Isaac that the first fork in the road, the differentiation between Hebrew and non-Hebrew offspring, actually occurred—Isaac being the Hebrew, and Ishmael and his other sons and daughters the non-Hebrews. So, as *goy* is used in Genesis 12:2, in the earliest development of the Hebrew people, it referred to both Hebrew and non-Hebrew nations: nations at large without regard to being Hebrew or non-Hebrew.

Returning to Genesis 28:3, we see what appears to be the same blessing that God gave to Abraham, and Abraham gave to Isaac, and is now being transferred by Isaac to Jacob; but there is an important difference. Where most Bibles say that Isaac told Jacob that he might become a “company of people” or “company of nations,” the Hebrew for “company of people” or “company of nations” is *kahal ammim*. This is entirely different from what God promised to Abraham and what was promised to Isaac; they were promised that they would produce *goy*, a mixture of nations. *Kahal ammim*, in its most literal translation, is used in Hebrew as the *opposite* of what God told Abraham. Literally, *kahal ammim* means a “holy convocation of fellow countrymen.” Put in other words, it is an assembly of people for holy purposes, consisting of people from the same tribe or groups of tribes.

This is significant because Jacob, soon to be renamed Israel, would be the first in the line of covenant promise to produce *only* Hebrews. He would produce only nations of Hebrew people, only people who would become called, by the time of Moses, “His [God’s] precious treasure.”

In summary, Abraham produced both Hebrew and non-Hebrew offspring (just as God promised him in Genesis 12:2). Isaac was the Hebrew produced by Abraham. Isaac also went on to produce Hebrew and non-Hebrew people. Jacob was the Hebrew that Isaac produced. But Jacob produced only Hebrews, all the tribes of Israel, which is exactly what the blessing of *kahal ammim*, a holy convocation of fellow countrymen, tells us.

### ESAU’S THIRD WIFE

In verse 6, Esau observed that Isaac sent Jacob to Mesopotamia to get a wife because his father detested Canaanite women. Poor Esau; he’s already taken two Canaanite wives, which had greatly displeased his father, and then in a misguided attempt to make amends, he went to his father’s brother’s family, his uncle Ishmael, the son Abraham had sent away, where Esau took

an Ishmaelite woman as his third wife. What a knucklehead! Despite the fact that this event is told very matter-of-factly, its future effect is beyond calculation. An alliance through inter-marriage is formed that bonds the two dispossessed firstborns, rejected by Yehoveh as possible heirs to the covenant line of promise, Ishmael and Esau, into what will rather quickly turn into a permanent anti-Israel group of nations. It is the alliance and mixing of the gene pool of Ishmael and Esau that forms the vast bulk of Islam in the world today, and the entire bulk of Arabs. These few words in verse 9 radically altered the course of history and set into motion the circumstances that will bring about the Antichrist and the end of history as we know it.

### JACOB’S VISION

Jacob left Beer-sheba and had traveled about forty miles when he stopped two or three days later for a night’s rest at an anonymous and very rocky place. It is here in the Torah that we find Jacob making a separate identity for himself, one that allows him to become the third and last patriarch. It was necessary for him to leave his land and his father, mother, and siblings in order for God to work with him, just as it was with his grandfather Abraham. Jacob had a dream, a vision actually, and in it, he was given a glimpse of the heavenly spirit world. He saw angels, *malach Elohim* in Hebrew, going back and forth from heaven to earth, receiving their instructions from God in heaven and then going forth to do His will on earth.

God Himself gave Jacob the promise of the land and of many descendants. He told Jacob that these descendants would bless all the families of the earth. He also told Jacob not to worry, because God would be with him wherever he went, and He would bring him back to this land because He had promised the land to Jacob and his descendants forever. It will happen just as He promised. In verse 13 most Bibles say *God* or *Lord*, but the original Hebrew is Yahweh, God’s

personal name. This was God the Father speaking to Jacob, and Jacob was quite aware of that fact.

The entire tone of this episode is one of surprise; first because Jacob had no clue that God would come to him in such a manner, and second because Jacob was likely feeling pretty defeated right about then. This was no happy trip to Mesopotamia he was on; he was running for his life. He was leaving the scene of a disaster of his own making; he had deceived his father and his brother to obtain a blessing and had to walk away empty-handed just to survive. This blessing represented the official transfer of the covenant promise from Isaac to Jacob. Jacob had been blessed a few days earlier by his father, but only at this point did Yehoveh validate those blessings.

## GOD'S RESIDENCE

Since the beginning of our Torah study in Genesis 1, we have watched God transfer His place of residence from heaven to earth, the Garden of Eden, and back again. Let's not too quickly pass this "ladder" (or the better translation, "stairway") between heaven and earth, for this is another biblical "type" of what is to come.

This stairway represented the connection between man and God that was currently broken. In the beginning, man could come directly to God because God was present with man. But rebellion and sin broke that connection, and God removed Himself back to heaven. Yet, for those who trust, there is the ladder, the stairway, by which God sends His ministering angels to do His work on earth. Later, another connection between heaven and earth would come—the wilderness tabernacle. And still further into the future the real ladder would come, the One who would reconnect God with man—Yeshua. Might you think that's just allegory or a nice story? Listen to what Jesus Himself says in John 1:51: "Yes indeed! I tell you that you will see heaven opened and the angels of God going up and coming down on the Son of Man!"

If we fail to thoroughly study the Torah, we miss so much. For without first seeing what was happening with Jacob here in Genesis, how in the world are we to fully understand this statement made by Jesus eighteen hundred years later? Yet once we know, it's an easy link to make. For Jacob, this was current reality *and* prophecy. For us, this is not only reality, it is prophecy *fulfilled*. Yeshua is our ladder, the only ladder that reconnects us with God. It's upon Him that the angels ascend and descend today.

## JACOB'S RESPONSE

Jacob was truly awestruck by what he was shown. He called the place "house of God," or more familiarly Beth-el (*beth*, house; *el*, God).<sup>106</sup> Watch for the use of the word *El* occurring before the exodus from Egypt. Until God gave Moses His personal name at Mount Sinai, God was most often known as El Shaddai, with emphasis on *El*. After Mount Sinai, we saw the use of the word *El* start to diminish, as it was slowly replaced by the word *Yehoveh*.

Jacob then anointed the stone that he had laid his head on to sleep during his vision. We see just how old the concept of anointing with



oil is, for this was taking place around 1800 BC. The exact meaning this held for Jacob is not clear, but obviously it marked the significance of his encounter with God. It was probably meant to establish a new covenant bond between Jacob and Yehoveh, one that involved a vow, because it was unknown in that time to use a rock as a memorial marker after anointing it with oil.<sup>107</sup> Anointing with oil was a rather widespread practice in this era, and it often marked the making of an agreement, not unlike the more extensive covenant of salt that involved animal sacrifice. Marking boundaries and creating memorial markers using a stone (called standing stones) was also common, but they weren't anointed with oil.

Yet I think Jacob's experience goes beyond that. It is possible that there is a link between this and Messiah, because *Messiah* means, in Hebrew, "the anointed one." One must also inquire just

why Yeshua is so often referred to as, of all things, a rock. Certainly, allegorically, we can see the physical characteristics of the solidness and steadiness of a rock and apply it to Yeshua, but we must remember that the context of the New Testament is just as Hebrew as the context of the Old Testament. The Jewish people didn't pick up any old metaphor that struck them; this was an ancient, traditional society that had an enormous history of well-established meanings in the events of the past, particularly as involved the patriarchs. I seriously suspect that calling Messiah Yeshua the "Rock" referred as far back as this event with Jacob, in which he anointed the rock he rested his head upon.

Jacob vowed to God that he would give all his allegiance to Him, and that of everything God gave him, he would return a tenth. Once again, we see the principle of the tithe very early in Scripture.

## GENESIS 29

ASSIGNMENT: Read Genesis 29.

When Jacob left his family at Beer-Sheba, it was with spiritual agitation, a heavy heart, fear, trepidation, and guilt. But after his encounter with Yehoveh, something was changed in him. He was more certain, focused, and calm. He was filled with the inner state that Gentile Christians call “a peace that passes understanding.” Hebrews would say he received HaShem’s *shalom*.

We don’t know how long it took for Jacob to reach Haran, about a four-hundred-mile journey from the southern end of Canaan. But when he arrived, he immediately sought out his mother’s family.

### JACOB RETURNED TO MESOPOTAMIA

Sometimes we get so focused on the land of Canaan, the Promised Land that would become Israel, that we forget the ancestral connection between the people of the Promised Land and Mesopotamia. Mesopotamia was Abraham’s birthplace, and a large part of his family remained there. Abraham sent a servant back to what he certainly considered his roots to find a suitable wife for his son Isaac. And here Jacob went back to exactly the same place for the same purpose. There is quite a contrast between how Eliezar, Abraham’s servant, came to Haran and how Jacob arrived. Eliezar arrived with an entourage of men, camels, and gifts to offer a potential bride for Isaac. Jacob arrived with the shirt on his back and nothing else.

Jacob’s search was rewarded at a water well, where three flocks of sheep were waiting to

be watered; the shepherds pointed out Rachel, Jacob’s first cousin, his mother’s niece, daughter of Laban.

### WATER WELLS AS CULTURAL CENTERS

Water wells were important places because it took much work to create one, and much care was involved in maintaining it. A well was owned by someone, sometimes the local king, or in this case a local family. Since the humans of the settlement needed water daily, and the animals that were part of their lives also had to drink regularly, the well became a place of meeting for the country folk, much the same as the city gates were the place of meeting for city folk.

There was a large rock over the top of the well where Laban lived. This was a normal and customary practice; it kept dust, small varmints, and even children from falling into the well and polluting it, but it also kept people who wanted water from helping themselves. Water had to be purchased from the well’s owner. The shepherds who spoke to Jacob were waiting until evening, when the owner of the well would come, roll the rock off, and collect a fee from them; then, their animals could drink.

In this scene, Jacob wanted the shepherds to water their animals and leave so he could have a private conversation with the family members he had come to find. Because Jacob was family, he felt justified in rolling the rock off the mouth of the well and allowing the sheep to drink so that the shepherds would go.

Jacob introduced himself to Rachel, and as was customary, he kissed this family member. Kissing in this era did not necessarily denote sexuality or affection. Kissing was a greeting,



Jacob with Rachel and Leah near their flocks

generally the equivalent of a handshake today, although it was not usually done between strangers. Jacob wept with joy, knowing his journey was over, and he had likely even met his future wife. It was a good day. We're told Rachel was a shepherdess; this was a somewhat unusual occupation for a woman in this area of the world. Bedouin women of the Sinai and Arabian Peninsulas, hundreds of miles to the south, often tended flocks and herds, but Mesopotamian women (and eventually Israeli women) usually did not.

### JACOB MAKES LABAN AN OFFER OF SERVITUDE

Laban, Rachel's father, heard of Jacob's arrival and came to meet him. Of course, he offered his hospitality to his nephew. A month passed and the self-serving Laban broached the question to Jacob: "What shall be your wages?" This was the signal that Laban understood Jacob was a semi-permanent visitor. Laban saw that Jacob would be a valuable addition to his family, as he was a gifted shepherd and a hard worker. He also likely noticed that Jacob was quite taken with the beautiful Rachel. Jacob offered seven years of his labor to Laban in return for Rachel's hand.

It was not a custom of those times for a father to essentially sell his daughter to a man in exchange for servitude. Later we will find that Laban's two daughters revealed the shame they

felt for being, quite literally, sold for a price. In Genesis 31:14–15 they said, "We no longer have any inheritance from our father's possessions; and he considers us foreigners, since he has sold us; moreover, he has consumed everything he received in exchange for us."

Seven years passed, and Jacob went to Laban to extract his "wages," which was Rachel. Then Jacob got a taste of just how devastating deceit and betrayal can be: after the wedding ceremony, Laban exchanged Rachel for Leah, his older, unmarried daughter. No doubt, Jacob instantly thought back to the day he disguised himself as his twin brother and fooled his father; he must have assumed that he was now experiencing God's payback for the dirty dealing he had perpetrated. In fact, the word *deceive* is played up in this story of Jacob acquiring a bride, because it is so organically connected to the central theme of deception in the story of Jacob stealing the blessing from Esau.

So, in exchange for another seven years of bond servitude to Laban, Jacob also got Rachel,

### CONTRADICTIONS IN THE BIBLE

Here is a good chance for us to better understand something that scholars will at times identify as "contradictions" in the Bible. In verse 5, when Jacob inquired of his mother's family, he asked some shepherds if they knew "Laban, the son of Nahor." In Genesis 24, we're told that Laban was the son of B'tu'el, not Nahor. So, what gives? Nahor was Laban's grandfather. This is a description of which clan Laban belonged to—the clan of Nahor. Often formal identities of people in the Bible include "of the tribe of so and so, and the son of so and so." "Son of . . ." doesn't necessarily indicate a biological relationship between father and son as we think of it. Sometimes it does mean father and son, but just as often it attaches a person with his clan, as it is here. Knowing which is which is in the context; the author understands that the reader knows Nahor is Abraham's brother, and Laban is his grandson. These supposed contradictions in names are not contradictions at all; it was the normal way of speaking and explaining one's identity in that era.

whom he married immediately after the customary seven-day wedding ceremony for him and his substitute-bride, Leah. This elderly man, eighty years old, suddenly found himself in the position of trying to please not one but two wives.

### JACOB'S DARK SIDE REVEALED

Another dark side of Jacob is now revealed to us, in that he unfairly loved and openly favored Rachel over Leah. The reason is suggested to us in verse 17: “Le’ah’s eyes were weak; but Rachel was good-looking, with beautiful features.” Beauty is often related to the appearance of one’s eyes, and particularly among Middle Eastern cultures strong eyes or weak eyes were idioms that indicated either beauty or plainness. The point is that Rachel was beautiful but Leah was not, and it was apparently primarily on the basis of physical beauty that Jacob made his choice. There is no reference to Jacob having consulted God on his choice of a wife. There is every reason to suspect that Leah should have been his choice over Rachel, as we’ll see shortly.

What irony! Esau, the firstborn, handsome and macho, was passed over by God for Jacob, quiet and plain. Rachel, beautiful and impetuous, was passed over by God for Leah, quiet and plain. Why do I say Rachel was passed over? Let’s see what happens next.

### LEAH’S CHILDREN

Almost immediately, Leah started giving Jacob children. Rachel could not seem to get pregnant. First, Leah conceived Reuben, the firstborn of Jacob. Remember this, because in a few weeks we’re going to come back to this important detail. Leah gave Jacob three more sons: Simeon, Levi, and Judah. In naming these children, Leah gave God all the praise and glory: Reuben means “look, a son,” because she felt God had seen that she was treated as a second-class citizen by Jacob, who fawned over only Rachel. *Simeon* means “hearing,” because God heard her prayers for another son. *Levi* means “joined,” because she hoped that because she had given Jacob yet another son, he would love her more. And *Judah* means “praise,” because she praised God for blessing her with four healthy sons.

In offering her praise to God for these children, Leah was showing her character. God was blessing her for it. Not only did she give birth to Jacob’s firstborn, but Leah, the plain one, was honored with carrying and giving birth to the Israelite line of priests and servants to God (the Levites) and with bringing Judah into this world, from whom the line of promise would be fulfilled in Jesus. Yeshua was a Judah-ite; we call Judah’s descendants Jews.

However, in a sad ending to this chapter, we are told Leah suddenly lost her ability to have children.



## GENESIS 30

ASSIGNMENT: Read Genesis 30.

In the last lesson Jacob wound up with two wives, the sisters Leah and Rachel, because his conniving father-in-law, Lavan, deceived him much in the same way Jacob had deceived his own father. This is an example of how Yehoveh often shows us our own sin and the devastating effect it has on others by permitting someone to do to us as we have done. Jacob pulled the old switcheroo on his father, Isaac, because he wanted to ensure that he (and not his brother, Esau) received the best blessing. As upsetting as this deception was to his father, it embittered Esau even more for years to come. Seven years later, after working all that time for Lavan so that he might have Rachel for a wife, Jacob was tricked by Lavan, who pulled the old switcheroo on Jacob during the wedding ceremony. He woke up to find that it was Leah, and not Rachel, whom he had married.

Near the end of Genesis 29, Jacob became a father for the first time. Let me remind you that he was well into his eighties. The focal point of the last several verses of Genesis 29 is about Leah providing sons for Jacob—first Reuben, then Simeon, Levi, and finally Judah. Then, for some unknown reason, Leah’s womb suddenly dried up.

The first several verses of Genesis 30 change gears and tell us about Rachel. There was a great contrast between Leah, the plain but godly sister, and Rachel, the beautiful but worldly sister. This could not be more clear. Jacob was still living in Haran of Mesopotamia. Like Abraham, who was born in a land outside of the Promised Land, so Jacob’s children, the

ones who would eventually be called the tribes of Israel, began life as foreigners.

### COMPETITION BETWEEN SISTERS

Rachel was blessed with beauty, a quality for which she could take no credit. She was the wife who got the lion’s share of Jacob’s attention, but she became jealous of the one thing that kept her sister from being a complete afterthought in Jacob’s life—her ability to have children. Like a petty child,<sup>108</sup> Rachel blamed Jacob for her barrenness, and Jacob replied by telling her firmly that it would certainly appear that *he* was not the source of the problem. So, taking direction from her grandmother Sarah’s experience, she gave her personal servant girl to Jacob so she would bear children in her stead. Again we see that a servant-girl was being given by her mistress “as a wife.” Remember that, in reality, this servant girl was what we would call a “concubine” in English. Her status was, indeed, elevated from servant by becoming a concubine of Jacob’s, but her status did not reach to the level of either Leah or Rachel, who were both legal wives, with all the rights and honors and marriage ceremonies that went with the position of “legal wife” versus “concubine-wife.”

Rachel gave Bilhah to Jacob to bear a child in her stead:

*She said, “Here is my maid Bilhah. Go, sleep with her, and let her give birth to a child that will be laid on my knees, so that through her I too can build a family.” (Gen. 30:3)*

The phrase “may bear on my knees” is a Hebrew idiom that is reflective of a long-standing Middle Eastern custom. The custom was that by

## DOES GOD CONDONE BIGAMY?

God most certainly did not validate Jacob's choice to take two wives any more than He did Isaac's or Abraham's. Too often we like to say, "Well, it's in the Bible, so God must be okay with it." Not so. Very often the Holy Scriptures honestly tell the historical truth, tell us what was said or what happened, but do not specifically comment on the morality of it. These statements simply stand on their own. God had made it quite clear early in Genesis that marriage was the forming of one flesh from two—not three, four, five, six, or a thousand, as was the case with Solomon many years later.

This is why it is so important to read and study the *entire* Bible, so that we can separate God's commands, principles, and characteristics from simple statements of historical fact. The Bible is full of statements by ordinary men and women, and many of those statements are outright lies, self-aggrandizing, greatly exaggerated, wishful thinking, rationalizations of personal behavior, or merely expressions of widely held superstitions. We see other examples of this in the case of Jacob, who deceived Esau and Isaac; it wasn't right, but he did it and the Bible straightforwardly reports it. Jacob didn't choose the wife God selected for him (Leah); he picked the one (Rachel) who most pleased his fleshly and impulsive male desires. It wasn't right, but he did it and the Bible reports it. When he realized he'd been tricked, he decided he'd marry two wives; it wasn't right, but he did it, the Scriptures tell us about it, and so on. We must never assume that because the Bible does not comment on the morality of every statement or action that those not commented on must be, at least to some degree, acceptable to God. If we have the Torah in our hearts, have read it and studied it, we will know what was right and wrong in God's eyes. That is what we are expected to do. The fact that we are given the full, unflinching view of just who these biblical characters were, flaws and all, doesn't change God's absolute, unchanging, uncompromising truth. Like us, *every* Bible character except Yeshua was imperfect and did things they ought not to have done.

ceremonially placing a child on one's knees or lap, that person was signifying that they were claiming that child as their own. This was a *legal* claim. It was done for reasons we see here—when

a servant was meant to be used as a surrogate mother for the servant's master, or when a child was being legally adopted. We have to understand that, in the same way Rachel had full right to claim the child that her servant Bilhah would bear, Rachel equally had full right not to accept a child her servant produced. She was not obligated to accept a child that her servant produced, even if that child came from her own husband's seed. For all we know, and it was likely the case, Bilhah probably produced some girl babies along the way and there is no evidence that Rachel accepted them as her own. It would have been great shame on Bilhah if she were not allowed to produce and keep some children for herself. A servant of her type was well treated, loved, cared for, and considered a part of the family, so it is unthinkable that she would not have been permitted to have and raise children of her own. We must look at it in context, and the purpose of this narrative in Genesis is to show where the tribes of Israel came from. The only pertinent information would be about the sons that were produced, not daughters, though we will find one notable exception in coming chapters.

Bilhah, Rachel's servant and now Jacob's concubine, bore him a son in Rachel's name: the son's name was *Dan*, which means "to judge." Shortly thereafter, she gave him another son, *Naftali*, which means "wrestling" or "contest."

Leah, who had stopped bearing children, saw Rachel's success and its apparent rewards and allowed herself to become persuaded by these weak notions. She gave her servant-girl, Zilpah, to Jacob to bear children in her stead. Jacob's sinful weaknesses was readily apparent, and he just couldn't seem to do the right thing. He accepted Leah's servant girl as another of his concubines. Gad ("good fortune") and then Asher ("happy") were born to Zilpah. They were claimed by Leah as her own.

## REUBEN'S MANDRAKES

There was clearly a battle going on between the two sisters; they each wanted to be their

husband's favorite, and they each figured they would earn that favoritism by giving him highly valued sons. But soon these competitive and superstitious sisters made a deal. Reuben, Leah's son, went into the field to gather mandrakes, which were believed to be an aphrodisiac. Reuben was well aware that Jacob, his father, would alternate sleeping with his two legal wives: Leah and Rachel. But Leah still played second fiddle to Rachel, and of course, that open favoritism bothered Reuben because it bothered his mother, Leah. For children raised around herds and flocks, sex was just a normal part of life; Reuben was trying to help his mother, who undoubtedly complained to her son about the unfairness of the situation. He thought perhaps mandrakes were the answer to his mother's unhappiness.

In Hebrew, the word translated "mandrake" is *duda'im*. Much folklore is attached to the aphrodisiac powers of mandrakes, but they were also widely used as real, useful medicines. A mandrake bears a small, cherry tomato-like fruit that ripens about the same time as the wheat harvest. It has a very heavy fragrance. Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love, bore the nickname "the Lady of the Mandrake."



Remember that Hebrew is a root-word based language: we find that the word for mandrake, *duda'im*, is an offshoot of the Hebrew word *dodai*, which means "love." In the Song of Solomon, for instance, there is a play on those two words when he says, "There I will give you my love [*dodai*]. The mandrakes [*duda'im*] are sending out their fragrance" (7:13).

Rachel, upon seeing the mandrakes her nephew Reuben had gathered, never even considered Leah's feelings, but said, "Hey, why don't you give me some of those?" Leah said, "Yeah right, so you can go sleep with my husband?" In what must have passed for wisdom between the two of them, Leah gave Rachel the mandrakes

in exchange for Jacob sleeping with Leah that night. Wow: talk about R-rated!

Leah became pregnant and gave birth to *Issachar*, which means, "He (God) brings reward." Verse 18 shows us the confusion Leah had, as she actually believed that Issachar was God's reward to her for having given Jacob her servant girl as a concubine. Leah then had another son, *Zebulun*, meaning "dwelling." Why dwelling? Because Leah believed that since her childbearing scorecard outpaced that of her sister Rachel, Jacob would dwell with her in preference to, perhaps even to the exclusion of, Rachel.

The Bible usually records only the sons who were born, but we have an exception in this list of children. A girl, Dinah, is born to Leah. After that, Rachel finally gives birth to Joseph, whose name is a very interesting wordplay on the original Hebrew as used here in these verses.

Genesis 30:23, which speaks about Rachel, says, "She conceived, had a son and said, 'God has taken away my disgrace.'" The Hebrew word translated as "taken away" is *asaf*. In the next verse, Rachel names him Yosef, because the Lord added another son to her. *Yosef* means "to add." *Asaf*, take away; *Yosef*, add. This was a prophetic name for Joseph, because in a few years Joseph would be taken away from his father and then many years after that added back in.

The Scriptures don't directly say that the use of mandrakes for the purposes Leah and Rachel had in mind were ridiculous superstition, but it does make a point of demonstrating that. The one who *gave up* the mandrakes, Leah, was the one who produced three more children, but Rachel, the one who *took* the mandrakes, remained barren for a few more years.

## JACOB'S FLOCKS VS. LAVAN'S FLOCKS

All but one of Jacob's sons were born while he was still in bond-servitude to Laban, living in Haran of Mesopotamia. Just as the sons of Israel would be born outside of the Promised Land, so

they would also be held captive and grow into a nation outside of the Promised Land, in Egypt.

Fourteen years—seven years each for his two wives—had passed and Jacob was ready to have his bond-servitude acknowledged by Laban as paid-in-full. But the ever-crafty, greedy Laban was not ready for Jacob to leave, for he had profited greatly by Jacob’s presence. Laban was a pagan spiritualist; he believed in the spirit world. He believed there were many gods in the spirit world, and he believed that Jacob’s God was but one of those gods. So in verse 27 Laban invoked Jacob’s God and said that he had “spiritually divined”<sup>109</sup> that it was Jacob’s God who had caused the great increase in the herds and flocks to occur. This was most certainly true, but Laban was just saying it to get Jacob to stay.

Here we have two masters of deception, Jacob and Laban, battling each other. Jacob employed the skill he knew best, tending flocks and herds, to his advantage against the apparently ignorant Laban. He said he’d stay for a while more if he was given all the speckled and spotted sheep and goats. The clever Jacob convinced Laban the reason for this was that it would make it easy to identify which animals belonged to him and which belonged to Laban,



Jacob’s sons, except Ephraim and Manasseh, were born in Mesopotamia.

and also to identify the increase of the two flocks. In reality, Jacob knew he could make his flock increase more, and Laban would never be able to cheat him by saying some of those animals were his because their coloring set them apart.

The peeled branches of almond, poplar, and plane trees were part of a strange practice that Jacob engaged in. The sticks seemed to make the animals breed and produce spotted, striped, and speckled offspring. Bible scholars have called this anything from rank superstition to the ancient way of promoting Mendelian genetic breeding.

Notice the emphasis in these passages on color, specifically that the color of the animals would determine whether they belonged to Jacob or to Lavan. The all-white sheep and the all-dark goats were Laban’s, but the goats with white spots or streaks in their dark hair and the white sheep with dark spots in their wool were Jacob’s. Sheep were usually pure white, and goats were normally dark brown or black. Lavan had a preference for the white animals—sheep. Why? Because white was the norm for sheep; no spots of dark color normally occurred on them. It was the reverse for goats: they were always dark and only rarely had white spots on them. So, if it was all white, it was to go to Laban, and practically all the sheep were white. Interestingly, in Hebrew, the word for “white” is *lavan*. Jacob’s father-in-law’s name meant “white.” All the white animals were to go to Mr. White.

Lavan’s expectation was that the number of sheep born all white would vastly outnumber those that had dark spots on them; likewise, he believed that the number of dark-colored goats would greatly outnumber those with white spots. That the herds of spotted goats and sheep increased as much or more than the all-white sheep or all-dark goats infuriated Lavan. The white spots and white streaks on the goats denoted that Jacob got the best of Lavan in a very visible way. This was a very open insult to Lavan, and it would quickly fester into a bigger

problem because it would stare him in the face every day. In the end, Jacob bred flocks and herds far superior to Laban's, and Jacob became greatly prosperous as a result. The servant had become greater than his master. This did nothing but exacerbate an already dangerous rift between Lavan's clan and Jacob's growing family. Trouble was just over the horizon.

## GENESIS 31

ASSIGNMENT: Read Genesis 31.

Jacob's life was in many ways similar to that of Abraham. He was a man without a country, a wanderer. Did he belong to Mesopotamia, or did he belong to the land of Canaan? This scene in Genesis reminds us of the situation between Lot and Abraham when Lot's wealth grew such that it caused tension between those loyal to Abraham and those loyal to Lot. The only solution at that time was separation. Here Jacob and Lavan found themselves in a similar situation.

### THE NATURE OF SEPARATION

It is rare in the Bible to find division and separation occurring on happy terms; something unpleasant was usually at the heart of the matter that caused it. Perhaps we should take heart that the divisions and separations that have happened in our lives resulting from bad judgment, selfishness, sin, or even something completely out of our control are normal. It is a Christian cliché that God uses imperfect people to bring about His perfect will. In reality, what other kind of people are there for Him to work with?

Just as Lot cut ties permanently with Abraham and went on to form a new and separate family line that would result in the nations of Moab and Ammon, Jacob also, due to circumstances Yehoveh used to achieve His purposes, finally cut family ties with the land of Mesopotamia and his in-laws. Although Jacob would eventually lead his family to Egypt for

the purpose of survival, the land of Canaan, and no other, was *home* for a time.

### JACOB'S DECISION TO LEAVE

In verse 1, Jacob overheard Laban's sons grumbling about how Jacob's herds and flocks really ought to have been theirs: "Ya'akov has taken away everything that our father once had. It's from what used to belong to our father that he has gotten so rich." Boy, the apple doesn't fall far from the tree, does it? Laban's sons were just like him: jealous, selfish, and greedy.

When the ever-observant Jacob noticed the distinct change in demeanor of Laban's family, he knew it was time to leave. That notion was verified by God, who instructed Jacob that now was the time He would fulfill His promise to bring Jacob back to his home: Canaan.



Jacob's clan fleeing from  
Laban's household

Jacob consulted with his wives. They were more than ready to leave. In fact, they revealed their hurt and anger toward their father, Laban, for in their eyes he had shown them the greatest disrespect by virtually selling them to Jacob instead of following the usual betrothal customs.

There can be no doubt that Hebrew society was male dominated. However, Hebrew society greatly revered women, and any notion that the Bible promotes the idea that women were then, or are now, of less value than men is uninformed. Notice here that the Holy Scriptures show that the first thing Jacob did after God told him it was time to leave was to consult with his wives. It's obvious by the way they responded that Jacob greatly considered their feelings and thoughts on the matter. It's not that Jacob didn't lead; it's that he included his wives in a decision that would greatly affect them—leaving their family forever.

### RACHEL STEALS LABAN'S IDOLS

Jacob planned their escape and executed it. He put his family on camels, separated his property from Laban's, and in an opportune moment while Laban was off shearing some sheep, they left—but not before Rachel stole her father's set of household gods to take with her on their journey. Why would she do that? Look at verse 14: “Rachel and Le'ah answered him, ‘We no longer have any inheritance from our father's possessions.’” They knew full well that their father had no intention of caring for them. Even more, this is an indication that they were breaking allegiance with their father, for in verse 16, they said, “Nevertheless, the wealth which God has taken away from our father *has become ours and our children's anyway*; so whatever God has told you to do, do” (emphasis mine).

In Mesopotamia, it was the tradition that he who possessed the family gods was the owner of the family wealth and authority. When Rachel stole those gods, her intent was to assure a family inheritance for herself after her father died. Apparently, she planned to keep them

until Laban went to the grave. Then she would appear before her family with what amounted to a will, keys to the safe-deposit box, and the position of executor of the estate all rolled into one. This was a most serious matter that went way beyond petty theft. Jacob had no idea Rachel had done this thing.

Even more, Laban and his family—likely Rachel as well—believed that those idols actually represented real gods. Those who adhered to that system prayed to the idols for rain, for healing, for children, for protection, and so on. Without his gods, Laban was in a fix.

### LABAN PURSUES JACOB

Jacob and his family made their break for freedom, but Laban soon found out they were gone and mounted a posse to go after him. During Laban's search, God came to him in a dream and warned him not to speak either good or bad to Jacob. This simply meant that Laban was not to try to harm Jacob, but it shows us something interesting: God speaks to nonbelievers. This isn't the first time we've seen Yehoveh speaking to pagans, and it won't be the last. Laban was a spiritualist. He accepted many gods, so it was no big deal for him to accept that Jacob's God was quite real. But Jacob's God was (to Laban) just another of a seemingly limitless number of gods.

Let us never think that Yehoveh interacts with, or speaks to, only believers. He will communicate with and use whomever He wishes; after all, the Scriptures even tell of a time He spoke through a donkey.<sup>110</sup> At the same time, let us also not think that because God has spoken to someone, that is an indication that person is a believer. Laban loved to invoke Yehoveh's name when speaking to Jacob, but not because he revered God Almighty or bowed down to Him. He did it in hopes of influencing Jacob, or Yehoveh, for his own selfish purposes.

Laban and his men caught up to Jacob in the northern part of Canaan, in an area called Gilead that would one day belong to Gad, one



of Jacob's sons. Laban, never at a loss for a good lie, scolded Jacob for leaving in secret, thus not permitting Laban to throw him a farewell party and give his daughters and grandchildren the proper good-bye. Yeah, right. Of course, immediately following his insincere words of greeting, Laban inquired about his missing gods, which was the real crux of the matter. Jacob said, "Hey, if you can find them, not only are you welcome to them, but the person who took them will be executed!" Uh-oh. Rachel was in grave danger, and she knew it.

Rachel hid the idols from her father by sitting on them, so that when he searched her tent, he didn't find them. She told her father that she didn't stand up because she was on her monthly cycle. Her father didn't demand she stand up, not because he felt sensitive toward her because of her condition, but because he would become ritually impure if he came into contact with her or whatever she was sitting on. The concept of a woman being unclean and transmitting that ritual uncleanness during her cycle was something that Moses would be instructed on five hundred years into the future. But it was also a law and tradition that was already in existence among almost all cultures long before Moses, even before Jacob. That Rachel would intentionally transmit her uncleanness to those gods she was sitting on was unthinkable to Lavan, so it apparently

didn't enter his mind that such was even a possibility.

Jacob, having no idea that Rachel actually had the idols, became angry at Laban's accusation, especially after a thorough search failed to produce them. Jacob had had it. He laid into Laban, explaining that twenty years of servitude ought to be quite enough, thank you, for two wives and some sheep. He told Laban he was well aware that Laban had been cheating him, constantly changing the terms of the deal. Remember, Jacob was, at this point, in his nineties.

Laban's answer was typical Laban: "Everything you have is mine!" He had never been able to accept the idea that Jacob's wealth, which had grown primarily from the high birthrate of discolored animals Lavan didn't want in the first place, had equaled or exceeded his own. However, in a rather ingenious display of graciousness, Lavan suggested they bury the hatchet since he certainly didn't want to be an enemy of his own daughters. They made a treaty with each other not to war, put up a pile of stones as both a testament to their agreement and a sort of boundary marker, and had the typical covenant meal to seal the agreement.

The setting up of "standing stones" or "stone piles or columns" as boundary markers is still in use today. Though this passage doesn't give full detail about the covenant procedure, it does mention a sacrifice, which of course would have been a clean animal, cut up, the pieces divided into two piles, with Jacob and Lavan walking between the pieces as a sign of agreement. And no covenant was complete without a sworn oath, which is what we read in verse 53: "May the God of Avraham and also the god of Nachor, the god of their father, judge between us.' But Ya'akov swore by the One his father Yitz'chak feared."

The Scriptures tell us that they each named the pile of stones, the boundary markers, according to their native language: *Y'gar-Sahaduta* is a form of Chaldean, and *Gal-'Ed* is Hebrew. They both mean "pile of witnesses."





Standing stones in Gezar

The primary terms of the treaty were that Jacob was to treat Laban's daughters well, and that he was to take no other wives. Jacob adhered to this agreement.

## GENESIS 32

ASSIGNMENT: Read Genesis 32.

To place what occurred next in the proper context, allowing us to draw a more realistic mental picture of Jacob's life, we need to understand that Jacob was an elderly man. Depending on the chronology you adhere to, Jacob was anywhere from slightly younger than ninety years old to nearly one hundred years old.

This chapter begins with Laban saying good-bye to his two daughters, Rachel and Leah, and to all his grandchildren.<sup>111</sup> Most Bibles will say he kissed his sons and daughters good-bye. It was common terminology to refer to male grandchildren as "sons" in those days, and that was what was happening here.

### JACOB PREPARES TO REUNITE WITH ESAU

Then "Ya'akov went on his way, and the angels of God met him" (Gen. 32:2).<sup>112</sup> The "angels of God" are exactly that, because the original Hebrew is *malachim Elohim*, messengers (plural) of Elohim, God. We're not given any more information than that. Perhaps this was an assurance that Jacob was back in the Promised Land, or the angels were a visible presence confirming that God was indeed with him. Upon Jacob's journey to *leave* the land of Canaan, Jacob encountered angels (at Beit-el); likewise, upon his journey to *return* to the land of Canaan he also encountered angels. Jacob was impressed by the visit and named the place *Mabanim*, meaning "two camps."

A few weeks ago we looked at the word *malach*, which means "messenger." We learned

that in strict Hebrew, when *malach* is used by itself it denotes a messenger of some sort, usually human. But when the word *Yahweh* or *Elohim*, or some other title of God, is attached to *malach*, it speaks of *heavenly* messengers, spirit beings, or angels. In verse 2, we saw heavenly messengers. In verse 4, Jacob sent some *malachim* (messengers) ahead to his brother, Esau. We can be sure these were *human* messengers, because the word *malachim* is used without attaching any word for God to it.

Jacob had just left an unpleasant encounter with Lavan, only to face his brother, Esau, who had sworn to kill him for swindling him out of his blessing. The messengers returned to Jacob with a good-news/bad-news report. The good news was that they indeed found Esau and presented him with Jacob's message. The bad news was that Esau didn't indicate anything more than that he was coming to meet Jacob with four hundred men. This scared Jacob to the core. He had not long ago felt Laban's wrath and dealt with it, but right was on his side in that case. In his situation with Esau, Esau was the recipient of wrongdoing by Jacob. Deceit of the highest level had robbed Esau of what both of them felt was Esau's birthright, and Jacob had to wonder if time had soothed Esau's desire to kill him . . . or not.

Esau's response to the messengers convinced Jacob that his worst fears would be realized, because Jacob ordered that his family be divided into two groups. He would stay with one, hoping that if Esau exacted his revenge on Jacob, perhaps the second group (presumably located elsewhere) would survive. It was the dividing of his group into two camps that gave this place its name: *Mabanim*, "two camps." Of course, now that all the deceit and



guilt of his life was suddenly manifesting itself in a situation from which there appeared to be no escape, Jacob fell on his knees before God and prayed. How often we have found ourselves running ahead of God, lagging behind, or just plain rebelling and doing wrong, only to eventually ask God to rescue us from the natural consequences of those sins. Jacob was doing the same. Yet we see how time and the experience of walking with God had changed Jacob. He acknowledged that he deserved nothing of the wondrous bounty and protection the Lord God had provided for him.

The area where Jacob was encamped is well known today. It is called the Jabbok, and it lies east of the Jordan River at about a midpoint between the Dead Sea and the Sea of Galilee. The Jordan River was clearly visible in the distance from the bank of the Jabbok where Jacob was standing. It is a beautiful place: green, lush, and fertile. The Bible tells us that Jacob sent several flocks ahead of him accompanied by his messengers, his emissaries who were to offer those flocks as a gift of repentance to Esau. The amount of the gift was

enormous; it consisted of 550 animals. It was truly a gift fit for paying tribute to a king. Jacob then took his immediate family, crossed the Jabbok, and parted company with them, apparently planning to face Esau alone.

## JACOB'S WRESTLING MATCH

Suddenly, in one of the strangest episodes in the entire Bible, Jacob found himself wrestling with an unknown “man.” The Hebrew for this word *man* is *ish*, which can mean “man,” “husband,” or even “a mighty or great man.” This man seemed, to Jacob, to be made of flesh and blood. The wrestling match went on all night long, and when the man concluded that Jacob was not going to give up, he dislocated Jacob’s hip with a touch.

While verse 25 says Jacob wrestled with an *ish*, a man; in verses 29 and 31 it is made clear that this being was divine, because Jacob said, “I have seen Elohim face to face.” Hosea 12:4 speaks of this encounter and clearly states that this was a heavenly being Jacob fought with. So why did the original reference say that Jacob’s opponent was a man, only to later change it to Elohim?

## WHO ARE ANGELS?

There has been so much confusion in Christianity as to what an angel is, what the appearance of one portends, and so on. The first thing to understand is that in its most foundational meaning, an angel is first and foremost a bearer of the divine word. An angel brings a divine message from God, or he carries out a divine command from God. Today, we have an expression “Don’t kill the messenger.” This means that the person who is telling me something of importance isn’t presenting his own words; he’s just been hired to bring to me the instruction from someone other than himself. He’s not responsible for the content of the message, other than his duty to carefully and accurately deliver it. That’s an angel.

Yet the Bible uses the word in a number of contexts, often metaphorically. For instance, in the Bible prophets and priests were at times called “angels of the Lord,” or more aptly, messengers of the divine word. In fact, Haggai and Malachi are referred to in the Scriptures as “angels of the Lord.” Were Haggai and Malachi divine, spiritual beings? No. But as men who were simply passing on God’s instructions to mankind, they certainly qualify as having been messengers of God.

We’ll also see in Holy Scripture the distinction being blurred between the bearer of the divine message (an angel of the Lord) and Yehoveh Himself. We see this in the burning bush episode with Moses, another time when Hagar was spoken to by an angel but responded directly to God, and in a number of other scenes as well. That shouldn’t surprise us or seem strange. As followers of Yeshua, we find ourselves faced with a similar blurred distinction in trying to comprehend just who Yeshua was. He was a man, but He was also God. We find that exact scenario here with Jacob, as the being he wrestled with is alternately called a man, an *ish*, and God, *Elohim*. Think of this as well: Is not Jesus also called “the Word,” or in its most complete biblical sense, “the divine Word of God”? Jesus was *the bearer* of the divine word (an angel); He *was* the divine Word (God); and He was also a flesh-and-blood *human* (a man). It’s impossible to comprehend, but all these blurred distinctions of where God leaves off and angels begin we find in Yeshua, the man-God-angel.

