



Good News
Bible Reading Program

A free educational service provided by the United Church of God, *an International Association*

— February 2002 —

DATE	READING TOPIC	SCRIPTURES
1 Feb	Creation; Earth's six-day renovation; The Sabbath	Genesis 1:1–2:4
2 Feb	Man and woman in the Garden of Eden	Genesis 2:4-25
3 Feb	Taking from the forbidden tree	Genesis 3
4 Feb	Cain and Abel	Genesis 4
5 Feb	Genealogy of Adam	Genesis 5
6 Feb	The antediluvian world; God calls Noah	Genesis 6
7 Feb	The Flood begins	Genesis 7
8 Feb	The Flood ends	Genesis 8
9 Feb	Noachian Covenant; The cursing of Canaan	Genesis 9
10 Feb	Table of nations descended from Noah	Genesis 10
11 Feb	The tower of Babel; Genealogy of Shem	Genesis 11
12 Feb	Call of Abram (Abraham); Abram journeys to Canaan and Egypt	Genesis 12
13 Feb	Abram and Lot separate	Genesis 13
14 Feb	Abram rescues Lot and tithes to Melchizedek	Genesis 14
15 Feb	Abram accounted righteous; Future slavery and deliverance	Genesis 15
16 Feb	Hagar and Ishmael	Genesis 16
17 Feb	Circumcision and future greatness	Genesis 17
18 Feb	Visit of God and angels; Abraham reasons with God	Genesis 18
19 Feb	Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah	Genesis 19
20 Feb	Abraham's dealing with Abimelech	Genesis 20
21 Feb	Birth of Isaac; Hagar and Ishmael leave; Covenant with Abimelech	Genesis 21
22 Feb	The offering of Isaac; Family of Nahor	Genesis 22
23 Feb	The death of Sarah	Genesis 23
24 Feb	A wife for Isaac	Genesis 24
25 Feb	Abraham and Keturah; Death of Abraham; Families of Ishmael and Isaac; Esau sells his birthright	Genesis 25
26 Feb	Isaac and the Philistines	Genesis 26
27 Feb	Jacob's deception to get blessing; Esau's future; Jacob flees Esau	Genesis 27:1–28:5
28 Feb	Esau marries an Ishmaelites; Jacob's vision and vow at Bethel	Genesis 28:6-22

Highlights to Think About from This Month's Reading

Introduction to Genesis (Genesis 1:1–2:4)

February 1

The book of Genesis is the first of the five books that Moses wrote (known collectively as the Pentateuch or Torah), apparently during the 40 years that Israel wandered in the wilderness before being brought into Canaan, the Promised Land, under Joshua. The other four books of Moses are Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

But since Moses lived long after the events described in Genesis, where did he get his information? The book of Genesis shows evidence that it was compiled by Moses from earlier documents. In some cases the earlier documents he used are specifically named. One of the most obvious is noted in Genesis 5:1: "This is the book of the genealogy of Adam." Another intriguing example is found in Genesis 2:4: "This is the history of the heavens and the earth when they were created...." Some scholars point out that this apparently refers to a document, "the history of the heavens and the earth," that is the source for all the preceding material from Genesis 1:1 through 2:3.

The British scholar and Bible translator James Moffatt was firmly convinced that this is an editorial note giving the source of the information. In his translation he even transferred the first part of Genesis 2:4 to serve as the introduction to Genesis 1:1. Thus his Bible translation begins with Genesis 2:4, "This is the story of how the universe was formed...." before going into Genesis 1:1.

The Hebrew word translated "history" in Genesis 2:4 literally means "generations"—or, as the New King James Version translates it elsewhere, "genealogy." Bible scholars recognize at least eight other passages in Genesis where the same word is used in what appear to be a series of ancient documents that form much of the source material for the book.

Genesis 6:9, for example, informs us, "This is the genealogy of Noah." The narrative then recounts how God told Noah to build an ark in which he, his family and the many kinds of animals were spared from the flood. Genesis 10:1 then picks up the story from what appears to be a new document: "Now this is the genealogy of the sons of Noah: Shem, Ham, and Japheth." Genesis 11:10 continues with another narrative, telling us, "This is the genealogy of Shem." The same literary structure continues with the accounts of Abraham's father Terah (11:27), Ishmael (25:12), Isaac (verse 19), Esau (36:1, 9) and Jacob (37:2).

From the particular Hebrew wording used it appears that these passages are in fact family histories and genealogical records written either at or near the time of the events they describe. These records were then passed down from generation to generation and ultimately compiled in the book we know as Genesis.

The different writing styles in each of these sections provides further evidence that they were written by different authors at different times and in different cultures. Notice what *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* introduction to the book tells us: "Much like the writers of the NT [New Testament] Gospels and the later historical books of the OT [Old Testament] (e.g., Kings and Chronicles), the writer of the Book of Genesis appears to have composed his work from 'archival' records of God's great deeds in the past. We know from references with the early historical books that such records were maintained at an early stage in Israel's history (Exod. 17:14; Num. 21:14; Josh. 10:13); so it is not unlikely that similar records were kept at far earlier stages within the individual households of the patriarchs and their tribal ancestors.

"In any event, the narrative within the Book of Genesis appear to be largely made up of small, self-contained stories.... If such is, in fact, the case, one should not expect to find absolute uniformity of style, etc., among all the individual narratives.... Indeed, we would likely expect the writer, working under the direction of God, to have preserved his records just as he had received them, sacrificing uniformity for the sake of historical faithfulness....

"The picture of the narratives of Genesis that emerges from such observations is that of a carefully wrought account of Israel's early history fashioned from the narratives and genealogical tables of Israel's own ancestral archives" (1990, vol. 2, pp. 4-5). And Moses then compiled, edited and perhaps enhanced this material as he was guided by the inspiration of God's Spirit.

In the Hebrew editions of the Scriptures the book of Genesis receives its name from the first word of verse 1, *Berishiyth*, "In the Beginning." The name by which we know the book, *Genesis*,

comes from the Greek translation of the Pentateuch known as the Septuagint (often abbreviated LXX); the word means “beginning” or “origin.”

Truly Genesis is a book of beginnings. Its purpose is to chronicle origins. It records the origin of the universe, the earth, man, sin, gentile nations, the Israelite people, the covenants and social customs of the Israelites. While it is the first book of the portion of the Bible known as the Torah (often rendered as “the Law” in English), Genesis is not primarily a book of law per se—that is, it is mostly a historical narrative. (It should be realized that Torah can more generally mean “teaching” or “instruction.”)

However, Genesis does issue some specific commands. Some examples: “Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat” (2:17). “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife...” (verse 24), which Christ later quoted as part of God’s law (Matthew 19:4-6). “But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood” (Genesis 9:4). This law is reiterated later in Leviticus (17:11-12). God also said in Genesis: “Walk before me and be blameless” (17:1). That is a definite command. Furthermore, Genesis also reveals the *origins* of many other laws, such as those dealing with the Sabbath, circumcision, proper foods and many other issues. This is important to understand, for some believe the laws of God codified in the other books of the Pentateuch had no prior existence and therefore are not intended for mankind in general but only for ancient Israel.

Genesis deals with several themes. Like multicolored threads woven together into a fine tapestry, each of these themes is woven through the narrative of the entire book. The sovereignty of God, sin and its consequences, obedience and faith, redemption and forgiveness—all these and many other themes come through loud and clear in this marvelous book. We’ll see many of these themes continue throughout the entire Bible as well.

Elohim (Genesis 1:1–2:4)

Feb. 1 Cont’d

In the opening sentence of the Bible, we are introduced to the Creator, who in English is called God. In the Hebrew, the word translated “God” here is *Elohim*. Understanding this Hebrew word is vital to understanding the purpose of God and *your* destiny.

Elohim is the plural form of *El* or *Eloah*. Both *El* and *Eloah* derive from a root meaning “strong,” and hence *El* and *Eloah* mean “the Strong One,” referring to God. Thus, *Elohim*, a plural noun, literally means “the Strong Ones,” and is used to identify God, who is all-powerful. *Elohim* is used to indicate both the true God and the false gods of human invention. However, when used to indicate the true God the word *Elohim*, plural in form, is often (but not always) paired with a singular verb, seemingly contrary to the rules of grammar. For example, in English we would say, “They run,” which would correctly follow the grammatical rule that the plural *they* be paired with the plural *run*. But we would never say, “He run,” for the rules of English grammar require that the singular pronoun *he* be paired with the singular verb *runs*. In just the same way we would expect the plural noun *Elohim* to be paired with a plural verb. But that is not always the case when referring to the true God. In Genesis 1:1 we read, “In the beginning God created...” While the word for God is *Elohim*, a plural noun, the word for “created,” *bara*, is *singular* in form. Why?

We must remember that *Elohim* is often used as a name—viewed best as a family name. Another good illustration can be found in the national name, United States. In American English, this is a singular noun. Though plural in form, you would pair it with the singular verb “is.” For instance, the United States *is* involved in the conflict—rather than the United States *are* involved in the conflict. Of course, the question might be asked, why is this name plural in *form*? The answer is that it does represent a true plurality—as multiple states make up the country. Just the same, why is the name *Elohim*, though often singular in usage, plural in form? The reason is that it too represents a true plurality—more than one Being making up the God family.

But why, if *Elohim* is plural in form, do we refer to it in English by the singular form “God”? The answer is that in most cases the inspired Greek of the New Testament translates the word as *Theos*, the singular form of the noun meaning God. And there definitely is a singular element to the God family. For the true God is a plurality in complete agreement and oneness of mind! Odd as it may sound, the Bible reveals that God is a *family* of Spirit Beings. Yet Jesus Christ Himself emphasized this truth when He continually spoke of the *Father*—a separate divine Being—and Himself as the *Son* of God. This divine family of God always acts, thinks and speaks in complete unity. And perhaps that is what the Greek *Theos* emphasizes. But that *Elohim* does in fact denote a

plurality of divine Beings is proven quite clearly elsewhere in Scripture, including two other verses in Genesis.

Genesis 1:26 reads, “Let *Us* make man in *Our* image, according to *Our* likeness...” The Hebrew is very clear, and the translation using “Us” and “Our” is precisely correct. God, *Elohim*, is a plurality! But some will point to verse 27 and note that it reads, “So God created man in *His* own image; in the image of God *He* created him; male and female *He* created them”—using this to argue that God was only a single individual Being. The simple scriptural explanation is that when it came to *doing* the creating, only *one* God Being acted—the One who became Christ (Ephesians 3:9). *He* created man in *His* own image as Genesis 1:27 states. But since the One who became Christ is the very image of the Father, the statement of verse 26 is entirely correct. There is no contradiction between verses 26 and 27.

But the clincher is Genesis 3:22—“Then the LORD God said, ‘Behold, the man has become like *one of Us*...” There can be absolutely no confusing of the matter here. The phrase “*one of Us*” can only mean that God is a plurality of Beings. While there is one God, that God is a spirit family of divine Beings, but a family without quarrel or schism, always acting in complete unison and harmony. (For a more complete explanation of this divine spirit family, request or download your free copy of our booklet *Who Is God?*)

The Creation (Genesis 1:1–2:4)

Feb. 1 Cont’d

Chapter 1 of Genesis presents the story of the creation. Though the Genesis creation does bear some superficial similarities to the creation fables of Israel’s Egyptian, Canaanite, Babylonian and Assyrian neighbors, a straightforward comparison of the creation stories reveals the Genesis story to be of a vastly different character—simple, majestic, inspiring and devoid of childish myth. In fact, the Genesis account of creation shows the true God in sovereign authority and unquestioned power over the very elements reputed to be gods by the pagan religions—light, water, earth, heavenly bodies, sea creatures, plants, animals and man.

Verse 1 records the creation of the heavens (the plural *heavens* here perhaps indicating the three kinds of heaven mentioned in the Bible: God’s spiritual dwelling place, outer space and our planet’s atmosphere) and the earth—which does not imply that all of these came into being at the same time. The account of creation in Genesis 1 has been the focus of ridicule by scientists, atheists and unbelievers since the mid-1800s. Central to the assertion that Genesis 1 is unscientific is the notion that biblical chronology only allows about 6,000 years since the universe was created. But a correct understanding of the first two verses reveals that the Bible allows for a much older universe, even an age commensurate with the estimates of many scientists.

