The Book of Genesis.

Section 1 of 2, (Gen 1-24).

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PREFACE

Can we imagine a God of infinite glory and dignity who never had a beginning? Can we understand His existing from eternity, yet having no created universe over which to exercise authority? As to these things there are problems that our finite minds can never hope to penetrate. Genesis says nothing about them, but opens with the sublime declaration, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” This is written for the sake of mankind, but God does not have to explain Himself to us.

The writer of Genesis, who was no doubt Moses (Luke 24:27) could not get his information from anyone but God. People have supposed that he gathered material for this book from other human sources, but this is settled by 2 Timothy 3:16: “All scripture is given by inspiration of God.” Humans have imagined all kinds of silly answers to the question of origins, but none of these answers comes near to the majestic dignity and truth of what God has revealed in the book of Genesis.

Genesis, being the book of beginnings, has been called the seed plot of the Bible. It contains in admirable seed form all the truths that are later developed throughout scripture. Here is seen the beautiful simplicity of early life on earth before creation was so greatly marred by the complications that sin has introduced. Genesis symbolizes the life-giving work of God begun in a soul — new birth — with promise of fruit to come. The book specially revolves around the lives of seven outstanding patriarchs — Adam, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph.

Genesis 1

THE FIRST DAY: LIGHT INTRODUCED (vv. 1-5)

In our human nature is a thirst to know about origins. God has given us this nature and God supplies the answer to our desire simply and decisively in the first statement of His own revelation to mankind. He goes no further back than to the beginning of the history of the created heavens and earth. Anyone who has faith understands this, “that the worlds were formed by the word of God” (Heb. 11:3). Some may question and reason as to **how** God could create so tremendous a universe, but faith simply believes what the word of God says, “He spoke, and it was done, He commanded, and it stood fast” (Ps. 33:9).

This was the beginning of God's activity in creation. John 1:1 also uses the expression, “In the beginning,” but does not speak of **what was done**, rather that “In the beginning **was** the Word.” Christ, the Word of God, had no beginning: He **was** in the beginning; so that verse 2 declares, “all things came into being by Him” (NASB).

Verse 1 stands alone in its solitary grandeur. We have no means of telling how long a time intervened between verses 1 and 2. Verse 2 tell us the earth was “waste and empty” (JND trans.), but Isaiah 45:18 declares, “not as a waste did He create it” (JND). Some have sought to prove that the earth became a waste at the time of Satan's fall, but though it might be true, scripture does not clearly state this. When it became waste, or how long it remained in that state, we do not know. the fact is clear that something took place to cause this desolation. In a similar way, though Adam was created upright, his fall brought ruin into his moral nature. “Darkness was upon the face of the deep” describes man's fallen condition too, just as it describes the condition of a desolate creation, all covered with water, a state of instability and restlessness.

Then the Spirit of God intervened, moving upon the face of the waters. This Hebrew verb indicates a continued movement. In conjunction with this movement, God's word accomplishes immediate results. He says, “Let there be light.” Light is not merely the result of one act of movement, but a movement that is constantly sustained, for we are taught that light travels at the rate of 186,000 miles per second.

Sir Herbert Spencer claimed that there are five observable elements in the universe. He was an unbeliever, yet these same five are plainly seen in the first two verses of God's word: (1) Time: “in the beginning;” (2) Force: “God created;” (3) Space: “the heavens;” (4) Matter: “the earth;” and (5) Motion: “The Spirit of God moved.”

God did not say, “Let darkness be removed,” but “Let there be light.” The positive radiance of light dispels the darkness. So also the light of God entering one's soul dispels his moral and spiritual darkness. “God saw the light, that it was good.” This is surely typical of the spiritual light of which John's Gospel and his first epistle have so much to say. Therefore the movement of the Spirit of God, together with God's spoken word, indicates the first working of God in the awakening of a sinner when in a desolate, restless state. Then God divided the light from the darkness. Thus we know that there was light before the sun was set in its place to rule over the day (vv. 14-18). Spiritually this reminds us that though light has entered the soul of every believer, there will still be night experiences because the fleshly nature is still in us, and its very character is darkness.

“And there was evening and there was morning, one day” (NASB) This is said of all six days of God's work in bringing order out of desolation, indicating clearly that these were literal days. The things introduced each day were done immediately when God spoke, though they are typical of His dealings in souls personally, and also typical of succeeding dispensations of God through the ages. This first day typifies the first of the ages, the dispensation of conscience as well as the light of creation and of promise. This began with Adam's fall and ended with the flood in Noah's time. Having the knowledge of good and evil together with a conscience that warned him against doing evil, man has proven that his conscience will not preserve him from evil. He will, and has, defiantly ignored his conscience as well as ignoring God's testimony in creation and in His promise to men (Gen. 3:15).

THE SECOND DAY: THE FIRMAMENT (vv. 6-8)

Now God speaks to introduce a firmament to divide waters from waters (vv. 6-7), those waters under the firmament from those above. He called the firmament heaven. This heaven is plainly the atmospheric heaven, and the waters above are no doubt those contained in the clouds. They are fresh, pure waters: those beneath are salty, unfit for human consumption. If the first day symbolizes God's beginning His work in a soul by new birth, the second day illustrates the fact that one is caused to look up to recognize that true blessing comes from above, and therefore that authority also is from above. “The heavens do rule” (Dan. 4:26). How important for the believer to learn early that he is to be in subjection to the authority of the Lord Jesus. If all below seems to be a watery waste with no order, yet in being refreshed by the pure water of God's word from above in true subjection to the Lord Jesus, the believer's life may be greatly changed from disorder into calm, orderly obedience, even when surrounded by the swelling seas of the world's confusion.

The second day also compares with the second age of God's dealings with man, the dispensation of human government, beginning with Noah's being given instructions as to how to govern (Gen. 9), though he failed in properly governing himself. This has proven to be the main great problem with every government in the hands of men. The end of that age is seen in the tower of Babel, when men were determined to wrest all government out of the hand of God and rule independently of Him.

THE THIRD DAY: WATERS DIVIDED AND EARTH PRODUCING

On the third day (vv. 9-13) God speaks twice in accomplishing two distinct results. First He commands the waters under the heaven to be gathered together unto one place, allowing the dry land to appear. It has been observed that all the seas of the world are connected, while all the land is not. Moses could never have known this apart from God's revealing it to him. In order for the dry land to appear it would have to be raised up above the level of the water. Some land remains covered by great depths of water, for the dry land on this planet occupies less than one-third of its surface.

The land speaks of that which is solid and stable in contrast to the unstable mass of the waters of the oceans. The heaving waters speak of the flesh in its unstable vanity, whether the flesh in unbelievers or in believers. Similarly, Revelation 17:15 speaks of the waters as “peoples, multitudes, nations and tongues,” where the flesh is seen in all its constant turmoil and disorder. These are the waters of the seas in contrast to the waters from above, the rain that signifies the blessing of God by His word (Isa. 55:10-11). This separation of earth from the waters God saw to be good.

God speaks the second time on the third day to command the earth to “bring forth grass, the herb that yields seed, and the fruit tree that yields fruit according to its kind, whose seed is in itself.” This clearly settles any objection that the tree could not be there until the seed was planted. If God had wanted to create the seed first, He could easily have done so. But He commanded the fruit of the earth to come forth before seed was sown. This was just as simple for Him as to do the opposite. The fruitfulness of earth is a picture of the new spiritual nature in the believer that brings forth fruit for God. “The works of the flesh” (Gal. 5:19) are put in direct contrast to “the fruit of the Spirit” (Gal. 5:22). These two natures are in a believer, always in opposition to one another, but the believer is told to “walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh” (Gal. 6:16).

The grass, the herb and the fruit tree illustrate the development of spiritual life in the child of God. The fresh green grass reminds us of the freshness of the faith of “little children,” as seen in 1 John 1:13 and 18. The herb yielding seed is a picture of the energy of the “young men”, of whom we read, “you are strong, and the word of God abides in you and you have overcome the wicked one” (1 John 2:14). The fruit tree emphasizes the maturity of “fathers,” who, in the settled knowledge of the Lord Jesus, spontaneously bear fruit for Him. Thus, the new life develops.

Connected with the third day, the fruitfulness of the earth is symbolic of the age from Abraham to Christ, where God's earthly people, the nation Israel, are seen to be blessed in separation from the Gentile nations. God planted them in their land, where they brought forth fruit, though we know it was sadly marred by their disobedience to Him.

THE FOURTH DAY: THE SUN AND THE MOON

The order of events in God's re-making of the heavens and earth is far different than man naturally would imagine it to be, so that only ignorance suggests that Genesis 1 is the product of anyone's imagination. Men criticize it because it does not describe things in the way they think would be the most likely. But God's thoughts are far higher than man's, and His wisdom infinitely greater. If we want to be wise, we must allow His word to correct our thoughts. On this fourth day God spoke again to introduce two great lights to separate the day from the night. We are not told that the sun and moon were created at that time, but at least they were then set in their present relation to the earth. If we question how this was done, the only answer God gives us is that He spoke the word and it was done.

These lights were “for signs and for seasons and for days and years.” As well as their introducing each succeeding day, they have a significance more important than their being an actual literal blessing. Their changing positions at different times of the year also indicates the changing seasons on earth. Then when all the seasons have passed through their yearly cycle, the position of the sun and moon marks the beginning of another year.

As regards the declared significance of the sun, it speaks of the Lord Jesus, “the Sun of Righteousness” (Mal. 4:2), the One whose brightness is so welcome, yet too dazzling for our eyes; and the warmth of His love so welcome too, though to unbelievers this warmth may become the heat of judgment. We have seen on the third day the fruitfulness of the earth in contrast to the waters, a type of the growth and fruitfulness of believer. Now the fourth day teaches us that we must have a proper Object outside of ourselves and of our fruitfulness. The person of the Lord Jesus is that Object, and when we are blessed with the sight of His own glory, this lifts our hearts above our circumstances and above our own spiritual state and experiences, to see in Him what fully satisfies and delights the heart. This is a precious climax in the history of a believer, when the glory of the person of the Lord Jesus bursts on his vision, to lift him out of himself, to see all beauty and virtue in Him alone.

Dispensationally, the significance of the fourth day is seen in the present age, “the dispensation of the grace of God.” All the glory of God is revealed in His beloved Son, who has suffered and died, now is glorified, shining in the heavens as the Object of the affections of the church of God. We may liken the church to the moon, which reflects the light of the sun toward the earth, sometimes being full in its reflection, but having phases that vary from full to almost nil. How greatly we also vary in our reflection of the Lord Jesus toward the world! But in just the measure that our faces are turned toward Him, so shall we reflect Him.

“He made the stars also” (v. 16). This is only stated as though it were incidental and of much lesser importance. Though many of the stars have been found to be tremendous in size, much larger than the sun, and their number beyond computation, their distances ranging into billions of light years, yet the sun and the moon are more important to us on earth, and God's revelation is for the benefit of human beings. Again God saw that His work on the fourth day was good, and again He declares that there was evening and morning, a fourth day (of 24 hours).

THE FIFTH DAY: THE WATERS BRING FORTH

Now we return to consider God's work in the waters, which He had named “Seas” (v. 10), and His work too in making life to exist in the firmament. On this fifth day is the first mention of animate life. He gives the command, “Let the waters abound with an abundance of living creatures” (v. 20). How true this is! It has been observed that the total **weight** of all the insect population of earth is many times the weight of all human and animal population — though it would take many mosquitoes to equal the weight of one elephant! But the combined weight of humans, animals and insects is nothing compared to the population of the seas!

For the second time in this chapter the word “created” is used (v. 21). God had created the heavens and the earth before, now He creates animate life, another order of creation entirely. The word is not used therefore when, on the sixth day, animals were introduced, but it **is** used when we are told, “God created man in His own image” (v. 27), for man is a totally different order of creation. There is a link between sea creatures, birds and animals, but none of these have any such link with mankind. On the fifth day, however, both great sea creatures and birds were created.

The creation of great sea creatures and birds involves a personal spiritual lesson for a believer. When we have known the Lord Jesus as the one great Object of faith, as we learn in the setting of the sun in the heavens, then the waters of turmoil, distress and unrest, that is, our experiences of deep trial, will miraculously bring forth abundant blessing. As Paul says, “Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (2 Cor. 4:17). Indeed, we shall realize this as true in just the measure that we make the Lord Jesus the Object of our lives. The waters of unceasing disturbance and restlessness may seem to us hopelessly unproductive, but the power and grace of God produces some of the greatest blessing for us through the greatest trouble and sorrow. The birds flying in the heavens teach us that by faith our spirit may rise high above the level of our circumstances in a world that is the 'valley of the shadow of death.” “As birds on the wing we rise and sing, and our troubles seem far away.”

The dispensational application of this should be clearly evident to us also. Following the dispensation of the grace of God (in our present age) is the time of great tribulation such as the world has never seen nor will ever see again (Matt. 24:21). Out of these waters of deep trouble God will bring blessing for a multitude which no man can number” (Rev. 7:9-14). Thus the power and grace of God will triumph over all man's ruin and sorrow, at a time when everything appears to be most hopeless.

THE SIXTH DAY: CREATION OF ANIMALS, THEN HUMANS

Again, by the power of the word of God, living creatures are brought forth from the earth, — cattle (representing domestic animals); creeping things (the lowest form of animal); and beast of the earth (the wider range of wild animals). Acts 10:1-15 and verse 28 clearly indicate that all these animals are typical of mankind. Domesticated animals would speak of the classes of men who are cultured and refined, creeping things, of the more despised classes in places of lowly humiliation. The beasts of the earth remind us of men in their wild, rebellious state, a third class even more prevalent than the others. But this work of God on the sixth day was only a preparation for a more important work the same day.

“Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness: and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth” (v. 26). In this case the climax of God's creatorial power is seen. It is the only time He says, “Let us,” for of all the creation on earth, man is the only creature who can enter into the fact that God is a triune Being, and can understand something of the wonderful counsels of God. Nothing is said of the creation of angels: they were created before this time (Job 38:4-7).

Man is of a totally different order than angels. He is made in God's image, that is, he is created to represent God. He is made “after God's likeness,” which involves similarity. God is a triune Being, Father, Son and Holy Spirit: man is a triune character, spirit, soul and body (1 Thess. 5:23). Animals are amoral: they do not have a moral nature. God has a nature of truth and of goodness. Man was created with the same faculties, though sin has now badly corrupted his nature and he has become immoral. Man is directly responsible to God, as animals are not. This responsibility involves man's authority over the lower creation. The fact is stated, “Male and female He created them.” Genesis 2:18-23 explains how the woman was created.

God then blessed them and told them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” This was said before sin entered the scene. Some have claimed that sexual union is sinful, but this is true only outside the marriage bond. At this time Adam and Eve were to rule over other animate creatures. By sin they spoiled this, so that man does not now have the same authority over animals, though Noah was told, “the fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast” etc. (Gen. 9:2). This is a mercy of God, for otherwise animals could take terrible advantage of their superior strength to terrorize men.

At the first men were vegetarians (v. 29), and beasts also were not carnivorous. God gave them sufficient food in herbs, fruits, etc., and no doubt they did not desire anything else.

This sixth day has its personal application to a believer also. After he has seen all fullness in the person of Christ (as the fourth day teaches) and finds blessing in tribulation also (the fifth day), he experiences what true victory is in virtually having the world under his feet. This is by his association with Christ, as Eve was associated with Adam in the place of rule. How good to learn that “all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or the world or life or death or things present or things to come, all are yours, and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's” (1 Cor. 3:21-22). All these things are serving the believer's best interests.

The dispensational application of the sixth day is as clear as we could desire it to be. Following the fifth day tribulation, it points to the millennial kingdom of the Lord Jesus, when He with His wife, the church, will reign over all creation. God will subdue all things under the feet of the Son of Man, who is the perfect representation of the eternal God because He is Himself God manifest in flesh. He has patiently waited while ambitious kings, rulers and governors have come and gone, all proving themselves unfit for the place of properly representing God. The eruption of the great tribulation will mark the conclusion of the aspirations of men of the world in this regard, and over them all the blessed King of kings will triumph in great power and glory. Thus He, together with His wife, the church, will reign over all. That reign will never be marred, as was that of Adam and Eve, by human failure, for He will represent God in beautiful perfection. Marvelous too will be the grace that delights to have His wife identified with Him!

Verse 31 gives God's pronouncement, not only as to the sixth day, but as regards all the work He had done in all six days: “it was very good.” Thus, God's work literally in the first creation was very good. His work in individual souls too, pictured by creation, is very good. His work in all the dispensations also just as clearly typified in these days, is very good.

Genesis 2

THE SEVENTH DAY: GOD'S REST

The first three verses here are directly connected with Genesis 1. “Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished.” The work of the first creation occupied six days. “All the host of them” evidently refers to the innumerable host of stars and planets which are set by God in the heavens for the benefit of man on earth.

Number 7 is the number of completeness, and on that day God rested from all His work. In this case only we read of His blessing the day, as well as sanctifying it. It is set apart from all the others as having a far superior significance, “because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.” Creating is bringing into existence from nothing, but making is modeling something from what had already been created. God's literal rest on that day is significant of something much more important.

As to the personal application, this indicates the completeness of God's work in a believer. God rests and the believer rests in the calm satisfaction of God's sufficiency. This corresponds to what is said of “fathers” in 1 John 2:13-14, “I have written unto you, fathers, because you have known Him who is from the beginning.” In speaking to fathers, nothing is added in the way of exhortation (as for young man and little children), for fathers are looked at as mature in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus and calmly at rest because of His sufficiency.

The dispensational application of the seventh day takes us beyond time “unto all the generations of the age of ages”(Eph. 3:21 — J.N.D. trans.). Though in the first six days we read of the evening and the morning, yet there is no mention of this on the seventh day, for there is no reckoning of time in eternity. God has worked and will work until the thousand years of peace is completed and the judgment of the great white throne takes place. Then He will rest with a rest unbroken by morning or evening. His rest after the six days of work in connection with the first creation was broken by Adam's sin, and since that time, until sin is totally banished from God's creation, God has worked, as the Lord Jesus said, “My Father has been working until now, and I have been working” (John 5:17 — NKJV).

There is also another application of the seventh day to the nation Israel. The millennium will be a comparative rest to the nation as such, after centuries of trouble and sorrow. As to this time, Zephaniah 3:17 tells us, “Jehovah thy God is in thy midst, a mighty one that will save: He will rejoice over thee with joy; He will rest in His love; He will exult over thee with singing.” Yet this is only a partial fulfillment of the truth of the seventh day rest, for it is not God's final rest, but a foreshadowing of it.

THE GRACE OF THE LORD GOD IN CREATION

Up to the end of Gen. 2:3 the name God appears 35 times. Beginning with verse 4 there is a change, however. No longer is the name God used alone, but “the Lord God” or “Jehovah Elohim,” used 11 times in Genesis 2. The reason is simply that in the first section the great power of God is seen in creating and making. In the second section the creation is looked at from the viewpoint of God's gracious relationship with mankind. The name “Jehovah” is significant of the kindness of God in drawing near to mankind in blessing. Thus it is used consistently in regard to God's covenant relationship with Israel (Ex. 6:2-8).

Creation therefore did not come into being merely as a display of God's power, but as a sphere in which God's tender interest in man is wonderfully evident. Beginning with verse 4 is 'the history of the heavens and earth when they were created,” that is, an expanded view of what has been told us in Genesis 1. The Lord God made the earth and the heavens before plant life of any kind existed. Then even when He had introduced vegetation there was no rainfall, but a mist that went up from the earth to water the face of the ground (v. 6). This is another evidence of God's authorship of the Bible, for this is something that man would never have imagined. Though there were “waters above,” God did not use them as rainfall. How the earth produced the mist we do not know. However, plants were made to grow in the earth — grass, herbs and trees — only three days before God created man to care for them.

While we are told of God's creating man on the sixth day, now we are told the means of His doing this (v. 7). Nothing like this is said of the fish, animals or birds. But “the Lord formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.” It is man's body that is formed of dust. This is certainly intended to keep us from being proud of ourselves! But on the other hand, man is given a dignity far above the animal creation. God's breath in his nostrils separates him completely from the rest of earthly creation. This should make us both thankful and serious in realizing that such a dignity brings the responsibility of representing the God who has breathed into us.

Though fish and animals are also said to be “living souls (Gen. 1:21, 24 — J.N.D. trans.), yet man differs from them entirely in the way in which he **became** a living soul. We learn later in scripture that man has a spirit and soul and body (1 Thess. 5:32), but in his present state he is characterized more by his soul than he is by his spirit, therefore is called “a living soul.” Yet when God breathed into him there is no doubt that he received a spirit as well as a soul, for the very word “breath” is the same Hebrew word as “spirit.” Elihu says, in Job 32:8: “But there is a spirit in man, and the breath of the Almighty gives him understanding.”

Man's soul gives him feelings, emotions, desires and even intuition, similar to what is seen in animals. But his spirit gives him intellect, understanding, reasoning power that can lift him above the level of his feelings and desires. Also, now that sin has entered creation, his spirit gives him a conscience to discern between good and evil, and which warns him against evil.

Men have planted and developed magnificently beautiful gardens in our day, but when the Lord planted a garden in Eden before sin caused the curse to affect the ground, before weeds, thorns and thistles did their unsightly damage, the beauty of that garden must have been wonderful. The place was ideal in every way for the comfort and blessing of man. Every variety of fruit tree was there, beautiful to the sight and its fruit edible and good.

The tree of life is singled out as being “in the midst of the garden,” but in spite of this it was evidently ignored by Adam and Eve. Its great significance, however, is brought into sight again in the book of Revelation (Rev. 2:7 and Rev. 22:12), while in between the shadow of death broods over the whole history of man.

But there was another tree in the garden, “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” This was a fruit tree also, its fruit good, its appearance pleasant (Gen. 3:7). This tree and the tree of life stand in direct contrast to one another. Both were put there as a test for man. Which would he choose? The tree of life speaks of Christ. But man naturally will ignore the blessed Christ of God and choose that which has been forbidden by God.

A river is also mentioned, flowing out of the garden, evidently having its source by a spring from the earth, but watering the garden as it flowed. This speaks of the blessing of God by His word and Spirit, as does also the “river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb,” described in Revelation 22:1. This river from the garden of Eden, however, was parted into four different rivers, indicating increasing blessing as the waters flowed. The last two rivers, Tigris and Euphrates, are prominent rivers today, though the contour of the land will have been so changed by the flood that their courses cannot be the same.

There was work for Adam to do in cultivating and caring for the garden (v. 15), though it would not require the same toil that became necessary after the ground was cursed with thorns and thistles, etc. (Gen. 3:17-18). Then the Lord gave full permission to Adam to use all the trees of the garden as food, with only one exception. Of course there was great abundance to more than meet all human need, so that having one tree kept from them was certainly no hardship at all. God told Adam that this tree was “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil,” and plainly forbad his eating of it, adding too that eating of it would certainly incur the penalty of death (v. 17).

Though in Genesis 1:27 we read of the creation of both the man and the woman, in Genesis 2:7 we are told **how** man was created, and in Genesis 2:18-24 we are given an explanation as to how the woman was made as a complement for man. The words of the Lord God in verse 18 must surely be willingly agreed to by every man, “It is not good for the man to be alone.” Man has been so created as to crave company. Also, there is a higher spiritual reason for this. The Lord Jesus, in becoming Man, has a nature that is not satisfied without the companionship of one who has the closest relationship to Him, that is, the church of God, the bride who is dear to His heart and who shares in the position and blessings that are His.

The God who created within man the desire for company has also fully met that desire: “I will make him a helper suitable for him.” Just so, the church is God's provision of a helper for the Son of Man. However, in verses 18 and 19 we are reminded of the animals and birds having been formed by God out of the ground. Though God brought them to Adam, who was able to give names to all of them (a monumental project!), yet none of them could provide the companionship that Adam required.

Certainly God could have created a wife for Adam in a different way if it were His will to do so. But He chose to do this in a way that man would never have imagined, and exhibit a wisdom that is far higher than man's. He caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and removed one of his ribs, closing up the wound (without sutures!). “And Jehovah Elohim built the rib that He had taken from Man into a woman, and brought her to Man” (v. 22 — J.N.D. trans.).

Why did the Lord God go to such pains in the case of the woman's creation? Does it not show that He is not merely displaying His power in this matter, but rather His great love that works in accomplishing proper results in individual souls and in the church of the living God? This is the first time the word “built” is used in scripture (see a Hebrew concordance), for it speak of the patient labor of the Lord in building up the church as a suitable companion for Himself. The Lord Jesus says in Matthew 16:18, “on this Rock I will build My church.” God's building has permanency in view. Men may build their huge edifices and cities, but all will come to ruin, while that which God builds will remain.

Adam's sleep speaks of the death-sleep of the Lord Jesus in His great sacrifice of Calvary, for it was from this great sorrow that the church was born. She is the direct result of the work of the cross. She is taken from His side, not from His head, to take a place over Him, nor from His feet, to be a mere slave under Him, but from His side, to be a suitable companion beside Him.

More than this, Adam speaks of Eve as “bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” (v. 23). She was actually **of his body** before she became his wife. Similarly, today the church is seen by God as “His (Christ's) body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all” (Eph. 1:23), and in glory will be presented to Him as His bride and wife (Eph. 5:17).

As well as God's seeking to impress on us the reality of the relationship of Christ and the church, however, He is showing how close is the unity of husband and wife in God's sacred ordinance of marriage. Today this has been terribly violated by the selfish independence of both men and women, but God's word is plain, “For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” (v. 24). Thus God established marriage as the first of human relationships, and He makes if clear for all succeeding generations that a man should leave his father and mother and cling to his wife. It is just as evident that the woman should leave her parents to become fully devoted to her husband. The word “cling” is beautiful here. It involves the reality of love, of devotedness and of faithfulness.

From the beginning God's thought of marriage was one wife for one man. The man was to cleave to his **wife**, not to his **wives**. It is true that many Old Testament believers had more than one wife, but this was contrary to God's word, though He bore with it because of the hardness of men's hearts. Only in the New Testament was this corrected by the Lord Jesus, together with the question of divorce (Matt. 19:9). Of course in the world today bigamy, polygamy, adultery and divorce are widespread. Only among Christians can we expect the true character of marriage to be maintained, and this should surely be the case since believers have known the living reality of the grace of God revealed in the person and work of their Lord and Savior, though too many believers also have succumbed to the attacks of the enemy in this matter, sadly failing in their Christian testimony.

In their innocent state it was perfectly normal for Adam and Eve to be naked. When by sin they acquired a conscience, however, God implanted within them a sense of shame in being naked. Animals do not have this, but even in the lowest type of human culture, conscience speaks.

Genesis 3

THE FALL OF MAN (vv. 1-24)

The serpent is introduced in this chapter as being more cunning than all other beasts. This was evidently so just by the fact of Satan's using the serpent for his mouthpiece. It is not likely that the woman had heard any other animal speak, and when the serpent spoke to her, she ought to have been doubly on her guard. God has never allowed Satan to appear to mankind as he is in his own person, except in his temptation of the Lord Jesus (Matt. 4:3-11). Satan's awesome dignity would be too much for us (Ezekiel 28:13-19). However, God allowed him to use a lower creature to tempt the woman. When the serpent questioned her in an insinuating way, “Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?'” there was no reason for her to entertain any questioning thought herself. God's word was final.

But she faltered. Her answer was not precisely right. While she admitted they could not eat of all the trees except one, she curiously said that this was the tree “in the midst of the garden” (v. 3). But the tree of life was in the midst of the garden (Gen. 2:9). No doubt because the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was forbidden to them, then to Eve it took the place of central importance. More than this, she said they were not only forbidden to eat of its fruit, but were not allowed to “touch it.” God had not said this: she only assumed it. Then she made a third mistake in saying, “lest you die.” God had said, “in the day you eat of it you shall surely die” (Gen. 2:17). We also may too easily quote God wrongly just because of impressions we take from what He says. Let us pay closest attention to what the word of God says, and be careful not to handle it deceitfully.

Satan took immediate advantage of the woman's indecision. It might have been different if she had firmly declared just what God had said, but now Satan seizes the opportunity of flatly denying the word of God: “You surely shall not die” (v. 4). Then he adds what was at least partially true, “For God knows that in the day you eat from it you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (v. 5). In eating of the tree they would be 'like God” only in **the fact of knowing good and evil, not** in the fact of refusing evil and doing only good. Satan himself had fallen simply because of his aspiration to “be like the Most High” (Isa. 14:14), so that he knows how to appeal to the pride of the creature.

The woman could have been protected from her serious fall if she had referred the matter to her husband, who had been given the place of headship. Because she ignored this she was deceived into deliberate disobedience to God. She saw the tree was good for food: it appealed to her taste. It was pleasant to the eyes: it appealed to her sight. It was desirable to make one wise: it appealed to her pride (See 1 John 2:16). She therefore trusted her own inclinations and ignored the word of God (v. 6). Before consulting her husband she ate the fruit of the tree. Then she gave some to her husband, who also ate of it. She was deceived, but he knew better: he sinned knowing well he was wrong (1 Tim. 2:14). Perhaps sympathy for his wife also prompted him. It is useless to ask what might have happened if he refused to eat after she had eaten: we do not know, for both of them were guilty of disobedience. Their eyes were opened to become ashamed of their nakedness (v. 7). Thus the work of conscience is to expose us to ourselves. By Adam's fall he acquired a conscience, and all mankind has inherited this. Every culture in the world, whether high or low has since been afflicted by a guilt complex, and cannot escape it by any other means than the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

Adam and Eve tried to submerge such feelings of guilt by sewing fig leaves together to make aprons for themselves. Since that time people have resorted to every kind of artifice to cover up the guilt of their sins, perhaps these may be professed “good works” or religious ceremonies or observances, but all are ineffective. The fig leaves were so unsatisfactory to Adam and Eve themselves that when they heard the voice of the Lord God in the garden they hid themselves. So today our own consciences tell us that our efforts to cover our sins fail so badly that we are afraid to face God. But fig leaves and trees are only part of God's creation: they can give neither protection from sin nor a hiding place from God.

The Lord God speaks to Adam, “Where are you?” Adam could not avoid that voice of power: he must answer. “I heard your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, and I hid myself” (v. 10).

Of course God knew what had happened, but He questioned Adam as to whether he had eaten of the forbidden tree (v. 11). Adam admitted it, but not before putting the blame on his wife, and even inferring that possibly God had some blame also, because He had given the woman to Adam! The woman followed his example, saying the serpent deceived her, yet admits she had eaten. How true of us all still: no matter how guilty we have been, we always want to shift the blame to someone or something else!

The Lord God allowed no delay (as men's courts do today) in His sentencing the serpent, Adam and his wife to the serious judgment they deserved. They are to learn that God means what He says. The serpent is condemned to a curse that reduces it to a level lower than creeping things, slithering on its belly (v. 14). We do not know what it was like before, but now its very diet was to be dust. This verse has strictly to do with the literal serpent, while what follows applies to Satan who used the serpent as his mouthpiece. God would put enmity between him and the woman and between his seed and her seed. In what precise way the enmity is seen between Satan and the woman may be difficult to decide, but it is most clear that Satan's seed are those who are given up to following Satan's ways, while the woman's seed is the Lord Jesus Christ. Naturally the seed comes from the man, but the one great exception is the virgin birth of the Lord Jesus. There is decided enmity between Satan's followers and the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus would inflict a mortal wound upon Satan: He would bruise his head; while Satan would bruise the heel of the Lord, which speaks of Satan's enmity inflicting a wound of pain and suffering when the Lord crushed Satan under His feet at Calvary.

The sentence of the Lord God against the woman was that her sorrow and pain would be greatly multiplied in conception. If she had borne children before their fall, no doubt suffering would not be connected with birth. This sorrow however emphasizes the fact that every child is born with a sinful nature, as David says in Psalm 51:5: “I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me.” Her desire would be to her husband and he would rule over her. This is the normal condition of the marriage relationship now. Many have been, and are, engaged in efforts to change this, so that we often see abnormal conditions, all tending to cause more confusion and dissatisfaction everywhere. Sometimes women even want to become men and men want to become women. When God's word is ignored, it is no wonder that the troubles of the world multiply. People cannot sidestep the consequences of sin so easily as they think.

Adam is sentenced also because he had accepted the voice of his wife when God had spoken otherwise. For his sake the ground was cursed. Adam would labor all his life in order to have the ground bring forth a living for him (v. 18). This labor would be increased in his seeking to control the thorns and thistles that would arise. His food would be gained by the sweat of his face, not merely the sweat of his brow (v. 19). Thus he was not promised any happy existence, and the end was not happy either: he would return by death to the ground from which he was taken, for he was reminded he was dust and would return to dust. Today men have invented many means — automation etc. — to reduce physical labor, though it is only a certain percentage who have profited by this, and the increase of inventions has increased work to keep them operating, while people become more and more unhappy with their circumstances, many being left in the misery of unemployment. But all will yet come down to the dust of death.

Adam gave his wife the name of Eve, meaning “life-giver.” Though he was sentenced to death, it seems that he believed the Lord's word that the woman's seed would bruise the serpent's head: in this way she was the life-giver. There is an inference in this that the Lord Jesus, the Seed of the woman, would bring life out of death.

Along with this we are told that the Lord God made garments of skin for the couple (v. 21). This is typical of God's clothing believers with the robe of righteousness. An animal had to be killed to provide this clothing, just as Christ had to be sacrificed to provide a covering for our sins.

Verse 22 bears further witness to the truth of the Trinity, the Lord God speaking of Himself as “Us.” Since, as He says, the man had become “like one of Us” in knowing good and evil, He was concerned that the man might eat of the tree of life and live forever in the condition he had chosen for himself. For now he knew good and evil (and only in this way being like God), yet, unlike God, he had the inclination to choose the evil rather than the good. How tragic it would be to live forever in such a condition!

Therefore the Lord God sent them out of the garden of Eden, banished from the abundant provision they had enjoyed, to till the ground that was not so bountiful, having to contend with weeds, thorns and thistles in order to survive (v. 23). Having driven them out, God placed in the east of the garden Cherubims with a flaming sword, which speaks of the severe holiness of God, “to keep the way of the tree of life.” Since that time men have tried every possible means of discovering the secret of endless life on earth, but it is hopeless: God has decreed that this cannot be. The sentence of death has been passed, and it must be faced. Only the voluntary, substitutionary death of the Lord Jesus Christ can meet this question, and **has** met it, for He has both died and risen, to introduce a life far higher than that which Adam lost. Thus, the Lord Jesus Himself is “the tree of life — in the midst of the Paradise of God” (Rev. 2:7).

Genesis 4

CAIN AND ABEL (vv. 1-15)

Adam and Eve, having acquired a sinful nature, could only communicate the same nature to their children. Their firstborn was named Cain, which means “smith” or “fabricator,” one who plans and fashions things in a pleasing way. Their second child's name, Abel, means “transitory.” Their names indicate something of what their history proved. Cain depended on his own ability, while Abel depended on the Lord, having his earthly life only transitory, though still speaking after his death (Heb. 11:4). Abel was a shepherd, Cain a farmer. Neither of these has any stigma attached to it: in fact Adam was commissioned by God to till the ground (Gen. 1:23), and Cain naturally followed this.

Eventually, however, both of these young men brought offerings to the Lord. They must have learned from their father that they could not actually approach God without an offering, and Adam would certainly only offer an animal, just as he knew that God had sacrificed an animal in order to make garments for him and his wife.

However, Cain ignored this, no doubt considering that the fruit of his own work should be just as acceptable to God as an animal, while Abel offered a lamb, a firstborn of the flock. We may think this was simple enough for him, and not so simple for Cain, who as not a shepherd; but whether simple or not, man must not dare to choose his own thoughts in preference to God's thoughts. Certainly Cain could have easily obtained a lamb if he had wanted to. Abel's offering was acceptable to God, but Cain's was not. Man's sin can only be atoned for by the shedding of blood. The clean animal was thus a type of Christ, the only sacrifice acceptable to God. His blood shed makes full atonement for sin, which nothing else could do.

Cain became very angry rather than ashamed as he should have been: his countenance fell, that is, the very look of his face became sour and depressed. God spoke to him directly, questioning him in such a way that it ought to have appealed to his common sense. Why should he be angry? If he had done well, he would have been accepted. All he needed was the proper sacrifice. If he did not well, yet a sin offering was available to him at his very door. He could still bring the proper offering and be accepted, if he would. Thus God pleads graciously with the young man to change his mind.

However, Cain did not even answer the Lord, but did talk with Abel, no doubt in an arrogant, self-righteous way, for he was not only angry at God, but so jealous of his brother that he killed him. How sad a picture of the multitude of unbelievers since that time, who have resented God's authority and His grace (as though they were not in need of it!) and have persecuted those who have honestly confessed their faith in the Son of God.

As well as pride, anger, selfishness, stubbornness, jealousy and hatred, Cain adds dishonesty to his unsavory qualities when the Lord asks him, “Where is Abel your brother?” (v. 9). Though there was no announced law against murder, Cain showed that he knew he had sinned in killing Abel. If he had considered himself right, he would have told the Lord plainly that he had killed Abel. But when one is determined to defend his sin, he will continue to multiply his sinful actions and to cover them up by falsehood. Thus, in the first child born of Adam we see the ugly works of the flesh come strongly to the forefront.

Though God spoke to Cain directly, Cain showed no faith in God's omniscience. How futile and foolish it is to lie to God! But as well as lying, he asks irritably, “Am I my brother's keeper?” God did not have to answer this: Cain knew well enough that he was responsible to have some honest care for his brother, but he had not only neglected this: he had been guilty of the total opposite. God then speaks with solemn words to the criminal's conscience, “What have you done! The voice of your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground” (v. 10). Of course this means that Abel's blood cries out to God for righteous retribution (Compare

Revelation 6:10).

God's sentence against Adam was that the ground would be cursed for his sake. Now Cain himself is “cursed from the earth” to which he had committed Abel's blood (v. 11). The ground would no longer yield as abundantly as before: he would be made to feel that his work was not so satisfactory as he had tried to impress God that it was, in his offering. If this curse had produced the proper effect in Cain, he would have honestly acknowledged his sin and the result could have been wonderfully different for him in regard to eternity. For it was evident that he must eventually leave the earth in which he had put his foolish confidence. But many today are the same as he: “they are enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame — who set their mind on earthly things” (Phil. 3:18-19). Their own proud works are more important to them than the sacrifice of Christ!

Cain would be “a fugitive and a vagabond on the earth” (v. 12). This is a description of every unbeliever. As a fugitive he is virtually running away from God, never facing up to his guilt and his need of a Savior. As a vagabond, he is a wanderer, going in every direction to seek rest or satisfaction but never finding it. Thus even on earth the condition of the unbeliever is sad, but how much more so in eternity!