## JACOB DEMANDS A BLESSING

Disabled by this divine messenger, Jacob still wouldn’t quit, saying, “I won’t let you go unless you bless me” (Gen. 32:27). Obviously, Jacob had come to know that this was no ordinary man he was grappling with.

There are, of course, many teachings on this event. I have heard that this never actually happened; it was just a fairy tale. I’ve heard this was added to the Holy Scriptures many centuries

later. I’ve heard that this is just allegory. But I am quite convinced that none of the above are true; this was quite real. What we have here is a scene that is at once literal and also symbolic. It’s symbolic in that all believers must go through a time when we wrestle with God for control of our lives. If we are to truly apprehend the life that God has for us, a time must come when, by our own choice, through absolute surrender, we leave our tattered history behind and start a new history with God as Lord of our lives. Yet, invariably, the scars of the past will come with us, and we’ll have to deal with them. Even more, sometimes we pay a price to leave behind our rebellious ways and go forward into new life. Thus was the case with Jacob as he inherited a permanent disability when he crossed over from a foreign place into the Promised Land.

How I wish it were that, when we first recognize our salvation or when we finally decide to live by faith after years of having been saved, our earthly past could be as dead as our old natures. Too often, well-meaning pastors tell converts that their slates have been cleaned; what they forget to tell them is that though spiritually we are forgiven, the natural consequences of our sin do not end. In some way or another, we will live out the rest of our lives regretting our foolishness. Jacob would walk with a limp for his remaining days—an inescapable testament to his having fought with God for almost a hundred years until he finally submitted instead of attempting to achieve a balance of power.

Jacob had always won against men before, using his own skills and cunning, often mixed with deceit. But when he recognized that he was wrestling with far more than flesh and blood, he knew he could not win as he always had. Instead, he gave up and asked to be blessed. Like most of us, we cannot seem to arrive at this point until we are broken and disabled. If we take the most literal version of Jacob’s name, it means “the cunning, self-helpful supplanter.” How well that characterized Jacob’s life up till now! But because Jacob yielded to God, he was to have a new destiny, and it would be reflected

in his new name: *Israel*, “a prince with God.” From this point on in the biblical narrative, we see a new Jacob. No more did he rely on himself or his fleshly ways; from this point on he rested in God’s strength. And, he would be called Israel.

When we fight God, there is absolutely no chance of victory on our terms. In the most ironic way, our victory in God must occur through the defeat of ourselves. This is exactly what happened in this scene with Jacob, and it has happened or will happen to every believer who surrenders his will to Yehoveh’s.

Verse 33 starts by saying, “This is why, *to this day*, the people of Isra’el do not eat the

thigh muscle that passes along the hip socket . . .” (emphasis mine). Redaction has taken place. The writer of these passages, traditionally believed to be Moses, is looking back. At least part of this was written from the perspective of a future time after the events of Jacob and the wrestling with this angel took place. It was written from the viewpoint of a time when a tradition had been developed to remove the sciatic nerve from animals that were to be eaten or sacrificed in honor of this day when Jacob had his hip dislocated, as this was the day he was given a new name that described his new nature . . . Israel. It is at this moment, in Genesis 32:29, that the nation of Israel was established.

## GENESIS 33

ASSIGNMENT: Read Genesis 33.

The dizzying events of the night before had prepared Jacob, in a nick of time, for what was coming next.

The question of Jacob's survival, and that of his family line, was about to be answered as he spotted Esau leading his band of four hundred men. He placed his family in a specified order that may have had some kind of meaning, but the only thing I can draw from it is that he put the least important people in his opinion up front and the most important to the rear. His concubines and their children were placed up front in immediate harm's way, but his most beloved wife, Rachel, and her child, his favorite, Joseph, were at the rear where they might have a better chance of escape should Esau attack.

Jacob ran to the front of them all and prostrated himself, bowed low to his brother. He lay completely prostrate on the ground and bowed

seven times . . . then waited for the shoe to fall. This was absolute capitulation. By Middle Eastern standards, Jacob presented himself and his entire clan to Esau as subject to Esau's mercy or wrath. The irony of this situation is hard-hitting; the blessing of Isaac upon his two sons was, at this moment in history, exactly reversed. Jacob received the blessing that he would be master over his brothers (his tribe), and Esau's was that he would be under the yoke of his kin. But here, Jacob laid his life at his brother's feet.

Esau had forgiven him, and the two brothers reconciled. The years had softened Esau's anger, just as Rebecca, the twins' mother, had said would happen. The unbelievably generous gift offering from Jacob to Esau showed the complete sincerity and repentance Jacob had for his misdeeds. In a Middle Eastern style greeting, with the greatest respect, Jacob offered gifts to his brother and introduced his family. Esau first refused the gifts, then eventually accepted them. Jacob was wise, though, and even after Esau had been gracious, Jacob continued to talk



as an inferior speaking to his superior. Middle Eastern custom demands that all gifts initially be refused before they're accepted. This customary cultural dance we see in which Jacob offered and Esau refused and then finally accepted could have gone no other way; there is no special spiritual meaning to it.

Esau assumed that Jacob and his clan would come and join his own in the land of Edom, and he offered to accompany his kin along the way. Jacob said that was not workable because the hardened Bedouin desert dwellers would move at a pace far too fast for the herds and flocks that Jacob must drive in front of him. Esau offered an armed escort. Jacob refused that as well and said he would trust God to protect him. Esau agreed and left for home, journeying south, back into Edom.

The cunning that had always been Jacob's<sup>115</sup> earmark was once again evident as he implied to Esau that he and his family were going to join Esau in Edom, a deception to be sure. Jacob had no intention of following Esau into Edom unless it was by force. So once Esau and his troops left, Jacob turned and headed northwest, back to the area near the location where the wrestling match with the angel took place, into land that would eventually become the territory of his son Gad. He stopped, apparently for a couple of years, and he named the place *Succoth*, meaning "booths" or "huts," because he built shelters for his family and some of the animals on a temporary basis. This was not where he intended on settling down.

After an undisclosed length of time (Hebrew tradition says that it was eighteen months), Jacob moved to Shechem, the place his grandfather Abraham had come to when he first entered Canaan. History once again repeats itself. But this was quite a changed place from what it was when Abraham and Sarah camped on its lovely grounds. At that time there was no city, not even a village; it was just a "place." It would not even have been called Shechem when Abraham was there. To put it in perspective, imagine I was telling you about the Chumash Indians who inhabited the Los Angeles basin



long before the Mexicans arrived. You would have no trouble knowing the area I referred to, but you'd also be aware that it certainly was not called Los Angeles in those days. Because the Scripture we are reading was first written down as a comprehensive document in Moses's day or shortly thereafter, it looked back to a time some five or six hundred years earlier. In Moses's era, Shechem was a well-established and widely known city. Saying that Abraham arrived at Shechem was an easy way to identify the place using contemporary terms. In fact, because the various books of the Old Testament were written over a span of about one thousand years, city and place-names changed frequently. Places and cities may have been called one thing in the earliest books, but several hundred years later they were called something else. Therefore, we'll find the same place given two or more different names in the Bible.

When Jacob arrived in Shechem, a walled city had been built. He purchased some land from the sons of Shechem's king, Hamor. King Hamor was from one of the many tribes of Canaan, and his particular tribe was the Hivites. The city was named after one of King Hamor's sons, Shechem.

Rather than live inside the city, Jacob pitched his tents well outside the city walls. He was a shepherd; living inside a city was not a lifestyle he would choose. On the other hand, living near a city gave him the opportunity to make a mutual security treaty for his family's protection and to have the staples of life nearby. The amount he paid for the land outside the city walls is important: because (a) it records that he did purchase land, and (b) he paid a proper price for it so he could not be accused of cheating the king. In principle, it operated in the same way as Abraham's purchase of the cave of Machpelah as a burial place; every element for proof of permanent ownership, without dispute, was provided. This would prove to be important at a later time. For we are told in Genesis 48 that this particular piece of land was willed by Jacob to his son Joseph. Joseph was then buried there after the Exodus—the Israelites brought his remains with them—although his bones were later moved to another spot. Furthermore, at this very spot (that little piece of land just

outside the walls of Shechem), Yeshua demonstrated a principle that most of us should be thankful for.

ASSIGNMENT: Read John 4:1–14.

At this moment in history, Shechem was going by the name Sychar, but they are one and the same. Here, at the very well Jacob dug to provide water for his family and his animals, we find Jesus's encounter with the Samaritan woman. It is interesting, is it not, that the first non-Jewish person to be offered a drink of the Living Water that brings everlasting life was (a) a woman and (b) a hated Samaritan. It occurred at the very first place Jacob, Israel, settled when he came back into the Promised Land from Mesopotamia. Today Shechem is in the West Bank and goes by the Arab name of Nablus. The Palestinians claim that they have always held this land.

Feeling he had come to a place that was likely his clan's permanent home, Jacob, now called Israel, erected an altar and called it *El-Elohe-Israel*. Those Hebrew words mean "El, the Highest God of Israel." Jacob wouldn't be staying long, though.



## GENESIS 34

ASSIGNMENT: Read Genesis 34.

### DINAH IS ATTACKED

Dinah, Jacob's daughter by Leah, was about fifteen years old when these events happened, according to most Bible historians. We are told that one day she went into the city to "see" or to "visit" some of the local girls. The Hebrew word here for "see" is *ru-ab*, which carries with it the sense of wanting to participate, explore, or learn something intellectually. Josephus said she went to join in one of the many pagan feasts celebrated by the Hivites. Shechem, son of the king, saw Dinah and liked what he saw, and he raped her. This whole story carries with it the tone of a naive, foolish, young girl getting in over her head, and then a series of events unfolding that were beyond her youthful capability to recognize as dangerous, let alone to control. We must understand that Dinah was a girl of marriageable age, a virgin, and would *never* have been allowed to go unchaperoned into a city. This was a blatant act of rebellion, and it led to horrible consequences.

Apparently, the king's son was in lust with Dinah. The Bible says he loved her, but at the same time, the Scripture is really just stating his side of the story. A man in love with a woman would not take her by force! But, as prince, he felt he could do as he pleased, and certainly, no woman would dare refuse his advances.

After he attacked her, the prince decided he wanted to marry Dinah, so his father, the king, went to speak with Jacob, who had already received word of the violation of his daughter. At about the same time, Jacob's sons who were

out in the fields got word of Dinah's rape, and they came back to the tents together, furious. The king addressed Jacob and his sons and explained that he and his son would like to make things right through his son marrying Dinah. Their two peoples could then intermarry and eventually become as one.

### THE KINGDOM OF SHECHEM

That the king of Shechem would quickly try to repair matters showed wisdom, but it also showed that he was not a typical monarch of that day. It has long been suspected that the city of Shechem was not occupied only by Hivites but by several different tribes. Hamor ruled over a confederation of tribes, and much diplomacy was called for in order for him to keep his power.

The kingdom of Shechem was large. The city was, at the time of Jacob, basically the seat of government over a widespread area. The city itself wasn't particularly large, but the landmass it ruled over was. Ancient Akkadian and Egyptian records tell of a kingdom of Shechem that comprised an area of about one thousand square miles that started a little south of Jerusalem and went as far north as Megiddo. There can be no mistake that the king and kingdom in Genesis 34 were the same as the one those ancient records describe. Hamor was more a chieftain than a king, and he had to be politically adept to run his diverse kingdom.

In verse 7, we see that rape was something that was simply not done. What had occurred here was illegal in the Middle East. It required that the male offender compensate the family of the girl, because she would have been ruined. Finding a husband for a girl who had lost her

virginity was near to impossible. The king offered a great deal more than the normal bride-price for Dinah, not out of a sense of responsibility but because he was legally obligated.

### DINAH'S BROTHERS' RAGE

What turned Jacob's sons to rage, however, was that the king didn't even mention the crime his son had committed against Dinah; it was as though it had never happened. Even more, Dinah was being held hostage inside the city, which was no doubt why the king felt brave enough to confront Jacob in such a flippant manner.

In the narrative that follows, Jacob did not reply to the king, but instead his sons gave their conditions for the king's request: the king, his sons, all his family, and all of the city's males must be circumcised before Dinah could marry Shechem. Why did all the men have to be circumcised? Because it was forbidden for anyone to be a member of Israel (which is what the king, in essence, said would result—that is, the two peoples would be joined) without submitting to the terms of the Abrahamic covenant. To be a member of that covenant required circumcision. But this was a ruse, for they had blood on their minds. They were employing what they had learned from their father, Jacob, now called Israel: deceit. They knew full well what the adult males of ancient times experienced after being circumcised: much pain and infection, and a resulting weakness and malaise.

### KING HAMOR'S PLEA

King Hamor was no better than the brothers. He called a public meeting, and he spoke to the city's males and told them he wanted them to be circumcised so that these two peoples could unite. They could not have been too thrilled about this, for in those days circumcision of an adult was a pretty grueling process. He made it sound like it would be a good thing for them. But primarily, it was for the purpose of wealth accumulation for himself. For in verse 23, the

king said to the men of his city, "Won't their cattle, their possessions and all their animals be ours?" Hardly. It would become *his!*

The chieftain argued eloquently for his point of view. He said these people were their *friends*, a term that would indicate a treaty between Shechem and the Israelites already existed, and so to turn down Jacob's terms would be an affront.

### SIMEON AND LEVI TAKE REVENGE

In verse 24, we're told that all the males of Shechem were circumcised, and three days later, at the height of their discomfort and with infection setting in, the brothers Simeon and Levi went around the city killing every male, all of whom were currently disabled; this included the king and his sons. They rescued Dinah, and then after Simeon and Levi had finished their murdering spree, Jacob's other sons joined in by looting the now defenseless city. They took not only possessions, but also people. This was the common mode of operation in those days; the taking of people added to the strength and power of one's own tribe.

Understand that it was the *tribes* of Simeon and Levi that went around killing every male. The men, Simeon and Levi, led them, but they had several male servants who participated. I suspect that some men from other Israelite tribes participated as well, because it would have taken more than a just a few men to kill all those townspeople. I suspect that it was done guerrilla-style, house-to-house, so that no one in the city was the wiser until his or her own demise came.

When Jacob found out what his sons had done, he was heartbroken and furious. He told them that he had become a "stench" to the Canaanites and the Perrizites as a result of their actions. It is thought that Perrizites were not a specific tribe, but just a general name for a group of unnamed tribes that lived in the hill country of Canaan; nevertheless, they most certainly are of Canaanite origin. Let's remember here that the Hivites (who were the ruling tribe of Shechem)

were one of the many tribes that emanated from Canaan, son of Ham, grandson of Noah. That is, they were all interrelated and probably also had a mutual protection treaty among themselves. Jacob told his sons that many tribes were going to come against them because of this, and they would have no chance of victory because they'd be so outmanned. His boys were still unrepentant about their dirty deed.

Later, Simeon and Levi would be further publicly shamed for their bloodlust and violence. In Genesis 49, when Jacob was on his deathbed and dishing out blessings to each of his twelve sons—what would prove to be *prophetic* blessings—Simeon and Levi heard this:

*Shim'on and Levi are brothers, related by weapons of violence. Let me not enter their council, let my honor not be connected with their people; for in their anger they killed men, and at their whim they maimed cattle. Cursed be their anger, for it has been fierce; their fury, for it has been cruel. I will divide them in Ya'akov and scatter them in Isra'el. (vv. 5–7)*

### THE TRIBE OF LEVI

Isn't it interesting that Levi became the priests and temple tenders. The two primary jobs

of Levi would be butchers of sacrificial animals and armed guards of the temple and its grounds—bloody and violent jobs. The Levites would receive no land in the allotment of territory in the Promised Land. Rather they would be scattered throughout each of the twelve tribal territories.

Simeon would be given a small piece of territory surrounded by Judah, and was one of the first tribes to become absorbed by another Israelite tribe, Judah.

### GOD'S ROLE IN DINAH'S STORY

God was not going to let a marriage between Dinah and Shechem occur. He was not going to allow a mixing of the Hebrews with those pagans. There is no indication that Jacob was for it either. In fact, there is no indication that his sons thought it was a good idea because their only goal in appearing to agree to the proposal was to find a way to exact their revenge. The effect of joining Israel's family with that of the Hivites (King Hamor and his family) would have been to reunite that which God had divided and separated; it would have united the blessed line of Shem (Jacob's line) with the accursed line of Ham (King Hamor's line). Satan would have liked nothing better.

## GENESIS 35

Genesis 35 is rich in information that is largely hidden to our view due to the Greek and the English translations. We're going to connect some dots that have been obscured over the centuries as we go through this chapter. We'll also use this as an opportunity to review some of the more difficult-to-decipher yet critically important principles that lay the foundation here for all that will come later.

**ASSIGNMENT:** Read Genesis 35.

In verse 1, God ordered Jacob, Israel, to pack up and move to Beit-el (Bethel), the place where so many years earlier Jacob had stopped on his journey *out of* Canaan on his way to Mesopotamia. That was where he saw the vision of the angels ascending and descending on the ladder between earth and heaven.

Jacob ordered his entire household to get rid of all their idols and idolatrous symbols. The sacking of Shechem by Israel's sons and their taking of many of Shechem's people had introduced many newcomers into Israel's clan; these newcomers, in particular, worshipped other gods. Even more, Jacob's sons would have stolen the god-idols of Shechem because this, by their way of thinking, would have stolen power away from Shechem. It was the norm for an invader to steal his enemy's gods, because in a very tangible way it weakened his enemy in addition to humiliating them.

### JACOB'S UNDERSTANDING OF YEHOVAH

The phrasing of God's instruction to Jacob points out the mind-set of that time; it demonstrates the supreme patience of Yehoveh in developing and maturing his infant nation of Israel.

A proper translation of verse 1 has God telling Jacob to build an altar at Beit-el "to *the* God who appeared to you." He didn't say, "Build an altar to Me." It is odd for Yehoveh to refer to Himself as "the God who appeared to you," because it implies that there are other gods, but He is the particular God who appeared to Jacob at Beit-el. According to the traditions of that era, gods were many, they were territorial, and they had specific job descriptions. Gods from different territories would fight against one another. Certain gods were more powerful than others. In Mesopotamia, for example, the god of rain was only the god of rain *for Mesopotamia*. He wasn't responsible for rain somewhere else, because there were other gods of rain in other places. Everybody believed this . . . everybody. We really don't find Yehoveh hammering away, making a point that He was the only God who existed. Rather, He characterized Himself as Jacob's God. We have no record of Yehoveh telling Jacob, while up in Mesopotamia, to build an altar to Him there, and I doubt that it happened because Yehoveh was a God that was associated with the land of Canaan, not Mesopotamia. But now that Jacob was back in Canaan, Yehoveh, the God of the Promised Land, told Jacob to build Him an altar. This made perfect sense to Jacob, and probably to most of his tribe (even the newcomers), although they had no idea what reality actually was.

As we read through the Torah, understand that who Yehoveh was, how He operated, and where His sphere of influence began and ended was just as fuzzy to the minds of the Israelites as was the concept of what happened to somebody after they died. Certainly, after the Exodus, Yehoveh defined Himself much more extensively. But people don't just forget centuries of traditions. Rather, Israel tended to understand Yehoveh within the context of their long-held beliefs and traditions; He was just added to the mix.

Yehoveh was *their* God—Jacob's God, Israel's God—but what would happen when their God matched wits and powers with the god of another people and another land? Who knew? This was constantly on their minds. So here we are two hundred years after Abraham was called, and still Jacob doesn't quite get who God is. His wives and the others who had made themselves part of his family certainly didn't understand either. So, as part of an ongoing education process by Yehoveh, we see Jacob saying:



Okay, we're now under the sphere of influence of my God, and we're going to build an altar to Him; I don't want your gods upsetting my God, and besides, your gods are useless here in a territory that is outside their primary area of influence. So give them to me, and I'm going to bury them under a tree. Why bury them? Why not smash them or burn them? Burying them was more a repudiation of their gods than an absolute belief that those gods didn't exist.<sup>114</sup>

In addition to getting rid of their gods, the people gave Jacob their earrings in verse 4. This had nothing to do with God condemning ear jewelry; these rings were worn in honor of foreign gods. They were amulets, so they also had to be removed from their midst and buried. As part of this process, they were also instructed to change clothes and to purify themselves. "Change clothes" simply meant washing their clothes or changing into clean ones. The changing of clothes was a rather usual part of the purification procedures.

These idols and symbols were buried under what some Bibles call an oak tree and others, a pistachio tree. Actually, it was a terebinth tree, of the pistachio family, but it is not an oak tree. I'm not quite sure where that notion ever came from.

## A NEW ALTAR

After purifying themselves and burying the foreign god symbols, the clan moved to Luz and Israel built the altar. Don't let the name Luz confuse you: Luz was the Canaanite name for



Beit-el. We'll see a lot of this double naming in the Bible, often using both the Canaanite and the Hebrew names.

### THE DEATH OF DEBORAH

Suddenly we get an interesting little aside. You'll recall that when Eliezer, the servant of Abraham, brought Rivkah (Rebecca) back from Mesopotamia as a wife for Isaac, her nurse accompanied her back to Canaan. This much beloved nurse, Deborah, had died, and there was much grieving in the camp.

Why does the Torah even mention Deborah, a seemingly minor player in the grand scope of things? After all, the deaths of the matriarchs Rivka and Leah, both prominent female figures in the creation and formation of Israel, are not even recorded. While the explanation is not universally accepted among Jewish scholars, it is generally thought that Deborah represents a link between Israel and Mesopotamia, a link that God was in the process of dissolving.

For Abraham and Isaac, and up to this point Jacob as well, Mesopotamia was more their homeland than Canaan. But Canaan was the land God set apart and promised to Abraham and his descendants, so God wanted to erase any ties between Israel and a "foreign" land—Mesopotamia. The death of Deborah is almost a metaphor for the death of any relationship between Israel and the land of the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers.

### GOD'S REAPPEARANCE TO JACOB

God appeared, once again, to Jacob. Part of what was communicated by God was His reassurance and reiteration of things that Jacob had already been told; for instance, that his new name and therefore his new nature was Israel. Like all of us, Jacob needed God to constantly remind him of His commands, of His direction, and of the truth, especially if it brought with it a new reality. Yet there was another reason for God to repeat this command for a name change: Jacob

had his name changed to Israel *by divine oracle* on the opposite side of the Jordan River, outside of the Promised Land. Once Jacob was inside the Promised Land, it needed to be reaffirmed. Why? Because in Jacob's mind, just like in the minds of all the people of the world in that era, gods were numerous and they were territorial. When Jacob's name was first changed to Israel, he was still in the province of the Mesopotamian gods, and therefore under their sphere of influence. Once Jacob was in Canaan, he was in the province of El Shaddai, Yehoveh, the God whose territory is Canaan—he needed El Shaddai to affirm that what he was told before still stood.

### JACOB'S POLYTHEISM

Did Jacob believe there were other gods? Yes. We, of course, know his thinking was false. Yet God showed grace and mercy, and He didn't insist that Jacob was to understand all the truths about God—that He is one, that He is the God of everything, that there are no other gods—all at once.

Don't think for a minute that God doesn't play along with each of us on many matters that may prove, in the course of time, to be error. For reasons I can't fathom, He allowed the church to go unchallenged for centuries in the belief that it had replaced Israel, a man-made doctrine that the Holy Scripture refutes. Somehow, He used that blind spot in the church for good, to spread the gospel to the Gentiles of the world. But over the last fifty years He has begun to correct us, showing us that He never replaced Israel with the church, nor did He ever decide He was finished with His people. That time when the church will make the Jewish people jealous for our faith and the stony hearts of His people will be softened so that they can accept their own Messiah is upon us.

### HOW GOD REVEALS TRUTH

One of the best descriptions of the way that God operates through the Bible is that He

*progressively* reveals His truth to us using the Word in concert with the Holy Spirit. Somehow, men go along for decades and centuries utterly blind to a great scriptural truth, and then suddenly they—hopefully, we—see it. That Yehoveh reveals truth progressively really shouldn't be so tough to accept. If you pick up any piece of literature—say a novel, or an essay—about which you have no prior knowledge and begin to read it, page after page you get more information as the characters develop, the plot unfolds, details are added, and the conclusion arrives. This is an example of the simplest sense of progressive revelation.

In the case of Scripture, much of what is told in the Word is prophetic. Most often, the prophecy is both literal and symbolic; it was happening then, and it would happen again. The difficulty for us in dealing with prophecy comes in that the literal truth about what is going to happen in the future is told by Scripture within the context of the ancient culture and language of the people and time in which it was written. Although we can look forward in space and time by studying Bible prophecy and fairly clearly see the major prophetic milestones, the details can be pretty shadowy. Yet, as the time for a particular prophecy to be fulfilled draws closer, the final pieces of the puzzle start to fall into place. The formerly shadowy details start to come into focus. This is a variation of the principle of progressive revelation.

As an example: we learn in Genesis 1 that the seed of the woman will strike, or bruise, the head of the serpent. Adam and Eve were nearly clueless as to what that meant, let alone how it would happen. If we read no further, we, too, would be in the dark. But progressively, page-by-page through Scripture, we learn more details about how it will all happen. From Adam to Seth, details are added. From Seth to Noah, more details are added. From Noah to Shem, then to Abraham, to Isaac, to Jacob, and to the birth of the tribes of Israel, the puzzle pieces keep appearing, new information gets added, and the picture starts getting clearer. We're at a

point right now in our study at which the tribe of Judah has been created, from which that "seed of the woman" will come, the one who will defeat Satan and restore man's relationship with God. However, Jacob didn't know that. We only know that Jacob's son Judah was going to be that special tribe because we have the benefit of hindsight. We have the benefit of studying the recorded history of prophecy as it is being revealed to us at a breathtaking rate in modern times. We know every important detail, the order in which it happened, generally how it happened, and what it all meant: Yeshua, our Savior, paid for our sins and conquered death. The seed of the woman struck the head of the serpent and defeated him at the cross.

Most of the prophecies of the Bible have already been fulfilled, although there are a few that have yet to occur. As each prophecy is fulfilled and we can see how it happened, we get a better picture of how the unfulfilled prophecies might take place. For instance, in the last century we have seen Israel reborn as a nation and Jerusalem taken back from the Gentiles. This information, and the way it all happened, gives us insight into the next round of prophecies to be fulfilled. We have information that the generations before us didn't have, yet we still don't have *all* the details.

The Holy Spirit, our true teacher and revealer of God's mysteries, supernaturally quickens men's minds and spirits at the proper moment in history in order that we might see and understand things in Scripture that, for some reason, mankind had been blind to. This recent understanding of a spiritual connection between the church and the Jewish people, the yearning by many believers to knock down the wall of partition between Christian and Jew, and the love of Israel that we find exploding within the Gentile church are fine examples of this mysterious progressive revelation at work in our time.

As we go through the OT, don't be surprised that we will see some things that scholars a mere fifty years ago—in some cases even

fifteen or twenty years ago—could not see because the details were just too shadowy, but now they are clearer.

## A NATION AND GROUP OF NATIONS

God said to Jacob in verse 11, “A nation, indeed a group of nations, will come from you; kings will be descended from you.” A better translation is “A nation *and* a company of nations will come from you.” In other words, God was not saying “a nation (singular)—oops, make that a whole bunch of nations . . .” Rather, He was saying there would be a particular nation, and in addition to that a group of nations, which would come from Jacob. See the difference?

It gets more complex. In Genesis 28:3, God promised to Jacob a company of nations. In the Hebrew, the words *kahal ammim* were used for “company of nations” as opposed to what Abraham was told when God said Abraham would be a father of a nation, and later the father

of many nations. The word used for nation in that earlier instance was *goy*. God told Abraham, “You will be the father of *goy*, a nation at large, an unspecified nation.” On the other hand, God told Jacob that he would produce a *kahal ammim*, “a convocation of fellow countrymen.” Abraham would produce a variety of nations and peoples; Jacob would produce a certain kind of homogeneous and holy people, united in purpose—this would be the congregation of Israel. Quite a difference.

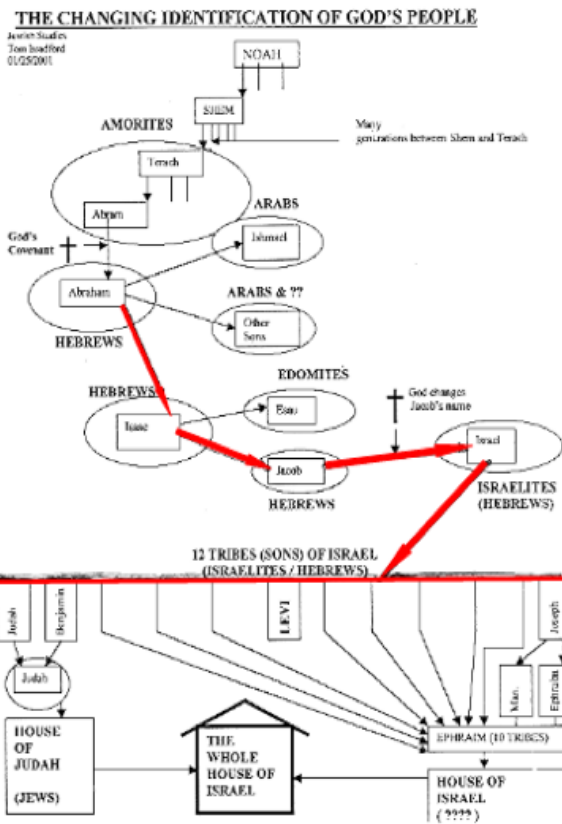
Here in Genesis 35:11 things once again have evolved. God told Jacob basically the same thing He told Abraham, employing the Hebrew word *goy* in verse 11, meaning “nations at large.” But there is an important difference from what was said to Abraham: God said that Jacob would produce a “holy convocation of *goy*.”

In review, by Jacob’s day God had divided the world into two kinds of people: Hebrews and everybody else. *Goy* is the name for everybody else.

So, a paraphrase of verse 11 would be: “Be fruitful and multiply. A nation, and in addition a holy convocation of both Hebrew and non-Hebrew nations, will come from you.” That may sound like confusing double-talk until we realize this: all of these conditions promised to Jacob have proven to be true.

Jacob was the first person to produce only Hebrew children: the twelve tribes of Israel.<sup>115</sup> Later, Jacob adopted his son Joseph’s two Egyptian children away from him,<sup>116</sup> and one of them, Ephraim, took over the authority that would have been Joseph’s. Even later, hundreds of years after that event, Ephraim, an Israelite tribe that had Egyptian blood mixed in, would be scattered by the conquering Assyrians, and the genes of a large portion of their population would become fused with the Gentile world. Then, in a prophetic event that is just beginning to occur, as recounted in Ezekiel, Ephraim will be reunited with the remnants of the tribe of Judah, the modern-day Jews.

We are spending so much time with this prophecy of Genesis 35:11 because its





manifestation has begun in earnest. This prophecy connects seamlessly with the prophecy in Ezekiel 37 that explains that in the end times Ephraim and Judah are going to supernaturally be brought back together. God stated that He is going to somehow bring this lost and scattered and absorbed Hebrew people group home (a substantial portion of which became non-Hebrew) and rejoin it with the group that has steadfastly retained its Hebrew identity—Judah,

ASSIGNMENT: Read Ezekiel 37:12–36.

the Jews. Think about the “holy convocation” that would eventually come from Jacob, and watch as that holy convocation is miraculously brought to fruition.

God has brought the holy convocation to its fullest. He is dwelling with His holy convocation. A member of the house of David will be eternally Israel’s and our king. Who is that king? Jesus! All of the holy convocation will have one shepherd. Who is our shepherd? Yeshua, of the house of David.

How is this going to happen? It’s still too shadowy to know entirely. But I can tell you with absolute certainty that the process of bringing Ephraim back together with Judah is currently under way. In 2005 the government of Israel recognized that the ten lost tribes that make up Ephraim weren’t so lost after all, that they still exist, and that they have retained a memory of their Hebrew heritage for more than twenty-five hundred years. These people are now being allowed to migrate to Israel, not as Jews, but as Israelites, as Ephraim. The first hint that this would occur is in Genesis 35:11. This is decidedly *not* a repeat or reiteration of what God told Abraham, then Isaac. This is progressive revelation at work.

I know this is new, and probably a little confusing, to many of you. Part of that is because in biblical scholarly writings published before 1990, you won’t find much if anything that

discusses Ephraim. You certainly haven’t heard sermons about it in mainstream denominations. Yet Ephraim is so very central in the prophetic Scriptures of Isaiah and Ezekiel concerning the latter days. How have our Christian and Jewish scholars overlooked this when the role of Ephraim, even if not fully defined, has become so important and apparent today? Because it wasn’t God’s time yet, and because it took several other events to lead us to see the importance of Ephraim in Scripture. Those of us who have caught the vision should be thankful that God has blessed us with it and be patient with the 99 percent of the church who know nothing of it (but soon will).

## JACOB MOVES ON

Jacob was about to move on, so let’s move on with him.

From Beit-el, the clan moved on to a place called Efrat. A long time later Efrat would come to be known as Beit-lechem—Bethlehem, the birthplace of Christ. Jacob’s beloved Rachel dies giving birth to his last son, the twelfth and final tribe of Israel. During childbirth, suspecting that she was not going to survive, Rachel named this baby *Ben-oni*, “son of my sorrow.” But, later, presumably after Rachel passed, Jacob renamed him *Benjamin*, which means “son of old age” or “son of happiness.” We call him Benjamin.

Rachel was buried, and Israel moved again, a short distance, this time near a place called *Migdal-Eder*, which means “the watchtower of the flock.” Eighteen hundred years later this would be the tower from which the shepherds watching over the flocks in the field at night would see and hear angels announce and rejoice at the birth of the Savior of the world.

The site of Rachel’s tomb was well known hundreds of years later, and the books of Samuel speak of the stone marker set upon her grave as a famous landmark. That site exists today, about one mile north of Bethlehem.

## REUBEN AND BILHAH

It was also near here that (in one simple statement) we are told that Jacob's firstborn son Reuben slept with Jacob's concubine, Bilhah; Jacob was aware of it. Bilhah had been Rachel's servant-girl. Nothing else is said about this transgression for now, but in time it will prove to have an enormous bearing on the future of Israel.

It is no coincidence that Rachel's death and then Reuben's taking of Bilhah are spoken of one after the other, because they are directly linked. Bilhah was Rachel's handmaiden. But Bilhah was also a concubine/wife of Jacob. Bilhah bore Dan and Naphtali. Reuben's action was very calculating—his intent was that Jacob would not elevate the concubine to the position of legal wife when his legal wife died Rachel died, a practice that was quite common in that time. Reuben was Leah's son, and as we think back to the story of the mandrakes that Reuben gathered for his mother, Reuben was acutely aware of his mother's status in the eyes of his father, Jacob. Rachel was first and Leah was a distant second. As far as Reuben and his mother were concerned, Rachel's death afforded them an opportunity for Leah to gain status as Jacob's one and only wife and, therefore, his most beloved. However, Reuben was worried that Jacob might decide to comfort himself with Rachel's handmaiden, Bilhah, rather than with Leah.

This was more than simple jealousy or emotion: the status of being the son of Jacob's favorite brought with it tangible benefits, and after all those years of playing second fiddle to Joseph and Joseph's mother, Rachel, he wasn't about to allow Bilhah to interfere.

By taking Bilhah, he ruined her. There was no way Jacob could legally marry Bilhah, for by having sex with Reuben she was made undesirable. It would have been shameful beyond imagination for Jacob to marry a woman who had slept with another man, let alone the son of her husband. Reuben wanted this act to be known.

It was necessary that what he did with Bilhah be known, so that Jacob would not accept Bilhah and therefore, Leah would become queen bee.

This is why those five little words at the end of verse 22—"and Israel heard about it"—are so key. Jacob had to find out for Reuben's plan to succeed.

The Talmud includes a statement that sums this event up rather well: "He (Reuben) said, 'If my mother's sister was a rival to my mother, must the *maid* of my mother's sister be a rival to my mother?'"

Additionally, during this era it was customary that a leader who vanquished another leader or a son who took over leadership from his father (presumably because of the father's death) also took possession of that leader's concubines. The possession of the former leader's concubines by the new leader was an affirmation and validation of that new leader's status and authority.

This entire episode between Reuben and Bilhah represents a clearly understood challenge to Jacob's authority as leader of Israel. Reuben's act was cunning and political; having sexual relations with Bilhah had nothing to do with a few moments of pleasure. It was a blatant coup attempt. Reuben wanted to be the leader of Israel.

Sometime later, Jacob would remove Reuben from the office of the firstborn and give that position to Judah. Listen to Jacob as he neared the end of his life and gathered his sons together to pronounce the blessing upon them:

*Then Ya'akov called for his sons and said, "Gather yourselves together, and I will tell you what will happen to you in the acharit-hayamim. Assemble yourselves and listen, sons of Ya'akov; pay attention to Israel your father. Re'uven, you are my firstborn, my strength, the firstfruits of my manhood. Though superior in vigor and power you are unstable as water, so your superiority will end, because you climbed into your father's bed and defiled it—he climbed onto my concubine's couch!" (Gen. 49:1–4)*

Reuben's attempt to replace his father prematurely not only didn't happen, but it backfired so completely that Reuben lost the rights of the firstborn.

After a concise listing of Jacob's sons, we are told that Israel "came home to his father Yitz'chak at Mamre." In other words, Isaac lived to meet all of his grandchildren through Jacob, and then Isaac eventually died at the age of 180 years. Esau came, and together with Jacob, they buried Isaac in Hebron.

Notice in verse 29 that Isaac "died and was gathered to his people." Here are words

that continue to express a cloudy view of what occurs to someone after death and reflect a continuation of ancestor worship to some degree. Did they really think that Isaac was now living on the other side of death with his ancestors? Probably, in some undefined way. But by now, the expression primarily indicated a peaceful death after a long life. Such a thing would not have been said about Isaac had he been murdered, died young, or been executed for breaking a law.

## GENESIS 36

While this chapter is primarily a genealogical listing, there's more to be gained from it than you might think. From it we can learn much about tribal society, how families mixed, and even the politics of the era. While this might seem like a nice point at which to just mentally turn off, you should actually pay close attention and take a lot of notes. It'll help you considerably down the line.

**ASSIGNMENT:** Read Genesis 36.

This chapter is called “the generations of Esau.” Esau had many children, and it is clearly spelled out that Esau and Edom are (a) one in the same individual, (b) the founder of all the Edomite tribes, and (c) the namesake of the land of Edom. Additionally, we are told that Mount Seir is in the land of Edom and that the terms *Seir* and *Edom* are interchangeable. When the Bible speaks of the land of Seir, Mount Seir, or Edom, it's all basically the same place. And that place is at the southeastern end of the Dead Sea.

### THE ERA OF THE PATRIARCHS HAS ENDED

At this point in the OT, the personal history of the patriarchs has ended, and the history of Israel, the twelve tribes, begins in the next chapter. Whenever we hear either Jewish or Christian scholars speak of the biblical “patriarchs,” or the Bible uses the term *patriarchs* or *fathers*, the reference is *only* to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

### WHY THE BIBLE PRESERVED GENEALOGIES

One of the purposes of this long genealogical listing is to show us that the prophetic blessings of Isaac over his twin sons, Esau and Jacob, had come to pass or were in process of coming to pass. Let's review this blessing:

*Esau said to his father, “Do you have only one blessing, my father? Bless me, even me also, O my father.” So Esau lifted his voice and wept. Then Isaac his father answered and said to him, “Behold, away from the fertility of the earth shall be your dwelling, and away from the dew of heaven from above. By your sword you shall live, and your brother you shall serve; but it shall come about when you become restless, that you will break his yoke from your neck.” (Gen. 27:38–40 NASB, emphasis mine)*

Most Bibles will *not* say “away from” the fertility of the earth. Instead, they leave out the word *away*, implying that Esau will live in a fertile place where there is abundant moisture. It has long been known by Jewish and Hebrew scholars that it was rabbinic tradition that the word *away* was removed from the text, showing sympathy and understanding for Esau and his having been tricked out of his birthright and blessing. But in fact, the earliest Hebrew manuscripts plainly include the word *away* in the description of the place of fertility and moisture that Esau would not live. Of course, that is exactly where Esau went—to an area known as the Arabah, a desert.

Esau continued in his “profane” ways. God, in His foreknowledge, knew he would do so, so He took away Esau's birthright and removed him from the line of promise even before he

was born. From here on in the Bible, OT and NT, Esau and Edom are symbolically associated with unrighteousness and rebellion; this develops as we leave the Torah and move into the later books of the OT. Yet some deference is paid to Esau; in Deuteronomy 23 Moses ordered the Israelites “not to abhor an Edomite” (and Edomite being a descendant of Esau) because they were kinsmen of Israel. Frankly, there is an almost schizophrenic remembrance of Esau in the Bible: at once aligning him with the unrighteous and the wicked, yet at the same time reminding Israel that the descendants of Esau are Israel’s kinsmen, so Israel shouldn’t hate Esau or his descendants. This kind of rationale is quite difficult for the Western mind to understand, because we look at family relationships from the more European “extended” versus “nuclear” family viewpoint. We must remember that the entire Bible talks about family relationships from the Middle Eastern *tribal* viewpoint. Let me say that again: from Genesis 1 to Revelation 21, the context of *family* and *nation* in the Bible is tribal. We have to be very careful not to substitute our Western views and social structures willy-nilly into our understanding of OT or NT Scriptures.