Verse 1 tells us that God created the heavens and the earth at some indefinite time in the past. Verse 2 then says that the earth “was without form and void.” First notice the word “was,” translated from the Hebrew *hayah*. It can also be rendered “became.” It is the same word used in Genesis 4:2, which says that Abel “was” a shepherd. He clearly wasn’t born as one, but *became* one in time. Moreover, the words “came to pass” in the next verse are translated from the same Hebrew word. So the language of Genesis 1:2 could be understood to mean not that the earth was originally “without form and void” but, rather, became that way. And, indeed, this is what happened, as we will see.

The Hebrew for “without form and void” here, *tohu va bohu*, could also be rendered “waste and chaos.” That this was not the state of God’s initial creation can be seen from Isaiah 45:18, which states, “For thus says the LORD, who created the heavens, who is God, who formed the earth and made it, who has established it, *who did not create it in vain*, who formed it to be inhabited.” The word rendered “vain” here is *tohu*—the same word from Genesis 1:2 signifying a wasted condition. God, therefore, did *not* create the earth in a state of waste and confusion. It *became* that way—evidently in the wake of the angelic revolt led by Satan (compare Revelation 12:4; Isaiah 14:12-14; Ezekiel 28:12-15; Luke 10:18). Thus, the creation account that then follows is actually the account of the *renovation* of the earth in preparation for the creation of man (compare Psalm 104:29-30).

Throughout Genesis 1, the creation is seen as the product of the deliberate, reasoned and purposeful act of a supreme Creator God. This stands in sharp contrast to the creation fables of Israel’s neighboring nations mentioned above. Those nations manufactured creation epics that had gods ruling the universe yet not having created it. In their epics, the universe had always existed, but in a chaotic state—the job of the gods being to bring some degree of order to the primeval chaos. In

some pagan creation epics, the gods did create the universe but only after falling into a drunken state—hence creating by accident! In other pagan creation epics the universe emanated from the gods, growing out of their bodies. Clearly the Genesis creation account stands apart from the creation epics of pagan religions and can in no way be said to be derived from or based on them.

The Genesis creation is presented in a very logical format. Key to rightly comprehending the narrative is to understand that the story is told from the perspective of one standing on the surface of the earth, not one looking down on the earth from some stellar vantage point. It is as if God wanted to put the reader right in the middle of the creative act, watching the process of creation occur all around him. From this terrestrial position, the reader watches the creative act unfold in apparently two stages, each stage occupying three days of activity, the corresponding days of each stage dealing with the same elements. It appears that the first stage comprises days one through three while the second stage comprises days four through six. Days one and four both deal with the heavens; days two and five both deal with the waters; days three and six both deal with the land.

From the pattern of creation shown in Genesis 1 we can learn about God. First, God is the living, active, sovereign Creator who exercises complete control over everything. Second, God is a logical God who creates with design and purpose. Third, God creates in stages—the first stage laying the foundation, the second stage providing the completion and beautification. With this understanding, consider how God is dealing with mankind. The first stage in mankind’s creation was physical, when mankind was created according to the physical and intellectual image and likeness of God, receiving dominion over the earth. The second stage in human creation is spiritual, wherein mankind is being created in the *spiritual character* image of God through Jesus Christ, and is ultimately to receive dominion over *all things*. In the first stage, God gave the codified law, known from the time of Adam and Eve and eventually redelivered and written on tablets of stone; in the second, He gives His Spirit, which writes the law on our hearts. In the first stage, God dealt with a physical people descended from one man; in the second stage, He deals with a spiritual people begotten by Himself. Clearly the Creator God is still creating, still following His pattern of creation!

Supplementary Reading: “Earth’s Age: Does Genesis 1 Indicate a Time Interval” and “Genesis 1 and the Days of Creation,” *Creation or Evolution*, pp. 29-30.

The Sabbath (Genesis 1:1–2:4)

Feb. 1 Cont’d

God accomplished the final act of creation week by resting from the work He’d been doing. Genesis 2:1 tells us that the heavens and the earth, and all their host, were completed on the sixth day. Verse 2 reads, “And on the seventh day God ended His work which he had done”—or, as some Bible versions better translate it, “By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing...” (New International Version). In other words, when the seventh day of creation week began, God had *already* ceased His work of creating. Instead of creating on the seventh day, God blessed the seventh day and *sanctified* it—set it apart—from all other days.

The first three verses of Genesis 2 narrate the *origin* of the seventh-day *Sabbath*, the weekly day of rest later reintroduced to the Israelites upon their deliverance from Egypt in the days of Moses. Though the word “Sabbath” does not actually appear in Genesis 2 directly, it appears indirectly. The word *Shabbath* (i.e., Sabbath) is a noun form of the Hebrew verb *shabath*, which means to cease and desist, to rest from doing a thing. This word *shabath* is translated “rested” in verses 2 and 3 of Genesis 2. God “*shabath-ed*” on the seventh day, the *Shabbath* day! Moreover, the same verb *shabath* is used in God’s instructions in Exodus 23:12, 31:17 and 34:21 to rest and keep the Sabbath day holy. So indeed the seventh day of Genesis 2 was the first Sabbath day, and this is the origin of the weekly Sabbath. (For a more complete explanation of God’s purpose for creating the Sabbath and commanding its observance, be sure to request or download your free copy of our booklet *Sunset to Sunset: God’s Sabbath Rest*.)

The Creation of Man and Woman (Genesis 2:4-25)

February 2

In Genesis 1, God’s acts of creation are presented in outline fashion. The intent is to provide a panoramic view of God’s creative activity. The creation of man occurs on the sixth day, but nothing is stated about the manner of the creation or how the creation of men and women are related in time or nature. In Genesis 2, God’s specific acts in creating man are detailed, thus providing a focus on the events of the sixth day.

Verse 7 says God “formed” and “breathed into” the man. “Formed” generally indicates the personal handling of the thing being made, as with one’s hands, shaping it with the fingers.

“Breathed,” which is perhaps better translated “blew,” indicates a forceful expulsion of air into the man, rather like the force of mouth-to-mouth resuscitation—a sharp and deep exhalation of air. The creation of mankind, therefore, appears very different from the creation of all other things in Genesis 1, for in the other cases we only see God speaking to bring them into life. With man’s creation, however, “formed” and “breathed into” indicate a hands-on and personally intimate involvement. Not only were human beings created in a special way, but God had planted a special garden for them to dwell in and tend. So we see a special act of creation producing a special creature, which is then placed into a special environment and given a special work to perform. All these details are intended to impress upon us the loving and intimate involvement of God with man.

Despite the special nature of the creative act involved in creating man, man was created from the dust of the ground and “became a living soul.” The words “living soul” are translated from the Hebrew *nephesh chaih*, which means “creature living” or “living creature.” In fact, Genesis 1:20-21 and verse 24 translate *nephesh* as *creature* when referring to sea creatures and land animals, and thus man is just another kind of creature, in this respect no different from the beasts of the earth.

This brings out another interesting aspect of the accounts of creation in Genesis 1 and 2. Throughout the two chapters there is a subtle tension between expressing the special nature of man while at the same time emphasizing man’s connection to the earth and his distinction from God. For example, to emphasize his earthiness man is created from the same elements as all the beasts and he receives a similar command to multiply; but to emphasize his superiority man is the last creature created and he is given dominion over all others. To emphasize his earthiness man is created from the dust of the ground; but to emphasize his uniqueness man is created in an especially intimate manner.

Of course, there is another important difference between animals and human beings. Human beings have a spiritual component to their existence. Not to be confused with the false concept of an immortal soul, this spirit is not conscious of itself but, rather, empowers the physical brain with human intellect. This “spirit in man” or “human spirit” is mentioned in a number of verses in both the Old and New Testaments. Interestingly, both the Hebrew word for spirit, *ruach*, and its New Testament Greek equivalent, *pneuma*, also convey the sense of “wind” or “breath.” So it would make sense that when God breathed into Adam physical life, he also “spiritually breathed” the human *spirit* into him. It is this spirit that enables man to have a mind in the image of God’s, to make moral choices and to have a genuine relationship with God.

The final act of God’s love in these verses is the creation of woman. God had provided marvelously for the physical needs of the man He had created. There was never a more healthful climate, a more pleasant environment, a more secure home or a more invigorating work than that within the garden. Yet God had fitted the man with an emotional and intellectual nature that could only be satisfied by companionship. Indeed, God had made man in His own image, desiring the man to experience life within a family—a type of the God-plane family relationship. Thus, God created a suitable companion for the man. (The phrase “help meet” in the King James Version of 2:18 should be understood as “meet help” or “fit helper”—“meet” simply being an archaic adjective meaning fit or suitable. The NKJV better translates this as “a helper comparable to him.”) And out of this companionship would come human reproduction to expand the family.

Before creating Eve, though, God seems to have decided to make the man aware of this need for emotional and intellectual companionship. God directed the man to name the various creatures He had made, thereby indicating the man’s leadership. (Throughout the Scriptures the bestowal of a name by one upon another indicates the former being over the latter in some sense—as in God naming Adam, Adam naming his wife Eve, God giving new names to Abram, Isaac and Jacob, Pharaoh renaming Joseph, Nebuchadnezzar renaming Daniel and his friends, God naming Jesus and Jesus naming Peter.) Yet at the same time it impressed on the man his own loneliness and need for a companion. God, it must be stressed, was not allowing Adam to seek a mate from among the animals. Rather, in examining the animals, Adam would see their pairings and realize his need for a companion like himself. God then took one of the man’s ribs and from it made (the Hebrew is, literally, “built”) a woman.

Why did God take a rib? Why not simply fashion the woman from the dust of the ground too? There may have been several reasons, although we can only speculate. First, to fashion the woman from the dust of the ground might have invited argument over whether Adam’s dust was different from or superior to Eve’s dust—that maybe he was made from rock and she from sand, or something

like that. Instead, the making of the woman from the rib of Adam emphasized the fact that woman was of the very same essence as man. Second, fashioning Adam's intended wife from his own flesh would serve as a reminder that neither man nor wife can be whole without the other—that they are a part of each other. Third, to paraphrase the poet Mildred North: "Woman was not taken from man's head, to rule over him, nor from his foot, to be crushed by him, but from under his arm, to be protected, and from near his heart, to be loved." Of course, these remain only guesses.

Two Trees (Genesis 3)

February 3

Genesis 3 may be one of the most important passages in all of Scripture. Its importance for understanding our nature, our need and our condition cannot be underestimated.

The chapter begins with the appearance of the serpent, whom Revelation 12:9 identifies as Satan. Satan's interaction with Eve provides a very instructive lesson in how he entices us to sin. First, notice his question: "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?" (verse 1, NIV) This is emphatically *not* what God had said. God had said, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die" (Genesis 2:16-17, NIV). God had placed *only one* restriction upon Adam and Eve. Nothing else was withheld from them. Satan's question was designed to magnify the restriction beyond its true proportion, to distort Eve's perception of right limits, and thereby to instill a sense of being personally wronged.

She replied that only one tree was forbidden. But with doubt planted, her perception altered, her emotions stirred and an erroneous premise in mind, Satan then offered a very different explanation of the situation: "The serpent said to the woman, 'You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil'" (3:4-5). Satan's words were a mixture of lie and deception. The assertion that Eve would not die was an outright lie. His statement that Eve would know good and evil was a deception, for the true nature of "knowing" good and evil was not disclosed to Eve. Satan's appealing assertion would have its effect upon Eve's unenlightened mind.

As affirmed in verse 22, Adam and Eve did indeed come to be like God in the sense of "knowing" good and evil. But just what does this mean? To answer, we might ask, in what way does *God* "know" good and evil? One very important way is that He *determines* it—that is, He *decides* what constitutes good and evil. And that is what Adam and Eve now did—they determined for themselves good and evil. In verse 6, Eve "saw that the [forbidden] tree was *good* for food." That wasn't true according to God's standard. But according to her own new standard, it was. In reality, she made that determination in her mind—albeit with Satan's influence. And mankind has followed suit ever since. For "there is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death" (Proverbs 14:12; 16:25). This is the bitter result of relying on *ourselves* to determine good and evil—right and wrong—rather than trusting in what *God* reveals on the matter.