Cain's response to God (v. 13-14) was not contrite, but protesting. Instead of being ashamed, he was sorry for himself: “My punishment is greater than I can bear.” This is in contrast to the words of the robber dying on a cross next to the Lord Jesus. He said, “we receive the due reward of our deeds” Luke 23:41). How much better it is to submit to God's penalty rather than to resent it, for submission leaves the way open for God to show mercy. But Cain says that God has driven him out from the face of the earth (not God's actual words), and adds that he would be hid from God's face. Yet it was Cain himself who had chosen this: he had sought to hide his evil works from the Lord. How can one deliberately lie to the Lord and expect the light of God's face in his life? God practically confirmed Cain's choice by His word, and Cain is unhappy. In fact, he goes farther and says that whoever finds him would kill him. But is it not only to be expected that a murderer should live in fear of being killed? Why did he not think of this before he killed Abel?

However, the Lord set a mark upon Cain, saying that vengeance would be taken sevenfold on whoever would kill Cain. God was dealing with him, and man must not interfere. In Noah's day, later on, God gave authority to governmental powers to execute a murderer (Gen. 9:5-6), but in Cain's time human government had not been introduced. God was dealing with Cain directly. This is also a striking picture of God's dealing with the nation Israel after they had suffered as a fugitive, fleeing from the God of their fathers, and as a wanderer, finding no resting-place for the sole of their foot.. Still, God does not give permission to Gentiles to exterminate them, though this has been tried time and again. God's mark is upon Israel, and those nations that make her suffer will themselves suffer God's retribution.

CAIN'S CIVILIZATION (vv. 16-24)

Cain left the Lord's presence because he preferred this, as is clearly true of unbelievers today. He went to the land of Nod, which means “wandering,” east of Eden (v. 16). His wife there bore him a son who was named Enoch (meaning “dedicated”). Of course Cain's wife would be his sister, the daughter of Adam and Eve. We are told then that Cain built a city (v. 17), which could take place only after some years, when his family had multiplied. Adam lived 930 years, long enough that his offspring could increase beyond his ability to count. We are not told how long Cain lived, but his brother Seth lived 921 years (Gen. 5:8).

Cain's building a city emphasizes the fact that man away from God sets his sights on building something great in the world. Cain wanted his city quickly, just as also, in Genesis 11:4 the successors of Noah wanted to build a city and a tower long before God's time. For God is still waiting for the day of glory to establish His city (“which has foundations” — Rev. 21:10), and the believer may wait patiently for this too.

In Cain's family there was also a Lamech as well as an Enoch (v. 18), just as was the case in the offspring of Seth (Gen. 5:18, 25). The Lamech in the line of Cain is the first bigamist of whom we read (v. 19). His sons by Adah were Jabal and Jubal, the first occupied with trade and commerce, dwelling in tents and keeping livestock; the second a musician. Zillah bore a son to Lamech named Tubal-cain, an instructor of those skilled in brass and iron work. The line of Cain is therefore seen in a foremost place in reference to trade and commerce, the arts and the sciences. Of course the unbeliever concentrates on these things rather than on the knowledge of God, and often the ungodly prosper in the world.

However, linked from the very first with this prosperity are two principles of evil that cannot but undermine the whole society. These are seen in verse 23, corruption and violence. Lamech corrupted God's institution of marriage by having two wives. But he also confesses to his wives that he has been guilty of murder. These two degrading evils have spread throughout all the world, and today are continually advertised in the media, while government unsuccessfully tries to control the wild beastly character of men. However, he claims that he killed the young man because he had been hurt by him, and under these extenuating circumstances he thought he would be more protected from retribution than was Cain. If seven fold judgment fell on one who killed Cain, then the judgment against Lamech's killer would be seventy-seven fold. Cain is a picture of Israel having killed the Lord Jesus and not confessing their crime. Lamech seems to be a type of Israel too, in a coming day confessing their guilt in having killed the Messiah. Then those nations that are determined to exterminate Israel will be punished with an overwhelming vengeance (Zech. 12:9-14).

SETH: TYPE OF CHRIST, THE SECOND MAN (vv. 25-26)

After reading of the development of Cain's seed — man in the flesh, — we are told now of the birth of Seth, as Eve says, “another seed instead of Abel” (v. 25). Abel was a type of Christ in His death: Seth is a picture of Him in His resurrection, and we read of Seth's seed in Genesis 5. As the second Man, the last Adam, we see the Lord Jesus having triumphed over death. In this place we hear Him say, “Here am I and the children whom God has given me” (Heb. 2:13). His resurrection introduces a new chosen seed. Cain, clinging to the first creation, seems to gain the most, but he must lose it all, while what Christ has gained in resurrection is eternal. Though it seems that man in the flesh has taken the first place, yet the second Man will in His own time take over the place of highest prominence and glory. The son of Seth was Enosh, which means “frail man” This indicates that when one is born of God he realizes his frailty and dependence: therefore at this time “men began to call on the name of the Lord” (v. 26). In this new line of Seth the dependence of faith is seen, not boastful, but in felt weakness that requires the grace of the Lord.

Genesis 5

THE FAMILY OF ADAM — THROUGH SETH (vv. 1-32)

This chapter is called “the book of the genealogy of Adam” (v. 1). However, the line of Cain is omitted and only the line of Seth included. The reason for this is indicated in this verse: “in the day that God created man, He made him in the likeness of God.” But Cain, through his rebellion, lost that likeness, therefore only the line of Seth was recognized as “sons of God,” while the women of Cain's line were called “the daughters of men” (Gen. 6:2).

Though God created male and female, He called **their** name Adam (or Man). Because they were “one flesh” (Gen. 2:24) they had one name. Society has wisely concurred with God's decision, in having the wife accept her husband's name. Some have resented this, but the only reason is pride and self-will, as though the creature is wiser than his Creator.

It may seem strange that Seth was not born till Adam was 130 years old. But whatever length of time passed, Adam could only bear a child in his own likeness and image. In measure this was still in God's likeness and image, though it had been spoiled by sin. After this Adam had more sons and daughters, but we are not told how many. Though he lived to the great age of 930 years, yet he died, as God had promised he would.

Following Seth there were seven generations before Noah. Most of these lived over 900 years, though Mahalaleel was five years short of 900 (v. 17) and Lamech died at 777 years (v. 31). Enoch has not died, though God took him, for Enoch was translated so that he did not see death, and was not found, because God had translated him; for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God.” In the fact of his translation he is a type of Christ in His ascension to glory after His resurrection. But as well as this the rapture of the assembly, the church of God, is pictured in this unusual event. The godly walk and testimony of Enoch bore evident fruit in the fact that his son, Methuselah, lived longer on earth than any other person — 969 years (Cf. Ephesians 6:2-3). The church, in whatever measure, pleases God, and He will translate her to heaven before the tribulation falls. The tribulation is pictured in the flood of Noah's day occurring after Enoch's translation, typically after the rapture.

Lamech, the son of Methuselah, called his son's name Noah, meaning “rest.” Whatever Lamech's thoughts were in what he said about Noah, yet his words were prophetic, being inspired by God (v. 29). Noah would “comfort us” or “give us rest from our works and from the toil of our hands arising from the ground which the Lord has cursed” (NASB). We may be sure that Lamech did not know how this was to be done. For the rest that was to come was dependent upon Noah's long years of labor in building the ark. Thus the great work of the Lord Jesus in His sacrifice of Calvary is the basis of rest for the believer. The curse of sin has spoiled the earth for us, but the work of Christ has brought in eternal blessing above the level of earth, giving rest to weary hearts. Of course Noah's work is only a very faint picture of this.

Verse 32 speaks of Noah being 500 years old, then of his three sons being born, which seems to indicate that his sons were born during the time of the building of the ark, for it seems likely that Noah was told to build the ark 120 years before the flood took place (Genesis 6:3), which would be 20 years before he became 500, since he was 600 when the flood came.

Genesis 6

MAN'S DEGRADATION TO CORRUPTION AND VIOLENCE (vv. 1-7)

It was not long before mankind multiplied greatly on earth, and the dreadful effects of sin multiplied with them. This is emphasized in the corrupt mixture of “the sons of God” with “the daughters of men.” We have seen in Genesis 5 that the line of Seth maintained “the likeness of God” in some measure at least, therefore they are called “the sons of God:” they were separate from the evils of the line of Cain. So today in the coming out from among the ungodly and being separate, believers take a place where God says of them, “ye shall be my sons and daughters” (2 Cor. 6:17-18).

Sadly, those of the line of Seth were seduced by the attractiveness of the women of Cain's line, and took wives just as they chose. It is the same today if a believer marries an unbeliever: there will be sad results, for God has plainly forbidden it.

Some have supposed that “the sons of God” were fallen angels, connecting this with Job 1:6 where angels are clearly spoken of as “sons of God.” But men are more often in scripture called “sons of God” than angels are. Besides, angels are sexless (Matt. 22:30), and they do not have bodies: they are spirits (Heb. 1:14). It is unthinkable that God would create special bodies for fallen angels in order that they might take ungodly advantage of women.

But this matter is plainly settled by God's word in verse 3: “The Lord said, My Spirit shall not always strive with **man**, for that he also is flesh.” It is clear that “the sons of God” were the responsible parties here: it was **they** who took wives, not the wives who took them. So God calls the sons of God “men,” insisting also that they are “flesh,” not spirit, as angels are. So early in history this event stands as a solemn warning to believers against yoking themselves with unbelievers. Such mixtures are often strongly censured in the Old Testament as well as in the New. Compare Ezra 9:1-4 and 2 Corinthians 6:14-18.

God had by His Spirit been striving with men against their willful sin, but His patience would come to an end, though He would evidently allow them another 120 years before He would destroy civilization. Genesis 5:32 speaks of Noah being 500 years old, so that it seems that God spoke as He did in verse 3 twenty years before Noah became 500.

Before the sons of God took the daughters of men as wives, there were giants in the earth. There is no indication as to why men became giants (v. 4), but generally in scripture giants are connected with unbelief. The spiritual lesson from this is that unbelievers aspire to be great and outstanding, but a giant is an abnormal monstrosity.

After that we read of the offspring of the sons of God and the daughters of men, becoming “mighty men, — men of renown.” Notice, they are still “men,” not angels. If a believer marries an unbeliever, the believer is responsible for the wrong, not the unbeliever. But the believer is thus using his many privileges and advantages in an unfaithful way. The unbelieving partner gets the advantage of these without being born again, and the result is that their children become prominent and influential **in the world**. In fact, a believer himself, if he uses his Christian capabilities **for the world**, may become great in the world, but is not true to his Lord. Thus, this mixture benefits the world in a material way, but the Lord is robbed of the honor that belongs to Him.

This is great wickedness in the eyes of the Lord, for it is the basis of every other kind of evil. People want what they want **now**: they see opportunities for material prosperity and God is calmly ignored. “Every intent” of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually. The line of Seth had become just as independent and callous as the line of Cain. Seth himself was no doubt a believer, but by this time his seed had become faithless.

Certainly God knew from eternity past that man would so greatly corrupt himself, yet we are told in verse 6 that He repented that He had made man on the earth. This surely indicates the depth of sorrow that God feels in contemplating the sin of mankind. On the one hand God's great wisdom and power is seen in His creation and also in His marvelous work of recovery after man's ruin; but on the other hand we see the reality of the feelings of His heart in reference to His creatures willingly choosing to rebel against Him. Though God is absolutely sovereign, yet man is seriously responsible and must be made to feel the results of his willful sin. Thus, God decreed that He would “blot out man — from the face of the land.” Yet animals, creeping things and birds are included in this awesome destruction, for man's sin has involved the rest of the earthly creation. People may say that when they sin it is only themselves thy have damaged, but man's sin always affects others too, even unreasoning creatures.

HOPE FOUND IN ONE MAN (vv. 8-22)

One man alone found favor in the eyes of the Lord (v. 8). Noah was righteous as regards his human relationships and blameless in his personal character, because “he walked with God.” When the population of the earth had increased so tremendously, it is tragically sad to consider that only one man walked with God. In this he is typical of the Lord Jesus. Yet he does illustrate the fact that it is possible for a believer to walk in true, godly separation from an evil world, even when he has no fellowship of others in so doing. Sometimes a believer may find himself in such circumstances, though this is exceptional, for 2 Timothy 2:22 tells us, “pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.” But in any case, a lonely path **with God** is infinitely better than having many friends **without** God's presence.

Noah's three sons are again mentioned in verse 10, though evidently born after he was 500 years of age (Gen. 5:32). The most serious evil of man is then emphasized — his corruption before God — which led to an earth filled with violence (v. 11). Violence is of course against others, and people consider this the worst thing; but their corruption is against God, though they think lightly of it. If there were no corruption there would be no violence. But at this time “all flesh” had corrupted itself. God tells Noah that the end of all flesh was imminent because the earth was filled with violence, for violence was the glaring proof of man's corruption (v. 13). God would destroy the inhabitants with the earth.

Yet a refuge was to be provided by the grace of God for those who realized their need of His grace. God instructed Noah to make a large ark of gopher wood, six times as long as it was wide, and with three decks, built with rooms, not only for people, but for animals also, covered with pitch inside and out (v. 14). One door is mentioned, which may seem inadequate for so large a ship, but it is typical of the fact that Christ alone is the door of salvation for mankind. It may be that the window “finished — to a cubit from the top” was an opening that encircled the whole ark, thus giving full ventilation, but capable of being closed. Of course there may have been other ventilation also, for we are not told the full details of the construction of this great vessel.

God gave warning of the flood well in advance, and there was no doubt of its coming. All animate life on earth would be destroyed (v. 17). Similarly, God has given advance warning that He has appointed a day in which He will judge the world by that Man whom He has ordained, the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 17:31). Men may mock at this, but it will come just as surely as the flood came. It is not simply that God allowed it to come, but He insists, “I, even I am bringing the flood of water upon the earth.”

However, if judgment was ordained by God, salvation was just as absolutely ordained. God established a covenant with Noah to this effect, to preserve him and his family by means of the ark, the only exception to the awesome destruction of man's civilization. Animals were also included in this preservation, for a pair of every species was to be brought into the ark, and of birds also and creeping things. In the case of clean animals and birds we shall learn in Genesis 7:2-3 that this was expanded to seven of each.

As to food, Noah was to bring in some of all kinds. A variety is of real value for the health of mankind. Noah was not to be a food faddist, demanding one kind of food and rejecting all others. God had made all. Of course if one is allergic to a certain food. it is only sensible to avoid this. The supply would have to be very large for the great number of animals as well as eight people. though it is possible that God would cause many of the animals to lapse into a state of hibernation during the 10 1/2 months in the ark. We may be sure that Noah was not ignorant of methods of food preservation, but nothing is said of this. The important matter is that he did as God told him (v. 22).

Genesis 7

PRESERVED THROUGH THE FLOOD (vv. 1-24)

Certainly so tremendous a project as the preparing of the ark would attract great attention by all the people, for in spite of Noah's preaching of righteousness (2 Peter 2:5), none were persuaded that God would judge the world by a flood. They likely considered him mentally affected and became “scoffers walking after their own lusts” (2 Peter 3:3-7). When the time came, God instructed Noah to enter the ark with all his household, not because his household is said to be righteous, but because God had seen Noah to be righteous, the only one in his generation. At least he had enough influence in his own family that they would willingly enter the ark also. Yet they were included on the basis of his faith, a principle of real importance in God's dealings. He is concerned not only as to individuals, but as to households.

God's instructions as to animals and birds are repeated in verses 2 and 3. Then a respite of seven days is given before the flood would come. This shows again the longsuffering of God. When men saw the large number of animals coming to the ark and then the family of Noah all entering this completed gigantic vessel, at least then they ought to have realized that this project was not merely conceived by Noah's imagination, in spite of the fact that rain had evidently never before fallen (Gen. 2:5-6). But God gave men another week to change their minds. Perhaps as those few days passed, people were becoming more confident each day that nothing was going to happen, rather than being sensibly concerned.

In verse 11 God gives the date of the beginning of the flood in relation to the age of Noah, not only the general time, but the exact day, the 17th day of the second month, in Noah's 600th year. The many dates, names and places recorded in scripture are an invitation to anyone to check as he pleases as to the accuracy of the word of God. In this verse we are told however that, not only were the windows of heaven opened, but first that the fountains of the great deep were broken up. This must have involved a tremendous tidal wave, the seas throwing up such waters as to cover the whole habitable earth. For it is claimed that the skies above us would be absolutely full to saturation point it they contained enough water to cover the earth to a depth of only thirty feet. One scientist has written that if a planet, — Saturn for instance, — were to come into close proximity to the earth, and make two passes around the earth, it could cause a tidal wave that would cover the whole earth, lasting 150 days. Of course, God could use such means as this if He pleased, or He could accomplish what He did apart from such means. But to add to the awesome inundation, the rain fell for forty days and forty nights (v. 12).

After all were in the ark (possibly by the end of the seven days' respite) God shut them in. It was not merely that Noah shut the door. Once God had shut the door, it could not be opened again to allow others in who might be so terrified when the rain began to fall that they would rush to seek refuge. It was too late when the door was closed. How solemn a lesson for those who neglect the salvation of their souls until too late!

The duration of the flood and its eventually covering even the high mountains, insured that all human and animal life would be destroyed. Of course this did not affect the life in the seas. It is reported that there are some high hills in the mid-east almost covered with human and animal bones, perhaps the result of people and animals trying to reach the highest elevation they possibly could for safety, but all in vain.

Of course the ark floated on the waters, and all inside were preserved. The ark itself is typical of the Lord Jesus, the one safe refuge from judgment for every child of Adam who will receive Christ as Savior. Evidently including the forty days of rain, the waters prevailed on the earth for 150 days (cf. v. 11 and Gen. 8:4).

Genesis 8

A RENEWED EARTH (vv. 1-22)

The five months of floating on a shoreless sea would seem interminable to Noah and his family, and it can be well imagined that they would feel that God had forgotten them. “But God remembered Noah, and all the beasts and all the cattle that were with him in the ark,” — the wild beasts as well as domesticated animals. But a flood covering even the mountains would require a long length of time to subside, even with the wind God sent to help in this. However, the sources from which the water came were stopped. If a tidal wave had emanated from the seas, this ceased to exert its power, and of course the rain from heaven no longer fell. This itself would be a welcome relief to the people in the ark. Yet at the end of 150 days the ark only grounded in the mountains of Ararat: there was still no land visible (v. 4). Four and one half months later the tops of the mountains were seen (v. 5).

Allowing forty days more, Noah opened the window of the ark and sent out a raven, and the raven did not return (v. 7). He also sent out a dove as a test, but the dove did not find any favorable circumstances and returned to the ark (v. 9). The unclean raven would no doubt find carrion to feed upon, which would be offensive to the clean dove. The raven is typical of the unclean, sinful nature of man that finds pleasure in the corruptions of this world, while the dove pictures the pure, renewed nature of the believer that can find pleasure only in what is pure and holy.

Now ten and a half months had passed since Noah's entering the ark. He removed the covering of the ark and found the face of the ground dry (v. 13). Yet of course it would be dry on the higher elevations where the ark was, while requiring more time in lower areas to have the waters recede. So that verse 14 tells us that it was about two months later that the earth was dried. This total time amounts to one year and ten days (cf. Gen. 7:11 and 8:14).

Nothing is said about anyone being anxious to leave the ark. Had they become so accustomed to living there that they were hesitant to leave? God gave them orders to go out, however, including all the humans and all the animals of every kind. Whether at first they returned there for shelter at night we are not told. The animals sent back into their natural habitat, would then "breed abundantly" and multiply.

How good it is to see that Noah's first recorded act after leaving the ark is to build an altar to the Lord and offer one of every clean animal and every clean bird as burnt offerings to the Lord. He showed no resentment toward God at the thought of so terrible a flood, but became if anything a more decided worshiper of his great Creator. Evidently God's awesome judgment of the ungodly world increased within Noah a healthy, reverential fear of the God of all the earth.

Because these offerings are all typical of the matchless sacrifice of the Lord Jesus, God smelled a sweet savor, and for this reason purposed that He would not again curse the ground for man's sake. The basis of this purpose is really the sacrifice of Christ pictured in the offerings, the only refuge for man. It is interesting too that, while in Genesis 6:5 we see that the reason for the flood was that "the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually," yet this same fact becomes a reason that God would not curse the earth again (v. 21). Since the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth, God would not again curse the earth or destroy every living thing out of it. The reason for this is that in the sacrifice of Christ there is a remedy for the evil nature of man. This is only implied here, whereas in the New Testament this marvelous truth is seen in the actual death of the Lord Jesus and the subsequent teachings as to all of its wonderful value.

From that time there would be a normal cycle of living conditions on earth so long as earth remains. After the awful catastrophe of the flood, who could foretell that for the rest of earth's history there would be a constant pattern of "seed-time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, and day and night." No-one but the Creator Himself would even venture to suggest this. In the New Testament, however (2 Peter 3:10), God has as definitely foretold that the earth is not going to remain as it is: "The heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up." God foretold the flood 120 years in advance: the flood came. He has foretold the constant cycle of seasons so long as the earth remains: this has been thoroughly accurate for thousands of years and will remain so until, as He has also foretold, the earth and its works shall be burned up. How vitally important it is that we believe the revelation of God!

Genesis 9

A NEW BEGINNING FOR MAN (vv. 1-17)

The earth itself having been purged by water, furnishing a totally new condition of circumstances for mankind and animals, now God establishes man in a new dispensation of things, blessing Noah and his sons with the promise of fruitfulness and of their multiplying to fill the earth that had been so reduced in the number of its inhabitants. God had told Adam and his wife to "have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over every living thing that moves upon the earth" (Gen. 1:28). The same cannot be said to Noah because the entrance of sin spoiled this dominion.

Rather, Noah is told (v. 2) that the fear and dread of man would be on beasts, birds and fish. It is a great mercy that this is so, for if the beasts, with their superior physical strength, had no fear of man, they could practically destroy all human population. But God has implanted that fear within them, though they no longer have the nature of spontaneous subjection to man as was true in the garden of Eden.

Besides this, mankind was no longer limited to a vegetarian diet (v. 3). Animals, birds and fish were allowed him as food, just as fully as herbs and fruits. There were no restrictions such as were later introduced for Israel under law (Lev. 11), and again abrogated after the death of the Lord Jesus (Acts 10:11-16; 1 Tim. 4:4-5). Of course it is evident that if one finds any food causing him physical difficulty, it is only wise to avoid that food, but God does not forbid the use of any.

However, when the meat of animals was eaten, God firmly prohibited the blood being eaten with it (v. 4). From this time, the time that the eating of meat was first allowed, blood has been always forbidden. In every dispensation this has been true. The reason is that the blood is said to be "the life" of the creature, and life belongs exclusively to God. In refraining from eating blood then, we recognize the rights of the Creator. On the other hand, the rights of human beings were to be recognized. If a man or a beast shed human blood, then proper government demanded the death of that man or beast (v. 6). This also remains true throughout history.

The Lord's instructions to Noah in verses 3-6 indicate that this is the beginning of human government being established on earth. Man being left to his conscience after Adam had sinned, totally broke down and the flood came. Therefore, something more than conscience must be necessary to meet man's need, so that at this point the dispensation of human government was introduced. This was necessary in order to restrain evil and to maintain order. God, however, leaves man with a minimum of legislation for government, only the two laws, involving the rights of God and the rights of mankind. Today governments have become extremely top-heavy with legislation. No individual can possibly know all the laws that are on the books in his own state or city. Government has certainly not proven to be the answer to the need of man occasioned by his own sin.

The encouragement of verse 1 to multiply on the earth is repeated in verse 7 with even more emphasis. Though multiplying would bring more sinners into the world, yet God would not be defeated by this: by His own pure grace He is able to save sinners. People today try every method of keeping the population of the world down, but God has not told them to do this. He knows how to take care of this problem and will do so in His own way. The world worries over a "population explosion," but God will relieve this very soon when the Lord Jesus comes to rapture Home to heaven all who have received Him as Savior. Then the following judgments of the tribulation will further drastically reduce earth's population!

At this time also God announced a covenant with Noah and his sons, also including all his descendants, as well as birds and animals, all who had been in the ark, therefore not fish. The covenant was to the effect that God would not again send a flood to destroy the earth (vv. 10-11). When a flood of this kind had occurred once, then people would be apprehensive of another, but God's word is absolute in this matter. Sadly, because another has not come, people deny that the first ever happened! Such is the perversity of human sinful nature!

Six verses are then devoted to God's establishing the sign of the covenant (vv. 12-17). The rainbow was this sign, not seen during the flood, but after it was over. God set His bow in the cloud. The scientific explanation of the rainbow is that the raindrops act as the prismatic medium that causes a refraction of the rays of the sun. The pure white light is thus divided into seven distinct visible colors, always seen in the same order, each color of the spectrum having a beauty of its own. This is a lovely picture of God's glory, for "God is light," and each color is symbolical of some particular aspect of God's many attributes, — supremacy, power, authority, grace, righteousness, holiness, love and others that are implied in the various shades of every color also. Therefore all the glory of God is involved in His promise that He will not again judge the world by means of a universal flood. This beautiful display following judgment is also anticipative of the fact that after God judges the world by that Man whom He has ordained (Acts 17:31), the glory of His grace will again be displayed in wonderful blessing to mankind. The book of Revelation therefore is not merely a book of judgments, but "the revelation of Jesus Christ," for all the beauty of the glory of God will be displayed in Him who conquers every enemy and shines forth in His eternal brightness for the purest blessing of mankind.

EARLY FAILURE OF HUMAN GOVERNMENT (vv. 18-28

The names of Noah's sons are given us in verse 18, — Shem, Ham and Japheth, — then the positive declaration is made that "from these the whole earth was populated." Shem is the father of the Semitic, swarthy races, Ham of the darker races, and Japheth of the fairer white races. However obscure some races have been, they have **become** obscure since Noah's time. How they were scattered through the world, — even into North and South America, — we have no clear knowledge, but all are the descendants of Noah.

Noah's occupation of farming was of course commendable, but anything may be abused and cause trouble. The man who was given the dignity of authority in government allowed himself an excess of wine and became drunk, and in this state was unclothed in his tent. This illustrates the weakness of human government from its very beginning. Why is human government doomed to fail? Because those in authority fail to exercise **self**-government. If one does not properly rule himself, how can he be trusted to rule others?

This weakness also leads to another evil, as we see in Ham, the son of Noah. He showed serious disrespect for his father. Instead of covering Him when he saw him uncovered, he went and told his two brothers (v. 22). This is the evil of despising government, which has become most prevalent in the day in which we live (Jude 8). Though governments often fail sadly, this gives us no right to reject or disobey proper authority (Rom. 13:1-7).

Ham's brothers, Shem and Japheth, at least showed the respect that was due to their parent, by going backwards into the tent and covering their father. Whether it is a question of parental authority or of governmental authority, the same principle holds true, proper respect will seek to cover failure rather than to expose it. But it must be emphasized that this is in cases of failure, not in cases of wicked abuse of authority. Even in such cases, however, a believer is not given permission by God to fight against government.

When Noah awoke he knew that Ham had shown this disrespect toward him, though we are not told how he found out (v. 24). Then he pronounced a curse, not upon Him, but upon his son Canaan. It may be that this would hurt Ham more than if the curse had been on him. Canaan would be "a servant of servants" to his brethren. How far this curse would extend to Canaan's children we do not know. But Shem was blessed, or rather, the Lord God of Shem was blessed (v. 26). Of course we know that Israel came from Shem. From Shem have come the more introspective, contemplative races which tend toward mysticism, if not kept in check. Japheth is the father of the energetic, practical races whose tendency is materialistic. If both are controlled and kept in proper balance, all would be well, but it has not been so. God would enlarge Japheth, and it is true that the white races have multiplied greatly on earth. Japheth would dwell in the tents of Shem. His practical energy was not enough. He would need a dwelling of contemplative faith too. This may also have reference to the present age of grace, when Israel had rejected their Messiah and the Gentiles are "grafted in" to Israel's stock, virtually dwelling in Israel's tents until Israel is restored. In both cases Canaan would be their servant.

Though this is no doubt prophetic, it does not infer that anyone has the right to subjugate others as slaves to themselves. That is, God is not giving authority to anyone to put the descendants of Canaan under servitude to them. But since Ham was not properly subject to government, then his descendants would learn by experience what obedience to authority means. In fact, we may all take a lesson from this, that we should willingly bow to authority that God has allowed to be over us. Not only Canaan's seed, but all mankind has been put under a curse, that of not continuing in obedience to all that the law commands (Gal. 3:10). Therefore, let us not think we are better than Ham.

Noah continued to live 300 years after the flood, attaining an age of 950 years, only 19 short of Methuselah. He lived long enough to see a large population of his own descendants.

Genesis 10

DESCENDANTS OF NOAH (vv. 1-32)

In this chapter the genealogy of Japheth is given first (vs. 1-5). Their history is not pursued in the book of Genesis: their character was that of the energy of independence, and though at first it seems they were involved in the building of the tower of Babel (for all Noah's family evidently remained at that time close to that area), yet they soon spread northward and had no significant connection with Abraham and his descendants

There is more said about the family of Ham (vv. 6-20). Nimrod was his grandson, and he became a mighty hunter in the earth (vv. 8-9). There is more implied in this than merely his being a literal hunter of animals. His name means "we will rebel," not only "**I** will rebel." He was a leader in hunting the souls of man, to make them rebels. The beginning of his kingdom was Babel, where man was exalted in defiance of God. Other places are also mentioned in the land of Shinar. "From that land he went forth to Assyria and built Nineveh, Rehoboth-Ir, Caleh and Resen" (v. 11 — NASB). This was no doubt **after** the Lord scattered the people from Babel (Gen. 11:8). Nimrod's ambitious course of self-will was not stopped even by God's judgment at the tower of Babel.

Canaan is spoken of in verse 15, along with his descendants, who took up the land that God had before decided was to be Israel's possession (v. 19). Because the Canaanites sank down in idolatry and demon worship in later years, Israel was told to completely dispossess them of that land (Cf. Gen. 15:16; Lev. 18:24-25); Lev. 20:23-24; Deut. 31:3-5). God's sovereign choice for His people was absolute to begin with. Whoever took possession of their land in the meanwhile, this would have no effect as to their eventual possession of it. But also, there was no doubt as to the righteousness of God in the expulsion of the Canaanites in due time because of their idolatry and demon worship.

Verses 21 to 31 consider the family of Shem. One name stands out, Peleg, the name meaning "divided." This likely refers to the division of the nations when languages were confounded (Gen. 11:7-8), At this time the family of Shem settled toward the east, from which direction Abram later came when God called him from Ur of the Chaldees (Gen. 11:31).

Genesis 11

BABEL: THE CITY AND THE TOWER (vv. 1-9)

Up to this time there was only one language. In the world today men wish they could have this advantage, but God is wiser than men. Men desire this for the very same reason that caused God to impose various languages upon them. They are infected by a pride that wants to unite independently of God, so as to have a great civilization.

They journeyed "from the east," literally "from the sunrising." This is strikingly typical of man's turning his back upon the promise of the coming of Christ ("the Sun of righteousness arising with healing in His wings" — Mal. 4:2). Forgetting the promise of God, they want to build a solid, united civilization **for themselves**. They have left the mountains and come down to the easier circumstance of the plain, where there is not the same exercise and endurance called for. Instead of trusting God they are moved by what appears to be their temporal advantage. They realize there is strength in unity, but they do not seek unity as in subjection to God. On the plain, of course, they found no stone for building, so they made brick from the available clay. "They had brick for stone and they had asphalt for mortar." The Lord draws attention to the fact of these substitutions because He builds with stone — "living stones" (2 Peter 2:5). typical of believers who are the workmanship of God, not of men's hands; and He uses the mortar of the Holy Spirit of God to join them together. Of course the brick does not endure as does stone, for it is man-made.

Brick laying is much simpler than stone masonry, because the bricks are all cast in the same mold. People who are merely converts of man are formed by the particular teachings of those men — "burned thoroughly," that is, diligently trained along that one line and easily fitted together because their views are identical. But God builds with stone. A stone mason must have far more skill than a brick layer, for he must take stones of various shapes and sizes and fit them together. God converts souls of totally different backgrounds, cultures and persuasions, and so works in their souls as to produce a vital spiritual unity among them that is far stronger than any man-devised unity, for they are bonded together by the living Spirit of God. This is unity in diversity, for each one retains his own distinctive character and usefulness: their views are not identical, yet the living power of the Spirit of God overcomes such differences, uniting them in a bond of genuine spiritual unity.

The Babel of this chapter is typical of the New Testament Babylon (Rev. 17-18), a great religious system devised by men, though it claims to be "the church." Thy have great aspirations, first, "let us build **for ourselves** a city" (v. 4). It is human selfishness that desires "a city," **a great company** in which they might boast. Abraham was of a different character: "he waited for the city which has foundations whose builder and maker is God" (Heb. 11:10 — NKJV). Faith can wait for God to accomplish what is of lasting value. **His** city will be one of absolute purity (Rev. 21:18) in contrast to the intrigue, violence and corruption that is characteristic of men's cities.

They propose also "a tower whose top is in the heavens." This is **a great center** that will stand out above everything, a symbol of their pride. But the Center of the church of God is the Lord Jesus Christ, who "has become higher than the heavens" (Heb. 7:26). The heavens speak of rule and authority (Dan. 4:26), and man would like to take this authority into his own incapable hands. But the Lord Jesus is exalted "far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named" (Eph. 1:20-21).

The real object of these ambitious builders is expressed plainly in their words, "let us make a name **for ourselves.**" They want **a great name** for themselves. But the only One whom God gives a great name is the Lord Jesus Christ. "God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow" (Phil. 2:9-10). How wonderful therefore is the privilege of the assembly of the living God to be gathered together unto His name (Matt. 18:20).

They considered their building to be the means of keeping them from being scattered over the earth, but they defeated their own ends, for because of this God scattered them. He "came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built" (v, 5). Of course He could see this without coming down, but His coming down shows the reality of the interest He takes in men's affairs, intimating that He comes close enough to know all that is involved in what they do. He sees that they are taking advantage of their being united in order to execute their ambitious schemes, in independence of Him. Having begun to accomplish such things, nothing would restrain them from whatever imaginative projects came into their minds

Just as nothing would restrain the builders of the tower of Babel, so today ambitious leaders in the world will be restrained by no barriers. The nations want to share their technology so that they may outdo every past generation in their advances in science and every other element of men's culture. They work hard to overcome all the difficulties of language barriers and of national prejudice, but God continues to work by these things in order to frustrate them. There is constant talk of a one world government, but the great tribulation will prove this to be mere folly. Nations will not co-operate with one another to make this possible. Only when the Lord Jesus takes His throne will this take place, when all shall submit to Him.

The means by which God halted this great undertaking was simple for Him. But it would be a great shock to them to find their languages confused (v. 7), some being suddenly unable to understand others, and probably thinking that others had suddenly lost their reason. the world speculates and argues about the origin of languages, but God has settled the matter very simply. All are the result of His great wisdom. Those of the same language would of course be drawn together, and separated from those who spoke different languages. Their city was left unfinished and all were scattered in every direction (v. 8).

The name Babel was given to the city afterward, its name meaning "confusion" because of the confusing of languages. The Babylonian empire rose later than this, and many nations (including Judah) had to bow to its authority — typically bowing to the shame of their own confusion because of disobedience to God. The New Testament Babylon (with headquarters at Rome) has caused confusion in the ranks of Christendom, and will be brought down in judgment at the time of the great tribulation, as shown in Revelation 17 and 18.

THE DESCENDANTS OF SHEM (vv. 10-25)

From verse 10 the line of Shem is traced further than in Genesis 10:21-31, which goes as far as Joktan the son of Peleg and stops with his thirteen sons. This genealogy of Genesis 11 continues with Reu the son of Peleg, ignoring Joktan and his sons. The reason is evident, for Reu's line issues in Nahor, Terah and Abram, and God had purposed Abram to be the father of a chosen race whom He would separate from the rest of the nations. There was to be absolutely no doubt of this though Abraham did not receive the son of God's promise until he was 100 years of age. God has been careful to trace that line down through the ages, and Matthew 1 begins the New Testament by showing that Christ the Messiah of Israel is the official descendant of Abraham, because He was officially the son of Joseph. The actual line is found in Luke 3:23-38, traced backward from the virgin Mary through Abraham to Adam. The marriage of Joseph and Mary was absolutely essential to accomplish the purpose of God in this matter

TERAH'S DESCENDANTS (vv. 26-32)

Terah had three sons, Abram, Nahor and Haran, and Haran died before his father did (v. 28), Then our interest is focused on Abram and Nahor, who were married to Sarai and Milcah respectively. We shall hear more of Nahor, but much more of Abram, for Nahor is only considered insofar as he is connected with Abram's history. The brief mention is made here that Sarai had no child.

From Ur of the Chaldees Terah took his son Abram (not Nahor, however) and his grandson Lot, who was the son of his deceased son Haran) and Sarai, Abram's wife, with the intention of going to the land of Canaan; but they journeyed only as far as Haran (not even crossing the Euphrates River), and stopped there. It may be they named the place after Haran, Lot's father. Terah died there at the age of 205 years. Genesis 12 gives the reason for their move.

Genesis 12

THE CALL OF ABRAM (vv. 1-3)

The Lord had before told Abram to leave his country, his kindred and his father's house, and go to a land He would show him. this call took place while he was still in Ur of the Chaldees (Acts 7:2-4). God declared that He would make of Abram a great nation, that He would bless him and make his name great, and that he would be a blessing (v. 2). More than this, God would bless those who blessed Abram and curse those who cursed him. Further still, in Abram all the families of the earth would be blessed (v. 3). This is above all a prophecy concerning Christ, the Seed of Abram, through whom blessing is to come to the entire world.

In Isaiah 51:2 God speaking of Abraham says, "I called him alone." He had not called Terah nor Lot, yet we have read that "Terah took Abram — and Lot" (Gen. 11:31). It appears evident that Abram told his father that God had called him, and his father, rather than have his son leave him, decided to go also. Abram too allowed his father to take the lead, which was not faith on Abram's part. How easily we too may be led by nature to go only halfway in the path of obedience to God!

OBEYING THE CALL OF GOD (vv. 4-6)

Abram remembered that God had spoken to him before he came to Haran, and there was no need of God's speaking to him again until he had obeyed his first instructions. Yet only when God had removed his father by death was Abram prepared to go further than Haran, cross the Euphrates River and journey to Canaan. He departed "as the Lord had spoken to him." Lot "went with him," evidently moved by some attachment to his uncle, not by personal energy of faith. Abram's age at this time was 75 years. With his wife Sarai, Lot, the servants he had acquired, and his possessions, Abram began the trip. This time, when they "set out for the land of Canaan," rather than going part way, "they came to the land of Canaan." With the man of faith leading the intended object was attained.