## MODERN CONSEQUENCES OF THIS DIVISION

Esau’s descendants intermarried to a large degree with Ishmael’s descendants, meaning that most of the peoples of the Middle East, today, have some mixture of Ishmael’s and Esau’s blood in their veins. It may be difficult for us to look through scientific and rational eyes to say that it is natural that the descendants of the two dispossessed sons of the patriarchs, Ishmael and Esau, would be in constant opposition to the descendants of the chosen and blessed sons of the patriarchs, Isaac and Jacob, but that is exactly what has occurred. Those modern-day descendants of Ishmael and Esau carry a hatred for the modern-day people of Jacob (Israel) that is both historical and spiritual in origin.



In the news of the Middle East that dominates our TV screens twenty-four hours a day, we endure frustrating realities in which the Sunni Muslims blow up Shiite Muslim mosques, and vice versa; some Shiites kill other Shiites, and some Sunnis kill other Sunnis; Iranian Shiites war against Iraqi Shiites, and so on. Yet when the United States comes to the aid of one in an attempt to stop the horror, the other suddenly turns on the United States, claiming brotherhood between the warring factions.

In Afghanistan, we hear of one warlord fighting against another, the United States siding with yet another, and then suddenly it all shifts around and the United States finds itself fighting against people who, only yesterday, were our allies. This is because these “warlords” are simply tribal leaders, doing what they’ve always done—attempting to gain dominance, which is the primary job and expectation of any tribal leader.

In the first war against Saddam Hussein, the war of the President George H. W. Bush, representatives of various Arab nations said that they did not want to go against Saddam because his invasion of Kuwait was simply bad behavior, something that deserved admonishment but not destruction. They saw him as a brother who was misbehaving and causing trouble for his family, not as a ruthless dictator threatening the stability of the world. Even though they viciously attack and kill one another, it is, in the end, an age-old battle for tribal dominance in their minds. It is normal behavior, not something to be stopped or changed. It is an ancient way of life that has existed since the beginning of history, and it is a preferred practice for perhaps the majority, and most certainly for the leadership, of these Middle Eastern nations.

That is why these Middle Eastern nations that absolutely seem to hate one another, even committing genocide upon one another, will join to fight against the United States and Europe—because they see themselves as extensions of the tribes of Esau and Ishmael; therefore, they are family. This is the mentality we deal with throughout the Bible—Esau is a bad boy, Ishmael is *not* the chosen one, but, they are still, in the larger tribal sense, distant kinsmen of Israel.

In his blessing, Abraham told Esau he would “break the yoke from his neck,” and that is what is going on in front of our eyes, displayed day after day, on our TVs. Esau’s descendants, the Palestinians, are restless; they don’t want to be under Israel’s yoke, which is how they see themselves. They are in the process of breaking that yoke from their necks and having their own sovereign nation. Several Bible prophecies seem to be clear that they will succeed for a time. But remember, all we see happening in the Middle East today is a result of God’s division, election, and separation between Isaac and Ishmael, then between Esau and Jacob; it is the result of these prophetic blessings that happened thirty-five hundred years ago. No amount of peace overtures or UN councils, treaties, or resolutions, is going to bring this to a happy ending.

God’s plan is not that He’ll give men a chance to work it out and only if we can’t, *then* He’ll intervene.<sup>117</sup> This will be worked out only when God intervenes.

One may argue that if it is true that all that is happening in the Middle East must happen, and that the only hope for peace is not man-made but rests entirely in the return of our Messiah, then why should we take sides with Israel against the Palestinians, Muslims, Iranians, or whoever is trying to destroy Israel? Why should we pay attention to what is going on, other than out of curiosity, because it is all destined to happen anyway?

Jesus Himself said that the end would not come and He would not return until all the things that must happen have happened. What is our role in all this, as followers of Yeshua? This is a time of testing for us. God does choose sides, because He makes the divisions that create sides. He demands that all mankind choose one side or the other. Are we for Yeshua or against Him? This is the first and most important choice.

As believers, we are called to trust God and His Word. But our choosing doesn’t end with Yeshua. The next most important spiritual choice for us is where we stand on Israel and God’s people, the Jews. Yehoveh made it clear that those who bless Israel (the land and the people) will be blessed, but those who curse Israel will be cursed. God does not tolerate neutrality. Christ says in Revelation, “I would rather you were hot or cold, but you are tepid so I spit you out of My mouth.” All one has to do is read the Holy Scriptures to know what choice is expected of us. Yet, just as Moses commanded Israel “not to hate Esau your kinsmen,” we’re not to hate those who side against Israel. We don’t have to hate the Muslims or Palestinians to side with Israel.

### GOD’S PATTERN FOR INHERITING HIS PROMISES

All of Esau’s sons were born *inside* the Promised Land, but Jacob’s sons were born *outside* the

Promised Land. Isn't that ironic! Esau's sons were born in Canaan; Jacob's were born in Mesopotamia. Yet, revealing his full character, Esau took his family and *removed* them from the blessing of the Promised Land, but Jacob took his family and brought them *into* the blessing of the Promised Land. What incredible symbolism we have here! What a terrible fate awaits him whose family knows God but the family leader takes a stand against God. Conversely, what a wonderful blessing to the family leader who takes his family from outside of God's blessing and leads them into God's blessing.

In God's great plan, eventually the people of Israel (Jacob), who were born into God's promises and were to be inheritors of all of God's promises, generally came to reject them and moved away, so to speak. Conversely, Gentiles born outside the promises, born as

non-inheritors, were given the opportunity to move into the Promised Land and become co-inheritors with Israel through Jesus. This is the story of Esau and Jacob all over again. As you have learned since Genesis 1, this is a God pattern. When God establishes a pattern, He sticks with it.

### THE REBELLION OF ESAU'S DESCENDANTS

The many sons, grandsons, and great-grandsons of Esau documented in Genesis 36 are mentioned because they would each have created their own named clan or tribe. Some of these names will reappear later in the OT, particularly during and after the exodus from Egypt. But notice a fellow named Baal-hanan, a descendant of Esau, in verses 38–39. His existence is

#### A. ESAU'S WIVES

##### 1. (Gen. 36:1–3)

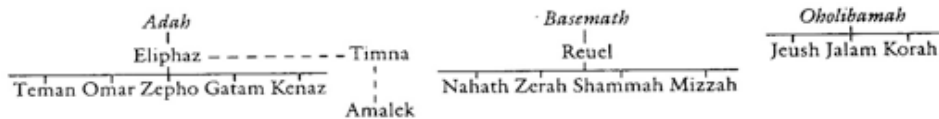
<i>Adah</i> daughter of Elon the Hittite	<i>Oholibamah</i> daughter of Anah daughter of Zibeon the Hivite	<i>Basemath</i> daughter of Ishmael sister of Nebaioth
------------------------------------------------	------------------------------------------------------------------------	--------------------------------------------------------------

##### 2. (Gen. 26:34; 28:9)

<i>Judith</i> daughter of Beerli the Hittite	<i>Basemath</i> daughter of Elon the Hittite	<i>Mahalath</i> Daughter of Ishmael sister of Nebaioth
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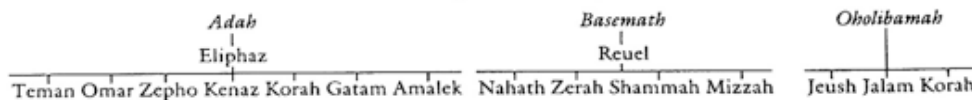
#### B. THE DESCENDANTS OF ESAU

##### Gen. 36:9–14



#### C. THE 'ALLUFIM

##### (Gen. 36:15–19)



#### D. THE EDMITES

##### (Gen. 36:40–43)

Timna, Alvah, Jetheth, Oholibamah, Elah, Pinon, Kenaz, Teman, Mibzar, Magdiel, Iram

concrete evidence of the rebellion and idolatry practiced by Esau and his descendants. Since time immemorial, it has been the practice of tribes in the Middle East to adopt the name of the chief god they worship as part of their family name. Here we see the familiar name “Baal,” a Canaanite name for the now deified Nimrod, attached to one of Esau’s progeny; this son, and I’m sure several others, were Baal worshippers and proud of it.

## CONTRADICTIONS IN THE LINEAGE

A sharp student of the biblical texts will catch the fact that the descendants and wives of Esau as listed in Genesis 26 do not precisely match those given to us here. Scholars have struggled with this and have come to various conclusions.

For instance, the three wives listed for Esau in Genesis 26 are Judith, Basemath, and Mahalath. Here in Genesis 36, the wives are listed as Ada, Basemath, and Oholihamah. The only agreement between the two chapters is Basemath, but even then she is assigned a different father: she is the daughter of Elon the Hittite in Genesis 26, but she is the daughter of Ishmael in Genesis 36.

This is clearly a rendering of the family lines from two different viewpoints. More and more as scholars stop trying to view the Bible from the European Western mind-set and start viewing it for what it is—a Middle Eastern, tribal, Semitic, Hebrew document—some of these issues start to clear up. For example, when we look at the NT genealogy of our Savior in different Gospels, we’ll get slightly different family tree listings. But as it is now known and understood, that is because it was the Middle Eastern and Hebrew way to lay out a family tree based on pure genealogy and firstborns when bloodlines are what matters, and a slightly different family tree list emphasizing leaders and kings of the tribe when what matters is rulership and tribal authority. These are not in conflict with one another; it’s really just a matter of the *purpose* of the family tree list.

Very likely, one of two things is happening with these two different lists of Esau’s wives. One option is that some of the wives went by two different names, depending on where they were living at the time (a common thing in that era). Another option is that these were all wives of Esau; it’s just that the first list was for one purpose, and the second was for a different purpose.

Another influence that often causes a divergence in genealogical listings is when two prominent family groups begin to intermarry, and so over time, the lines blur. Consider the ways names change today. In our age divorce is more common than not, so it is normal for brothers and sisters living under one roof to have different last names. A wife usually changes her last name to match that of her current husband, so a mother’s last name could be different from the name of her own child. Whether or not the mother’s last name matches that of her child is based on when her name was written down and for what purpose. If she was still married to the father of her children when her name was written down, then she and her children’s last names will match. If the woman divorced and remarried and then her name was recorded, her last name will probably not match that of her children. Then there are situations in which a biological father will consent to allow the new stepfather to adopt, so the child’s last name is changed, and so on.

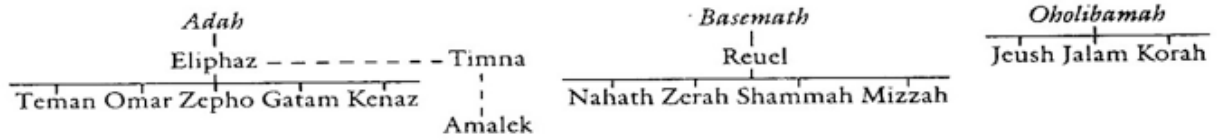
All that is true for our society, and we don’t consider the same person’s name appearing differently on documents from different times as necessarily “error” or “conflict.” Likewise, in the Bible era names changed in similar ways, but for different reasons. In the Bible we get a jumble of overlapping names and name changes due to births, deaths, a widow marrying a husband of a different nationality, the family relocating to another nation and adopting the local customs for naming people, the family dropping allegiance to one god and beginning allegiance to a new god, and on and on.

What we need to notice from all this is that there was much intermingling by means of



B. THE DESCENDANTS OF ESAU

Gen. 36:9-14



marriage between the descendants of Ishmael (Abraham’s son), and Esau (Isaac’s son, Jacob’s twin brother, Ishmael’s nephew). It began very early on and accelerated rapidly. It happened more in some clans and less in others. The result is that by the time we reach the NT times, the intermingling was great, and it is hard to draw a distinction between a person who would call Esau his ancestor and one who would call Ishmael his ancestor. In Jesus’s day, as it is now, a true Arab—that is, an Arabian, not simply a person who speaks one of the many Arabic dialects—is generally a descendant of Ishmael; most of the other Middle Eastern tribes are a mixture of Esau and Ishmael—the main exception being those of the northern Middle Eastern areas who have more Persian blood in them.

**AMALEK**

The final thing we need to note before we move on is of the appearance of Amalek, Esau’s grandson. Amalek was a very early enemy of Israel; much is said in Exodus about the tribe of Amalek attacking Israel on their journey through the wilderness after leaving Egypt. Amalek was the son of Timna, who was a Horite. Timna was not a legal wife but a concubine. She had

an inferior status, which in turn gave Amalek an inferior family status according to the tribal way of thinking.

That Timna was a Horite (a Canaanite tribe) and was joined to the Edomite tribe by means of marriage to Eliphaz (Esau’s son, an Edomite), made Amalek an Edomite tribe, but he was inferior to some of the other descendants who married more closely within the family. Therefore, Amalek, though technically a descendant of Esau, was really treated somewhat separately from his siblings by the Holy Scriptures. Amalek was not considered a kinsman of Israel, but other descendants of Esau are considered kinsmen of Israel. This reflects more politics and traditions than actual genealogy, and we’re going to find an awful lot of this sort of thing throughout OT and NT Scripture. It’s up to us to discover and understand, because the Hebrew writers and the early readers of the Torah and the Hebrew Bible well understood these nuances that have been lost to us.

Don’t close your mind off to these historical, sociological, and genealogical matters. Next only to the Holy Spirit dwelling within you, these are the keys to actually grasping what the writings of the Bible mean and how they are to be applied to your life.

## GENESIS 37

From this point on, Genesis will focus on Joseph. The era of patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob has come to a close. More will be said about Joseph and his life than any of the patriarchs. It is also at this point in the Torah that Israel becomes the center point for the first time. Israel is now painted as a separate people, although as of Genesis 37 they certainly had not yet attained nation status.

So, considering how much time is spent on telling Joseph's story (thirteen chapters of Genesis), why is Joseph not considered a patriarch? I can't really say for sure why that status ends with Jacob and not Joseph, but I can point to one outstanding fact that certainly is a marked change in the way Yehoveh operated with the leader of the Hebrews: God had direct and two-way communication with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He delivered His instructions to the patriarchs by means of direct divine oracle, but He did not with Joseph. Direct, two-way communication was reserved for very special cases, and Joseph was not one of them.

### GOD'S GOVERNING DYNAMICS

#### SANCTIFICATION

Woven throughout this narrative are God's governing dynamics. The first governing dynamic we recognized was that of division, election, and separation. It is God's device to achieve His goal of perfecting humanity and bringing mankind into unity with Himself. Today we call this sanctification. Sanctification is the act of God's dividing, electing, and separating people for His purposes. Sanctification is

the setting apart of human beings for Himself. A person set apart for God has been granted a holy status, a status elevated from *common*. The world's status is common, but those set apart for God have a holy status. Israel was set apart for God, so they are holy. As a believer, you have been sanctified; that is, you have been divided, separated, and elected to become God's own children, to conform to His will, to serve Him. You have been declared holy. But in reality, believers are more like the set-apart tribe of the set-apart nation of Israel; that set-apart tribe was Levi. For we are told in the NT that believers of Yeshua are His priesthood.

#### DIVINE PROVIDENCE

The second governing dynamic of God is the one that we see the Lord employ when dealing with Joseph—divine providence. God works His will largely unseen and unknown to us, yet in our ignorance, we are actually party to it. Somehow in the free exercise of our wills, God guides mankind to the end He decided back in eternity past, yet often it seems as though He isn't guiding at all. It even seems, at times, that He has created His creation and left us on our own, allowing His creation to take whatever route destiny has.

Many times it feels that God could not possibly achieve His goals using present circumstances. Yet without our knowing it, divine providence is at work, moving toward its inevitable, unchangeable, God-ordained conclusion. While we can see this in action within the lives of the patriarchs, albeit dimly at times, the story of Joseph is positively ablaze with observable divine providence. Of course, for us it is observable because we have something that Joseph

and all the other characters associated with this amazing journey didn't have: the benefit of hindsight. For while they were in the midst of it all, they couldn't see the divine providence at work. That is because one of the prime characteristics of divine providence is that it is rarely observable by humans as it unfolds.

Now that we have been introduced to two of God's governing dynamics—sanctification (the process of dividing, electing, and separating) and divine providence (the unseen working out of God's will in all humanity), let's look at the life of Joseph.

**ASSIGNMENT:** Read Genesis 37.

At the outset of Genesis 37, Joseph, second to the last of Jacob's sons, was seventeen years old. He was living in Canaan, along with the rest of his brothers. Soon, he would wind up in Egypt.

### WHAT DID ISAAC KNOW?

Recall that at the end of Genesis 35 the death of Jacob's father, Isaac, was recorded. Isaac had lived long enough to meet all of his grandchildren, the twelve tribes of Israel. Isaac remained alive long enough to know of Joseph's disappearance, but he didn't live long enough to learn the outcome.

It is not unusual in the Scriptures for a statement to be given, and we'll of course assume that it necessarily is attached to the verses written just before it. In fact, that's often not the case. In Genesis 35:27 we read of Jacob returning to Hebron and greeting Isaac. In the next two verses we read that Isaac died at the age of 180 and that his sons, Esau and Jacob, attended to his funeral. Verses 27 and 28 are not connected; they are simply two different statements of fact, one following the other—Jacob came

home, and sometime later Isaac died. With a little basic math, we find out that Isaac died after Joseph had gone missing for twelve years. Here are the two key ingredients: Jacob was sixty years younger than Isaac. So, when Isaac died at 180, Jacob had to have been 120 years old. The second thing to know is that Jacob died at 147 years old.

### THE BLESSING WAS UNFOLDING

The destiny that Isaac had given to his twin sons in the blessing was unfolding. Jacob now lived in the Promised Land, and Esau had left it, living away from fertile ground and away from regular rainfall. But another part of a prophetic blessing from a time earlier than Jacob, even earlier than his father, Isaac, was near to coming to pass; the Abrahamic blessing that, for a time, the Hebrews would live as strangers in a foreign land, and be oppressed:

*ADONAI said to Avram, "Know this for certain: your descendants will be foreigners in a land that is not theirs. They will be slaves and held in oppression there four hundred years." (Gen. 15:13)*

The "land that is not theirs," the place where they would live for four hundred years, was Egypt. In chapter 37 we're but a few years away from that event becoming a bitter reality.

### THE SONS OF BILHAH AND ZILPAH

As the era of the patriarchs came to a close, Joseph picked up where the patriarchs left off. In verse 2, we're told of seventeen-year-old Joseph, "Once when he was with the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives, he brought a bad report about them to their father." In other words, he tattled on them. Do you have a younger brother or sister who just can't wait to find something on you to run and tell Mom and Dad about? That's the situation here. These particular brothers who were tattled on were not the sons of Jacob's legal wives, Leah

and Rachel; they were the sons of Jacob's two concubines, Bilhah and Zilpah. That could only have caused additional stress and strain on the already tense relationships between the sons of Jacob, who were born by four different women. Imagine the problems in this family!

There was also a subtle change in family status that shows up in the Hebrew: for the first time Bilhah and Zilpah, Jacob's concubines, were called *ish'ishah*, a term usually applied only to a legal wife. I can't say with 100 percent assurance, but unless this is a redaction or an anomaly, it appears that Jacob had made Bilhah and Zilpah full wives. The Rambam, also known as Maimonides, says that at the time of this story, both Leah and Rachel were deceased. If this is correct, and it is more probable than not that it is, then we understand why Jacob would have elevated the status of Bilah and Zilpah. We also understand all the more the terrible turmoil that existed within Jacob's family at this time.

### JACOB'S FAVORED STATUS

Jacob had always favored Rachel, and likewise he favored the two children she gave him: Joseph and Benjamin, but especially Joseph. We are told in verse 3 that Jacob loved Joseph more, and he apparently made that fact very clear to his family. He further signified Joseph's favor by giving him what most Bibles will say is a "coat of many colors." It was not a coat, but a tunic. In Hebrew, *k'tonet passim*. There are many types of tunics, ranging from the ordinary to the special. There was a certain style of tunic that went from neck to ankle and all the way to the wrists on the arms. This was a royal tunic, and the form of the Hebrew used here says that, indeed, this robe Jacob made for Joseph was a royal robe. This wasn't simply that Joseph got a nicer coat than his brothers. It was that his father virtually anointed him as a prince, and allowed him to prance around among his brothers in kingly garb. The jealousy and envy this was bound to cause was going to wind up nearly costing Joseph his life. In fact, the envy grew

into hatred of Joseph to the point, as it says in verse 4, that his brothers could not speak to him in friendly or civil terms. Jacob's actions in his almost obsessive preference of Joseph made Joseph not fit in with his brothers. Literally, the translation is "they could not get themselves to address him unto peace." Much as in the Middle East today, at that time the common greeting was "Peace be with you." This verse is saying that these brothers couldn't even bring themselves to offer Joseph the standard "Peace be with you" greeting because they loathed him so much. It's within this context that we must view what is about to transpire.

### HOW JOSEPH WOULD COMMUNICATE WITH GOD

Joseph was at least somewhat aloof to all this rage and hatred that surrounded him. In youthful naïveté, Joseph didn't have the good sense to keep his mouth shut when he had a dream with an exciting meaning to *him*, but most certainly *not* to his brothers.

In this dream, he saw sheaves or bundles of harvested grain of some sort. There were twelve of these sheaves, and eleven of them were bowing down to the twelfth. Picture this teenage Joseph, standing there in his regal tunic, full of himself, telling this story to his ten older brothers who knew full well this dream's symbolism: that they would, someday, all submit to Joseph as their master!

We see in this story that God would communicate to Joseph in dreams and visions, as opposed to the more direct, audible two-way conversations He had with the patriarchs. This was not unique to Joseph, though. Dreams and visions were standard ways that people of that era thought their gods communicated with them. People generally believed these prophetic visions and oracles, but it was also understood that the personality and ambitions of the dreamer played a role in the dream. A dream was viewed as a kind of hybrid: it was an oracle that was part god and part aspiration of the person having the dream.

In verse 9, Joseph had another dream, and once again he couldn't wait to tell everybody. The first dream he told only to his brothers; the second he related to his father, Jacob, as well. He said that the sun, the moon, and eleven stars bowed down to him. They again knew what that meant. It was even more insulting because in that era, and actually right down to pagan religions of our day, the sun represented the father figure, the moon the mother, and the stars their offspring. Joseph was saying that not only would his brothers bow down in subservience to him, but so would his mother and father! Jacob tried to rein Joseph's self-importance in a bit by mocking him and saying, "Are we to come, I and your mother, and bow low to the ground to you?"

This passage lends credence to the idea that Bilah and Zilpah had become wives for Jacob. Though Rachel was long dead before this incident, Jacob responded by saying, "So you say I and your mother . . . should bow down to you?" Rachel was Joseph's mother, but Bilhah had been her handmaiden. Bilhah would have had much to do with Joseph's upbringing. If Jacob had elevated Bilhah's status to a full wife, it would have been customary in that era to refer to her as "Joseph's mother." Nevertheless, the whole family must have thought Joseph was suffering from delusions of grandeur, but it would turn out that these dreams were accurate, and further, that dream interpretation was a spiritual gift from God for Joseph.

## THE BROTHERS TAKE ACTION

The flocks of the Israelite clan were at this time pasturing in the grassy fields and valleys surrounding Shechem, while their home base was in Hebron. Jacob and his sons apparently felt no compunction in going back to Shechem, even though just a few years earlier the king of Shechem's son had raped Jacob's daughter Dinah, and in retaliation the sons of Jacob had slaughtered every male resident of that city and taken many of their widows and children for

their own! But return they did, and Joseph's brothers were in the pastures tending the animals. Jacob told Joseph to go to his brothers and check on their welfare. Jacob may have sent Joseph out of concern for his sons in light of that horrible incident. As we've seen, in the Middle East the desire for vengeance can last and even grow for generations.

Joseph went, unaware of the precarious situation he was in. It was a journey of about fifty miles, and as he got near Shechem, a man informed him that the flock had been there but moved on to a place called Dothan. Despite a few older Hollywood movie versions to the contrary, this man was only a man. The Hebrew word used was *ish*, man. This was not an angel. The name of the place called Dothan means "two wells," and Joseph was about to have a close encounter with one of those wells.

The area of the two wells was hilly and lush. From a vantage point atop one of those hills, the brothers saw Joseph coming toward them. Their hatred was overflowing, dear old dad was at least three days' journey away, and before Joseph reached them, they had decided to kill him. Verses 19 and 20 show us rather clearly what it was that finally put them over the edge: it was Joseph's dreams that offended them to the point of murder. This is not only about jealousy and insult. These brothers believed, to some degree, that the dreams of Joseph being their master were true. If they killed Joseph, however, then the problem was solved.

## REUBEN SAVES JOSEPH

Reuben, the firstborn of Jacob and a son of Leah, intervened and suggested that they not kill Joseph by their own hands; rather, they should throw him in a pit. Joseph would starve to death and never be found. But the Bible tells us that Reuben's real intention was to keep Joseph alive so that he could come back later and retrieve him after the brothers had left the area. Why? Reuben, Jacob's firstborn, was the one who attempted a coup against his father by sleeping

with Bilhah, thereby claiming his father's concubine as a prize. Although the coup failed and Jacob married Bilhah anyway, ignoring the fact that she was "ruined" by Reuben, Reuben was still considered the top dog among the brothers. Reuben had the most to lose because of his father's special preference for Joseph, yet he tried to intervene and come to Joseph's rescue. Perhaps he knew he would have been held responsible for the actions of the group and he was in enough hot water as it was because of the Bilhah affair.

We have seen a pretty good glimpse of the hardened individuals that these brothers were. They had slain all the males of Shechem after duping them into being circumcised. Then they went on a rampage to loot the helpless city, even carrying off some of its women and children to increase their own families. It should be of little surprise that these same pitiless men would throw their teenage brother into an empty well to die, and then immediately sit down to have lunch as his pleas for mercy hung in the air!

## A CHANGE IN PLANS

No sooner had they begun to eat than they spotted a caravan of Ishmaelite (Arab) traders. Judah, another son of Leah, had an idea: "Let's not allow him to die in the pit, let's sell him to the Arabs." Whatever happened to him from that point would be beyond their control. Additionally, they could actually profit monetarily by getting rid of Joseph this way, so why not do it? What fractured logic!

### WHY DIDN'T JOSEPH DROWN?

The pit was, in fact, an empty well—a cistern. Remember, the place was called Dothan, two wells. One of those two wells was dry (see Gen. 37:24). Dry wells and cisterns were commonly used as prison cells, even hiding places, in that day. So Reuben's idea was hardly novel.

It was no great coincidence that these traders came along, out in the middle of nowhere. One of the oldest trading routes of the Middle East ran from the spice-producing region of Gilead down through the area of Shechem (right where they were located), and all the way into Egypt. The Biblical record alternates between saying that the brothers sold Joseph to Ishmaelites and to Midianites. Ishmaelites were a different people than the Midianites. Ishmael was a son of Abraham, as was Midian. But Ishmael's mother was Hagar, while Midian's was Keturah. Perhaps Ishmaelites had already become a general term for all the Semitic peoples living in the area of Arabia, and Midianite was a more specific and precise identification. We're just not sure.

The brothers sold Joseph to the traders for twenty shekels of silver, the going rate for a male slave. Reuben returned, found Joseph gone, and "tore his garment," a sign of mourning. This was not a lament that Joseph was gone, but as the eldest, he would be held responsible by his father, Jacob.

## JACOB MOURNS JOSEPH

The brothers came up with another plan: they put blood on the royal tunic they had stripped from Joseph before they threw him in the well and took it to their father, asking, "Is this Joseph's tunic?" Of course, Jacob immediately identified the tunic as Joseph's. The blood on the tunic was proof enough to Jacob that a wild animal had killed and eaten Joseph. The brothers didn't even have to tell their lie. Rather, they offered their father comfort.

But, Jacob couldn't be comforted. This gives us a hint of how people of his day viewed death. He says, rhetorically, that surely *he* shall now die, and go down into Sheol to be with his son. At that time, *Sheol* basically meant the grave, or the place of the dead. The concept of dying and going to heaven did not exist. As we have seen in recent chapters, there was this concept of dying and "being gathered to your people,"

a statement associated with the nearly universal practice of ancestor worship. Exactly what that meant to the mind of these ancients is unclear, but certainly it carried with it the idea of some type of life after death, even if they were uncertain as to what that amounted to.

### JOSEPH'S ARRIVAL IN EGYPT

In the last verse Joseph arrived in Egypt and was sold to a very high Egyptian government official: Potiphar. Potiphar was a rather common

Egyptian name, and it is found on Egyptian monuments from several dynasties. Written *Pet-Pa-Ra*, it simply means “dedicated to Ra” or “a gift to Ra.” Ra was the Egyptian sun god. It is often debated as to exactly what office Potiphar held for Pharaoh, but it certainly had something to do with the military. It isn't fully clear whether he was captain of the palace guard, in charge of all of Pharaoh's armies, or simply the Pharaoh's chief bodyguard, but he was probably the second most powerful man in Egypt—for the moment, anyway.

## GENESIS 38

**ASSIGNMENT:** Read Genesis 38.

The story shifts, for a while, back to Canaan and focuses on the brother whose suggestion it was to sell Joseph into slavery, Judah. First, let's focus on Judah, because it was out of Judah that would come the Jewish people and the eventual Messiah, Yeshua. Judah was the continuing line of covenant promise that began with his great-grandfather, Abraham. Judah was Jacob's fourth son; he was a son of Leah, one of Jacob's two legal wives.<sup>118</sup> In trying to figure out why Judah was mentioned so prominently in the previous chapter as the one who perpetrated selling Joseph and now in this chapter as the one who thought he was sleeping with a prostitute when it was actually his widowed daughter-in-law, we need to take notice of the state of the family of Israel, the clan of Jacob.

### RIVALRY BETWEEN JUDAH AND JOSEPH

It's entirely possible, even probable, that Judah viewed his half brother, Joseph, as a rival. Remember, Judah was born to Leah and Joseph was born to Rachel. Judah may have seen himself as the one who was owed the firstborn blessing and all the wealth and authority that went with it. Why would he think that? As we'll see later, Jacob had decided that Reuben (even though he was Jacob's firstborn son) would not receive the firstborn blessing because Reuben had slept with Jacob's concubine Bilhah. Simeon and Levi, the next two in line, were deemed unworthy to inherit the blessing because they led the raid on the males of Shechem, killing them in revenge for the rape of their sister, Dinah.

It would seem to follow that Judah, the fourth in line, would inherit the firstborn blessing. But the gift of the tunic of royalty and open favoritism toward Joseph by his father indicated to Judah that Jacob was leaning toward, or perhaps had already decided to bypass his first ten sons and give all rights and authority over the clan to Joseph; this, of course, would not have settled well with Judah.

This wrestling for power, which the teenage Joseph was utterly oblivious to, was but the beginning of the rivalry between Judah and Joseph and their descendants. These two brothers represent those people who would eventually become the two dominant tribes of Israel: Judah and Ephraim. As we'll see in a few chapters, Ephraim, an Egyptian-born son of Joseph (born to Joseph's Egyptian wife), would effectively replace Joseph as a tribe of Israel. In fact, Jacob adopted Ephraim and his older brother Manasseh away from Joseph for the purpose of replacing Reuben. Centuries after that, Judah and Ephraim became the two Israelite kingdoms when Israel split. The descendants of Judah and Ephraim would find themselves warring against each other, off and on, until Assyria finally conquered the Northern Kingdom of Ephraim and scattered the ten tribes of Israel that constituted Ephraim throughout the far reaches of Asia. So, from the time Joseph was a young man until today, the descendants of Judah and the descendants of Joseph, by way of Ephraim, have been at odds with one another.

In the prophecy of Ezekiel 37, a time is foretold when Israel would have ceased to exist as a nation, yet they would become a nation back in the land of its beginning. Judah and Ephraim would return to the land and be ruled under one king, a descendant of King David, for all time.



Judah returned to the Middle East in 1948 and reconstituted the nation of Israel in the same place it was before it was destroyed some two thousand years earlier. But what of Ephraim? Those “Joseph” tribes have been making news recently. We have traditionally talked of “the ten lost tribes of Israel” when referencing the tribes of Ephraim. Ephraim had not returned to Israel, but Judah had. For several years now, large tribes of people scattered around Asia and India have been claiming that they are some of those lost tribes. After nearly twenty years of investigation, the Jewish religious leadership of Israel has determined that indeed they are Ephraim and they have convinced the Israeli government of that fact. As of March 2005, some of these tribes of Ephraim have been invited to immigrate to Israel. The prophecy of Ezekiel 37 is under way.

But there is still a problem: the Judaism that modern Jews practice is different (to varying degrees) from what these various Ephraimite tribes practice. Just as it started with the man Judah, and the man Joseph, and as it has happened since Judah sold Joseph into slavery and he wound up in Egypt, Judah and the Joseph tribes (Ephraim) are still at odds. Judah, the Jews, have told Ephraim that they must adopt the Jewish traditions and basically convert to Judaism in order to return to Israel. Those of Ephraim, who are desperate to come to Israel, have grudgingly agreed. You can bet that this is not the end of the story. I suspect that as the return of Ephraim increases so will their resistance to adopting the ways of Judah.

## JUDAH LEAVES HIS FAMILY

At the time of this story, Israel was still several centuries away from possessing the land of Canaan and from dividing Canaan up into twelve districts, one for each of the twelve tribes of Israel. This occurred sometime between the day that Joseph was sold to the slave traders and the time Jacob decided to move his entire family to Egypt to survive the famine.

Judah parted ways with his family for a time, and had children with a Canaanite woman: a definite offense to God. We aren’t told this woman’s name, only that her father’s name was Shua. Without doubt, Judah had made a conscious decision to part ways with his family, and this is reflected in the first words of Genesis 38, when it says Judah “went off from his brothers.” He certainly knew that marriage to Canaanite women was not even to be contemplated by Israelites; as we all know, when we want to do something that we know is both wrong and unacceptable to our families, we separate ourselves from them so that we don’t have to face them. This is what Judah did.

This unnamed woman produced three sons for Judah, but none of these should have been suitable to carry on the line of the covenant promise because they all were of Canaanite blood. But without doubt, this never even occurred to Judah. He did not seem to think about the fact that his uncle Esau had been passed over for the firstborn blessing, partially because he married Canaanite women. Here was Judah, doing the same thing. How often we tend to live like Judah; we claim faith in God but then separate that faith from the everyday matters of our lives. What troubles and sorrows that mind-set and behavior inevitably brings to us, just as it was about to for Judah.

Yet, as was going to happen on a regular basis, these foreign women were brought in to Israel, assimilated, and were considered Israelites in time. This principle of being adopted or grafted into Israel was one of the earliest principles set down by Yehoveh.

## THE FATE OF A WIDOW

As the three sons of Judah matured, the firstborn, ‘Er, was given a wife selected by Judah: this wife’s name was Tamar.<sup>119</sup> Then we are told that God killed ‘Er because he was evil. Tamar became a widow. The key here is that Tamar was a *childless* widow, or more correctly, a son-less widow. She may have produced some daughters

before her husband's death, but we know how critical it was for a man of this period to produce a son.

## ONAN'S DUTY

Onan, the second son of Judah, was instructed to go and take his brother's widow, Tamar, as his wife. This was simply a custom of that day; generally speaking, this was not optional—it was the law that the brother do this. Just as a female could be a substitute “wife,” a concubine or baby producer for a woman who was unable to bear children to her husband, so could a substitute husband impregnate a woman whose husband had died, leaving her without a son. The substitute husband was usually a family member, normally a brother, of the deceased man. The traditional name for this law among Hebrews is *Levirate Marriage*. It might appear from its name that this is taken from the Hebrew tribal name Levi, but it is not. The actual Hebrew word for this ordinance is *yibbum*. Our modern translation “Levirate” is taken from the Latin word *levir*, which is the designation for a husband's brother. So, *Levi* and *Levirate* are just similarly spelled and pronounced words that are in no way related.

The levirate marriage was not unique to Israel; it existed in other cultures as well. This is attested to with well-preserved Hittite documents, and even documents from the Middle Assyrian age. This levirate law can be found in Deuteronomy 25:5–10:

*If brothers live together, and one of them dies childless, his widow is not to marry someone unrelated to him; her husband's brother is to go to her and perform the duty of a brother-in-law by marrying her. The first child she bears will succeed to the name of his dead brother, so that his name will not be eliminated from Isra'el. If the man does not wish to marry his brother's widow, then his brother's widow is to go up to the gate, to the leaders, and say, “My brother-in-law refuses to raise up for his brother a name in Isra'el; he will not perform the duty of a husband's brother for me.” The leaders of his town are to summon him and speak to him. If, on appearing*

*before them, he continues to say, “I don't want to marry her;” then his brother's widow is to approach him in the presence of the leaders, pull his sandal off his foot, spit in his face and say, “This is what is done to the man who refuses to build up his brother's family.” From that time on, his family is to be known in Isra'el as “the family of the man who had his sandal pulled off.”*

This sandal flinging was a rebuff, and it indicated the poor character of someone who refused to do his family duty. It was a public humiliation. Nevertheless, in Genesis 38:9 we're told that Onan, the brother of the deceased Er, refused to impregnate Tamar, so God killed him, because he, too, was evil in God's eyes. Why did Onan refuse to do this? Well, Scripture tells us it was because the son he produced would not have been his.

Let's dissect this a bit: the brother who died (Er) was the firstborn. Onan was the second-born, but as the eldest surviving brother, he had become the firstborn. However, if he produced a child in the name of his deceased brother, that child would have been entitled to part of Judah's estate. In other words, Onan would have received less if his deceased elder brother's family line had continued. It was not uncommon for family members to maneuver to gain the most power and wealth when the father died, but to intentionally deny a widow her son did two things: it meant that her deceased husband's family line would end (a disaster to the ancient way of thinking), and she would have no son to care for her as she grew older. This was tantamount to living in extreme poverty. For Onan to knowingly put Tamar in this position made him appear selfish and callous to a very high degree. Yehoveh took his life as a consequence.

## SHELAH'S DUTY

By tradition, it would have been the levirate duty of Judah's third son, Shelah, to marry the twice-widowed Tamar, but it was judged that



he was too young to marry. Judah sent Tamar home to live with her own father until Shelah was old enough to marry her. But Judah had absolutely no intention of allowing his last son to marry Tamar.

Time passed. Judah's wife (the mother of his three sons) died, and the third son, Shelah, matured. He was old enough to be married, but Judah did not allow it. He had seen the result of his other two sons marrying Tamar: they died.

I think it's safe to say that Judah didn't know why they died. We are told it was because they were evil, but I see no indication that Judah knew this. Judah was living a life utterly oblivious to God and His laws and commands. To Judah, Tamar was really bad luck. He wasn't going to chance losing his last son, his last heir, by letting him marry this woman who seemed to bring God's wrath upon her husbands.

### TAMAR'S PLAN

After the formal period of mourning of his wife (probably thirty days) was over, Judah went to a

### SACRED SEX

Most of the mystery Babylon-based religions adopted "sacred sex" as part of their religious practices, and there is a movement within the fringes of the new Spiritualist and New Age movements worldwide<sup>120</sup> to bring the practice back. Their stated goal is to combine the erotic with the sacred, a fundamental goal of the mystery Babylon religions. This shows us how easily we can adopt traditions within the church that are not in line with God's Word or will, usually taken from something out of the pagan world's customs, and present them as a "good thing." While we can attach sincerity to some of these long-held and comfortable traditions, often, as with Judah here, these things are an abomination to God.

place called Timnah to supervise and participate in the sheep-shearing season. Tamar found out about this and "took off her widow's clothes." Women were required to wear special clothing when their husbands died. Typically, it was only during the thirty-day mourning period that they wore the widow's garb, but possibly because Tamar had been denied her right to have a child from her deceased husband's brother, she continued to live in a state of mourning.

Judah was doing a terrible and shameful thing by not allowing Shelah to marry Tamar; Tamar was greatly disgraced by this. So she developed a plan: she would find a way to sleep with her father-in-law, Judah, and directly from his seed perform the all-important task of carrying on the bloodlines of her dead husband's family. Understanding that Judah would never do this knowingly, Tamar disguised herself as a prostitute and set herself at a place called 'Einayim. This must have been a well-known place where prostitutes found clients, for *'Einayim* means "eyes that look." In other words, it was a place where men looked for this kind of women. Even more, she was thought to be a "temple prostitute." The Canaanites had adopted prostitution as a "worship" practice (symbolizing fertility), and it was connected

with the pagan temple to Baal. It was a duty, and in many ways an honor, for these woman to be prostitutes for Baal. It was considered a legitimate practice by both customer and client, so Judah, totally disconnected from Yehovah, thought nothing of it.

Tamar's plan worked; she tricked Judah into thinking she was a temple prostitute, he purchased her favors, and she became pregnant. Three months later, when it was clear to all that Tamar was with child, someone told Judah about it. In order to save the family honor, Judah ordered her burned to death for adultery; after all, she was unmarried and pregnant and that was proof enough of her offense—that she had brought dishonor to Judah and his household.

When Judah found out that he was the father of this unborn child, he realized that by withholding his last son, Shelah, from Tamar, he had caused her to take this drastic action. He declared that it was he who had done wrong, not Tamar. He repented and she was spared. Even more, Judah said that Tamar was righteous in what she did. This is another of those statements in the Bible that is a factual report of a person's declaration, and the person was just plain wrong. Tamar was not righteous in what she did, no more than Judah was righteous in what he did. God simply used them despite their sin and rebellion to achieve His divine purpose.