It should also be pointed out here that while Eve fell prey to Satan's deception, there was greater culpability on the part of Adam, who may have been right there "with" Eve during the talk with Satan (compare Genesis 3:6). As the apostle Paul later explained, "Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression" (1 Timothy 2:14). Adam freely chose to join his wife in transgression—perhaps to avoid the pain of separation from her that would have ensued. In any case, Paul tells us that it was "through one man [that] sin entered the world, and death through sin" (Romans 5:12)—that man being Adam.

The episode with the two trees helps to explain human civilization ever since. For all of us, these two trees remain a figurative representation of the choice we have—either to embrace what God has to say about right and wrong and be blessed with life or to decide for ourselves and be cursed with suffering and death (compare Deuteronomy 30:19). Man, in general, has ever since Adam and Eve been *cut off* from the tree of life. Indeed, man has been cut off from right knowledge of God—so that to come to Him for life and spiritual direction requires that He call us out of this evil world (compare John 6:44). For this reason, even many who believe they are seeking God's definition of right and wrong are going along with what others have told them rather than what God's Word actually says. Indeed, in a sense the Scriptures themselves, the "words of eternal life" (John 6:63, 68), may be equated with the tree of life. But cut off from God, mankind is not truly able to understand the words unless God empowers them to do so.

Sadly, man continues to choose from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This has had some measure of positive results—as man has embraced some truly good things as good (since experimentation and reason can lead to right conclusions and since man has retained *elements* of truth earlier revealed by God). This explains why we find kindness and other right virtues among false religion—or even among people with *no* religion. But because mankind rejects other good and vital things as wrong or unnecessary and, at the same time, embraces so many bad and harmful things as good and acceptable, the overall effect of mankind’s ongoing choice is all the pain and heartache we see in the world. Thankfully, Jesus Christ is returning soon to this earth to make the knowledge of God available to all nations (compare Isaiah 11:9).

Supplementary Reading: “Archaeology and Genesis: What Does the Record Show?,” *The Good News*, Sept.–Oct. 1996.

Two Brothers (Genesis 4)

February 4

The sin of Adam and Eve would have tragic consequences that would become evident in their very own family. Indeed, the larger human family has repeatedly duplicated the dysfunctional dynamics that sin produced in the first human family. A thoughtful consideration of the story of Cain and Abel yields some interesting lessons.

Adam and Eve had two sons—Cain, the firstborn, and Abel. (They would also have other sons and daughters, too, as mentioned in Genesis 5:4. Yet they apparently had no other sons until the death of Abel, as Seth seems to be the next male child in line, compare v. 25). Cain, we are told, became a tiller of the ground, a farmer. Abel became a shepherd. As to the acceptance of Abel’s offering and the rejection of Cain’s, some have suggested that there was something wrong in Cain bringing a grain offering. Yet we later see grain offerings as perfectly acceptable to God. Indeed, God said the grain offering was to be burnt “on the altar for a sweet aroma, as a memorial to the LORD.... It is most holy, like the sin offering and the trespass offering” (Leviticus 6:15, 17). So what was the problem? Genesis 4:4 tells us that Abel brought from the “firstlings” of his flock, but no such indication of giving God the first or best is attached to Cain’s offering in the previous verse. Perhaps this was due to Cain’s overall attitude. Verse 5 states, “But [God] did not respect *Cain and his offering*.” Notice that it was not just the *offering* that God did not respect, but *Cain himself!* Indeed, that may be the very reason that God did not accept his offering. We are often told in Scripture that God loathes the sacrifices, festivals and even prayers of those who are guilty of great wrong and yet are unrepentant (see Isaiah 1:10-15). When such a person “offers a grain offering, [it is] as if he offers swine’s blood” (Isaiah 66:3). God recognized that Cain was on the verge of allowing sin to control him (verse 7)—to manifest itself in real action.

We are told that Abel, on the other hand, offered a better sacrifice because it was offered by *faith*, through which he was considered righteous (Hebrews 11:4; Matthew 23:35). Faith comes by hearing God’s instruction (Romans 10:17). God’s commandments must have been transmitted through Adam and Eve. And God must have even prescribed rules for worship at some point, or else how would Cain and Abel have known to bring sacrifices? Abel was obedient—through faith.

Cain’s rejection roused him to anger and jealousy—though he may have already had these emotions to some degree. In any event, he did not master his urges, as God told him to (verse 7). Instead, he murdered his brother. Later, God confronted Cain: “The voice of your brother’s blood cries out to Me from the ground” (verse 10). When someone is said to cry out to God, the cries are usually for relief, protection or vengeance. Abel’s blood, figuratively speaking, cried out for vengeance. This is confirmed by Cain’s fear that vengeance would be taken out upon him by anyone who found him, and by God’s remarks in verse 15, which explicitly connect vengeance with the context. This is interesting because the book of Hebrews states that the blood of Jesus “speaks better things than that of Abel” (Hebrews 12:24). Why? Because Abel’s blood sought vengeance, which was well and just, but Christ’s blood offers mercy and forgiveness to those who will accept it, which is better.

Cain departed and headed east to the land of *Nod*, meaning “vagabond” or “wandering”—thus perhaps not indicating an actual geographic name. And then we see mention of Cain’s wife, who must have been one of his sisters. “The problems associated with incest, addressed in Lev. 18, would not have occurred when the genetic pool was pure and unpolluted” (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on Genesis 5:4). Today, as defined by God in Leviticus 18, incest is a sin.

The Genealogy of Adam (Genesis 5)**February 5**

Someone once said that the most boring parts of the Bible are “the begats,” the genealogies. To most they are dry, uninformative lists of people who largely had no role in the narrative of Scripture. But genealogies can be quite instructive. Generally speaking, genealogies serve several functions. First, they provide a chronological framework. Second, the genealogies provide a history of the persons through whom God accomplishes His work. Through the genealogies we can see how God fulfilled his promises to certain people, such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and David. But the greatest function in this regard is to provide a genealogy of Jesus Christ, the One through whom we have reconciliation with God and by whom came the means to fulfill our incredible human potential.

Third, the genealogies can provide instruction and, sometimes, even show apparent divine involvement. When we examine the meaning of the roots of the names in the Genesis 5 genealogy, we find something interesting. Some of the roots are still debated by linguists, but most are settled. *Adam* comes from a root meaning “red earth” or “man,” who came from the earth. *Seth* comes from a root meaning “appointed.” *Enosh* comes from a root meaning “mortal.” *Cainan*, or more properly *Kenan*, comes from a root meaning “spear” or “sorrow.” *Mahalalel* comes from two roots meaning “praised” or “blessed” and *El*, “God,” and thus means “blessed of God” or “blessed God.” *Jared* comes from a root meaning “descend” or “come down.” *Enoch* comes from a suggested root meaning to “inaugurate,” “dedicate,” “start up,” or even to “train” or “teach.” *Methuselah* comes from two roots meaning either “man” and “weapon” or perhaps “death” and “shall bring,” thus possibly meaning “his death shall bring.” *Lamech* comes from a suggested root meaning “powerful” or “wild” or perhaps “lamenting” or “despairing.” And Noah, as is well-known, comes from a root meaning “to bring rest, relief or comfort.” Putting all the names together and using the possible meanings that fit, we have, “Man [is] appointed mortal sorrow, [but] the blessed God shall come down teaching, [and] his death shall bring [those] despairing rest.” While we should not place too much emphasis on this, especially since the root meanings are not certain, it is interesting nonetheless.

Supplementary Reading: “Was Enoch Taken to Heaven?,” *Heaven & Hell: What Does the Bible Really Teach*, p. 40.

Sons of God, Daughters of Men, and Giants (Genesis 6)**February 6**

Some have taught that Genesis 6 describes fallen angels interbreeding with human women to produce half-demon giants. But there is a more rational explanation.

Halley's Bible Handbook states that “the ‘sons of God’ (6:2) are thought to have been either fallen angels...or leaders in Sethite families who intermarried with the godless descendants of Cain” (24th ed., p. 72). The first possibility offered here is not really a possibility at all, even though angels are referred to as “sons of God” in Job 38:7 because God is their “Father” through creation. Angels are spirit beings (Hebrews 1:7), not fleshly creatures. They neither marry nor sexually reproduce (compare Luke 20:34-36). Also, this explanation would violate the principle made clear in Genesis 1 that each kind reproduces only “according to its kind.” Furthermore, the risen Jesus explained that “fallen angels,” or demons, are not able to manifest themselves materially like He and the righteous angels can (Luke 24:39; compare verses 40-43; Genesis 18:1-8, 16; 19:1). Rather, we see demons in Scripture only possessing individuals or appearing as ghostly apparitions.

The second explanation in *Halley's* is far more reasonable and better fits the context of the passage. Genesis 4 gives the story of Cain and Abel and follows with the genealogical descent from Cain. Genesis 5 is called “the book of the genealogy of Adam” (verse 1). It starts with God’s creation of Adam and how Adam’s line continued through Seth. As with the angels, Adam was a “son of God” by creation (compare Luke 3:38)—though even more so since Adam was made in God’s image (Genesis 1:26; 5:1-3). Of this family line through Seth it is stated, “Then men began to call on the name of the LORD”—which could also be rendered “called *after* the name of the LORD.” Then, in the next chapter, Genesis 6, we see “the sons of God” (men of Seth’s godly line in this explanation) intermarrying with “the daughters of men” (women of Cain’s ungodly line).

There is even a third possibility, in which “sons of God” should be translated “sons of the gods,” as the Hebrew word *elohim* here, plural in form, can sometimes refer to false gods instead of the true God. In this explanation, wicked men referred to as sons of the gods (either pagan worshipers or perhaps men claiming to be demigods themselves) forcibly “took” innocent women as wives—an example perhaps of the evil conduct of the day.

In any event, human beings were clearly the problem here—not angels. God says, “My Spirit shall not strive with *man* forever” (verse 3) and “I will destroy *man* whom I have created from the face of the earth” (verse 7). Thus, the giants mentioned must have been human also—descendants of Adam and Eve (compare Acts 17:26). These very tall people were destroyed in the Flood. But there would be more like them following the Flood, who were descended, just as everyone else in the post-Flood world, from Noah—again, not angels (compare Deuteronomy 2:20-21; 3:11). Consider Goliath, whom David slew. He was more than nine feet tall (1 Samuel 17:4). But he was still just a man (verses 24-25, 33)—not some human-demonic hybrid.

The Antediluvian World (Genesis 6)

Feb. 6 Cont'd

The antediluvian world should be a subject of interest to all Christians living in the end times, for Jesus explicitly connected end-time conditions with those just before the Flood (Matthew 24:38).

Genesis 6 presents a picture of the pre-Flood world as being awash in violence, which was the natural consequence of the human heart being wholly motivated by evil purposes. As verse 5 says, “The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” All of man’s motivating dispositions were dominated by evil. Man’s continual intention was the pursuit of ungodly purposes. “For as he thinks in his heart, so is he,” the Proverbs tell us (23:7). And Jesus was equally clear: “Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts” (Matthew 15:19). Yet Jesus also tells us that despite the appalling evils and evident social degeneracy, the people of Noah’s time just continued with their normal daily living, “eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage,” seemingly oblivious to the miserable state of their world. But that is what sin does—it progressively desensitizes one to the ungodly conditions around him.

In many respects, our modern, frantic, pulsating 21st-century world is in or approaching the same condition as the ancient world of Noah. Stop and consider our societies. Violence and depravity are everywhere—and considered highly profitable and entertaining. For example our sports and popular entertainment are filled with strife, brutality, assault and murder. The news of the day chronicles endless crime. The streets of our cities are avenues of bloodshed and thievery. Sex and sensuality are not only ever-present but literally pushed in our faces as our cultural icons engage in and promote open eroticism and perverse “alternative” lifestyles, while semi-nude women are used to hawk everything from cars to health care. Unmarried couples living together is common, and about half of all American marriages are destined for divorce. Despite the “liberation” promised by the sexual revolution, violence against women and poverty for households headed by single women stand at an all-time high. Children are abused and exploited on a scale that is truly shocking. As conditions worsen, more and more of the signs that Jesus said would mark the last days are becoming apparent.

The Deluge Begins (Genesis 7)

February 7

God gave Noah instructions to build a large ship, capable of housing himself, his family, a pair of every unclean animal and seven pairs of every clean animal. The Hebrew of Genesis 7:2 is literally “seven [and] seven” and the phrase is followed by “a male and his female.” Incidentally, this passage proves that the distinction between clean and unclean animals came long before the Sinai Covenant at the time of Moses. Only clean animals could be eaten by people or sacrificed to God. (Request or download our free booklet *What Does the Bible Teach About Clean and Unclean Meats?* to learn more.) And thus we see a compelling reason that God instructed that more of the clean animals be taken on the ark than the unclean—perhaps in addition to the fact that the clean animals are often prey for the predators and any ecosystem needs much more prey than predators to persist.