Canaan is a picture of the heavenly inheritance to which all Christians are called **now**, as in Ephesians 2:6 we are told that God "has raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus." This is not future, but present. The proper **position** of the believer is heavenly, not earthly, and he is called to enter into the enjoyment of heavenly things **now**, just as Abram was called to sojourn in the land of his inheritance.

Abram's first milestone in the land was Shechem and "the oaks of Moreh," The meaning of Shechem is "shoulder" and Moreh "teacher." Shoulder speaks of bearing responsibility. This is an initial step of real value for the child of God. Too many of us would rather avoid responsibility, but if we willingly accept the place of bearing a responsible witness for the Lord Jesus, we shall find good results in being well taught, as Moreh — "teacher" implies. We shall not be properly taught if we do not willingly accept the responsibility teaching brings with it.

Also we are told "the Canaanites were then in the land." Canaanite means "trafficker," reminding us that there are those professing Christianity who merely use it as merchandise, and this becomes a real trial of faith to those who desire to walk with God. But in spite of the Canaanites, Abram would both accept proper responsibility and would learn from God. Let us also not use the Canaanites as an excuse for failing to apply ourselves to obeying fully the word of God and learning that word in a living, vital way.

ABRAM'S FIRST ALTAR (v. 7)

At this time the Lord appeared again to Abram, the first time of so doing since His first calling him. When we have proven ourselves willing to take responsibility for a walk with God and to learn His word, then God will certainly encourage us with the blessing of His presence. He tells Abram that He will give that land to his descendants. Then Abram builds his first altar. The altar characterizes the positive side of Abram's history all through. This speaks of his relationship **to God**, for the altar is typical of Christ, whose sacrifice establishes the believer in righteousness before the eyes of God. Verse 8 speaks of his tent, which indicates his relationship to the world, his not settling down, but passing as a pilgrim through a strange land. This may be a negative thing, but it accompanies the positive fact of his relationship to God in the altar. This first altar is the altar of submission and learning, a most important beginning of a path with God.

Abram moves on, going westward, and pitches his tent with Bethel to the west of him and Ai to the east. Ai means "ruins." The man of faith realizes that what he has left behind is of no real value, just as Paul writes in Philippians 3:7-8: "But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I count all things loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ." Paul had before greatly prided himself on his outstanding advantages and accomplishments, but when the glory of the Lord Jesus burst on his vision, those things became totally worthless to him.

HIS SECOND ALTAR (v. 8)

Therefore, Abram had his back toward Ai and his face toward Bethel, which means "the house of God." He had left his father's house, to find infinitely greater value in God's house. The most important feature of the house of God is that God dwells there, yet God's house involves all of God's interests. Today the typical meaning of this for us is most significant, as is expressed in 1 Timothy 3:15, "the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." God's interests in the present dispensation of grace are centered in the church of God, which includes every redeemed child of God worldwide. This therefore pictures the leaving behind of selfish aspirations and advantages, to find true joy and blessing in the things of God, and in unselfish love and consideration toward every member of the body of Christ, the church. Here Abram builds his second altar, which we may well designate as the altar of decision. All true decision for God is based upon the value of the person of Christ (the altar itself) and His great

sacrifice.

DECLINE AND FALTERING FAITH (vv. 9-10)

Abram continues journeying southward. The south speaks of favorable, pleasant circumstances (cf. Acts 27:13). Though we may have made a firm decision to leave our former life behind and choose God's interests, yet there are still dangers to which we may be exposed. Pleasant, easy circumstances are attractive, and if we go in that direction we may go too far. Circumstances change, and we should realize that it is God who changes them, and therefore should seek the face of God as to every move we make. If we have been looking too much at circumstances, then when they change for the worse, as in Abram's case of a famine in the land (v. 10), we are in danger of seeking means of adjusting ourselves according to circumstances instead of more earnestly seeking the guidance of God.

Could God have sustained Abram in the land in spite of the famine? Certainly He could! But Abram forgot to consider this: he went **down** into Egypt, which was outside the land of promise. It is a type of the world in a little different form than Mesopotamia, where he had come from. Egypt's idolatry may not have been so blatant as that of Ur of the Chaldees, but Egypt symbolizes the world in its independence of God. Its name means "double straits" because of its dependence on the river Nile to water the land on both sides. Its character is portrayed in Ezekiel 29:3, where she is quoted as saying "My river is my own; I have made it for myself." Since the source of the river is far removed, she does not give God credit for having originated it.

DECEPTION (vv. 11-20)

As they are about to enter Egypt, Abram, because of Sarai's attractiveness, asks her to say that she is Abram's sister rather than his wife (vv. 11-13). How sadly we too may be guilty of deception because we are in the wrong place! Sarai speaks of the covenant of grace (Gal. 4:22-28), and she was the property of Abram, the man of faith. Grace cannot belong to the ungodly world, though they may admire grace as a true and beautiful principle. But when believers get into wrong associations, they will always in some way deny their proper relationship with God, which is based entirely upon His grace in Christ Jesus. How much more safe and happy is the path of simple, unswerving faith!

Abram too was fearful of that which was not actually a danger at all. He thought if he told the truth that he might be killed (v. 12). Whatever might happen, we ought never to compromise the truth in any way, but one failure, however small it seems, is likely to lead to another that will be more serious.

The matter does not end with their falsifying their relationship. When Pharaoh, king of Egypt, learned of Sarai's beauty and understands that she is an unmarried woman, he has her taken into his own house (v. 15). Also he enriched Abram for Sarai' sake, giving him sheep, oxen, donkeys, camels and servants (v. 16). A believer who mingles with the world and compromises his testimony for Christ in this way may often prosper materially; but ought not this to have greatly troubled Abram's conscience? Was he not also deeply disturbed by having his wife welcomed into the house of another man? Here were complications he had evidently not anticipated, and he found himself helpless to extricate himself.

But the Lord graciously intervened by sending great plagues on Pharaoh and his household (v. 17). We are not told whether Pharaoh enquired as to why the plagues came, but he did find out that Sarai was Abram's wife. Whether or not we are willing to confess the truth, God will certainly bring it out. This is a great mercy for the child of God.

Then Abram has to face Pharaoh about this matter (vv. 18-19), but he has nothing to say when Pharaoh charges him with treating Pharaoh in an unjust, unfair way. This is another result of his failure to walk in faith: he deals unfairly with an unbeliever. Therefore God uses the unbeliever to reprove him. How wonderfully wise is our God and Father. Rather than reproving Abram Himself, He left this in the hands of the unbeliever whom Abram had wronged. This kind of an experience would be humiliating for any believer. He also finds that his fears were groundless: Pharaoh had a proper respect for the marriage bond, as many unsaved people do today. This is a case of an unbeliever acting more honorably than a believer. There are many, though they do not accept Christianity, who do show respect for those who have genuine faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and Pharaoh showed this respect for Abram in spite of his having to reprove him. On the other hand, while Pharaoh gives Sarai back to Abram, he does not expect Abram to remain there. He tells him to "take her and go" (v. 19), "and they sent him away, with his wife and all that he had" (v. 20). By this time also, Abram would surely realize that Egypt was not the place for him. God had brought him to this point of realization, for it is only His working that brings about restoration.

Genesis 13

RECOVERY (vv. 1-5)

At last Abram "went up," leaving Egypt behind and coming into the south of the land of Canaan. Again Lot is mentioned as accompanying his uncle Abram. But Abram had been greatly enriched in Egypt (v. 2), and Lot also had been prospered. There are two distinct lessons here. Typically speaking, God will use even the history of our failure to result in spiritual blessing. Such is His sovereign grace. But on the other hand, literally speaking, temporal blessings do not mean spiritual prosperity.

But the grace of God leads Abram back to Bethel, "the house of God" (v. 2). If we are to be properly restored after failure, we must return to the place from which we departed, and here it is emphasized that it was the place he had first pitched his tent between Bethel and Ai, the place of decision to leave behind his former life in favor of the interests of God. Besides this, further emphasis is given it as "the place of the altar," where he had given God the positive honor that belongs to Him. Here for the first time since his leaving that place do we read that he "called upon the name of the Lord" (v. 4). Compare

Genesis 13:8. Does this not tell us that we are not having true communion with God if we are away from His place for us?

SEPARATION BETWEEN ABRAM AND LOT (vv. 6-13)

Now the wealth of both Abram and Lot raises a serious problem. Their possessions were too great to allow them to subsist comfortably together. Quarreling began between their herdmen (v.7). At the same time it is noted that “the Canaanites and the Perizzites then dwelt in the land.” Is this not told us because they would be observers, and likely to mock at the friction between brethren, specially those who were believers in the living God? If believers today have quarrels, the world is quick to ridicule the testimony of the Lord rather than to be impressed by it.

Abram did not want to continue any such friction: he would not make this an issue with his nephew, but instead asked him that there should be no conflict between them or between their herdmen, for they were brethren (v. 8). He saw only one solution to the problem, that they should separate from one another (v. 9). Lot had been in a good measure dependent on Abram's leading, and should have by this time learned to have such wisdom as to depend on the Lord for himself. But though he had not really learned this, it was time that he must be on his own.

His lack of faith is seen immediately when Abram offers him the opportunity to take the first choice as to where he wanted to dwell. Instead of his depending on the Lord, and therefore rightly giving the first choice to his uncle, “he lifted up his eyes” (v. 10), but not high enough! He had no idea of asking the Lord's guidance. What tragic mistakes we can make by following such an example! He is guided only by what his eyes saw. The plain of Jordan was well watered everywhere — though it is added “before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.” So indeed the world has been greatly blessed by God, but in spite of this the ominous shadow of coming judgment hangs over it!

Lot sees that it was “like the garden of the Lord,” that is, Eden. Thus today, many people are deceived by what appears to be a virtual return to paradise in spite of God's having forbidden the possibility of this (Gen. 3:24) because of man's sin. Also, the plain appeared to Lot “like the land of Egypt.” He had learned by his uncle's taking him down to Egypt that the world can be an appealing place to the eye. He had not been properly recovered from the mistake of his experience there.

Abram was willing to leave the choice with God as to where he should go: Lot was not. He chose for himself, and embarked on a downward course toward the east (the direction from which they had originally come). Abram dwelt in the more rugged areas of Canaan, reminding us of the rigorous exercise of the trials of faith through which the Lord sees fit to lead a believer who purposes to walk with Him. This is not an easy path, but it is by all means the most happy path, for the Lord is there to encourage and strengthen faith for whatever needs may arise.

Lot chose to settle “in the cities of the plain,” drifting toward Sodom (v. 12). He wanted the easiest circumstances, and of course in Sodom he found the people who love the easiest circumstances, those who were “wicked exceedingly and sinners against the Lord.” If we seek only to please ourselves, we shall soon find company who have the same unwholesome inclinations. But it is unbelievers who throw themselves unreservedly into this kind of a life. Lot, as a believer, did have reservations, but allowed himself to settle among those with no such reservations. Thus it will be for a Christian who is only half hearted as regards his testimony for the Lord Jesus. Peter says concerning Lot, “that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds” (2 Peter 2:8).

ABRAM ENCOURAGED AND STRENGTHENED (vv. 14-18)

Now that Lot had chosen for himself what he wanted, the Lord tells Abram “lift up your eyes” (v. 14). This is just what Lot had done (v. 10), but he had limited his sight to what appealed to him. God tells Abram to look to the north, south, east and west, for He would give Abram and his descendants all the land that he saw. How much broader is God's view than that of our natural selfishness! For the believer is told today, “all things are yours: whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come — all are yours. And you are Christ's, and Christ is God's” (1 Cor. 3:21-23). All is ours, but we do not have the headache of maintaining it. The Lord Himself is our capable custodian of it! And we are His!

More than this, God would increase Abram's descendants “as the dust of the earth” (v. 16). The man of faith will always prove fruitful in the end. It may seem otherwise to us because of the long delay, as it did to Abram, but God's promise was absolute: it could not possibly fail. At this time God only speaks of “the dust of the earth,” for He infers only an earthly people, primarily Israel, though later (Gen. 15:5) He tells Abram his seed would be as the stars of heaven, involving the great number called “sons of Abraham,” whose inheritance is in heaven, as Galatians 3:7 tells us, “Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham.”

On that occasion (Gen. 15:15) Abram was told that he would not personally have part in an earthly inheritance, but would go to his fathers and “be buried in a good old age.” Also Hebrews 11:10 tells us, “he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.” Verse 16 further describes the city as “a heavenly one.”

Therefore the Lord tells Abram, “Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and he breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee” (v. 17). He was not to settle down and take possession of any part of the land, but pass through all of it, as Stephen says in Acts 7:5: “God gave him no inheritance in it, not even enough to set his foot on. But even when Abraham had no child He promised to give it to him for a possession, and to his descendants after him.”

Abram moves on then to dwell “by the terebinth (or oak) trees of Mamre, which are in Hebron,” and there built his third altar to the Lord. Mamre means “fatness” and Hebron “communion.” This appropriately follows the second altar, which was that of decision (between Bethel and Ai — Gen. 12:8). True decision to put God's interests first will lead to fatness, that is, spiritual prosperity, which is found in communion with the Lord. This is therefore the altar of communion, for communion with God is based upon the truth of the person of the Lord Jesus (the altar), and involving also His sacrifice, for this was the purpose of the altar. There is no approaching God without this.

Genesis 14

THE WORLD'S CONFLICT (vv. 1-12)

We read now for the first time in scripture of war among nations of the ungodly world. Abram has no part in this. It is recorded mainly because of Lot. Four kings war against five. The names of the four kings have meanings that imply a religious significance, the first one, Amraphel meaning “sayer of darkness,” and Shinar meaning “change of the city.” Thus false religion can speak in dark, mystical ways with the object of improving (not saving or converting) people. In verse 4, however, we see that Chedorlaomer assumes the chief role, his name meaning “as binding for the sheaf,” while his city Elam means “their heads.” So false religion exerts every effort to bind its captives into a sheaf under its authority, while having various “heads” instead of the one Head, who is Christ (Col. 2:16-19).

The five kings are typical of the outright wickedness of the ungodly, corrupt world. The king of Sodom, Bera, means “in the evil,” and Birsha (king of Gomorrah) means “in wickedness.” Of course an ungodly world needs salvation, but instead of this, mere human religion fights hard to bring the world into bondage to its rules and dogmas. Actually this only glosses over the world's corruption with a thin layer of religion, making it seem outwardly less corrupt while it remains inwardly the same, but it has added religious deception to its moral corruption.

The five kings became subject to Chedorlaomer for twelve years, typically the world under subjection to false religion, but finally rebelled against this bondage (v. 4). However, just as the history of the professing church through the middle ages teaches us, false religion can be determined and strong. Chedorlaomer and his allies began with defeating six nations (vv. 5-7) before approaching Sodom and Gomorrah. Then the king of Sodom and Gomorrah, with three other kings, went out to engage the four kings in battle (vv. 8-9), But the fleshly, ungodly world has little power against satanically inspired religion. To be properly delivered from such a yoke it is necessary to have a true knowledge of the Lord Jesus.

The valley of Siddim was full of slime pits in which the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah became trapped. This is the very picture of the ungodly being snared in their own sinful lusts, the slime of this world. Others who escaped this fled to the hill country. Yet they could hardly carry much in the way of their possessions with them, and the four kings took possession of the goods and food supply of their defeated foes, as well as taking Lot captive, with his goods (vv. 11-12). Other captives are not mentioned at this time, but verse 16 speaks of them. Thus man's religion is zealous in capturing both people and what they possess, a contrast to the principle of true Christianity expressed by Paul in 2 Corinthians 12:14: “I do not seek yours, but you.” Nor did Paul seek them as mere captives, but that they might be set free in “the liberty by which Christ has made us free” (Gal. 1:5).

ABRAM FIGHTING THE GOOD FIGHT OF FAITH (vv. 13-16)

A fugitive from the battle brought news to Abram, who is here called “the Hebrew” for the first time (v. 13). The name is in contrast to one settled in the land, for it means “passenger,” or one passing through, a good example for every child of God today. He was at the time living by the oaks of Mamre the Amorite, who with his two brothers were allies of Abram. In later years a link of this kind would have been wrong, but at this time “the iniquity of the Amorites was not yet complete” (

Gen. 15:16), and the Lord makes no issue of it.

Ordinarily Abram would not have become involved in this conflict, but when he hears that his brother Lot had been taken captive, he does not hesitate in his decision to intervene. He led out 318 trained men who had been born in his house, to pursue the four kings. There is a lovely picture here of those born again in the house of God, the church of the living God. They have not needed the training of worldly wise men nor of theological schools. God has trained them in His own house, the assembly of the living God. Here is where the best training is found, in the fellowship of the saints of God (God's house), where God is free to teach in His own way by means of every gift He has given to His saints.

Warfare was not the object of Abram's life: his object was the knowledge of God. So we too ought to be well trained in the ways of the Lord, not with the object of fighting. Yet if we find it necessary to fight we shall be better equipped for this than those who are well trained controversialists, for then it will be God's battle we are waging, and not a battle for a certain “cause” or “principle.”

One verse (v. 15) is sufficient to describe the battle of Abram with the four kings, and his decisive victory. No doubt his adversaries far outnumbered his force of 318 men, but the Lord does not depend on numbers. God rewarded Abram's faith by making his enemies flee as he pursued them for a long distance, to north of Damascus.

Then Abram returned with all the goods that had been taken, as well as with Lot and the women and other people who had been captured (v. 16). Nothing is said of any slaughter taking place, but Abram gained his object of liberating Lot, while also liberating others and retrieving property that had been taken. Do we have such energy of faith to seek to recover saints of God who have been ensnared by falsehood? It was not anger against the enemy that moved Abram, but love for his brother.

BLESSING FROM MELCHISEDEC (vv. 17-24)

When the king of Sodom learned of Abram's victory, he was quick to go to meet and congratulate him for what Sodom was helpless to do (v. 17). But the Lord knew how to intervene first. He sent Melchisedec, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, to refresh Abram with bread and wine. This is the only occasion in history of which we read of Melchisedec. Psalm 110:4 speaks of Christ being a Priest forever according to the order of Melchisedec, and this is quoted in Hebrews 5:10 and 6:20; then elaborated on in Hebrews 7:1-28.

This man is strikingly typical of the Lord Jesus, who has now, in resurrection and ascension, been “saluted of God a high priest forever after the order of Melchisedec” (Heb. 6:20). Therefore, after a believer has gained a victory, his faith overcoming the world, the Lord Jesus, as High Priest, delights to refresh His servant with the reminder of His own great sacrifice, the bread speaking of His body given for us in suffering, the wine of His blood shed for us. In this way our hearts are drawn away from any mere pride in our own accomplishments, for His great work is infinitely greater than the greatest we could ever attain.

Melchisedec too pronounces a blessing upon Abram (v. 19), just as the Lord Jesus pours His blessing on the church of God from heaven today. His hands were uplifted in blessing when He was taken up to glory after His resurrection, and this remains true during all this dispensation of the grace of God. The blessing is from “the Most High God, Possessor of heaven and earth,” a title of special significance as to the millennium.

God's portion was more blessed than Abram's, for it was He who gave Abram the victory, as Melchisedec reminds Abram that it was God Most High who had delivered his enemies into his hand (v. 20). Then Abram gave a tenth of all the plunder to Melchisedec. This was a spontaneous, voluntary response to the grace of God, just as every believer today ought to respond to the remembrance of the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus and His blessing poured upon us.

This unusual experience of Abram with Melchisedec prepares him fully to refuse the offer of the king of Sodom. No doubt the world thinks that the man who gains the victory is entitled to the goods he recaptures, but as with Abram, the believer should remember that every true victory has really been **by** God and **for** God. The king of Sodom tells Abram he will take the souls, but leave the goods to Abram. But it was for the sake of the soul of Lot that Abram had fought: he had no interest in the goods. He tells him he had sworn to the Lord God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth, that he would take absolutely nothing, not the most trivial thing that belonged to Sodom, lest the king of Sodom would take the credit for enriching Abram (vv. 22-23). The Possessor of heaven and earth had brought about a deliverance for Sodom that ought to have driven Sodom to realize they needed the same faith as Abram, a faith that gives God the first place. But the ungodly world only walks by sight, not by faith. How good it is if we, like Abram, allow no suggestion that we are dependent on a world at enmity with God.

However, Abram did not ask that Aner, Eschol and Mamre should act on the same faith as he. He agreed that they should take some remuneration for their work. For faith is intensely personal (Rom. 13:22). As regards Lot also, he was a believer, and though he owed his deliverance to the faith of Abram, yet even this did not awaken in his soul the serious exercise of walking by faith himself. It is sad to think that he went right back to Sodom! Did the Most High God, Possessor of heaven and earth not mean more to him than this?

Genesis 15

THE PROMISE OF GOD AND ITS CONFIRMATION (vv. 1-21)

Abram having proven that he was not seeking gain for himself, but depending on the God of heaven and earth, then the Lord gives him His word of wonderful encouragement, “Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward” (v. 11). It is not simply that God would protect him and reward him, but rather that the Lord Himself was his protection and the Lord Himself his reward. Abram therefore was not merely to have confidence in what God would do for him, but to have confidence in God Himself. The Lord may allow circumstances to test us severely as to such things, but however adverse the circumstances, God's faithfulness and grace remain. Therefore, just as Abram had no reason for fear, so this is true for every believer: he may confide at all times in the Lord, and find the Lord Himself a wonderful reward as well as protection.

However, Abram's circumstances pressed deeply on his soul at this time, so that in responding to the Lord, he did not rise to the level to which God sought to lift him. He answers, “Lord God, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” Though God had promised him many descendants in Genesis 13:16, yet, as he says, God had not given him any offspring (v. 3). He was no longer a young man and did not see any prospect of having a son.

But rather than reproving his lack of faith, God encourages his faith by telling him that Eliezer would not be his heir, “but one who will come forth from your own body shall be your heir” (v. 4). God's promise was absolute, though it took longer to fulfill than Abram expected. Then God brought Abram outside and directed his eyes toward heaven. Could he count the stars? He did not tell Abram at the time that he could only see a very small percentage of the number of stars actually in the heavens, but tells him that his descendants would be as the stars (v. 5).

Previously God had told him that He would make his descendants “as the dust of the earth” (Gen. 13:16). Thus there was to be both an earthly “seed of Abraham” and a heavenly seed. God had wonderful purposes in view, higher than Abram would naturally understand. Yet we are told here (v. 6) that “he believed in the Lord, and He reckoned it to him as righteousness” (NASB).

This expression “reckoned as righteousness” beautifully describes the truth of justification. Though in the flesh we are all far from righteous, yet God delights to count one righteous who has true faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Though Christ had not yet come in Abraham's day, yet the Lord Jesus says in John 8:56, “Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it and was glad.” Abram's faith in the living God was faith in the Lord Jesus, for Jesus is God. No doubt he did not know much concerning Christ, but it is not knowledge that justifies: God justifies by faith.

The basis of all blessing for the believer is in the fact of who God is. This is the reason that God reminds Abram in verse 7, “I am the Lord who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give you this land to inherit it.” Thus Abram is encouraged to have fullest confidence in the living God and in what He says.

Yet Abram feels that his faith requires the help of some confirmation of the promise of God, for he asks, “Lord God, how shall I know that I will inherit it?” Surely God's word was enough, was it not? Yet we are all slow to fully rest in the perfect truth and reliability of that word alone. Later Abram had no difficulty in doing this, as Romans 4:19-21 shows, and his faith is beautifully seen in Hebrews 11:17-19. But his faith had by then been strengthened by God's encouragements.

Such encouragement is now given him beginning with verse 9. The absolute assurance of blessing for anyone is based upon the value of the sacrifice of Christ. Therefore God tells Abram to bring a three year old heifer, a three year old female goat, a three year old ram, a turtledove and a young pigeon. These are all important pictures of the sacrifice of Christ, each one indicating a different aspect of the value of that sacrifice. But the three cases of three-year old animals are intended to specially emphasize the resurrection of Christ. His sufferings and death are of infinitely great value in atoning for the guilt of our sins; but His resurrection is just as vital a matter, for it is this that proves God's acceptance of the sacrifice. Without this we could have no assurance that our sins are forgiven, but every genuine believer may be absolutely positive that he is accepted by God because Christ has been raised and glorified at God's right hand as the Representative of all those who are redeemed by His blood.

The heifer speaks of the faithful **service** of the sacrifice of Christ; the female goat speaks of its **substitutionary value**; and the ram of the **devotion or submission** of that wonderful offering. All of these are good to meditate upon, for they are all of vital value in regard to our being given absolute assurance of being accepted by God and having certainty of the future. The turtledove and the young pigeon indicate the heavenly character of the Lord Jesus, One who is not of this world, but the only One who could possibly be a sacrifice satisfactory to God.

In presenting these Abram divided the animals, but not the birds. This is because the animals speak of the Lord Jesus in His earthly walk and character of service and devotion to God. We may divide this for our own spiritual profit. For instance, in His service we see both unswerving faithfulness and truth on the one hand, and on the other hand gentleness and love. In His being our Substitute we are reminded that He must be totally without blemish or spot, a pure offering, but also that He must be so tender as to be a willing offering for us. In the ram character, He must be a submissive offering, yet not merely submitting through slavish fear, but One who has a genuine will. Such divisions are worth our meditation.

But the birds teach us that He has a heavenly character, high above our ability to contemplate Though He is true Man, yet He is the Lord from heaven, and as such He is inscrutable. Instead of understanding this great glory, we only worship. Therefore the birds were not divided.

These were all presented to God in death, but not burned. The pieces were laid together, perhaps on an altar, though we are not told this. However, unclean birds were attracted by the dead meat, and Abram drove them away (v. 11). These birds speak of Satan and his band of unclean spirits (Matt. 13:4, 19), always ready to steal away from us the priceless value of the sacrifice of Christ. Let us have energy of faith to drive these birds of carrion away, that the truth of Christ may be preserved to us in all its pure simplicity.

There is more added to the picture in verse 12. Verse 10 has shown that the offering of the Lord Jesus was a sacrifice; now we read of a deep sleep falling upon Abram. This speaks symbolically of the sleep of death, just as the sleep of Adam does in Genesis 2:21. Besides this, a horror of great darkness fell upon him. So the offering of Christ involved (1) sacrifice, (2) death, and (3) the awful darkness of being forsaken by God. How well worth our meditation all of these are, for they all emphasize the vital fact that it is the great work of the Lord Jesus alone upon which we can rest to find certainty of eternal blessing.

However, God then speaks to Abram, telling him to know with absolute certainty that his descendants would be strangers in a strange land, in bondage to a foreign nation for four hundred years (v. 13). This would appear to be a hindrance to their blessing, but the very fact that God foretold this to Abram is evidence that God was in as full control of this matter as He was in control of the fact of their eventual blessing. In other words, the promise of God often involves long waiting, but this is intended only to be a needed trial of faith, for God's end in blessing is not affected by the affliction.

In the four hundred years of affliction for Abram's descendants in a strange land, we can see also a secondary application of the picture of the deep sleep and horror of great darkness that fell upon Abram. Israel was virtually a dormant nation when in Egyptian bondage, as in the misery of “a horror of great darkness” in some measure, though nothing like the Lord Jesus bore at Calvary. This was to be true for Israel for four hundred years, but again it has been true since Israel rejected their true Messiah nearly two thousand years ago and has suffered many horrors while in a deep sleep of ignorance concerning the fact that all their blessings actually center in the Lord Jesus Christ. Their eventual awakening will be like a resurrection from the dead (Rom. 11:15).

God's promise included His judging the nation that oppressed Israel, and not only liberating Israel, but blessing them with great substance. This was true at the time of the exodus (Ex. 12:35-36), and it is typical also of the great blessing Israel will receive when at last the nation receives their Messiah who will liberate them from their bondage to sin which has enslaved them for centuries.

The promise as to Abraham's descendants then involved long years, but with absolute certainty of fulfillment. Now in verse 15 the Lord tells Abram himself that he would not remain on earth, but would go the way his fathers had (that is, through death), and be buried in a good old age. Indeed he would have a far better inheritance than his children, Israel. For Hebrews 11:10 tells us that Abraham “waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God,” and verse 16 of the same chapter further assures us, “now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country.” So that Abraham, even without the knowledge of every spiritual blessing in heavenly place in Christ, did not have his heart set on earthly things.

In the fourth generation Israel would return to the land of Canaan (v. 16), because only then would “the iniquity of the Amorites” be complete. God tells Abram this because He intended to dispossess the Amorites of their land in order for Israel to possess it, but would not do so until the wickedness of that nation had risen to a height that required the judgment of God.

God has been speaking to Abram while he was in a deep sleep. It may be that it is still in a dream that Abram sees the sun go down, for it is no doubt in a dream that he sees a smoking oven and a flaming torch (v. 17). The smoking oven is another aspect of the sacrifice of Christ, for it speaks of the judgment of God which the Lord endured alone at Calvary. But the flaming torch tells of light arising after the judgment. The torch passed between the pieces of the sacrifice Abram had offered, indicating that true light results from the value of the sacrifice of Christ. In a secondary way the smoking oven pictures the affliction of Israel as passing under God's chastening hand, while the flaming torch shows that there is to be light and blessing at the end, when Israel finally recognizes the wonderful value of the sacrifice of Christ, their Messiah.

Verses 18-21 speak then of an unconditional covenant that the Lord made with Abram that day, telling him that He has given his descendants all the land from the river of Egypt (the Nile) to the river Euphrates, including land at that time possessed by ten different nations. When Israel returned from Egypt they did not possess anything like that whole territory, and never have. But the promise of God stands, and the fulfillment of this awaits the millennium.

Genesis 16

HUMAN EFFORT TO ACCOMPLISH GOD'S PROMISE (vv. 1-16)

Though Abram was a man of faith, Sarai his wife had not borne children, and she weakened his faith by making a mere fleshly suggestion that he should use Sarai's bondmaid, Hagar, by whom to bear a child **for Sarai** (v. 2). Abram's experience with the Lord in Genesis 15 ought to have strengthened him to realize that God's promise was sure even though they had had to wait so long for its fulfillment. As to the fulfilling of the promise, Abram did not have to resort to a means, not only merely human, but morally wrong. But he listened to the voice of Sarai rather than undividedly listening to the voice of God.

Sarai should surely have realized that a child born in this way would not be hers at all. Sarai could never be attached to the child in the same way that his mother would be. In fact, her giving her maid to Abram is expressed in verse 3 as giving her to Abram “as his wife.” Therefore the child could not possibly belong to Sarai. Hagar knew this, and when she had conceived she despised Sarai because Hagar had achieved what Sarai could not. What could Sarai do now? She becomes so distressed that she blames Abram for her dilemma: “My wrong be upon you” (v. 15). How much better it would have been if she had accepted the blame for her own mistake and humbled herself before the Lord to ask His forgiveness.

In blaming Abram for the situation that arose after Hagar's conception, Sarai asks that the Lord should judge between her and Abram, no doubt because she felt that Hagar was virtually robbing her of her husband. Abram did not remind her that the whole matter was her suggestion, but he made it clear to her that he had no intention of considering Hagar his wife. He tells Sarai that Hagar is **her maid** and she may do with her as she pleases. Sarai took advantage of this permission from Abram, and made life hard for Hagar, as countless numbers of employers have kept their employees in virtual misery by their cruel oppression. Understandably, Hagar became a runaway, not knowing where she was going, but going anyway.

But the Lord still had a good and kindly interest in Hagar. The angel of the Lord comes to her in her lonely distress as she is by a spring of water. At least she could find water, but it was a different matter to find food and shelter. The angel asked her where she had come from and where she would go. She could answer the first, but had no answer for the second. Though fleeing from her mistress, where could a pregnant woman go, specially when having no relatives or friends to contact?

There was only one course open to her, as the angel tells her, “Return to your mistress, and submit yourself under her hand.” She was not only to return, but to cease from despising her mistress, and instead submit to her. A wrong attitude had made it hard for her: to change her attitude into one of submission would of course make Sarai's attitude more favorable toward her.

Then Hagar, though a bondmaid, is given the promise that the Lord would multiply her descendants so greatly that they would be more than could be counted. This is true: all of Ishmael's family (of Arabic descent) who have ever lived and are living today cannot possibly be numbered.

In these verses where the angel of the Lord is mentioned (vv. 7, 9, 10) the angel is clearly the Lord Himself, for it is He who multiplies Abram's posterity. The term “angel” is used to signify a messenger, and Malachi 3:1 speaks of “the Lord whom you seek” as “the messenger of the covenant.”

Though Hagar was not to be the mother of God's promised child to Abram, yet the Lord is interested in her and concerned about her and her expected child. He tells her that she is to name the child “Ishmael,” meaning “God will hear” (v. 11). However, the character of the boy would be consistent with the fact of his being born from a union of contrary parents, the father a free man but the mother a slave. Ishmael would be figuratively “a wild donkey of a man,” self-willed and rebellious (v. 12). He would be contentious, his hand against all other men, and of course they would therefore be against him. This has been one of the characteristics of the Arabs from that time, and their animosity will culminate in the violent attack of the king of the north against Israel in the tribulation period (Dan. 11:40). But it will be God's sovereign way of teaching Israel a lesson they sorely need (Isa. 10:5-6). Consider also verse 12 of the same chapter. Abram learned by experience, and all this history teaches us that a wrong union leads to trouble and sorrow.

Added to this is the interesting statement, “he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren.” This is an intended contrast to his father Abram who made a practice of dwelling in the presence of God. Genesis 25:18 also tells us that Ishmael “died in the presence of all his brethren.” Legality always places more importance upon the people and the opinions of the people than it does upon God and His word. Even in death a legal minded man does not abandon his desire for men's approval in order to make God the supreme object of his heart.

Hagar was so impressed by this intervention of God that she called Him “the God who sees.” “For,” she adds, “Have I also here seen Him who sees me?” Not that she had seen God personally, but recognized Him in the words He had spoken to her, and was evidently subdued. Perhaps we cannot be fully sure if she was born again, but no-one can ever be the same again after having an interview with the Lord of glory. Usually such an experience either draws one nearer to Him or, if resisted, tends to harden the heart toward Him. The latter case does not seem to be true of Hagar.

The well seems to infer that she was in a good place, for typically it speaks of the refreshment of the living word of God, and this one is Beer-Lahai Roi, which means “the well of Him who sees me.” Thus, though Hagar is typical of the legal covenant, it is not necessary to suppose that she was therefore personally without God. No doubt there were many in Old Testament times of whom we can not speak definitely as to their being born again, but we know that this is true even now, when there is fullest reason for a clear, positive knowledge of salvation, since Christ has come and brought eternal redemption through the great sacrifice of Himself. The birth of Ishmael is recorded in verse 15. He is called Abram's son, not Sarai's.

Genesis 17

THE COVENANT AND ITS SIGN — CIRCUMCISION (vv. 1-27)

Another thirteen years passes before the Lord's appearing to Abram now at the age of 99 years. In Genesis 15:1 He had told Abram, I am your shield, your exceeding great reward.” Now He tells him, “I am Almighty God” (v. 1). He does not emphasize the fact of His faithful protecting care for Abram, as He did before, but the fact of His own great power. Based on this, He tells Abram to walk before Him and be blameless. Also, because He knew that Abram's faith needed strengthening, He confirms what He had told Abram before, “I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly” (v. 2). Though God has spoken so clearly as to many things, we too little appreciate the absolute truth of His word, so that we also often need to have our minds stirred up by way of remembrance, to value rightly the truths we have before acknowledged, and so easily forget.

This time Abram is more ready to listen than to question (as he did in Gen. 15:2). He fell on his face, giving due homage to his great Creator, and in this attitude is prepared for a further communication from God. God tells him His covenant is with him. In this way God chose one man to be a type of Himself, for Abram would be the father of a multitude of nations. This goes further than the promise of the multiplying of Abram's descendants, and of course there are today many nations that trace their ancestry to Abraham.

His name is therefore changed from Abram to Abraham. The first means “great father,” the second “father of a multitude.” God adds, “I will make you exceedingly fruitful.” Naturally this seemed particularly unlikely at the time, for Abraham was 99 years of age, with only Ishmael, son of a bondslave as a possible means of further fruit. But God had other things in mind. He tells Abraham that kings would come from him, and further confirms His covenant to be effective throughout the generations of Abraham's descendants, in fact, as “an everlasting covenant” (v. 7).

Also, He absolutely affirms that He will give to Abraham and his descendants the land in which he sojourned, all the land of Canaan, “for an everlasting possession.” Israel has never possessed all the land that God had promised them, and will not until the thousand years of peace. Their establishing themselves in the land as a nation in 1948 after centuries of being expelled from it has been greatly resented by other surrounding nations. Palestinians who had occupied the land, though without any solid form of government, were bitterly opposed when Israel established a government. Though Israel promised them equal status as citizens if they would submit to this government, most of the Palestinians refused this and left the land. Since then they have strongly agitated for the expulsion of Israel in order that they may form their own government, though some remain in the land.

Who decides what land belongs to whom? Only God! and He has decreed that the land of Canaan is Israel's. Though other nations fight against this, God will eventually make it clear to all the world that Israel is to possess all the land from the Euphrates River to the Nile River. Nations continue to bitterly oppose this now, but they will fail. Meanwhile, because Israel's ways do not please the Lord, they must suffer the strong opposition of these nations until such time as they receive their true Messiah, the Lord Jesus.

God's side of the covenant cannot be broken. But Abraham is told that he and his descendants are to keep His covenant (v. 9). This covenant is totally different than that of law, which required obedience to all the commandments. For this covenant to Abraham, long before law was given, clearly assumes that man is totally incapable of keeping the laws of Moses. Why so? Because it required that every male of Abraham's seed must be circumcised. The significance of this is seen in Philippians 3:3: "For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh." This is just the opposite of confidence in the works of law, which was actually confidence in the flesh. Man in the flesh can deserve nothing but judgment: only when the flesh is cut off can the promise of God become effective for anyone. So there is no question of man's **doing,** but rather of man's **dying**, being reduced to total helplessness as regards doing anything. Then everything is plainly God's sovereign working in grace.

Circumcision was to take place as early as eight days old, certainly a time when the child could not understand anything about it. Its meaning remains the same whether people understand it or not, just as is true of baptism, which also teaches death to the flesh. The connection between the two is seen in Colossians 2:11-14. In the present dispensation baptism has replaced circumcision as the sign by which one is put in the place of death, the outward acknowledgment that the flesh is reduced to nothing.