### TAMAR'S DESCENDANTS

Tamar delivered twin boys: Perez and Zerach. Judah's "wrong" had been to bring shame upon Tamar by not giving his son Shelah as a husband to her. He broke from tradition. But the wrong that was being righted with the birth of these boys was of a spiritual nature. Judah intended to carry on his family line via his Canaanite wife, which produced Canaanite children, but God would have none of it. Judah was utterly oblivious to his sin before God. To him, everything turned out okay in the end, or so he thought.

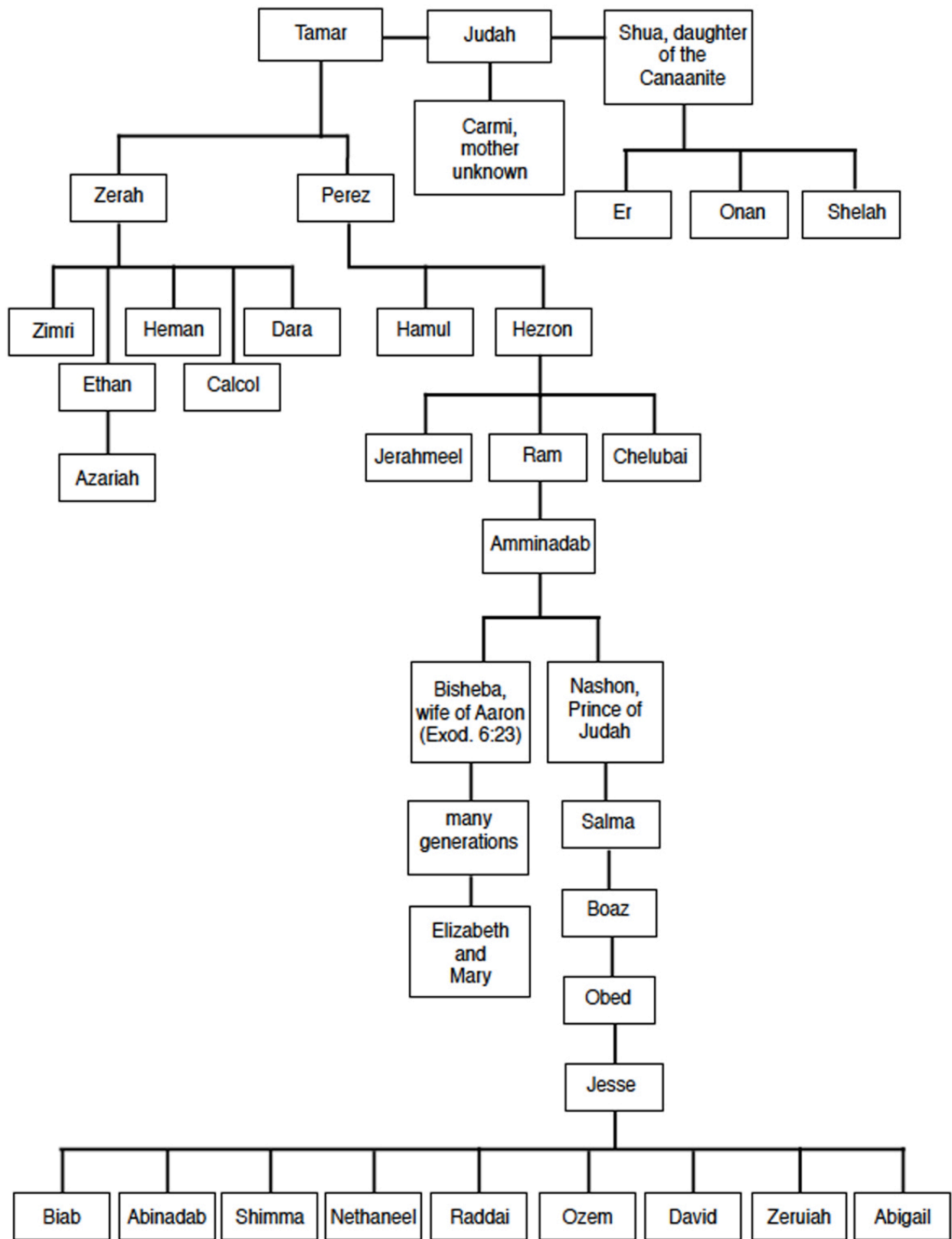
The ancient rabbis give us a helpful piece of information that is not contained in this story:

Tamar was a Semite, a descendant of Shem, the sanctified line of good. She was not a Canaanite, a descendant of Ham, the accursed line of evil. Up to now, Judah had produced his three sons by a Canaanite woman. Two of them died. The third, who should have impregnated Tamar and would have produced the son who would carry on the line of Judah, never got the opportunity to do that because Judah refused to let it happen for all the wrong reasons. The result was that Judah himself unwittingly made Tamar pregnant. Despite Judah's intention to pollute the line of covenant promise (which he cared little about) with Canaanite blood, Judah impregnated a Semite woman, Tamar, and from that came the Semite sons who would continue the line of promise.

God went to great lengths to ensure that Canaanite blood not be mixed with Israelite blood, particularly if it affected the line of covenant promise. Yehoveh even did it when the covenant line would *not* be directly affected, as when the planned marriage between Jacob's daughter Dinah and the king of Shechem's son was averted because the males of Shechem were killed by Simeon and Levi.

Because Judah was the father of Tamar's children, and because Tamar was a Semite, the children from their union were acceptable to God; we see that the purity of the line of covenant promise that would eventually produce the Messiah—which began with Abraham, went on to Isaac, then to Jacob, and now to Judah—was preserved by Tamar's rather bold and unsavory act. As we look in other chapters of the Bible where we find the lengthy genealogy of Jesus, we have confirmation of this. Perez, the first-born of Tamar's twin sons, was a direct ancestor of Yeshua. Perez, son of Judah by Tamar, his widowed daughter-in-law, was the one who carried forth the line of promise for the tribe of Judah, with no Canaanite blood in him.

God's governing dynamic of sanctification was at work. Perez was divided, elected, and separated away from all the other children of Judah to be the conduit for the all-important line of



The genealogy of Judah to David

the covenant promise first given to Abraham. We also see the governing dynamic of divine providence playing out as Judah and Tamar each attempt to satisfy cultural traditions and their own selfish lusts and ambitions. Neither had the

intent to obey God, nor did either realize they would produce the next generation of the line of covenant promise: Perez. There could not be a better example and demonstration of divine providence than this story.

## GENESIS 39

In Genesis 39, the Torah resumes the tale of Joseph. His time in Canaan was over, and his life in Egypt began when he was a teenager and would not end until his death.

**ASSIGNMENT:** Read Genesis 39.

The first verse in this chapter says something so obvious that our eye almost skip over it: “Potifar, an officer of Pharaoh’s and captain of the guard, *an Egyptian* . . .” (emphasis mine). Here we are, in Egypt, and we have to be told that Potiphar is an Egyptian? What else would we have expected of the second in command over all of Egypt but that he would have been an Egyptian? Yet Moses, who wrote this down, made a point of it.

### THE BEDOUIN KINGS OF EGYPT

The answer lies in the fact that at one time, long before Israel became a sovereign nation, Egypt was conquered; it found itself under the control of non-Egyptians. It wasn’t until later times that Egypt sought a position as a world power. Up to Joseph’s time Egypt had been a very highly developed civilization that had contact with the outer world, sent emissaries, and even developed trade with the outer world, but their goal was only to make Egypt a great nation within its own borders; historically, there had been no aggressive imperialistic designs.

However, as has been the case since these nations have existed, that goal turned out not to be the same as that of their neighbors. They soon

found out that simply being a peace-loving nation and trying to get along with their neighbors did not immunize them from conflict or aggression.

Egypt was attacked and routed by Bedouins, Semites who had come from Arabia and Syria. The war was not a result of any dispute between Egypt and these Semites; it was simply that these Bedouins wanted what Egypt had. Semite rulers controlled Egypt for approximately two centuries; Semites, sons of Shem, cousins of Israel, sat as pharaohs on the throne of Egypt, not Egyptians. The Egyptians called these foreign rulers of Egypt the Hyksos. *Hyk* means “king” and *sos* means “shepherd”; these foreigners were known as the Shepherd Kings. We don’t know a lot about them, nor are we able to precisely place them in time because the records from the Hyksos period are scant. This might seem strange in itself, for the Egyptians were tremendous writers of history and great record keepers. But, as was typical of most ancient nations, the Egyptians did not record defeats or times of subjugation. What we know of this time generally comes from records from private Egyptian citizens who lived in that era.

Even with some inherent historical inconsistencies and contradictory scientific findings, scholars generally agree that during the time of Joseph, and for perhaps one hundred years or a little more after Joseph’s death, the Semite Shepherd Kings ruled Egypt. When we know that the Bedouins (Semites) were in control at the time Joseph was sold into slavery in Egypt, it makes sense that Moses thought it was important to mention that Potiphar was *not* a Bedouin but an Egyptian. It also explains why the pharaoh seemed to have little trouble giving Joseph (a foreigner, Hebrew, and Israelite) such an

incredible amount of authority over Egyptians. With that as a background, let's continue.

Joseph was a very good-looking young man, and Potiphar's wife was quite taken with him. He also, in some way, became prosperous; apparently he was able to do more than simply serve Potiphar. God was with Joseph and he did well for himself and for Potiphar. We're going to find the statement "God was with Joseph" four times in this chapter, clearly to make the point that even though Joseph was abandoned by his family and placed into a strange land with strange gods, the God of Israel was still with him—protecting, controlling, and guiding events. Bad circumstances don't mean God has turned His back on you. Even the fact that the Semite Hyksos were in power was divine providence, although, of course, Joseph was oblivious to it all.

Potiphar's wife was infatuated with Joseph and constantly tried to seduce him. He refused all her advances. It happened again and again and again. One day Mrs. Potiphar, tired of being rebuffed by a purchased house servant, grabbed Joseph in a desperate attempt to have him. He ran for his life, but in the doing, she removed a piece of his garment. Embarrassed, she decided to take revenge for being scorned: she told her husband that Joseph tried to rape her, and Joseph was thrown into prison. In verse 14 she declared that the Hebrew was brought in by her husband to make fools of her household. This is another indication of the hatred the Egyptians had for Semites due to their current condition of being subjugated by Semite people, even though this particular group of Semites were not Hebrews.



Within no time, Joseph was made a supervisor over all the prisoners. Although the concept of prison is one that has always been part of our society, it was not part of every society in Joseph's day. Prisons didn't exist among most Canaanite societies, and they didn't exist among the Hebrews. God protected Joseph even though he was locked up. In fact, we're going to find out in the next chapter that Joseph was not kept with the other prisoners. He was kept in the home of the prison captain, in a dungeon or basement of some kind, not the normal household living space. Without knowing it, Joseph was proving his trustworthiness to the very man who had locked him up and undoubtedly all who came into contact with him. This would serve him well, as God was about to do something astonishing. God's governing dynamic number two, divine providence, was a central theme of Joseph's life.



## GENESIS 40

**ASSIGNMENT:** Read Genesis 40.

### JOSEPH'S GIFT WITH DREAMS

About eleven years had passed since Joseph's older brothers sold him into slavery. He was twenty-eight years old. Did Joseph still think his dreams of his family bowing down to him, which had much to do with his current condition, bore any significance? Or, were they just dreams of childhood? From where he sat, so long removed from Canaan and from his family, he may have forgotten all about those sheaves of grain bowing before him and the sun and the moon and eleven stars paying homage to him. But let's be very clear about what those dreams meant to Joseph: if they were true, he was going to get the firstborn blessing. His ten older brothers would be skipped over, and he would become the inheritor of all the wealth and authority of the clan of Israel. In all likelihood, he hadn't forgotten them. Nevertheless, Joseph was sitting in prison because the wife of Potiphar, his master, lied and said he had tried to assault her. How long he had been languishing in prison is difficult to know, but it was long enough that he gained the trust of the jailer.

Eventually the pharaoh became angry with two high government officials: the official cupbearer and the head baker. These were not servants, although everyone was, by definition, subservient to the pharaoh. These men were likely right in line behind Potiphar in authority. Some unknown offense wound up costing these men their freedom and even their lives, but this was often the case with Orientals (remember: it was Oriental Semites,

not Egyptians, ruling Egypt at that time). The pharaoh was probably just in a bad mood, or the men unknowingly (because they were Egyptian) committed some faux pas against Oriental sensibilities. It resulted in the two men being arrested and, like Joseph, held in the house of the prison captain, not the regular prison as the common folk had to suffer.

After some time Joseph noticed one morning that they both had puzzled and bothered countenances. He inquired what troubled them and they each reported that they had had dreams but they couldn't understand what they meant. These men didn't see danger in their dreams; they were concerned because in prison there were no seers available, no dream interpreters to tell them the significance of their night visions. Dreams were important in that era, so there were professional dream interpreters available for a fee. But Joseph's suffering had clearly bolstered his faith, and he responded, "Don't interpretations belong to God?" (Gen. 40:8). Then he told them to tell him their dreams.

They proceeded, the cupbearer going first. He spoke of a vine with three branches, and grapes forming on the branches, which he made into wine for the pharaoh. Instantly, God gave Joseph the meaning, and Joseph told the cupbearer good news: within three days the pharaoh would reinstate the cupbearer to his position, and all would be well.

This seemed to have emboldened the baker, who undoubtedly expected equally good news. The baker dreamed within the context of his life's experiences, just as the cupbearer had done, and he saw three baskets of bread on his head, stacked one upon the other. The uppermost basket attracted birds that came and ate the baked goods right from the basket still on

### HOW THE BAKER WOULD BE KILLED

Many versions say that the baker was hanged from a tree. However, what the Hebrew actually said is that he would be impaled on a tree. Hanging was not a typical manner of execution in this era, but beheading was. Often the head was removed from the corpse and impaled on a stake (or a tree) as a warning to others.

the baker's head. Joseph told the baker the bad news: on the same day that the cupbearer was going to be restored, the baker would lose his life. Of course, that's exactly what happened.

### THE VALIDITY OF THIS STORY

Egyptian hieroglyphs prove many of the details of this story. For instance, males carried items in Egypt by balancing them on their heads,

much like the image of the stacked baskets in the baker's dream. These stacked baskets were a normal means of conveying the bread from the ovens to the palace, which the baker would have done several times a day. But, here's the thing: you would never see an Egyptian woman put a load on her head; rather, Egyptian women toted things on their shoulders and back. This was opposite from the customary way the Oriental cultures toted loads. So this little insight is just one of many proofs of the authenticity of the biblical narrative of Joseph's, and eventually Israel's, time in Egypt.

The last sentence of this chapter is a rather sad one but so typical of mankind: Joseph, having shown kindness to the cupbearer, had requested that the cupbearer might do the same for him after being restored to his position. But we are told that once everything was back to normal for the cupbearer, he forgot about poor Joseph and left him languishing in prison for a crime he had not committed.

## GENESIS 41

ASSIGNMENT: Read Genesis 41.

## THE SEMITIC TAKEOVER OF EGYPT

It may have caught some of you off guard that at the time of Joseph Egypt was ruled by Semites, descendants from Shem, son of Noah. The pharaoh of Egypt at the time Joseph was made ruler of the land was not an Egyptian. During a 150-year period, official Egyptian government records regarding Egypt's history suddenly ceased.

The reason for this is that kings and pharaohs tended not to record defeats and times of subjugation for their histories. This helps us understand how Joseph became so powerful and how Israel was, at first, free to grow and prosper, but later it became the brunt of Egypt's rage, and the Israelites eventually became slaves.

There were several records of that time, however, that were written down and preserved by private Egyptian citizens, and they tell the

story of these foreign rulers, the Hyksos. In particular, the Egyptian historian Manetho compiled several of these records and left them for us to ponder:

*We had a king called Tutimaens. In his reign, it happened. I do not know why God was displeased with us. Unexpectedly, from the regions of the East came men of unknown race. Confident of victory, they marched against our land. By force they took it, easily, without a single battle. Having overpowered our rulers, they burned our cities without compassion and destroyed the temples of the gods. All the natives were treated with great cruelty, for they slew some and carried off the wives and children of others into slavery. Finally they appointed one of themselves as king. His name was Salitis, and he lived in Memphis and made Upper and Lower Egypt pay tribute to him . . . and when he found a city in the province of Sais which suited his purpose (it lay east of the Bubasite branch of the Nile and was called Avaris) he rebuilt it and made it very strong by erecting walls and installing a force of 240,000 men to hold it. Salitis went there every summer, partly to collect his corn and pay men*



*their wages and partly to train his armed troops and terrify foreigners.*

This is a very emotional and condensed recounting of the conquering of Egypt by the Semites from Asia. We are even given an Arabic name of the conquering king: Salitis. How it must have stuck in the craw of the Egyptian people to be overrun so easily and swiftly by these “uncivilized hoards.”

Yet in God’s unfathomable divine providence, this set the stage for Joseph to assume a powerful position and for Israel to be held hostage in Egypt for more than four centuries.

### WHAT WAS AVARIS?

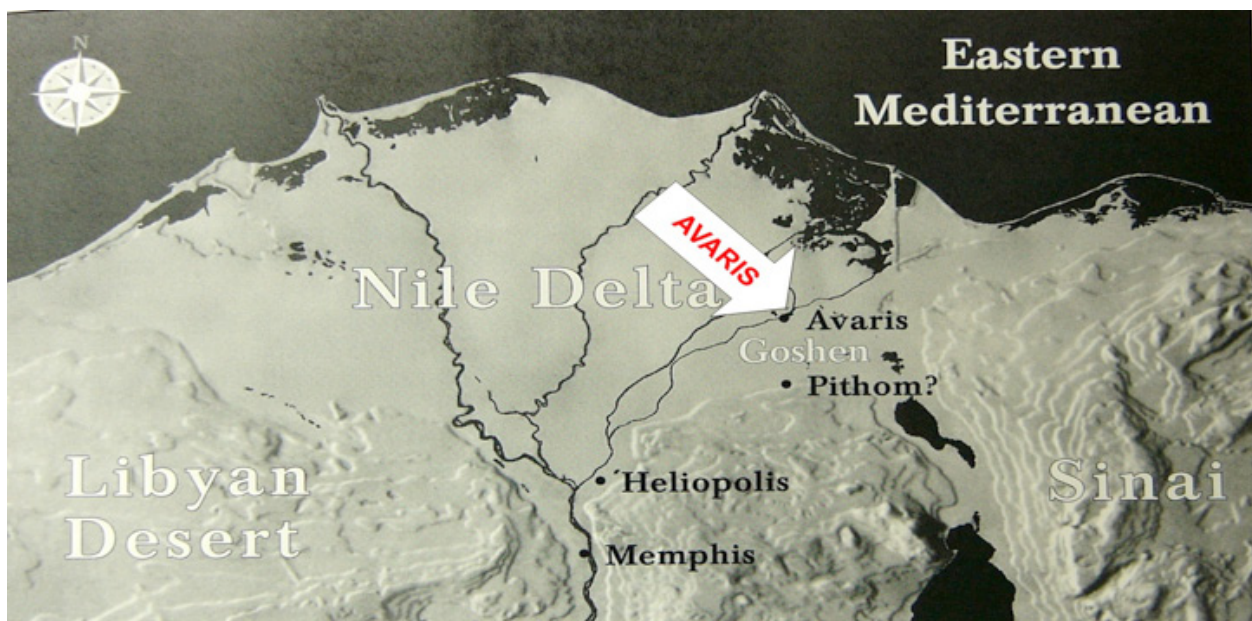
Now, I would like you to take note of a name that is mentioned by Manetho: Avaris. In Exodus we shall spend some time talking about this city. Avaris was the large city that became home to the Hebrews, the Israelites, in the land of Goshen, Egypt. This is the very place most secular archaeologists say doesn’t exist: a place where an enormous population of Hebrews lived after Joseph’s time. Note what a large place it was, for this Salitis, the new foreign pharaoh, stationed almost a quarter of a million troops there just to secure it.

### THE PHARAOH IS HAUNTED BY DREAMS

Two years had passed since the end of Genesis 40. Joseph was nearing thirty years old, and prison was still his home. Dreams had, so far, been nothing but trouble for Joseph, but that was all about to change.

The pharaoh had two dreams, and they were disturbing to him. They seemed so real that after he awoke he was relieved to realize they were just dreams (verse 7). Yet the content was such that they seemed more than a dream—more like a vision—so he felt he must pursue the meaning. He called all of his “magicians” and “wise men” to tell him the meaning of these dreams. These two groups of men the pharaoh summoned were his brain trust, his governmental cabinet; they represented the spiritual and intellectual elite of Egypt, and they were stymied.

The religion of Egypt consisted of magic and sorcery as well as many gods and goddesses. The pharaoh, like all of his subjects, believed strongly in the ancient mystery Babylon–styled religion of Egypt, so it was an integral part of life. Christians could learn much from the unwavering commitment these pagans had to their religion (even though it was false), for they



## BEDOUINS, SEMITES, AND ORIENTALS

*Bedouin*, *Semite*, and *Oriental* have been used somewhat interchangeably. This is because the landmass that contains what we today call the Middle East is the continent of Asia. It was proper to call people who hailed from the Middle East then, as now, Asians or Asiatics, people of Asia. The term *Oriental* refers, not to people from the entire continent of Asia, but to Middle Easterners and people extending to China. Orientals are a subgroup of Asians.



Semites are people who descended from Shem. Descendants from Abraham are Semites because Abraham was a Semite. Therefore, Arabs and Hebrews are both Semitic people.

Bedouins were a certain branch of Semitic peoples that tended to be desert dwellers and wanderers.

The people who invaded and conquered Egypt were (a) Bedouins, because they were desert dwellers, (b) Semites, because they were descendants of Shem, (c) Orientals, because they were part of a Middle Eastern culture, and (d) Asians or Asiatics because they were from the continent of Asia.

considered it the center of their lives. Every facet of their existence was tied to their belief system, unaware that it was a counterfeit system designed by Satan. The pharaoh naturally had these experts in religion, these spiritualists, as part of his group of close advisers.

The “wise men,” however, were not representatives of the spiritual realm. They were Egyptian intellectuals; they represented the

worldly knowledge and science that had been developed to a high level in Egypt.

Pharaoh told these men about his dreams, but they stood silent, having no understanding as to their meaning. The chief cupbearer, who had been imprisoned by Pharaoh two years prior, reluctantly stepped forward. He told Pharaoh about Joseph, who had accurately interpreted his and the chief baker’s dreams. Pharaoh immediately ordered Joseph to be brought before him.

## JOSEPH INTERPRETS PHARAOH’S DREAMS

Pharaoh told Joseph that he had had dreams, which his brightest and best could not interpret, but he was told that Joseph would be able to. Joseph answered truthfully: “It isn’t in me. God will give Pharaoh an answer” (Gen. 41:16).

So there stood the Hebrew slave Joseph in the company of the pharaoh and the most admired religious and intellectual elite in all of Egypt, being asked to do what they couldn’t possibly do, for they were not equipped to do it. These were prophetic dreams of holy truth given by God to Pharaoh, so how could the simple yet wholly inadequate employment of worldly knowledge or false, though sincere, religion possibly fathom their meaning? It never can; only the children of God, in spiritual union with the Father, can know the truth. And Joseph was about to announce the truth to Pharaoh.

First, Joseph made it clear that these dreams were from God. Next, he informed Pharaoh that both of these dreams were concerning the same matter: a coming time of great famine. The first dream was about cows: first seven healthy ones, then seven sickly ones. The second dream was about corn: first seven healthy stalks, then seven sickly ones. It was important that there were two dreams because one concerned livestock and the other field crops; that is, both major elements of the food supply were going to be affected by what was coming.

As is God’s way, He did not bring judgment

without sufficient warning for those who pay heed to Him. So God said He would see to it that there would be seven wonderfully, unusually abundant years of food growth and harvest, before seven years, not of less-than-normal production, but of terrible famine.

### JOSEPH'S ADVICE

Joseph didn't simply interpret the dream; he gave wisdom about what to do to prepare for the coming trial. The nature of the wisdom is such that we have no doubt as to its source: the Creator of all. Joseph said, in paraphrase: "Pharaoh, during the next seven years, make it a law that all throughout Egypt, 20 percent of all produce will be stored away for the day seven years in the future when it will be needed. Rather than living beyond our means during the seven years of unusual plenty, be wise and use that time to prepare." I suspect that the people were not too thrilled at this ruling. After all, as they looked around all they saw was prosperity. The future seemed bright, without a cloud on the horizon. Why this negativity? No doubt, many saw it as a conspiracy of these detested foreign Hyksos rulers to simply confiscate food from the people and somehow enrich themselves. It is difficult to believe God, instead of our eyes, especially when things are going well. But one has to give the pharaoh a lot of credit for taking Joseph seriously and acting on his advice, not just pondering it.

### WHY THESE ARE THE LAST DAYS

Would we have the faith to do what this heathen pharaoh was about to do? Would we have the faith to hear God warning that a time of terrible tribulation was nearing, and that we needed to prepare by putting aside some of our time, our riches, our labors, our interests, ourselves? Could we intentionally deprive ourselves when we were in the midst of abundance, when life was good? Could we do it on faith, and not by what we see with our eyes? Could we do it

when the best and brightest minds, and our most prestigious religious leaders, tell us that the future is unknowable, except as they can discern it from their positions of authority?

Beloved, I sure hope we can, because we have been told. We are right now in that time of relative abundance and plenty, just before the onset of the greatest trial mankind has ever or will ever experience. How do I know this? God has revealed it to us. He has shown us in His Word the signs to look for, and they have occurred and are occurring right now. He has told us unequivocally that when Jerusalem is back in the hands of the Jews, that generation will see the coming of the Lord (Matthew 24). He has also told us that a few months before Jesus once again sets His feet on the Mount of Olives, there will be a time so terrible that we cannot possibly comprehend it. He has told us to prepare; prepare by giving over our lives to Him. Prepare by following the wisdom that comes from God: living within our means, getting out of debt, seeking Him instead of personal pleasures, learning to rely on Him and nothing else. Trust Him, believe Him, and not what our fleshly senses and corrupted intellects tell us. Those of us who do not prepare will experience much more devastation than what Egypt was about to experience.

It doesn't matter that most of our religious leaders are blind to this. It doesn't matter that our academic elite scoff at it. It doesn't matter that our government sees everything in terms of geopolitical realities and our lawmakers see things in terms of attaining and maintaining personal power. Most of our secular and religious leaders are as oblivious to reality as were Pharaoh's wise men and magicians. You see, God has not entrusted the truth to them: He has entrusted it to *us*, His true church—not the facade of church institution, with its bureaucracies and man-made doctrines, but His people, His followers, sanctified through the blood of Christ.

## PHARAOH TOOK ACTION

For the pharaoh, the next question was, Who was going to make sure that all that needed to be done was done? The answer was obvious. The man God chose to deliver the message should be the one to carry out the preparations: Joseph. Thus, in a most unlikely event, the Hebrew slave was removed from the dungeon and anointed the ruler of all Egypt. Joseph went from the outhouse to the penthouse, and the only higher authority in Egypt was Pharaoh himself.

A ceremony was held so that all Egypt would know of Joseph's position over them. As part of this ceremony, Pharaoh gave Joseph a new name: Zaphenath-panea. The form we have Joseph's name in today seems to be a hybrid Egyptian and Hebrew word. Scholars say it means either "God speaks, He lives" or it means "the creator and sustainer of life." More recent scholarship doubts this translation. It would make more sense that this name is purely Egyptian and, indeed, we find that there is a common word used in naming Egyptians, *zat-en-aph*; it means



Reliefs of Joseph and his wife, Asenath

"he who is called." The second word of Joseph's new name, *panea*, is also fairly easily identifiable in the Egyptian language. *Aneah* was a common word for "life" in Egypt. So the Egyptian meaning of his name was likely something along the lines of "he who is called life."

In our day a name is simply a way to identify a person, but in ancient times a name was far more than that. A name was a person's reputation. It was a statement of one's character and attributes or perhaps even their status in society. Thus, when Joseph went from house slave to prisoner to vizier of Egypt, a new name was necessary, one that reflected the pharaoh's view of Joseph's position and purpose.

To seal Joseph's appointment and make it permanent, and, without doubt, to cement Joseph's loyalty, Pharaoh gave him a wife: Asenath, the daughter of a priest. This was no small thing. This priest was of the Temple of On, the city of the sun god, about seven or eight miles north of Cairo. At the time, this temple honored the god Re, later called Atum-Re; Re was the highest Egyptian deity. Later, the city of On would come to be known as Heliopolis, city of the sun. Joseph married the daughter of the priest of the sun god, Re.

Once the ceremonies were concluded, Joseph began traveling throughout Egypt, setting up a system and seeing to it that an enormous amount of grain was saved and stored. We're told that the six years before the famine were abundant (the Bible term *abundant* means there were six years of bumper crops).

## JOSEPH'S SONS

Six years passed; it was one year before the onset of the famine. Joseph had two sons by his Egyptian wife; the firstborn was Manasseh and the younger, Ephraim. These are Hebrew names, not Egyptian. However, due to the customs of those days,<sup>121</sup> the mother's nationality and genealogy determined that of the children. Despite their Hebrew names, these two boys were, without question, Egyptian children. It

was possible that the foreign mother of an Israeli could renounce her nationality and gods and become a member of Israel; if that happened, then the mother was not considered foreign anymore (despite her genealogy) but Hebrew. That did not happen in this case. Asenath, mother of Joseph's children, was Egyptian; there is no evidence that she gave up her Egyptian culture and beliefs. In fact, it would have been unthinkable, given her position as the daughter of the sun god's priest and as a princess of Egypt, to become a Hebrew. Tuck this important fact about Asenath, Manasseh, and Ephraim away in your memories. These are two grandchildren that Jacob is not yet even aware he has; Ephraim and Manasseh, these two children of Joseph's, born of his Egyptian wife, are by all accounts Egyptians, Gentiles.

The names of Joseph's sons give us two important clues about his feelings toward Egypt. First, *Ephraim* means "fertile," in the sense of abundant. We'll see this carry over into Jacob's prophetic blessing of Ephraim later in Genesis. *Manasseh* means "causing to forget," and his name is a reference to the fact that Joseph had put his old life behind him and joined this new life in Egypt. Joseph in no way viewed Egypt as an enemy. Rather, he saw Egypt as a friend, even a place of comfort. He even referred to it as a sort of replacement home. We'll eventually see the Hebrews become Egyptian slaves, but we'll also find in the Bible a certain favor of God toward Egypt, especially in the last days of the last days.

### FAMINE IN EGYPT

The famine hit just as God said it would. We're told that this famine was widespread. Many Bibles say that the famine was severe throughout the world, but that's not really what the Hebrew says. It says that the famine spread over the *panim of the eretz*, "the face of the land." This is a very general term, not one that seeks to indicate all landmasses, known and unknown, of the entire planet Earth. However, as we'll find

out in a little while, not just Egypt but the whole of the Middle East was affected.

The stored-up grain was rationed, or sold. The grain was not given away. Egyptian records of that time, describing the famine and how the grain distribution was handled, have been found, and they completely agree with the biblical record. As people ran out of money, they gave up their starving cattle to Pharaoh in exchange for grain, the staple food. When they ran out of cattle, they gave up their land. And, when they had nothing else to sell, they sold themselves into bond-servitude to the Pharaoh. In this way, pharaoh eventually owned all the land and all the wealth of Egypt. It also allowed him to build up an enormous slave class who would construct magnificent temples, roads, and cities. As cynical and hard-hearted as this was, God used the situation to save lives and to assure the survival of Israel.

### JOSEPH'S REPUTATION

Do you wonder what the Egyptian people thought of Joseph during this time of famine? Do you suppose he was thanked for forcing them to save up grain, to make do with less during a time of plenty, thereby allowing them to survive later on? Or did he get the blame and hatred when so many had to sell themselves into slavery in order to obtain that same grain? After all, Pharaoh had made Joseph the front man; Joseph was the supreme administrator of this program. Pharaoh had a large public ceremony to make it clear to all just what Joseph's position was. All cunning politicians put someone between them and the people to act both as a buffer and a lightning rod. When things go well, the politician jumps to the front to accept the credit and the adoration of the people. But when something goes wrong or is unpopular, the politician becomes silent and invisible and the front man catches the flack. I imagine the leftover bitterness about the confiscation of grain from the Egyptian people's private land, and then selling their own grain back to



them, often at the cost of their own freedom, greatly impacted the way people viewed Joseph. For after Joseph died and new pharaohs were in place, and Joseph's descendents had grown and prospered, the dispossessed people of

Egypt turned on the Hebrews. Matters like this famine situation are not easily forgotten, and it's unthinkable that this didn't have much to do with Egypt eventually turning the tables on Joseph's family by enslaving them.

## GENESIS 42

At the end of Genesis 41, the seven years of abundant crops and livestock had passed and the great seven-year famine of Pharaoh's dream had begun. Joseph was in charge of Egypt and this food program, and he was second in command of the nation with only Pharaoh above him. Joseph was one of the most powerful men on earth at this time in history.

### THE GEOGRAPHY OF EGYPT AND THE MIDDLE EAST

The famine of Genesis 41 was caused by low rainfall, a drought. This drought affected northern Africa, where Egypt lay, but it also affected much of the Middle East.

Knowing the geography helps us understand the overall situation occurring in this section of the Torah, and it explains why many things happened the way they did.

First: the regional designations of Egypt are virtually backward from what we would normally think. Egypt was spoken of as Upper Egypt and Lower Egypt, but interestingly *Upper* Egypt is to the south, and *Lower* Egypt is to the north. This is because the Nile River flows from south to north; it flows from Upper Egypt to Lower Egypt. Obviously, water flows downhill. As it turns out, the southern end of Egypt, or Upper Egypt, is a slightly higher elevation than the northern end; therefore, as anyone knows is the case with a river that flows from up to down, the southern end of the river is called *upper*, and the northern end is called *lower*.

The Nile begins at its southern end, and there are two enormous geographical basins where the rainfall occurs and where the water from that rainfall naturally funnels toward the Nile to fill it. The White Nile flows from one basin, and



the Blue Nile flows from the other. Near the city of Khartoum, the White Nile and the Blue Nile come together to form the Great Nile River, which we typically just call the Nile River.

The Great Nile then flows to the north, toward the Mediterranean Sea. As it approaches the land of Goshen in Lower Egypt, it encounters what is called the Delta Region, and the river dissipates into a number of natural fingers that all eventually find their way to the sea. Even though the Delta Region (most of Lower Egypt) is a virtually rainless desert, due to the abundant waters of the Nile and the marshlands that are created by all those fingers spreading out in the land of Goshen, allowing the water to flow across the lands much as in the Florida Everglades, the area is fertile and great for growing crops and grazing animals.



The only thing that makes Egypt inhabitable is the Nile. And the only thing that creates the Nile is rainfall in these two great basins far to the south, in Upper Egypt.

The Egyptians very early on began digging canals to channel water from the Nile to water crops, but it was the annual rising and falling of the water levels of the Nile that determined feast or famine. It was crucial that the Nile overflow its banks during the three summer months; this overflow was caused by monsoon-type rains that occurred far to the south, in the two southern river basins that formed the headwaters of the Nile. The overflow not only watered the land but it brought silt, rich in nutrients necessary to grow crops all along the Nile. It takes only a few inches of rainfall deficit in one of the two basins to destroy the delicate balance and prevent water flow sufficient to cause the necessary downriver flooding.

The Nile did not dry up in Joseph’s time, nor did people not have sufficient water to drink, but for a several-year period, the Nile did not overflow, and the marshlands of the Delta receded. Therefore, sufficient crops were not produced to feed the citizens of the Egypt. All food production did not cease, but it was dramatically reduced and there was not enough to sustain the people.

Just so we understand the supernatural nature of this widespread famine: the weather systems that govern rainfall in southern Egypt and those that govern rainfall in the Middle East are totally separate. That very low rainfall that occurred for several years in southern Egypt was simultaneous to a drought for several years in Canaan; this was an act of God that does not normally occur.

One of the reasons that Egypt and the people of Canaan knew each other so well and had long-ago established trade with one another was because usually when there was crop failure in Egypt due to low levels of the Nile, Egypt could count on going up to Canaan to buy extra food, and vice versa. But this time it was different. Had God not given Pharaoh the prophetic dream and then given him Joseph to interpret it, there would have been widespread death in both Egypt and Canaan because of low food supplies in both lands. But God warned Egypt, and Egypt was able to prepare. God first gave them supernatural abundance so they would have hefty surpluses for seven straight years; Joseph planned and used this so they could build up enormous stores of grain for the seven coming bad years.

Later, upon the onset of the drought, Egypt, partly from a sense of compassion but primarily from a sense of self-interest, made food available from its warehouses to people of other nations. This was not welfare. The price for those stored grains was very high. Several bags of silver were required to buy food from Egypt for the clan of Jacob; food would normally not have required a sum of money that would be described as “bagfuls” of silver.



Trade routes between Canaan  
and Egypt

Egypt was going to make a huge profit on its adept handling of this extended and extensive food crisis. But, make no mistake, these high prices were not only for foreigners; Egyptian citizens also were required to purchase their food from Pharaoh—or better, Joseph. This was a supplement to be sure, not their sole source of food. But for those who were poorer and did not have access to other more commercially available food sources, this famine wound up costing hundreds of thousands of Egyptians—possibly a million or more—their liberty. As these lower-class Egyptians ran out of money to buy food, they had no choice but to sell themselves and their families into bond service to the pharaoh in exchange for grain. From their viewpoint, it was this Semite foreigner, Joseph, who was to blame for this travesty and humiliation; Joseph was the front man, the visible symbol for the entire food program—getting both the credit and the blame.

This was not something Egypt would soon forget; after Joseph’s death and a long period of social upheaval, the Egyptians would blame Joseph’s kin, the tribes of Israel, for their oppressed condition. This would eventually lead

to the Egyptians’ turning the tables on Israel. The peasant Egyptians would enslave the more well-to-do and free Israelites, beginning a cycle of persecution of the Hebrew people in foreign lands that we read of throughout the Bible, have witnessed ourselves in the last century, and will continue to witness until Messiah comes.

**ASSIGNMENT:** Read Genesis 42.

If we can grasp that Israel was the tool God would use to bring about His divine purposes from this point forward in history, until time comes to an end sometime in the near future, then perhaps we can begin to comprehend the significance of what is about to happen in this biblical narrative.

## ISRAEL SENDS HIS SONS FOR FOOD

The story had moved from Egypt and Joseph back to Canaan and Jacob. The great famine having affected an enormous area, Jacob’s clan was in a bad way. The first verse of this chapter shows Jacob, Israel, in a rather sarcastic mood, as he says to his sons: “Why are you staring at each other?” In other words, you know we’re in dire straits, you know that there is grain available in Egypt, so why are you all sitting here waiting for somebody else to do something?” Let’s remember, he was not speaking to children. These men were all middle-aged and beyond, most with their own families and children by now.<sup>122</sup>

While I wish there were some good and lovely things to say about Jacob’s sons, the tribes of Israel, the Bible doesn’t offer much about their character that is admirable at this point. God didn’t choose Israel because they were great men; He chose them because He is a great God and uses ordinary people to carry out His will. Likewise, as believers we’re not told to stand with Israel because they’re an especially good or

extraordinary or sympathetic race (they're not); we're to stand with them because that's what God has instructed all the people of this planet to do, with dire consequences for those who do not heed Him. So brace yourselves, America: a desire for a legacy of peace in the Middle East, regardless of the cost to Israel, has been the goal of most of our presidents. We are going to pay an awful price—every one of us.

Jacob, unable to wait any longer for these sons to do (on their own volition) what was right and necessary, ordered all of them except Benjamin to go to Egypt to buy grain. Was Benjamin not old enough to go? Certainly he was. But Benjamin had taken the place of Joseph in Jacob's heart because Benjamin and Joseph were his two sons through the wife Jacob loved the most—Rachel, who was now deceased. He simply wasn't going to risk Benjamin after having already lost Joseph.

As the sons of Israel arrived in Egypt, they joined many other tribes and peoples from other nations, all in need of salvation from starvation. Who was it that they must go to for their salvation? Joseph.

### JOSEPH REUNITES WITH HIS BROTHERS

Verse 6 shows us it was common knowledge that the great vizier of Egypt, who was not going by the name Joseph but by his pharaoh-given Egyptian name, Zaphenath-Panea, was the man everyone was to seek in order to buy grain. Joseph must have had an immense organization to deal with the millions who needed food, and certainly it would have been rare for Joseph himself to deal directly with those who sought to buy grain.

Of course, Joseph's brothers didn't recognize him. It wasn't just that twenty years had passed since they had last seen their little brother and his boyish features had become manly; it was that he now looked like an Egyptian. He was clean shaven (Hebrews, by tradition, always wore beards); he wore his hair in Egyptian



fashion and would have used certain cosmetics that Egyptian royalty typically applied to their faces. He spoke Egyptian. The mannerisms of that former tent-dwelling boy with all of his teenage gawkiness had been exchanged for the refined and confident regal bearing that was now Joseph.

But he recognized them right away.

We can only imagine what must have flashed through Joseph's mind upon seeing his brothers: deep pain from being so long ago torn from his family at the hands of these same men. But instantly he remembered those dreams of his youth (verse 9), of the eleven sheaves of grain bowing down to his and of the eleven stars, the moon, and the sun paying homage to him. At that moment, with all the preparation so carefully guided by the invisible God, those dreams that his brothers and his own father had chastised him for had come true! Joseph realized for the first time that divine providence had been at work all along. He now knew with certainty why God had allowed all that had happened to him. Yet, some testing was needed to see if his brothers had also been prepared by El Shaddai.