Of course, atheists, unbelievers and scholars have scoffed at the idea that the account of the ark is true, claiming that such a ship would need to be of gargantuan proportions, far beyond what is recorded in Genesis or what was possible for the ancients to accomplish. But their criticism rests on some very questionable assumptions.

The critics frequently state that the number of animals aboard the ark would be in the scores of thousands if two of each were freighted. But this assumes that the biblical *kinds* are equivalent to scientific species. This is not necessarily the case. Biblical *kinds* appear to be distinct breeding groups, but scientific *species* can often *interbreed*—showing that multiple interbreeding species could perhaps make up a single kind. It may be that a biblical *kind* would be closer to a scientific genus, thereby dramatically reducing the number of required animals. It is a well-known fact that all modern dog varieties could be produced from one pair of “generic” dog by the application of selective breeding

principles, from the diminutive Chihuahua to the imposing Saint Bernard. Moreover, the objection also fails to consider that the vast majority of land-bound animals are insects, most of which would require only a few square millimeters of space. Furthermore, the average-sized land animal would require only a cubic foot and a half of space. Suffice it to say here that many studies have concluded that a ship the size and design of the ark would be capable of containing the required animals and still have a great amount of space left for storage and living quarters.

The Deluge began in the 600th year of Noah's life, the year also in which Methuselah died. The Bible records that it rained for 40 days and 40 nights, the "windows of heaven" being opened (which we'll see more about in our reading of Genesis 9). But it is also recorded that "all the fountains of the great deep were broken up" (7:11). This refers to subterranean aquifers which were emptied, perhaps by tectonic up-thrusting. A common critical objection raised against the story of the Flood is that there simply was not enough water required to cover the mountains, as required by verse 19. But this objection assumes that the topography of the earth today is what was present in Noah's day. Scripture, however, seems to indicate that this may not have been so. For example, Genesis 1:9 states that the waters of the earth (i.e., seas) were gathered into *one* place. It also seems to indicate that the land was one huge mass in its own place. Today, however, we see the land masses of the earth scattered about its surface, so that the seas are not literally in *one* place. It may be that some elements of the current topography of the earth have been altered since the time of Adam as the result of tremendous geologic upheaval at the time of the Flood or since.

The Deluge Ends (Genesis 8)

February 8

The waters of the Flood remained on the earth unabated for 150 days. At the end of this time we are told that God caused a wind to begin the evaporation process. Also, the fountains of the deep were stopped, indicating that the subterranean aquifers were refilled, perhaps by a reversal of the tectonic forces that originally emptied them. At the end of the 150 days, the waters began to abate. After about 2 1/2 months the waters had substantially declined. After another three months, the water had disappeared from the land, and after another nearly two months the land was suitable for habitation.

The ark, we are told, came to rest upon the mountains of Ararat. Many spectacular claims have been made that a large, box-like, wooden object now rests atop Mount Ararat in eastern Turkey. Several expeditions have been made to the alleged resting place of the ark, and several pieces of worked wood have supposedly been retrieved from the area. Some have claimed to see the ark embedded in ice and snow. For all the curious interest about Mount Ararat, however, Scripture simply does not tell us the precise place where the ark came to rest. It simply says that "the ark rested...upon the mountains [plural] of Ararat" (8:4). That leaves a large area of possible locations, for Ararat is simply an ancient name for Armenia, a territory covering much of far eastern Turkey and western Iran. Mount Ararat is only the traditional site. More recently, there has been a great deal of interest in a massive boat-like formation in the hills *near* Mount Ararat, though some geologists regard it as simply a natural anomaly. In any event, the claims of adventurers to both sites have not been verified with any certainty. If the ark has endured these nearly 4,000 years, it would be a remarkable find. But God always mixes a need for faith into His revelation, and an "ark tour" might be too convenient.

The Noachian Covenant (Genesis 9)

February 9

When Noah and his family disembarked from the ark, releasing the animals, God evidently pacified the animals (as they had apparently been made docile by Him for their voyage on the ark). At this point He also delegated the administration of the death penalty to man. At the same time God permitted meat to be eaten (verse 3).

Some seize on this as proof that men were supposed to be vegetarians before the Flood. However, Abel sacrificed an animal and, as Leviticus shows, parts of sacrifices were eaten. Moreover, the apostle Paul later explained that some animals—those the Bible designates as "clean" (see Leviticus 11; Deuteronomy 14)—were created to be eaten (1 Timothy 4:3-4). Indeed, we already saw the distinction drawn between clean and unclean—i.e., edible and inedible—animals before the Flood in Genesis 7. Why would there have been a distinction at that time if animals were not then eaten? Thus it appears that God was simply telling Noah and his family that it was okay to eat animals *again*—which likely means they had *not* been permitted to kill any of the live animals *on the ark* in

order to have eaten them while still aboard. Perhaps that would have depleted some species before they had a chance to amply multiply after the Flood.

God also established a special covenant with man, promising never to send a universal deluge again. As a token (or sign) of the promise, God “set” the rainbow in the sky (verse 13). The Hebrew word translated “set” is *nathan*, meaning *give*. This has led some to suggest that the rainbow had never been seen before. If this suggestion is true, it would mean that God either modified the laws of physics governing optics, for a rainbow is just the product of the refraction of light through the medium of airborne water droplets, or that He altered the atmosphere of the earth, perhaps by removing some kind of upper vapor canopy that formerly altered the character of the light reaching the earth’s surface. Such a vapor canopy may help to explain the rain of 40 days and 40 nights when the “windows of heaven were opened” (7:11-12). And this may have constituted the “waters which were above the firmament” in Genesis 1:7.

A Curse on Canaan (Genesis 9)

Feb. 9 Cont’d

Some decades after the Flood (time enough for Noah’s sons to father their own sons and for these grandchildren to grow up), Noah became a husbandman, growing grapes and making wine. Then, when he drank the wine, he became intoxicated and fell asleep in his tent, whereupon, the Bible records, his nakedness was uncovered. This expression is used throughout Leviticus 18 to denote sexual relations. When Noah’s son Ham discovered him, he told his brothers, who then covered their father. When Noah awoke, he learned of what happened and called forth a curse upon Ham’s youngest son, Canaan. Why? Why should *Canaan* be cursed?

Verse 24 states that Noah “knew what his younger son had done to him.” This is often interpreted to mean that Noah “knew what his [Noah’s] younger son [Ham] had done to him.” Yet if Ham himself were guilty of whatever wrong had been committed, we might assume that Noah would have cursed him personally or, if his *offspring* were to be cursed, that it would apply to *all* his offspring or perhaps the *eldest* and *his* family rather than just Ham’s *youngest* son Canaan and those who would spring from *him*. So the most likely scenario is that Canaan himself had committed the wrong—apparently some sexual sin against Noah while Noah was intoxicated—which Ham discovered. Thus verse 24 should probably be understood to read that Noah “knew what his [Ham’s] younger son [Canaan] had done to him”—particularly if we consider verse 23 as parenthetical.

The Genealogy of Noah (Genesis 10)

February 10

Genesis 10 contains what is commonly called the Table of Nations. This genealogical record lists 70 nations descended from the sons of Noah. The Israelites, and the descendants of Abraham generally, are not mentioned, although their common ancestor, Heber, is included in the list.

The genealogical record here is in the form of a clan list, which typically follows the father-son-grandson format—although exceptions to the rule and extended lists (such as we will later encounter with Israel’s clan lists) are not uncommon. The purpose of clan lists is to show affinities between related peoples. At the head of the list stands the common ancestor, in this case Noah. Under the common ancestor are listed the tribes, and under the tribes are listed the smaller clans. The further down the clan list one moves, the greater divide there is within the large family groups—but cultural and political affiliations between the members of the *smaller* family units are actually more pronounced. Thus, Japheth fathered Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech and Tiras. All of those peoples were related and shared certain *general* cultural and political affiliations. But Ashkenaz, Riphath and Togarmah, who were fathered by Gomer, are further down the list and therefore shared greater cultural and political affiliations than they did with those peoples descended from the other sons of Japheth.

Are these ancient historical lists of any importance to us today? While many of the nations recorded in the genealogy disappear from the scriptural record, some of them will *reappear* in the prophetic books—with a surprising number mentioned in connection with end-time events. God appears to refer to the nations of the world by these family names, and it is interesting to note that the end-time configuration of nations provided by the prophetic books shows the nations allied by their clan affiliations. Surprisingly, these prophecies show that the passage of around 4,000 years of history has done little to alter the basic pattern of international relations.

The Postdiluvian Rebellion (Genesis 11)**February 11**

When Noah and his family disembarked from the ark, God said, “Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth” (Genesis 9:1 KJV), and the words suggest that God intended the people to diffuse themselves widely over the land. When they came to Shinar, or Mesopotamia, the people made a fateful decision. They decided to gather together to build large cities, contrary to God’s original intent. “Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth” (11:4). The statement is revealing on several levels. It reveals that the express purpose for building the city and the tower was to *prevent* wide population dispersion. The design to build a tower (probably some type of ziggurat or pyramid) indicates that concentration of population would be achieved through highly organized governmental projects. History provides evidence of a centralization of religious authority as well. And the phrase “let us make a name for ourselves” is an idiomatic way of saying “let us get power over others.” Furthermore, the choice of a tower whose top is in the heavens may indicate a deliberate disbelief in God’s promise to not send another great flood, effectively calling God a liar. Thus, we see the formation of a political and religious power center, opposed to God’s will and using its power to dominate others. It appears that the leader of this effort was Nimrod, who built an empire from here (10:8-12).

Verse 5 tells us that God “came down” to see the city and the tower. Besides its literal meaning, when God is said to “come down” it is frequently a way of expressing impending judgment (compare Genesis 18:21; Exodus 3:8; 2 Samuel 22:10; Psalm 144:5; Isaiah 31:4; Jeremiah 21:13). It is a way of expressing the seriousness of the action as well as God’s personal involvement in the punishment. When God saw the work of the men He said, “Indeed, the people are one and they have all one language, and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them” (Genesis 11:6). Man had once again decided to use his intellect and energies to live contrary to God. The last century bore stark witness to what human beings working together can do. Without God, evil permeates—and among wonderful technological advances comes also the ability to destroy the world. But God is never out of options. To end this ungodly effort, and to accomplish His purpose of widely dispersing men over the face of the earth and preventing rapid technological development that would lead to weapons of mass destruction sooner than His time frame allowed for, God confounded the language of men. And thus the name of this place is Babel, the first Babylon of history. As an aside, notice that God said the people, though many, were *one*—a plurality in unity, just as *Elohim*, the Hebrew word for God, indicates a plurality in unity.