Circumcision was also to apply to a male servant who was born in the house of an Israelite or one who was bought (v. 13). A hired servant was not even allowed in the congregation of Israel: he could not eat the Passover (Ex. 12:45). Nor could any uncircumcised man of Israel keep the Passover (Ex. 12:48). If an Israelite was not circumcised he was to be cut off from his own nation. Why? Because he had broken God's covenant: he had no part in the blessing God had promised, because God's promise is not given to man as alive in the flesh, but to those in whom the flesh is judged as under sentence of death. The sign of circumcision was therefore necessary for Israel, while today we should learn the spiritual reality of it, as seen in Philippians 3:3. Yet even in Christianity the outward sign of baptism has its serious place.

It is of significant interest that, though the sign of circumcision was connected with the covenant given to Abraham, yet when Israel was to come out from the bondage of Egypt, before the law was given, God made it clear that every male Israelite must be circumcised (Ex. 12:47-48). This has continued just as strictly in all Israel's history under law. Thus Israel has this constant testimony to the fact that the works of law must utterly fail. The flesh with all its pride has to be consigned to the sentence of death: it must be cut off.

God does not only change Abraham's name, however, but tells him that Sarai's name is to be changed to Sarah. Sarai means "my princess," as being Abraham's property, but Sarah means "the princess," giving her the wider honor of being "a mother of nations." She stands for the grace of God. Is there not a lesson in this that we must learn the grace of God personally first, before we shall be glad to share that grace with all who may be brought to desire it? Sarah was to be greatly blessed: even after 90 years of age she would have a son: she would be blessed and others would be blessed through her: she would be a mother of nations, with even kings being among her descendants.

Abraham's faith was too weak to accept what God had positively spoken. He laughed inwardly, just as Sarah did later (Gen. 18:12). Could he, at 100 years, become a father? and Sarah, at 90 years, give birth to a son? Of course, naturally speaking, this is impossible, but God is not confined by impossibilities.

Abraham's thoughts revert to his son born after the flesh and pleads with God, "Oh that Ishmael might live before Thee" (v. 18). This is the same lingering hope that engages the thoughts of many people, that the flesh might be brought to please God. But scripture declares the opposite, "those who are in the flesh cannot please God" (Rom. 8:8).

God answers Abraham's suggestion by a decisive "No," and affirms "Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac" (v. 19). With this one son God would establish His covenant, and with his descendants. This refers particularly to the nation Israel, the sons of Jacob, though Esau was also a descendant of Abraham through Isaac, and other nations may claim descent from Abraham also (Gen. 25:1-6), for we are told that Abraham would be a father of many nations (v. 5).

As for Ishmael, God heard Abraham's plea, and would bless him and make him fruitful, multiplying him greatly. He would beget twelve princes and become in measure prominent, a great nation. It is no doubt today not easy to distinguish true Ishmaelites from other Arab peoples, but their character is evidently established as being nomadic. They spread over some area to the south of Israel, specifically "the wilderness of Paran" (Gen. 21:21). Being the son of a bondwoman, Ishmael typifies those under the bondage of law (Gal. 4:22-25), wild and rebellious. Living in the desert, he reminds us that the law is not a fruitful principle of living, but barren, producing no fruit for God. Yet he has many descendants, and this is true spiritually today also. Many prefer the bondage of law to the liberty of the pure grace of God.

But God's covenant He would establish with Isaac (v. 21), a clear type of the Lord Jesus. Sarah, a picture of God's grace, would bring him (Isaac) to Abraham, just as the grace of God brings Christ to the believing sinner today. Isaac's birth would take place one year from the time God spoke to Abraham. Abraham was to wait that much longer, with time to reflect upon the promise of God that was perfectly sure, though not to be rushed before God's time.

This wonderful interview being ended, Abraham then took Ishmael and all his male servants who were born in his house, or bought by him, and circumcised them. Ishmael was 15 years of age and Abraham himself was circumcised at the same time, being 99 years old. Isaac therefore was to be born of a circumcised father. The promise was to be fulfilled only when the strength of the flesh is seen to be cut off, for the works of the flesh are totally refused: the promise can be realized only by faith in the living God.

Genesis 18

A DIVINE VISITATION (vv. 1-14)

Though previous to this chapter we read twice of the Lord appearing to Abraham (Gen. 13:7; Gen. 17:1), we are not told in what way He appeared. Now, in Genesis 18 we are faced with what is called a "theophany," for the Lord Himself appears in manhood form, and two angels accompany Him, also appearing as men. They are called angels in Genesis 19:1. The occasion is not confined to leaving a message, but involves having a prolonged visit with Abraham. It is clear that the Lord desired this time of fellowship with His servant before He must engage in the solemn work of judging Sodom and Gomorrah. In what body He came remains a mystery: we do not know, though it was certainly miraculous.

Abraham was no doubt meditating as he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day (v. 2). It was not the time for work, but for relaxation. Sitting in the tent door reminds us of his pilgrim character. Very likely his thoughts were centered around his Lord, for when He saw the three men nearby, he immediately recognized one of them as the Lord (v. 3). He ran to meet them, though he was not a young man. The energy of his faith and affection for the Lord is lovely to observe. He bowed himself to the earth and entreated the Lord to remain with him in order to partake of his hospitality, offering water to wash their feet and asking them to rest under the shade of the tree. Then he only mentions a piece of bread for food, though he had more than that in mind (v. 5).

When his suggestion is accepted, he enlists the help of Sarah to quickly prepare three measures of fine flour to make bread cakes. Matthew 13:33 speaks of "three measures of meal" also. Typically this speaks of the Lord Jesus in the detailed perfection of His Manhood, the number three implying His resurrection from among the dead. Besides this, Abraham ran to his herd to find a tender and good calf, having a young man slaughter and cook it. Of course this would occupy some time, and he added butter and milk to the nourishing meal, setting it before them to eat while he stood by (v. 8). The calf speaks of Christ in His patient, lowly service, and His blood shed in sacrifice. Milk symbolizes the word of God in its simplest form, while butter is the cream of the milk churned and solidified, thus typically the word of God becoming substantial to one who is exercised by it. How good is such food! Let us keep always in mind too that the heart of God is delighted with that which speaks to Him of His beloved Son. Thus we too may have practical fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.

But the Lord had a message for Sarah too. He asks Abraham where she was, which was certainly intended to attract Sarah's attention, specially when her name was mentioned (v. 9). Therefore she understood well what the Lord said to Abraham, "I will certainly return to you according to the time of life, and behold, Sarah your wife shall have a son" (v. 19). However, Sarah did not stop to consider who it was who was speaking in this unusual way.. She only thought of the fact that Abraham and she were very old, and being far past the age of childbearing. She laughed inwardly (v. 12) in total disbelief, and her silent words are forever recorded in the word of God. (In fact, to her credit, 1 Peter 3:6 speaks of this very occasion when she called Abraham "lord," indicating her subjection to him even in her private thoughts.)

The Lord therefore asked Abraham why Sarah laughed, questioning the truth of what He had said about her. Then He has a question for her that she must face directly: "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" (v. 14). So that He repeats what He had said, and not the slightest questioning of it can be permitted: "Sarah shall have a son."

Sarah did not again show her disbelief, but she did deny that she had laughed. She may have meant she did not laugh audibly, but the Lord insisted, "No, but you did laugh" (v. 15). The Lord had the last word, and no doubt this occasion was the turning point for Sarah; for we read in Hebrews 11:11, "By faith Sarah herself received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past age, **because she judged Him faithful who had promised.**" Her unbelief was changed into genuine faith through the plain word of God given to her, and that faith bore fruit. To take deeply to heart the truth of God's word is the very essence of faith. As to this same occasion, Abraham's faith is commended in Romans 4:19-21.

Abraham has therefore had the wonderful privilege of ministering comfort to the Lord and the two angels as they are on their way to do the painful work of judging Sodom and Gomorrah. It is a reminder to us that the Lord now seeks the comforting fellowship of the church of God previous to His having to pour out His judgment upon an ungodly world. Is there not a special emphasis on this truth involved in the Lord's words to His disciples on the night of His betrayal, "With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer" (Luke 22:15)? Today He seeks that same fellowship with us before He must judge the world.

ABRAHAM INTERCEDES FOR SODOM (vv. 16-33)

Following the Lord's refreshing, comforting experience with Abraham, there is solemn, dreadful work to be done. The men rose up from their enjoyable meal, and looked toward Sodom. Abraham, not realizing their purpose, accompanies them for a distance (v. 16). Then the Lord spoke, evidently to the two angels, "Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do, seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice, that the Lord may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him."

It is a wonderful principle that the Lord affirms here. His own future purposes are not to be hidden from the man of faith. Because the Lord has known Abraham to be a man of solid, dependable character, He will reveal to him His thoughts as to the future. Indeed, He had already told Abraham that he would be the father of a great and mighty nation and that in Him all the nations of the earth would be blessed. More than this, the Lord knew Abraham well, and knew that Abraham would command his children and his household. This is just what God Himself does, in contrast to great numbers who show irresponsibility in regard to so serious a matter. It is not merely that Abraham would give orders to his children, but that his character and conduct were such as to command their respect. Compare Genesis 22:7-9,

But not only does God have thoughts of future blessing for those who trust Him. He will reveal to them also another side of the truth, most solemn and terrible. He must punish the rebellion of evil doers. This is just as faithfully recorded in the word of God as is the blessing of the godly. He speaks to Abraham therefore of the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah: the outcry of the city was becoming so alarming, their sin so extremely grave, that He would go down to fully investigate its condition (v. 21). Of course the Lord knew every detail of the evil of those cities, but He is always slow to judge until the wickedness is demonstrated to be beyond remedy.

The Lord personally, however, remained with Abraham to give him opportunity to intercede, while the two others left and went toward Sodom, plainly as being representatives of the Lord (v. 22). Now as Abraham pleads with the Lord, we know he has Lot particularly in mind. Yet he could evidently not bring himself to think that Lot might be the only righteous person in Sodom. The Lord had mentioned both Sodom and Gomorrah (v. 20), but in Abraham's intercession only Sodom is considered (v. 26). He begins by asking if God would destroy the righteous with the wicked, and questions, if only 50 righteous were in the city, would all be destroyed? He cannot imagine the Judge of all the earth making the righteous suffer together with the wicked, for certainly the Judge will do right (vv. 23-25). Fifty would be a very small percentage, yet Abraham probably remembered that God had saved eight people only out of the whole world when He destroyed it by a flood (Gen. 7:7).

The Lord gives Abraham full assurance that He would not destroy the city if He found fifty righteous there. This surely reminds us that believers are "the salt of the earth" (Matt. 5:13). Their presence preserves the world from the judgment that seems so imminent. At the Rapture, when all believers are transferred into the presence of the Lord, this preserving character will be gone, and judgment will fall in all its terror on the ungodly world.

When Abraham lowers the number to forty-five (v. 28), he takes the humble place of recognizing that he is only a creature of dust speaking to his infinitely great Creator, yet he asks out of confidence in the living God. Again God gives His word that He would not destroy the city if forty-five righteous were found there. Then Abraham reduces the number to forty, and receives the same gracious assurance that the city would be spared for the sake of forty. Then to thirty (v. 30), and lower yet to twenty, and finally to ten (v. 32). Each time he shows that he feels his own unworthiness of making these requests, but the Lord loves to encourage confidence in His grace, and declares that He would not destroy the city if even ten righteous were found there.

No doubt Abraham may have gone further yet in his intercession, for evidently Lot was the only righteous person in the city. But this surely tells us that we generally always underestimate the fullness and perfection of the grace of God. Our prayers might have much more confidence in them than we usually show. Whether Abraham thought there must be at least ten righteous in Sodom, or whether he decided that he had gone low enough in his intercession, yet he ends it here, and the Lord leaves while he returns home. Yet Abraham would certainly be left with subdued thoughts, and his eyes would be turned in apprehension toward Sodom.

Genesis 19

SODOM'S WICKEDNESS EXPOSED (vv. 1-11)

Not in the heat of the day, but in the evening, the two angels arrived at Sodom. Lot was sitting in the gate, the place of a judge. He was a believer making an effort to control the evil natures of ungodly men. Many Christians since that time have attempted to make the world better by their entering politics, but the Christian is "not of this world:" rather he has a message of grace that has power to deliver people "out of this present evil world" (Gal. 1:4), and give them an eternal inheritance in heavenly places. For the world is destined to the judgment of God (Acts 17:31): if we are faithful witnesses we shall warn sinners of this and tell them of the only possible escape through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Rather than doing this, Lot settled in Sodom with apparently some hope of improving it. He was a righteous man, but he "tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds" (2 Peter 2:8). He was simply in the wrong place, and rendered himself incapable of warning the people of God's judgment against evil.

Lot met the angels very respectfully, though not with the refreshing enthusiasm of Abraham. Abraham had run to meet them and bowed **himself** to the earth: Lot rose and bowed with his face toward the earth, a more stiff, formal greeting. Being a believer, he invited the men into his house to spend the night, suggesting that they rise early and continue their journey. Perhaps he felt it would not be too safe for the men to stay long. His invitation was not a warm one, and the men responded that they would remain outside for the night. However, Lot urged them strongly. No doubt he realized the danger they would be in if they were outside.

They accepted his invitation and he prepared a feast for them, including unleavened bread which he baked (v. 3). Abraham's meal had been simple, wholesome food, though he spoke of it as only "a morsel of bread." Lot evidently prepared city fare, possibly rather elaborate, to make an impression. As to the unleavened bread, since leaven symbolizes evil, the scriptural teaching of unleavened bread is separation from evil. Was Lot telling his visitors that he believed in separation from evil? If so, his life style did not back it up.

But their visit was rudely interrupted by many men of Sodom, both young and old, boldly demanding that the two men who came to Lot's home should come out and be subjected to the horror of homosexual relations (vv. 4-5).

Lot's concern for his guests was commendable. He even went outside, closing the door after him, to plead for the two men who had come under the shelter of his roof (vv. 6-8). But his offer to sacrifice his daughters was far from commendable. How could he offer his virgin daughters to men of such vile character? Indeed, he had no right to offer them to anybody, for children are not actually the property of their parents, and besides, they were already engaged to be married (v. 14). As to the two men, he says the reason they had come to Lot's home was for protection. How different were Abraham's words in Gen. 18:5, who realized that his visitors had come to have their hearts comforted by Abraham's fellowship. We may be sure that the two angels would not have allowed Lot to give his daughters to the men of the city.

However, the men would not even accept Lot's daughters, but spoke defiantly, telling him that he had come as an alien to their city, and now was acting as a judge. Of course there was some truth in this, as Lot would have to recognize. Similarly, a Christian has no proper rights of citizenship in this present evil world, let alone having the right of acting as a judge in the world's affairs. His citizenship is in heaven (Phil. 3:20). May we be preserved from unholy mixtures such as that with which Lot became involved.

When the men threatened to use Lot worse than they had wanted to use the men, then the two men quickly pulled Lot back into the house and closed the door. But besides, they used the power of God to inflict blindness upon the attackers, so that this thwarted their wicked intentions. It is a picture of the way in which God will inflict judicial blindness upon the ungodly who have willingly blinded themselves to the truth of His word and laid themselves open to His dreadful judgment. Such blinding is a warning of greater judgment to come.

LOT'S ESCAPE FROM SODOM (vv. 12-22)

With great urgency the men then speak to Lot. No slightest doubt remains as to the enormity of Sodom's wickedness: they have brazenly demonstrated it in public way. The only answer to this whole matter is the well deserved judgment of God. Lot is told to see that all his relatives are rescued from the city, son in law, sons and daughters, "bring them out of this place." (v. 12). For they would destroy the city because its iniquity had exceeded all bounds and the Lord had sent them to destroy it. What news of terrible import for Lot!

Being warned of the imminent judgment of Sodom and strongly urged by the angels, Lot went out to speak to his sons in law who were to marry his daughters (v. 14). Why did he not warn his sons? Did he consider it no use to say anything to them? Sad to say, his own life had not been consistent with any warning of judgment he might give, and it is not surprising if his sons received no good, solid instruction from him, backed up by faithful example. But what effect did his words have on his sons in law? They thought he was only joking. They would surely not have thought this if Lot had before shown any serious conviction that the Lord strongly disapproved of the evil of Sodom. Had he made a habit of joking in this way? Let us be deeply serious in our testimony to the fact that God's judgment will fall very soon upon an ungodly world, and that only in Christ Jesus is there any escape.

Even Lot himself was insensitive to the imminent danger he was in. When morning came the angels had to urge him to leave the city. Yet, still he lingered. Did he want to at least take some of his possessions with him? Then the angels literally took him, his wife and his two daughters by the hand and virtually dragged them out of the house. They had two hands each, so that was all they could take (v. 16).

Bringing them outside of Sodom, the angels told Lot to escape for his life, not even to look behind him nor stay in the plain, but escape to the mountains from the danger of being consumed (v. 17). The mountains speak of a level higher than that of the world, typically the presence of God, the only real safety.

But Lot, though a believer, shows no real faith in the clearly announced word of God. He protests to the angels that, though he appreciates their kindness in actually saving his life, yet he is fearful that there might be some terrible disaster awaiting him in the mountains. He ought to have been so fearful of the judgment of Sodom as to escape from it as far as he could. But he singles out a town not too far away, and asks permission to go there, since it was near and also only small (v. 19).

The angels gave him this permission, saying that that town would be spared when Sodom was destroyed. But he is told to hurry, and moreover that nothing could be done before he arrived there at Zoar. Such is the protecting care of God over one believer! This tells us that Lot was evidently the only righteous inhabitant of Sodom.

THE OVERTHROW OF SODOM AND GOMORRAH (vv. 24-29)

By the time Lot entered Zoar the sun had risen (v. 23). The people of Sodom and Gomorrah, seeing the bright sunshine, would be happily prepared for another day of sinful pleasure. But what a shock! Judgment from God suddenly falls in the form of brimstone and fire such as a volcanic eruption might produce (v. 24), though we are not told the means of this terrible catastrophe. Some would be killed immediately, no doubt others would have time to realize that God was punishing them for their gross wickedness. But it was too late to escape. The judgment and desolation was total. Every inhabitant of the cities and all the vegetation was destroyed. But this is a picture of a greater judgment still: "As it was in the days of Lot: they ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built; but on the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. Even so will it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed" (Luke 17:28-30). 1 Thessalonians 5:3 comments on this, "When they say, 'Peace and safety,' then sudden destruction comes upon them — and they shall not escape."

Lot had entered Zoar, but not his wife: she, from behind him, looked back; and she became a pillar of salt" (v. 26), She apparently lagged behind. Her heart was evidently still in Sodom. It seems that Lot had obtained her in Sodom, for we do not read of her before he went there. Such an unequal yoke in marriage might explain why Lot remained there as long as he did when he was continually troubled by "the filthy conversation of the wicked." They had been told not to look back, but the fear of God had not really laid hold of her soul. "Remember Lot's wife" (Luke 17:32). Salt is a preserving agent, but this is only a preserved testimony to the folly of unbelief.

Abraham rose early that morning to go to the place where had interceded with the Lord, evidently a point from which he could view the area of Sodom and Gomorrah. How deeply he would be affected in seeing the smoke from the land going up like the smoke of a furnace (v. 28). He might well wonder if Lot had been killed in that terrible catastrophe. Yet verse 24 tells us that God remembered Abraham in this case, and delivered Lot, who was evidently the only righteous person in either Sodom or Gomorrah (v. 29). We have no information, however, as to whether Abraham ever knew of Lot's escape. He had lost everything except his two daughters, and though in poverty, he may have been too ashamed to try to contact his uncle Abraham.

LOT'S PATHETIC DEGRADATION (vv. 30-38)

Lot had pled to go to Zoar, but after Sodom's destruction he became afraid to remain in Zoar, and took the angels' previous advice to flee to the mountains. Abraham walked generally by faith, but Lot had not learned such a lesson: he was moved at this time by fear. He found a cave in which he lived with his daughters. How deeply impoverished he had become! Lot's history is a warning indeed to every child of God, that friendship with the world will lead, not necessarily to material poverty, but always to spiritual poverty.

The scheming of Lot's daughters to have children by their father is a sad comment on what they had learned in Sodom (vv. 31-32) Also, Lot had so sunk down in unconcern about the honor of the Lord that he would allow himself to become so drunk as to not realize what he was doing. Nor was this only once, but a second time on the following night (vv. 34-35). We may wonder even at the survival of the children, but the first became the father of the Moabite nation, the second the father of the Ammonites, both of them proving to be troublesome enemies of Israel.

Nothing more is recorded of Lot after this time, not even his death. One writer suggests that this was not necessary because he had practically died long before!

Genesis 20

ABRAHAM EXPOSED AND REPROVED (vv. 1-18)

Now we return to Abraham's history. He journeyed toward the south, which is typical of pleasant circumstances, but nearly always having danger in it. He dwelt between Kadesh and Shur. Kadesh means "set apart for a purpose," which beautifully describes God's work with Abraham, and is true also of all Christians. However, Shur means "point of observation." Does this not tell us that, though we know we are set apart for God, we sometimes look the other way to observe what others may be doing? They may be doing more work, seemingly for the Lord, than we are. They may have apparent public success in a way that surpasses us. They may have attractive programs and entertainments. But whatever it is, the child of God should remember that he is set apart for a special purpose as the Lord's possession, and should always be guided by the Lord, not by his observation.

Is it surprising that following this he sojourned in Gerar? Gerar, a Philistine city, means "dragging away." If we are led merely by our personal observation, it is always likely that we shall be dragged away from the place of devoted separation to God. We can be thankful, however, that it was only a temporary visit in Gerar. But it involved a humiliating experience for Abraham.

He fell into the same snare as when he went down into Egypt (Gen. 12:10-13), saying that Sarah was his sister rather than his wife (v. 2). A Christian, when he fails to walk by faith, will always give the wrong impression as to his true relationships. Let us be unafraid, unashamed to let it be known that we belong to the Lord Jesus, therefore are set apart for the purpose of pleasing Him.

Just as in Egypt, it was the king who took Sarah into his house. It may seem amazing that, at 89 years of age, Sarah had retained such beauty that a king was attracted by her. Whether she was pregnant with Isaac at this time we do not know, but Abraham did know that Sarah was to have a son, which seems an added reason that he should not think of denying that she was his wife.

We have before noted that Sara pictures the covenant of God's grace (Gal. 4:22-31). The beauty of grace far outshines the vanity of the law of works, and it is the true possession of the man of faith. Though unbelievers may commend its beauty, grace cannot be **their** possession, for they hold to the principle of works of law. Believers are sometimes afraid to stand firmly for the truth that grace alone gives us any true relationship with God, and we may leave the impression with the world that we depend on good works rather than on the pure grace of God. In this case our faith has faltered, as did Abraham's.

God again mercifully intervened, not this time by plagues, as He did with Pharaoh, but directly speaking to Abimelech in a dream, telling him he was a dead man because of the woman he had taken, for she was a man's wife. Why did God not directly reprove Abraham? Was it not because the reproof he received from Abimelech would cause him to feel ashamed before the face of the man he had wronged?

Though Abimelech had Sarah in his house, he had not come near her, so that he protests to the Lord, would He kill a nation that was blameless? The Lord had not said He would kill the nation, or even Abimelech, but rather that Abimelech's condition was one of virtual death because he had Sarah in his house, even though, as he said, both Abraham and Sarah had deceived the Philistines.

It was true enough that Abimelech had not been guilty of wrong in his treatment of Sarah, and God acknowledges this to him, but adds also that He Himself had kept Abimelech from sinning against Him, in not allowing him to touch Sarah (v. 6). How gracious indeed is our God and Father in the way He protects us even when we put ourselves in compromising positions! Yet this is no excuse for our failure, and we must not dare to count upon God's protection when we deliberately do wrong.

Then the Lord tells Abimelech to restore Abraham's wife to him, and because he was a prophet he would pray for Abimelech. This itself would be humbling for Abraham and instructive for Abimelech. Even if one is ignorantly involved in a wrong, he requires the grace of God. But then the Lord tells him that if he would not restore Sarah to her husband, he would certainly die, together with his household. Now that he knew the truth he must act on it.

Abimelech rose early the next morning, first to acquaint his servants with what God had told him, which frightened them, for they were members of his household (v. 8), Then he called Abraham and protested strongly against Abraham's treating him and his kingdom so unfairly in the deceit he had practiced. Had Abimelech sinned against Abraham that he should deserve to suffer in this way? What had Abraham seen among the Philistines to move him to do such a thing? (v. 10).

Abraham's explanation sadly shows the weakness of his faith in the living God. If God had led him to that place, then whether the fear of God was in the place or not, he would be sustained by God. But he says **he thought** the fear of God was not in the place, and reasoned that he might be killed for his wife's sake, so that he concealed the truth that Sarah was his wife. However, he wanted Abimelech to understand that he had not told an outright lie, for Sarah was actually his half sister, and had become his wife. But his deception obtained the same result that a deliberate lie would have. When we practice deceit it will likely lead us to embarrassing trouble, for it stems from weakness of faith.

Also, Abraham exposes the sad fact that he had planned with Sarah to adopt this subterfuge wherever they went (v. 13). We only read of two cases where Sarah was taken into the household of another, but we may wonder why Sarah did not strongly object to having part in such deception. However, our fear will make us do strange things.

Abraham found that he was wrong in thinking that the fear of God was not in Gerar. It was the fear of God that prompted Abimelech, not only to restore Sarah to her husband, but to accompany this with presents to Abraham of sheep and oxen and servants, both male and female (v. 14). The very receiving of such gifts would be a reproof to Abraham's fear, but a kind reproof. In fact, Abimelech also gave Abraham permission to live wherever he wanted to in the land (v. 15).

Sarah also was reproved by Abimelech (v. 16). Since she illustrates the grace of God she is a picture of the church in marriage relationship to the Lord. Her beauty should be really for Him, not for the admiration of others (Ps. 45:11). So Abimelech says he was giving to "her brother" (!) a thousand pieces of silver for a covering for her eyes, a veil for Sarah to conceal her beauty from others rather than display it. This reminds us of Rebekah, when she saw Isaac, covering herself with a veil (Gen. 24:65). If Sarah had done this in Gerar, the king would not have noticed her.

Then Abraham prayed for Abimelech and his household, and the Lord reversed the governmental infliction he had placed upon them. None of the wives in all the court of Abimelech had been able to bear children because of Sarah's being taken into his household. Typically this reminds us that, though religious systems, claiming to be Christian, apparently like the idea of bringing the grace of God into their ritual, still they only see it as an addition to their principle of law-keeping, and this kind of mixture of law and grace is abhorrent to God. "If it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace" (Rom. 11:6).

Genesis 21

THE PROMISE FULFILLED IN ISAAC (vv. 1-7)

Now the grace of God bears its most important fruit in the history of Abraham. Sarah, at the unlikely age of 90 years, gives birth to Isaac, at the time God Himself had appointed (v. 2). Though faith (that of Abraham) had waited long, till he was 100 years of age, yet grace (as seen in Sarah) eventually bore the fruit that God had promised. This pictures the fact that believers throughout the Old Testament had waited through centuries before the grace of God is seen in all its beautiful fruition in the birth of the Lord Jesus. What an answer to their patient waiting in faith!

He came at God's appointed time, after the law had proven itself unable to bring forth any fruit for God. He has come to fill the hearts of the faithful with deepest joy, just as Abraham and Sarah were so delighted with their son that they named him Isaac, meaning "laughter."

ISAAC WEANED AND ISHMAEL PUT OUT (vv. 8-21)

It may seem a curious matter to us that Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned (v. 8). But the typical teaching in this is of striking importance. Dispensationally, the birth of Christ is foreshadowed in the birth of Isaac; then the death of the Lord Jesus is pictured in Isaac's circumcision. The weaning of Isaac therefore would speak of the establishing of Christianity as seen in the book of Acts.

At this time Sarah saw Ishmael the son of Hagar mocking. Being the son of the bondwoman, we have seen that he is a type of Israel after the flesh, under bondage to law. When Christ was preached in the book of Acts, this caused contemptuous opposition on the part of the religious Jews who were zealous for the law of Moses. Sarah demanded of Abraham that he should drive out the bondwoman and her son, for she insisted he was not to have any part with Isaac as heir (v. 10).

Abraham found this extremely hard to do, because, after all, Ishmael was actually his son (v. 11). Therefore God Himself intervened to tell him not to be grieved in acting on Sarah's word. However he felt about it, his feelings were not to rule in this matter. The reason for his putting Hagar and Ishmael out is plainly told him, “For in Isaac your seed shall be called” (v. 12). Again we are given the clear message that grace and law cannot be mixed. In fact, when Galatians 4:30 refers to this matter, Sarah's words are said to be “scripture:” “What does scripture say? “Cast out the bondwoman and her son.'” In other words, it was God who put those words into Sarah's lips.

By the time the book of Acts was finished, therefore, Christianity was clearly distinguished from Judaism. God made it abundantly clear that He accepted repentant sinners on the ground of pure grace, and only through the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, the seed of Isaac.

On the other hand, God assured Abraham that He would make a nation of Ishmael because he was Abraham's seed. In spite of the nomadic, wandering character of the Ishmaelites, God would preserve them as a nation, as He has for centuries. They are of course not Israelites, but they are typical of Israel after the flesh. We must not forget that God's dealings with nations as such are distinct from His dealings with individuals in the nations. Though Israel is His chosen nation, yet this does not limit Him in His working in the hearts of people in any nation under heaven. Nor does Israel's national status guarantee the personal blessing of all who are born Israelites. The New Testament makes it clear that personal faith in the living God is an absolute requisite for the receiving of the grace of God in Christ Jesus. Consider Romans 10:1-13.

Abraham, believing God, did not delay. He rose early the next morning, no doubt considering it well that Hagar would have an entire day in which to prepare for what to expect by nightfall. He gave her food and a skin of water. But she had no direction as to where to go. She wandered in the wilderness of Beer-sheba, which means “well of the oath.” It is like Israel, wandering in their present state of independence of God, but in the very place that should remind them of God's oath that He will unfailingly bless them yet.

The water in the skin was soon used up. This is a picture of the fact that under law there was some measure of ministry of the word of God, but a very limited measure, so that eventually the law itself would lead to death (cf. Rom. 7:10). In her utter desolation Hagar thought that Ishmael was dying, and she left him under a shrub while she went a little distance away and wept, not able to bear the sight of her son's death (v. 16).

But the God who ordered her expulsion is the God of grace. He heard the voice of the boy (v. 17), then spoke directly to Hagar, “What ails you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has heard the voice of the lad where he is.” At such a time, why did Hagar show no faith in God by appealing to Him? But if not, God would still hear the complaint of her son. The legal principle always leaves one to himself and to his own strength, which must fail. But God in grace tells her to rise and lift up the lad “and hold him with your hand.” That is, she was to hold him up that he would not fall. Does it not remind us that God, by His grace, holds up every believer, — “for God is able to make him stand” (Rom. 14:4). This is true, no matter how distressing our circumstances may be. God opened Hagar's eyes to see a well of water that she had not observed before. How often it is the case that people are perishing for thirst spiritually because they are blinded by the legality of their own thoughts, and do not discern that God's source of true refreshment is actually near them — “in your mouth and in your heart (that is, the word of faith which we preach): that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved” (Rom. 10:8-9). But people's eyes are not opened to this naturally: this work must be done by God's sovereign operation.

By the water from the well Ishmael was saved from an untimely death, and Hagar also. Nothing more is said about how they survived or where they went at the time, but it is sufficient that God was with the boy. He grew, living in the wilderness, and became an archer, earning his support evidently by selling the meat of the animals he killed in hunting. This was in contrast to Isaac who owned flocks and herds (Gen. 26:14). As a type of Christ, Isaac had a shepherd character. Ishmael's archer character is more in keeping with his picturing the law with its arrows being continually fired to cause damage. Hagar, an Egyptian herself, chose a wife from the land of Egypt for Ishmael, for the law's closest relationship is with the world, symbolized by Egypt.

PHILISTINES RECOGNIZE GOD IS WITH ABRAHAM (vv. 22-34)

Evidently it is the same Abimelech of Genesis 20 who, with his chief captain, approaches Abraham to tell him they had observed that God was with him in all that he did (v. 22). Since Abraham had so increased in riches, this could be a threat to the Philistines if Abraham were to become militant. Therefore Abimelech desires the protection of an oath from Abraham that he would not deal falsely with him, with his son, nor with his grandson. He reminds Abraham that he himself had shown kindness to him, which was true (v. 23).

Abraham had no hesitation in telling Abimelech that he would indeed swear by God to this effect. It is good to see that he first gave this promise before telling him of a well of water that Abimelech's servants had violently taken away (v. 25). Thus the matter is rightly faced, while the relationship remains cordial. Abimelech assures him that he personally had had no knowledge of this.

It may seem that, rather than Abraham giving gifts of sheep and oxen to Abimelech at this time, it would have been more becoming the other way around. However, Abraham is showing the genuineness of his covenant. This reminds us too that in Genesis 20:14 it was Abimelech who gave to Abraham sheep, oxen and servants at a time when Abraham was really to blame. Now it is Abraham's turn!

Abraham set seven ewe lambs apart from the other animals (v. 28) and explained this to Abimelech as being a witness that Abraham had dug the well (v. 30). Of course Abimelech's receiving them would therefore be a public acknowledgment that this was true. Abraham then called the place “Beersheba” — “well of the oath,” because both he and Abimelech gave their oath to one another, evidently a covenant of peace, that neither would infringe on the other's rights. The situation then was much more amicable than that now existing between Israel and the Palestinians (present day Philistines)! But it is typical of the peace that will be established in the millennium. Consistently with this Abraham planted there a tamarisk tree (an evergreen) and “called upon the name of the Lord, the Everlasting God.” It pictures a true, lasting peace to be established only by the everlasting God, and which we know is yet future. But Abraham was welcome then to sojourn in the Philistines' land for many days.

Genesis 22

THE TRIAL OF ABRAHAM'S FAITH (vv. 1-19)

The time comes when God gives to Abraham one of the most severe trials of faith possible. When He calls his name, Abraham is fully alert and responsive, “Here I am.” Surely he would not be really prepared for the message God gave him, that he must take his son, of whom God says, “your only son Isaac whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.” Who can measure what a shock this would be to a father who greatly loves his son?

Yet on Abraham's part we read of no protest or no hesitation as to obeying the word of God. He rose **early in the morning,** saddled his donkey and split the wood for a burnt offering. Taking two of his servants with him as well as Isaac, he began the long journey of three days. We can well imagine what thoughts would fill his heart. Why would God so miraculously give him a son, only to ask him to give him up again? What was God's purpose in asking of him such a sacrifice? But he had learned through much experience that God was to be fully trusted in everything, whether or not Abraham understood what God was doing. This simplicity of faith is beautiful. Hebrews 11:17-19 shows us that at this time Abraham considered that if Isaac died, God would raise him up again, because God had promised that Isaac would be a father.

However, God had reasons for this engrossing occasion far higher than Abraham could possibly know at the time, for it beautifully illustrates the wonder of the greatest sacrifice that could be possible, the sacrifice that God the Father has made in giving His own Son, to bear what Isaac could never bear — the overwhelming burden of suffering for sins that were not His own, but ours. This three day journey reminds us that God too had plenty of time to fully consider the tremendous sacrifice of giving His Son.

In making the great sacrifice of his son, it was no sudden spur of the moment feeling of devotion that moved Abraham, but deliberate, well considered obedience to the word of God. So our great God, knowing fully all that was to be involved in the sacrifice of His own Son, calmly, deliberately counseled this great event in the past, and carried it out with sublime, unwavering decision.

Abraham left the young men behind while He and Isaac proceeded to the mountain to worship. This was to be a matter strictly between the father and his son. Yet he tells his servants that he and the lad would worship and come back to them. Though God had told him to offer Isaac, he had no doubt he would return with Isaac, since he counted that God was able to raise him from the dead (Heb. 11:17-19).

Isaac carried the wood for the burnt offering, and Abraham took both the means of lighting a fire and a knife. In Isaac we are reminded of the Lord Jesus bearing His cross before His actual sacrifice took place. In verse 6 and verse 8 we are told, “they went both of them together.” How much more wonderful to think of God the Father and His well beloved Son going together to the cross of Calvary. For the sacrifice of the Father was just as great as that of the Son. the Son gave Himself: the Father gave His only begotten Son.

The words of Isaac and of Abraham in verses 7 and 8 indicate a lovely relationship of respect and trust toward one another. When Isaac questions as to where the lamb for a burn offering was, Abraham did not yet tell him he was to be the sacrifice, but that God would provide a lamb. This was indeed a prophecy that Abraham himself did not realize the significance of. Only God would provide the lamb who could be a satisfactory offering to take away sins.

At God's appointed place Abraham built an altar, arranged the wood on the altar, then bound Isaac, laying him on the wood. We read of no resistance on Isaac's part, yet of course terror must have gripped his heart, and we know that Abraham's heart must have been affected to its depths. But Isaac's evident submission reminds us of the more marvelous submission of the Lord Jesus when He was hung on the cross of Calvary. “He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth” (Isa. 53:7).

Then Abraham took the knife, being prepared to fully carry out what God had told him, in actually killing his beloved son (v. 10). At this crucial moment he was interrupted by the urgent voice of the angel of God calling him by name. How great must have been his relief, and that of Isaac too, when he is told to do nothing to the lad. Then it is made clear to him that this was “only a test,” the trial of his faith, which is “much more precious than of gold that perishes” (1 Peter 1:7). The reality of Abraham's faith had been proven, and the trial must end before Isaac is actually sacrificed. Yet this historical record is inscribed in the word of God for eternity, not only as a commendation of genuine, unquestioning faith, but as a striking picture of the Father sacrificing His Son.

But also the Lord has a substitute for Isaac ready at that very spot. He caused Abraham to look behind him, where a ram was caught in a thicket by his horns (v. 13). How a domesticated animal came to be there we do not know, except that God led it there. At least Abraham recognized it as an acceptable offering and offered it to God as a burnt offering instead of his son. Isaac would surely be thankful for such a substitute, just as believers today thank God for the Lord Jesus and His great substitutionary work at Calvary for our sakes.

Appropriately, Abraham named that place “Jehovah Jireh,” meaning “the Lord will provide.” Added to this we are told it is “the mount of the Lord.” Later Mount Sinai and Mount Horeb are called “the mount of God” and “the mount of the Lord,” for the expression speaks of the height from which God deals with mankind. But this mountain, speaking of the grace of God in the gift of His Son, is the first mentioned, for it is nearest to God's heart. The law must take a lower place.