## A TEST FOR THE BROTHERS

Joseph, knowing otherwise, accused them of being spies. The brothers were utterly taken aback by this; the accusation didn't even make sense and bordered on irrational. But they were afraid, for they were totally at this ruler's arbitrary mercy. Truth and justice mattered not at all at this point, and they knew it. A ruler of Joseph's stature could decide matters summarily and order whatever punishment he deemed appropriate. They were helpless and powerless to control their fate, just as Joseph himself had been helpless, so long ago, lying at the bottom of a dry well, begging and crying for mercy that would not come from these pitiless brothers now standing before him hat-in-hand.

He questioned them and found out his father was still alive, as was his little brother, Benjamin. So he ordered that one brother go and bring back the youngest to prove that they were not spies, that they were truthful. But first, all ten were to be put in prison for three days. Of course, the reason behind Joseph's decision to jail them was to separate his brothers from the myriad of Egyptian citizens and foreigners who daily hoped to buy from Egypt's reserve grain supplies. He wanted, and needed, to deal with his family separately, not under the gaze of everyone else.

At the end of the three days, he gave a different order. Nine brothers were to return with the grain they needed to feed their clan. One, Simeon, was to remain in custody, as surety for the rest. If they did not bring back Benjamin, Simeon would forfeit his life (or so was the implication).

The brothers discussed their plight among themselves in front of Joseph, assuming he was an Egyptian and would not understand what they were speaking in Hebrew. Joseph had kept up the ruse by using an interpreter as a go-between during his dealings with his brothers, but what he heard made him weep. The guilt of more than two decades overcame them, and they knew that this was the day of reckoning for what

they had wrongly done to their little brother. He also heard Reuben try to absolve himself, with apparently no disagreement as to his position of innocence. Joseph must have believed him, for rather than keeping the all-important firstborn, Reuben, as a prisoner, Joseph ordered Simeon, the second son of Jacob, to be held hostage.

## JOSEPH CONFUSES THE BROTHERS FURTHER

Joseph ordered that the money the brothers paid for the grain be hidden in the necks of their grain sacks in order to confuse them even further. The first night on their way back home, one of them went to get some grain for his donkey and there was the money! They panicked but quickly decided that God was giving them their just deserts.

One wonders what must have gone through their minds on that many-day journey back to face their father. Who would be the spokesman among them to tell their fragile father that not only had they come back one short in their number, but that now they were to take Benjamin, Jacob's most-beloved child, back to Egypt with them or Simeon would die . . . along with the rest of them when Pharaoh's men caught up with them?

Jacob's reply was obvious: you've taken two of my children away from me, and now you want to take a third? Reuben gave Jacob the guarantee that he would bring Benjamin back. If he failed, Jacob could kill Reuben's two sons as punishment. Though we're not given Jacob's reply to this offer, one can only imagine the unbelieving look on Jacob's face. His stunned reply probably would have been something like, "Brilliant! Only *you* would figure out that after I had lost three sons, I should now kill my own grandchildren as retribution! Are you insane?"

More and more we see the wisdom in Reuben's being denied his firstborn birthright. Reuben was a politician, a windbag. He was always making grandiose, unwise statements and promises that were worthless and designed

to do little but elicit an emotional response. After this, we won't hear from Reuben anymore. He was set aside, and we hear Judah's voice more than any other brother from this point forward.

For the time being, though, Jacob was simply paralyzed and couldn't fathom what to

do. All he knew was that should Benjamin be taken from him, he could not survive it. He didn't really trust his sons anymore, so he wasn't about to entrust Benjamin to them. Yet how would they survive without more grain?

## GENESIS 43

**ASSIGNMENT:** Read Genesis 43.

Time passed, and the famine did not let up. The grain supply purchased and brought back from Egypt was exhausted. Apparently, the nine sons of Jacob (Simeon was still a hostage back in Egypt), who had earlier sat in a depressed state and did nothing to try to save their clan from starvation, were once again completely passive, so Jacob told them to go back to Egypt and get more grain. Of course, Jacob was reminded by his sons that they could not go without Benjamin, but Jacob was still unconvinced to hand Benjamin over to his treacherous sons.

### JUDAH BECOMES A LEADER

Judah, humbled by life, humbled by his daughter-in-law Tamar's bold act when he failed to respond to her plight appropriately, now offered *himself* as the surety bond for Benjamin. Just exactly what penalty could Jacob exact on Judah should he fail on his mission to take Benjamin to Egypt and return him safely home? Well, as we discussed awhile back, Judah almost certainly saw himself as the likely inheritor of the wealth and authority of the clan of Israel. He apparently knew that Reuben was no longer going to receive the firstborn blessing, for he had defiled his father's bed. Jacob's second and third sons led the raid of revenge upon Shechem,<sup>123</sup> killing every male and then leading the plundering of the remaining inhabitants—this would have disqualified them. And with Joseph, formerly Jacob's favorite, thought to be dead, Judah, fourth in line, must have seen himself as that person who would soon

be the leader of the tribes of Israel. Judah, by agreeing to accept all blame if something were to happen to Benjamin, had much to lose. He, too, could have been disinherited. Jacob knew that and must have felt that if it were at all possible for Benjamin to be spared, Judah would do all that could humanly be done to see to it. Here, finally, was a son who could be trusted; Jacob could trust Judah in this matter. But even more, Jacob would trust God. If he were to lose all of his sons, then so be it. It was in God's hands.

### THE BROTHERS RETURN TO EGYPT

Taking the money that had mysteriously found its way into their grain bags on the first trip, along with an equal amount to buy new grain, the brothers, including Benjamin, journeyed back down to Egypt.

Joseph saw that his brothers had returned, and with them was Benjamin. He ordered a banquet to be prepared and served at noon. He ordered his servants to bring his brothers inside his house for this banquet, but the brothers thought this was a trap. They felt sure they were going to be taken as slaves (as they had arranged to happen to Joseph), in retribution for the incident with the money found in their packs. Joseph's house manager assured them that that was not the case.

Joseph arrived at his home, and the brothers presented him with the gifts they had brought with them from Canaan. Joseph inquired about their, and his, father's well-being, and they told him he was fine. Then Joseph saw Benjamin. He was overwhelmed with emotion and had to leave them for a few moments to weep bitter-sweet tears in private.





Once composed, Joseph returned and the meal was served. What we see in these verses is a completely accurate account of the way a meal of this sort would have been served in Egypt: Joseph ate alone. The brothers ate together as a group, and the Egyptian house servants ate separately from both the brothers and from Joseph. It is a well-documented Egyptian custom that the head of the house never ate with the servants. But why didn't the servants eat with the Israelite brothers? We're told in verse 32 that "Egyptians don't eat with Hebrews, because that is abhorrent to them."

Hebrews, like many Semite tribes and people groups in this era, were shepherds.

Egyptians saw shepherds as the lowest class of people, and their mere presence was offensive. An Egyptian would *never* eat with a shepherd. Egyptians valued cattle, not sheep. That's one of the reasons the Egyptians' highest deity, Isis, was represented by a bull. Soon another aspect of this Egyptian tradition would come into play: the Israelites were going to be given the land of Goshen to live in, a land where they would be away from the bulk of Egyptian society and could grow their sheep without offending Egyptian sensibility.

As the brothers sat down to eat, each carefully seated by a servant in a place reserved specifically for that brother, they were stunned to see that they had been arranged from oldest to youngest, in perfect order of their birth. What could this mean? Even more, Benjamin was given a portion of food five times the size of everyone else's. Scholars have debated the meaning of this fivefold blessing of food upon Benjamin, and the general consensus is that in Egypt a prince or a ruler was given five times as much as everyone else as a sign of their royalty. Of course, that raises the question, What was Joseph signifying with this? My opinion is that Joseph was honoring the brother he would have had the most affinity to, the one with which he shared a common mother. And the one who, of the eleven brothers, was completely innocent of any wrongdoing in connection with Joseph's being sold into slavery. But we should also not overlook the fact that the very first king of Israel would be a descendant of Benjamin.

## GENESIS 44

In this chapter, every time you see Joseph dealing with his brothers, mentally picture Yeshua dealing with us, His followers. As we're going to see, Joseph was a kind of Old Testament version of Jesus in more ways than immediately meet the eye. He was not, of course, an earlier incarnation of the Word; rather, he was a "type." Joseph was used, partially, to create a pattern after which the Messiah would follow. Naturally, because Joseph was but a mere man, he could not hold a candle to the essence, nature, stature, or holiness of Yeshua HaMashiach, but we can learn some valuable principles about Yeshua from what we read of Joseph. The trick is to recognize patterns while avoiding allegory.

**ASSIGNMENT:** Read Genesis 44.

### JACOB TRICKS HIS BROTHERS AGAIN

Despite the questions that must have arisen among the brothers at the banquet—being invited to dine in the home of the second-most-powerful man in all Egypt, the incredible coincidence of being seated in exact order of their birth, the strange offering of the royal portion (five times as much) of food given to Benjamin—they got the grain they had come for, packed up their donkeys, and left at first light the next morning. They likely figured their ordeal was finally over.

Hardly. Just as before, Joseph had each brother's money placed back into his sack of grain, but a new twist was added. Joseph's silver

cup was placed into the mouth of Benjamin's sack.

No sooner had the brothers begun their journey home than Joseph's house steward, sent by Joseph, caught up to these Israelites and accused them of stealing from his master. The brothers were dumbfounded. The house steward told the eleven exactly what Joseph had instructed him to say: "Why have you repaid me evil for good, and why have you taken my goblet, or cup, from which I make my divinations?"



An African man using a divining bowl

## THE CUP

First, let's address the cup. It was shaped like a bowl, and made of silver. If the master of a house in Egypt in those days was judged to be a sage or seer, he had a special bowl from which only he could drink. It was also used for the purpose of divining messages from the gods. One can only imagine how Joseph came by this "diviner's bowl"—it was likely a gift from the pharaoh because Joseph was undoubtedly, after accurately interpreting Pharaoh's dreams, determined the highest or best diviner in all the land. Typically, the bowl was filled with water, and then gold or silver amulets, sometimes with magic inscriptions written on them, were put into the water. From the reflections, the seer would attempt to see the future. It is unimaginable that Joseph actually used the bowl for anything except drinking, but to keep up the appearance of being thoroughly Egyptian, he used the common knowledge of the bowl as an

### DID THE BROTHERS NOTICE JOSEPH'S RACE?

We never hear a word about the brothers' questioning whether or not Joseph was an Egyptian, which he obviously was not. Why not? Why don't we hear the brothers wondering why Joseph didn't even look like other Egyptians? Egyptians, after all, were not Semites. They were children of Ham. And their physical features were quite different from Semites', the most obvious being their dark skin compared to the Semites' more olive skin. Once again, this is another hidden allusion to the Hyksos rulership over Egypt at this time. The whole of the Middle East would have been quite aware of this political situation in Egypt, wherein Bedouins conquered and ruled Egypt. It was no surprise at all to these Israelites from Canaan, these Semites, that the vizier of Egypt looked physically much like themselves, even though he dressed in more typical Egyptian garb and adopted Egyptian customs and traditions.

implement of divination to continue to test his brothers.

In response to the accusations of stealing the divining cup of the vizier, the brothers boldly announced that they were so sure that the cup was not among them, should the house steward inspect their grain sacks and find it, not only would they offer themselves to be slaves to the master, but the one with the cup should die! Almost every time it became necessary for any of these Israelite brothers to prove their intent or honesty on a matter, or to resolve a difficult situation, death was their answer. They killed the males of Shechem for raping their sister. They decided to kill Joseph, but only sold him into slavery, figuring he wouldn't survive very long in those conditions anyway. Judah ordered that his daughter-in-law Tamar be burned alive for her supposed fornication and dishonoring of Judah's family by her out-of-wedlock pregnancy. Reuben offered his own children's lives to Jacob as retribution should anything happen to Benjamin. And so on. This shows us that up to this point in their lives, ten of the twelve tribes of Israel had very little respect for life and had utterly no understanding of God's moral principles!

The house steward refused that offer but did order that the guilty party alone would bear punishment—that punishment would be enslavement, not death. Of course, to add drama to the situation, the house steward, already knowing exactly where the cup was because he had put it there, began his dramatic inspection of the grain sacks with the oldest brother's first, working his way down to the youngest. Finally, as he opened the mouth of Benjamin's sack, the glittering of the polished silver bowl sent the brothers into a frenzy of disbelief and confusion, and they tore at their clothes in anguish. They knew what this meant: Benjamin, their father's favorite, would be lost. And the news of his loss would probably kill Jacob.

## JUDAH INTERVENES AGAIN

Verse 14 marks a turning point in the character of at least some of the tribes of Israel. All the brothers returned, with Benjamin, to Joseph's house. Once the bowl had been found, all the brothers, except Benjamin, were free to go their way and return to their families in Canaan. But they didn't do that. Rather than getting rid of their problem the way they had so long ago when they abandoned Joseph, they decided to stay with Benjamin and bear together whatever fate awaited them.

Judah now acted as a spokesman for the brothers—the Judah who confessed that it was he who had done wrong and not his pregnant daughter-in-law Tamar, the Judah who offered himself up as surety for Benjamin's life to his father, Jacob, Israel. Judah confessed all to the vizier, Joseph, and told him that although they were innocent of stealing his cup or his money, indeed, they were guilty before God. They were guilty for their many wrongdoings, guilty for selling their little brother into slavery, guilty for deception and for grieving their father nearly to the point of death. In this way, Judah, the most humbled by life of the eleven brothers, did in small measure what his greatest descendant, Yeshua, Jesus of Nazareth, would do in infinite measure in the future: he offered himself up to pay for the sins of his brothers.

## JOSEPH AS A TYPE OF MESSIAH

Let's look at some characteristics of Joseph, his reaction to the brothers, and even his relation to Pharaoh, which may help us to understand Jesus and His role. It has long been understood that Joseph was a type of Messiah.

### RESPONSIBILITY FOR SIN

In Genesis 44:9–10, Joseph's house servant accused the brothers of taking Joseph's silver divining bowl. The brothers said that whoever was found with the bowl would die and all the

other brothers would become Joseph's slaves. The response to their offer was this: No, only the one who did the deed was responsible, the rest could go in peace.

This shows us perhaps the greatest principle of salvation in Christ: you are responsible for only your sins, not for the sins of anyone else. Further, no one else can pay the price for your sins; your sins are your responsibility. Was your father an abuser? You are not responsible for his sins. Was your mother mean and self-absorbed? You are not responsible for her sins. Is your brother a criminal? Those are his sins, not yours. Are you rebellious? No one else but you is responsible for your sin. This, however, is a good-news/bad-news deal; although you aren't responsible for the sins of others, neither are others responsible for your sins. You must bear your own guilt. And since the wages of sin before God is death—your eternal death—what is to be done to escape this fate in which there seems to be no hope?

## ALL ARE GUILTY

A little later, in verse 16, we have a profound speech by Judah, and another great principle of salvation is brought to light. Judah admitted to Joseph that it was useless to plead innocence before him, because even though they did not commit the crime of which they had been accused (stealing the silver bowl), they were guilty of other crimes—crimes they thought were well hidden and unknowable, crimes long past and nearly forgotten, crimes of the heart and soul. They were infested with sin, and as a result lived sinful lives. Despite their outward appearance of honesty and integrity and their earnest pleading of innocence, all that they were and all they had done had been exposed by God. This is exactly the position we are in before Jesus.

## DIVINE KNOWLEDGE

Joseph said to Judah, “How could you do such a thing? Don't you know that a man such

as myself can learn the truth by divination?” (verse 15). Divination is the supposed power of the gods used to help a human discern hidden things. Divination is man’s attempt to be like the gods. Most of the time it was a hoax men perpetrated on other men. At other times men turned their lives over to Satan, who gave them certain insights in exchange for their souls. At times, God gave the power of divine discernment to His prophets.

Jesus said there is nothing about us that is hidden from Him. All the evil and deceit that are in us are exposed to Him. How does Yeshua know this? Divination. Yeshua, being divine, knows everything there is to know about us, including things we don’t even really know about ourselves. Where does Yeshua get this power of divination? It’s simple: He is divine.

#### THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN YESHUA AND YEHOVAH

Then, in verse 18, Judah was paying homage to Joseph when he said, “For you are like Pharaoh himself.” Oh, how key this is! Look at Joseph’s position in Egypt. He was appointed to power by Pharaoh. Joseph was given authority to wield all of Pharaoh’s power, by Pharaoh. Joseph was so connected to Pharaoh that he was essentially the equal of Pharaoh. But was Joseph the pharaoh? No. The pharaoh still existed and was the highest of the high. Joseph was the vizier, but Pharaoh was the pharaoh.

This comment from Judah was put here so that, in addition to knowing this important piece of history, we might understand the relationship between Yeshua and Yehoveh—Jesus the Son and God the Father. There is at once an equality—oneness, unity, *echad*—between Jesus and the Father, and yet there is also a subservience of the Son to the Father. Joseph wielded the full power and authority of Pharaoh, but he was not Pharaoh. Yeshua wields the full power and authority of the Father, yet Yeshua is not the Father. Joseph was the ruler of Egypt, and likewise Pharaoh was the ruler of Egypt, yet

Joseph was not Pharaoh. Yeshua is God, but He is not God the Father; He is God the Son. The Son is ultimately subservient to the Father, just as Joseph was subservient to the pharaoh. Do you see this? The relationship between Joseph and the pharaoh is the earthly demonstration of the heavenly, spiritual relationship between the Word who became flesh, Jesus, and the Father of all things, Yehoveh. Of course, the picture presented in Joseph and Pharaoh is neither flawless nor perfect because the physical can never fully represent or explain the spiritual. But it is a correct picture, as far as it can be.

In Genesis 44, as in all the first five books of the Torah, we see this glaring messianic foreshadowing that quickly brings to mind what Jesus said as it was written in Matthew 5:17–18: “Don’t think that I have come to abolish the Torah or the Prophets. I have come not to abolish but to complete. Yes indeed! I tell you that until heaven and earth pass away, not so much as a yud or a stroke will pass from the Torah—not until everything that must happen has happened.”

When Jesus said, “I have come not to abolish but to complete,” the most literal sense of this is, “I have come *not* to abolish, but to fill full (of meaning).”

Jews study only the Old Testament or Tanach portion of God’s Word, which Jesus Himself studied. All the greatest Jewish religious leaders, scholars, and rabbis, both ancient and modern, who have read these passages in Genesis about Joseph in Egypt and Judah offering up his life for his brothers thousands of times missed the ultimate fulfillment of it. In fact, all of the Torah and the Prophets were certainly understood to be true, but the ancient Hebrews thought they were more about Israel’s history and God’s laws and commands than about God pouring out His heart, explaining the need for and characteristics of a coming Messiah, and having a personal relationship with man. It was Yeshua who would fill the Torah and the Prophets full of meaning, not just by explaining it, but by living it and fulfilling it. Jesus is who the Torah

and the Prophets pointed to beginning with the book of beginnings, Genesis. Jesus didn't come to abolish the Torah and the Prophets, as so many now think. He didn't come to replace the Old with the New. He came to bring the older Testament to its fullest God-intended meaning and purpose through the newer. And, of course, Jesus is the new covenant.

The Lord's Prayer, as instructed by Jesus in Matthew 6 as part of the long discourse called the Sermon on the Mount, is given to us as the best and greatest model of how to pray to the Father of the universe. It's not that we pray to Jesus; rather we pray to the Father in the name of Jesus. We pray to the Father by means of Jesus. We have the standing to pray to the Father only because we are in union with Yeshua. Jesus didn't pray to Himself but to the Father. Even the prayer begins, "Our Father . . ."

But if there is a second-best example of what our attitude in prayer ought to be, it must be Judah's plea in Genesis 44, as he lay prostrate before Joseph. He confessed all; he

acknowledged his lack of understanding, his helplessness before the greatness of his master, his guilt, although not of what he was accused but absolutely beyond measure nonetheless. He acknowledged that in vain he tried to hide his sin and his evil deeds, but the master was able to divine it all; it was a futile attempt. He interceded for others—his brothers, Benjamin, his father, Jacob, whom at this point he loved and valued above himself. He pleaded with complete honesty of soul; he offered himself up, a substitute, for what was due the others.

The question is, How would the master, Joseph, receive these pleas? Would he rightfully mete out justice for the great guilt of those who were bent over in hopeless anguish before him? Hold your breath, because what will occur at the beginning of the next chapter gives us the answer. It is there to show us the way that Yahweh, Creator, God of Israel, will respond to all of our pleadings to Him from our position of absolute, undeniable guilt.

## GENESIS 45

**ASSIGNMENT:** Read Genesis 45.

In our last chapter, Judah was pleading before Joseph for mercy, confessing his guilt before God for his actions, asking to be the one upon which all payment for offenses against his master Joseph be exacted, and offering himself up as a substitute for his brother Benjamin so that Jacob would not be grieved to the point of death.

Because everything we have studied concerning Joseph since Genesis 40 is a foreshadowing of the Messiah, we are approaching that pivotal moment in Scripture that will tell us just how the Lord God of the universe hears and reacts to our pleas for mercy. And it is shown to us in the way Joseph reacted to the pleas of his elder brother Judah.

### JOSEPH REVEALS HIS IDENTITY

Chapter 45 starts by telling us that “at last Yosef could no longer control his feelings in front of his attendants.” So he dismissed everyone around him, that he might be alone with his eleven brothers. Then he broke down and wept. With weeping so violent, with his body heaving with the intensity and range of emotions now pouring out of him like a dam bursting, his crying out could be clearly heard outside of his home. What he felt we can probably all, to some degree, identify with. These were tears of deep pain finally released. He was experiencing relief from an ordeal that had come to a poignant conclusion after so many years, gratitude for a reuniting with his family, sadness upon seeing his brothers eaten up with guilt, but

at the same time, joy, having witnessed them embrace repentance. All this gave Joseph the opportunity to forgive. But Joseph also wept, for he knew the thing he longed for the most was at hand; he would be soon be back in the presence of his beloved father.

Jesus must have felt a similar but much greater spectrum of emotions as He hung on the cross, His life draining away—as He suddenly felt the full burden of immeasurable, crushing weight placed upon Him for the sins of every human who had ever, or would ever, live; as He absorbed the divine wrath of His Father in righteous judgment for the sins He bore, none of which were His; and as He remained silent, choosing to endure for my sake and your sake, until He sensed the conclusion was but moments away. Then, in agony and in victory He could no longer contain Himself, but cried out in a voice so loud and powerful and filled with pain: “Eloi, Eloi, L'mah sh'vaktani?!” “God, God, why have You separated Yourself from Me?” The people who were gathered near Him hid their faces in awe and fear, and the six-inch-thick veil in the temple split from top to bottom.

But Yeshua knew, just as Joseph knew, that soon He would be back in the presence of His Father. His mission was accomplished. God's will was done. What Joseph's brothers had done to him for evil, the Father has used for good. Joseph saved Israel's *physical* life: Jesus saved Israel's *eternal* life—Israel's and all the families of the earth who would be joined to Israel's covenants.

## JOSEPH'S ACTIONS MIRROR THOSE OF CHRIST

### FOOD TO EAT

Joseph ordered that his father and all the clan of Israel be brought to Egypt that he might care for them. As of this time, only the first two years of the seven-year famine had passed; the next five would be even worse.

When Jesus died, He instructed His disciples to “feed My sheep.” Just as Joseph had forgiven his brothers, the fact remained that the famine was ongoing. When Jesus left, there was going to be trouble in the world; its condition of evil and malevolence was going to continue. And, it would gradually get worse.

### A PLACE TO LIVE

When Pharaoh heard of the coming of Joseph's brothers, he was pleased for Joseph and rewarded Joseph's years of loyalty and service with the order that wagons were to be sent to Canaan to bring Israel's clan and their belongings back to Egypt. They were to be given the “best” of the land to live in. Of course, Joseph had already determined that the land of Goshen would be the suitable place and had undoubtedly suggested as much to the king of Egypt.

Likewise, the Father has prepared a place for Yeshua's brothers, all those who have accepted and kept the faith in Yeshua. He is ready to welcome all who will come, and He will send for us at the appropriate moment—a moment that is very, very near.

The land of Goshen was not an arbitrary choice as a place for Israel. It was excellent pastureland, perfect for grazing sheep. But, just as important, it was well away from the bulk of the Egyptian population that despised sheep and shepherds. The Egyptians preferred meat from cattle, not sheep, and they considered shepherds to be of the lowest class of people. This would prove to be a boon to the Israelites, for during the next one hundred years or so, they would be

left to prosper and multiply far and above their Egyptian hosts. Later, however, the jealousy of the Egyptians against the Israelites' preferential treatment and prosperity would lead to their persecution and enslavement.

### DO NOT QUARREL

In true Oriental tradition, Joseph sent valuable gifts back to Canaan for his father. Likewise, he enriched each of his brothers, with Benjamin once again getting the royal portion of five times as much as the others. One can only imagine that this royal treatment by Joseph upon Benjamin likely continued all their lives. And, it could only have served to make Benjamin's relationship with his brothers strained, at the least. In fact, I suspect that Joseph's instruction to not quarrel on the journey (verse 24) was at least in part due to the highly favorable treatment Benjamin received and what the brothers might think to do about it. After all, these were the same men who twenty years earlier had deposited the teenage Joseph in a dry well due to nothing more than the favoritism Joseph had been shown by their father.

While the “do not quarrel” instruction is a strange inclusion, because the story of Joseph is a model of what was to come in Yeshua, it would be missing something without the admonition of Joseph's brethren not to quarrel. For this is what is expected of the brothers (and sisters) of Yeshua as we are on our journey with God. We are warned not to quarrel but to have oneness of spirit. Not a million bodies and one mind, but a million bodies and one heart. Unified not by consensus, but by means of our union in Christ. Wow. Have we ever failed Him in this!

### JACOB HEARS THE GOOD NEWS

Upon their arrival home in Canaan, the brothers reported to Jacob that Joseph was alive and, in fact, was a ruler of Egypt. Is it any wonder that Jacob didn't at first believe these sons who had proved to be of such doubtful character? I





suspect his first thought was, *What kind of trick is this, and for what gain?*

But, with the appearance of the wagons and the gifts, he was convinced of the truth of it, and verse 27 says his spirit was revived. Jacob, after all these years, had never recovered from the loss of Joseph, and it had taken its toll on his countenance. But now, with the news that Joseph was alive and well, he was filled with peace; the painful past was forgotten, and his life was once again complete.

## GENESIS 46

With this chapter, the era of the patriarchs truly closes. Abraham and Isaac were dead, and Jacob (a very old man) was in the midst of moving the Israelites out of Canaan into Egypt and the authority of Joseph and Judah. Before long, Jacob would go to be with God. After moving the family to Egypt, Jacob had but one duty left: to pronounce the all-important blessings upon his sons, the blessings that officially transferred wealth, power, authority, and responsibility to his successors. We will see the prophetic saga of these blessings beginning in Genesis 48, and will discuss the whole matter in great depth when we get there.

### ISRAEL GAINS NATION STATUS

Note the use of the word *Israelites* in this chapter. The clan of Israel had now grown large enough to warrant nation status.

ASSIGNMENT: Read Genesis 46.

### JACOB'S FEARS

Let's examine for a moment what Jacob's mindset must have been about leaving Canaan and going down to Egypt to join his most beloved son, Joseph. Of course, he was grateful beyond measure that his long-lost son was alive, and soon he would be back together with him. He was now certain that his clan, the twelve tribes of Israel, would survive the famine that had gripped the world because of Joseph's ability to

care for them. But Jacob wondered what would be the long-term result of their migration to Egypt. Was this about to become the fulfillment of the prophecy about the Hebrews' fate, given in a dream to his grandfather Abraham so many years earlier? Jacob would have known all about this prophecy. He would have heard it from his grandfather's mouth, and again from his father Isaac's. It disturbed him; it made him anxious and afraid.

Let's back up and remember those prophetic words of God to Abraham, in Genesis 15:12–16:

*As the sun was about to set, a deep sleep fell on Avram; horror and great darkness came over him. ADONAI said to Avram, "Know this for certain: your descendants will be foreigners in a land that is not theirs. They will be slaves and held in oppression there four hundred years. But I will also judge that nation, the one that makes them slaves. Afterwards, they will leave with many possessions. As for you, you will join your ancestors in peace and be buried at a good old age. Only in the fourth generation will your descendants come back here, because only then will the Emori be ripe for punishment."*

Jacob knew that if his taking his family to Egypt to survive the famines was the time and fulfillment of what God had spoken of to Abraham (and, what else could it be?), then he would die down in Egypt. Jacob was essentially removing his family from the Promised Land to become enslaved in Egypt for an extended period of time. He knew that four centuries would pass before his family would once again be free and move back to the land promised by God to the Hebrews.

### JACOB'S SACRIFICE

### HOW LONG IS A GENERATION?

This same passage in Genesis 15 makes many a Bible scholar convinced that a biblical “generation” is one hundred years, because the Scripture says here that the Israelites are going to be in Egypt for four hundred years, and it also speaks of that time period as being of four generations.

After the Israelites packed up and began their journey down to Egypt, probably beginning at Hebron, they stopped at Be’er Sheva and there Jacob had a vision. In that vision God addressed the fear and dreaded anticipation of what might lay ahead for Israel and his family. In verse 3 God told Jacob not to be afraid to take his family down into Egypt, for it would be there that God prepared a place for the Israelites to grow from a rather smallish group of seventy individuals into a *great* nation, although Jacob had no clue just how great a nation it would, in time, become. God confirmed to Jacob that indeed he would breathe his last there, but his remains would not forever rest in Egyptian sand. God would see to it that he was brought back to the land of his ancestors.

Jacob offered sacrifices at Be’er Sheva in preparation for this momentous migration. In the Hebrew it says Jacob offered *zevabim*. *Zevab*, or its plural *zevabim*, is a very specific kind of sacrifice, one of several that we will learn about when we get to the book of Leviticus. While the *zevab* is laid on the fire of the Great Bronze Altar,<sup>124</sup> this is not *the* burnt offering, a general term for the various kinds of sacrifices that are to be burned up.

Sacrifices were never made on the ground in a common fire; Jacob would have had to have used an altar. His father, Isaac, had built and used an altar in Be’er Sheva many years earlier, and very probably this was the same one Jacob used here. In fact, even though the verses do not explicitly say that it was Isaac’s altar that Jacob used, the fact that it says Jacob sacrificed

to “the God of his father, Isaac,” all but assures it. For altars were always built and dedicated to specific gods, and therefore when an altar was being referred to, it was called by the location it was in, who built it, and the god it honored.

### YEHOVAH’S TERRITORY HAS NO BOUNDARY

In verse 4 we have a reminder of the standard Middle Eastern cultural mind-set of that era: gods were territorial. It was an unquestioned belief that gods observed national borders, and for whatever reason, Jacob and his family still generally thought the same way all the other world cultures did. Yehoveh had apparently not gone to great lengths to enlighten him or explain the reality of that error. So, naturally, one of Jacob’s fears was that once he crossed the boundary of Canaan and entered Egypt, he would leave behind the influence and protection of his own God, Yehoveh, and be subject to Egypt’s gods. God assured him, “Not only will I go down with you to Egypt; but I will also bring you back here again” (verse 4). In other words, Jacob’s God would take the unusual step of crossing territorial boundaries and accompanying Israel on his migration. This was not the normal operating method for a god, but it must have been a welcome surprise for Jacob, even if he did not understand how Yehoveh could just change the god etiquette that had been established over the centuries.

As we continue in Torah, then get into the book of Joshua, we’re going to encounter all sorts of interesting comments like this one about God going with Jacob. These are typically brushed aside as ancient figures of speech. Trust me: these are not at all superfluous figures of speech but rather conversations and oracles about matters that were very real to the minds of those ancient Hebrews.

Verse 5 tells us that a sufficient number of wagons had been sent for all of Israel to bring their possessions with them to Egypt, but of course, the most important possession of Israel

was the people. What is being communicated here is that all of Israel's family moved to Egypt; none stayed behind.

### FURTHER REDACTION

Verses 8–25, and possibly even verses 26–27, were either added to this text at a later date or they were significantly modified from the original at a later time. How do we know this? Because the numbers don't add up for this time; when this genealogy is repeated in Numbers 26 and 1 Chronicles, there are substantial variances.

Plus, there are matters of common sense. Joseph was in his early thirties at this time, so Benjamin would have been in his twenties, a very young man. Yet we have a listing of ten sons of Benjamin. In Numbers the listing is five sons and two grandsons! Since the clearly stated timeframe for this chapter is the migration of Israel to Egypt during the time of the famine, it is utterly impossible for Benjamin to have sired so many children, let alone grandchildren, at such a tender age.

This may unnerve you a little, but don't let it. Genealogies are inserted into the text for various reasons in the Bible, and they have been amended for all kinds of reasons. Not the least of which is that after time passed, a larger and clearer picture of the family tree was available, so that additional information was added. Sometimes genealogies were modified because a clan had completely died out, and it was necessary to insert their name to be sure they weren't forgotten.

In the case of Genesis 46, it is also possible that the number seventy is symbolic rather than an exact census. Seventy is symbolic of the totality of a cycle; it also represents universality and divine ordination. It is very likely that there were far more than seventy individuals who went to Egypt, because genealogies and censuses generally only count the males of the population. The sixty-six males mentioned in the genealogy of Genesis 46 are an example of this tradition. There would have been at least as

many females born, and probably a few more females than males, which is the normal pattern of birthrate. It is likely that the full and complete number that went down into Egypt was closer to 150 family members. In addition, any small nation of that size would also have owned foreign slaves. In fact, we know from the passage that describes the slaughter of the residents of Shechem some years earlier (recall, this was revenge by the Israelites for the rape of Jacob's daughter, Dinah, by the king of Shechem's son), that Israel took many women and children as slaves and concubines. I would be surprised if their number was any less than two hundred, and probably a bit more.

All genealogical listings in the Bible had a method to their madness. The names were grouped in a particular way for a specific reason; it was never at random. We see that here in Genesis 46. The first members of Israel listed are Leah (Jacob's first wife) and her children; then Leah's servant-girl, Zilpah, and her children. Next is Jacob's second wife, Rachel, along with her children; and that follows with Rachel's servant-girl, Bilah, and Bilah's children.

Of course, we get further proof of the later redaction of the genealogy when it includes as "among those who went down to Egypt," Joseph's Egyptian-born children, Ephraim and Manasseh; these were children Jacob would have known nothing about, and who were born and raised in Egypt, not in Canaan.

Very probably, verse 28 belongs right after verse 7 in the original, omitting the entire genealogy completely.

### JUDAH ACTS AS FIRSTBORN

In verse 28 we are told that Judah was sent ahead of Jacob to scout out the way. This was a job for the firstborn, but of course, we see no mention of Reuben, Jacob's first son, doing this task. Apparently Judah had assumed that role, bypassing three brothers who were normally, by tradition, ahead of him, Reuben, Simeon, and Levi.

## JOSEPH REUNITES WITH HIS FATHER

Jacob and his family arrived for the long-awaited reunion, and Joseph went immediately to the land of Goshen, the place that would be their new home. This is a touching scene wherein Joseph, the ruler of the great land of Egypt, humbles himself before his aged father and weeps while embracing him . . . for a long time.

Joseph left to tell Pharaoh of his family's arrival: this was so that the pharaoh was shown proper respect, and so that he could honor and welcome Israel in whatever way he chose. In verse 31 it says that Joseph went "up" to tell Pharaoh, but Joseph most certainly did not go north from the land of Goshen to Pharaoh, for Pharaoh was most likely residing in Memphis, which was a short distance south. The key here is to remember that Egypt was a divided land

and it consisted primarily of two large territories—one called Upper Egypt in the south, and the other called Lower Egypt in the north. The terminology used simply expresses the Egyptian viewpoint; you always go *up* if you are headed toward Upper Egypt, and *down* if you are headed toward Lower Egypt.

In any case, as is common for heads of state like a pharaoh, he had been prepared in advance for the greetings and blessings that he would give to his honored guests, Israel and the family of the vizier of Egypt, Joseph. In proper protocol it is necessary for the pharaoh himself to pronounce his rulings face-to-face with representatives of Israel. So Joseph also prepared some of his brothers as to what the procedure would be, and told them exactly what they were to say, so as to accommodate Pharaoh's already decided plan for Israel. In the end, the idea was to make it 100 percent official that the land of Goshen was the place to be set aside for Israel.

## GENESIS 47

ASSIGNMENT: Read Genesis 47.

### THE BROTHERS COME BEFORE PHARAOH

At the end of Genesis 46, we saw the brothers preparing to go before the pharaoh to ask for land in Egypt. At the beginning of Genesis 47, this ceremony had begun, and Joseph started the preplanned agenda by formally announcing the arrival of his family to the pharaoh. Of course, right on cue, Pharaoh asked their occupation. The five brothers chosen to represent the whole family responded that they were shepherds and that they had come to request that Pharaoh might let them live in Egypt as the famine was so severe in their homeland, Canaan, that they could no longer survive there.

In verse 4 the brothers said, “Therefore, please, let your servants live in the land of Goshen.” The term used to describe the stay the Hebrew brothers sought is “sojourn.” That is, to stay *temporarily*. To be guests, not citizens. While Jacob knew they were going to be in Egypt a long time, either he had not revealed this to his sons—the ones who spoke with Pharaoh—or, more likely, they chose not to believe such a pessimistic assessment.

In a magnanimous gesture of friendship befitting royalty, Pharaoh offered the Israelites the land of Goshen. But further befitting royalty, Pharaoh did not respond directly to these lowly Hebrew shepherds; instead, he turned to Joseph and gave his reply.

### JACOB MEETS PHARAOH

In a separate meeting from the one the brothers had with Pharaoh, Jacob was presented to the ruler. At this time, Jacob blessed Pharaoh. That might sound a little odd, for it reverses their stations in life. It would seem that a humble and simple shepherd like Jacob, a refugee, would have no business blessing such a great man as Pharaoh. But what this amounted to was the respect that existed in that day for the aged. Jacob was probably the most aged man in all Egypt, perhaps the oldest man Pharaoh had ever met. Ancient records don’t show Egyptians living nearly as long as the Hebrews. In fact, Jacob’s elderliness so intrigued Pharaoh that he said to Jacob in verse 8, “How old *are* you?” (emphasis mine). Jacob responded that he was 130 years old, and most of those years had not been pleasant. He also told Pharaoh that 130 years old was nothing. His ancestors lived to much older ages than he.

### JOSEPH INCREASES PHARAOH’S POWER

Jacob and all his clan settled in the land of Goshen, and there they would remain for the next four centuries. But the famine was continuing more severely than before, and both Egyptians and foreigners came to depend even more on the grain stockpiled by Joseph as the yield of the land dwindled. The people’s food ran out, then their money was exhausted, then their livestock was sold, so they traded their land for food and eventually sold themselves into the service of the pharaoh. As these people were giving up their money, land, and liberty, it was Joseph the Hebrew they were dealing with.

So we see how Pharaoh not only gained ownership of all the land of Egypt, but also extended Egypt's influence into Canaan and the Middle East.

Of course, the land was useless to Pharaoh without people to tend his newly acquired flocks and herds and to till the soil. So Joseph created a tenant-landlord relationship between the now dispossessed Egyptian people and their pharaoh. The people were allowed to remain on the land they had given up to Joseph, but they had to give a substantial portion of its increase to Pharaoh as rent. This arrangement, which is commonly called serfdom, was closer to enslavement than a legitimate business deal. Only the priests of Egypt were exempted from this arrangement, as they were wards of the state anyway. It was Egypt's obligation to care for them.

### HOW THE PEOPLE VIEWED JOSEPH

Let's estimate again what Joseph must have been in the eyes of the people of Egypt and even parts of Canaan. It was Joseph's plan, Joseph's decrees, Joseph's implementations of the plan that caused the people of Egypt and Canaan to become paupers and serfs. It was Joseph's face the people saw confiscating their land and livestock. Joseph, while certainly saving their lives during that period of famine, was now their owner: he, as Pharaoh's representative, owned their lands, and he owned them.

This is the point at which the hatred of the Egyptians toward the Israelites began, and it was the seminal moment that began the steady path toward fulfillment of the prophecy to Abraham that his descendants would be slaves. The current Semite pharaoh, of course, could have cared less what the Egyptian people wanted. But years later, when the Egyptian people overthrew the hated foreign Hyksos rulers of Egypt and installed an Egyptian pharaoh, they were able to exact retribution for one hundred years of built-up anger and envy toward these Hebrews, led by Joseph, who had taken both their land and their freedom.

To make matters worse, we see in verse 27 that at the same time the Egyptian people were being forced to give up their land in exchange for food to survive, the Israelites were acquiring land in Goshen. And in that land that they owned, unlike their Egyptian neighbors, they prospered and grew dramatically in number.

### JACOB'S DEATH

Jacob would live seventeen more years in Egypt before he died at the age of 147. Jacob, the last patriarch, would be the only one to die on foreign soil. But before he died, when he knew his time was near, Jacob called Joseph to his side and made him promise not to bury him in the sands of Egypt but to return his remains to the Promised Land. Jacob had no need to worry if this promise would be carried out, because before he had arrived in Egypt, God had assured Jacob that this wish would be granted.