The Call of Abraham and God’s Promises (Genesis 12)**February 12**

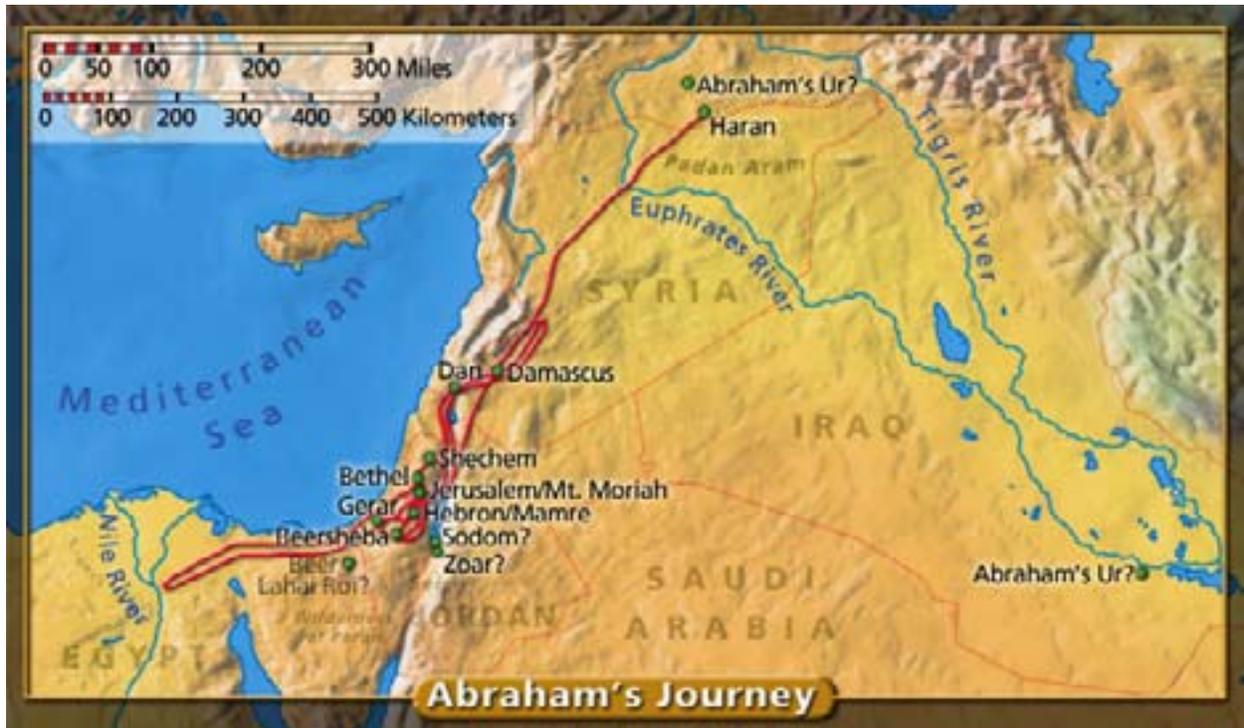
Genesis 12 presents the story of the call of Abraham, who was at this time known as Abram. God spoke to Abram, saying: “Get out of your country, from your kindred, and from your father’s house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (verses 1-3). From this one promise springs all the rest of the Scriptures. For this foundational covenant, called the Abrahamic Covenant, contains the seed from which grows all the history of Israel and the work of Christ. (Of course, it should be noted that part of this promise goes back to the time of Adam and Eve—the promised seed of the woman in Genesis 3:15 being a Messianic prophecy.)

God promised Abram physical and spiritual blessings—if he would leave his father’s house and go where God would lead him. From Abram would descend a great nation, a nation that would not only be great in population but also a blessed nation, itself a blessing to others, enjoying God’s protection. This aspect of the promise is entirely physical—the promise of national greatness. But the aspect of the promise contained in the statement “in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” was primarily *spiritual*, fulfilled in the Messiah, a descendant of Abram, through whom salvation would be offered to all men—as well as in the Bible itself eventually being produced and widely distributed through Abram’s offspring.

Related to this Abrahamic Covenant is the statement in verse 7, where God promises the land of Canaan to Abraham. But we should understand that the Abrahamic Covenant and this specific promise are actually separate and distinct, and that the fulfillment of one in a particular way at a particular time did not require the fulfillment of the other in the same way or at the same time. Yet ultimately, they will find fullest fulfillment together.

Surprisingly, this chapter that records Abram faithfully responding to God's call also shows him later employing a *faithless* strategy of deception that backfires. Here we see a pattern repeated throughout the Bible—that it is sometimes hard on its heroes. The Bible shows their weaknesses, mistakes and problems. God knows that we slip up, sin, stumble and make mistakes. Yet “He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” when we repent and admit our sins (1 John 1:9). God tells us that the examples recorded in the Scriptures “were written for our learning” and are examples for us (Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:11). While the Bible records the sins and problems of many men and women of faith, it also often shows the consequences of those sins—the problems they and others suffered as a result. It also shows that they were forgiven upon repentance and overcame, and that God considers them righteous—as He will consider us if we likewise repent and overcome.

Supplementary Reading: “Archaeology and Genesis: What Does the Record Show? (continued—Abraham to the End),” *The Good News*, Nov.–Dec. 1996.



Abraham's Sojourn: Born in **Ur**; Called out of **Haran**; Builds altar in **Shechem**; Builds altar in **Bethel**; Journeys to **Egypt**; Returns to **Bethel**; Dwells at **Mamre/Hebron**; Rescues Lot **north of Damascus**; Entertains angels at **Mamre/Hebron**; Dwells in **Gerar**; Makes covenant in **Beersheba**; Told to sacrifice Isaac on **Mt. Moriah**; Returns to **Beersheba**; Buries Sarah in **Hebron**; He is buried in **Hebron**.

Abram and Lot; Expansion of the Promises (Genesis 13)

February 13

The story of the separation of Lot from Abram gives us a concise and interesting picture of Abram and how he dealt with others, as well as how he trusted God. When he and Lot returned to Canaan from Egypt, both were rich and had large flocks and herds. But as pasturage and water were in short supply, with all their possessions it was inevitable that strife would result. When the trouble came, Abram took the lead in resolving the dispute. Though he could have made the decision unilaterally, being the elder, the patriarch of the clan and possibly Lot's foster father (since his real father had died years earlier, Genesis 11:28), he instead behaved himself with deference, care and entreaty. Not only was this an act of good will and humility, but it was also an act of faith—for Abram trusted that God would make good whatever would fall to him as a result of Lot's choice. Abram's motivation, faith and conduct are an example for all of us.

Lot's motivation, faith and conduct here are also an example for all of us—and, as the results would show, not the best example for us. Lot saw the richness of the well-watered Jordan River valley and chose to dwell among the cities of the plain—"toward" Sodom (verse 12, KJV). At the time he

simply made the best choice human reason would indicate. However, when we next meet Lot he is no longer dwelling “toward” Sodom but actually living *in* it (Genesis 14:12). Later we find him even sitting in the gate participating in that evil city’s government (19:1). Though a “righteous man” who was severely troubled by the depravity of the people of Sodom (2 Peter 2:7-8), he was nevertheless corrupted by it, to the point of offering his daughters to be sexually assaulted (Genesis 19:8) rather than trusting in God’s protection (although it is possible that this was a lying ploy, which still shows lack of trust in God). When we last see Lot, though delivered with his life and posterity, his life is in shambles. He has lost his possessions in Sodom’s destruction, he has lost at least two married daughters who remain behind (compare verses 12-15), he has lost his wife to the desire for Sodom instilled in her by living there (verse 26), and he has incestuously fathered children by both his remaining daughters (verse 30 ff.). The lesson is clear: Seeking our own paths without God’s guidance and immersing ourselves in a corrupt environment can gradually seduce us into the ways of the world and lead eventually to ruin.

After Abram and Lot separated, God appeared to Abram. He told Abram to look toward the four cardinal directions, surveying the land of Canaan. All that he could see, God assured him, would be given to him and his seed forever. In addition, God expanded His promises by telling Abram he would have vast numbers of descendants. It is probably significant that this incident occurs after Abram had expressed faith in God’s providence by giving Lot first choice as to where he would dwell and pasture his flocks.

Abram Rescues Lot, Tithes to Melchizedek (Genesis 14)

February 14

The first nine verses of this chapter are packed with the kind of detail historians crave. But as yet, none of it helps to conclusively identify the nine kings listed here in the surviving records we have of the city-states of Canaan and Mesopotamia.

This chapter, along with the previous one, is also interesting for the glimpse we are given of Abram’s life in Canaan. Abram was rich in flocks, herds and gold. He possessed a large household consisting of those persons whom he acquired, either by purchase or through voluntary association. But this chapter also shows Abram as allied with three Canaanite chieftains—Mamre, Eshcol and Aner—and Abram himself is able to field a fighting troop of 318 men. Abram also appears to be rather skilled in the art of warfare. While it may seem odd for this man of God to be so engaged, one should bear in mind that Canaan was not a place of pleasant pastures and relative safety. Bandits often roamed the hill country, the Negev was often raided from the south and east, and relations between the various city-states were sometimes uneasy. And Abram was right in the middle of this.

Indeed, the common picture many have today of Abram as a simple nomadic shepherd is incorrect. For in Genesis 23:6, he is identified as a “mighty prince” among the people of the land. Though he was certainly rich in flocks, we should see him more as a “merchant prince” leading a wealthy caravan. In fact, the places he chose to dwell, and that Isaac and Jacob chose after him, were important locations on trade routes. This being their true occupation is perhaps why Joseph had to later tell his family to state that they were shepherds in order to be segregated from the Egyptians (46:31-34). This would not have been a lie as it was technically correct—yet the term shepherds was by no means a full and apt description of what they were. Indeed, the implication seems to be that if they had not said they were shepherds, they would have been fully welcomed among Egyptian high society just as Abram had earlier been—enough so that his wife Sarah was able to be noticed by the princes of Pharaoh’s court (12:15). And Joseph didn’t want that.

Getting back to the account here, it is interesting to see Abraham’s approach concerning his wealth and military capability. After pursuing and defeating the confederacy headed by Chedorlaomer and rescuing Lot, Abram returned. Coming out to meet him were the king of Sodom and Melchizedek, the King of Salem (i.e., of Jerusalem or simply of Peace). The mention of bread and wine brought by Melchizedek has caused some to suggest that these transactions occurred around the time of Passover. It is interesting to note that, flush with victory, Abram had God uppermost in mind. To Melchizedek Abram gave a tithe, or tenth, of all he had taken in battle. To the king of Sodom Abram returned the remaining goods, refusing to take any payment lest Abram’s wealth be attributed to his battle victory instead of the graciousness of God.

Concerning tithing, the Bible doesn’t say whether any of Abram’s ancestors or contemporaries also practiced it. Yet secular history reveals it as quite prevalent in the ancient world. *The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary* states: “Just when and where the idea arose of making the *tenth* the rate

for paying tribute to rulers and of offering gifts as a religious duty cannot be determined. History reveals that it existed in Babylon in ancient times, also in Persia and Egypt, even in China. It is quite certain that Abraham knew of it when he migrated from Ur (Gen. 14:17-20)... By Abraham's day the giving of tithes had been recognized as a holy deed (cf. Heb. 7:4)." Indeed, the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* says that "the custom was almost universal in antiquity" (11th ed., vol. 26, "Tithes," p. 1019). For this godly custom to have been so widespread, it is reasonable to believe that God had earlier given instructions to mankind regarding it—perhaps as far back as Adam and Eve.

Consider then: Did Abram tithe to simply honor God with a popular religious custom of the day? Or did he understand tithing to be a divine *law* instituted by the Creator? God later said of him, "Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, *My commandments*, *My statutes*, and *My laws*" (Genesis 26:5). This disproves the widespread belief that the law of God didn't come into effect until 400 years later in Moses' day. For what *statutes* did Abraham keep? Interestingly, the practice of tithing is later listed as a statute of God (compare Leviticus 26:46; 27:30); therefore we would conclude that this was one of the statutes Abraham kept. Rather than tithing being something Abram came up with on his own or simply copied from pagan societies of his day, it is far more logical and scripturally consistent to conclude that God had revealed tithing as a sacred duty—a law to obey.

And what of Melchizedek? This chapter is the first of two Old Testament references to him. He is called King of Salem (which, Hebrews 7:2 points out, means King of Peace) and priest of the Most High God. In Psalm 110:4 the coming Messiah is said to be made Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek. In Hebrews, it is stated that Melchizedek is "without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life," that He "remains a priest continually" and that He still lives (Hebrews 7:3, 8). This description can fit no mere human being. Comparing all the scriptures that mention Melchizedek, He is revealed to be none other than the preincarnate Jesus Christ. (For more information about who and what Jesus was before His human birth, request or download our booklet *Who Is God?*)

Supplementary Reading: "Who Was Melchizedek?," *Who Is God?*, pp. 32-33; "Why Tithe in Today's World?," *What Does the Bible Teach About Tithing?*, pp. 3-4.

Standing on the Promises (Genesis 15)

February 15

Once again, the promises God made to Abraham are about to be expanded. This is a frequent pattern in Genesis—promise or covenant followed by expansion.

The events narrated here occurred some years after Abraham had come out of Haran and into Canaan in obedience to God's call. He had as yet no child, neither by Sarah nor by any other woman. Here he was an old man, years after God's promise was first given, and there was no sign of the fulfillment of that promise. But, as Paul wrote in the book of Romans, speaking of Abraham when he was even quite a bit older and at an age when he would be unexpected to be able to father children, "Not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead" (Romans 4:19). Abram had confidence that God would fulfill His word. For he walked by faith, not by sight. Nevertheless, the wait was difficult.