Following this the angel of the Lord (that is, the Lord Jesus Himself) called to Abraham the second time from heaven. Actually, He confirms the promise He had made before to Abraham (vv. 17-18), and yet tells him that He will bring this promise to pass because Abraham had obeyed His voice in this matter. One might ask, if Abraham had not obeyed, would the promise be ineffective? The answer is simply that God's promise can never fail, and that He knew beforehand that Abraham would obey Him; in fact it was His own sovereign work in Abraham's heart that caused this act of willing obedience. In other words, God's promise was vitally bound up with the faith He had given to Abraham

Then Abraham, Isaac and the young men returned to Beersheba, where he was living. This is “the well of the oath,” therefore speaking of living in the calm confidence of the faithfulness of God's sworn promise.

NATIONS BLESSED FOLLOWING THE SACRIFICE (vv. 20-24)

Though Abraham had left his former house, yet his brother Nahor is not forgotten. When God blesses Israel He does not forget Gentiles. After Abraham's experience as to the virtual offering of Isaac, he is told that Nahor has had children. This reminds us that the offering of Christ was not for the nation Israel only, “but also that He would gather together in one the children of God who were scattered abroad” (John 11:51-52). But the special reason for verses 20-23 is to bring Rebecca to our attention (v. 23). She was to be the bride for Isaac, as a type of the Church united to Christ following His wondrous sacrifice. The names of these descendants of Nahor will surely have some significance in illustrating God's work among Gentiles as a result of the sacrifice of His beloved Son.

Genesis 23

THE DEATH AND BURIAL OF SARAH (vv. 1-23)

The time arrives for Sarah's death at the age of 127 years. This illustrates another lesson as regards the aftermath of the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus. Sarah is typical of the elect remnant of faith in the nation Israel, the godly, who virtually gave birth to the Lord Jesus. But after the cross, Israel practically withered away and died so far as any godliness was concerned, and since that time has not been revived to take any place of godly devotion to their Creator. The godly in Israel were cast out by their brethren, and were made to realize they were no longer part of Israel at all, but found that God had given them a place in the Church of God as members of the one body of Christ, of which Gentile believers also are members (Eph. 3:6).

However, Sarah died in Hebron (v. 2) meaning “communion,” which has sweet significance for any believer. Such a death has beautiful promise of resurrection. Abraham mourned for her, as God also sorrows for the demise of godliness in the nation Israel. Then he speaks to the natives of the land, the children of Heth. Heth means “fear,” reminding us of those who, “through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage” (Heb. 2:15). He asks, as a stranger among them, for only “a possession of a burying place” (v. 4). He was not one of them, for he was not afflicted in any way by the fear of death, as he proved in Genesis 22. He had no inheritance among them, and desired of them nothing but a burying place.

They were fully willing to give this to him without charge, for they recognized his dignity as “a mighty prince” (v. 6). However, Abraham is firm and decided that he will pay the full value of the place in money. In this history it is lovely to see the respect they showed to each other. Abraham asks that he might buy a field with a cave belonging to Ephron, whose name means “he of dust,” another reminder of death (dust returning to dust). The name of the cave is Machpelah, meaning “doubling.” Does this not suggest the thought of resurrection, a doubling back from the direction one had come?

Ephron personally expressed his willingness to give Abraham the place without charge (vv. 10-11), but Abraham in response insisted that he should pay the full value of the land (v. 13). We may be sure that this is intended to be compared to

Matthew 13:44, where we are told of a man finding a treasure hid in a field, then going and selling all that he had in order to buy the field. The field is the world, and the Lord Jesus has sacrificed everything in order to buy it, just for the sake of the treasure. Though Satan was a usurper who had no proper right to be “the god of this world,” yet man has allowed him to take possession, and the Lord Jesus would not simply demand it back, nor would He accept it on any other terms but paying the full price for it. Of course Abraham's treasure was Sarah, whom he would hide in the field. The treasure therefore is the godly in Israel: the field is the world. The eventual revival of Israel will be virtually “life from the dead” (Rom. 11:15). Ezekiel 37:1-14 confirms this in its parable of the valley of dry bones.

Abraham therefore paid the current proper price of four hundred shekels of silver for the property, with witnesses being present. Four is well known as the world number, the world having four directions. The book of Numbers, the fourth book of the Bible, is the book of Israel's testing as they pass through a wilderness world. This payment however reminds us of the infinitely greater payment of the Lord Jesus in the sacrifice of Himself at Calvary, by which He has purchased the whole world. Purchase is not the same as redemption, however. The Lord has bought the whole world, but has redeemed only those who have received Him as Savior. His buying the world gives Him title to do with it as He pleases. But He is pleased to redeem every true believer today, that is, He has set them free from the bondage of sin by means of the price He has paid. The nation Israel will be redeemed only when they recognize the Lord Jesus as their Messiah, bowing in faith to His gracious rule. But Abraham buried Sarah in the calm confidence that she would rise again.

Genesis 24

ISAAC'S BRIDE FROM HIS FATHER'S FAMILY (vv. 1-67)

Only after Sarah has died does Isaac receive a wife. When Israel, after the death of the Lord Jesus, was set aside as the vessel of God's testimony in the world, then God the Father (typified by Abraham) sent the Spirit of God (symbolized by the servant) to obtain a wife for the Lord Jesus, of whom Isaac is a picture.

Abraham required his servant to swear by the God of heaven and earth that he would not take a wife for Isaac from the Canaanites, but one from Abraham's own family. The bride of Christ, the Church, is not from the ungodly, Satan-energized world, but from the family of faith. On the other hand, the servant is told not to think of taking Isaac back to Mesopotamia: rather he must take the bride to Isaac (v. 6). Abraham had confidence that the Lord God of heaven would send an angel before the servant to guide him clearly in regard to the choice of Isaac's wife (v. 7).

This reminds us that Christ, having been raised from among the dead and exalted in the heavens today, will not return to earth during the dispensation of grace, but will have a bride whom He associates with Himself in a heavenly inheritance.

The willingness of the woman to travel to Isaac's country was a vital matter. If she were not willing, then the servant was freed from his oath (v. 8). What a lesson concerning the Church of God! There is no demand of law to be placed upon her. She is to be influenced only by the pure grace of God which produces a willing response of devotion that is ready to leave natural relationships behind in favor of a living relationship with the Lord Jesus in heavenly places.

The servant then took the long journey. Having ten camels, it is evident that there were other men traveling with him (v. 32), but nothing is said of this at first because the emphasis is to be placed on the typical significance of this one man picturing the Spirit of God. In fact, verse 10 tells us that “all the treasure of his master was under his hand” (JND). Also, this servant told Laban that Abraham had given all that he had to Isaac (v. 36). How beautifully these things remind us of the word of the Lord Jesus in John 16:13-15: “When He, the Spirit of truth is come, He will guide you into all truth, for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak: and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and declare it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you.” All the Father's wealth is equally the wealth of the Son, and all is in the hand of the Spirit of God to be communicated in grace to the Church of God today. How wonderful is the liberality of the grace of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit!

Arriving in the area of the city of Nahor, the servant found a well where he gave his camels a rest, at evening when it was customary for the women to come to draw water. The evidence of the Lord's leading him there is beautiful. However, he prays to the Lord God of Abraham, that He will show mercy to his master by sending a woman to the well who will demonstrate a character of unselfish kindness. He had evidently no vessel with which to draw water himself, or else he deliberately decided not to do this himself in order that he might depend fully upon the guidance of God.

He asks the Lord that, when he requests a drink of water from a young woman who comes to draw water, she would not only give him his request, but would offer to draw water also for his ten camels (v. 14). This would be no small task, for camels consume a great amount of water. No ordinary young lady would be willing to take on a job like this without any promise of remuneration. But no ordinary young lady was to be satisfactory for Isaac, just as today, a Christian man should be sure that his intended wife is a willing hearted believer.

God answered the prayer of the servant immediately. Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel, grand-daughter of Nahor, came to draw water. Of course the servant did not know who she was, but we are told she was beautiful and unattached. He ran to meet her as she came from the well with her pitcher of water, and courteously asked for a drink.

She did not hesitate, but gladly complied (v. 18). Then she told him she would draw water for his camels also. This was more than an offer, but a decision that she would do so, and she quickly began this work with such willingness that the servant was amazed (v. 21), wondering if his mission would prove as successful as these first impressions indicated.

She was far more than repaid for her kindness, for the servant gave her a ring (evidently for her nose) and two bracelets for her wrists, all of gold. The Lord Himself loves to reward faithful diligence, and this is specially seen in the present dispensation of His grace. There is no suggestion of a bargaining arrangement, as there was later in the case of Jacob's desiring Rachel as a wife, and offering to pay Laban for her (Gen. 19:18). The results at the time were painful, but not so in this case.

The servant then asked Rebekah whose daughter she was, and if there was room in her father's house for him to lodge. When Rebekah told him her parentage, the servant of course would recognize their relationship to Abraham (v. 24). She also assured him that they had provision for his camels as well as room for lodging.

Before meeting her brother Laban, however, the servant bowed his head to worship the Lord. It is good to see this thankful appreciation of the grace of God in His directing him. His words are worth quoting: “Blessed be the Lord, the God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken His mercy and His truth toward my master. As for me, being on the way, the Lord led me to the house of my master's brethren” (v. 27). Do we not see in this a picture (though in measure veiled) of the fact that when one seeks honestly the Lord's way, He will lead him to the fellowship of those who are His own brethren?

Rebekah ran to bring to her household the news of the visitor having come, and then brought her brother Laban, also running, to the well (v. 29). He gives the servant a hearty invitation, calling him “blessed of the Lord,” telling him he has prepared everything for him and his camels (v. 31). Then the needs of the camels were fully met, and the servant and other men with him were given water to wash their feet, thus being refreshed after a long journey.

When food was provided for them, however, the servant refused to eat until he had told them why he had been sent. The importance of his mission was his first consideration. He was Abraham's servant, he tells them, and reports that the Lord had greatly blessed Abraham with flocks and herds and silver and gold, with menservants and maidservants, camels and donkeys.

But more importantly, the Lord had given Abraham a son by Sarah in his old age and this son was heir to all Abraham's possessions. The servant reports what Abraham had told him, that he was not to take a wife for Isaac from among the Canaanites, but to go to Abraham's relatives to find a wife for him. He recounts the history of his coming to the well, and his contact with Rebekah, with her willingness to draw water for his camels and themselves, then also his worshipping the Lord in having his prayer so strikingly answered (vv. 42-48).

The servant asks the pertinent question as to whether they “will deal kindly and truly” with his master. He desires an immediate answer, for if not, he would go elsewhere. It is good that Laban and Bethuel perceived that this whole matter had been ordered by the Lord (v. 50), and they realize that they must not interfere with the Lord's working. They are willing to give Rebekah up without question. Later Laban was ready to bargain with Jacob when Jacob desired Laban's daughter, but there is no suggestion of any such legal agreement in the case of Rebekah, but rather a true representation of the proper character of marriage. For marriage is a relationship of grace. “He who finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favor (grace) from the Lord” (

Prov. 18:22). To pay for a wife therefore is an insult to her and contrary to God's word.

The servant, in having the approval of Laban and Bethuel, again bowed himself in worship to the Lord (v. 52). Then he brought forth jewels of silver and of gold, and clothing, giving them to Rebekah, but giving gifts also to her mother and brother (v. 53). This is nothing like payment: it is free hearted giving.

Then they were able to enjoy sweet fellowship together as they ate their evening meal. Remaining only overnight, the servant, in the true character of a servant, was purposed to return to his master. Since his mission was accomplished, then it was time to return (v. 54). However, her brother and her mother urged that they should wait for some days, at least ten, for they no doubt wanted some time to accustom themselves to the thought of the young lady leaving home (v. 55).

This was not acceptable to the servant: he insisted that they should leave that day. Let us remember that he is a type of the Spirit of God, who acts with positive decision, and produces firm decision in the hearts of those whom He influences. this is further illustrated by the unhesitating reply of Rebekah when she is asked, “Will you go with this man?” She promptly answers, “I will go” (v. 58). Such is the response that the grace of God brings forth from the hearts of those who are drawn to the blessed person of the Lord Jesus. Natural relationships fade into the background when Christ becomes the Object of the heart. He must have first place.

Rebekah takes her nurse with her, but they had little time to pack their suitcases. She would not need the possessions she owned in Haran, for Isaac would certainly supply her with all she needed and much more. The things we leave behind in coming to Christ are nothing compared to the riches of the spiritual blessings that He has laid up for us. May we be glad to give up anything, if it is really for the sake of the Lord Jesus.

Rebekah leaves home with the blessings of her family, desiring that she might be the mother of thousands of millions (v. 60). No doubt God put this language into their mouths, for it has been truly prophetic, just as is the second expression, “may your descendants possess the gate of those who hate them.” Israel has been hated by many nations, but will take over authority in the gates of their enemies, the very place of governmental judgment.

Nothing is said of the length of the journey nor of how many days it took: faith could bear this without complaint. So too, when our anticipation of seeing our heavenly Bridegroom is fresh and real in our hearts, we shall not complain about our present circumstances.

As Isaac went out to a field to meditate in the evening, he was greeted by the sight of a procession of camels returning (v. 63). It may be that thoughts of his obtaining a wife were the chief subject of his meditation, but it is a faint picture of the fact that the Lord Jesus Himself will come to meet His bride, the church, as she nears the end of her journey on earth. Of course Rebekah needed to be told who Isaac was, then she covered herself with a veil (v. 65). She was not anxious to display her beauty at the first moment. We too shall be glad to be as it were veiled when we meet our Lord, for we shall want Him to be the real Object of attraction.

The servant gives the report of his mission to Isaac, and Isaac receives Rebekah as his wife. There is no mention of any marriage ceremony, for at that time it was not necessary to satisfy government as to the act of marriage. There was no doubt of marriage having taken place, however. Isaac took Rebekah into his mother's tent. Typically this tells us that, since Israel has been set aside as God's testimony on earth, the church of God has taken her place in this capacity. Isaac loved Rebekah. This is the second mention of love in the Bible. The first was the love of Abraham for his son (Gen. 22:2), typical of God the Father's love for His Son. The love of Isaac for Rebekah is typical of the love of Christ toward the assembly, the church of God. It is beautiful to remark the truth symbolized also in Isaac's being comforted after his mother's death. Since the godly remnant of Israel has passed off the scene, the Lord Jesus now finds comfort in His bride, the church.

Genesis 25

OTHER GENERATIONS OF ABRAHAM (vv. 1-6)

We are not told at what time Abraham took Keturah as a wife. Of course, God could enable him to be a father of children even after Sarah had died, but in this case he would be over 137 years, and nothing is given to enlighten us in this matter. However, verses 1-4 tell us that Keturah bore Abraham six sons, and that some of these also had sons afterward. Whenever they were born, they were not considered by God as having any place compared to Isaac. Abraham gave all that he had to Isaac (v. 5). Yet in fact we are also told that he had sons by concubines. All of this reminds us that, though God's prime interests are centered in His Son and the bride His Son receives, yet He does not forget His kindness toward Gentile nations. To these sons Abraham gave gifts, but sent them away from any close proximity to Isaac, to the land of the east (v. 6). The names, Midian, Ephah and Sheba are mentioned in Isaiah 60:6 when the prophet speaks of Gentile nations converted in the coming millennial age.

ABRAHAM'S DEATH AND BURIAL (7-11)

Abraham's age is now recorded — 175 years — at the time of his death (vv. 7-8). Isaac and Ishmael were brought together again at this time, both having part in their father's burial. Abraham was buried with Sarah in the cave he had bought from Ephron (Gen. 23:19-20). Just as the circumstances at that time pointed to the promise of Sarah's future resurrection, so it was with Abraham, who fully believed that God was able to raise the dead (Rom. 4:17-21).

After this Isaac takes the place of Abraham as a vessel of God's testimony, and is blessed by God (v. 11), living by Beer Lahai Roi, “the well of Him who sees me.” There is true spiritual refreshment (the well) in the consciousness of living under the eye of God.

THE FAMILIES OF ISHMAEL (vv. 12-18)

Ishmael's genealogy is given in verses 12-16. As we have seen in verses 1-4, God does not forget the Gentile nations because of His interest in the church (Rebekah); now Ishmael's genealogy tells us God does not forget Israel either, for Ishmael typifies Israel under law (Gal. 4:22-25). That nation is yet to receive blessing from God in His own time. Verse 16 mentions 12 princes, a reminder of Israel's 12 tribes. Ishmael then died at the age of 137 years (v. 17). His brother Isaac outlived him by 33 years (Gen. 35:28). Ishmael both lived and died in the presence of his brethren (v. 18). Such is the legal principle. Legality lives as before the eyes of others: faith lives as in the presence of God.

ISAAC'S SONS (vv. 19-28)

Verse 19 draws our attention now to Isaac, whom we have seen takes Abraham's place as the vessel of God's direct testimony in the world (v. 11). He was forty years of age when married to Rebekah. The same problem that Abraham had with Sarah now surfaces again with Rebekah. She had been unable to bear children. However, in this case the prayers of Isaac were answered and she became pregnant (v. 21). She did not understand why she had such turmoil in her womb until she went to enquire of the Lord. It is good to see both Isaac's entreating the Lord and Rebekah's enquiring of the Lord when problems arose.

She receives the answer that she has twins: in fact God calls them two nations, telling her that the twins were two totally different characters, one stronger than the other, but that the elder should serve the younger. This is a lesson that God often impresses on us in His word, to the effect that the last shall be first and the first last. Ishmael was born before Isaac, but he had to give place to Isaac. Now the same lesson is emphasized even when the same mother gives birth to twin sons. This totally casts us upon the sovereign wisdom of God. It is He who orders such matters, far above any question of people's character or actions. He is sovereign and we must simply bow to Him.

Verses 24-26 record the birth of the two sons. Esau, the first, was strikingly red in his appearance, hairy, and his hair red. This reminds us of Adam, which means “red earth,” for Esau's history was to emphasize what man is **in the flesh**, just as “the first man is from the earth, earthy” (1 Cor. 15:47). The second son, Jacob, followed closely, his hand holding the heel of Esau. This is told us in order to illustrate what was to be true of Jacob in his life. His name means “he will take by the heel.” Esau referred to this later when Jacob had deceived his father in taking Esau's place. Esau's words then were “Is he not rightly named Jacob, for he has supplanted me these two times?” (Gen. 22:36). His hand grasped for the blessing that was going to be given to Esau. This tells us what Jacob was **in the flesh**, but later his name was changed to Israel, “a prince with God,” for God's counsels would stand, and He did a work in Jacob's soul that made a glorious change in the man.

When grown Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the outdoors, while Jacob was of a more reserved nature, conforming to the general trends of society, and dwelling in tents. We are told here too that Isaac loved Esau because he enjoyed the taste of wild game, while Rebekah loved Jacob, perhaps because the Lord had told her that he would be given preference over his brother. But it is not good that parents should ever have a preference for one of their children over another.

Jacob's character comes out strikingly in the incident of verses 29-34. When he has stew already prepared and Esau comes in faint from hunger, asking for some stew, Jacob, instead of kindly giving him some, takes advantage of the occasion to bargain with his brother. He would sell him the stew for his birthright. Esau reasons that the birthright would be of no use to him if he died from hunger, and the compact is made by an oath that Jacob required from Esau. Jacob's character as a bargainer is established from the beginning. He is a fitting father for the nation Israel, choosing the principle of law-keeping as a rule of life. He had to learn by later experience that this principle failed him, and that he must eventually depend only on the grace of God.

But another matter here is most important. Esau despised his birthright (v. 34), that which God had given him: it became of no more value to him than a mouthful of stew! How many are like him, who consider satisfying their present natural appetite as being more important than God's long range blessing! On the other hand, though Jacob used wrong methods of getting the birthright, yet the fact is clear that Jacob valued what God had to give.

Genesis 26

ISAAC IN GERAR (vv. 1-14)

A famine occurs in the land, just as it had in the days of Abraham (Gen. 12:10). In that case Abraham went down to Egypt, whereas Isaac went only as far as Gerar, in the land of the Philistines, but the same place where we read of Abraham denying his relationship with Sarah. It may be that Isaac had some thought of continuing down to Egypt, for God appeared to him, telling him not to go there, but to remain in the land of promise (v. 2). He was not told to remain in one place, but to sojourn in the land. He could in this way count upon the blessing of the Lord for himself and his descendants.

Again God confirms the word that He had spoken to Abraham, telling Isaac that “all these lands” (as described in Genesis 15:18-21) He would give to him and to his descendants, thus reaffirming His oath to Abraham and applying it to Isaac (v. 3).

God speaks of multiplying Isaac's descendants “as the stars of heaven.' He does not tell Isaac, as He does Jacob later, that his seed would be “as the dust of the earth” (Gen. 28:14), for Jacob is seen as the father of Israel, while Isaac, typifying Christ, is prominent for His relationship to Rebekah, a type of the church. Since Israel is God's earthly people, the dust of the earth signified

Yet also, as God had said to Abraham, so He assures Isaac, “in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed” (v. 4). The “seed” here is not their many descendants, for Galatians 3:16 insists, “He does not say, 'and to seeds,' as referring to many, but 'and to your seed,' that is, Christ.” Abraham is typical of God the Father, and in His Son, the Lord Jesus, all nations will be blessed. Interestingly, God adds here, “because Abraham obeyed Me, and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes and My laws” (v. 5). This was never stated as a condition to Abraham, but is said after he had lived his life. It shows the sovereignty of God in knowing perfectly well beforehand that this was Abraham's character, which of course was proven in his life. God did not lay down any conditions to Isaac either. As He had told Abraham, “I will,” so He tells Isaac (Gen. 22:15-18).

In spite of God's clear declaration of His faithfulness, Isaac does not take this to heart in being diligent to prove faithful himself. He is snared by the same fault that overtook his father Abraham, telling the Philistines that Rebekah was his sister rather than his wife (v. 7). He was motivated also by the same unfounded fears, thinking that because Rebekah was beautiful, the men of the place might kill him in order to get his wife. He certainly failed as regards his being a type of Christ in this matter. The Lord Jesus will never deny His relationship with the church, though she may sadly at times deny in practice her relationship to Him.

In this case Rebekah is not brought into Abimelech's court, nor is she evidently courted by anyone else over a period of “a long time.” Isaac was also near enough to Abimelech's house that Abimelech could see him showing such affection for Rebekah that would only be the case between husband and wife. How can our true relationship ever be indefinitely concealed? Things must always come out as they are.

When Abimelech faces Isaac with such facts, Isaac can only admit that his fear had moved him in being deceitful (v. 9). Then he must receive a righteous reproof from Abimelech, who told him he had been guilty of an injustice toward the Philistines in misrepresenting the truth. One of his men might easily have treated her as an unattached woman and had sexual relations with her. If a believer does not frankly confess before the world his relationship to the Lord Jesus, he is unfair to the world.

Isaac is not sent away, however. Rather, Abimelech gives orders to his people not to touch Isaac or his wife, on pain of death (v. 11). In view of this, how foolish had been Isaac's fear of being killed by the Philistines! The truth having come out, then we read that Isaac is greatly blessed. The crop he planted that year brought forth one hundred bushels from one bushel of seed, an absolutely maximum yield. This prosperity continued, so that his wealth increased to such an extent that he became the envy of the Philistines (v. 14).

There is important spiritual significance in the envy of the Philistines leading them to stop up the wells that Abraham had dug, and fill them with earth (v. 15). Wells are typical of the living refreshment of the word of God obtained through the work of the man of faith. Only through spiritual diligence do we find the blessing of drinking in the truth of God's word, and Abraham's faith and labor had been rewarded by this refreshment. But the Philistines picture the mere formalism of Christian religion, without its living power. They do not appreciate the pure word of God, but contaminate it with material, earthly doctrines. Earthly pleasures and cares displace the word of God so far as they are concerned. This has happened over and over again in our present dispensation of grace.

WELLS RESTORED (vv. 17-25)

However, the time comes when Abimelech recognizes that Isaac's prosperity is a threat to the Philistines, and he asks him to leave them, which Isaac does, though he does not go far distant, for he was still in the valley of Gerar. In that area he dug a second time the wells that Abraham had before dug, but which the Philistines had filled with earth. Formalistic religion may obscure to us some of the most precious truths of the word of God, as has taken place extensively in Christendom. The energy of faith will labor to restore these, however. Isaac also called them by the same names that Abraham had given them. When we are privileged to recover any truth, let us not think that **we** have done something original. Rather, let us remember that the truth was in scripture before **we** discovered it, so that we have nothing to boast of. Let us give it the same name it had long ago.

Digging in the valley, Isaac's servants found a spring of living water, but the herdsmen of Gerar contended for this, claiming that the water was theirs. Isaac named the spring Esek, meaning “contention,” but “the servant of the Lord must not strive” (2 Tim. 2:14), and instead of continuing the strife, Isaac dug another well. However, this too became a matter of contention (v. 21), to the point that Isaac named it Sitna, meaning “hatred.” The wise thing for him to do therefore was to move from the place before digging another well (v. 22). Evidently this was far enough away that the Philistines no longer demanded it for themselves. Isaac called it Rehoboth, meaning “room,” considering that the Lord had made room for him to be fruitful and expand.

However, he finally left the land of the Philistines and went to Beersheba (v. 23). Likely by this time the famine had abated (v. 1). But only then did the Lord appear to him again (v. 24), for Beersheba means “well of the oath,” and indicates that Isaac was learning to depend on the oath that God had made to Abraham and himself. God reminds him that He is the God of Abraham his father, and assures Isaac that He is with him, would bless him and multiply his descendants for Abraham's sake. How often did the Lord remind Abraham, Isaac and Jacob of this absolute, unconditional promise! But we too easily forget what God Himself has purposed concerning us, and we need as many reminders as they. Consider Hebrews 6:16-18.

Isaac's response to God's word is good. He built an altar there (v. 25). Of course this was for offering sacrifices, which would tell us of His appreciation of Christ and the value of His great sacrifice of Calvary. Isaac did not fully understand this, but he did know that only a blood sacrifice was acceptable to God in order that Isaac might be accepted. The promise of God therefore was on the basis of the value of the sacrifice of His beloved son. The altar indicates Isaac's relationship to God, while his tent (as with Abraham) speaks of his relationship toward the world — a pilgrim passing through. In the same place Isaac's servants dug a well, speaking of the refreshment of the word of God energized by the Spirit of God.

A COVENANT WITH ABIMELECH (vv. 26-35)

The prosperity of Isaac served to put questions in the mind of the Philistine king Abimelech and his officers as to whether Isaac might threaten their liberty or their independence. When they come to him, Isaac is puzzled, however, because they had before asked him to leave them, and he considered that they hated him (vv. 26-27). Actually, they were more afraid than they were hateful.

They tell him that they see plainly that the Lord is with him, of course because of his prosperity. They knew well that if a man has power in his hand, he may often use it in oppressing others. Sad to say, even believers are not exempt from this danger, as we see in some of Judah's kings, including Solomon (1 Kings 11:6; 1 Kings 12:4). It is too bad that an unbeliever must require a promise from a believer that he will not harm him. Our character as believers should be such that an unbeliever would have full confidence that we should do him good rather than harm.

But Abimelech reminds Isaac that the Philistines had actually been good to him, and asks that Isaac should respond in the same way. Isaac had no reservations as to making such a covenant, however, and he makes his visitors a feast, while both parties make oaths to one another that they will remain peaceful (vv. 30-31).

At the same time Isaac learns from his servants that they had dug a well and found water (v. 32). They called the well Shebah, meaning “oath,” and the place was therefore called Beersheba (v. 33). But this must have been in confirmation of the fact that this was its name before, for Abraham and Abimelech had made a covenant at Beersheba, naming it this because of their oath (Gen. 21:31-32). These two covenants (between Abraham and Abimelech and Isaac and Abimelech) were the occasion of the well receiving its name, but it is symbolical of the far greater covenant that God made with Abraham and confirmed to Isaac.

But verses 34-35 show us that Esau, the firstborn of Isaac, did not value the promise of God as his fathers did. Isaac had received a wife from the kindred of Abraham, for God's promise was connected with that line, the line of faith. Esau took two wives, both from the Hittites, the children of Heth, which means “fear,” typical of those who live in fear of death rather than by faith. Compare Hebrews 2:15, which speaks of “those who, through fear of death, were all their lifetime subject to bondage.” How dishonoring to God it is to mix His promise with the fear of death! But mixed marriages have been a source of great trouble throughout history. Esau's marriages therefore were a grief of mind to his parents. May every believer pay closest attention to the serious admonition of 2 Corinthians 6:14 to 18, which begins, “Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers.”

Genesis 27

JACOB DECEIVES HIS FATHER (1-29)

In spite of Esau's wrong marriages, and in spite of God's word that Isaac's older son would serve the younger (Gen. 25:23), Isaac was ready to confer his chief blessing on Esau. We are told in verse 1 that his eyes were dim, and no doubt his spiritual eyes were dim also, evidently because he allowed his natural appetite to take precedence over the revealed will of God (Gen. 25:28) But in order that he might bless Esau, he wanted Esau first to take his bow and quiver of arrows to hunt deer, and bring him cooked venison, “such as I love,” he adds (v. 4).

When Rebekah overheard these instructions, she recognized a threatened emergency, but instead of going in prayer to the Lord, who had told her that Jacob would have the chief place, she took the only way she saw to change things. It is true that her plan worked in the way she wanted, and no doubt God was over this, but still we cannot defend her cunning scheme to deceive her husband. God could have worked the matter out in another way without both Rebekah and Jacob being involved in deception. If they had acted in faith and had depended on God, they may have seen a miraculous answer to the problem, and in this way have reason for deepest thanksgiving, rather then being left with troubled consciences.

Rebekah had Jacob kill two kids of the goats, of which the meat would be young and tender (v. 9), and she was able to prepare it in such a way that Isaac did not even suspect it was not venison. So much for our preconceived ideas of what we like the best!

Jacob was hesitant about the whole scheme. He objected that all his father had to do was to feel his hands and arms, for Esau was a hairy man and Jacob not so (vv. 11-12), But Rebekah urged him to obey her and that she would bear the results of any miscarriage of the plan. One writer defends Jacob in this whole matter because he says that Jacob was responsible to obey his mother, therefore no blame could attach to him! But Jacob was a grown man, not a little child. In fact, even a little child is wrong to tell a lie, whether his mother tells him to or not. Rebekah gave Jacob Esau's clothes to wear, put goat skins on his hands and on the smooth of his neck, and Jacob proceeded with the deception.

He brought the meat to his father and told him that he was Esau. Isaac wondered at Esau's finding venison so quickly, but Jacob hypocritically brought God's name into his deception in order to make Isaac more comfortable (v. 20). Still, Isaac was not too sure that it was Esau speaking to him, and as Jacob anticipated, he wanted to feel him to be certain. It is a lesson for us that we cannot always depend on our sight or on our feelings either. But Isaac allowed his feelings to persuade him, though his hearing told him it was Jacob's voice (v. 21). Still, he pressed further in asking if Jacob was actually his very son Esau, and Jacob flatly lied to him, saying, “I am.”

After finishing his meal, which he thought was venison, Isaac asked his son to kiss him, and he recognized the outdoor smell of Esau's clothes, as being the smell of a field which the Lord has blessed” (v. 27).

His blessing first voices the desire that God would give his son of the dew of heaven. This is typical of the living refreshment of the Spirit of God. Added to this is an abundance of grain and wine. The grain speaks of the Lord Jesus as the food of the believer, whether it may be barley (typical of His character of lowly humiliation on earth) or wheat (symbolizing the higher truth of Christ glorified at God's right hand). Both are valuable in providing needed nourishment for the Christian life. The new wine pictures the joy of a new life in Christ based upon the value of the shedding of His blood. Every Christian father or mother may well desire such blessing for all of their children.

But more than this: Isaac desires and virtually prophesies that people will serve his son. Nations would bow down to him. He would be the master of his brothers. His own mother's sons would bow down to him. Those who cursed him would be cursed, and those who blessed him would be blessed (v. 29).

While Isaac intended all this for Esau, he was not in concord with God's thoughts, for God had decreed that the elder would serve the younger, and Isaac did not realize that he was blessing his second son rather than his first. Jacob was to be the father of the Israelitish nation, and other nations would eventually bow to them. Predominantly, Christ would be born of the line of Jacob, and the force of the prophecy is primarily that all must bow to Christ. But the nation Israel was to have a place above all other nations. Nations who bless her will find themselves blessed, while those who curse her will not escape a curse on themselves. The ultimate fulfillment of this prophecy has never taken place as yet, and will not until Israel is recovered from her present state of unbelief in bowing to the Lord Jesus, the true Messiah of Israel.

ESAU BLESSED IN A SECOND PLACE (vv. 30-40)

Jacob was able to accomplish his ends just in time to leave his father before Esau returned with his prepared venison. He had been quick in finding a deer and preparing it for Isaac, no doubt because he was anxious to receive the blessing. Actually, since he had sold his birthright to Jacob, he was not entitled to the blessing, but he did not tell his father this. He saw an opportunity of getting the blessing of the firstborn, and would get it before his brother became aware of it!

But he found that it was he who was too late. Isaac was shocked when Esau told him who he was (vv. 32-33). At first he questions who had already come, but of course he knew the answer to this. He tells Esau he has blessed the first one who came, and adds positively that “he **shall** be blessed.” In this way God had overruled Jacob's inexcusable deceit in order that the blessing should be given to the younger son, as God had decreed.

Esau deeply felt the pain of being deprived of the blessing of the firstborn, and cried with an exceeding great and bitter cry, entreating that his father should bless him also. Hebrews 12:16-17 refers to this occasion, speaking of Esau being a profane person who, for one morsel of food sold his birthright, then when he expected the blessing, was rejected, We are told that “he found no place for repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.” Not that he sought repentance: he sought the blessing, but without repentance. He ought to have repented for despising his birthright, but he found no place to repent.

Isaac could not bless Esau now with the same blessing as Jacob, for he had made Esau the servant of Jacob, as he tells him that his brother had come deceitfully to take away Esau's blessing (v. 35). Esau reminds his father that Jacob's name means supplanter, and that he has been true to his name in taking away both Esau's birthright and his blessing. Did Esau forget that he had willingly sold his birthright to Jacob? This being the case, Jacob was entitled to the blessing too. But Esau wanted the blessing though he had despised the birthright. He entreats his father if he had not at least reserved some blessing for him (v. 36). This is a common affliction among human beings. While they have no interest in that which God has to give in a spiritual way (for the birthright is significant of this), they are most importunate when it becomes a matter of their temporal prosperity and blessings. It is really a matter of their desiring all the blessings that God may give while ignoring the Giver Himself. Thus men may receive much blessing from God, yet at the same calmly refuse to receive the Lord Jesus, the Son of God, as Savior and Lord.

In all this history God was sovereignly working. Jacob was the heir according to His promise. Esau is typical of the flesh, which will not live before God. It must be put into the place of subjection. Yet Isaac does give Esau his blessing, just as God in man's present life provides many material blessings for him in spite of his rebellious character. But Isaac tells Esau he will live by his sword. The flesh is always in conflict, just as the troubled sea cannot rest, and the flesh considers it necessary to fight for its rights. Esau would serve his brother, yet would break Jacob's yoke from off his neck: in spite of his subjection, his rebellious character could not be tamed, just as the flesh continually breaks out in rebellion.

ESAU'S HATRED AWAKENED (vv. 41-46)

This occasion awakened such hatred in Esau toward Jacob that he purposed to kill him after their father's death (v. 41). While it is only written that Esau said this in his heart, he must also have told someone else of his intention, for his mother heard about it, and warned Jacob of it (v. 42).

Rebekah therefore advised Jacob to leave and take a long journey back to Haran, where he could count on the hospitality of her brother Laban. She tells him he should stay there “a few days” until Esau's anger has abated, but the few days turned out to be over 20 years, probably because Jacob was not anxious to see Esau in all that time. But the government of God did not allow Jacob to see his mother again on earth (see

Gen. 35:27), though he did see his father. She said she would send for him at the appropriate time and have Jacob brought home again. She was therefore as fully deprived of Jacob's presence as if she had been bereaved of him, as she feared (v. 45).

Rebekah had made that decision for Jacob before she spoke to Isaac about it. But her words to Isaac in verse 46 were altogether different to those to Jacob. She tells Isaac she is tired of living because of the daughters of Heth, two of whom Esau had married. They evidently continued to be “a grief of mind” to her (Gen. 26:35). How many Christian mothers since then have had deep sorrow over their children being married to unbelievers! Rebekah tells Isaac therefore that her life would be miserable if Jacob were to marry one of the daughters of Heth.

Genesis 28

JACOB SENT TO PADAN-ARAM (vv. 1-9)

Though scripture tells us that Isaac loved Esau, he had not done as Abraham had in making sure that Isaac's wife was of his own kindred. Rebekah's words to him now evidently awaken him out of such laxity, and he called Jacob and charged him that he must not take a wife of the Canaanites, but must rather go to Padan-aram and take a wife from the kindred of his grandfather, in fact one of the daughters of Jacob's uncle Laban (v. 2). Today a marriage of cousins is not wise because weaknesses have multiplied greatly since sin was introduced into the human family, and special weaknesses attach to each family. Those weaknesses would be doubled by the marriage of two who are closely related, and the children therefore likely to be badly affected. In early history this was not a problem at all.

Isaac again gives Jacob his blessing in verses 3 and 4, desiring that God Almighty might make him fruitful and multiply his descendants, and that through him God's promise to Abraham should be fulfilled, both as to his descendants and as to the possession of the land of promise. It seems clear in this passage that Isaac's thoughts had been corrected, for he did not speak this way to Esau. When God had overruled him in having the blessing given to Jacob, then at least Isaac stayed by this action, and here confirms it in no uncertain terms.

Isaac then sends Jacob away (v. 5). Possibly this was some relief to Esau, for he did not have to kill Jacob, yet would have him far removed from him. But when Esau knew that Isaac had given Jacob his blessing and sent him away with a charge not to take a wife from the Canaanites, and that Jacob had obediently accepted the charge of his parents (vv. 6-7), then Esau was stirred up about the fact that his two wives had not pleased his father (v. 8). Yet how sad was his effort to remedy the situation! Apparently he thought his parents would be more pleased by his adding another wife, just so long as she had some relationship to Abraham! So he took the daughter of Ishmael, the son of the bondwoman (v. 9). This is of course the foolish reasoning of the flesh. He knew his father had only one wife: how could he expect him to be pleased with Esau's having three! In fact, even the third one alone would not be pleasing to Isaac, who had been persecuted by his half brother Ishmael. But “they that are in the flesh cannot please God” (Rom. 8:8).

JACOB'S DREAM (vv. 10-17)

Jacob goes out from Beersheba (v. 10). This is a striking picture of the nation Israel, the sons of Jacob, for Beersheba means “the well of the oath” and Haran means “mountaineer.” Israel has practically left the ground of the unconditional promise of God and has chosen rather the mountain of law-keeping, as though this could ever bring the blessing of God! Just as Jacob, all the time he was in Haran, retained a character of selfish bargaining, so Israel at present remains in a state of self-righteousness, professing to believe and obey the law, but not submitting to the righteousness of God (Rom. 10:3).