Jacob loved God and trusted God, but all Jacob knew of how God operated he learned from the well-established and common beliefs and traditions of the Middle Eastern cultures. That's why the location of Jacob's burial was so critically important to him. This was not some idealistic matter, nor was it about honor. This wasn't even about nationalism, as when a country makes every effort to bring soldiers who died in battle on foreign soil home to be interred in their native land. The issue for Jacob was the all-important matter of ancestor worship. How was he to be buried and gathered to his kin if his kin (Abraham and Isaac) were in Canaan, but he was in Egypt? The spirits of the dead didn't travel. How was his essence to continue on, after his death, by means of his spirit being tended and honored by his sons, grandsons, great-grandsons, and so on, if those sons were in Canaan but his spirit was still in Egypt? If a spirit wasn't tended, it would come to an end; that person's essence would evaporate for all time. Besides, the gods of each territory had rule over their own kingdoms of the dead. Jacob wanted to ensure that he, indeed, would

be taken back to Canaan so he could live with his ancestors in a place ruled by Yehovah, and his spirit would be properly looked after by his descendants.

But Jacob had some further duties, as head of the clan, to perform before he passed. He had to transfer the rights as leader and ruler of the family of Israel along with the possession of its wealth over to the one who would be the next leader of Israel; along with it, he would give blessings and instructions to all twelve of his sons. That's why the steps Jacob took in the

hours and days before his death were quite dramatic and had the most serious, far-reaching, and eternal consequences, even for us. I cannot find the words to stress enough that for us to truly understand the remainder of the Torah (as well as the whole of the Old Testament), we *must* grasp the significance of the events about to unfold in the last days of Jacob's life. After understanding that, even the New Testament will take on a deeper and fuller meaning to us, as will the rapid unfolding of current events happening in Israel today.<sup>125</sup>



## GENESIS 48

We are about to embark on a study that is full of ramifications for our day and time. A study that is going to explore some areas of Scripture you may have never before read, let alone considered to be prophetic. They are contained within the final three chapters of Genesis.

### THE RIGHT TO BE WRONG

I have changed my thinking on some of the conclusions I held when I first started this study. What caused that change was some very recent events that added new information and clarity to the mix. I will do my best to separate concrete fact from speculation, something that is necessary to approach this important area of prophecy. Nevertheless, I will speculate, but as a good friend of mine often says to me, I reserve the right to be wrong.

ASSIGNMENT: Read Genesis 48.

### JACOB RECITES THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT

Joseph received an urgent message that his aged father was very ill, so this ruler of Egypt took his two children born to his Egyptian wife Asenath and went to see Jacob, Israel. Jacob, with great effort, propped himself up in bed out of respect for the office his son Joseph held as vizier of Egypt, and then he recited the Abrahamic covenant in paraphrase to Joseph. The terms of this covenant were taught to him by his father, Isaac, just as Isaac was taught by his father, Abraham. The Hebrews would become very numerous; they

would become a *kabal ammim*, a holy convocation of fellow countrymen. They would be given the land of Canaan as an everlasting possession.

The recitation of the covenant begins in verse 3, and Jacob recounted an earlier part of his life: “El Shaddai appeared to me at Luz in the land of Kena’an and blessed me.” Luz is an alternate name for Beth-el; they are the same place. Jacob did not call God by the name YHWH (Yehoveh or Yahweh) because God had not yet revealed His personal name.<sup>126</sup> Before the era of Moses God went by the name El Shaddai. The meaning of this name has recently come into better focus. I was taught all my life, as probably most of you were as well, that *El Shaddai* meant “God Almighty.” This is *tradition*. There is absolutely no linguistic basis whatsoever to translate *El Shaddai* as “God Almighty.” In fact, the older traditions regarding what that mysterious name might have meant are generally based on the era, culture, and language it was translated into. For instance, the earliest Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, called the Septuagint, variously translated *El Shaddai* as “God,” “All-Powerful,” “Heavenly One,” and even “Lord.” The first Latin translation used the word *Omnipotent*. The Syriac version uses “the Highest” and “the Strong One.”

All of these were primarily guesses. However, more recent scholarship in the field of paleo-linguistics—the study of ancient and/or extinct languages—has started to give us a more accurate picture of the meaning of some of these obscure words. Hebrew is an offshoot of the Akkadian language, so we find that by studying language cognates, we can zero in on some of these definitions.

*Shaddai* is almost certainly a language cognate of the Akkadian word *shaddu*. *Shaddu* means

“mountain.” *El Shaddai* likely means “God of the mountain.” This, of course, fits hand in glove with the general belief of men in that ancient era, of which gods generally lived high up in mountains. It also fits with the understanding of the early Hebrews that God lived on a mountaintop—Mount Sinai, to be precise.

### JACOB ADOPTS JOSEPH’S SONS

Jacob’s next action was rather astounding: he took possession of Joseph’s two sons. Israel adopted Joseph’s children. I’ve heard some Christian speakers argue that Jacob’s adopting these children was nothing unusual; he was simply making these Egyptian children officially Israelites by accepting them into the tribe of Israel.

This sort of thing did happen among tribes of this time; a declaration was usually all that was needed to change the nationality or tribal affiliation of a person. But Jacob didn’t just make these children Israelites; he didn’t simply make these boys equals to the other of his many *grandchildren*. He made them equal to his twelve *sons*. Jacob made Ephraim and Manasseh sons,

as he says in verse 5, “Now your two sons, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt, are mine; Efrayim and M’nasheh will be as much mine as Re’uven and Shim’on are.” He made these two Egyptian children not adopted grandchildren, but his own children. Starting at this moment, and for a time, it would be fair to say that there were now fourteen tribes of Israel: the original twelve plus, now, Ephraim and Manasseh.

But things aren’t always as they appear.

### THE COVENANT IS MADE WITH *ISRAEL*

This study may make some of you a little uncomfortable and for others of you, you may gain a new understanding that you have been searching for, perhaps without realizing it. It’s going to be fairly deep. It’s going to be fairly difficult. It may go against some things your denomination taught as proper church doctrine. If you question the things I’m going to be telling you, that’s okay; just ask God to show you the truth. He will.

At the least, our study of Genesis 48, which is centered on Ephraim, will help answer the question of why so many people have this growing interest, if not downright passion, for Israel and for Torah.

You see, for almost nineteen hundred years, the church has done its best to ignore, even disavow, God’s plainly stated plan that, in order for the Gentile world to be saved, Gentiles must be grafted into the spiritual heritage of Israel. Ever since I was a child, I can remember my pastor telling the congregation that when we accept Christ we are adopted, or grafted, into the family of God. True enough, I suppose, but that statement is like describing a piece of artwork as “interesting.” It is so commonly bandied about that it really has no meaning other than to be gracious. The issue, however, is that the church has forgotten that “the family of God” is Israel; that is certainly *not* the inference intended by most traditional church leaders.



Jacob gives a blessing to Ephraim and Manasseh

Isn't the real family of God the church? Yes. But what makes the church what it is, is that, as disciples of Yeshua, Gentile believers have been grafted into the covenants of Israel—not instead of Israel, not as replacement for Israel, but alongside Israel. But here's the rub: it's not about the physical Israel, per se, but a spiritual ideal called Israel.

Both the older covenants and the newest covenant were given to Israel. The promise of another covenant after the covenant of Moses on Mount Sinai was prophesied in a number of places in the Hebrew Bible, but probably most directly in Jeremiah 31:31–34:

*“Here, the days are coming,” says ADONAI, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Isra’el and with the house of Y’hudah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their fathers on the day I took them by their hand and brought them out of the land of Egypt; because they, for their part, violated my covenant, even though I, for my part, was a husband to them,” says ADONAI. “For this is the covenant I will make with the house of Isra’el after those days,” says ADONAI: “I will put my Torah within them and write it on their hearts; I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will any of them teach his fellow community member or his brother, ‘Know ADONAI’; for all will know me, from the least of them to the greatest; because I will forgive their wickednesses and remember their sins no more.”*

Just exactly whom is this new covenant going to be made with? “The house of Israel and the house of Judah.” There is no mention of this being a universal covenant or of this covenant being made between God and Gentiles. Nowhere in Holy Scripture will you find such a suggestion. Gentiles have no part of this New Covenant unless we are somehow declared by Yehoveh to be part of either the house of Israel or the house of Judah.

Jeremiah 31 continues, and makes the matter crystal clear:

*This is what ADONAI says, who gives the sun as light for the day, who ordained the laws for the moon and*

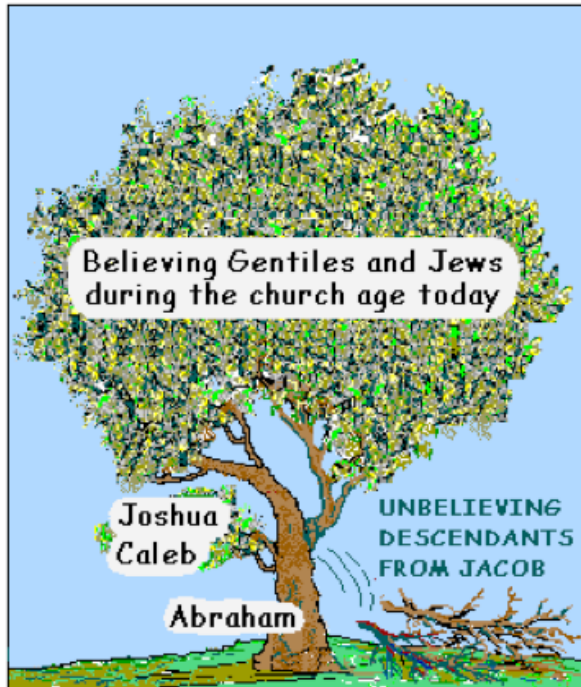
*stars to provide light for the night, who stirs up the sea until its waves roar—ADONAI-Tz’va’ot is his name: “If these laws leave my presence,” says ADONAI, “then the offspring of Isra’el will stop being a nation in my presence forever.” This is what ADONAI says: “If the sky above can be measured and the foundations of the earth be fathomed, then I will reject all the offspring of Isra’el for all that they have done,” says ADONAI. (verses 35–37)*

Plainly, if the sun stops giving off light and waves cease to occur in the oceans and stars disappear and the moon stops shining, *then and only then* will God cease to consider Israel and their offspring as His people, which is what “a nation before Me” means.

There is simply no way around this. Replacement theology is error of the worst sort because it is not a mistake; it is intentional deceit. Replacement theology, the belief that the church has replaced Israel as God's people is not the result of innocent error or ignorance. It is a premeditated attempt to dishonor God's chosen nation of Israel, to steal from them their inheritance (the covenants God made with them), and to answer a burning question that believers began to ask as the decades rolled on after Yeshua's death and the destruction of Jerusalem: If Israel was coming back into existence as a nation (as prophesied), where were they?

## A HOPE FOR GENTILES

But Gentiles can have hope. We can be included in this newest covenant of Israel and Judah, and hundreds of millions, perhaps billions of us have been included. But not because of us. From the time of Abraham forward, God made provision that any Gentile (usually called a foreigner or stranger) who wished to give up their allegiance to their pagan gods and become joined to Israel was not only *allowed* to do so, they were *welcomed* to do so. They were to be considered firstclass citizens of Israel. No distinction was to be made between naturalborn Israelites and those who were born outside of Israel (Gentiles) but had chosen to become part



of Israel. Those who joined Israel had just as much right to partake in the inheritance of the covenants of God as a naturalborn Israelite did.

However, outside of becoming part of Israel, there was and remains absolutely no way to partake in *God*. Not physical Israel, but the spiritual element and ideal that is Israel. Now, perhaps making a distinction between physical Israel and spiritual Israel sounds like mumbo jumbo to you, simply a rationalization to suit my purposes. But in fact, God, through Paul and others, made the distinction between spiritual Israel and physical Israel.

What we're going to find as we put the pieces of Scripture together, is that God has created and implemented a plan that is, in essence, a circle. He created physical Israel—human beings called Hebrews—to be His chosen people to bring the knowledge of the one true God by means of the laws and commands of God to the world. He brought the Living Word forth from Israel, specifically from the Jews. Then, because most Jews rejected the incarnate Word of God, Christ, He gave the duty of spreading the gospel to the Gentiles. Then after a long time, when the Gentiles have spread the Word of God to the entire world,

He has ordained that the Gentiles will bring the Word back to the Jews. The Jews will accept the Word, who is Christ, and they will be saved. In this way all Israel will be saved. It's a big circle.

Let's look at several Bible passages that makes this plan of God perfectly clear.

ASSIGNMENT: Read Romans 2:26–29.

We have been using the word *Israel* throughout this study—as in, we must be a part of Israel. But Paul used the word *Jew* in place of *Israel*. Why? As far as anyone knew in Paul's era, the Jews were all that remained of Israel; in their minds, they were the remaining remnants of the Hebrews who represented Israel. To Paul, and to most Jews, “Jew” and “Israel” were essentially the same.

Paul said that in order to be a true Jew, a true Israelite, you must be a spiritual Jew, a spiritual Israelite—being a physical Jew is not the issue. He even said that it doesn't matter whether a person is circumcised (meaning, that person has identified himself as a Jew) or uncircumcised (meaning, he identifies himself as a non-Jew, a Gentile), because God's definition of being a true Jew is the condition of one's heart, not his flesh. It's his spiritual standing with Yehoveh, not his genealogy that matters. Spiritual standing is based on the provisions of the covenants made with Israel in which faith in Yeshua—that He is who He says He is, that He is God, and that He is able to declare you clean and holy—is the only means to salvation.

We know that Paul was most definitely talking about Jews and Gentiles when he spoke of the circumcised and the uncircumcised, and not of various Jewish people who lived in cultures scattered throughout the Roman Empire or of differences between various Jewish sects, because of what he said in Romans 3:

*Then what advantage has the Jew? What is the value of being circumcised? Much in every way! In the first place, the Jews were entrusted with the very words of God. If some of them were unfaithful, so what? Does their faithlessness cancel God's faithfulness? (verses 1–3)*

Paul made an emphatic point of saying that there is no spiritual distinction between people who trust the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, so he must now answer the logical question that any Jew who heard him speak those words would have asked: Then what's the point of being born as one of God's chosen people, a Jew, at all?

Paul said that being a physical Jew had many advantages, because it was to physical Israel that God entrusted His Word. The Word of God was not just the Bible; Jesus was also the "Word become flesh." Jesus was a physical Jew, but He was also the ultimate spiritual Jew, the ultimate spiritual Israelite. There is a definite distinction, of course, between being a physical Jew versus a physical Gentile, but the only distinction of a spiritual Jew (Israelite) is the condition of the heart. Those who trust Yehoveh, whether Jew or Gentile, are spiritual Jews (spiritual Israel); those who don't trust God aren't.

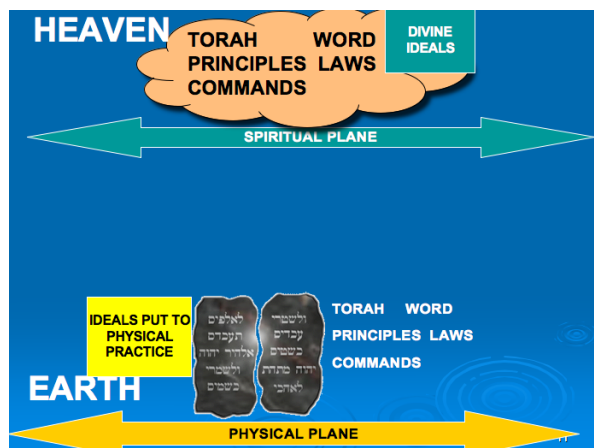
### ANOTHER WAY TO LOOK AT IT

The kingdom of God is the people who have given themselves, willingly, to the Lord. It is people who acknowledge the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as the one and only true God. But, more, it is those who acknowledge this

truth by means of having faith in the Messiah, whom God sent to be our substitute by bearing the penalty for our sins. It is this faith that God counts as the sole factor in identifying who His people are or are not. The entire legal reason this is even possible is contained within the covenants that God made with Israel, and nowhere else. Spiritual Israelites are the sole residents of the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God *is* spiritual Israelites. Spiritual Israelites are Jews and Gentiles who trust Yeshua as Savior. Spiritual Israelites are not Jews who have taken on a physical Gentile identity in order to worship Christ, and spiritual Israelites are not Gentiles who have taken a physical Jewish identity to worship Christ. Jews remain Jewish, and Gentiles remain Gentile; the common point is spiritual union in Yeshua.

### THE NATURE OF BEING GRAFTED IN

Gentiles cannot take Jewish heritage away from the Jews nor can we appropriate it for ourselves. Nothing mystical happens to our bodies to make us physically Jewish when we come to believe in the Jewish Messiah, Yeshua. But long before there was an Israel, God's principles and laws and commands existed. By definition these laws and principles and commands were spiritual in nature. They existed only in heaven, and it was the Lord Himself who brought these spiritual laws and commands and principles from heaven to earth and gave them to Israel, making these laws and commands physical. By giving these spiritual laws and commands to Israel, they took on a physical nature. They became behavioral do's and don'ts. In other words, before any physical creature was given God's laws, the laws were already in existence as divine ideals. Now, as they have been given to a physical people at Mount Sinai—the Israelites—and were literally written onto a physical piece of stone, these laws and commands and principles donned a physical form. However, their spiritual origin and aspect did not cease to exist.



Likewise, Yeshua, who is the Word, existed from eternity past as a purely spiritual entity until He was born a human baby from Mary's womb. The divine Word donned a physical form when He entered the world to save it.

The whole point of being an Israelite—a Jew, in Paul's terms—was to be a physical creature who received these laws and commands from God and who embodied and trusted them as spiritual ideals of God. These were spiritual ideals that became physical and tangible laws, commands, and principles. Therefore, God sees any person who embodies these ideals as the truest form of an Israelite. Again, not in a physical way but in a spiritual sense. Just as the physical symbol of being an Israelite was circumcision, so the spiritual symbol of being a spiritual Israelite is circumcision of the heart—trust in Yeshua.

## GOD WELCOMES THE GENTILES

*Therefore, remember your former state: you Gentiles by birth—called the Uncircumcised by those who, merely because of an operation on their flesh, are called the Circumcised—at that time had no Messiah. You were estranged from the national life of Isra'el. You were foreigners to the covenants embodying God's promise. You were in this world without hope and without God. But now, you who were once far off have been brought near through the shedding of the Messiah's blood. (Eph. 2:11–13)*

This is pretty explicit. Gentiles by birth (*physical* Gentiles) are foreigners to the family of God; the family of God is defined as Israel. But, now, these outsiders are brought near and declared to be citizens of Israel, members of the family of God, by the work of Christ. Once again, they are not physical Israel or part of national Israel *per se*, but rather the spiritual ideal of Israel.

The irony in all this is that today Gentile believers generally deny that we become citizens of spiritual Israel when we are saved, but back in Paul's day Jews were trying to require that when Gentiles were saved they had to become part of

physical (national) Israel. In other words, they had to put a physical sign into their physical flesh, and this physical sign was circumcision.

Let's put a little more meat on these bones:

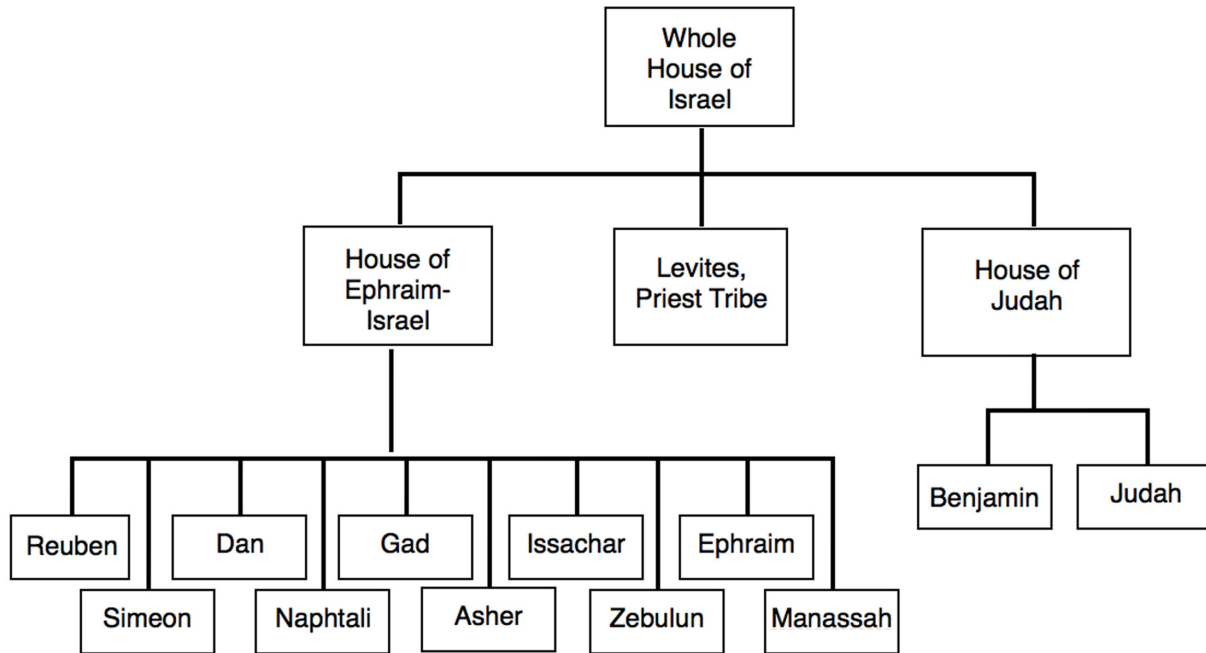
*But the present condition of Isra'el does not mean that the Word of God has failed. For not everyone from Isra'el is truly part of Isra'el; indeed, not all the descendants are seed of Abraham; rather, "What is to be called your 'seed' will be in Yitz'chak." In other words, it is not the physical children who are children of God, but the children the promise refers to who are considered seed. For this is what the promise said: "At the time set, I will come; and Sarah will have a son." (Rom. 9:6–9)*

Every Israelite is not necessarily a part of true spiritual Israel. Likewise, not every Gentile will be part of the kingdom of God. Paul has explained that the true nature of Israel is in the spiritual context, not the physical. The children that the promise referred to are the true children, those who trust God in their hearts.

Let's wrap up this part of the lesson with a quick study of Galatians 3:

*For in union with the Messiah, you are all children of God through this trusting faithfulness; because as many of you as were immersed into the Messiah have clothed yourselves with the Messiah, in whom there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor freeman, neither male nor female; for in union with the Messiah Yeshua, you are all one. Also, if you belong to the Messiah, you are seed of Abraham and heirs according to the promise. (verses 26–29)*

If you belong to Yeshua, Jew or Gentile, then you are of the seed of whom? Abraham! We are heirs according to what promise? The promise God gave to Abraham. Where is that promise to Abraham contained? Within the covenant God made with Abraham, the first Hebrew. Is Abraham the forefather of the Israelites, or is he the forefather of the Gentiles? Of course, he's the forefather of the Israelites. All of our hope, as Gentiles, is wrapped up in becoming *spiritual* Israelites, which we can become by trusting



Christ so that we might become partakers in the promises or covenants made between God and them. And, it's the Israelite Messiah Yeshua who leads us to that and makes it possible by His sacrifice on the cross. But, that's not all there is to it. Christ was but a part of God's plan. Most certainly the most important part, but He was not the entire plan.

### THE SHARES OF JACOB'S INHERITANCE

Let's return now to Genesis 48, where we learn another part of the redemption plan.

One of the effects of this adoption and blessing by Jacob was that the firstborn blessing was finally assigned . . . and it was to Joseph. It may not seem so at first glance, but this *was* the case. One of the inherent attributes of the firstborn blessing was that the one who received it got a double portion; in fact, another name for the firstborn blessing was the “double-portion blessing.” The two terms traditionally mean the same thing. That is, the son who received the firstborn blessing got double (or more) of the clan's wealth—twice as much as anyone else received. Joseph's double portion was manifested in that

Joseph was to get two full portions of “Israel” itself. How did that occur? Jacob adopted two of Joseph's own sons, making them entitled to a full share of all the wealth, authority, and heritage equal with their new brothers, the other twelve tribes of Israel. Each of the sons of Israel, from Reuben down to Benjamin, were entitled to an inheritance of one-twelfth of all that Israel possessed. But when Joseph's two sons were adopted and considered to be Jacob's sons, each of them also received a share. Joseph's family got the double-portion blessing in that they received two shares of Israel—one each for Ephraim and Manasseh—but the other sons got one share.

### MISSING TRIBES

You may wonder, with the additions of Ephraim and Manasseh making it a total of fourteen sons, why Jacob divided his inheritance into twelfths and not fourteenths. There are a number of reasons for this.

First, Joseph did not receive a twelfth, in addition to each of his sons receiving shares. By giving Joseph's two sons each a portion of Israel, the effect was the same as giving Joseph two-twelfths, the double portion. So Joseph



would be replaced (or more accurately, represented) as a tribe of Israel by his two sons, who were each given their own tribe—the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh.

But there’s still a problem. When you take Joseph away as one of the tribes of Israel and replace him with his two sons, you have thirteen tribes of Israel, not twelve:

$$12 \text{ tribes} - 1 \text{ tribe (Joseph)} = 11 \text{ tribes}$$

$$11 \text{ tribes} + 2 \text{ tribes (Ephraim and Manasseh)} = 13 \text{ tribes}$$

Well, we find the answer approximately 450 years after this cross-handed blessing occurred. It concerns the unique treatment of the tribe of Levi, and we’re going to study it a little later. Up to this point in our study, you have bits and pieces concerning certain prophecies about the Israelites, and we’ve briefly discussed Ephraim. But, having reached this important point in Genesis, it is now time to flesh out the impact of Jacob’s cross-handed blessing upon Joseph’s two Egyptian sons and how this cross-handed blessing would affect the descendants of Ephraim and Manasseh far into the future.

## ISRAEL’S CLAIM ON GOD’S PROMISED LAND

Jacob (called Israel) blessed Ephraim and Manasseh, with an especially important blessing

upon Ephraim, the younger of the two. That blessing indicated that Ephraim was in some undisclosed manner going to be a blessing to all the nations of the world, which by definition meant Gentile nations. Remember: at this point in history, and in Scripture, God saw the world as composed of two basic groups: Israel versus the nations (Gentiles).

ASSIGNMENT: Read Numbers 34:13–28.

After four centuries in Egypt, the Israelites were free and being led by Moses. They had approached the Promised Land some years earlier, but when spies were sent out to reconnoiter the land, the majority of them said that although the Promised Land was just as wonderful as God had promised, the inhabitants were too many, too fierce, and too powerful for the Israelites to conquer. This lack of faith and rebellious attitude caused God to drive those three million Israelites back into the desert wilderness to wander for thirty-eight more years.

Fast-forward. Forty years passed since Israel left Egypt, and with the extremely elderly Moses still leading them, the Hebrew tribes were again ready to move upon Canaan and take the land at God’s direction. Up until this time, God always spoke about giving the land to the Hebrews in the future tense: that is “I *will* give it you.” But, many things had to happen first. Here, the time had come and He gave it to them. Numbers 34:2 says, “When you enter the land of Kena’an, it will become your land to pass on as an inheritance . . .” The answer to the question *when* has been answered: the moment this enormous throng of Israelites crossed over the Jordan and set foot on the land of Canaan would be the time they took the land as their own. At that moment in history, Canaan became the property of the Israelites in God’s eyes and is to remain so forever.



As believers in the God of Israel, we have a decision to make. Do we believe His Word or not? If we do, then right here in Numbers we understand that from the only viewpoint that really matters, Yehoveh's, that land in the Middle East that is today called Israel was transferred to all those folks Moses was leading, and it would remain so in perpetuity. If anyone ever asks you where it says that the Promised Land was actually given to Israel, specifically when ownership and possession was transferred, it is here in Numbers 34.

Never once in Scripture is the issue of "Who was there first?" or "What is fair?" from a man's point of view raised as a factor in who owns the Promised Land. We never find God directing Israel to take whatever action *avoids* war and brings peace concerning the land of Canaan. None of these issues have any bearing whatsoever upon God's giving that land to Israel as a permanent possession. Therefore, as we can see, the various books, articles, and debates about whether Israel belongs to the Jews, whether parts of it should be given to the Palestinians out a sense of "fairness," or whether it just makes sense for Israel to have less land for their people in exchange for peace, should not matter one whit for a believer of the God of Israel. The one and only issue that overrides all others is this: Did God give the land to Israel or not? That question is answered right here in Numbers 34. Not only did He give it to them, but also they took possession of it around 1300 BC.

Don't ever fall into the trap of debating over the issue of Israel's legitimacy on the basis of its historical or modern geopolitical realities. From that standpoint, which is, by definition, merely men's various points of view and ideas of morality or fairness, there are arguments against Israel's having that land that sound reasonable. God is not impressed in the least by those arguments. God declared that land to belong to His people, Israel, and that is that. In fact, the Genesis 15 warning to all mankind<sup>127</sup> applies to two matters: the land of Israel and the people of Israel. Not one or the other, but both. Do you



stand with the Israelites as the apple of God's eye, or do you see them as the source of many of the world's problems and as rejected and replaced? Do you stand with the land of Israel as belonging exclusively to the Israelites without compromise, or do you see this as simply a matter of international political intrigue, strategic borders, oil possession, and appeasement of certain elements of Islam?

### MOSES'S DIVISION OF THE LAND

As a point of reference, Numbers 34 occurs about 450 years after the happenings of Genesis 48. So between Jacob giving his cross-handed blessing and Moses dividing up of the land of Canaan in Numbers 34, almost five centuries elapsed. The gist of what we read in Numbers 34:13–28 is this: two of the tribes of Israel and part of another tribe (the Bible says half of that

tribe), made a decision not to enter into Canaan but instead to make their homes on the east side of the Jordan River. These tribes were Reuben (Jacob's biological firstborn, but was passed over for the firstborn inheritance); Gad (one of the three tribes that made up the division of Israel that Reuben led); and about half of the people of the tribe of Manasseh (one of the two Egyptian-born sons of Joseph). The remaining nine tribes (of which Ephraim was one), along with the half of the tribe of Manasseh that wanted to go into the Promised Land, would be given territories inside the land of Canaan.

### DOING THE MATH AGAIN

Returning to that missing tribe, let's do the math again:

$$9 \frac{1}{2} \text{ tribes} + 2 \frac{1}{2} \text{ tribes} = 12 \text{ tribes}$$

The problem is, there were thirteen named tribes, weren't there? What happened to that thirteenth tribe? The list of tribes in Numbers 34 shows that, as was ordained 450 years earlier in the cross-handed blessing in Genesis 48, the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh replaced the tribe of Joseph. But there's another important name missing in this tribal listing: Levi. Moses's own tribe, the priestly tribe, the tribe of Moses's brother, Aaron, the first high priest of Israel, the tribe known as Levi is not mentioned. Why?

**ASSIGNMENT:** Read Numbers 35:1–5.

In the first couple of chapters of Numbers, we discover that there was a census taken of Israel soon after they left Egypt. There were actually two censuses taken: one for only the tribe of Levi, and another for the other twelve Israelite tribes. The reason for this is that God was effectively removing Levi from Israel to make them a special group of people whose sole job was to be in service to Yehoveh for the sake of Israel. Just so you get the picture: the tribe of

### CHAPTERS AND VERSES

Chapter and verse marks are modern additions to the Bible, only put there for the purpose of making it more convenient for us to find and reference certain Scriptures. When this was originally written, it all ran together; it didn't start and stop in sections or chapters. Modern scholars, using their best efforts, decided where one chapter or verse ended and the next began. We need to read Numbers 35:1–5 as though it is a continuation of Numbers 34. It addresses the same subject, which is the dividing of the land into separate territories for the tribes of Israel.

Levi at that moment was no longer seen as a part of Israel. They were a tribe set apart for a special divine purpose. Therefore, the Levites would not receive a named territory of their own like the other twelve tribes, partly because Canaan was exclusively for Israel and Levi was no longer part of Israel like the other tribes were. In contrast, the Levites were to be given cities and a small amount of open land surrounding these cities to be used as pastureland as their portion. These cities of the Levites were to be within each of the territories legally ascribed to each of the twelve tribes of Israel. In fact, the Levites were to be given a total of forty-eight cities and the land surrounding each; these cities and land would be reserved for a special purpose and would be controlled by the Levites.

From that moment forward, even though we can count thirteen tribes emanating from Israel, only twelve were to be considered as "Israel," for only twelve had been given territory: one tribe, Levi, had effectively been removed from Israel. Just as Jacob had adopted away Ephraim and Manasseh from Joseph to be his own, God, in essence, adopted away from Israel the tribe of Levi to be His own tribe of priests unto Him. Even though the Levites came from Israel, they were divinely moved into a unique category.

Upon the removal of the tribe of Levi, Israel went back to twelve tribes, with the names of

Ephraim and Manasseh essentially taking the place of Levi and Joseph.

If we have any hope of understanding the prophetic happenings that follow, as well as the prophetic happenings of the end times, many of which we are now witnessing, we need to get a handle on the tribal structure of Israel, how it evolved, and how it will evolve further. We've just scratched the surface.

## THE HOUSES OF ISRAEL

In order to understand it further, we need to add another important piece of information: even though there were twelve tribes of Israel, plus the set-apart priest tribe of Levi, Israel would eventually be divided into two distinct groups that the Scriptures call *houses*. Each of the twelve tribes would eventually belong to one or the other of the two houses of Israel. The Bible speaks often of the “two houses of Israel” and of the “whole house of Israel.” Well, the two houses, when combined, made up the whole house of Israel. It's important for us to not only see the difference between the two houses versus the whole house, but also which tribes belong to which house.

### A PROPER CHRISTIAN STANCE ON THE ISRAEL-PALESTINE DEBATE

ASSIGNMENT: Read Isaiah 8:11–16.

Here we see in Isaiah 8:14 the mention of “both,” obviously referring to two, houses of Israel. While that is the point most germane to our topic, I picked this passage because it also points out something that is happening today that is significant.

Modern Israel believes that the source of all their trouble is a conspiracy of men, of nations, and of terrorist groups all against them. Israel negotiates, deals, argues, and fights with



these nations, and with these men—the United Nations, the United States, the European Union, the Palestinians, various terrorists—because Israelis believe that these are the ones to be feared, the ones whom Israel must pay attention to, and therefore the ones to whom they must sue for peace. But they are wrong; that is what God is instructing Isaiah to tell the Israelites, and to tell us.

Isaiah is told not to believe as Israel believes, nor to fear as Israel fears; nor is he to fear whom Israel fears, nor to react as they react. Rather, it is God with whom Israel should sue for peace. It is God who has the might to defeat their enemies. Once Israel realizes this and gives up their stiff-necked ways of self-dependence, secular humanism, traditional religion and apostasy and they turn back to God, then God shall become their sanctuary and settle this long-running dispute once and for all.

As Christians we have an obligation to follow and believe the truth of God, and we need to realize that the Roadmap to Peace, the Oslo Accords, various UN resolutions, treaties, and agreements between Israel and the Palestinians, and all the other plans and conspiracies of men that will come and go are *not* what will decide the future of Israel. These are not the avenues that we, the church, should seek, embrace, or accept as the way to peace. For us to debate the Palestinian/Israeli problem over issues of rights of return, fairness, economic policies, humanitarian concerns, and so on is to do exactly as God commanded us not to do in Isaiah.

There is one reason, and one reason *only*, why Israel can lay full claim to that land, and

it is the only reason we, as believers, should hold onto: God gave it to them as a permanent possession. There is only one person who is going to solve the dilemma of the Middle East: Yeshua of Nazareth. Neither the consensus nor the compromises of men are going to make for a lasting peace. So, let us resolve first to stand up for Israel, and second, when asked *why* we stand up for Israel, tell all who will hear that it's because God gave them that land as a covenant between Him and them forever. No other reason has any bearing at all.

## GOD'S LOYALTY TO ISRAEL

ASSIGNMENT: Read Jeremiah 33:23–26.

I chose this particular Scripture to demonstrate a couple of things. First, notice in verse 24 that God refers to the “two families” which the Lord chose. What people did the Lord choose? Israel. The “two families” are the two houses of Israel. But I also want you to notice the gist of what God is saying here through His prophet Jeremiah: God says, Look, the world in general, even including some of the Israelites themselves who have fallen away from the principles and ideals of Israel, are saying that God has rejected these two families, these two houses of Israel. People are saying God has rejected Israel, that He's through with him, that He's transferring His blessings to other people, and even that Israel is no longer the Father's special people.

God answers this false assertion emphatically by saying, “Not on your best day, Satan! Israel will always be My chosen.” And, very colorfully the Lord says, “If you want to know what it will take for me to reject Israel, here it is: if day and night no longer exist, if all the stars and planets and galaxies no longer exist, if their fixed movements in the heavens and the physics of the universe that control those movements no longer exist, then I would reject my people.”



At the end of verse 26, concerning the two families, the two houses of Israel, God says: “I will restore their fortunes and will have mercy on them.” In other words, Israel will pay dear consequences because of their mistrust, sin, and rebellion and their fortunes will rise and fall, but God's mercy upon them will endure. That He chastises them and disciplines them in no way indicates that He rejects them on a permanent basis.

Hopefully this settles the matter of whether or not Israel is still God's chosen people, whether God is through with them or not, and whether the church has replaced Israel as God's chosen once and for all. The last time I looked up at the heavens, day and night still existed and the sky was full of stars moving in their regular routes through those same heavens. Therefore, by God's written decree, Israel is still and will remain God's chosen people, and He has decided that nothing they do, no amount of sin or rebellion, no amount of their rejecting Him, is going to change that. Even if there is nothing left but a handful of Hebrews, the remnant of Israel, He will keep His promise to them.

Let's put even more meat on these bones.

## THE FATE OF THE NORTHERN KINGDOM

ASSIGNMENT: Read Ezekiel 37:15–22.

This passage gives us further understanding and definition of the “two houses of Israel.” The heads of the two houses are identified as Judah and Ephraim. From the time of Joseph, all the way to the time Israel will return in the latter days, Ephraim will remain as the chief representative of the tribe of Joseph.

God is going to take these two families, these two houses, also at times called two kingdoms of Israel, and make them into one united family that will never again be divided. This is often referred to in the Bible as “the whole house of Israel.” The catalyst and source of that coming unity will be Jesus the Christ.

When and how did Israel go from being one united family to a divided family of two houses, two groups?

ASSIGNMENT: Read Hosea 6.

In the book of Hosea, God had decided to judge Ephraim because their behavior had become such an abomination to Him. At this point in history, the tribe of Ephraim had brought every tribe of Israel under its control except for Judah, Benjamin, and most of the Levites. In fact, historians would say that Ephraim had, to a degree, absorbed several other Israelite tribes. When we see the word *Ephraim* here, it refers to a conglomerate of ten tribes, all of which have been gobbled up by Ephraim. Together these ten tribes form one huge supertribe, which the Bible calls the house of Ephraim. Again, why is this ten-tribe entity called Ephraim? Because the powerful tribe of Ephraim came to rule over



those nine other tribes. And, as it says in Hosea 6:9, “Their conduct is an outrage” to the Lord.

ASSIGNMENT: Read Hosea 7.

When this prophetic Scripture was written, Ephraim and Judah had become two separate nations. These nations are also referred to in the Bible as *houses* and *families*. In this context, the two nations, two kingdoms, two houses, and two families of Israel all mean exactly the same thing. The tribes had been split; the tribes of Judah and Benjamin essentially formed the Kingdom of Judah, and all the other tribes essentially formed the Kingdom of Ephraim, or as our Bibles often call it, Israel. Remember, the Levites were in a special category and were not counted among the twelve tribes; therefore, they are not part of the two houses of Israel.

How did this split occur? After King Solomon died (about 925 BC), the nation of Israel divided in a horrible civil war. As a result of the split, although the people of both kingdoms still thought of themselves as Israelites,

only one kingdom continued calling itself Israel, and that was the kingdom that came to be known as Ephraim. The Kingdom of Judah, not long after that civil war, stopped calling itself Israel and called itself simply Judah. Think of it in these terms: during the American Civil War people on both sides of the battle still called themselves Americans, but one side called their home the Union, and the other, the Confederacy. The same principle applied in Israel, but not for long.

Soon, the Northern Kingdom dominated by Ephraim stopped calling itself Israel and instead began to call itself Ephraim. The patriarch Jacob was called Israel, and the Bible switches back and forth between those two names; likewise, when the Bible speaks of the house of Ephraim and the house of Israel, it is speaking of the same place. This applies only after the death of Solomon and after the civil war, which split the nation into two kingdoms. So when we get into that time period we have to watch the context of the prophets' writings very carefully because they switch back and forth from calling the Northern Kingdom Ephraim and Israel. When they refer to the kingdom of Ephraim or Israel they are not including the kingdom of Judah, which was seen as a separate entity. In fact, the kingdom of Judah is dealt with quite separately by God.

### EPHRAIM ASSIMILATED BY GENTILES

ASSIGNMENT: Read Hosea 7:8–9.

We're told something very important in Hosea 8: foreigners will *swallow up* Ephraim-Israel. These ten tribes are among the goyim, the Gentile nations, and will be assimilated by the Gentiles.

Hosea 7:8 says, "Efrayim mixes himself with the peoples." Knowing that there were

only two kinds of people on earth—Hebrews and Gentiles—we see that this clearly refers to Ephraim mixing with Gentiles. Around 725 BC, Assyria (also identified at times in the Bible as Ashur) conquered the Northern Kingdom of Ephraim-Israel and scattered the Israelites of the ten tribes who lived there like chaff in a strong wind. This didn't happen overnight. It took about ten years of military battles between Assyria and Ephraim, and each time Ephraim lost more land and more people to the Assyrian Empire. The Ephraim-Israelites were eventually spread all over the 120 conquered nations that made up the vast Assyrian Empire. We even see Egypt mentioned prominently in Hosea because Assyria also conquered Egypt for a time, so many of the Ephraim-Israelites were exiled southward to Egypt.