When God appeared to Abram in a vision and assured him of protection and reward, Abram reminded God that he had as yet no child, and that according to custom Abram's steward, Eliezer, would become his heir. God then took Abram outside into the night and showed him the stars, saying: "Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them.... So shall your descendants be" (Genesis 15:5). The magnitude of this promise can often be lost on us in our modern world, for man has so fouled the air with pollution and has so obscured the starry brilliance of the heavens with our city lights that the number of stars we can behold on any given night is often a paltry few. But go out into the desert, or up on a mountain, on a clear night and, with this scripture in mind, you will be astounded by what you behold. Imagine, then, how Abram felt. Though awestruck, no doubt, "Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness" (verse 6, NIV).

Supplementary Reading: "Abraham: God's Friend," *The Good News*, Jan.–Feb. 1996.

Slavery and the Promise of Deliverance (Genesis 15)

Feb. 15 Cont'd

God promised multitudinous descendants to Abram, but He also promised that they would be enslaved for a period of time before being delivered with great wealth. The period of 400 years mentioned in verse 13 is not the period of their slavery. Biblical chronology indicates that Israel was

enslaved for just over 200 years. The 400 years appear to date from Abraham's death to Israel's possession of the Promised Land (though there are other possibilities).

But why was there to be a delay in Israel's possessing the land and servitude to a foreign nation? One reason is expressly stated. God says that the iniquity of the Amorites, who dwelt in Canaan, was not yet full—meaning that God was extending mercy to them, allowing them time to repent. God deals justly with all people, and He often delays punishment until the situation shows no hope of betterment. But another reason for the delay and servitude was probably to condition Israel. If Israel had developed in the land, unmolested, they may have acquired a general disposition of rejecting any dealings with God whatsoever—"Who needs God if everything is fine," human reasoning says. But by allowing Israel to be enslaved, they would be humbled and willing to listen. Though they ultimately displeased God by rebelling against Him, they undoubtedly went further in serving Him than they otherwise would have. As God told Paul, in weakness we can be made strong (2 Corinthians 12:9; compare Hebrews 11:34). Additionally, if Israel would be taken out of slavery and made great, the credit for the greatness would more obviously be God's.

Sarai's "Solution" (Genesis 16)

February 16

The wait for the promised son was long and hard. Abram looked forward to the fulfillment of the promise and we can see that his thoughts were firmly fixed on it. But for Sarai the wait appears to have been the most difficult. She, like most women, wanted a child of her own, and the social stigma of barrenness only added to her sorrow. In such a condition, Abram and Sarai made a fateful mistake for which we are still paying the price.

No doubt Sarai longed for the fulfillment of the promise, just as Abram did. But with no fulfillment in sight, Sarai began to consider other options. Was not Hagar able to bear children? Did not God promise Abram a son without limiting Himself to providing the son through Sarai? Perhaps the promised son would come through Hagar. Besides, if it was not God's will, wouldn't He simply close up Hagar's womb? So goes human reasoning. Impatience produced the "solution" to the problem: Abram should go into Hagar and father children by her. That Abram offered no resistance to the idea seems to suggest that he, too, found the reasoning compelling.

This might strike us today as a very strange way to attempt to solve the problem. There is, however, more than meets the eye here—a cultural factor that would have provided a rationalization for Abram and Sarai. Dr. Eugene Merrill explains in his book *Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel*: "Certain peculiar actions of Abram and his wife in Genesis 15 and 16 require some attention to ancient Near Eastern custom and law, especially a few Hurrian practices attested in the Nuzi tablets [documents from northern Mesopotamia of the patriarchal age].... [An] example is Sarai's barrenness and the steps she took to ensure offspring in spite of it (Gen. 16:1-6). She simply offered her slave girl Hagar to Abram as a surrogate mother, and the child of that union, Ishmael, came to be regarded as the son of Abram and Sarai. This...is paralleled by Nuzi texts which describe the same remedy for a similar situation" (1987, pp. 38-39).

Yet Ishmael, despite cultural precedent, was clearly not Sarai's son—neither in her own eyes nor in the eyes of God—and trouble and heartache ensued within the family. Furthermore, Ishmael would ultimately become the father of many of the Arab peoples so that, even today, we still live with the tragic results of Sarai's solution—i.e., major facets of the perpetual Middle East conflict.

The lesson ought to be obvious. What would have happened if Sarai and Abram had simply waited for God to provide the solution? Perhaps generations of strife could have been avoided. The geopolitical scene today might be very different, with the ever-present threat of war much diminished. We must learn to live with what God gives us, trusting that if He has made a promise He will fulfill it at just the right time and in just the right way. Man cannot bring about the fulfillment of God's promises on his own. To attempt to do so is presumptuous and inevitably leads to misery. But to patiently wait for God to act, knowing that He *cannot* lie, builds faith and character, and avoids what could be generations of strife.

Supplementary Reading: "Sarah: A Story of Virtue," *The Good News*, Mar.–Apr. 1996

Circumcision; New Names; Future Greatness (Genesis 17)

February 17

Once again, the promises to Abram are expanded, this time to include a multitude of nations and kings. As a token of His covenant with Abram's descendants, God commanded circumcision. It is a visible sign in the flesh of every male Israelite that they are part of a family with whom God has a special relationship and for whom God has a special work. Every male is to be circumcised on the

eighth day of life. It is interesting to note that in male babies vitamin K—the blood clotting factor—rises sharply from birth and peaks on the eighth day, before declining to the normal level. While this could not have been known by Abram and the Israelites, it was perfectly well-known to God.

Genesis 17 also records the renaming of Abram and Sarai. Up to Genesis 16 the Scriptures always use the birth names *Abram*, which means “Exalted Father,” and *Sarai*, meaning “Princess.” But, here in Genesis 17, God bestows new names on them. *Abraham* means “Father of a Multitude” and *Sarah*, while still retaining the sense of “Princess,” seems to mean one of an even higher station (e.g., it is derived from the same word translated “queen” in Isaiah 49:23). Interestingly, both new names differ from Abram and Sarai by the addition of one letter in the Hebrew—the letter *He*, pronounced, like the English *H*, as a breath of air, which is often a symbol of God’s Spirit. Though there may be no significance to this, becoming new persons and circumcision can both picture spiritual conversion. In any event, whether Abraham and Sarah received the indwelling of God’s Spirit at this particular time or not, we do know for certain that they did receive it at some point (compare 1 Peter 1:11)—for they will be in the Kingdom of God, and only the converted have that honor (Romans 8:9, 11).

Also of interest in this chapter is the hint at future national greatness we are afforded here. While the primary national blessings were to come through Isaac, God promised to make of Ishmael a great nation also (Genesis 17:19-21; 21:18). Ishmael became the father of many of the Arab peoples. And the world has certainly seen a period of Arab greatness. American author Louis L’Amour described this period in his bestselling novel *The Walking Drum*, set in 12th-century Europe and Asia: “In the space of one hundred years following the death of Mohammed in 632, the Arabs had carried the sword of Islam from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean, holding at one time most of Spain, part of southern France, the isle of Sicily, all of North Africa and Egypt, all of Arabia, the Holy Land, Armenia, Persia, Afghanistan, and almost a third of India. The empire of the Arabs was larger than that of Alexander the Great or of Rome.... Under the *flush of greatness*...for more than five hundred years the Arabs carried the torch of civilization” (1984, pp. 171-172).

Consider, then, what that must mean for the descendants of Isaac. If Ishmael becoming a “great nation” meant an empire more vast than Rome’s, which preserved civilization through the Dark Ages of Europe, then think what must have been in store for the descendants of Isaac—who were to become *many* nations and inherit *far greater* blessings! Have the Jewish people ever been the recipients of such greatness? No. Even today, Arab national territory is far greater than the land of the modern state of Israel by a ratio of 540 to 1. Yet God’s amazing prophecies have been fulfilled—surprising as it may sound, through the modern descendants of Joseph in the form of the British Empire and the United States of America. You’ll find the entire amazing story spelled out in greater detail in our free booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*.

Supplementary Reading: “Promises to Abraham,” *Fundamental Beliefs of the United Church of God*, pp. 35-37; “Chapter 1: God’s Commitment to Abraham and His Descendants,” *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*, pp. 3-11.

A Lesson in Service (Genesis 18)

February 18

The sins of Sodom, Gomorrah and the other cities of the plain were great, and the cry against them had come to the ears of God. Now God “comes down” to deal with the matter. The story of God’s visit to Abraham also reveals much about the character of Abraham.

While Abraham sat in the shade of his tent, he saw three men approaching. Subsequent events show them to be the preincarnate Christ and two angels. It was the custom in those days that one had an obligation to treat well any visitor who happened upon one’s camp. Indeed, this custom prevails to this day among the nomadic Bedouin of the Middle East and was much in evidence in the early decades of the 20th century. To neglect to welcome and provide for a visitor was esteemed a great insult and a mark of a man of worthless character. So when Abraham, a 99-year old man, saw the men, “he ran from the tent door to meet them, and bowed himself to the ground” (verse 2).

In the opinion of one source: “The writer of Hebrews used this account to encourage hospitality to strangers, ‘for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels’ (Heb. 13:2). Abraham’s words *My Lord* suggest that he suspected the identity of the visitors, but perhaps he was not sure until later of the full significance of the event” (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on Genesis 18:2-3).

In fulfilling his social duty, though he may have been going above and beyond if he recognized his guests, it is, in any case, interesting to note what Abraham said as compared to what he actually

provided. He said: “Please let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. And I will bring [you] a morsel of bread” (verses 4-5). But notice what Abraham actually told Sarah to prepare: not just a little water and a morsel of bread but three measures of fine meal kneaded into dough and baked into cakes, a dressed young calf, butter and milk. That was a very sizable quantity of food—indeed, a veritable feast! From this the rabbis derive a simple lesson: promise little but deliver much.

Abraham Reasons with God (Genesis 18)

Feb. 18 Cont’d

The account of Abraham reasoning with God over the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah reveals much about both God and Abraham. As mentioned before, the phrase “come down” often indicates the serious nature of a personal intervention by God, usually in judgment. That God Himself would leave heaven and personally come to make an inspection shows His diligence in administering justice, as well as His close involvement with the affairs of man. And the fact that He was ready to repeal the sentence if He found only 10 righteous inhabitants shows His great mercy. Furthermore, that God would reveal His intentions to Abraham demonstrates that God desires interaction with His people. God is interested in *our* opinions and He is willing to reason with us. We too can talk to God in prayer. Jesus said, “Ask, and it will be given to you” (Matthew 7:7). God hears and answers our prayers. He even changes His plans at times in response to our prayers. Interestingly, God disclosing His business to Abraham, who will later be called a prophet (Genesis 20:7), brings to mind Amos 3:7, which states, “Surely the Lord GOD does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servant the prophets.”

We also see reflected in the account something of the nature and character of Abraham—that he could be bold toward God, generous to his guests and merciful toward even the sinful inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah.

The Sins of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19)

February 19

Sodom has clearly been a corrupting influence upon Lot and his family. In order to save his unknown guests, Lot offers to bring his unmarried daughters out to the threatening mob. Of course, it is possible that this was a ploy to give his guests a chance to escape. Nevertheless, even drawing such attention to his daughters put them at grave risk. Either way, it is clear that Lot was not putting his trust in God. Of interest, it may be noticed that Lot apparently had at least two other daughters who were married (verse 14). Yet being under the authority of their scoffing husbands, they do not escape the city’s destruction.

As for the utter depravity of Sodom and Gomorrah, as well as the other cities of the plain, it was fully confirmed by the visit of the two angels. When confronted with the phrase “Sodom and Gomorrah,” most identify their sin as being homosexuality. But that was not their only grievous sin. In Ezekiel 16 God says that their sins included “pride, fullness of food, and abundance of idleness; [and] neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. And they were haughty, and committed abomination before Me” (verses 49-50). Considering Abraham’s example of humility and diligence in care of the visitors he received in Genesis 18, we can see from Ezekiel’s condemnation that Sodom and Gomorrah had transgressed the basic boundaries of morality and social custom. Their entire lifestyle was one of self-exaltation and indulgence, indifference to others and social injustice.