We are told only of one of the nights Jacob spent on his way to Haran. He laid down to sleep with a stone for a pillow. No doubt he found the law of God rather a hard resting-place also, for it is as hard as the stones upon which it was written.

Though Jacob was not walking in communion with God, yet God was not stopped from communicating with him. When God sends a dream He has a captive audience (v. 12), and this dream given to Jacob was of particular significance. He saw a ladder set up on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God ascending and descending on it. Some have imagined that this intimates that man by his spiritual energy is able to climb up to heaven, gradually ascending by human effort, into favor with God. But it has nothing to do with man's ascending, just as is true when the Lord tells Nathanael he would “see the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man” (John 1:51).

This is a prophetic picture of the future restoration of communication between heaven and earth, once interrupted by Adam's sin. The fulfillment of this will be during the 1000 years of peace introduced by the coming of the Lord in power and glory. God gave this dream to Jacob in order to assure him that, in spite of Jacob's failure and wandering, God's purposes remained absolutely certain.

The Lord stood above the ladder and told Jacob, “I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac.” There was to be no mistaking the fact that Jacob's blessing did not depend on Jacob's faithfulness. The source of it went back, not only to his father and his grandfather, but to the living God, who had revealed Himself in grace to both Abraham and Isaac, and who would not change His purpose even though Jacob was a failing vessel, just as is true as regards God's purposes as to the nation Israel, whom Jacob represents.

In this dream of Jacob the Lord's initial message to him is that He would give him the land on which he was lying. Though Jacob was in a poor state of soul, the Lord did not reprove him, but emphasized the grace of His own heart. He promised the land to Jacob and his descendants. This has nothing to do with heavenly blessing, but is plainly earthly, so that natural blessings in earthly places is all that is promised to the children of Israel, in contrast to “all spiritual blessings in heavenly places” that are today the possession of all the saints of God, members of the body of Christ, the church (Eph. 1:3).

Consistently therefore, Jacob's seed would be “as the dust of the earth” (v. 14), not “as the stars of heaven” (Gen. 26:4), which was a promise to Isaac because he is a type of Christ in connection with the church, the bride, as typified in Rebekah. The Lord further emphasizes the earthly character of Jacob's blessing in saying that his descendants would spread “to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south.” There are no such directions in heaven. More than this, in Jacob and his seed all the families of the earth will be blessed. Israel will be the center of blessing on earth in the coming day of millennial glory, and in identification with Israel all the Gentile nations will be blessed. This is a firm, absolute declaration.

Added to this is the Lord's promise to Jacob personally, that he would be with him and keep him everywhere he went, and would bring him back to the land of promise (v. 15). He would not leave him till his promises were fulfilled completely. This promise is totally unconditional. This is all the more striking when we consider that Jacob was not enjoying a good state of soul. Nothing therefore depended on Jacob's faithfulness.

Jacob was not really going with God at this time, but God was going in pure grace with Jacob. This is typical also of God's preserving hand being over the nation Israel even at a time when they have failed miserably and are in a state of wandering and self seeking. Though for centuries they have been dispersed in this condition of self-will, God “has not cast off His people whom He foreknew,” and He will yet restore them to their land in His own time. Meanwhile they must learn through trial and affliction not to depend on themselves, but on their God who cannot fail.

Jacob's soul was stirred to its depths by the dream. In waking up he was alarmed by the fact that the Lord was in that place and he had not realized it (v. 16). Did he think it might have been better to go on to another place? Could the Lord not meet him wherever he went? However, it is good that the fear of God was deeply impressed on him to such an extent that he called the place “the house of God” and “the gate of heaven” (v. 17), and after 20 years absence he did not forget that place.

JACOB'S FIRST PILLAR AND HIS VOW (vv. 18-22)

Now Jacob sets up the first of four pillars that were landmarks in his eventful life. He set up the stone he had used as a pillow and poured oil on it, calling the place Bethel,” “the house of God.” Abraham had before dwelt between Bethel and Ai (Gen. 12:8), and Jacob simply renames the place. “The name of the city had been Luz previously” (v. 19). This name means “separation,” and reminds us that the house of God must be given a place of holy separation from all the principles of man's civilization.

Though Jacob appreciated God's blessing, yet his faith as to God's promise was pathetically weak. Rather than simply thanking God for the absolute truth of His word, Jacob considered that he also should make a promise to God! But Jacob's promise is conditional, not unconditional, as God's was. Abraham had been strong in faith, giving glory to God, — being fully persuaded that what he had promised he was able to perform (Rom. 4:21). But Jacob says, **If** God will be with me” (v. 20). But what God promises, faith simply believes.

However, did Jacob desire God's presence because he wanted to enjoy fellowship with God? This does not seem to be his motive. Rather, he realized that God was able to bless him and keep him in the way he had chosen to go, as well as supplying his food and clothing. Jacob did not ask for God's way (as Moses did in

Exodus 33:13), but rather desired God's blessing in the way Jacob decided to go! But God had told him He would bless him and bring him back to his homeland. All he needed to do was to believe this and therefore be concerned about enjoying the Lord Himself. If this had been his object, how much trouble he would have been spared!

He promises that, on condition the Lord will fulfill all His promises, then when this is accomplished the Lord would be his God. Who would be his God in the meantime? Also he promises that the stone he set would be God's house. How many there are like Jacob who think that in the future they will be concerned about the truth of God's house, but at present think their own house more important!

He vows too that he would surely give to God one tenth of all that God gave to him! Did he seriously think he was being very generous? God had said, “I will,” but Jacob said, 'I will surely.” Of course God's promise is perfectly fulfilled, but there is no record of Jacob's having ever carried out his promise to give God one tenth of all.

Genesis 29

JACOB MEETS RACHEL AND LABAN (vv. 1-14)

After many days of travel Jacob came to the land of his relatives. He could not phone to find his directions to their home, nor did he have any street and house number, but it did not take long for him to contact them. A well was of course the most likely place to meet people. Three flocks of sheep were nearby, waiting to be watered, which they could not until a huge stone was removed from the mouth of the well (v. 2). The stone was evidently necessary to prevent humans or animals from accidentally falling into the well. Their practice was to wait until all the flocks were gathered together, then the shepherds would roll the stone away, the flocks would be watered and the stone would be returned to its place.

Jacob finds through questioning the shepherds that he has come to the right place, for their home was at Haran. They knew Laban also, and that he was well (vv. 5-6). More than this, at the very moment Laban's daughter Rachel was coming with her flock of sheep to the well.

However, Jacob was puzzled that the shepherds were still waiting to water their flock, but they tell him that they were unable to do this until there were enough shepherds present to roll the stone from the well's mouth. When all were gathered there they would do this and water the sheep. There is a picture in this of men waiting for the time of universal blessing, which will take place in the millennial age.

Then Rachel arrives with her father's sheep (v. 9). When Jacob saw Rachel, the daughter of his mother's brother, and the sheep of his mother's brother, he was moved with amazing strength, rolling the stone away by himself (v. 10). How striking a lesson is this that the energy of faith and love is able to remove great obstacles and bring blessing before the time of “the restitution of all things.” This is what is seen in the present “dispensation of the grace of God.” The Lord Jesus, in pure love and devotion to God, has shown the strength of that love toward the church, His espoused bride, and toward the sheep of God's flock (another type of the church) in the great sacrifice of Himself, in His resurrection power, and in already having “raised us up together and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2:6). Thus the church has been marvelously blessed before the time of the universal blessing in the world, and the living water of the word of God has become most precious to her.

The warmth of family affection then predominates the scene as Jacob kissed Rachel, weeping for joy, telling her that he is the son of Rebekah, her father's sister. Of course they had never met, but family ties can be remarkably strong in spite of this. Rachel left the sheep and ran to tell her father the good news of a relative from a far country (v. 12). Laban also ran to meet Jacob and embraced and kissed him. Thus he welcomed him into his home as his own “bone and flesh” (v. 14). How good it would have been if this attitude had continued throughout their relationship! But when they parted 20 years later, the atmosphere was hostile rather than congenial (vv. 31:25-55).

BARGAINING FOR A WIFE (vv. 15-30)

They had been one month together, with Jacob evidently working for his uncle, when Laban, realizing that Jacob should have wages for his service, asked what Jacob would like for wages. Jacob's character as a bargainer again comes strongly to the fore on this occasion. Laban had an older daughter than Rachel, but she was not so attractive. Jacob was drawn only to Rachel and offered to work for Laban for seven years in order to earn Rachel as his wife (v. 18). Laban agreed to this, evidently conveniently forgetting that his sister Rebekah had been given to Isaac immediately when the servant of Abraham brought his message (Gen. 24:57-61). There was no bargaining then, no suggestion that her father would virtually sell her to Isaac, but simply a willing decision on her part.

Rachel did not belong to Laban, and both Jacob and Laban were totally wrong in placing a mercenary value on a wife. When the Lord created a woman for Adam, He gave her to him as a gift by grace, and grace should always predominate in the sacred relationship of marriage. However, Jacob was willing to work for all this seven years because of his ardent love for Rachel. In fact, the time seemed to him very short in comparison to the prospect of having her as wife. When the time was fulfilled he asked now that Rachel should be given to him (v. 21).

Laban therefore made a marriage feast for them. We may wonder what part Rachel had in the feast, and if she thought she was to be married to Jacob. If so, the shock to her would be as great as that to Jacob. When evening came (and of course darkness with only very dim light at best) Laban had Leah go to share Jacob's bed with him, and Jacob had no suspicion of this until the morning (vv. 21-25). Possibly he had drunk too much wine at the feast, but he was certainly not prepared for such unprincipled deception as this practiced by a near relative

When Jacob faced Laban with his deception in giving him Leah instead of Rachel, Laban coolly answered him that in his country the younger must not be married before the elder daughter. Certainly honesty would have at least informed Jacob of this at the time the agreement was made seven years earlier! It may be that Laban made up this policy in his own mind and considered it adopted by his own country! For surely if it had been the usual custom, Jacob would have heard of it before seven years. But Laban knew that the best way to get Jacob to continue working for him was to do just what he did; so he told Jacob that he could work another seven years for Rachel. What could Jacob do? He still had his heart set on Rachel, so he simply submitted to this unjust treatment, and eventually got her also as a wife.

However, the deception of his uncle might well have reminded Jacob that he himself had before deceived a relative, his own father. Such things have a way of recoiling, under the governing hand of God. It is a striking fact that those who form the character of deceivers will very likely be deceived themselves (2 Tim. 3:13). In this case too Jacob painfully learned the rights of a firstborn, which he had ignored in the case of his brother Esau.

There is a serious spiritual lesson for us in the history of Jacob's two wives. Rachel (meaning “sheep”) is typical of the lovely state of soul in humble submission to God that believers would like to attain. She was the desire of Jacob's heart. But in struggling to get Rachel, he only got Leah, meaning “wearied.” For Leah is a picture of what I really **am**, not what I desire to be. There was conflict between the two. I may try hard to make myself different, only to find myself “stuck” with what I really am, as Jacob was “stuck” with Leah! This is the struggle of Romans 7, where “I” is seen fighting against “I.”

CHILDREN BORN TO LEAH (vv. 31-35)

It was Leah who bore children, while Rachel remained fruitless for a long time. So that it is the hated “I” that seems to predominate in the experience of a believer who really wants to be what he thinks he should be. Leah bore four sons, Reuben, Simeon, Levi and Judah (vv. 31-35), while Rachel remained childless. It is good to consider that in spite of Jacob's dislike for Leah, he never made a suggestion of resorting to people's present day practice of putting away his wife. In fact, he kept her longer than Rachel, who died in childbirth and was buried on the way to Ephrath (Gen. 35:19), before Jacob came to his father at Mamre. We are not told of Leah's death, but Jacob says he buried her at Mamre (Gen. 49:30-32).

Thus the proper experience of the believer is that he keeps the fact of what he is longer than he keeps the desire to attain a high spiritual state. In fact, when Rachel died she gave place to Benjamin (meaning “son of my right hand”), a type of Christ in exaltation. Thus, when the Lord Jesus takes the place of my desire for a better spiritual life, it is not hard for me to give up that desire. For I have title to forget myself and find everything in Christ Jesus my Lord. I remain just what I am, but I have a perfect Object, and actually it is only through enjoying Him as my Object that I can have any proper state of soul.

Genesis 30

THE STRUGGLE BETWEEN RACHEL AND LEAH (vv. 1-24)

The fruitfulness of Leah moved Rachel to jealousy, then her demand to Jacob for children moves him to anger (vv. 1-2). We may see a serious lesson in Rachel's words, “Give me children or else I die.” If we do not see evident fruit, we have the tendency to give up: the exercise of soul that desires true godliness may virtually die. Many Christians have their proper growth stunted by this very thing.

On the other hand, Jacob's anger does not help the situation. If Christ is not the Object of our lives, our efforts to make ourselves more spiritual will always involve the principles of jealousy, anger and discouragement, which are contrary to the very result we seek to obtain.

Then we too often resort to a humanly conceived substitution, as Rachel did in verse 3. Sarah had done the same in giving Abraham her handmaid by whom to have a child. Rachel ought to have known that this did not work out as Sarah planned, but she thought, as Sarah, that the children of Bilhah, her handmaid, would be hers. When a boy was born (vv. 5-6), Rachel said that God had given **her** a son, and she named him Dan, meaning “judge.” Bilhah also had a second son whom Rachel named Naphthali, meaning “my wrestling,” because of Rachel's wrestling with her sister Leah. All of this struggle is a picture of the struggle of Romans 7, which only stirs up the evil passions of our hearts, rather than subduing them, as we attempt to do. At first sight it may be that people would not discern any spiritual significance of a history like this, and might wonder why the Lord has gone to such pains to record all the details of this. But all scripture is of vital consequence to every believer.

When Leah had no more children, she resorted to the same tactics as Rachel had, giving her maid Zilpah to Jacob, by whom he had a son, Leah naming him Gad, then another whom she named Asher (vv. 9-13). Gad means “a troop” and Asher means “happy.” Thus we find human support (a troop), and seek to make ourselves happy **as we are**, without attaining the state we desire, but Leah is not satisfied with this. For as soon as Reuben brings her mandrakes she sees the possibility of having another son. Rachel tried to obtain some with the same purpose, but Leah answered her sharply (v. 15). She knew Rachel's purpose. Thus neither of them was actually content: the struggle continues.

Evidently mandrakes were a cherished delicacy, and Jacob was persuaded to share his bed with Leah that night. His natural appetite leads him, and Leah bears another son, Issachar, meaning “he will be hired.” Then a sixth son is added for Leah herself, named Zebulon, which means “dwelling.” These six are all the sons that Leah herself bore. This pictures the fact that people can struggle hard to accomplish their own ends, but always come short, for seven is the number of completeness, while six is the number of man's work day week. So Leah, speaking of **what I am**, can only produce that which falls short of any proper satisfaction, though she did then bear a daughter whom she named Dinah (v. 21).

Finally God answered the prayer of Rachel, and she gave birth to Joseph (vv. 22-24), whose name means “adding” because she had confidence that God would add to her another son. Joseph is plainly a type of Christ. A desire for a high spiritual state should thus lead us to the person of Christ, who is the only One in whom such a state is seen. Yet, Joseph gives us only one side of the truth concerning Christ, that is, that He was a Sufferer before being exalted. This is most important for us all to learn, before we are in any condition to appreciate the truth seen in Benjamin, a type of Christ as the Son of the Father's right hand, glorified and exalted to the throne, reigning in glory.

A BUSINESS AGREEMENT WITH LABAN (vv. 25-43)

Appropriately, when Joseph is born, Jacob's thoughts turn toward his proper home in Canaan (v. 25). When the person of Christ dawns upon the vision of the believer, he begins to realize that he should be in God's place for him. However, when Jacob informs Laban of his intention of leaving, Laban is unwilling to be deprived of the service of his son-in-law. He says he has learned by experience that the Lord has blessed him through Jacob's presence there, and does not want to lose this (v. 27). If Jacob had insisted on leaving at that time, he and Laban would have parted on less unpleasant terms than they did later (Gen. 31:25-55). But Jacob agreed to stay on terms that he himself suggested.

He first emphasized what Laban had already admitted, that he had served Laban faithfully, so that though Laban had little when Jacob came, his herd of sheep was greatly increased (v. 39). Both of them recognized that the Lord had done this. Since that time many Gentile nations have actually been blessed by God through the presence of Israelites among them, after Israel was scattered among the nations.

Then Jacob asks, “When shall I provide for my own house also?” Certainly it is right for a man to provide for his own house. Yet Jacob was at the time more concerned for his own house than he was for the house of God. Most of us put our own house first, and it was some years yet before Jacob was finally told by God to return to Bethel (“the house of God”) where he had made his vow (Gen. 31:13).

Jacob suggested wages that seemed to be very low, asking for only the speckled and spotted sheep and goats and the black lambs. The normally colored sheep and goats would therefore all belong to Laban. Such a percentage for Jacob would seem to be low indeed, and Laban saw himself as having the great advantage in this bargain (vv. 32-34). In this there is no doubt that Jacob desired to show that he was depending on God to give him what He wanted Jacob to have, and the element of faith in God was surely present. We know that God answered such faith. Yet we see later that his faith was weak when he resorted to human artifice in trying to make the sheep produce as he desired (vv. 37-42).

All the special class of sheep he left with his sons. Then he himself took all Laban's sheep a long distance from the others, a matter of three days' journey (v. 36), thus assuring Laban that Laban's sheep would not mix with any spotted or speckled. Since Laban's sheep were all a normal color, it was not likely there would be many born for Jacob to claim.

However, in being so far away, Jacob could put into operation his cunning plan by which to make Laban's sheep bear striped, speckled or spotted lambs. Taking fresh rods from trees, he peeled strips of bark off them, then put them in front of the sheep when they came to drink (v. 38). At this time they mated, and the plan worked remarkably for Jacob, for the number of striped, speckled or spotted lambs being born was very large.

There are some who question that Jacob's trickery in verse 37-39 made any actual difference, but whether it did or not, there is a spiritual lesson here that ought to have spoken deeply to Jacob himself. The things that we allow to most occupy our attention will affect us and everything that comes from us. Jacob was allowing his desire for gain to have foremost place in his thoughts. This was bad for him spiritually, and caused him to be selfish and underhand in his actions. But we can generally recognize such principles in natural things, while not seeing their significance in our spiritual lives.

Jacob separated the lambs that he could claim for his own and kept all of his own apart from the flock of Laban (v. 40), then when the stronger sheep of Laban were mating he would use his peeled rods in the watering troughs, which he would not do in the case of the weaker sheep. Thus he was able to secure the stronger sheep while Laban was left with those weaker (vv. 41-42). No doubt Laban was not aware of what Jacob was doing, and Jacob wanted Laban to consider that Jacob was only depending on God to decide how many sheep Jacob should have. How often it is true with us too, that we persuade ourselves we are walking by faith in God while using our own wits to help God out in supplying our needs!

Jacob prospered, but he ought to have realized that this was really by the grace of God, not because of his artifice. God had told him He would bless him, and He did so in spite of Jacob's trickery.

Genesis 31

JACOB'S SECRET DEPARTURE (vv. 1-21)

The prosperity of Jacob could not but awaken the envy of Laban's sons. Jacob had gained all of this through his caring for their father's sheep: now the majority of the sheep and the stronger sheep belonged to Jacob. But Laban had agreed to the arrangement, and they could do nothing about it. Before this Laban had recognized that it was Jacob's presence with him that caused Laban to prosper greatly; so he appreciated Jacob. Now Jacob prospers and Laban's attitude toward him changes to that of resentment (v. 2).

We must not excuse Jacob's manipulating as he did. But on the other hand, Laban had been taking unfair advantage of Jacob all the way through. Jacob did the hard work of caring for Laban's flocks for twenty years. Laban had sons who could have helped with this work, but they evidently left the work to one who could do it well. Were Laban and his sons all partaking of the benefits of Jacob's work without having to work themselves? It seemed this was the case. Management commonly considers it has the right to reap all the benefits that labor produces, because management has provided the original capital. but God takes account of the guilt of management in the oppression of its employees (James 5:4).

The time has come when the Lord tells Jacob to return to the land of his fathers (v. 3). There is no reason for him to continue with Laban when there is serious friction in their relationship. While scripture has plainly exposed what Jacob was doing, yet the Lord does not reprove him for this: Jacob knew that his actions were wrong, being not the fruit of faith. The Lord therefore left him to fight that matter out with his own conscience. But God repeats His promise to Jacob, that He will be with him. Such is the sovereign goodness of God toward His servants in spite of their failing ways.

Jacob therefore sent for Rachel and Leah to come to him where he was with the flock, and set before them the facts as to Laban's changed attitude (v. 5). He does defend himself in the whole matter: it would have been better if he had not done so. However, it was true that he had served Laban with great diligence. Here we learn that Laban had changed Jacob's wages ten times. When he saw that Jacob was gaining greatly by one bargain, he would change the terms of his wages. Then the sheep would bear in another way to Jacob's advantage (vv. 7-8). Thus he says that God had taken Laban's flocks and given them to Jacob. He does not tell them of his own trickery in the matter: evidently he had been able to hide this from everyone except the Lord.

He speaks of a dream in which he saw the goats mating in the way that would benefit him, and of the angel of God speaking to indicate that it was God who had caused the animals to bear in such a way as to be to Jacob's advantage. This is no doubt true, but it shows us that there was no need for Jacob to resort to his deceitful actions. God would bless him apart from this. He tells him that He has seen all that Laban was doing to him. It may be true that Jacob's descendants, like Jacob, have often been guilty of deceit, and Gentiles make a great deal of this, but Gentiles, like Laban, have been guilty of treating Israel shamefully, and God takes full account of this also. Gentiles can be just as deceitful as Jews: there is no difference (Rom. 3:22-23).

Jacob reports further to Leah and Rachel that God told him, “I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed the pillar and where you made a vow to Me” (v. 13). This designation, “the God of Bethel, is of very real importance, for it means “God of the house of God.” Jacob had been concerned about his own house (Gen. 30:30), allowing the claims of God's house to wait. But the increase of Jacob's house had not produced peace and happiness in all his relationships. It was time that he learned that true contentment is only found in connection with God's house, where God's interests are paramount. God also remembered Jacob's vow (Gen. 28:20-22), though He only mentions it without comment. But he tells Jacob to return to the land of his family.

Rachel and Leah were fully prepared to move immediately. They realized that there was nothing to tie them to their father. One thing they remembered, that their father had sold his daughters, enriching himself through their sale, so that they became virtually strangers to their own father. We may say that, spiritually speaking, Laban had chosen to sell all spiritual exercise as to (1) what he is (Leah) and (2) what he ought to be (Rachel) in favor of base gain. Far too many professing Christians do the same thing today, rather than go through the exercise of soul that would lead them to find in Christ the one real answer to their need. But Rachel and Leah have good advice for Jacob: “Do whatever God has said to you” (v. 16).

Jacob did not delay his departure. This time he does not consult with Laban, as he had before (Gen. 30:25-26). In fact, he does not even inform him that he is leaving. His sons and his wives ride on camels (v. 17). Of course he had servants also who would be caring for the sheep. He was able to organize all his possessions to put everything in motion three days before Laban even heard of his leaving. Since Jacob had such large possessions now, there was of course some distance between him and Laban. Also the time was opportune for Jacob since Laban was occupied with the shearing of his sheep.

Only four times in scripture do we read of sheep shearing. First, on this occasion (v. 19); second in Genesis 38:13 (Judah); third in l Samuel 25:4 (Nabal); and fourth in 2 Samuel 13:23 (Absalom). In each case, something unpleasantly selfish is involved. Peter was not told by the Lord to “shear My sheep,” but “shepherd My sheep” and “feed My sheep” (John 21:16-17).

Another sad complication takes place also. Rachel had stolen the teraphim (household images) that belonged to her father (v. 19). She had not learned to walk by faith in the living God, but like her father, she needed to depend on what she could see. Though she was a beautiful woman, yet her desire for a religious atmosphere allowed her to indulge in stealing, idolatry and deceit (vv. 34-35). This is common with all human religion: it is only the true knowledge of the Lord Jesus that will preserve us from such things.

LABAN PURSES JACOB (vv. 22-43)

The journey was long, but Jacob ought to have realized that Laban would pursue him. Though he had three days start before Laban learned of his leaving (v.22), Laban did not then delay in taking others with him and pursuing Jacob. After seven days he caught up with him.

Before their confrontation, however, God spoke to Laban in a dream, charging him that he must not speak to Jacob “either good or bad” (v. 24). Of course, he was most likely to speak bad to Jacob, for he was angry with him, and God made it clear that Laban was not Jacob's judge. It is interesting, however, that Laban must not speak good to Jacob. Why is this? It is because God was dealing with Jacob, and Laban must not interfere. This is a needed lesson for all Gentile nations. They must not either defend the Jewish nation, nor oppose them. At the time of the end, some nations will take sides with Israel while others fight against them. But Israel must not be supported in their wrong doing (idolatry), nor does anyone have the right to condemn Israel, for they are God's people and He will deal with them. In fact, He will in sovereign wisdom send the Assyrians against Israel because of their idolatry (Isa. 10:5-6), and when the Roman beast and his armies try to interfere to defend Israel, God will judge them first (Rev. 11-21). Afterward He will judge Assyria also because their intentions against Israel exceed the reasons for God's sending them (Isa. 10:12).

But Jacob must face Laban, unpleasant as the experience must be. Though Laban was angry, God's words to him kept him from going too far in what he said. He asks why Jacob had sneaked away in an underhand manner, as though he was carrying Laban's daughters away as captives (v. 26). Why did he act in such secrecy without even a word to Laban, thus giving Laban no opportunity for giving them a pleasant send-off, including being able to kiss his daughters and their children? He does not hesitate to tell Jacob that he has done foolishly in this matter.

Having spoken of Jacob's foolishness in secretly leaving Haran, Laban tells him that he had the power to do harm to Jacob, yet admits that his desire for revenge was arrested by God's warning him to speak neither good or bad to Jacob. Still, he says, though Jacob was anxious to get back to his father's house, why had he stolen Laban's gods?

Jacob answers his first question first, excusing himself for his secret departure on the ground of his being afraid that Laban might take Leah and Rachel from him by force. This was not sensible, for it is not likely that Laban would want two daughters back under his roof to care for, with their children, without any prospect of their having husbands. Besides, Laban had sold his daughters at a high monetary price.

Jacob however did not at all suspect any of his company of having stolen Laban's idols, probably least of all Rachel. He invites Laban to search through the goods of everyone with him, and to put the thief to death (v. 32). What a shock it would have been to him if Rachel had been discovered! But Rachel was like most of us. We know well how to hide our idols and to deceive even our own loved ones! In fact, Rachel was the last in Laban's search, evidently the least suspected. She was sitting on the images and had a good excuse for not standing (vv. 34-35).

Then Jacob's self-righteous anger begins to boil (v. 36). If only Laban had discovered the idols, how different this would have been! “What is my trespass? What is my sin,” Jacob asks, “that you have so hotly pursued me?” Of course, if there had not been the sin of stealing, there was still the fact of Jacob's having kept his departure a secret from Laban. He tells Laban, since he has searched through all of Jacob's possessions, to set before everybody anything he has found that belonged to him (Laban). Of course he knew that Laban had found nothing.

Then he strongly speaks of the way Laban had treated him. For twenty years, he says, he has served Laban. He had so cared for the females of Laban's flock that they had not miscarried, nor had he taken any of Laban's sheep, even to eat. Any animal that was lost, whether killed by wild animals or whether stolen, Laban held Jacob accountable for: he had to pay for the loss (v. 54). He found himself suffering often by the heat of the day and shivering at night because of the cold, being unable to sleep. He stresses that he had served Laban fourteen years for his two daughters. Of course he had willingly offered to work seven years for Rachel, but had been deceived. Then he had worked six years in order to gain the large number of sheep he now had. But more: he affirms that Laban had changed his wages ten times (v. 41). This must have been true, or Laban would have denied it. It does show the manipulating character of Laban. He was not at all behind Jacob in this artifice.

What Jacob says in verse 42 is also very likely true. It was only the intervention of God that enabled Jacob to accumulate the wealth he had. Laban was so greedy of gain that he would have been content to leave Jacob without any accumulation whatever for his twenty years of labor. He says that God had observed how he had labored and suffered, and therefore had rebuked Laban the previous night.

Laban had little that he could say in defense of himself in answer to Jacob's tirade, but he does use the one argument that he considered valid, “These daughters are **my** daughters, and these children are **my** children, and this flock is **my** flock” (v. 43). Leah and Rachel **had been his** daughters, but Laban had sold them. The children were actually Jacob's children, though grandchildren of Laban (at least those from Leah and Rachel). As to the flocks, while they had been bred from Laban's flocks, yet they were the wages Laban had agreed to give Jacob for his labor.

Since Leah and Rachel were his daughters, he thought (wrongly) that they were his possession and he had the right to sell them. They were not his own to begin with, let alone after he had sold them. But this verse loudly proclaims the fact that a merely possessive character loses what he tenaciously seeks to hold. Laban found that he was left poorer in various respects when Jacob left him. But he asks, What can I do this day to these my daughters or to their children whom they have borne?” He feels himself virtually bereaved of his family. May we well learn the lesson that this history teaches: what we own is not ours, but the Lord's, and what we selfishly hold we will lose. On the other hand, what we unselfishly give up for the Lord's sake we shall find that we gain in the end. Consider Abraham's willingly offering Isaac (

Gen. 22:10-13).

A COVENANT BETWEEN JACOB AND LABAN (vv. 44-54)

However, Laban was subdued enough that, instead of continuing the argument, he suggested that he and Jacob make a covenant between them (v. 44). It is sad to think that he considered this necessary between relatives, for it is again a legal arrangement rather than a trusting relationship characterized by grace, as every family relationship should be. There is still here the evidence of mere confidence in the flesh, rather than the faith that trusts in the living God.

Jacob sets up his second pillar. His first was in Genesis 28:18, where he made his fleshly vow, therefore the pillar of confidence in the flesh. This time his pillar is a memorial to the fact of broken confidence between relatives, a contrast to the first pillar, for it tells us that the flesh has proven it cannot be trusted. A heap of stones further emphasizes this, both Laban and Jacob calling it a “heap of witness,” Laban using the Chaldee language and Jacob the Hebrew (v. 47). They eat upon the heap, not the most comfortable dining room!

It is Laban who pronounces the terms of their covenant, saying that the heap was a witness to it. He introduces the Lord's name here, expecting Him to watch between himself and Jacob when they are absent from one another (v. 49). He is really telling Jacob, “I cannot trust you out of my sight, so I want the Lord to watch.” Of course it was true the other way also. Jacob had learned not to trust Laban. So that this pillar is the milestone in Jacob's life that proclaims clearly the untrustworthiness of the flesh. Very often it takes two parties to expose it to one another!

We may wonder if Laban suspected that Jacob might try to take some revenge against Laban by mistreating Leah and Rachel (v. 50). There is no indication that Jacob had done this before. But as we have seen, Laban was still possessive of his daughters, and felt that he was caring for them better than he expected Jacob would care for them. He was even fearful that Jacob might take other wives as well as Leah and Rachel. After all, he himself had initiated the project of Jacob's having two wives: why did he have a right to complain if Jacob took another also? But his fears were groundless. Jacob never did show any inclination to have another wife, or more.

Then Laban speaks of the heap and the pillar as a separating point between him and Jacob, a witness of the agreement of each not to pass that point in order to do harm to the other (v. 52). The whole covenant might seem rather superfluous to us, for it is not likely that either of them had any intention of passing that point for any purpose: they would be happier living far apart from each other.

While Laban has emphasized the covenant, Jacob offered a sacrifice (v. 54), which was far better. Then he invited the whole company to eat a meal with him. At least the sacrifice was a reminder that God had rights far more important than those of either Jacob or Laban. Eating together served as an easing of the tension between them. so that they could part on comparatively friendly terms. The next morning, before their parting, Laban kissed his daughters and their children, but there is no mention of his kissing Jacob, as he had done at the time of their first meeting (Gen. 29:13).

Genesis 32

RETURNING TO FACE ESAU (vv. 1-32)

As Jacob continues his journey we are told that the angels of God met him (v. 1). It was not God Himself as yet who met him, but the angels were no doubt intended as an encouragement for Jacob to be diligent to return all the way to the Lord's place for him. We may wonder in what way they appeared, but Jacob recognized them as “God's host,” and named the place “Mahanaim,” meaning “two camps.” Jacob had not yet learned that his interests ought to be merged with God's interests, therefore he considers God's “camp” separate from his. This has its unhealthy influence over his actions soon after, when he divided his own company into “two bands” (v. 7). How much better it would have been for him if he had prayed the prayer of the Psalmist, “Unite my heart to fear Thy name” (Psalm 86:11). It is always because our hearts are not undividedly devoted to God that we resort to divisions among the people of God.

Jacob realizes that in returning he must meet Esau again. Twenty years previously Esau had spoken of killing him, and he had no knowledge of whether Esau's attitude had changed. He sends messengers to Esau, telling him of his long sojourn with Laban and that he had acquired livestock and servants. He even takes a place of subservience to Esau, calling him “my lord,” and asking that he might find grace in Esau's sight.

The messengers bring back word that Esau is coming with four hundred men to meet Jacob (v. 6). They say nothing as to whether Esau was glad to hear of Jacob or not; and Jacob is thrown into a panic. He is so frightened that, instead of first appealing to the Lord, he divides his company into two bands, thinking that one band may escape if the first is attacked by Esau. Of course such human reasoning was not God's leading. God does not divide His saints in order to sacrifice one part of them for the protection of the other. He loves all His saints, and has no intention of sacrificing any of them to the enemy. But what of ourselves when trouble of any kind threatens us? Though every believer surely knows that our only true resource is in the Lord, yet our first impulse is to try something to relieve us, rather than going first to the One who can really help.

After Jacob had resorted to his own planning, then he prays, addressing the Lord as the God of Abraham and of Isaac, the One who had told him to return to his own country, where God would deal well with him. But where was Jacob's faith to absolutely believe that God **would** deal well with him in his own land? He ought to have had perfect confidence that God would do this, for God said He would. However, he has learned more than he had when he made his vow at Bethel. He had thought then he would prove fully worthy of whatever blessing God would give him. Now he confesses, “I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and all the truth which You have shown Your servant (v. 10). At least he is giving up the self confidence that he had before expressed, though he has not yet learned to have total confidence in the living God.

But he has nowhere else to turn, and he earnestly entreats the Lord to deliver him from Esau, his brother (v. 11), for he admits he is afraid of Esau, that he might kill him and his wife and children. “For you said,” he adds, I will surely treat you well, and make your descendants as the sand of the sea” etc. He was virtually saying to God, “You said this, but now Esau might kill me, and what will happen to your promise?” Did he need to plead with God to keep His promise? He did make an error, however, in saying that God had told him he would make his seed as the sand of the sea. God had said this to Abraham (Gen. 22:17), but to Jacob He had promised a seed “as the dust of the earth” (Gen. 28:14)

After prayer Jacob goes back to his planning as to how he can protect himself from Esau (vv. 13-20). Of course he finds afterward that his planning was totally unnecessary. He sets apart 560 animals altogether as a present for Esau, apparently in about six droves with some distance between each. He gave the driver of the first drove instructions as to what to say to Esau when he met him. He expected Esau to inquire as to who the man was and to whom the animals belonged. In reply he was to tell Esau that they belonged to Esau's servant Jacob (why not Esau's brother?), and Jacob was giving them as a present to “my Lord Esau.” When Jacob knew that the Lord had told Rebekah ”the elder shall serve the younger” (Gen. 25:23), it is sad to see him taking this place of unseemly subservience to Esau. Of course, because of his previous supplanting of Esau, he was moved by both conscience and fear.

Each succeeding driver was given similar instructions, for Jacob assumed that by this means he might appease any antipathy of Esau (v. 20). This is the natural conception of human beings, and they constantly use this method in seeking any proper relationship with God, as though God is going to be influenced by man's giving him presents of things that God has in the first place created! But God is not looking for gifts from men. Rather, He desires their hearts. The droves went on before Jacob, and he lodged that night in the camp (v. 21). However, he did send his two wives, his two female servants and his eleven sons over the brook together with his possessions (vv. 22-23).

Now God designed matters so that Jacob was left alone. It was time that Jacob was wrestled with, and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. No doubt this was the Lord Himself in bodily form, which required an unusual miracle. Certainly the Lord could have subdued Jacob immediately, yet the wrestling continued for hours. However, this was intended to be a significant lesson for Jacob, and for us. The Lord had actually been wrestling with Jacob all his previous life, and Jacob had not surrendered: he continued to struggle against God's dealings with him. How could he properly learn until he had yielded himself to God? His planning, then praying, then going back to his planning was only consistent with his previous character of self confidence rather than confidence in God. He was struggling, yet hardly realized his struggle was against God.

Finally, because Jacob continued to struggle, the Lord simply “touched the hollow of his thigh,” putting it out of joint (v. 25). He could have done this before, but had given Jacob opportunity to submit without any drastic action. Usually, however, we require some hard measures before we learn to truly submit ourselves to God.

Jacob was rendered unfit to wrestle any more, but he was still clinging to the Lord, who told him, “Let me go, for the day breaks.” The Lord could have easily left at once, but He gave opportunity to Jacob to say what he did, “I will not let You go unless you bless me” (v. 26). At least the faith of Jacob was real, though it was weak. He knew he needed the Lord's blessing, though he had acted inconsistently with a spirit of unquestioning faith and dependence on God.

The Lord then first requires Jacob to confess his name by natural birth. But Jacob (“the supplanter”) must have his name changed if he is to receive proper blessing from God. Only when the flesh is touched and shriveled does Jacob receive the name Israel (”a prince with God”). By nature he was Jacob, but by the grace of God he becomes Israel.

God said of Jacob that he would be named Israel because he had “struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed.” It certainly does not mean that he had defeated God in wrestling, for he actually prevailed only when he was crippled and therefore clung dependently to the Lord. This dependence on God would enable him to prevail with men too. This will prove true in the future day for the nation Israel also; and the same proves true for every believer today who has been brought down to a place of clinging dependently to the Lord. May we know this place well.

Jacob wanted to know the name of his adversary in wrestling, but he is only answered by the question, “Why is it that you ask about my name?” Jacob would not learn that name properly until he was in the place of God's name, that is, Bethel, “the house of God.” It is only in God's way that we really know God Himself (Ex. 33:13). Jacob had begun the trip back to Bethel, but he was not there. Yet the Lord blessed him where he was (v. 29). But until he reached Bethel, he was not called “Israel” at all, for he did not learn quickly to act in the princely dignity becoming to that name. But we are all slow learners.