Surely not every last individual Ephraim-Israelite family was deported from their land. There would have been a handful left behind. But not more than perhaps 5 percent of its total population remained. All the others were scattered, assimilated, and for the most part, intermarried with the scores of different Gentile races and cultures that made up the Assyrian Empire, until the vast majority of Ephraim-Israelites just became part of the Gentile world. This assimilation was not forced upon the Ephraim-Israelites; they sought after it. They wanted it. They wanted to take on the ways of the Gentiles. They wanted to be free from the strict restrictions and requirements of the Torah and the Law of Moses. So God accommodated them. Within a few generations, most of the Ephraim-Israelites had no idea that, at one time, their ancestors were Hebrews.

It's important to recognize that not every Israelite who was deported became assimilated. It is now becoming evident today that groups from each of those ten tribes of Ephraim-Israel managed to stay together (maintaining their tribal affiliation and loyalty), and they retained a distant memory of their Hebrew history.<sup>128</sup> But, for the sake of clarity, it is fair to say that, for the most part, the members of the various tribes

forming the kingdom of Ephraim-Israel simply became part of the Gentile world, and no one knows who or where these people are except God Himself. Almost certainly, many of us are walking around with Hebrew blood from one or more of the ten lost tribes of Ephraim-Israel. But, physically, we have no way of knowing it.

### THE FATE OF THE SOUTHERN KINGDOM

While Ephraim was attacked by Assyria, Judah made a treaty with Assyria instead, and they paid tribute to Assyria in exchange for remaining a separate nation. But a little after 600 BC, some 130 years after the Northern Kingdom of Ephraim-Israel ceased to exist, Babylon became the new world power. Their leader, Nebuchadnezzar, attacked and conquered Judah.

Unlike what Assyria did to Ephraim-Israel, the Babylonians did not scatter the inhabitants of Judah. They deported a large group of Jews up to Babylon, but they were not assimilated or separated. They were generally allowed to stay together as a group and—this is key—maintain a separate culture. Not only were the people of Judah allowed to stay separate, most *wanted* to stay separate, which was a significant difference between them and Ephraim-Israel. Ephraim-Israel was turned over to the Gentiles because they wanted to be like the Gentiles, so God granted it. Judah did not desire to be like their Gentile neighbors, so God allowed them to remain separate. In addition to the hundreds of thousands of Jews taken away to Babylon, thousands more were left in Judah as caretakers of the land (these were primarily peasants), simply because they were of so little value to the Babylonians; it wasn't worth the trouble to deport them to Babylon.

By the time the Babylonians invaded Judah, it consisted primarily of the two tribes of Benjamin and Judah. Most certainly we should include the Levites as well. In addition, tiny groups of other Israelite tribes also lived in Judah, but the presence of these tribes was insignificant because

their numbers were so small and their influence nonexistent. It's also important that we understand that not long after Judah was hauled off to Babylon, when Persian and then Greek influence began to spread after Babylon lost its grip on the Middle East, the people of Judah would start to be called Jews. Jews, as we know them today, are only people from the former nation of Judah, but after their experience with Babylon, they considered themselves to be the complete remnant of all Israel, because to their view, the tribes forming Ephraim-Israel were long gone.

### EPHRAIM WOULD BE A GROUP OF NATIONS

Armed with the knowledge that much of Ephraim had been scattered and assimilated into the Gentiles, but Judah had remained a separate and identifiable Hebrew culture and race, let's return to Genesis 48:17–19 again.

The end of verse 19 says that Ephraim is going to become “many nations.” Some Bibles say “a multitude of nations”; still others say “a group of nations.” So let's look at the original Hebrew.

By the time Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt, the world had been starkly divided by God into two groups: Israelites and everybody else. The “everybody else” is what the Bible calls Gentiles. *Gentile* is the English translation of the Hebrew word *goy*. To this day, God views the physical world in two groups: Israelites and Gentiles. The common terminology we use is *Jews* and *Gentiles*.<sup>129</sup> Where our Bible says “group of nations,” the original Hebrew is *melo ha goyim*. Those words, in their most literal sense, mean “a fullness of Gentile nations.” So Ephraim was going to become the fullness of the Gentile nations. Of course, the question is, What exactly does that mean?

### THE PURPOSE OF EPHRAIM'S ASSIMILATION

Though the clouds are lifting, the window is still somewhat fogged. We can see that Ephraim

was identified with the Gentile peoples of the world. But we also know that large populations of the various ten tribes that formed Ephraim have been rediscovered. They are saying, “We are Israel, but we are not Jews.” They are correct. They are from the Kingdom of Ephraim, not from the Kingdom of Judah.

Some believe that the purpose of Ephraim being absorbed into the Gentile world is so that, through the miraculous ways of God, every Gentile believer in Christ has literal, physical, genealogical ties to Ephraim. Some will say that they can even tell you which tribe of Israel they descended from. There is a group called the Brit-Am Association, which takes it a step further by asserting that Britain and America are two of the ten lost tribes of Israel. Others say that Ephraim is purely symbolic of Gentile believers. Still others say that spiritually, but not physically, Gentile believers are Ephraim—spiritual Ephraim.

Nonetheless, the bottom line is that Ephraim was prophesied by Jacob to “become a fullness of the Gentiles”; that is, Ephraim was going to be a special and important blessing to non-Hebrews. Twelve hundred years after the prophetic cross-handed blessing by Jacob upon Joseph’s sons Ephraim and Manasseh, Ephraim was indeed scattered and large segments of the population absorbed by Gentiles. At least part of the prophecy is clear, and it has happened. Other parts of the prophecy, such as those parts of Ephraim that were exiled but maintained tribal affiliation as well as a memory of their Hebrew roots, are also starting to play a different prophetic role. And it is happening right before our eyes.

### EPHRAIM AND JUDAH REUNITE

Now, to understand the context, the book of Ezekiel was written by a man, Ezekiel, while he was living in Babylon. He was among the exiles of Judah—that is, he was a Jew who had been hauled off to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar. Ephraim-Israel had ceased to exist for more than a century before this time.

The key verses for this discussion are Ezekiel 37:15–19. Judah and Ephraim, after being brought to life again, are brought back to the reestablished land of Israel, and are being rejoined into one unified people. This is an end-times prophecy. This has never happened. It can happen only after Israel was reborn as a nation, which occurred in 1948.

We know who Judah is; it’s the Jews. But, what of Ephraim? How can Ephraim rejoin Judah if Ephraim is the ten lost and scattered tribes, almost all of whom have become Gentiles and have no idea who they are?

What is inescapable is that there is going to be a joining of the Jewish people with those who find out they are Ephraim. We know from Jacob’s prophecy concerning Ephraim, and from all the other prophecies we’ve studied, that at least part of Ephraim is most definitely connected to the Gentiles. But we also know with certainty that the identifiable Israelite tribes that formed Ephraim, twenty-seven hundred years ago, are alive and well. In fact, they have stepped forward, asserted their Israelite heritage, and petitioned the State of Israel for immigration. Even more, in March 2005 the government of Israel and the religious hierarchy of Israel agreed that these Ephraimite tribes have been found and that indeed they are Israel; a law was passed allowing these Ephraimites to return home and be reunited with their Israelite brothers, the Jews.

Meanwhile, Gentiles are awakening and finding a growing love and concern for Israel in our hearts. This is happening all over the world; it is by no means an American movement. We don’t know where this love came from, but we know in our spirits that we do have some sort of connection with the Jewish people. Without a doubt, that connection has its source in Ephraim. I think it is a spiritually based connection, but indeed some physical element may also be involved. Time will tell.



## UNDERSTANDING THE END TIMES

Let's look at a place where Ephraim is not mentioned, when one might expect that it should be, and that should indicate something important to us.

ASSIGNMENT: Read Revelation 7:1–8.

The context of this passage is that it is occurring in the Tribulation period—the period that is known to the Jewish people as the Time of Jacob's Trouble. The Time of Jacob's Trouble and the Tribulation indicate basically the same thing. They are just two different cultural expressions for the same event or time period.

We have heard about this great event for years: the sealing of the 144,000 witnesses. These witnesses are all from the tribes of Israel, and these witnesses are listed tribe by tribe:

$$12,000 \text{ people} \times 12 \text{ tribes} = 144,000 \text{ people}$$

But look carefully: there are two names missing from this list, and an old one has been put back in: Ephraim and Dan are missing, and Joseph and Levi are added back in. Why?

As we get ready to study the blessings of Jacob upon his twelve sons in Genesis 49, we'll see that Dan is going to have a serious ongoing problem with idolatry. Some even think that the Antichrist will arise out of a connection to the tribe of Dan.<sup>130</sup> That may be the reason Dan is left out. The next logical question is: Where is Ephraim? In Ezekiel we see that Ephraim and Judah will be reunited in the end times. But here, in place of Ephraim, Joseph is added back in. The makeup of the tribes of Israel evolves, beginning from the time of their inception and ending here in Revelation, but we must understand that this is significant. To suddenly see Ephraim deleted and Joseph added back in indicates that something dramatic has happened. But what?

ASSIGNMENT: Read Genesis 7:9–14.

First, let's remember that Ephraim and Judah will come back together before the Great Tribulation, also called the Time of Jacob's Troubles. It happens in the latter days, before the world enters that terrible period.

Another group of people are described as being from every nation, tribe, and tongue in Revelation 7. Of course, these are the believers who have been removed from the Tribulation. Some say these are those people who were martyred during the Tribulation; others say that these are those people who have been raptured. But the point is, whoever these people are and however they wound up before God's throne, it is clear they are believers.

I warned you earlier that I would be speculating, and this is one of those times. Who are these people dressed in the white robes? Could this be a portion of Ephraim, who is suddenly missing from the listing of the twelve tribes? John asks the angel in verse 13, "Who are they and where are they from?" He's already stated that they are people from every nation, tribe, and tongue. *Every* means *every*. Because Ephraim was not only scattered among the Gentiles but a few Ephraimites also joined the tribe of Judah, they are part of *every* nation and tribe.

### WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR US?

The tribes of Israel called out in Revelation 7—those who had been called "lost" but are certainly lost no more, those who are called part of Ephraim—are those who did not assimilate into the Gentile world, but through God's providential hand managed to stay together and stay identified to their original tribes. The bulk of that 144,000 will come from these "Ephraimite" tribes. Most of the tribes in the listing in Revelation 7 are what came to be known as Ephraim-Israel completely apart from Judah, Benjamin, and Levi.

Why are the Levites no longer being apart but included again as a tribe of Israel? Because there is no more need for a special priestly tribe to officiate temple services. The only men who will survive the Tribulation in one form or another are believers. All men will be as priests in service. All redemption will be complete. It will be finished. There will be no more need for the Levites to be set apart as ransom for Israel's firstborn. The Levites' unique role will be completed, and so they will be returned to their heritage, Israel.

### WHO EPHRAIM REPRESENTS

There is a possibility that Ephraim in some way represents the Gentile portion of the church, probably on a spiritual level more than on a physical level. However, a physical connection is certainly possible. As with all prophecy, one only gets the full picture after it has come to pass. When one is in the midst of its fulfillment, as we are today in regards to the reuniting of Ephraim and Judah, not all is clear. There is much about all this that is mysterious, so we need to be careful not to be rigid and dogmatic in our beliefs about the path to the final outcome.

### THE REALITY OF DUALITY IN EPHRAIM

When Ezekiel says that the two sticks, Ephraim and Judah, will come back together, I believe that we may be hearing of a reunion on two levels: spiritually and physically. We should think of it in terms of the Reality of Duality, the mysterious way God operates in which every part of His plan has a spiritual and physical element working in parallel.

On a physical level, I see the reunion spoken of in Ezekiel 37 as the return of the "lost" tribes of Ephraim to Israel, joining their brothers from the tribe of Judah (the Jews) who came a few years before them to establish the State of Israel. We don't have to guess about this; it is happening and we are witnesses to it. On an earthly

and physical level, we have the two houses of Israel—Ephraim and Judah—coming back together to form one nation of God as they were at their inception almost three thousand years ago.

On a spiritual level, the reunion of Ezekiel 37 is ultimately about the Gentile believers in Christ, possibly represented in some way by Ephraim, who are going to come together with the Jewish believers in Christ, represented by Judah. Together, these are spiritual Israel, or the *true* Israel that Paul speaks of. This is beginning to happen, right now, as Gentile believers are reaching out in love to the Jewish people as never before in history. The number of Jewish people coming to faith in Yeshua is growing at a breakneck rate; there is a bond of love growing being Gentile and Jew, especially between Messianic Jew and Gentile Christian. How it would happen, in what order it would happen, where it would happen, and who would be involved has all been prophesied.

**ASSIGNMENT:** Read Psalm 102:1–19.

In verse 14<sup>131</sup> the psalmist says "your servants" will love Israel's very stones. It doesn't say just God's chosen people, but His servants. *All* those who love Him, Jew or Gentile, are His servants. Jews and Gentiles will simply fall in love with Israel. Verse 18 says, "May this be put on record for a future generation; may a people yet to be created praise ADONAI." This is for a people who hadn't yet been created but will praise God. All of Israel had certainly already been created, lived in Egypt, left Egypt, and at the time of this psalm, were living in their own sovereign nation with one king over all twelve tribes: David. This mention of a mysterious "people not yet created" refers to nothing less than the body of Gentile believers—the church—who will become part of the spiritual or true Israel. We will all love Israel and praise God, according to this prophecy.

## WHY IS THIS GOD'S PLAN?

Let's look at Romans 11 in light of what we've learned. Why is it that God gave His Torah to twelve tribes of Israel, then gave us our Savior through the house of Judah, the Jewish part of Israel, only to have the torch of the gospel passed from the Jews to the Gentiles, and finally for the Jews and the Gentiles to be at odds with each other for centuries? This question is explicitly addressed and answered in Romans 11:11–26:

*“In that case, I say, isn't it that they have stumbled with the result that they have permanently fallen away?” Heaven forbid! Quite the contrary, it is by means of their stumbling that the deliverance has come to the Gentiles, in order to provoke them to jealousy. Moreover, if their stumbling is bringing riches to the world—that is, if Isra'el's being placed temporarily in a condition less favored than that of the Gentiles is bringing riches to the latter—how much greater riches will Isra'el in its fullness bring them! However, to those of you who are Gentiles I say this: since I myself am an emissary sent to the Gentiles, I make known the importance of my work in the hope that somehow I may provoke some of my own people to jealousy and save some of them! For if their casting Yeshua aside means reconciliation for the world, what will their accepting him mean? It will be life from the dead! Now if the ballah offered as firstfruits is holy, so is the whole loaf. And if the root is holy, so are the branches. But if some of the branches were broken off, and you—a wild olive—were grafted in among them and have become equal sharers in the rich root of the olive tree, then don't boast as if you were better than the branches! However, if you do boast, remember that you are not supporting the root, the root is supporting you. So you will say, “Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.” True, but so what? They were broken off because of their lack of trust. However, you keep your place only because of your trust. So don't be arrogant; on the contrary, be terrified! For if God did not spare the natural branches, he certainly won't spare you! So take a good look*

*at God's kindness and his severity: on the one hand, severity toward those who fell off; but, on the other hand, God's kindness toward you—provided you maintain yourself in that kindness! Otherwise, you too will be cut off! Moreover, the others, if they do not persist in their lack of trust, will be grafted in; because God is able to graft them back in. For if you were cut out of what is by nature a wild olive tree and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these natural branches be grafted back into their own olive tree! For, brothers, I want you to understand this truth which God formerly concealed but has now revealed, so that you won't imagine you know more than you actually do. It is that stoniness, to a degree, has come upon Isra'el, until the Gentile world enters in its fullness; and that it is in this way that all Isra'el will be saved. As the Tanakh says, “Out of Tziyon will come the Redeemer; he will turn away ungodliness from Ya'akov.”*

God's plan was to give His covenants to Israel; covenants that would lead to a restoration of the relationship between mankind and God. In due time, the Gentile world was to be joined to Israel's covenants—old and new. When Israel, for the most part, rejected the new covenant, which is manifest in the sacrificial blood of Christ, Gentile believers were grafted into Israel with the twin purposes of partaking of Israel's covenants and of carrying forth the gospel to the whole Gentile world. But at the appointed time, the Jews would wake up and see that the Gentiles have what had always been intended for Israel; they become jealous and want what the Gentile believers have. And then, Paul said, the Jews will learn the gospel from the Gentiles, who originally learned the gospel from the Jews, and in this way all Israel will be saved. Both houses. Who is all Israel, spiritually? Believers—Gentile and Jew; Ephraim, the house of Israel that became part of the Gentile world, and Judah, who remained Jewish. Both houses. Saved. We are seeing this happen with our own eyes.

## GENESIS 49

This week we are going to look at another, separate set of blessings made by Jacob. Recall that we are speaking of a time when the twelve tribes of Israel were in Egypt; Joseph was the vizier of Egypt, and Israel were honored guests of Pharaoh. The events of Genesis 48 and 49 probably occurred around 1700 to 1750 BC.

In Genesis 49, we are going to look at the destinies, as described in the form of blessings, which were prophetically called out for each of the twelve tribes of Israel. We have come a long way, haven't we? In earlier parts of Genesis we saw Israel created when God gave Jacob a name transplant (to Israel), and now we will see prophecies concerning the future of the individual tribes of Israel called out hundreds of years before their fulfillment. Much of what we will learn about them is already fulfilled prophecy. What we can take from this is the absolute inerrancy and the literal nature of Bible prophecy. That is important to us in our time, because there are still many prophecies about the tribes of Israel that are in the process of being fulfilled, and there are others that soon will be. True enough, some of these prophecies are a little obscure and their meaning cloudy, but the veil is starting to lift. I think that if you pay close attention to what we'll study about these tribes, the book of Revelation in particular will have new meaning to you. Recall that in the previous lesson, for instance, we discovered that the makeup of the twelve tribes of Israel looks different in Revelation 7 than it does in the Torah; Ephraim and Dan are removed, and Joseph and Levi are added back in.

As we read through Genesis 49, we need to put it in proper perspective; what Jacob pronounced was an overall picture of each of these tribes. These were not prophecies about things

they would necessarily do; they were prophecies about what each of these tribes would become. Jacob would pronounce what each tribe's characteristics and attributes would be over the long haul. He did not address specific behavior at a given moment in time, though we can see moments when a certain tribe eerily reflected the blessing Jacob gave it. We need to keep in mind that it was more than thirty-five hundred years ago that Jacob made these pronouncements concerning the traits of the descendants of the sons gathered around his deathbed, and these traits would apply to the history of each tribe from beginning to end.

Remember: from here on, when the Bible speaks of one of the twelve Israelite tribes—such as Rueben, Judah, or Ephraim—it's not speaking about the destiny of any particular man. These men, these twelve sons of Jacob, were long dead before the individual tribes that went by their names grew large enough to form identifiable characteristics. The Bible is addressing the thousands and millions of descendants of each of these men who stayed together in family groups called tribes. This was the typical social structure then, and it might surprise you to know that the largest part of the world population today is still tribal. Tribalism is far from being a thing of the past; it is alive and well. How tribes operate has everything to do with the intractable troubles we face in the Middle East, as well as the horrible genocides in modern-day Africa.

### SETTING THE SCENE

**ASSIGNMENT:** Read Genesis 49.

Like a modern-day family sitting around a table while an executor reads the will of the departed one who had held all the family's wealth and power, there was an air of anticipation among the twelve brothers receiving Jacob's blessing in Genesis 49. The sons of Jacob were anxiously waiting to hear what their particular blessing might be, and like the family at the reading of the will, some were going to be pleasantly surprised at their portion, while others would be drained with disappointment. Still others would walk away content, however modest their lot.

Later, after it had time to sink in, hard feelings would result as some of those sons of Jacob who received the lesser blessings burned with envy against those who received the greater. Of course, those who received the greatest blessings looked down smugly upon those who never deserved as much as they had rightfully received, anyway. Time doesn't necessarily solve these hurts and rejections; sometimes it can actually magnify the animosity. Such would be the case as we follow the history of Israel from this point forward. Some of the tribes of Israel have had long-term hatred against other tribes of Israel, and at times they actually warred against one another.

## THE TIMELINE FOR THE BLESSING

The twelve sons of the last patriarch, Jacob, called Israel, gathered around their father, who had just enough strength left in his aged body to perform his final duty on earth. They listened intently as the all-important blessings began predictably with Reuben, the firstborn, and progressed in approximate but not exact accordance with the order of their birth.

## THE *ACHARIT-HAYAMIM*

Jacob begins his blessing by saying something that is unclear to scholars even to this day: he says, "I will tell you what will happen to you in the *acharit-hayamim*." Some versions say "in the latter days," "in the days to come," and "in the last days."

The Hebrew words *acharit-hayamim*, in their *most* literal sense, mean "in the end of the days." Some rabbis and scholars say that this speaks of the time when Israel's days in Egypt will be over and Moses will lead them out. Others say this is speaking of the latter days and end times of the world. There have been very reasonable arguments for both sides. Jacob's sons were probably not thinking in terms of thousands of years into the future, but as with every pronouncement in the Bible that is of God, we must remain aware that there is simultaneously a physical and a spiritual manifestation to these blessings. Certainly, Jacob's sons could only see the physical, material side and thus were thinking of the near-term prospects. But we can, with hindsight, also see the spiritual side and see that various prophetic statements can play out over many generations and manifest themselves in unexpected ways.

About one thousand years after this blessing, ten of the twelve tribes—all but Judah and Benjamin (and the tribe of special category, the Levites)—vanished; therefore one would think that indeed the meaning of Jacob's words, "the end of days," spoke of a time before they vanished—a time that represented the state of each tribe in the years that would lead up to their exodus from Egypt. This is opposed to the belief that Jacob's words refer to the end times of the world. Yet, we are made aware that Ephraim, who represents those lost tribes, is supposed to mysteriously reappear in some form in the end times. This leaves open the possibility that indeed Jacob *did* mean the end times of the world and not simply the end of Israel's time in Egypt.

In reality, *acharit-hayamim* could mean either interpretation. Time will tell. Likely, it has some elements of both past and future, for we see many biblical prophecies repeat themselves. Bible prophecy tends to create patterns as much as it foretells future events. For the present, I prefer to leave this as an unknown rather than dogmatically say it means one thing over the other. Perhaps over the next few months and years, God will make this clear to us.

## THE BLESSING OF THE SONS

### REUBEN

*Re'uven, you are my firstborn, my strength, the firstfruits of my manhood. Though superior in vigor and power you are unstable as water, so your superiority will end, because you climbed into your father's bed and defiled it—he climbed onto my concubine's couch! (Gen. 49:3–4)*

We are not told the reaction of any of the sons, but it should not be hard to imagine the crushing blow this dealt to Reuben; at this instant, humiliated in front of his brothers, he was disowned from his position as the natural firstborn of Israel. He should have suspected this was coming, particularly since his younger brother Judah had been relied on more and more by Jacob for leadership over the few years prior. Reuben knew the wrongs he had committed against his father, but hit with the unalterable finality of it all, a brutally depressed Reuben had to be the result.

Jacob told Reuben, You are “unstable as water . . . your superiority shall end . . . because you climbed into your father's bed and defiled it.” In other words, you do not have the necessary attributes to lead Israel, so you shall not receive the firstborn blessing.

This “bed defiling” incident is recalled for us in Chronicles. We need to consider very carefully what it says, for it is key to our understanding of the blessings that Jacob will give his sons, and more:

*The sons of Re'uven the firstborn of Isra'el—he was the firstborn, but because he defiled his father's bed, his birthright was given to the sons of Yosef the son of Isra'el, though not in such a way as for him to be regarded in the genealogy as the firstborn. For Y'hudah became greater than his brothers, inasmuch as the ruler came from him; nevertheless, the birthright went to Yosef. (1 Chron. 5:1–2)*

This verse tells us a couple of things: first, the reason Jacob passed over Reuben was that

he had slept with Jacob's concubine, Bilhah. That's straightforward enough. But what also happened was, in essence, the honors and blessings that traditionally went to the firstborn were split between two sons: Joseph and Judah. As we saw in Genesis 48, the firstborn rights actually got split between Ephraim, Joseph's son, and Judah. So the Chronicler tells us that the earthly reason behind Jacob's cross-handed blessing upon Joseph's sons was to disinherit Reuben because of what Reuben had done. Of course, God had other reasons to allow this scenario to unfold.

### TRADITIONAL FIRSTBORN BLESSINGS

There are two major components that make up the traditional firstborn blessing: first, the double portion, which meant that the firstborn was to receive two shares (or more) of the tribe's wealth instead of one. Second, the firstborn was given the right of authority to lead, to rule over the whole tribe. If all had gone as normal, Reuben would not only have been the leader of the tribe of Reuben, he would have become the leader over all of Israel—he would have ruled in place of his father, Jacob, over the full twelve tribes. Additionally, he would have received a double portion, twice as much of the tribe's wealth as any of his brothers received.

Reuben got none of this. Instead, Joseph received the double portion (by means of his sons Ephraim and Manasseh) and Judah received the right to rule and lead.

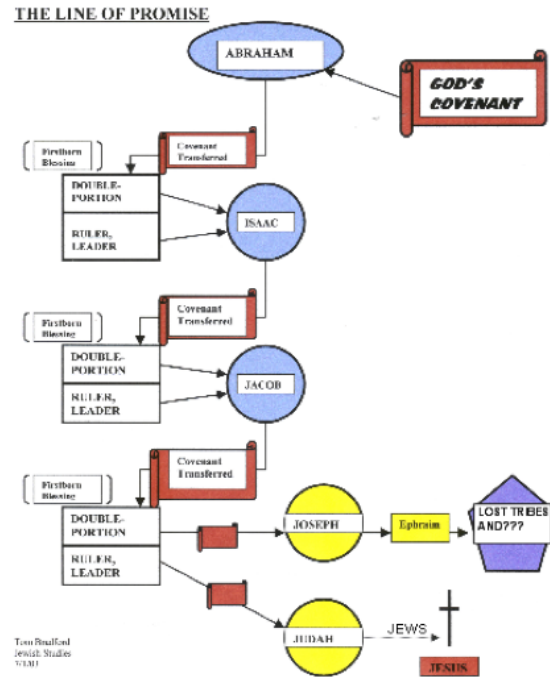
This is strange action that Jacob took, splitting the firstborn blessing. The writer of Chronicles explains a very important element in this: genealogically speaking, Judah's family was the one who would carry forth authority. In matters of Israel where genealogy was the deciding factor, such as who would be the first legitimate king of Israel (David) and who would be the king forever (Jesus), it would be Judah's bloodlines that would be used, not Joseph's and not Reuben's. Yet, in a strange way, Joseph also received the firstborn blessing. Let me show you how that happened.

Often we will see the Bible use the terms *double-portion blessing*, *birthright*, and *firstborn blessing* interchangeably, but we need to understand that even though the term *double portion* was used synonymously with *firstborn blessing* in the common vernacular of that day, technically the double portion was only *part* of the firstborn blessing. It was assumed, according to tradition, that whoever was awarded the firstborn blessing got every element that traditionally went with it. That is, whoever received the double portion of the family's wealth also automatically received the right to rule over the tribe. Jacob did something very rare in splitting the firstborn blessing between two heirs, two sons, and two tribes of Israel.

The reason that the writer of Chronicles worded these verses in the way he did was because he didn't fully comprehend what it all meant or what it would all lead to. The writer obviously didn't know why the firstborn blessing was divided between two sons, because it wasn't usually done this way. In fact, I'm unaware of anywhere else in the Bible from this point forward that the splitting of the firstborn blessing, as Jacob did, ever again occurred. The writer of Chronicles simply asserted the facts, as he understood them, without further explanation.

#### HOW THE BLESSING WORKED OUT FOR REUBEN

Jacob prophesied that Reuben's descendants would be as unstable as water, and that they would not be leaders. When we search the Scriptures, we find that the tribe of Reuben did not produce one single military leader, king, prophet, or judge; not one of Reuben's descendants is mentioned in the Bible as having attained a position of particular value or honor, nor of accomplishing anything of significance. After the twelve tribes, led by Moses, approached Canaan, the tribe of Reuben decided not to enter the Promised Land, but to settle for "good enough" on the east side of the Jordan River, outside the land of Canaan.



We even find that Reuben's tribe experienced a steady decline in their population. Moses was so concerned about the condition of the tribe of Reuben that he prayed, "Let Re'uben live and not die out, even though his numbers grow few" (Deut. 33:6).

The tribe of Reuben was destined to become an asterisk in the history of Israel due to Reuben's unstable ways and his sin. It is a simple yet profound biblical principle that, while our sins are most certainly forgiven and paid for by Yeshua, the earthly consequences of our sins can be enduring throughout our lifetimes and on into the lives of our children, our children's children, and beyond. We may not like it, but it is so. Our sinful ways can introduce characteristics into our families that are detrimental and long-lasting in their effects. All we have to do is live long enough to know the truth of that statement.

#### SIMEON AND LEVI

*Shim'on and Levi are brothers, related by weapons of violence. Let me not enter their council, let my honor not be connected with their people; for in their anger*

*they killed men, and at their whim they maimed cattle. Cursed be their anger, for it has been fierce; their fury, for it has been cruel. I will divide them in Ya'akov and scatter them in Isra'el. (Gen. 49:5–7)*

This is another harsh verdict, with two more undoubtedly stunned inheritors. Jacob saw his second- and third-born sons in the same light, with similar personal attributes and characteristics; therefore, they apparently—and I emphasize the word *apparently*—shared a common destiny. They were brothers in violence, and so they would be brothers in their transgressions.

Unlike Reuben, who committed his primary offense in secret, Simeon and Levi committed their greatest offense for everyone to see and were proud and unrepentant for what they had done, to boot!<sup>132</sup>

The primary thrust of this blessing was that neither Simeon nor Levi would partake in the Promised Land in the same proportion as their brothers; this was a result of their bloodlust and cruelty as demonstrated upon the citizens of Shechem. They would, instead, be divided and scattered. And that was exactly what happened.

#### HOW THE BLESSING WORKED OUT FOR SIMEON

Let's look first at Simeon, who would become the smallest tribe by the time of the census of Numbers 26. Like Reuben, the tribe of Simeon struggled simply to stay in existence and to maintain a separate tribal identity. In a census reported in the early part of the book of Numbers, Simeon is said to have had a population of 59,300. Within a mere forty years,

#### A HINT FOR UNDERSTANDING THIS BLESSING

Remember that one of God's governing dynamics is to divide, elect, and separate, but it's a deceived mankind that looks upon division as *always* being a punishment or negative action.

however, the census of Numbers 26 shows their population had shrunk by over 50 percent to 22,200. For the sake of clarity, the census would have counted only men in the prime or middle portions of their lives. This is often expressed in the Hebrew idiom as “men capable of bearing arms.” So this is probably something on the order of men ages twenty to fifty years old. Males who were younger and older than this or disabled were not counted. Neither were females of any age or status.

Further, when Moses handed out the tribes' land inheritances, Simeon was given territory within Judah's territory. Technically, they were given certain cities within Judah's territory. Simeon's territory was like the round bull's-eye in the center of a target: they were completely surrounded by the tribe of Judah. Worse yet, the area they occupied within Judah was primarily the Negev, an arid desert.

Simeon was probably the first tribe to be completely absorbed by other tribes, with some of them joining Judah and others joining what would eventually come to be known as the ten northern tribes of Ephraim. There was even mention in 1 Chronicles of some members of the tribe of Simeon leaving the Holy Land altogether and joining with Edom.<sup>133</sup> Jacob said they would be scattered; how true this proved to be.

#### HOW THE BLESSING WORKED OUT FOR LEVI

Levi suffered a similar fate, though not destructive, in its land and territory inheritance. Levi, as Simeon, was not given its own territory, but it was given cities—forty-eight cities—within the tribal boundaries of every tribe. Levi was divided and separated to become God's priests; in Hebrew, God's *cobanim*. It was the Levites who would officiate all matters at the wilderness tabernacle, and later, the temple. So while Simeon was destined to the loss of its tribal identity and near extinction, Levi's separation from Israel was a holy matter.



Verse 7 says, “I will divide them in Jacob and scatter them in Israel.” Often we will see in Scripture two phrases or sentences back-to-back that appear to simply be a repetition, as we do here in verse 7: “I will divide; I will scatter.” Usually this is just a standard Hebrew literary device called a *doublet* or a *couplet*. At other times, though, there is a subtle and important message being introduced and it is not the same thing being said in two different ways. Both division and separation happened, but each in its own way. Levi was divided, separated, and elected away from the other tribes to become priests to God, but Simeon was utterly scattered into all the other tribes of Israel. Levi maintained their identity; Simeon eventually lost theirs.

From the time of Jacob until now, the Levites have been seen as separate from the rest of Israel. Jews do not regard Levites as Jews; they are separate and distinct. Even if the rest of the world, through ignorance, doesn’t make this distinction, God does. Considering where we are in prophetic times, it might be wise for us to understand and acknowledge it as well. The time is near when the Levites are going to once again play a prominent role in Judaism and in temple activities.

### REPETITION IN THE PROPHETS

In the Prophets it seems to be unarguable that there is much repetition, but in fact, this is because of the near impossibility to accurately and appropriately translate Hebrew word structure into English. The Bible was originally created in a structure meant to be learned through the spoken word and through hearing. Latin, French, and German translations, as well as English, were written in a style meant to be absorbed by reading. To those who are not literary professionals, the difference between creating a speech designed to be absorbed by the ears versus a manuscript designed to be absorbed by the eyes might not seem apparent. However, the differences are substantial.

So, the eldest three sons have been dispossessed and their blessings look more like curses to them. Next, we come to the fourth in line, Judah.

### JUDAH

*Y’hudah, your brothers will acknowledge you, your hand will be on the neck of your enemies, your father’s sons will bow down before you. Y’hudah is a lion’s cub; my son, you stand over the prey. He crouches down and stretches like a lion; like a lioness, who dares to provoke him? The scepter will not pass from Y’hudah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his legs, until he comes to whom [obedience] belongs; and it is he whom the peoples will obey. Tying his donkey to the vine, or: until Shiloh comes his donkey’s colt to the choice grapevine, he washes his clothes in wine, his robes in the blood of grapes. His eyes will be darker than wine, his teeth whiter than milk. (Gen. 49:8–12)*

The first thing we notice is that Jacob had a lot more to say to Judah than to Judah’s older brothers. Many excellent commentaries tell us that Judah receives the firstborn blessing here. That’s only partially true. As I mentioned earlier, what Judah actually received was only part of the blessing that goes to the firstborn. Since there are two primary elements to the firstborn blessing: (1) receiving double the amount of tribal wealth as any other inheritor, and (2) the official assumption of leadership and authority over the tribe, we see that what Judah inherited was only the second part: tribal authority and leadership. Back in Genesis 48, Joseph was given the other part of the firstborn blessing, the double portion, when Joseph’s two sons were made equal with all of Jacob’s sons. Therefore, Joseph received two-twelfths of all that was Israel’s through his two sons.

Judah was the lion, an ancient symbol of regal status. Judah was the new leader of Israel. And true to his name, *Judah*, which means “praise,” would have the praise of his brothers and eventually the whole world, because out of him would come God’s anointed kings of Israel

and the Messiah. The royal line of David was from Judah, and the right to rule Israel will remain with the tribe of Judah until, finally, Shiloh comes.

### WHO IS SHILOH?

Verse 10 is a controversial verse in this chapter. Some Bibles use the words “to whom obedience belongs” in place of the word *Shiloh*. The word *Shiloh* appears in the oldest manuscripts we have, and in the Septuagint, which was a Greek translation of the OT created 250 years before Christ. *Shiloh*, by all evidence, is part of the original text. Later in the OT, we will see that there is a town in Canaan called Shiloh, and it’s there that the tabernacle of the wilderness will rest for many years. Interestingly, Shiloh will be in the territory of Ephraim. It was the first holy city of the Holy Land. While we all think of Jerusalem in that regard, Shiloh was actually first; later the honor of being the holiest city was transferred to Jerusalem. But even then Shiloh remained a holy city in Israel for centuries to come, second only to Jerusalem.

Some scholars believe that this city is what was being referred to in this verse, though of course it was not yet in existence at the time of Jacob’s blessing. But if we render the meaning of Shiloh in Jacob’s blessing to be the name of a future city, the verse doesn’t make a lot of sense. For most certainly the scepter, the authority to rule, did not depart from Judah when the city of Shiloh was founded, nor did Judah’s leadership decline as prophesied here. Thus, we ought not take this to mean a specific city.

The next popular explanation is that *Shiloh* is a word that has the meaning “to whom obedience belongs,” and that is what we find in most Bible versions. While this most certainly has the implication of referring to a Messiah, we must assume that one of the letters in the word *Shiloh* was handed down to us incorrectly in order to achieve this meaning. We must assume that the Hebrew was misspelled (the Hebrew letter ן “sheen” should have been a ש “seen,” giving

us the correct word *siloh*). There is no evidence that this was the case, and even if it seems to afford us a nice answer to what Shiloh is, we should not accept a conclusion that does not trust Scripture to be what it is without modifying it to help achieve an answer that suits us.

The last and most appropriate explanation is that Shiloh is another name for the Messiah. In other words, Shiloh is a proper noun; in this case, a name. What’s ironic is that the previous explanation is modern Christianity’s attempt to prove that this refers to the Messiah, but the Christian scholars responsible for this assertion regarded the original Hebrew word *Shiloh* as having no literal meaning that they could discover . . . so, they made one up.

Yet, beginning with the most ancient Hebrew commentary in existence (called *Bereshit Rabba*), the majority of Hebrew sages and scholars from times long past agree that Shiloh is purely messianic in nature. It speaks of the Messiah, Shiloh. In the end, if Christians had not maintained such an animosity toward the Jews for the last nineteen hundred years, they could have had very early sources for their belief that Shiloh referred to the coming Yeshua of Nazareth. Instead, they chose to twist the meaning around, to our shame, although they eventually wound up with the same result anyway!

Right here in Genesis 49, it is prophesied that the Messiah will come from the Hebrews, the nation of Israel, the tribe of Judah, the family of David. With the benefit of the hindsight we now have, knowing who the Messiah is, it is correct to read Genesis 49:10 as fulfilled prophecy: “The scepter shall not pass from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his legs, until it is handed over to Jesus Christ.” That rulership has, indeed, been passed to Jesus.

Religious Jews have a big problem today. They continue to assert, correctly, that the Messiah or at least one of the Messiahs—many Jews believe there will be two—is to be from the tribe of Judah, from the Jewish royal family of David. But, of course, they do not acknowledge

that Yeshua, who revealed Himself about AD 30, is that Messiah. When that expected day arrives and a “mashiach” reveals himself as such, how will the Jews be able to prove that it is actually Him in the manner by which they prefer to prove such things—genealogy? In AD 70 the house of records in Jerusalem and every document that proved the lineage of every Jewish family was destroyed. Coupled with the nearly nineteen-hundred-year exile and dispersal they suffered through after that, before returning to a reborn Israel in 1948, there is absolutely no way for anyone alive today claiming to be Jewish to prove genealogically that they are from the line of David. Jesus was able to prove it, and His genealogy has never been, even up to this day, disputed by the Jews. Even ultraorthodox Jews today readily admit that Yeshua of Nazareth existed, that He was of the tribe of Judah, that He was of the line of David. Yet, due to the blindness that has overcome so many Israelites, they cannot see the reality of Jesus’s being the Messiah or the fact that proving a future messiah as coming from the line of David by means of genealogy is hopeless.

## ZEBULUN

*Z'vulun will live at the seashore, with ships anchoring along his coast and his border at Tzidon. (Gen. 49:13)*

Zebulun’s destiny was to be in commercial ventures: he’d be a merchant and a trader. Even more, his ancestors would have much to do with shipping and other maritime industry. Hundreds of years into the future, we find that Zebulun’s territorial allotment will put them as a land bridge between the Sea of Galilee and the Mediterranean. They never possessed territory all the way to the seashore, but they had shipping and trade interests on both seas. Directly through their territory ran one of the greatest trading routes of their era or any other: Via Maris, the Way of the Sea. It began in Damascus and wound its way all the way to Egypt. It was an enormous economic boon for the tribe of Zebulun.

Just as Zebulun’s blessing is short and sweet, so is the tribe’s biblical history. Very little is said about them. No person of significance is mentioned as coming from the tribe of Zevulun. However, in the “Song of Deborah and Barak,” Zevulun is mentioned as being one of several tribes that committed many men to fighting against the king of Hazor in the Valley of Jezreel, which was in Zevulun’s territory. Though precious little is said in the Bible about Zevulun, what is said could be characterized as positive and complimentary.

## ISSACHAR

*Yissakhar is a strong donkey lying down in the sheep sheds. On seeing how good is settled life and how pleasant the country, he will bend his back to the burden, and submit to forced labor. (Gen. 49:14–15)*

Even less is known about Issachar than his brother Zevulun. In fact, so little is known about Issachar that the ancient Israelite scholars went out of their way to invent good things to say about his descendants. Primarily, it is asserted that while the ancestors of Zevulun toiled away as merchants, they were working to support the tribe of Issachar, who were great Torah scholars. This is easy to debunk as a self-serving fable because after Babylon, when the vast amount of rabbinical writings and rulings and commentary was created, the tradition was born that Torah study was the highest calling for any Jewish male. Conversely, being a merchant, being absorbed in the worldly dealings of trade and money, was considered to be the lowest. The notion that the merchant tribe of Israelites would be the supporters of the tribe of learned Torah scholars was quite an ideal, and it fit in very well with the social agenda of the Jewish post-Babylon time when these legends and traditions concerning Issachar and Zevulun were created.