Consider for a moment our modern societies. Never have we been wealthier, more secure in our daily needs, with so vast an array of leisure options. But, at the same time, we are plagued with poverty, homelessness, corrupt politicians, unjust laws, courts more concerned with procedure and the rights of criminals than with justice, and social systems and customs that violate God’s instructions. Surprising as it may sound, even many churches’ popular religious practices are nothing more than a recycling of ancient pagan customs God repeatedly condemns in the Scriptures. While God desires for mankind to repent—to humbly turn to Him and begin living His way of life—it will be necessary that He “come down” again in judgment for that to occur on a broad scale. Yet God is slow to anger and abundant in mercy—and for that we should be truly thankful.

Abraham’s Dealing with Abimelech (Genesis 20)

February 20

In this chapter we find the second incident in which Abraham identifies Sarah as his sister. The first time was the incident with the Egyptian pharaoh in Genesis 12. Now, in Genesis 20, he does the same thing with another ruler, Abimelech. While in neither case was this a complete lie, as Sarah was his half-sister, the intent was nevertheless one of outright deception. Interestingly, the strategy

backfires in both circumstances. Repeating the same mistake is not unusual for any of us. Sometimes it takes multiple times before we learn our lesson. And like everyone else, Abraham and Sarah had to grow in faith. Sometimes we think that our own “prudence” is compatible with faith when, in fact, it is not. Perhaps this is what was behind the action of Abraham and Sarah. In any event, these incidents affirm to us that God will protect His people in spite of our weaknesses or the unforeseen twists of circumstance. We all make mistakes or wrong choices. In some cases, there may be consequences. But ultimately, God will work things out for our good (Romans 8:28).

The Birth of Isaac (Genesis 21)

February 21

Finally, after 25 years, God fulfilled His promise to provide a son and heir to Abraham and Sarah! The wait had been difficult, sometimes dispiriting, sometimes frustrating. But, true to His word, God did just as He promised—and just *when* He promised the previous year (18:10, 14).

But the birth of the promised son did not lead to peace and joy. Instead, the fruit of Abraham and Sarah’s attempt to fulfill God’s promise through Hagar was now beginning to be borne. Strife rent the household of Abraham, with Sarah seeking to ensure Isaac’s preeminence and resenting Abraham’s love for Ishmael, his other son. Although the narrative presents the entire transaction in a relatively brief space, it is likely that the tensions in the household had been building for quite some time. Ishmael’s ill treatment of Isaac was merely the straw that broke the camel’s back.

Abraham was distressed by the entire affair. He truly loved Ishmael (17:18) and, given God’s pointed mention of Hagar in 21:12, Abraham may have had tender feelings toward her. He probably tried everything he could to keep peace in the house. But it was to no avail. In this circumstance, God told Abraham to heed the words of Sarah. Whether or not Sarah had a right to feel and behave as she did, God’s plan necessitated the separation of Ishmael from the household.

In requiring the separation, however, God reassured Abraham that Ishmael would be blessed, “because he is your seed” (verse 13). In other words, although God had not obligated Himself to provide for Ishmael, nor bless him, God would graciously bless Ishmael because God loved Abraham and Abraham loved Ishmael. God’s grace sometimes falls on others because of His love toward His people. When we become His children, God’s love and affection is extended to more than simply ourselves. Because He loves us and we love others, God, for our sake, sometimes extends His protection and blessing to those we love. This is born out explicitly in 1 Corinthians 7:14, where Paul tells us that an unbelieving spouse is sanctified by the believer—an extension of God’s love toward us. So, though we are separated from the world by the plan and call of God, nevertheless we are given the sure knowledge that *because* of our separation to God, our unconverted loved ones will often share in the overflow of God’s grace.

We should also stress in this context the kinds of problems that can arise whenever we depart from God’s pattern for marriage—that a man and woman unite for life in a loving monogamous relationship (Matthew 19:5-6). As we see from the example of Abraham, Sarah and Hagar—here in Genesis 21 and earlier in chapter 16—relationships contrary to this pattern lead to heartache, jealousy, bitterness and misery. We see many of the same problems again when we come to the life of Abraham’s grandson Jacob. These stark examples should remind us of the kinds of consequences we saddle ourselves and others with when we decide to ignore God’s laws and instructions.

The Offering of Isaac (Genesis 22)

February 22

The offering of Isaac is one of the best-known stories of the Bible. In fact, it has become synonymous with faith and obedience.

Why would God need to test Abraham? The answer is implied in verse 12: “For now I know that you fear God.” As mentioned in one of our previous readings, Genesis weaves together several recurring themes. Two of those themes are the sovereignty of God and our submission to Him. Did Abraham *really* have a proper fear of God—respect for who God was, His divine power and awesome purpose? Did he really believe and trust in God from his innermost being? Or was Abraham merely obedient because some instant gratification was in it for him? Would Abraham obey when it appeared greatly to his present disadvantage to do so? Obedience, of and by itself, is not necessarily a sign of love or submission. One can obey out of terror or pursuit of material gain. How would God know? A test was required.

What must Abraham have been thinking? He didn’t delay to obey (he rose *early* the next morning), but as he and Isaac journeyed to Moriah his mind was not on the weather. Hebrews 11:17-19 tells us what Abraham was thinking: “By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and

he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, that in Isaac shall thy seed be called: accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure" (KJV). Abraham *accounted* that God was able to raise Isaac from the dead in order to fulfill His promise that Abraham's primary line of descent would be through Isaac—rather than through any of Abraham's other children. The Greek word translated "accounting" signifies exactly what it appears to mean—to add up. Abraham was adding up the situation as he proceeded to Moriah. He was considering God's promise, God's integrity, God's character—adding up all the facts and coming to the conclusion that God would have to resurrect Isaac. Abraham's faith was being built by a sober consideration of *who God was!*

Abraham's confidence can even be seen in Genesis 22. He tells his servants, "Stay here with the donkey, the lad and I will go yonder and worship, *and WE will come back to you*" (verse 5)—that is, he told them that he *and* Isaac would return. Indeed, Abraham truly believed it. His willingness to put the knife to Isaac's throat proved both his obedience and his faith, while proving also that he had an intelligent faith and a submission to God's sovereignty *not* based on a pursuit of selfish advantage.

But Abraham was not the only one being tested. It seems that Isaac, too, was being tested. Would he submit to his father's apparently crazy intentions? Would he struggle against his father? Isaac's response was simple submission. There is not a hint of resistance given, not a contrary word spoken. Isaac foreshadows the unquestioned obedience and willing submission of Christ to God. Jesus never resisted His Father's will. Though His death would be humiliating and painful in the extreme, Jesus was committed to doing his Father's will—"Thy will be done" (Matthew 26:39, 42)

But Abraham and Isaac weren't the only ones being tested. God was also allowing Abraham to put *Him* to the test. Would God become a breaker of His own word? Abraham had known God for more than 30 years. He had left his family and kindred for God. He had kept God's laws, statutes and judgments. He had observed God's providence in his life. He had spoken directly with Him on several occasions. He had reasoned with God over Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham knew God—or so he thought. Now Abraham added up the situation. For three days Abraham pondered what he had been asked to do, and *who* had asked him to do it. For three days the mental calculations were performed. The bottom line: If God is God, He *would* keep His promise. *How* the promise would be kept was another matter. But in the end, Abraham really would *know* God—and that God would always keep His word.

The Death of Sarah (Genesis 23)

February 23

Sarah dies at 127 years of age. She had lived to see her beloved Isaac reach his 37th birthday. Abraham must now provide a burial place for his wife. The transactions recorded in this chapter are insightful for their picturesque detail and cultural accuracy.

At one time various scholars declared the Hittites (descendants of Heth, mentioned in Genesis 10:15) to be fiction because archaeologists and historians could find no trace of them outside the Bible. Thus, in their reasoning, the Bible was also a fiction. But then came revolutionary archaeological finds that conclusively proved the Hittites were not imaginary but instead ruled a large and powerful empire centered in modern-day Turkey but with extensive holdings in upper Mesopotamia, down the eastern Mediterranean coast and even in Egypt for a time. Much of the archaeological data on the Hittites comes from voluminous cuneiform tablets detailing business transactions. Interestingly, those tablets show that Hittite title deeds to land made particular mention of the number of trees on the property, just as recorded in verse 17—a small detail that provides startling confirmation of the accuracy of the Genesis record.

The actions and dialogue recorded between Abraham and the Hittites provide a marvelous picture not only of Abraham's personal comportment but also of the complex rules of approach common to much of Middle Eastern culture. Abraham calls himself a stranger and sojourner when he addresses the council of the sons of Heth. The word translated stranger is *ger*. The *ger* was similar to what we call a resident alien, and it carried the idea of submissive dependency upon the host. That Abraham would so characterize himself before a council who knew him to be a "mighty prince among us" (verse 6) shows not only his humility but also the cultural practice of self-humiliation. This self-humiliation is reinforced by Abraham twice bowing himself before the people.

The dialogue between Abraham and Ephron also preserves the very strong Middle Eastern flavor of the whole transaction. Abraham requested the council of the sons of Heth to "intercede for me" (as the Hebrew literally says) with Ephron, at once showing deference and submission befitting his

status as a *ger*. Ephron, in fact, was already sitting before Abraham (for verse 10 should be translated, “And Ephron *sat* among the sons of Heth”), but to show his deference Abraham does not directly address him. Now the haggling for a price begins.

Although the conversation does not appear to be haggling, it actually is—only it is done in such a way as to cause each party to the negotiation, Abraham and Ephron, to appear to be righteous and generous. Ephron, with great show, implores Abraham to take the land without payment, an offer that he fully expects Abraham to politely refuse. Indeed, according to the culture of the day, Abraham *had* to refuse. It should be noted here, though, that Abraham had only asked for the cave at the end of Ephron’s field. Ephron’s response meant that if Abraham wanted the cave, he was going to have to buy the whole field. In reply, Abraham offers to buy the field, but he does not name a price—for to do so would have transgressed proper etiquette by putting Ephron in the awkward position of appearing to put the bite on a mourning man if the price were not to his liking. Ephron then replies, again with an award-winning display of “magnanimity,” naming as expected a price for the land that was somewhat excessive but characterizing it as an inconsiderable sum.

Normally, Abraham’s next move would be to “generously” offer a lower amount, leading Ephron to come down on his price. The haggling would continue until a satisfactory deal was struck. But in this circumstance, Abraham simply pays the first price Ephron names. Perhaps he wanted all to witness that his acquiring of this property was more than fair. No doubt, he wanted the land right away—and that there be no question about ownership. With the negotiations ended, Abraham acquires the property for a burial place. Remarkably, with all that God promised Abraham, this was the only piece of land the Bible records him ever personally owning during his lifetime.

A Wife for Isaac (Genesis 24)

February 24

Three years have passed since the death of Sarah. Abraham is now 140 years old; Isaac is 40. Feeling his age, and now more sensible that his own time may be short, Abraham begins the process of acquiring a wife for his son. Arranged marriages have become a thing of the past in most, though not all, modern cultures. But in Abraham’s day one of the duties of a father was to ensure that a proper mate was selected for his children, especially his sons.

The selection of a wife for a son, especially the firstborn and heir to the position of head of the family, was a serious undertaking. The right woman had to be selected, ensuring the continued stability and prosperity of the family. In some cases the father himself negotiated the purchase of a bride, but in other cases the services of an intermediary (called a *malach*, angel or messenger, in Hebrew) were employed. Abraham is now old, so he entrusts the responsibility to the steward of his household, here identified as the “the oldest servant of his house, who ruled over all that he had” (verse 2). Most likely this is Eliezer, whom Abraham mentioned in Genesis 15:2-3 as his heir before he fathered children—although it is possible that Eliezer has died by this point. In any case, Abraham imposes a most solemn oath upon his servant, instructing him to return to Abraham’s country and kindred in the city of Nahor in northern Mesopotamia, and from them to select a wife. He is strictly forbidden to take Isaac with him.

There are many parallels between the selection of Isaac’s wife and the selection of a wife for Jesus Christ, His wife meaning the Church (see Ephesians 5:22-33). Abraham can be seen as a type of the Father, being himself later called the father of the faithful (Romans 4:16). Isaac is a type of Christ, a son born according to promise, whose birth was announced beforehand, and whose conception was miraculous. The servant is a type of the role of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, if the servant was Eliezer, the type is even more striking since his name means “God his help” and God’s Spirit is called the Helper (as the Greek word *parakletos* may be legitimately translated in John 14–16). Of course, all analogies break down at some point—and it certainly does here in the fact that the Holy Spirit is not a person nor an independent agent capable of decision-making on its own. (To learn more, see our free booklet *Who Is God?*) Still, the analogy appears valid to a point considering that Jesus *personified* the Holy Spirit in referring to it as a *parakletos* (in essence, a personal helper or court advocate).