Jacob called the place “Peniel,” meaning “the face of God,” saying he had seen God face to face and his life was preserved (v. 30). What he understood by this we do not know, but whatever he saw of God was concealed by a human form. Still, he realized the Lord was involved in this encounter, and he would remember it.

As he passed over Peniel we are told “the sun rose upon him.” This is in designed contrast to Genesis 28:11, when he had left Beersheba: “the sun was set.” The night of darkness in our lives passes only when the flesh has been crippled (or judged) and we learn to cling only to the Lord. The sun (typical of the Lord Jesus) rises on our vision in a living, practical way. But Jacob remains crippled (v. 31).

The children of Israel were impressed enough by this to take the outward action of abstaining from eating meat from the hollow of the thigh of the animals they slaughtered. But it was only outward. How little in all this history have they learned in spiritual reality to put the flesh in the place of self-judgment. Similarly, after being established in the land, they could go to Gilgal and ”multiply transgressions” (Amos 4:4), rather than have the serious lesson of Gilgal impressed upon their souls, the lesson of the sharp knives of circumcision cutting off the flesh (Joshua 5:2-9).

Genesis 33

THE BROTHERS MEET AGAIN (vv. 1-16)

Jacob's trepidation is not eased when he sees that Esau has passed by all the droves and is coming with his four hundred men to meet Jacob. He even divides his family at this time, putting the maids and their children first, then Leah and her children, followed by Rachel and Joseph, for whom he was plainly the most concerned (vv. 1-2).

Now he must meet Esau, and with a servility that is not becoming to a brother, he bows himself seven times to the ground (v. 3). Of course it was conscience and fear that made him do this, but Esau had no such attitude. He ran to meet his brother, embraced him and kissed him. Then both of them wept. Time had made a difference with Esau particularly. What a relief for Jacob! Indeed, family feuds should never be allowed to continue long without a reconciliation. Only an unusually hard heart could maintain bitter rancor against a brother for long years.

Esau then needs an introduction to Jacob's wives and children, and each in turn are presented in the order that Jacob had previously arranged. Actually, if he had more confidence in Esau, he would have presented Rachel and Joseph first, for they were most important to him (vv. 6-7). Then Esau asks the meaning of all the droves that he met. Jacob does not conceal the fact that this was not a gift given because of his love to his brother, but tells him honestly that he was giving them to him in order to find favor from Esau, — whom he calls “my lord” — virtually as a bribe to secure his good-will! (v. 8).

But even Esau was not looking for any such thing: he tells him that he has enough, therefore that Jacob should keep what belonged to him (v. 9).

Jacob insists that, since Esau's attitude was favorable toward him, he wants Esau to take his present. His words to Esau are far too flattering and exaggerated, when he says that seeing Esau was like seeing the face of God (v. 10.) If this meeting had been like his parting with Laban, he would not have spoken of Esau's face being like the face of God. But he urges Esau to accept his gift, and Esau does so (v. 11). Though we read of Jacob giving this large gift to Esau, we never read of his keeping his promise to give one tenth of his possessions to God!

Now that they have met on friendly terms, Esau proposes to Jacob that they travel together to Seir, Esau going before (v. 12), but Jacob replies, quite plausibly, that he and his large company could not keep pace with Esau's four hundred men. The flocks and herds with young must not be over driven, and his children also were young. Therefore he asks that Esau go on and that he (Jacob) would proceed at a slower pace to come to Esau's residence at Seir (vv. 13-14). Jacob continues to call Esau his “lord,” but he had no intention of obeying Esau's will that he should go to Seir, even though he told him he would do so. When Esau wants to leave some of his company with Jacob to accompany him to Seir, Jacob only responds that there was no need for this.

Why did Jacob not act in simplicity of faith? He could have simply told Esau the truth, that God had directed him to return to Bethel. Was he afraid that Esau might be “put out” by Jacob's not coming to visit with him at least? But would Esau not be **more** put out by Jacob's deceiving him as he did?

Perhaps one reason for Jacob's deceit was that he was not prepared to fully obey God at the time, for he did not continue to Bethel, but came as far as Succoth, where he built a house and made shelters for his flock and herds (v. 17). Rather than going to Bethel (God's house) he built a house for himself. This was only half-way obedience, and evidently it did not satisfy his own conscience, for he left all these buildings behind and journeyed to Shalem, a city of Shechem. Shalem means “peace,” and Jacob was not at peace at Succoth, but finds it apparently at Shalem. Shechem means “shoulder,” and implies that peace cannot be enjoyed apart from our taking responsibility on our shoulders. Here he does not build a house, but pitches his tent. At least he seems to realize that, in being away from Bethel, he should maintain pilgrim character.

Still, this was also only a half-way measure, and there he bought “a parcel of a field,” typical of “a part of the world,” not a large part, but nevertheless involving him in a compromise that brought some sad results, so that he actually paid far more for this than only his hundred pieces of silver. He erected there an altar, but it was not because of God's word he did so. God told him later to make an altar at Bethel. He names this one at Shalem “El-Elohe-Israel,” meaning “God, the God of Israel.” For it was still not God's honor primarily that he was seeking, but his own blessing. At Bethel his altar's name was “El Bethel,” “God of the house of God,” for then he finally learned that God's glory was more important than Jacob's blessing. God is the God of **His own house**, not merely the God of Israel.

Genesis 34

SHAMEFUL SIN IN JACOB'S HOUSE (vv. 1-31)

Jacob had been concerned about his own house: now he must learn through painful experience that when he puts his house first, he will find trouble and sorrow from his house. Understandably, Dinah the daughter of Leah did not want to be confined to her home, and went out to see the daughters of the land. But it was more than daughters she saw. She became sexually involved with a young man, son of the prince of that land. However, having been guilty of such an act of fornication, the young man did not then reject her, as many would do, but apparently genuinely loved her and spoke kindly to her (v. 3).

Then he appealed to his father Hamor, asking him to intercede with Jacob so that he might marry Dinah. Jacob had heard the news before Hamor came, but had said nothing, waiting till his sons returned from their employment in the field before speaking at all as to the shame of Shechem's sin with Dinah. The sons, when they came, were not only grieved, but very angry at Shechem. Did they not stop to think that the blame was not only Shechem's, but Dinah's also? For though this was sin, it was not rape.

Hamor came at this time to tell them that Shechem had real affection for Dinah and wanted to marry her. At the same time he invited them to remain in the land and have their families intermarry. No doubt to the mind of Hamor this was the honorable way to meet the question. Shechem adds to this that he is willing to pay any dowry that they might ask of him for Dinah (vv. 11-12).

But the sons of Jacob were far from honorable in the way they answered. No doubt Jacob did not suspect their motives at all, but it was with cruel deceit that they told Shechem and Hamor that only if all the males of the land would be circumcised could they consent to Hamor's suggestion, and in fact promised that if the men were circumcised, they will live together as one people, willing to intermarry with the natives there. If they would not agree to be circumcised, then the brothers say they will take Dinah with them and leave the country (vv. 14-17).

The terms of the pact proposed by Jacob's sons were fully agreeable to Hamor and Shechem, and Shechem specifically did not delay to be circumcised because of his love for Dinah. We are told he was more honorable than all the household of his father. The two of them then carried a message to the inhabitants of their city, to the effect that Jacob and his family were friendly toward them and would be glad to settle there and intermarry, but only on condition that all the men of the city should be circumcised as they were. All no doubt recognized that circumcision had a religious connotation and they would not be in the least suspicious of any ulterior design against them. Moreover, the wealth of Jacob's family would be a welcome addition to the area, making all to benefit by them (vv. 20-23). These were persuasive arguments, and found the men of the city fully agreeable, so that all them were circumcised.

Then the cruel treachery of Jacob's sons comes to the surface. Only Simeon and Levi are mentioned here, brothers of Dinah, though Reuben and Judah were also her brothers. The two however attack the unarmed city, killing every male while they were still sore from surgery. Of course this was totally unexpected and the men had no defense. No men were left either to organize any counter attack. Hamor and Shechem also, who had been considerate of Jacob's family, were killed. Dinah was taken from Shechem's house, and other women and children all taken captive, while the possessions of the inhabitants, including all their livestock, were taken as if they were the spoils of war (vv. 26-29).

This whole action was so cruelly unjust that we wonder that there was nothing whatever done in the way of retribution or correction. God has certainly exposed it in all its naked wickedness, and we know He could not approve of anything like this. Yet why was there no recompense? It seems the answer is simply that God does not always settle His accounts quickly: the wheels of His government grind slowly, but He misses nothing, and will in His own time take care of every detail of our ways. At least, as to Simeon, see Genesis 42:24. The other brothers at the same time went through a traumatic ordeal. But the full end of the matter is in God's hands. This is consistent with God's ways always in regard to Israel the nation. He did not allow others at this time to attack Jacob, but He will deal with His people in His own time and way.

Jacob was shocked by the vicious action of his sons, and protested to them that they had given Jacob an odious reputation before the inhabitants of the land, and that he was exposed to the likelihood of being attacked himself and destroyed together with his household. Jacob's sons, however, only answered defiantly, “Should he deal with our sister as with a harlot?” This was not fair-mindedness, for Shechem had not actually dealt that way, and if he had, did that justify Simeon and Levi in their killing **all** the men of that city and plundering their houses? Their dealings with the city were far worse than was Shechem's sin.

Genesis 35

BETHEL AT LAST!

Jacob knew he could not remain at Shechem, though it took a humiliating experience in his own house to drive him away from there. God speaks to him in no uncertain terms. He is to arise and go to Bethel to dwell, and to make an altar there to the living God who had appeared to him before at that place when he was fleeing from Esau. Had he not found out by now that in his seeking the blessing of his own house he had only incurred trouble and sorrow? It is time therefore that he should give God's house and God's interests the first place. Though we ought to learn this lesson early in our Christian life, it seems that we only learn it through painful experience.

When God speaks in this way to Jacob, then Jacob's conscience also speaks. Jacob had allowed room in his own house for idols, but when he thinks of God's house, he knows that God will allow nothing of this kind there. Therefore he tells his household to get rid of these, to be clean and to change their garments (v. 2). There must be no idolatry, no uncleanness and no unsuited clothing in the house of God. These were negatives that must not be ignored, for he adds what was significantly positive, “let us arise and go up to Bethel; and I will make there an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went” (v. 3). He fully acknowledges how faithful God had been in keeping His promise, though as to his own vow to God on that occasion he is totally silent. It has taken him some time to learn that God is truly more faithful than Jacob was. But though we may be believers, we far too often fail in this matter too: we forget to give credit to God for being absolutely dependable in every detail of His ways with us, and we think too highly of our own faithfulness.

Jacob's household gives up their strange gods, which must have included the teraphim that Rachel had stolen from her father, for it is said, “all their strange gods.” We are not told **when** Jacob learned of these, but at least he knew it now. Added to this were their earrings; and all were hidden under the oak tree near Shechem (v. 4). This is typical of burying our idols beneath the cross of Christ. We too often merely decorate our ears instead of using them for their intended purpose, hearing the word of God.

Obeying God, they journey to Bethel. Of course other cities in the area of Shechem would know of the destruction caused by Jacob's sons, but only the restraining hand of God, implanting fear in their hearts, kept them from pursuing Jacob's company (v. 5).

They arrive at Bethel, which we are reminded was before called Luz, which means “separation,” because we must realize that the house of God has a place separated from the world and from all that has any suggestion of man's work. Here Jacob builds an altar, calling it “El-Bethel” (v. 7). At Shalem he called his altar “El-Elohe-Israel,” which is “God, the God of Israel.” How much less selfish and more objective is this name now, “God of the house of God.” We never have any proper focus in our lives until we come to this point, to realize that God's house and its interests are to claim the first place. Today of course we know that the house of God is “the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:15). Do we have that vital, primary interest in and concern for the entire body of Christ, the Church?

There is a striking dispensational picture here also. Jacob and his company illustrate the returned remnant of Israel, brought back to God's place for them after long years of wandering. For this reason we are told in verse 8 that Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died and was buried under an oak. Rebekah had been a type of the church, the bride of Isaac, type of Christ. Therefore, dispensationally the death of Deborah tells us that “the times of the Gentiles” are finished: the nursing of a heavenly hope comes to an end, for Israel's earthly hope has finally been achieved.

Here at Bethel God appears again to Jacob to bless him, reaffirming that though His servant's name was Jacob (which was not to be forgotten), yet that he was to be called Israel. It was in God's place for him that this name was to have its full significance, for it speaks of the dignity to which God had elevated him by grace, “a prince with God.” Though his name had been changed before (Gen. 32:28), he had still only been spoken of as Jacob until coming to Bethel. In fact, even after this he is sometimes called Israel, but more often Jacob.

In this case God tells Jacob, not that He is the God of Abraham and Isaac, as He did in Genesis 28:13, but “God Almighty” (v. 11). He had shown His sovereign might in keeping His promise to greatly bless Jacob and bring him back to the land. Now that power is to be manifested also in His multiplying the descendants of Jacob, making him into a nation and a company of nations, decreeing also that kings would come from Jacob. His promise in Genesis 28:13-15 had been absolute, with no conditions attached: this promise similarly is unconditional, but adds what is said of “a nation and a company of nations” and kings.

But though Jacob had been absent from the land for many years, yet as to this God reaffirms His promise that the land is to be given to Jacob and his descendants (v. 12). This does not change in spite of the various occasions when the nation has been scattered away from their land and other people have taken temporary possession. God's covenant cannot fail.

The Lord's appearing to Jacob on this occasion is evidently a picture of the revelation of the Lord Jesus to Israel in order to establish His kingdom after the tribulation. He will speak peace to His people and greatly comfort their hearts. Then after establishing peace on earth, He will return on High, as is pictured in verse 13, “God went up from him in the place where He talked with him.” This occasion is directly spoken of in Psalm 47:5: “God is gone up with a shout, the Lord with the sound of a trumpet.”

Then Jacob sets up his third pillar, which is his second at Bethel. His first had been one of confidence in the flesh (Gen. 28:18-22); his second was the pillar of broken confidence (Gen. 31:45), signifying the untrustworthiness of the flesh. This third is the pillar of confidence in God. For this time he makes no vow, but pours a drink offering and oil on the pillar, significant of his unfeigned appreciation of the faithfulness and grace of God. He names the place “Bethel” again. He had named the place before, but his naming it the second time no doubt indicates that the significance of this name has become vital and real to him. He has learned to love the habitation of God's house.

THE DEATH OF RACHEL (vv. 16-22)

Since Jacob had reached Bethel, this becomes a starting point of a journey of a different kind, just as the path of a believer today becomes different when he comes to rightly appreciate the truth of the house of God. There are trials still, but looked at now from a viewpoint of calm submission, rather than fleshly scheming as to how to meet them. Jacob journeys (v. 16), and when near to Ephrath (meaning “fruitfulness”), Rachel travailed in giving birth. It was a particularly hard birth, but the midwife sought to comfort her by the assurance that she was bearing a second son, as she had been confident she would (Gen. 30:24).

She called his name Ben-oni, meaning “son of my sorrow,” but in doing so she was taken away in death. Jacob however gave him a totally different name, Benjamin, meaning “son of my right hand.”

In this history there is vitally important instruction for us. Rachel had been the foremost desire of Jacob's eyes, her name meaning “sheep.” We have seen that this is typical of what a believer often considers most important, a desired state of soul that is fully submissive and attractive, that will tend to make a believer satisfied with himself. Jacob struggled along these lines for years, but such an object has no power in it to enable Jacob to reach it. His eyes were in the wrong direction. After coming to God's house he must realize that God, not Jacob's spiritual experience, is the only Object in whom there is both satisfaction and power. Therefore, Rachel dies, that is typically, Jacob gives up his strong desires; but Rachel is replaced by Benjamin, a type of Christ as “the Man of God's right hand.” Only when the Lord Jesus, exalted now at the right hand of God, becomes the true Object of our hearts, do we give up the useless ambition to improve ourselves morally and spiritually.

Yet when we cease struggling to achieve high spiritual goals in a state of lovely submission, and instead become unfeigned admirers of Christ, it is then that, without struggling, our hearts are brought spontaneously to submit gladly to His sovereign will. What we sought to achieve by the energy of our own wills, is found only in our turning from such self-occupation, judging ourselves and seeing all beauty and perfection in the Lord Jesus. What rest this brings! and what joy!

Jacob set a pillar on her grave, which is the pillar of Rachel's grave to this day.” Genesis 35:20 All of this is the lesson of Galatians 2:20: “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”

Rachel died and was buried “on the way to Ephrath” (v. 19). Her burial was a necessary step on the way to Jacob's reaching a state of fruitfulness, of which Ephrath speaks. This is also called Bethlehem, “the house of bread.” Now Jacob sets up his fourth pillar on Rachel's grave. We have seen that his third pillar was that of simple confidence in God alone. The fourth rightly follows, being the pillar of the burial of earthly ambition or desire. Jacob's four pillars are therefore seen to be important milestones in God's dealings with him. Because God's house, God's interests, find the first place in his life, then he is content to bury all that he was or sought “in the flesh.”

He journeys further, still with his tent, but called Israel, toward Edar, meaning “a flock” (v. 21). The character of the church as the house of God is seen in Bethel, and this emphasizes God's own presence as dwelling with His people. The flock, on the other hand, speaks of the church as a dependent company, constantly in need of care (Acts 20:28). When once we have learned the sweetness of God's presence in His house, then in practical, daily character we are fitted to have part with the saints in seeking their encouragement by shepherding and feeding them.

In this area the sad sin of Reuben is recorded in violating his father's concubine. As to this we are told only, “Israel heard of it.” He makes no angry response, for he has learned to submit himself to God, though we know from Genesis 49:3-4 that he felt it keenly. Reuben was, as Jacob says, “the beginning of my strength.” Now he is to witness in his firstborn the unstable, untrustworthy character of the flesh, just as it surfaced in Jacob himself, though in a different way.

THE TWELVE SONS OF JACOB (vv. 23-26)

We are then told the names of the sons of Jacob (vv. 22-26) — not called Israel in this case, for his sons are to be known simply as of the same sin-infected stock as their father. In spite of this inherited sinful nature, God had ordained that the twelve tribes of the nation Israel were to come from these twelve men. They were not chosen because they were any better than others, but only as a sample of all mankind, an object lesson to teach us all, not only what is our actual sinful condition, but our need of a Savior. No doubt each one of these brothers pictures a distinct feature of the ruin of mankind, and also of God's grace in providing salvation, as Genesis 49:2-27 indicates.

THE DEATH OF ISAAC (vv. 27-29)

The delay has been long, but at last Jacob returns to his father at Hebron. Nothing is said of his mother: she had evidently died before this time. Isaac's eyes had become dim long before, at which time Rebekah seemed strong and energetic, but he outlived her. Esau was not near him either, and we have no idea how he was cared for in his old age.

Many years intervene after this before Isaac died at the age of 180 years. Jacob and Esau were 120 years of age at this time. for they were born when Isaac was 60 (Gen. 25:16). Ten years after Isaac's death Jacob was presented before Pharaoh at age 130 (Gen. 47:9). But Joseph had been sold into Egypt at age 17 and was exalted as Ruler over Egypt 13 years later at age 30 (Gen. 37:1; Gen. 41:46). Following this there were seven years of plenty in Egypt and some years of famine. It seems therefore that Isaac must have died at about the time that Joseph was exalted in Egypt.

Esau and Jacob were both present for Isaac's funeral. Therefore Jacob must have sent word to Esau at the time, so that Esau could come. Nothing is said of whether Jacob was embarrassed to meet Esau again after having deceived him when agreeing to go to Esau's home (Gen. 33:12-17). But at least it is good that the brothers met face to face again. The wisdom of God arranges matters of this kind.

Genesis 36

THE FAMILY OF ESAU (vv. 1-18)

This chapter deals with the generations of Esau. Verse 6 tells us that he took his wives, family, and all his possessions, leaving the land of Canaan, going “from the face of his brother Jacob.” The man “after the flesh” cannot dwell together with the one who is chosen by God. Yet Esau (Edom) prospers and develops greatly in a material way, his sons becoming “dukes” (vv. 15-43) before Jacob's family attain such honor (except for Joseph in Egypt). We must remember that Joseph did not exalt himself, but was exalted by Pharaoh; but Esau's family illustrates the common history of the flesh always exalting itself. The long list of names therefore is intended to impress on us the fact that God has taken full account of the flesh and all its activities, finding it only vanity.

Genesis 37

JOSEPH AND HIS BRETHREN (vv. 1-11)

How significant is the truth of verse 1: “Jacob lived in the land where his father sojourned, in the land of Canaan.” It had taken him some years to finally settle there, but even though dwelling, he was still really only a sojourner (Heb. 11:9). He did not remain indefinitely, but later went down to Egypt, where he died (Gen. 46:5-6; Gen. 49:33).

We have seen in Genesis 36 a long list of the generations of Esau, but a great contrast faces us in Genesis 37, where we read of the generations of Jacob. Remarkably, his generations center simply in Joseph (v. 2): there is no list of names. The answer to this is simply that the true genealogy of the line of faith centers in the person of the Lord Jesus, of whom Joseph is a type. Working together with his half-brothers in feeding Jacob's flocks, he brought to his father the report of their bad practices. If these things were of a serious nature, it may have been necessary for Joseph to do this, but scripture does not say one way or the other. On the other hand, we know that the Lord Jesus was always right in communing with His Father about the evils of His brethren according to the flesh.

Verse 3 tells us that Jacob loved Joseph more than all his other sons. This was Jacob's failure, for love in a family should be thoroughly impartial and concerned about the true welfare of every child. However, above all this, we are reminded in this history that God's love for His Son is necessarily unique. The garment of many colors Jacob made for Joseph (v. 3) is typical of the many features of the glories of the Lord Jesus, for indeed all the colors of the rainbow are involved in giving us some little picture of the attributes of this blessed person in His very nature as the eternal God.

However, the love of Jacob for Joseph drew out the bitter animosity of his brothers. Jacob was to blame for this, or course, not Joseph, but the same thing has happened in many families. In the case of the Lord Jesus, Israel hated both Him and His Father (John 15:24), nor did they have the slightest excuse for this, as Jacob's brethren might have had for hating Joseph.

We read now of two dreams manifestly sent by God to Joseph, who told them to his brothers, only thereby increasing their hatred toward him. We may question, was it morally appropriate that Joseph should tell them his dreams? But it is clear that God overruled this in His sovereign wisdom, and we are reminded that the Lord Jesus told the Pharisees, “I tell you, hereafter you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven “ (Matt. 26:64).

In Joseph's first dream he tells his brothers that he and they were binding sheaves of grain in the field: his sheaf arose and stood erect, and those of his brothers all bowed down to his sheaf (v. 7). Joseph did not likely understand that God designed the dream as prophetic of the fact that Joseph's brothers would yet bow to his authority, as Genesis 42:6 tells us they did. Of course, the most vital lesson here is that all Israel will yet bow to the Lord Jesus, whom they have despised and hated. At the time Joseph's brothers considered it ridiculous that he would ever have dominion over them (v. 8).

The second dream seems to have awakened thoughts of questioning in his brothers' minds. When he told them and also told his father that he dreamed that the sun and moon and eleven stars bowed down to him, his father rebuked him, evidently feeling it was pride on Joseph's part that occasioned the dream, for he realized that the implication was plain that both he and Rachel and his eleven children would bow down to Joseph,. But his brothers envied him. Did this not indicate that they were apprehensive that Joseph would have such a place of authority? We know too that it was not only unbelief on the part of the Jewish leaders that moved their rejection of Christ, but envy (Matt. 27:18).

JOSEPH, SENT BY HIS FATHER, BUT REJECTED (vv. 12-36)

Joseph's brothers had gone to Shechem to feed their father's flock. Shechem means “shoulder,” and speaks of assuming responsibility, which Israel did under law. So the Lord Jesus, sent by the Father, came to the place where Israel was responsible to be, under the law God had given them. Joseph was sent “from the valley of Hebron” (v. 14). Hebron means “communion,” reminding us that the Father sent His Son from the place of intimate communion, which had been the portion of the Father and the Son from all the past eternity.

Joseph did not find his brothers at Shechem, however, just as the Lord Jesus did not find Israel in the place of obedience to the law of God. A man found Joseph wandering in the field and asked what he was looking for (v. 15). Then the man was able to tell him that he had heard his brothers proposing to go to Dothan (v. 17). This holds a most instructive lesson for us. Dothan means “their decree.” Just as Joseph thus found his brothers at Dothan, so the Lord Jesus found Israel in a place of their own decrees and traditions, rather than in the place of subjection to the law of God. He told the Pharisees and scribes, “You have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition. Hypocrites, Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying, These people draw near to me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. And in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men” (Matt. 15:6-9).

When Joseph was still some distance from his brothers they saw him coming and plotted against him to put him to death (vv. 19-20). Herod, from the time of the birth of the Lord Jesus, was determined to kill Him) Matt. 2:13-16). However, at this time God's sovereign protection was evident, for Reuben, the oldest of the brothers, had some sense of responsibility for a younger brother and was able to influence them not to kill him. Similarly, though the Jews sought often to kill the Lord Jesus, they could not do so until the time God Himself had appointed. In the meantime their fear of consequences restrained them (Matt. 21:45-46).

Reuben suggested simply putting Joseph into a pit from which he could not escape, intending himself to afterward liberate Joseph so that he could return to his father (v. 22). He evidently felt that, being the oldest, he would be answerable to his father for what the brothers did, for evil does not generally continue long without being discovered.

They likely took pleasure in stripping Joseph of his coat of many colors, on account of their jealousy toward him because of his father's favoritism (v. 13). All of this reminds us of men taking the garments of the Lord Jesus and casting lots for them at the time of His crucifixion (Matt. 27:35). Then also, just as Joseph's brothers coolly sat down to eat, so we are told of those who crucified the Lord, “sitting down they watched Him there” (Matt. 27:36).

But an unexpected opportunity arises, of which the brothers take selfish advantage. When a company of Ishmaelite traders appear, traveling toward Egypt, Judah is not slow to recognize an ideal way of getting rid of Joseph and at the same time gaining some monetary profit. He therefore indicates to his brothers that if they killed Joseph and tried to conceal the fact, they would make no profit from this, but in selling him as a slave to the Ishmaelites they would realize a profit as well as having no problem as to how to dispose of a dead body. He also appeals to their sense of some loyalty to their family relationship. Joseph was their brother (v. 27). He seems to have a conscience against killing his brother, but no conscience against selling him as a slave!

The brothers sold Joseph for 20 pieces of silver. There are two points here that compare with Israel's rejection of Christ. He was sold for 30 pieces of silver, and also the Jews delivered Him into the hands of Gentiles. Joseph is taken down to Egypt.

Reuben evidently was not present when the brothers sold Joseph, and in his returning to the pit he is shocked to find him gone (v. 29). His question to his brothers, “and I, where shall I go?” shows his fear of being held accountable. Did he perhaps think that Joseph had escaped and returned to report the whole matter to his father?

Of course the brothers would have to tell Reuben of their selling Joseph. Now they devised the plot of dipping Joseph's coat in the blood of a goat, and bringing it to Jacob, saying they had found it (v. 32). Thus they were guilty of cruel hatred both toward their brother and toward their father. They ask their father to examine the coat, to make sure it was Joseph's. Of course, in recognizing it he surmised that a wild animal had killed and eaten his son. Apparently it did not occur to him to ask them if they found bones in the vicinity or other articles of clothing. For a wild animal would not be so careful as to hide everything else and leave only a bloodstained coat.

Jacob was crushed to the point of deepest depression. This son was one in whom he had found greatest comfort. Now he is certain that Joseph has been killed. His mourning continued for his son over a long period of time, and though all his sons and his daughters sought to comfort him, he did not respond to this. Of course the comforting of his sons would be hypocritical, and we may be sure that Jacob's intense sorrow made their consciences more perturbed. He tells them that the agony of his mourning will not be relieved before he goes “down to Sheol,” the unseen state of soul and spirit when death takes place.

In the meanwhile the Midianites, taking Joseph to Egypt, sold him as a slave to the captain of Pharaoh's bodyguard, named Potiphar. Nothing is said here of how intensely Joseph felt the trauma of his ordeal. but we learn something of this in his brothers' later words to one another, “we saw the distress of his soul when he pleaded with us, yet we would not listen” (Gen. 42:21). Now taken to a far distant country and made a slave at the tender age of 17, how many must have been the hours of his painful agony!

Genesis 38

JUDAH'S HISTORY OF SHAME (vv. 1-30)

The story of Joseph is interrupted in this chapter to expose the shamefulness of an important part of Judah's history. We have seen that Judah took the lead in selling Joseph as a slave. In fact, in every relationship of Judah his shame and dishonor is evident. He sold his brother, he deceived his father, he married a Canaanite wife, he had both his sons killed by the Lord for wickedness, he deceived his daughter-in-law when promising his son Shelah to her, then had two sons by the same daughter-in-law (unwittingly).

He pictures the tribe of Judah, which has had a deeply painful history over the ages, so that it will require the powerful work of the Holy Spirit in conjunction with the manifestation of the Lord Jesus in glory, to break down Judah's proud arrogance (Zech. 12:7-14), just as we see Judah personally broken down when having to face Joseph in Genesis 44:18-44. In verse 1 Judah is seen leaving his brothers. The history of his brothers is not considered here, for Israel's long history has really been represented in the history of Judah since the ten tribes were separated from Judah and Benjamin. Judah's marriage to a Canaanite wife (v.2) symbolizes the nation's illicit commerce with Gentile business. For Canaan means “a trafficker,” a principle contrary to true Christian character, but Israel has exchanged any spiritual values she had for the legal principle of trading or trafficking in the world's markets. Shuah's name means “riches,” which the Jewish nation has sought as an object for centuries.

Three sons were born to Shuah, the first one killed by the Lord because of wickedness (v. 7). The second, Onan, agreed to take the widow of Er as his wife in order to have a child that would be officially his brother's. But he did not complete his contract honorably, and the Lord considered this serious enough to kill him also (vv. 8-10). The reason was his absolute selfishness, for the child would not be officially his (though actually so). These two cases illustrate the degrading history of the tribe of Judah. Shelah, the youngest son, is said to possibly mean “sprout,” and indicates at least a preserved remnant that promises a miraculous revival for the nation Israel.

Judah promised Tamar that when Shelah was grown (for as yet he was only young), then she could marry him, meanwhile asking her to remain as a widow in her father's house. But we shall see that Judah failed to keep his promise, just as the tribe of Judah has constantly done.

Eventually Judah's wife Shuah died, for “riches (the meaning of her name) take themselves wings; they fly away” (Prov. 23:5). Judah was not driven to the feet of the Lord by this, but turned to the company of one whom he thought was a prostitute. He had promised to give his youngest son Shelah to Tamar, but had not kept his promise. She therefore took matters into her own hands and deceitfully posed as a prostitute to seduce Judah (vv. 13-15). When he promised to send her a kid as payment for his fornication, she demanded some security, and he gave her three things that were unmistakably his property (v. 18). From this one occasion she conceived a child.

Immediately she left the area and changed her clothes, resuming her widowhood state. Of course when Judah sent the kid, expecting to retrieve the pledge he had left, the messenger was not only unable to find the prostitute, but was told that no prostitute had even been in that place.

Tamar's plan worked as she had desired, and three months later Judah was told that she was pregnant through prostitution (v. 24). He had no hesitation in condemning her, and passed sentence that she should be burned to death. Evidently he never even thought of the man who was involved in the case. Judah could sin without any question being raised, but he considered that for the very same sin Tamar must be killed!

Then Tamar exposed him, sending to him the three items of security he had given her, telling him she was pregnant by the owner of these things (v. 25). Judah at least gave her credit for being more righteous than he (v. 26), though rather, he was more guilty than Tamar, for righteousness was not involved in the matter at all.

Tamar gave birth to twins, one beginning to come first, but superseded by the other (vv. 27-29). This is another lesson of the first being last and the last first, as in the case of Esau and Jacob, and many others.

However, out of this shameful history it is amazing to think that God has seen fit to bring about marvelous blessing. For Judah, Tamar and Pharez are recorded as in the genealogy of the Lord Jesus in

Matthew 1:3. In fact, Tamar is one of only four women mentioned in that genealogy, — Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and “her who had been the wife of Uriah” (Matt. 1:3-6). But this is intended to impress upon us the marvel of the pure grace of God in reaching guilty sinners in the gift of His holy, sinless Son!

There was no continued relationship between Judah and Tamar, and we have no record either of Tamar's subsequent history.

Genesis 39

JOSEPH — FAITHFUL AND TRUSTED THOUGH A SLAVE (vv. 1-6)

How good it is to turn from Judah's sordid history to consider Joseph's history of faithful devotedness to the Lord! The deepest blessing for us in this is of course in the fact of the refreshing way in which Joseph is a type of the Lord Jesus. Just as Joseph learns through suffering, so the Lord Jesus “learned obedience by the things which He suffered” (Heb. 5:8).

Joseph was sold in Egypt to Potiphar, the captain of Pharaoh's bodyguard. But the Lord was with him (v. 2). He had suffered unrighteously, losing every connection with relatives and friends, and the Lord delights to encourage the lonely and deprived. The result was that he was faithful and dependable in his work, prospering in it, though he was a slave. For this reason Potiphar put him in charge of the work of his entire house, and everything prospered under his direction. This included too the work carried out in the fields of Potiphar (v. 5), so that he was no doubt over many other servants

This faithful, dependable character reminds us of the far more devoted life of the Lord Jesus in His proving Himself through lowly obedience to be fitted for the highest honor of His being entrusted by God to rule over all creation.

JOSEPH FALSELY ACCUSED AND IMPRISONED (vv. 7-20)

But Joseph must learn that further suffering must take place in view of his being eventually promoted to a higher honor than he would have before imagined. If God is to exalt anyone, it must be through suffering. Those who humble themselves to bear the suffering will be exalted, while those who seek to exalt themselves will find themselves abased.

Satan's instrument in this wicked attack was Potiphar's wife. She sought a number of times to seduce Joseph to commit adultery with her (vv. 7-14), but he steadfastly refused, telling her that his master had trusted him with great responsibility in his house. He was not going to prove false to that trust by violating the marriage between his master and his wife. By doing so, he tells her he would be committing great wickedness, and sinning against the Lord.

When Potiphar's wife continued urging Joseph to commit adultery with her, what could he do but firmly refuse? If he reported it to Potiphar, she would accuse him of lying, and probably say that Joseph had tried to seduce her. Finally, when no-one else was present and Joseph had to go into the house to take care of work responsibilities, she caught him by his garment and demanded again that he commit adultery with her. He pulled away, anxious to get far from her, but she held on to his garment while he left the house (vv. 11-12).

She then saw an opportunity of getting revenge on Joseph because he would not join her in evil. She called out for other men, no doubt servants of the household, and told them Joseph had come in with the object of raping her. She said she cried out, and he left without his garment. Thus, from the very time of the incident, she had witness against Joseph that seemed conclusive. When Potiphar came home she told him the same false story, having Joseph's garment there as apparent proof of her evil accusation (vv. 16-18).

Of course Joseph was helpless to do anything. His word, the word of a slave, would mean nothing to Potiphar in comparison to the word of his wife. He was understandably angry with Joseph, and not only demoted him from his high position in Potiphar's house, but put him in prison with others who were evidently mostly political prisoners of Pharaoh (v. 20).

JOSEPH BLESSED BY GOD IN PRISON (vv. 21-23).

But again, as in verse 2, we are told, “the Lord was with Joseph.” How good it is that everyone who suffers for righteousness' sake will have the gracious sympathy of the Lord, and He will not give him up to self-pity and depression. The chief jailer of course observed that Joseph was an honorable man, not a common criminal, and he soon entrusted Joseph with unusual responsibilities for a prisoner. He could see that Joseph was well able to keep things in order even among the other prisoners, and willingly left to Joseph the responsibilities that were normally those of the jailer himself. Again we are told that the Lord was with Joseph and whatever he did the Lord made to prosper (vv. 22-23). It may seem strange that this could be true of a prisoner, but it does indicate that Joseph was not of a negative character, but positive and faithful.

Genesis 40

JOSEPH, INTERPRETER OF DREAMS (vv. 1-23)

Two men are seen now to be committed to Joseph's care in the prison, the cupbearer and the baker of Pharaoh, king of Egypt. It is not told us for what offenses they were imprisoned, but they had incurred Pharaoh's anger and this was enough (v. 2). The captain of the bodyguard committed them to Joseph. We may wonder if this captain was Potiphar, who is said in Genesis 39:1 to have this position, but it is possible there was more than one captain.

After some time in the prison both the cupbearer and the baker were given a dream, each one different, but on the same night. The dreams were evidently strongly impressed on their minds, and in the morning Joseph observed that they were worried (v. 6). In kindly questioning them, he draws from them the fact of their having dreams without any means of having them interpreted (v. 8).

Joseph did not profess to be an expert in interpreting dreams, but rather told them, “Do not interpretations belong to God?” In this statement he was indicating that to have any answer they must depend on God Himself to reveal it. But he asks them to tell him their dreams.

The cupbearer's dream was that of a vine having three branches, which in the dream budded, blossomed and brought forth grapes. With Pharaoh's cup in his hand, the cupbearer squeezed the juice from the grapes into the cup and gave it into Pharaoh's hand (vv. 9-12).

Joseph, in communion with the mind of God, had no difficulty in interpreting this dream. “The three branches are three days,” he says (v. 12), and within three days Pharaoh would “lift up his head,” that is, bring him into public view, and restore him to his office of cupbearer.

There is striking spiritual significance in this dream. The three days remind us of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. The juice of the grapes signifies the shedding of His blood, He enduring the suffering of the figurative winepress and His blood being shed as the only means of forgiveness of sins. Therefore, as depending on the value of the blood of Christ, the offending sinner is liberated from his guilt and bondage. The cupbearer then pictures the sinner saved by virtue of the shedding of the blood of Christ.

No wonder Joseph then requested of the cupbearer, “Think on me when it shall be well with thee.” This surely speaks to the believer's heart today as being the request of the Lord Jesus. Since He has so greatly blessed us, it is only right that we should show some thankful response.

Joseph desired the cupbearer to speak to Pharaoh on his behalf, appealing to the fact that he had been kidnapped from the land of the Hebrews, then was unjustly accused and put in prison (vv. 14-15). It was true enough that there was no cause in Joseph for his being so treated, but how much more this is true of the Lord Jesus, who was totally sinless in every way, yet subjected to far worse treatment than was given Joseph.