Issachar’s being called an “ass” or a “donkey” sounds pretty demeaning to us, but it was not so to the people in Jacob’s day. This was

### A NOTE ON STUDYING THE TALMUD

While an enormous wealth of information and exciting finds are waiting for anyone who can has the time and stamina to study the Talmud, one should only use it for the purpose of its historical content, helping to understand societal structure in those ancient times, what their thought processes and agendas were, and how they evolved. It sheds light on how certain ceremonies occurred, what they represented, and how various rituals were performed. Sometimes the Talmud can help us put certain things from the Bible in proper chronological order. But it is not inspired of God. It is in no way on par with the Holy Scriptures. It is not a pack of lies or inaccuracies either. Generally speaking, the writers and commentators were the best and finest Jewish scholars, sages, and historians of their day. But what is written can only be counted upon as earthly wisdom and knowledge, not of the Spirit.

Unfortunately, the Jewish people have for thousands of years put the Talmud, tradition, on par with, or even above, the Holy Scriptures. Jesus verbally scourged the academic elite of His day for doing that, even telling them their so-called knowledge of godly matters was of their true father, the devil. He was referring to the huge and growing body of tradition that was dominating Jewish life.

not a derogatory remark; donkeys were valued creatures that were a combination of taxicabs and trucks in that era. In sports today, we might call a player a “diesel,” short for diesel truck. Of course, it means that athlete is powerful, single minded, and no-nonsense; it is the opposite of finesse. Athletes who are referred to as “diesels” wear that title proudly. It would have been the same with Issachar being referred to as a strong donkey.

### DAN

*Dan will judge his people as one of the tribes of Isra'el. Dan will be a viper on the road, a horned snake in the path that bites the horse's heels so its rider falls off*

*backward. I wait for your deliverance, ADONAI. (Gen. 49:16–18)*

We have finished with the first group of six of Jacob's sons, all provided by his wife Leah. Now we come to the blessings given to the four children of Jacob's concubines. These four were born after Leah produced Judah but before she bore Issachar and Zevulun. These concubines are often referred to in the Bible as the handmaidens Zilpah and Bilhah, servants to Jacob's two wives, Leah and Rachel.

We can be sure that the twelve sons of Jacob had established a pecking order among themselves, and we can also be sure that the four sons born to the handmaidens were pushed to the bottom of the totem pole. Other than for Jacob's unabashed favoritism toward his wife Rachel and the two sons she gave him, Joseph and Benjamin, there is no indication that Jacob himself thought any less of these four sons produced by Zilpah and Bilhah than the other eight. But traditions of the era demanded that sons of concubines didn't carry an equal status as the sons of a man's legal wives.

Aware that his twelve sons were only too human, Jacob was probably concerned that those four sons not in any way be construed as second-class citizens. This likely explains the odd statement in verse 16 in which Jacob says, “Dan will judge his people as one of the tribes of Israel.” Why would Jacob say “as one of the tribes of Israel”? While it is obvious to us that all twelve sons were legitimately of Israel, Jacob wanted to make it clear that the sons of his concubines were no less than the sons of his legal wives.

Dan's name means “judged.” Although Bilah, Rachel's handmaiden, was Dan's biological mother, Rachel had the rights to name the child. Rachel had exclaimed, “God has judged me,” when she couldn't produce a child for Jacob, but her servant girl did. It was a great shame upon a woman who was unable to bear her husband children, so this child was stuck with the name “judged.”

Dan was given the unenviable territorial allotment that shared a border with the fierce and seemingly unconquerable Philistines. Remember: *Palestine* is simply the Greek word for Philistine. So when we talk about the Palestinians of the West Bank, or the creation of a Palestinian state, what we are actually talking about is the Philistines of the West Bank and the creation of a Philistine state. Prophetically speaking, the Bible tells us that exact thing will happen in the last days.

Probably the most famous descendant of Dan was the supernaturally strong Samson. Samson was one of the twelve judges (in Hebrew, *shofet*) mentioned in the Bible who were raised up by God over an approximately 250-year period called “the time of the judges.”<sup>134</sup> Samson was brought forth by God as a deliverer for the tribe of Dan from the oppression of the Philistines. Even though all the biblical Judges, the *shofet*, were called by the same title of “judge,” they performed different functions. Some were prophets, some were military leaders, others were rulers, and some were deliverers like Sampson.

It is interesting to note that there is mention of a “serpent” in describing Dan’s future characteristics. While every tribe of Israel struggled with idolatry and giving in to Satan, perhaps none were as vexed by this problem as the tribe of Dan. Even the great judge Sampson had a terrible time resisting the pagan influences of the Philistines, as we see how he imbibed himself with prostitutes, loved to party with these pagans, had a fling with Delilah, and even married a Philistine girl.<sup>135</sup>

Many in the tribe of Dan grew so weary of battling the Philistines that they eventually gave up control over their land inheritance and moved northward, near the border of modern-day Lebanon. They conquered the city of Laish, renamed it Dan, and many of the tribe moved to the area. Immediately the leaders of Dan set up a carved image, an idol, assigned priests to it, and the city became a center of pagan cult worship, and stayed that way for the next several hundred years. The ruins of this city are visible today.

## DAN’S EXTINCTION

Dan’s tribe diminished, over time, in size and importance. In fact, not only are they not even mentioned in the OT listing of tribal genealogies of 1 Chronicles 2, they are omitted in the NT listing of tribes that will make up the 144,000 sealed Israelite witnesses told about in Revelation 7.

Does the exclusion of Dan in the tribal makeup of Revelation 7 mean that Dan is extinct for all time? Apparently not; in the millennial kingdom, the one-thousand-year reign of Christ as described in Ezekiel 48, Dan does receive an inheritance. We need to remember that the timing of the 144,000 sealed Israelites takes place during what Christians call the Tribulation period (what the Jews call the Time of Jacob’s Troubles); the millennial kingdom comes after that. Dan will exist during the Tribulation, but perhaps he’s up to his old tricks and there’s not a single Danite worthy to be part of the 144,000 sealed witnesses. We’ll have to wait and see.

## A LINGUISTIC STUDY OF DAN

*Dan* means “judge,” or more accurately “judged.” Remember that Hebrew is what is called a root-word language. You take a word that has a specific meaning, and you can add, subtract, or change a letter or two (usually the vowel sounds), and you have a new word. But that new word is still related in meaning to the original word. For instance, in Genesis 15:14, God said: “But I will also judge that nation whom they serve.” The Hebrew word used for judge in this verse is *din*—notice the relationship to the word *dan*. In between the letter **ד** *dalet* and **נ** *nun* (*d* and *n*), only the vowel has changed, so the two words are related. *Din* and *dan* both carry the idea of judgment, retaliation, punishment, or penalty.

There is another entirely different use (in the English language) of the word *judge*, as we find in the book of the Bible called Judges; in

Hebrew, *shofet*. *Shofet* is a person who is a magistrate, usually a person who makes legal rulings or is a leader or a decision maker. A good analogy is our modern American legal system where we have a judge presiding over a court of law. We have two words, *dan* and *shofet*, that both wind up being translated into the English as “judge.” But, they have two totally unrelated meanings in Hebrew. The name Dan does not indicate a person who presides over a court, makes legal rulings, or leads. Rather, Dan indicates someone who receives a divine judgment against them. Of course, that was the sense of the word that Rachel used to name this child born by her handmaiden Bilhah, because Rachel felt that the reason her own womb had dried up was that she had been judged or punished by God. According to tradition, she named her child after some event or circumstance that surrounded that child’s birth.

In following, this son named “judged,” Dan, had all sorts of calamitous things happening to him, even being omitted from the list of tribes in Revelation 7. Dan’s destiny was completely reflective of his name.

In Genesis 49:18, Jacob suddenly says, “I wait for your deliverance, ADONAI.” Or, more literally “I wait for your salvation, Yehoveh.” It is unknown whether this statement was meant to be attached to the blessing of Dan, or whether Jacob, in a moment of ecstasy, knowing that his time was but moments away, shouted this out to the Lord in praise. Some think that the mention in the previous verses concerning the serpent that bites the heel is a reminder of the scene in Genesis 3:15, of how the woman will produce a seed who will crush the head of the serpent (Satan), and the serpent will bruise the heel of that seed. These are obvious Messianic references. If that’s the case, then Jacob shouting out the words “I wait for the Savior” is all the more meaningful. But it really isn’t clear enough for me to say for sure that is what is happening here, and I don’t want to allegorize to make it appear so. Therefore, we’ll just have to wonder.

## GAD

*Gad [troop]—a troop will troop on him, but he will troop on their heel. (Gen. 49:19)*

Gad’s blessing is quite short—only fourteen words in length. Gad is going to be constantly oppressed and under attack, but in the end, Gad will overcome.

If we look at the territory Gad was given, we see that Gad was one of the tribes that, like Reuben, decided not to enter into the Promised Land. Instead, Gad’s descendants settled to the east of the Jordan River. His borders were exposed to several longtime enemies, including the Moabites and the Ammonites (descendants of Lot). Much like Dan, the tribe of Gad found themselves constantly at war. The silver lining was that this constant warfare led to Gad’s becoming regarded as the fiercest of warriors.

Interestingly, Gad is not credited in the Bible with any particular outstanding person belonging to that tribe. Elijah, by tradition, is said to be a Gadite, but that is strictly legend and has never been verified. The most famous was probably Jair, who was a *shofet*, a judge or leader, over Gad for a time.

In the OT we will occasionally run into the geographical place of “Gilead.” Gilead and Gad are generally used interchangeably to describe where the tribe of Gad settled.

## ASHER

*Asher’s food is rich—he will provide food fit for a king. (Gen. 49:20)*

Asher was the third of Jacob’s concubines’ four sons, and once again we can’t help but notice the very short and succinct nature of the blessing given to him. *Ashur* means “happy,” and certainly the blessing Jacob gave to Ashur and his descendants was one of well-being, if not downright good fortune.

Ashur’s portion of land was some of the most fertile in the Holy Lands. Stretching

between the land of Tyre to Mount Carmel, their corn and olive oil were famous for quality and quantity. Apparently Ashur shunned military conflicts and chose a very peaceful life of agriculture. Consequently, we read of no great military commander, leader, or judge coming from Ashur.

## NAPHTALI

*Naftali is a doe set free that bears beautiful fawns.*  
(Gen. 49:21)

Naphtali is the last of the four sons of Jacob's wives' handmaidens. And, true to form, Naphtali is given a very abbreviated blessing.

Naphtali is told that his descendants shall be as a *hind* let loose. A hind is a female deer, a doe. We find many passages throughout the Bible that make reference to a "hind," and they are always in a favorable light.

We're told in this single verse that Naphtali is destined to be of graceful beauty, swift, and quick to react.

When we look at Naphtali in times after they entered into the Promised Land, we find the most prominent mention of that tribe in Judges 5, in the Song of Deborah and Barak. Barak and his tribe of Naphtali are singled out for the special acts of bravery in a significant military conflict between the Israelites and some Canaanite tribes.

For me, though, most significant mention is an unprecedented honor the tribe of Naphtali received; for it was in Naphtali's territory, now part of the Galilee, that Jesus recruited most of His disciples and began His ministry. Interestingly, in Isaiah 9:1, the prophet foretold that the insignificant territory of Naphtali would receive a great light. Of course, Isaiah 9 is one of the greatest prophecies concerning the coming of Christ in the entire Bible. Naphtali was greatly blessed, even if no other thing of importance could be said about this tribe.

## JOSEPH

*Yosef is a fruitful plant, a fruitful plant by a spring, with branches climbing over the wall. The archers attacked him fiercely, shooting at him and pressing him hard; but his bow remained taut; and his arms were made nimble by the hands of the Mighty One of Ya'akov, from there, from the Shepherd, the Stone of Isra'el, by the God of your father, who will help you, by El Shaddai, who will bless you with blessings from heaven above, blessings from the deep, lying below, blessings from the breasts and the womb. The blessings of your father are more powerful than the blessings of my parents, extending to the farthest of the everlasting hills; they will be on the head of Yosef, on the brow of the prince among his brothers.* (Gen. 49:22–26)

One can only imagine Jacob's anticipation of getting around to the official blessing of his most favored son. His eleven brothers must have braced themselves for what they knew was coming: praise heaped upon praise, blessing heaped upon blessing.

Perhaps the overriding theme of this blessing upon Joseph, which is to be carried forward primarily under the banner of Ephraim, is *fruitfulness*. This fruitfulness not only told of Joseph's personal life, but it also told of his descendants' destiny. This fruitfulness came at a high cost; Joseph endured much in his life. His fruitfulness was not a result of cleverness, good fortune, or having things handed over to him. His fruitfulness was a result of his faithfulness. And his faithfulness a result of his absolute, unwavering trust in God.

I wonder how many of us could have endured those years in prison under false charges, let alone being rejected by our family the way Joseph was, and then forgiving all. Not only forgiving, but then blessing those who had done to him such pitiless, merciless wrongs. Beyond even that, Joseph had such a sustaining faith that he refused all bitterness because he knew, without doubt, that it was all part of God's divine plan for his life, even if it seemed to make absolutely no sense and was so painful.

## WHO RECEIVED JOSEPH'S BLESSING

While the blessing happened in the name of Joseph, it came to fulfillment under the tribal authority of Ephraim and, to a lesser degree, Manasseh. Once Joseph's two sons reached maturity, married, and had children of their own, there was no longer a named tribe of Joseph; there were two tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh. Jacob gave Joseph the firstborn blessing by naming Ephraim and Manasseh to supersede Joseph; further, he pronounced that Ephraim was to be considered the firstborn. Joseph did not get the honor that a father typically got, which was to pronounce the firstborn blessing upon his *own* children, because at the moment of the cross-handed blessing, Jacob became those two boys' father, not Joseph.

These words of Jacob reveal God's heart toward those who run the good race in faith—blessing upon blessing upon more blessing.

## HOW THE BLESSING WORKED OUT FOR JOSEPH'S DESCENDANTS

Historically speaking, the fruitfulness of Ephraim and Manasseh was most apparent. Manasseh received the largest of the territorial allotments, spanning both the east and the west banks of the Jordan River.

In the first chapter of Numbers, we see that the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh (that is, the *whole* tribe of Joseph) were the largest at 75,900 men. Not surprisingly, the tribe who received the other half of the split firstborn blessing, Judah, was second largest at 74,600. Yet by the time of the census of Numbers 26, around forty years later, Judah's population only grew marginally to 76,500, while the combined population of Ephraim and Manasseh jumped to 85,200. Fruitfulness was promised to Joseph, and fruitfulness was what he got.

We are only now, within the last few years, beginning to understand that Ephraim's fruitfulness may have grown to proportions that are staggering. Remember, it was Ephraim that

eventually dominated and absorbed every tribe of Israel except for Judah and Benjamin. Further, when that one huge supertribe was overcome by the Assyrians and scattered throughout the known world—the known Gentile world—most of Ephraim joined their genes with the genes of the Gentiles. As we have recently discovered, the tribes of Ephraim who retained their identity throughout the centuries but live in isolated areas of the world also number in the millions. We don't know all those who have the genes of the tribes forming Ephraim in them, but one could guess that it's in the hundreds of millions. Fruitfulness fulfilled.

This dispersion among the Gentiles is another fulfillment of Genesis 48:19: "his (Ephraim's) descendants will become the fullness of the Gentile nations." This has literally happened. The one thing that is still not completely clear, although it's getting clearer, is the precise way this matter of the split blessing going to Ephraim is going to fully manifest itself. Will this be a strictly physical and genealogical matter, that those Gentiles who biologically but unknowingly possess Ephraim's genes in their bodies are in for a significant blessing? Or, will it be a strictly spiritual matter, that God's blessing upon the Gentile world was predicated upon those who have benefited from identifying with Ephraim-Israel? That is, that Gentile believers identify, spiritually, with Israel as Paul instructed us in Romans 11. Or, could it possibly be some combination of both the physical and the spiritual?

What we need to take away from this is that all believers in Yeshua are destined to identify with Israel. Ephraim sits directly in the middle of making this identity real, not merely philosophical. Ephraim is like a magnificent bridge that organically and spiritually connects the world of the Jews with the world of the Gentiles.

## BENJAMIN

*Benjamin is a ravenous wolf, in the morning devouring the prey, in the evening still dividing the spoil. (Gen. 49:27)*



Last, we come to Benjamin. And, a total of one verse is dedicated to the blessing of Benjamin. If we really need any more proof that it is the Holy Spirit guiding these blessings, then Benjamin's should be all that we require. Because Jacob's second-favorite, and youngest, son was given a blessing that was anything but flattering, even though we have been shown in Scripture that Jacob carefully protected and fawned over Benjamin. Benjamin was characterized as a predator—a wolf—viscous and merciless. This would prove to be true.

Benjamin had a rather schizophrenic future. Though it would have contact with, and even play a part in, the royalty of Israel, Benjamin was also ferocious and stiff-necked. Much of the outcome of the descendants of Benjamin had to do with their between-a-rock-and-a-hard-place territorial tribal allotment: they became a buffer state between Ephraim and Judah. Additionally, both the major north-south and east-west trade route highways passed through the narrow strip of land that was the territory of Benjamin.

Sometimes we get incorrect mental pictures of these multithousand-man ancient armies scampering over hilltops like mice, blazing new trails as they went. Not true. As any military man can tell you, wars are fought around, over, and by means of the major highways of a nation, because the well-established roadways are where the armies had to travel. The roadways were strategically placed near water and usually over friendly terrain. Even back in the days of Abraham wagons and carts were in use, so there needed to be a flat and wide trail to accommodate the rather fragile wheel and axle mechanisms of those early wooden vehicles.

Those trade routes that crossed through Benjamin likely produced a valuable source of income for Benjamin when Benjaminites attacked and plundered merchant caravans. Remember that one tribe pillaging another and taking what they needed to increase their own wealth and serve their own needs was and is the very essence of the tribal system.

It might surprise you that the holiest city in all of the land was in this territory; Jerusalem was originally in the territory of Benjamin, and not Judah as many assume. Many other important Israelite cities were also within the boundaries of Benjamin: Mizpah, Ramah, Gibeon, Bethel, and even Jericho.

#### HOW THE BLESSING WORKED OUT FOR BENJAMIN

One excellent example of Benjamin's characteristics is found in the book of Judges, at a particularly bad time for Israel, when the Bible says the holy land was a place where "a man simply did whatever he thought was right" (17:6). Benjamin was at the center of a terribly chaotic series of wars between the tribes of Israel. In the city of Gibeah an incident occurred that was eerily akin to when Lot was in Sodom and the townspeople wanted to have homosexual sex with the two angels who had come to bring God's judgment upon Sodom. A man from the tribe of Ephraim was temporarily staying in Gibeah when he took in a traveler as a guest in his home. The Benjamite men in Gibeah demanded that the traveler be given to them so they could ravage him. The elderly man from Ephraim offered them his daughter and his concubine instead. They took his concubine and nearly killed her. After they returned her, the man considered his concubine so defiled as to be worthless to him. So he allowed her to die on his doorstep, cut her corpse into twelve pieces, and sent those pieces along with a message to each tribe of Israel. The other tribes were so outraged that they gathered together and sent an army against Benjamin to punish it. We can see how terrible and unholy the condition of the tribes of Israel was in the time of the judges, when they would view the mutilation of a man's own concubine (even though she was deceased) as not only a justifiable act, but as something to be blamed upon Benjamin, who had ruined her all in "good fun."

When the battle began, Benjamin devastated the Israelite tribal coalition army for the

first two days. Interestingly, part of the reason that Benjamin was succeeding was a combination of ferocity and the fact that they had a group of deadly accurate stone-slingers who killed forty thousand people. All of these particular soldiers were left-handed, a trait that was common among members of the tribe of Benjamin.

In the end, the coalition army finally got the upper hand and annihilated the tribe of Benjamin, nearly to the point of extinction. The tribe of Benjamin never fully recovered.

### FAMOUS BENJAMINITES

#### SAUL

One of the most famous men from the tribe of Benjamin was Saul, often called the first king of Israel. There is some disagreement among both Jewish and Christian scholars as to whether Saul really ought to be viewed as the first king of Israel or whether he was simply the last judge, albeit a centralized judge who attempted to rule over more than just his own tribe. He was never really accepted by all of Israel as a king, and his reign was never-ending turmoil. More important, however, just as God anointed Saul as the kind of king the people wanted (the kind He cautioned them about through Moses and Samuel), so wickedness was his legacy and failure was the result of his reign.

#### ESTHER AND MORDECAI

Toward the end of OT times, two members of the tribe of Benjamin rose above their ruinous tribal character: Esther, the namesake of the book of Esther, and her cousin Mordecai. The Jewish Festival of Purim was established in memory of the brave acts of these two, which saved the Jews from the pagan people of that time, who were led by a man named Haman.

#### PAUL

Other than Benjamin himself, though, I doubt there is any more famous and influential Benjamite in all the tribe's history than Saint Paul. Yes! The Apostle Paul was from the tribe of Benjamin. It should also be remembered that his saying he was from that tribe was simply a family remembrance, for he also called himself a Jew, which any surviving Israelite in Paul's day would have done. The tribe of Benjamin, as an independent and separate entity, was essentially gone and assimilated by the tribe of Judah by Paul's day. Therefore, these former Benjaminites were called Jews.

### JACOB'S DEATH

The blessings of all twelve sons of Jacob were complete. Bookmark Genesis 48 and 49 in your Bible as a reference, because whether we're studying the OT or the NT, these blessings explain much of what was going to happen in the centuries following this event, well into a time that is still future to us.

Chapter 49 comes to an end as Jacob commanded his sons to take his body and bury it in the cave back up in Canaan, the one Abraham purchased where Jacob's parents, grandparents, and his wife Leah lay entombed. Then Jacob died.

This paragraph in Genesis 49 is really the first time that Israel is seen as a nation unto itself rather than as merely a man (Jacob) with his growing extended family of twelve sons. In fact, this is the first use of what will become a well-worn biblical phrase: "the twelve tribes of Israel."

Let's not miss the opportunity to once again notice the mind-set of the ancients at work. Jacob said, "I am about to be gathered to my kin . . . bury me with my fathers." When we can begin to grasp that 99 percent of everything that happened in the Bible must be read between the lines, we can start to think of the Bible "characters" as the real people, living real

lives, under real and everyday circumstances, that they were. It is important that we understand the terms, phrases, and idioms for what they really meant, based entirely on the era in which they were spoken. They are neither universal nor timeless. This era had its own beliefs and traditions about death and its aftermath. Israel was no different. Jacob believed what all the other Middle Eastern societies believed in—ancestor worship. In no way did this seem to be in conflict with having trust in Yehoveh or His teachings. In fact, to this point in the Bible, there has been no mention of an immortal soul living on in heaven or any such concept beyond the haziest general statement. In Egypt and a few of the other Middle Eastern cultures, elaborate belief systems and complex rituals concerning the dead had been developed. We don't find that among the Israelites, but neither do we find it among the bulk of the ancient cultures. Yet,

in Israel, we do find ancestor worship, respect for the dead, and an understanding that there is something beyond the grave, even if it is not fully evident.

Jacob wanted to be buried with his fathers, because if he wasn't he wouldn't be able to be with them after his death. After all, here Jacob was in Egypt and his ancestors were up in Canaan. How could his after-death essence commune with his relatives' after-death essences if they were interred hundreds of miles apart? That was what he feared.

Moses is usually credited with having written down the book of Genesis, but whoever wrote the last words of Genesis 49, that Jacob "breathed his last and was gathered to his people," also believed in ancestor worship because it states matter-of-factly that indeed Jacob was gathered to his people.

## GENESIS 50

ASSIGNMENT: Read Genesis 50.

### JOSEPH MOURNS HIS FATHER

What a heartrending scene we have here, in which Joseph broke down upon his father's death, and cried and kissed the empty shell that was Jacob. Then Joseph ordered his father's body to be embalmed. This is not now, nor ever, going to be usual or normal Israelite custom; however, it did happen from time to time.

As is well known, the Egyptians had perfected the art of embalming the dead. The reason for embalming was wrapped up in Egyptian beliefs about the afterlife. Physical preservation was key to the survival of death by the immortal soul, according to the long-established Egyptian cult of Osiris, the god of the underworld.

However, that is not the reason why Jacob was embalmed. Jacob's body had to be taken on a long and hot journey to Canaan to be buried with his forefathers, and if they did not embalm him, well, I don't think I need to paint a vivid picture for you. Part of the reason we know Jacob's embalming had nothing to do with the Egyptian death cult is given to us in a subtle message: Joseph called the *physicians* to perform the embalming. Physicians were not normally embalmers in Egypt; usually the priests of Osiris performed this intricate and secretive task. Embalming was a religious practice, not a medical one, and so was always performed by professional mortuary priests.

The embalmers worked for forty days, and the Egyptians mourned Jacob for seventy days. The typical period of embalming was forty

days, and this was probably followed by the customary thirty-day mourning period Hebrews observe, which gives us a total of seventy days.

### A GRAND FUNERAL PROCESSION

The brothers complied with their father's wish, and the entire clan, except for the smallest children, led by Joseph and accompanied by royal charioteers and an armed guard, proceeded in a funeral procession fit for a king for two hundred or so miles from Goshen to the cave at Makhpelah in Canaan.

All of Egypt was apparently ordered to go into a period of mourning over Jacob. This was a very great honor, indeed, usually accorded only to royalty.

### TROUBLE IN EGYPT

Just as we were given a subtle message that Jacob's embalming had nothing to do with Egyptian religious practices, we're also given a hint that things were not calm and peaceful in Egypt at the moment. In verse 5, Joseph went to Pharaoh to ask permission to journey to Canaan to bury his father. This would have been seen as a normal and respectful thing for Joseph to do. Joseph said, "I beg you, let me go up and bury my father; I will return." Obviously the pharaoh was anxious about Joseph leading this procession of all his primary adult family members back to what was ostensibly their homeland; Pharaoh was concerned that Joseph might not return.

So while this was a funeral procession fit for a king, it was also a funeral procession filled with high Egyptian government officials and sufficient military presence to both protect everyone

on their journey and also to ensure that Joseph would return to Egypt. Remember: the current pharaoh of Egypt was *not* an Egyptian; he was a Semite. Also, the seven-year famine was over. Joseph was not needed as the overseer of the nation's food supply any longer, but Joseph was still Pharaoh's right-hand man and a valued ally, of the same genetic stock as Pharaoh.

### FORGIVENESS FOR THE BROTHERS

This chapter not only ends the saga of Jacob's life but ends the saga of Joseph's as well. It was necessary for the writer to tidy up matters with Joseph's brothers.

After the burial ceremony in Canaan, everyone returned to Egypt. But on the way back, the brothers realized there was a chance their powerful brother still held a grudge against them for their offenses in the past now that their father was no longer a hedge of protection against revenge. Obviously, they still didn't understand the condition of Joseph's heart.

They confronted Joseph with their worries, but he gently and mercifully assured them that he not only had no intentions of doing anything but caring for them, but in fact he believed that they were instruments in the hand of God, as was he. If only God would make us all like Joseph, fully understanding that no offense can be committed by another against us unless God allows it to happen. How often I have looked back upon the trials and sins of my own life and realized that the blessed place God led me to could not have happened any other way than the way it did. If I could feel that same way about the unresolved things, the things that still hurt, the things I still can't make any sense of, that only God knows why they were necessary.

Joseph's remaining days were blessed; he lived to see his sons grow and mature, to see his grandchildren born and mature, and to see his great-grandchildren born. When the Bible says that a child was born on someone's knees, as it does here, it simply means that those children were considered that person's own: sometimes

symbolically, other times literally. In this case, it means that Joseph was still the leader of his clan and those children fell under his familial authority.

Fifty-four years after his father died, Joseph expired at the age of 110 years. Despite the fact that Joseph had been so well treated and highly thought of in Egypt, he made it clear that Egypt was still a foreign land to him. He made his family promise that when that day came that Israel would finally leave Egypt for the Promised Land, they would take his bones with them. Joseph was embalmed per Egyptian custom, and his body was placed in a coffin to await the day that he, too, could join his ancestors in the land that God had promised to the Hebrews.

### DID JOSEPH'S BROTHERS HEAR HIM?

Several scholars have noted that it is mostly impossible that Joseph's actual brothers heard him say, "I am dying. But God will surely remember you and bring you up out of this land to the land which he swore to Avraham, Yitz'chak and Ya'akov" (Gen. 50:24). Joseph was the second youngest of the twelve, and he died as a very old man. It is unimaginable that his older brothers all survived him. When we look at the Hebrew for "brother," *ach*, we see it's a word that can mean anything from an actual sibling to a fellow countryman. Most often, it was term directed at a close male family member. Almost certainly some of those who were present for Joseph's command to take his bones back to Canaan were children, grandchildren, and nephews.

### NUMBERS IN THE BIBLE

Numbers used in the Bible have great significance. Often they are not literal but symbolic, particularly when we see round numbers as we do with Joseph's death at the age of 110. This is likely a symbolic number. That said, many

round numbers were likely simultaneously literal and symbolic. Joseph did die at a very old age; the fact that he lived to see his great-grandchildren indicates this. But in Egypt the traditional number of a full life span was 110 years. For Hebrews, the traditional number was 120 years. In other words, if a person attained that many years or more, then they had lived a long life, one that was blessed by the gods. Of course, few people actually did.

### IN CONCLUSION

This wraps up our study of the book of Genesis. It is the book of foundations, and you're now familiar with many of the key foundations of our faith. This world exists within the Reality

of Duality—the things we see and experience are both physical and spiritual in nature. Within this reality, God has two governing principles we've learned. First, that of sanctification—the process of dividing, electing, and separating His chosen plan. And second, that of His divine providence, leading the way and directing our paths even when we don't realize it. He has chosen to reveal these patterns to us through the people of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, although certainly these patterns existed long before even these men. The patterns will continue throughout the rest of the Old Testament, into the New Testament, and right on to our time as well. Pay attention to the patterns, for in them you will see the character of God.

## NOTES

1. Throughout this book the spellings for the name of God will alternate between YHWH, Yahweh, Yehoveh, and Jehovah. This is because all that exists in the Hebrew texts are the letters Y-H-W-H, and Yahweh and Jehovah are our best guesses on how to pronounce it.
2. Elohim is also used occasionally when speaking of false gods, but as we learned in the introduction, context is everything when dealing with Hebrew language and culture.
3. All Bible verses will be quoted from the Complete Jewish Bible, unless otherwise noted.
4. 2 Peter 3:8.
5. Since one full rotation of the earth equals one day, if it takes longer to make that one rotation, then the day is longer.
6. Genesis 1:3.
7. Genesis 1:16.
8. 1 John 1:5.
9. Genesis 1:14, 16.
10. Genesis 1:3.
11. Take a minute to read all of Revelation 21 and 22.
12. This will be explained more in chapter 2.
13. See Genesis 2:4, for example.
14. *Nachan* is the root word for the name Noah or Noah.
15. In some cases, they have changed Shabbat from the seventh day (Saturday) to the first day of the week (Sunday).
16. See “breathed into his nostrils” in Genesis 2:7.
17. Jonathan Wells, *Icons of Evolution: Science or Myth?* (Washington, DC: Regnery, 2000).
18. See Luke 9:18 and Isaiah 14:12.
19. Genesis 3:3
20. In Hebrew the word for earth, soil, is *adam-ab*.
21. I’m not here to convince you of any particular answer, because I believe some things are simply mysteries beyond the human intellect’s ability to ponder them. I have problems with the very simplistic answers we seem to accept so easily from our pastors, rabbis, and priests, answers to complex or vague statements we find in the Bible. Man has a tendency to “fill in the blanks” when something in the Bible isn’t made readily apparent, and such a response can be dangerous.
22. Elohim.
23. Immanuel M. O’Levy, trans. *Maimonides: The Laws and Basic Principles of the Torah*, <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/rambam-yesodei-hatorah.txt>. Accessed May 9, 2011. Bracketed information original.
24. “The Laws of the Basic Principles of the Torah,” Immanuel M. O’Leary, trans. [http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsourc/Judaism/Principles\\_of\\_Judaism.html](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsourc/Judaism/Principles_of_Judaism.html). Accessed 9 May 2011. Bracketed information added.
25. See John 3.

26. The Hebrew name for Eve.
27. Zechariah 12:2 (KJ21).
28. Here we have two places in the Bible, early on, in which God speaks of Himself as “us.”
29. *Nod* translates to “wandering,” and it incorporates the sense of “unrest” or “restlessness” in its meaning.
30. I believe this will happen in the very near future.
31. We know this because Shet was still reproducing at age 130, but when we get to the story of Sarah we discover that it would have been considered absurd for a woman in her nineties to give birth. In modern times, most women have children in their teens, twenties, and/or thirties.
32. Pronounced “nee-fee-leem.”
33. Deuteronomy 14:2.
34. *Benei Elohim* translates to “Sons of God.” However, that is a title or an epithet, not a literal statement of fact or origin.
35. See Joshua 11.
36. Genesis 1:31.
37. Although these scientists acknowledge an element of design in the universe, they do not necessarily acknowledge the existence of a Creator or God.
38. When our spirits leave our bodies, our lives cease.
39. Note that darkness was the original/natural state on earth.
40. Although we do need to account for Satan and the fallen angels in some way.
41. Remember that God made humankind in His image, and He clearly has a will.
42. For more on the term *malach*, skip ahead to chapter 17 under “An Angel of the Lord.”
43. This description continues through verse 19.
44. This truth was explained in chapter 6.
45. Of course, we will ultimately fail in this attempt.
46. Don’t get the wrong idea: of course the only way to a relationship with God is through unmerited grace, a free gift of God, given by means of Jesus.
47. Michael Fronczak, “Genesis: Chapter 7,” [http://www.biblestudyresourcecenter.com/yahoo\\_site\\_admin/assets/docs/Genesis\\_Chap\\_07.196155508.pdf](http://www.biblestudyresourcecenter.com/yahoo_site_admin/assets/docs/Genesis_Chap_07.196155508.pdf).
48. Genesis 4:4.
49. The number seven is the most-often-used number in the Bible.
50. An interesting note: Yeshua fasted in a place called Ofra, which is now a West Bank Orthodox Jewish settlement that Torah Class financially supports.
51. Author’s translation.
52. Quite remarkably, it is well known by olive growers that they never have to fear flooding that would drown and destroy normal trees because an olive branch will actually bear leaves while still submersed under the water.
53. However, when a specific number is emphasized, this gives us all the more reason to pay attention to that.
54. Some covenants we will study later will have mutual requirements—both God and man have roles to play in them.



55. This is the first mention of wine in the Bible.
56. This is my own theory, not that of the ancient sages.
57. The Bible shows us that in reality all of Ham's line was cursed, not just Canaan.
58. Arabs are of the line of Shem, not Ham.
59. Remember: we are told Nimrod was the ruler of Babel in Genesis 10:10.
60. See Genesis 9:7.
61. *Avram* means "exalted father." Several years later in Avram's life, God would change his name to *Avraham* (Abraham), which means "father of many."
62. This principle is reflected repeatedly throughout the Bible, and never more dramatically than in Christ's own words: "Large crowds were traveling along with Yeshua. Turning, he said to them, 'If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father, his mother, his wife, his children, his brothers and his sisters, yes, and his own life besides, he cannot be my talmid'" (Luke 14:25–26).
63. Many translators even have a built-in prejudice against the ancient Hebrews, so they work with a negative view or an outright incorrect understanding of the words they are translating.
64. We see both conditional and permanent covenants in the Bible.
65. The West Bank is the disputed area on the border of Palestine and Israel. Both entities are fighting for exclusive control of the region.
66. Ezekiel 37:11.
67. The Complete Jewish Bible does this to a degree, but not thoroughly.
68. This location is unknown.
69. This is similar to the church's tendency to suggest any human attribute of God is actually a manifestation of Jesus. It is an unconvincing stance on the issue.
70. Numbers 23:19.
71. Do not attach the concept of tithing as we think of it in the church today to this act. This tenth that was given was standard payment due to a king for the spoils of war. This is a one-time payment, not an ongoing obligation.
72. Psalm 110:4.
73. Matthew 4:9, author's paraphrase.
74. Remember, the Hebrew word for covenant, *b'rit*, means "cutting" or "dividing."
75. Genesis 15:12.
76. Some translations label Hagar as Avram's wife, which does not make sense.
77. Even so, we will see another of God's divisions take place in Genesis 17.
78. My speculation, however, is that this being was a manifestation of God Himself.
79. We will see as time goes on that this covenant of circumcision followed only one line of Abraham's descendants. It didn't mean that all of his children were eligible. And just who was it who would be included in "the line of promise"? Hebrews, who would eventually lead to the Israelites.
80. Islam is not a race of people; it is the religion the Arabs adopted some six centuries after Christ's death and resurrection. The Muslims call Ishmael and Abraham the fathers of Islam.

81. A better translation would be “I am blessing him.”
82. In the Complete Jewish Bible it says, “ADONAI appeared to Abraham.”
83. Exodus 33:20.
84. There are other spirit beings mentioned in the Bible as well, but we won’t study them at this point.
85. John 14:9.
86. Long ago, Gentiles started using the word *Jehovah* instead of *Yehoveh*.
87. Note: the discussion isn’t about the variations of YHWH that are acceptable (or of Yeshua). We know with certainty that the Hebrew letters for God’s name are *yud-beh-vah-beh* (YHWH). There is no valid disagreement over that.
88. Throughout our studies you will see some of these names spelled differently. This is because the Hebrew offers us a large variety of options, and you should be familiar with them all.
89. Genesis 19:28.
90. If you’re saved, you’re righteous before God.
91. Which they have done.
92. You’ll remember that *malach Elohim* meant “a messenger of God,” or “an angel.”
93. We’ll not get into exactly where Yahshua was executed, but according to well-documented Jewish law at that time, and some very strong hints that Paul gives, it is not likely that either traditional location of the Crucifixion is correct.
94. “A king’s ransom” is a figure of speech meaning a large quantity of goods. Any idea where it might come from based on our studies so far? After a battle had been fought, the plunder recovered was to be given to the king.
95. This is a tradition that many people around the world continue today.
96. Were there concubines other than just Keturah and Hagar? Possibly. But at this point it is unclear.
97. I want to make it clear that there are many Arab believers in Messiah, so-called Christian Arabs.
98. Proverbs 24:17.
99. The OT was completed in 400 BC. The NT was completed in AD 100. Muhammad was born in AD 575.
100. The curse on the line of Ham simply meant that there would be elements of their existence that God would justifiably use in a negative way to bring about His overall plan of redemption. To say that the line of Ham is cursed does not mean that God hates them, has abandoned them, or counts them as lesser humans than others. Rather, something happened in their early history that the Lord judged as terrible enough that in some way or another, future generations would bear the brunt.
101. As in most cases in the OT, the word *Lord* here is actually YHWH, God’s personal name.
102. *Vadi* or *wadi* means “river.”
103. Patriarch here simply means the male leader of the family, not exclusively Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
104. Later to be called Edom.
105. Later to be called Israel.

106. A more correct translation would be *Beit-el*, which means “the house of God, El.”
107. This is found nowhere else in the Bible.
108. In all likelihood, Rachel was around seventeen or eighteen when she married Jacob, so she was almost a child.
109. Spiritual divination is a practice of psychics and mediums.
110. Numbers 22.
111. Some translations place Genesis 32:1–3 at the end of Genesis 32.
112. Because some translations vary, please note that this book uses the CJB as the primary source, and the CJB is what is being referred to for verse references unless otherwise noted.
113. At this point he was called Israel, but his cunning was more characteristic of his years as Jacob.
114. Toward the end of this chapter, we’re going to see another statement that very much points to the fact that Jacob and the Israelites still followed traditions and customs that they held dear, yet were quite in error.
115. Jacob’s father, Isaac, produced Hebrews (Jacob) and non-Hebrews (Esau). Isaac’s father, Abraham, also produced both Hebrews (Isaac) and non-Hebrews (Ishmael and several others).
116. Genesis 48.
117. Sadly, this is the theology of many confused denominations.
118. Jacob’s first four sons were all born to Leah.
119. *Tamar* means “palm tree.”
120. This happens in the United States as well as in the world at large.
121. These customs remain intact even today in many cultures.
122. Note that Judah has returned to his clan by this time. We’re not told when or why, but later in the chapter we see that he is unequivocally with the tribe of Jacob, living among his brothers again.
123. And also remember that Simeon (the second in line for the inheritance) was in prison in Egypt; they didn’t know his status at this point.
124. At least a portion of all sacrificial offerings are laid on this altar.
125. These blessings and instructions will occur in the next three chapters of Genesis.
126. This occurs in Exodus when Moses meets with God on Mount Sinai.
127. Whoever curses Abraham’s Hebrew descendants will themselves be cursed, and whoever blesses them will be blessed.
128. There is an excellent documentary film called *The Quest for the Lost Tribes*, which clearly identifies all but a couple of the ten Ephraimite tribes in various places in Asia.
129. For the purpose of this conversation, Jew, Hebrew, and Israelite are all the same thing. But technically, and for those who want to better understand the Scriptures, these three terms all mean something different, and I hope you’re beginning to grasp that difference.
130. I do not subscribe to that belief, but I also don’t think it’s entirely impossible. We just don’t know.

131. It is verse 15 in some translations.
132. You can revisit the offenses of Simeon and Levi in Genesis 34:1, 2, 5–7, 13–15, and 25–27.
133. Recall that Edom was the land of the descendants of Esau, Jacob's twin brother.
134. The timeframe covered by the book of Judges in our Bibles. However, there is no consensus as to the exact length of this period, and some scholars make it considerably longer than 250 years. Judges appeared in many of the twelve tribes, not just Dan.
135. See Judges 16.