Thus we have the Father sending His Spirit to select out and prepare a Bride for His Son. The Bride receives gifts from this agent of the Father (Ephesians 4:8, Romans 11:29, 1 Corinthians 12), agrees to marry one she has never seen (1 Peter 1:8), undertakes a journey with that agent (the journey of this life with the Spirit as a guide), is brought to the Son (Revelation 19), and takes up

residence in the tent of Sarah (whose name means “Princess”) where the marriage is consummated (which is a type of spiritual union—1 Corinthians 6:16-17).

It should also be mentioned that God’s ministers (servants) play a role in bringing Christ’s bride to Christ. As the apostle Paul wrote to the Church: “For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ” (2 Corinthians 11:2). Through His ministry God calls people to enter into a relationship with Christ, and through His ministry He also provides the gifts of help and instruction to those who respond.

From Abraham to Jacob (Genesis 25)

February 25

This chapter presents a rapid transition from Abraham to Isaac, whose life will be presented very quickly and with little detail. The narrative of Genesis is dominated by Abraham, Jacob and Joseph, with Isaac’s history serving as a brief interlude between the lives of Abraham and Jacob. In fact, the majority of the narrative concerning Isaac serves mainly as a prelude to the life of Jacob. For this reason some have called Isaac a shadowy figure.

The chapter begins with a list of Abraham’s sons and descendants by a later wife, Keturah. The descendants of many of these sons have apparently become peoples of Eastern Europe and the Middle East. Then follows the list for the descendants of Ishmael; most of these peoples live in various countries of the Middle East. The list for Isaac begins in verse 19 and moves directly into a narrative about the birth of Isaac’s sons, Esau and Jacob. As can be seen, the purpose of the chapter is to distinguish between the sons of Abraham, with the story line being passed along through Isaac to the father of the Israelites, Jacob. Comparing patriarchal ages, it is interesting to note that in spite of the order of verses, Abraham’s life overlapped that of Esau and Jacob by about 14 years (compare Hebrews 11:9).

The Genesis 25 narrative is continued by relating the events surrounding the births of Esau and Jacob. The fundamental theme in the narrative of these two sons is that of competition for supremacy. Even in the womb of their mother, Esau and Jacob struggled—and this would be continued throughout their lives and on into the histories of the nations descended from them.

It is interesting to note that Esau is described as a “skillful hunter, a man of the field,” while Jacob is called a “mild man, dwelling in tents” (verse 27). These descriptions are intended to draw a maximum contrast between the two brothers. The mention of Jacob dwelling in tents is intended to show him to be a civilized and more refined person than his elder brother. That Jacob dwelt in tents, whereas his brother was a hunter in the field, also seems to imply that he showed more interest in the family’s mercantile and herding business. Moreover, the word translated “mild” (verse 27) is the Hebrew *tam*, which is normally translated “blameless.” Jacob was a blameless man—blameless as far as the letter of the law went. But Jacob was also a *cunning* man, one who would *manipulate* people and events in order to obtain what he wanted. This character trait would cause him years of grief before it was rooted out of him—before he became truly blameless in letter and spirit.

The purchase of a birthright has been documented in several contracts of the ancient Hurrian people, and thus Jacob’s actions can be seen in the light of cultural precedent. That Esau would so lightly esteem his birthright is just another story element showing the great contrast between the two brothers. At least Jacob rightly appreciated its great value—and his dealings with Esau show him to be the more business-savvy of the two brothers. The Scripture tells us that Esau, in connection with the sale of his birthright, was a *profane* person (Hebrews 12:16), and Paul also makes use of the phrase “whose god is their belly” (Philippians 3:19) when describing those who set their hearts and minds on earthly things—an interesting phrase given Esau’s coveting a mere bowl of stew. The intent is to get us to understand that man often forfeits spiritual realities for the temporary pleasures of physical things, and that such misordered priorities and behavior render a person profane and indicates who that person’s god truly is. The result in such cases is the loss of the spiritual reality, and the inheritance of a curse rather than a blessing.

Isaac and the Philistines (Genesis 26)

February 26

As in the days of Abraham, the land of Canaan experienced another drought and famine—and, having the example of his father before him, Isaac journeyed south with the probable intent of going into Egypt where food would be more likely available, that country being sustained by the annual inundation of the Nile. His journey took him to the southern Philistine city of Gerar, whose king bore the hereditary title Abimelech (meaning “Father King” or “My Father Is King”). That several kings bore the title of Abimelech is amply proven by archaeological discoveries.

Verse 2 records that God told Isaac, “Do not go down to Egypt; live in the land of which I shall tell you.” This implies that God generally directed Isaac’s movements, for if God had merely wanted Isaac to remain in Canaan, He would have simply said, “Live in the land,” omitting “of which I shall tell you.” The latter phrase implies continued guidance. This is interesting because we are told that Abraham, although going into Canaan, went “not knowing where he was going” (Hebrews 11:8), and that God had said, “Get out of your country...to a land that I will show you” (Genesis 12:1), implying that although Abraham knew he was heading toward Canaan, he did not know whether he would remain there or if God would lead him elsewhere. Isaac’s movement toward Egypt was stopped by God’s directly intervening to guide his movements within Canaan. For the moment, God gave no further direction than to remain in the land of Canaan (verse 3).

Notice also that in both Genesis 12 and 26 we have the repeated pattern of God commanding his servant (Abraham or Isaac, respectively) to go to a land that He would show him, followed immediately by a giving or reaffirming of what has come to be called the Abrahamic Covenant. Genesis contains several examples of this kind of couplet—as you read through the book, you should keep your eyes open for them. One of the couplets is Abraham and Isaac’s denial of their wives, in each case to a king titled Abimelech (Abraham also did so to Pharaoh, Genesis 12). These couplets have led some to suggest that the book of Genesis was stitched together from several different and contradictory traditions—in this case, one tradition having Abraham denying his wife, and another tradition having Isaac denying his wife. The truth is that there are no contradicting traditions. Abraham and Isaac both did the same things, the son imitating the father, perhaps for the same reasons.

Though the incidents with Abraham occurred before Isaac was born, Isaac probably heard about them, perhaps viewing such an approach as acceptable. In Isaac’s case, however, he did not have his father’s excuse that his wife actually *was* his sister. So this was blatantly a lie (although it could perhaps be argued that a close relative could be called a sister). In any case, this was clearly wrong and illustrates the fact that a bad example can go a long way.

Still, despite Isaac’s problems, he was a man who, like all of us, was growing in faith. Indeed, his is a tremendous example of perseverance. God greatly blessed him (26:12-14). But enemies tried to thwart him, filling in wells that his father’s servants had dug. Isaac’s answer: dig *new* wells. When the same enemies then quarreled with him over a new well, he dug another well, and then another, and then another. Country singer Paul Overstreet actually wrote a song inspired by all of this called “Dig Another Well.” It talks about the devil thwarting our efforts—stopping up our wells—and then says, “When I go out for my morning drink, and get a dipper full of dirt, my heart does sink, but I think of old Ike and I have to grin—God blessed me once and He can do it again.” And the song’s advice to those facing such circumstances: “Just pick up your shovel, and dig another well.”

Jacob’s Deception (Genesis 27:1–28:5)

February 27

This chapter contains the well-known story of Jacob’s deception of his father Isaac. It is important to note the elements of the story, and to recall Jacob’s previously cunning acquisition of the birthright, for Jacob is here sowing very bad seed that would yield a bitter crop in due time. There is a real law of cause and effect operating not only in the physical universe but also in the moral universe. What you sow, that you shall reap (Galatians 6:7).

Recall that Jacob obtained the birthright through a cunning business transaction. Later, however, Jacob meets his match when he becomes entangled with the even more cunning Laban, who outwits or takes advantage of Jacob at every turn for the better part of 20 years. Here, Jacob deceives his blind father with a slain goat and a special coat. Later, Jacob is deceived by Laban when he is “blinded” by the darkness of his wedding tent, and by his own sons who counterfeit the death of Jacob’s beloved Joseph by using the blood of a slain goat and Joseph’s special coat. Indeed, for more than 20 years, Jacob will believe the terrible lie concocted by his own sons—that his dearly loved son is dead. Notice also Rebekah’s fateful words: “Let your curse be on me.” Indeed, she *would* be cursed—for just as Isaac could not see his son, so Rebekah would never again see her beloved Jacob after he left for Padan Aram. For before Jacob’s return some 20 years later, Rebekah would die.

Beware: Reaping what you sow is a very real spiritual principle. And just as God did not completely remove the bitterness of the crop Jacob was to reap—even though Jacob finally repented and became converted—so God will not completely remove the bitterness of the crop *you* sow. The spiritual effects of your bad actions may be forgiven, but in the flesh there will still be consequences.

“Behold...the goodness and severity of God” (Romans 11:22, KJV). Just as God allowed Jacob to reap hardship and live a bitter life in order to help purge his character, so God will do with *you* in many respects. God is *not* mocked. Sow good seed—and reap the same. Sow bad seed—and reap the same as well!

After Jacob obtained the blessing by deception, Isaac and Rebekah sent him to Padan Aram, primarily to get him away from the wrathful Esau, but also to find him a wife from one of the daughters of Laban, Rebekah’s brother.

Jacob’s Vision at Bethel (Genesis 28:6-22)

February 28

In sending Jacob away, Isaac had sternly forbidden him to marry a Canaanite woman. Overhearing this, Esau resolved to find a wife more pleasing to his father—apparently still desiring to somehow get into the good favor of his father that he might thereby receive a better blessing. So Esau took a third wife from the daughters of Ishmael. But, as Esau was to learn, there was no way for Isaac to change his mind about the blessing (Hebrews 12:17)—Isaac knew the events had been *allowed* by God and he had to live in submission to God’s sovereign choice.

Journeying to Haran, Jacob stopped in the place called Luz, later renamed Bethel. There Jacob slept on the ground with a stone at his head (Genesis 28:11). In his sleep he dreamed, and in his dream God assured Jacob that He would be with him and return him to Canaan. The Abrahamic Covenant, moreover, was confirmed to Jacob. When Jacob awoke, he took the stone at which his head rested and anointed it, setting it up for a “pillar” or sacred stone. It appears that Jacob took this stone with him on his journeys, especially since he mentions the stone in the context of returning to Isaac (verses 20-22), apparently set it up and anointed it again in Bethel later (35:14-15), and still later, at the end of his life, he seems to have prophesied that it would be with the descendants of Joseph in the end time (49:24). If Jacob did take the stone with him, as would be likely, there would have been a physical, typical stone going with Jacob, paralleling the spiritual, antitypical Stone (i.e., God) who had promised that He would be with Jacob and not leave him (28:15).

Jacob also promised that if God would return him to his father Isaac, then God would be Jacob’s God and Jacob would faithfully tithe. These statements appear perplexing, but a careful attention to the development of Jacob’s character would seem to resolve the apparent difficulty. Jacob surely knew of God. Isaac had never worshiped any other but God, and he had learned this from Abraham. But it appears that Jacob, although certainly worshiping God, likely did so mainly because he believed it to be materially advantageous. Jacob, as we’ve seen, had a grasping personality; he was someone who used others to further his own ends, and perhaps God was no different to him. Jacob, it appears, served God for selfish advantage. The story of Jacob will show that over time Jacob was transformed from being a manipulator into being one who sought righteousness through his actions, and finally into one who became wholly submissive to God and served God out of love and devotion. Jacob’s statement that God would be his God is another way of saying that Jacob would rely on Him alone; his promise to tithe is another way of honoring God by recognizing His sovereign lordship. Thus, the promises essentially boil down to exclusive devotion to God.

In many ways, Jacob is every man. Or, to be more precise, every man is like Jacob. We all start out grasping, self-oriented, concerned with our needs. As we grow, we become less self-centered and more motivated by principle. But as we become mature, we learn to love God and act out of devotion to Him. We must learn to live with God, and along the way our character is changed, shaped and molded, going through various phases as we become more and more like God Himself. For this reason, the character development of Jacob is one of the most interesting studies of the book of Genesis.