The baker, when he heard Joseph's interpretation, expected a favorable interpretation of his dream also. He tells Joseph that in his dream he had three baskets on his head and in the top basket were all kinds of bakery goods for Pharaoh, and the birds were eating out of the basket. Joseph's interpretation is however totally in contrast to that of the cupbearer's dream. “The three baskets are three days; within three days Pharaoh will lift up your head from you and will hang you on

The significance of this is most important too. The three days would still remind us of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, for while this is great blessing to the believer (1 Thess. 4:14), it is just as surely the condemnation of the unbeliever (Acts 17:31). We have seen that the juice of the grapes is typical of the blood of Christ. It was given into the hand of the king. God is delighted with the value of the blood of His Son, and on this basis alone He forgives sin. But the bakery goods were the work of the baker's hands. They were intended for Pharaoh, just as men intend to please God by their good works, not realizing that these things can never take away the sins they have committed. God can certainly not accept men's works as a substitute for the work of His own Son in bearing the agony of terrible judgment on Calvary. The bakery goods were intended for Pharaoh, just as men think God will accept their works as payment for their sins, but they did not reach Pharaoh's table: the birds ate them. The birds of the air are typical of the Satanic activity of evil spirits, who love to deceive people by flattery of their so-called good works (Matt. 13:4 and 19). It is Satan who gains from this, not God.

Joseph's interpretation of the dreams was proven fully true when the third day arrived. Being Pharaoh's birthday, he made a feast for his servants. Both the cupbearer and the baker were brought forth to public view, but for contrary reasons (v. 20). The chief cupbearer was restored to his former capacity, while the baker was hanged (vv. 21-22). What influenced Pharaoh in these matters is not mentioned, but the evidence of God's presence with Joseph was unmistakable. But the cupbearer's heart was apparently not drawn to God in thankfulness. Rather than speaking well to Pharaoh about Joseph, he forgot him! May the Lord preserve us from being like him. For we who are believers have incomparably more for which to remember the Lord Jesus than the cupbearer had for remembering Joseph. He has not only foretold our deliverance, but has Himself delivered us from all our sins and our bondage by means of the great sacrifice of Himself. Believers may too easily allow this to become almost forgotten as to any practical realization of it; and there is real reason for the Lord's instituting the Lord's supper with the words, “This do in remembrance of Me” (

Luke 22:19).

Genesis 41

DREAMS SENT BY GOD TO PHARAOH (vv. 1-8)

Joseph remained in prison two full years longer, a further time of learning in humiliation the practical lesson of self-discipline. But he was under God's eye, and at the right time God sent two dreams to Pharaoh of such a character that he was greatly stirred by them. No doubt he had had many other dreams, but these were so outstanding that he could not ignore them.

In the first dream seven cows came up out of the Nile river, beautiful and well nourished, and were feeding in the meadow. Then seven other cows came up unnourished and ugly, and these ate up the well nourished cows (v. 4). The second dream did not come until he had wakened and then went to sleep again. Then he saw seven ears of grain come on a single stalk, plump and good. Following them were seven other ears thin and scorched by the east wind; and the bad ears swallowed up the good ones (vv. 5-7).

There was such a similarity in the dreams that Pharaoh knew they were intended to convey some meaning. In the morning he was troubled because of them. He therefore called the magicians and wise men of Egypt, but none of them could suggest any interpretation of the dream (v. 8).

JOSEPH INTERPRETS THE DREAMS (vv. 9-32)

Only then did the cupbearer wake up to the realization of his own indifference to Joseph. He told Pharaoh that while he was in prison he and the chief baker had had dreams that distressed them until a young man in the prison, a Hebrew, had interpreted their dreams, and his interpretation proved perfectly correct in each case (vv. 9-13).

In this history of the imprisonment of Joseph and the butler and the baker, God was working graciously behind the scenes to both bring Joseph out of prison and to exalt him in a way that would have naturally been unthinkable for a Hebrew. Pharaoh sent for Joseph immediately, and he came shaved and with a change of clothing. Nothing was said about the reason for which he was put in prison. So far as the record goes, he was never cleared of the charge that was falsely brought against him. He evidently left this in the hand of God, who knows how to care for His servant's reputation.

`Pharaoh then told Joseph that he had been unable to find anyone who could interpret a dream for him, but has heard that Joseph is able to do this (v. 15). Joseph fully disclaims any personal ability or gift for this, telling Pharaoh rather that it is God only who can give the answer, but indicating also that God **would** give him an answer of peace. This simple confidence in God was the secret of Joseph's receiving such revelations from Him.

Pharaoh then tells Joseph his dreams, adding to what we have read in verses 2-7 the interesting fact that after the seven thin, ugly cows had eaten the seven well nourished ones, the thin ones remained just as thin as before (v. 21).

Without hesitation Joseph interpreted the dream for Pharaoh, saying, “The dream of Pharaoh is one,” that is, the second dream was simply a confirmation of the first. God was showing Pharaoh beforehand what He was going to do in Egypt. The seven cows signified seven years, and the seven good ears of grain signified seven years. Similarly, the seven ugly cows and the seven parched ears of grain each signified seven years (vv. 26-27). God had chosen to reveal to an Egyptian king what He purposed to do. The well fed cows and the good ears of grain indicated that there would be seven years of abundant produce through all the land of Egypt, while the lean cows and the thin ears of grain were prophetic of seven years of famine to follow. Then because of the severity of the famine the good years would be forgotten as though eaten up by the bad years with no helpful result (vv. 28-31). God does such things as this with the object of awakening people to realize that their blessing does not depend on circumstances, but on the God who brings about every circumstance.

The fact that the second dream was a confirmation of the first indicated that the matter was fully established by God and that He would quickly accomplish His purpose.

JOSEPH'S ADVICE AND HIS EXALTATION BY PHARAOH (vv. 33-45)

Joseph then gave Pharaoh some sound advice as to how to prepare for the future. He must appoint a wise, dependable man to manage the great work of gathering produce into storehouses throughout the land of Egypt. This would require many to help. During the seven years of plenty, they would require only one-fifth of the produce of the land to be kept for the future (vv. 33-36). The abundance of the first seven years must have been great. Often when people are greatly blessed they do not consider wisely what the future may hold. After they have squandered the large amount the Lord has given them, they find that the lean years come unexpectedly and they are not prepared. Similarly, when a nation has lived lavishly it is likely that a recession will strike and the whole atmosphere is filled with bitter complaining. Through such things God speaks loudly to men.

The interpretation of the dream was so simple and appropriate that Pharaoh had no difficulty in believing Joseph and therefore in approving of his advice. But not only this, he realized that Joseph was the very man who was qualified for the great work of supervising the storing of Egypt's produce. It was evident to him that the Spirit of God was in Joseph, and since God had revealed the interpretation of the dream to him, then there was no-one so discerning and wise as he (vv. 37-39). 1 Corinthians 2:15 tells us, “he who is spiritual judges all things,” that is, he judges in the sense of discerning. Not only does he discern spiritual things, but he discerns rightly temporal matters better than any unbeliever does, simply because God is the Creator of material things just as well as things that are spiritual.

Thus God used the imprisonment of Joseph as a step toward a far higher dignity than he had enjoyed in the house of Potiphar. He is set over the house of Pharaoh. By Joseph's word all the people of Egypt were to be ruled. Pharaoh would of course not give his throne to Joseph, but would depend on Joseph to be the administrator of all his affairs. The dignity of Pharaoh's position remained, but he gave authority into Joseph's hand (v. 40). There is an analogy here. God remains always in the dignity of eternal glory, yet He has given His beloved Son the place of supreme authority over His creation.

Announcing Joseph as Ruler, Pharaoh even gave him his own ring, clothed him with fine linen and put a gold chain around his neck (v. 42). In all of this Joseph is typical of the Lord Jesus exalted to the right hand of God. The ring, having no end, speaks of His eternal identification with God, the fine linen reminding us of the perfect purity of His Manhood (Rev. 19:8). The golden chain pictures His unity with the Father in His Godhead glory.

Then Pharaoh gives Joseph the honor of riding in his second chariot and having heralds calling on the people to “bow the knee” (v. 43). This surely reminds us of Philippians 2:9-10, “Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow.”

“Pharaoh also said to Joseph, 'I am Pharaoh, and without your consent no man may lift up his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt.'” This was an imperial decree, just as God has decreed by the honor of His own name that without Christ there is no true work (the hand) or walk (the foot) in all the world.

Pharaoh gave Joseph the name of Zaphnaph-paaneah, which means in Coptic language “revealer of secrets,” but in Egyptian, “Savior of the world” (v. 45). Both are appropriate as applying to Christ, for He has revealed the Father and the Father's counsels, and by virtue of His great sacrifice on Calvary He is indeed the Savior of the world. As to the wife Joseph was given, Asenath, we are told almost nothing, except that she was a daughter of Potiphera, priest of On. But she is typical of the church, a Gentile bride, being united to the Lord Jesus at a time when He has been rejected by Israel.

JOSEPH STORING FOOD FOR SEVEN YEARS (vv. 46-57)

At this time we are told Joseph's age was 30 years (v. 46), the same as that of the Lord Jesus when He began His public ministry (Luke 3:23). Thus his combined time as a slave and in prison was 13 years. Now he goes out throughout all the land of Egypt, to supervise the organization of plans to gather in to many storage places the tremendous amount of grain that was only one-fifth of the super abundance that was yielded during the fruitful first seven years (vv. 47-48). The amount was so great that it was found impossible to compute it (v. 49).

During the seven plentiful years two sons were born to Joseph by Asenath, the first named Manasseh (v. 51), which means “forgetting,” for, as he says, “God has made me to forget all my trouble and all my father's household.” This is typical of the truth of Christianity: it makes us forget the first creation with its natural relationships and its vexatious trials. But this is because it introduced something better, the new creation, of which Christ is the Head. This is involved in the name of Joseph's second son, Ephraim, which means “fruitful” (v. 52), for only in new creation is there true fruitfulness for God. Manasseh therefore implies the negative side of the truth, Ephraim the positive. Even in the land of Joseph's affliction God had made him fruitful. Thus today, when affliction is to be expected by the Christian, he is already the subject of new creation, and is therefore fitted to bear fruit for God.

The seven years of plenty came to an end, as God had forewarned by Joseph. The famine came, not only to Egypt, but to other countries also. But Egypt alone had prepared for the famine (v. 54). The people of Egypt appealed to Pharaoh for food, and he tells them, “Go to Joseph: whatever he says to you do” (v. 58). How clear is the lesson here for ourselves today. The Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world (

1 John 4:14). Therefore He directs us all to the Lord Jesus as the One appointed to care for our needs. Joseph opened all the storehouses of Egypt (v. 56), just as the Lord Jesus has opened the storehouses of heaven by virtue of His great sacrifice of Calvary, for the blessing of those who have found themselves reduced to spiritual poverty. One great contrast, however, is that the Lord Jesus gives freely, “without money and without price.” People from all countries came to Egypt in order to buy food (v. 57). The grace of God in Christ is available for all the nations today, at a time when the whole world is in a state of spiritual famine.

In such a history we are privileged to see that the wheels of God's government, though turning slowly and deliberately, are perfectly directed to accomplish marvelous results that will display the greatness of His wisdom and His grace throughout eternity. The history itself is wonderfully designed by God as a picture of His own working in the more wonderful history of the coming of the Lord Jesus, His rejection by His own brethren, His suffering among Gentiles, but His eventual recognition and exaltation while still His brethren, the Jewish nation, are in a state of unbelief that will require a spiritual famine to eventually awaken them to a deep need that will lead to an unexpected and marvelous revelation of their Messiah, with its abounding blessing.

Genesis 42

JACOB SENDS HIS SONS TO EGYPT (vv. 1-24

The famine reaches to Jacob's land. God makes him and his sons to feel the distress of famine until they hear that Egypt has an abundance of food that is available for sale. Jacob therefore orders his sons to take a trip there to buy food (v. 2). Joseph's ten brothers then “went down” (v. 3), indicating that Israel must be humbled in order to receive blessing from God.

Benjamin does not go with them, for Jacob feared for his safety, no doubt specially because Joseph had before been taken from him, and Benjamin was the only son of Rachel remaining. In this matter there is striking spiritual significance. Joseph's brothers had rejected him, a picture of Israel's rejection of the Lord Jesus. Joseph is therefore a type of Christ in suffering before exaltation. Benjamin (“son of the right hand”) is a type of Christ, the Messiah, reigning in glory. At the time when Israel is again awakened because of their need, they will not only have no recognition of Christ as the rejected Sufferer, but even thoughts of a glorious Messiah will be practically dormant in their minds.

When the brothers come they are brought into the presence of the governor himself rather than a lesser authority, but they of course had no idea that they were bowing down to their brother Joseph, though Joseph recognized them. But he spoke roughly to them, asking them where they came from (v. 7). Verse 23 tells us he spoke to them by an interpreter, though of course he knew their language perfectly well, but he would not give them the least inkling that he might be known to them. When they asked to buy food, he accused them of being spies. Though this was not accurate, yet Joseph was seeking to awaken exercise in their hearts as to their past dishonesty. They protest that they are true men, the sons of one man (v. 11). They must later be brought to confess that they have **not** been true.

When Joseph continues interrogating them, they give him the information that their father had twelve sons, one of them remaining at home, while the other, they say, “is not.” How little they suspected that the governor knew better than that! But now he is going to test them in regard to their attitude toward another younger brother, Benjamin. He tells them that they must be kept in prison while one of their number returns home to bring Benjamin with him (vv. 15-16).

They are all put in prison, however, for three days. Joseph was wisely making them feel the pain of enforced confinement, though only briefly compared to the years of his own imprisonment. After the three days he lightens the sentence against them, for instead of nine being kept in prison, he decrees that only one be kept while the rest return home to bring their younger brother back with them. He did this because, as he said, “I fear God” (vv. 18-20).

These words too spoke to their consciences, for with Joseph present they confessed to each other that they were guilty concerning their treatment of Joseph, “because,” they say, “we saw the distress of his soul when he pleaded with us, yet we would not listen; therefore this distress is come upon us” (v. 21). Reuben reminded them too that he had before remonstrated with them and they ignored him. “Now comes the reckoning for his blood,” Reuben says. They knew it was true that we shall reap what we sow, and they recognize that it is God who is bringing this back upon their own heads, though they do not mention the name of God.

When Joseph heard them speak this way he turned away from them and wept (v. 24), for it was evident that God was beginning a work in their hearts by the convicting of their consciences. But Joseph would not yet reveal himself to them, for a deeper work was yet required which would take more time. Still, God rewarded Joseph's wisdom up to this point by the apparent self-judgment of his brothers, and he would be encouraged, though having to still wait in patience.

He returned to them and took Simeon and bound him before their eyes, a reminder of their having before made Joseph a captive. But without the brothers knowing it, he gave orders to fill all their sacks with grain and to restore their money to them by putting it into their sacks, besides also giving them provision for their journey. So the Lord Jesus, even when He has to use disciplinary measures, cannot forbear to show the kindness of His grace. He does this with people individually, and will eventually do it with the awakened remnant of Israel in order to encourage their further self-judgment and restoration. The law, with its strict regulations and demands, while it might expose men's sins, will never lead them to repentance. Romans 2:4 is most clear, however, in its declaration, which many do not realize, “that the goodness of God leads you to repentance.”

THE BROTHER RETURN HOME (25-38)

The brothers loaded their donkeys and began the return journey without Simeon. But when they stopped for the night, one of them opened his sack in order to feed his donkey, and was alarmed to find his money in the mouth of the sack (v. 27). His brothers too were shocked at this, and realized that this was a matter in which God was definitely intervening, but for what purpose they do not understand. They were afraid. John Newton expresses this reaction clearly in his hymn, “Amazing Grace,” when he writes, “'Twas grace first taught my heart to fear.” It is always grace that brings us face to face with the living God, though because of our sin this experience at first is frightening. This is the first time we hear the brothers mentioning God's name, so that we know that they did not miss what Joseph said as to his fearing God.

Returning home, they recount to their father Jacob their experience with the governor of Egypt (vv. 29-34). Then, opening their sacks, they find the money of all restored to them. Both they and their father were afraid rather than thankful, for they suspected some ulterior design in this. Thus is it with mankind generally. they are suspicious that there must be some “catch” when the free grace of God in Christ Jesus is proclaimed (v. 35).

Jacob is greatly disturbed. He tells his sons that they have bereaved him of Joseph (which was more true than he suspected) and now also of Simeon, and that they want to take Benjamin away with them. “All these things are against me,” he says. He did not have the slightest idea that all these things were going to work out wonderfully **for** him. Do we not also too frequently have a complaining attitude as though everything is against us? Yet the fact is that everything works together for good to all who love God (Rom. 8:28).

Reuben then proposes to Jacob that he would be responsible for Benjamin if Jacob would send him, and in fact offers the lives of his two sons as surety (v. 37). But such a thing would be folly. If Jacob's son was taken from him, would the death of his two grandsons serve to comfort him? Jacob flatly refuses, saying his son would not go with them to Egypt, for he feared that some type of harm would come to Benjamin which would cause Jacob such grief as to result in his own death (v. 38).

Genesis 43

THE BROTHERS, WITH BENJAMIN, RETURN TO EGYPT (vv. 1-15)

The famine continued until Jacob and his family had eaten up all the provision they had gotten from Egypt. Then Jacob urged his sons to go again and bring more food from Egypt (v. 2).

This time Judah (the one who had taken the lead in selling Joseph) protests to his father that the governor of Egypt had absolutely decreed that if they returned without Benjamin they would be refused. Therefore he said they would not go unless they could take Benjamin. He offered to be surety for Benjamin (v. 9), saying that if he did not bring Benjamin safely back again, he (Judah) would bear the blame forever. He adds also that if they had not delayed so long they could have made the second journey and returned by this time.

All of this does not allay Jacob's apprehensions, but the pressure of hard circumstances finally decided him to allow Benjamin to go. Yet he wanted to do all he could to dispose the governor of Egypt favorably toward his sons. He would send a present to him of balm, honey, spices, myrrh, nuts and almonds (v. 11). These things would not be so quickly affected by the famine as would the grain crops, yet it would no doubt demand some sacrifice to send these. Besides this Jacob instructs his sons to both take back the money that was returned in their sacks and to add to this double the amount of money that was required for the food they wanted to buy (v. 12). In sending Benjamin also, he invokes the name of God Almighty, desiring His compassion in the sight of Egypt's governor, that Simeon might be released and Benjamin also be returned safely. As to himself, Jacob bows to the possibility of his being bereaved of Benjamin also (v. 14). The brothers then go down the second time to Egypt and were brought before Joseph.

ENTERTAINED BY THE GOVERNOR (vv. 16-34)

Before Joseph even speaks to them, seeing that Benjamin was with them, he orders his house steward to bring all those men into his own house, and have an animal killed to provide food for them, for they were to dine with Joseph at noon (v. 16). Not only did they see Joseph's face, but were made his favored guests. But this only awakened their fear and suspicion. Grace does this in those who want matters on a legal basis. They were afraid that Joseph was showing such kindness with the motive of finding a pretext for which to steal all they had. How little they knew Joseph's heart! Many there are also who remain unsaved only because they are suspicious of God's grace in Christ Jesus.

Before eating in Joseph's house, the brothers speak to the steward, telling him of their coming the first time and on departing some distance had found in their sacks the money they had brought to buy food. Not knowing how the money had been put there, they tell him they have brought it back, together with money to buy further provisions (vv. 20-22).

The steward responded kindly to them to set them at rest about this matter. “Peace be to you,” he says, “fear not.” They ought only to thank their God, the God of their father, for the money, for he tells them, “I had your money.” This was true: he **had** it, but had restored it, though he does not tell them this. Then he brought Simeon out to them.

Every kindness was shown them for their comfort, even to the feeding of their donkeys. Hearing that Joseph was to eat with them, they prepared to give him the present they had brought. When he came in they gave it to him, bowing themselves before him to the ground (v. 26).

Of course Joseph was vitally interested in knowing about their father: was he still alive? Yes, they tell him, their father was both alive and in good health. Typically this tells us that in the tribulation period the Jewish remnant will have their thoughts exercised as to their relationship to the **living** God. Men may say that God is dead, but this is only because they themselves are dead toward God. This has been true for years in communist countries, but now many are awakened to have to deal with a living God. Again the brothers bowed their heads in homage to Joseph, not realizing he was the brother whom they had rejected. The living Son of God will be dealing with Israel during their tribulation, though they will not realize that it is the same One whom they rejected who is exercising their souls.

But Benjamin, the younger son of Rachel is of vital interest to Joseph too, far more so than the brothers could guess (v. 29). We have seen that he is a type of Christ the Messiah of Israel reigning in power and glory. Israel must learn to connect a reigning Messiah with a suffering Messiah, as they have never done before. Of course both are one and the same person, the blessed Lord Jesus, but it takes more than one man to form any adequate picture of that which is perfectly seen only in Christ. Joseph asks, "Is this your youngest brother of whom you spoke to me?" To Benjamin he said, "May God be gracious to you, my son."

But the sight of his brother moved him with such a surge of emotion that he had to immediately leave them and go to his bedroom to weep (v. 30). We can well understand this, for he had not seen Benjamin for well over 20 years. After weeping he returned to his normal self-control, washed his face and came out to eat with his brothers.

Yet even in the house there was a division carefully maintained between them. Joseph ate by himself, the Egyptian servants by themselves, and Joseph's brothers by themselves (v, 32). Here is a reminder that the Lord Jesus is alone in authority over all, while Israel and Gentiles are distinct companies. This will be true in the Millennium. The church of God stands in great contrast to this, for all believers (Jewish and Gentile) are fully united in one body: there is no division between them; and Christ is in their midst as Head, not only as Lord. The Egyptians considered it loathsome to eat with Hebrews. Later, Peter said it was unlawful for a Jew to have any company with Gentiles (Acts 10:28). Peter had to learn then that God had intervened in marvelous grace, to make all believers in this present dispensation of time members of one body, whether Jews or Gentiles. This unity stands therefore in wonderful contrast to the divisions in the Old Testament between Jew and Gentile, and also in contrast to the distinct companies of Jews and Gentiles in the millennial earth.

The brothers were astonished when they found they were seated in order of their ages (v. 33). Israel will be astonished when they find that the Lord Jesus knows them as well as they know themselves — in fact better than they know themselves.

But as they were served, Benjamin was given five times as much as any of the others. One wonders if he did not have difficulty eating it! However, in this the brothers were taught that a younger brother was given greater recognition than those older. They had before rejected a younger brother, and both younger brothers (Joseph and Benjamin) are types of the Lord Jesus in distinct ways, as we have seen. This was the first time all the sons of Jacob had eaten together for well over twenty years, yet only Joseph realized this! The special favor Joseph showed to Benjamin was intended to emphasize to the brothers that God, far from despising a younger brother, gives him a place of honor. Too often the older look down on one younger, but according to natural birth, the Lord Jesus was a younger brother in Israel, and the pride of the older must be brought down.

Genesis 44

BENJAMIN ACCUSED WRONGFULLY (vv. 1-15)

The wisdom of Joseph is seen now in such a way as to lead his brothers to repentance without accusing them. He instructed his steward to fill the brothers' sacks with food and again restore their money to them in their sacks (v. 1). But as well as this he tells him to put his own (Joseph's) silver cup into the mouth of the sack of Benjamin. the next morning they were on their way, no doubt rejoicing that this time everything had gone so well.

However, this relief was short lived, for Joseph had told his steward to overtake them and accuse them of returning evil for good in stealing Joseph's silver cup (vv. 4-5). Of course such an accusation was a shock to the brothers. They protested that they would not think of such a thing. The fact that they had brought the money back after having found it in their sacks was surely proof that they were not thieves (vv. 7-8), They are so confident of this that they say if one was found to have the silver cup he should die and the rest would be slaves to Joseph (v. 9).

The steward approved of their words, but was much more lenient in answering them. Of course Joseph had instructed him. He tells them that the guilty one would be kept as a slave to Joseph and the rest could go free, The search began at the eldest, finishing with the youngest, in whose sack the silver cup was found (v. 12). What a shock to them all! What a traumatic experience for Benjamin who knew himself innocent!

The brothers knew they could not leave Benjamin and go home under these circumstances. Heavy-hearted they return to the city, where Joseph was still in his house. Again they bow down to him. Joseph asks them, "What is this deed that you have done? Do you not know that such a man as I can practice divination?" (v. 15).

JUDAH'S BROKEN CONFESSION (vv. 18-34)

It is not Reuben, the eldest, who speaks to Joseph, but Judah, the one who had been leader in selling Joseph as a slave. He does not plead any defense whatever. In fact, though he had not been personally guilty of stealing the cup, yet he realizes that God was in this way reminding him of their previous guilt in selling Joseph. He tells the governor therefore, "God has found out the iniquity of your servants." In fact, he does not condemn Benjamin and justify himself, but takes his place with Benjamin and his brothers in a willingness to accept the place of slaves to Joseph (v. 16).

However, Joseph answers that he would not require the brothers to be slaves, but would keep only Benjamin as a slave while allowing the others to return home to their father. Joseph knew of his father's affection for Benjamin and that the very mention of their father now would devastate the brothers in having to return to him without Benjamin. Judah in particular had made himself surety for Benjamin, so he found himself in a dreadful predicament. What could he do now but plead for consideration from the governor?

He came near to Joseph, as Israel will yet eventually come near to the Lord Jesus without realizing who He is. He entreats Joseph not to be angry at his further speaking to him, "for," he says, "you are equal to Pharaoh" (v. 18). So indeed in a coming day Israel will confess that Christ is equal to God. Judah recounts the experience of meeting the governor at first, and Joseph's asking them if they had a father or a brother, and their answer to the effect that their father was still alive and had a younger son, the only remaining son of his mother, for her only other son was dead (not exactly a convincing statement so far as Joseph was concerned!).

Judah reminds him that they had protested before that their father was so attached to Benjamin that he would not think of letting him leave, but that Joseph had firmly insisted that if Benjamin did not come, Joseph would refuse to see them (vv. 21-23). Therefore when Jacob again urged the brothers to go to Egypt to buy food, they told him they could not go unless Benjamin was with them. Their father had responded to this that his wife Rachel had borne him two sons and the first had never returned when he left home, and Jacob considered him to have been killed by wild beasts. He was therefore all the more jealous concerning his younger son and said, "if you take this one also from me and harm befalls him, you will bring my gray hair down to sheol in sorrow" (v. 29).

Judah pleads then with Joseph that if he comes back to Jacob without Benjamin the trauma for his father would be so great that he would die, since as he says, "his life is bound up in the lad's life" (vv. 30-31). More than this, Judah tells Joseph that he had become surety for his brother to his father, offering to bear the entire blame himself if he did not bring Benjamin back (v. 32).

The last words of Judah to Joseph are refreshing in the way they reach the root of the whole matter. For he asks Joseph to allow him to take the place of Benjamin as a slave and that Benjamin be allowed to return to his father (v. 33). What a contrast to the way Judah had before treated his younger brother Joseph! This was the end that Joseph had been seeking, to see in Judah a genuine repentance that was willing to suffer as he had made his brother suffer. This is the repentance that is seen in the thief who was crucified with the Lord Jesus. He said that he and the other thief deserved the punishment they received (Luke 23:41).

The last matter that would speak to Joseph's heart was Judah's changed attitude toward his father (v. 34). Judah now was deeply concerned that his father would be utterly grief stricken if Benjamin did not return.

Thus too, when Israel goes through the great tribulation, the sovereign grace of God will work in many hearts to bring them to have real concern for their promised Messiah (Benjamin) and concern for the living God whom they had before dishonored in the rejection of His Son. This work will have begun in their hearts before they ever realize that Jesus whom they rejected (Joseph) is actually their true Messiah.

Genesis 45

JOSEPH REVEALS HIMSELF vv. 1-15)

Now that the grace of God has wrought genuine repentance in the hearts of the brothers, and Judah in particular, Joseph is free to reveal to them His own true identity. He was so deeply affected that he could not restrain himself; and called upon all his servants to leave the room. Only his brothers were with him as he broke down and wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard it outside the room, including the household servants of Pharaoh (vv. 1-2).

"I am Joseph," he tells them. What a shock for them! "Is my father still alive?" He wanted such a confirmation from their lips, but they were so stunned thy could not speak (v. 3). What will be the result also when the great Messiah of Israel reveals Himself to the nation, as the Lord Jesus whom they had crucified? "They will look on Me whom they have pierced, and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him, like the bitter weeping over a firstborn" (Zech. 12:10). Like Thomas, they will be broken down to confess, "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28).

Yet Joseph's brothers would have some troubled fear that now they would have to face punishment for their previous treatment of Joseph. How anxious Joseph was to quieten their fears! He did not command them, but asked them, "Please come closer to me." When they did, he confirmed that he was their brother Joseph whom they sold into Egypt. But he adds immediately that he does not want them to be grieved or angry with themselves because of this, for it was God who had sovereignly worked in this painful experience in order to preserve life for many (v. 5). If he did not want them to be angry with themselves, then certainly **he** was not angry with them. Wonderful attitude for an exalted ruler!

Then he lets them know that the two years of famine they had suffered was only the beginning. There were five years to come. They must have wondered how he knew this, but they did not question his word. He seeks to impress on them again that it was God who sent him to Egypt in order to preserve the family of Jacob and to save their lives by a great deliverance (v. 7). Thus too, it is the Lord Jesus by whom God has actually preserved Israel by means of the rejected One being exalted among the Gentiles as He has been during this dispensation of grace now for many centuries, though Israel has been ignorant of the glory of their rejected Messiah.

So then, he assures them, it was not they who had sent Joseph to Egypt, but God; and God had made him (1) a father to Pharaoh (one whose goodness and guidance Pharaoh depended on), and (2) "lord of all his house" (having authority second only to Pharaoh in his household) and (3) a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt (one in charge of the administration of all governmental affairs).

He then instructs his brothers to hurry home to their father, with the electrifying news that God has made Joseph lord of all Egypt, and to tell him that he is to come immediately to Joseph, bringing all his family and his goods with him, and that they might live in the land of Goshen in Egypt (vv. 9-10). Joseph also promises to provide for them during the five years of famine that were yet to come. Thus Joseph returns great good to his brothers for the evil that they had shown him. How much greater yet is the goodness of the Lord Jesus, who has been treated far more shamefully than Joseph was, but will bless Israel (His brethren according to flesh) in overabounding grace in the coming millennial age!

Now that Joseph had fully revealed himself to his brothers and had instructed them to return home to bring their father and possessions to Egypt, he again embraced his brother Benjamin, and both of them wept (v. 14). Of course Joseph had a special attachment to the one who was the son of his mother. But he afterward did the same to each of the other brothers (v. 15) and took time to talk with them.

RETURNING TO JACOB WITH AMAZING NEWS (vv. 16-28)

News of the coming of Joseph's brothers reaches Pharaoh, who is pleased to hear this (v. 16), so that he confirms what Joseph had said, that the brothers should return to Canaan and bring their father and their households with them back to Egypt, where Pharaoh would give them the best of the land (v. 17-18). Of course Pharaoh realized that he was greatly indebted to Joseph and was glad to show his appreciation in this way. More than this, he orders them to take wagons with them from Egypt in order to bring their wives and children and their father. As to their possessions, he tells them not to be concerned, for everything they needed would be provided for them in Egypt (v. 20). Of course they would bring their flocks and herds, and no doubt there would be many things they would not want to leave behind, but Pharaoh wanted them to know that he would supply whatever goods they had need of.

Joseph gave them wagons (which would of course include animals to pull them) and provisions for their journey, even including changes of clothing, but to Benjamin he gave five changes of clothing and added to this three hundred pieces of silver. One wonders if Benjamin might have had a little difficulty in knowing how to handle this! But Joseph's heart was abounding in grace, and he sent to his father ten donkeys loaded with the best things of Egypt and ten female donkeys loaded with grain and bread and other food, just for his father's journey. Evidently he did not consider the wagons sufficient to carry all this food.

In sending them away, Joseph told his brothers not to quarrel on the way (v. 24). He knew their character, and the Lord Jesus too knows the natural character of Israel, which is all too sadly reflected in ourselves, even the church of God. They return to their father with the unexpected news that Joseph was still alive and was ruler over all Egypt. Jacob was stunned, and could not believe them. But they told him all the words Joseph had spoken to them. At this time the truth must have come out, that the brothers had sold Joseph into Egypt, for their father had been deceived all these years. But the knowledge that Joseph was living would for Jacob override the deception of his brothers. As well as for Joseph's reported words, Jacob was persuaded when he saw the wagons that had been sent by Joseph. His spirit revived and he said, "It is enough. Joseph my son is still alive. I will go to see him before I die" (vv. 27-28).

Genesis 46

JACOB AND HIS FAMILY MOVE TO EGYPT (vv. 1-27)

Nothing is said of the great amount of preparation they must make for their journey, but Jacob is said to take the journey with all that he had, which of course included all his family. On his way he stopped at Beersheba (the well of the oath), which indicates his remembrance of the promise of God on which he was dependent. It is good to see him offering sacrifices there.

That night God spoke to him in a vision, a reminder of the dream God gave him at Bethel when he was going toward Haran (Gen. 28:10-15). But how different are the circumstances! His journey now is away from the land, and it might have been with some trepidation that Jacob was leaving the land of promise. However, He told him, "I am God, the God of your father," and gave him the encouragement of knowing that God approved of his trip to Egypt at this time (vv. 2-3). In fact, He tells him that He will make of Jacob a great nation there in Egypt. This confirms God's word to Abram in Genesis 15:13, that Abram's seed would be a stranger in a foreign land, where, as servants, they would be afflicted 400 years.

God promises his own presence with Jacob, and that He would surely bring him back again. This return of course referred to Jacob's posterity, the nation Israel. For as to Jacob himself, Joseph would close his eyes, that is, in death, though he was buried in the land of Canaan. He would not personally experience the sufferings his children would.

From Beersheba therefore they all journey in the confidence of the promise of God. Wives and little ones and livestock and other property are all included in this large company traveling to change their dwelling place (vv. 5-7)

We are told now the names of all the household of Jacob, who came with him, indicating that our great God is interested in individuals, not only in nations or great companies. The total was 66 persons (v. 26), plus Joseph and his two sons. Jacob himself is the seventieth.

SETTLED IN A FOREIGN LAND (vv. 28-47:12)

Jacob sent Judah before him to direct the way to Goshen, and the family arrived there in due time. Then Joseph came by chariot to meet his father, whom he embraced, weeping for a long time. Israel's words to Joseph are wonderfully significant, "Now let me die, since I have seen your face, that you are still alive" (v. 30). Israel may die, for Joseph lives! This is the same principle of which John the Baptist speaks in John 3:30: "He must increase, but I must decrease." When the Lord Jesus is given His place of supreme honor, Israel the nation will be content to be reduced to nothing. How good for us if we personally learn this lesson well, glad to see the flesh put in the place of death in order that Christ may be exalted.

Joseph then prepares his brothers and their households for their being presented before Pharaoh, telling them he will announce their coming to Pharaoh (v. 31) and will tell him they are shepherds, having brought their flocks and herds with them, so that Pharaoh would be prepared to grant them land that would not encroach on the lands of the Egyptians who had accustomed themselves to loathe shepherds. Joseph tells them to let Pharaoh know that they had been shepherds from their youth and of course desired to continue this in spite of the attitude of Egyptians toward shepherds (vv. 31-34). There is a spiritual lesson in this also. God expects His own people to have hearts as shepherds, to care for the needs of souls. The world (Egypt) not only ignores such shepherd care, but resents others who engage in it. In fact, too frequently even believers do not appreciate the pastoral care and concern that a godly saint seeks to show for them. For this reason we sadly neglect to engage in true shepherd work.

Genesis 47

JACOB MEETING AND BLESSING PHARAOH (vv. 1-12)

In announcing to Pharaoh the coming of his father and his brothers, Joseph first introduces five of his brothers to him (vv. 1-2). We are not told which ones, but they were likely those who could speak on behalf of their other brothers. They answer Pharaoh's question as to their occupation by confirming Joseph's word that they were shepherds as their fathers were, and that they desired to sojourn in Egypt because there was no pasture available in Canaan on account of the famine. They therefore requested that they might be allowed to settle in the land of Goshen (vv. 3-4).

Rather than directly answering them, Pharaoh speaks to Joseph, reminding us that God gives all blessing through the Lord Jesus, the One in whom He finds great delight. Through Joseph therefore all they desire is freely granted to them, for Pharaoh tells Joseph they may have the best of the land (vv. 5-6). This was pure grace. But also, on the ground of capability, some could be given the position of being put in charge of Pharaoh's livestock. Since he knew Joseph, he expected that at least some of his brothers would be capable men.

Then Joseph presented his father Jacob to Pharaoh. Before Pharaoh speaks, however, we are told that Jacob blessed him. "Beyond all contradiction, the lesser is blessed of the better" (Heb. 7:7). But this is a picture of the coming day, when Gentiles will be blessed through Israel.

In answer to Pharaoh's question as to his age, Jacob speaks of his years as "few and evil," not attaining to the age of his fathers, Abraham and Isaac (vv. 8-9). He had seen great trouble and sorrow during his 130 year pilgrimage, just as has been true of His descendants, the Jewish nation, who have suffered more affliction than any other nation over a period of centuries. Then Jacob blessed Pharaoh again before leaving him.

Joseph placed his father and his brothers in the best of the land, that is, Rameses in the land of Goshen, in the north and on the east side of the Nile River. This pictures the Lord Jesus restoring Israel to great blessing under subjection to His authority, for we are also told that he nourished them with food (vv. 11-12). How wonderful it will be to Israel in the millennium to be permanently settled and abundantly provided for! Of course the history here is only typical, for Israel soon after found itself in the bitter bondage of slavery to the Egyptians.

EGYPT BROUGHT INTO TOTAL SUBJECTION (vv. 13-26)

The famine was as serious as Joseph had predicted. Egypt and Canaan were both greatly affected. The people continued to buy food from Joseph as long as they had money (vv. 13-14). But when they had spent it all and still needed food, Joseph told them to bring their livestock to exchange for food. This arrangement continued for a year, and the people came to Joseph again telling him they had nothing left except their bodies and their lands. Now they request that Joseph should take their land and also make the people the property of Pharaoh. Are we not to learn from this that it is good for us to brought down to nothing?

The proposition of the people that they and their lands should belong to Pharaoh was agreeable to Joseph, and he removed the people into the cities (v. 20-21). The land of the priests was however exempt from this decree, since they were already supported by Pharaoh and nothing in this respect was altered (v. 22). Though these were not priests who had any ordination by God, they still picture the liberty that true believers in the Lord Jesus are given today. The people illustrate the sphere of **government**, while the priests speak of the sphere of the free operation of the Spirit of God in grace. As priests of God, all saints today are not under bondage, but full provision is made for them by grace.

Joseph was not a cruel dictator who was seeking his own wealth by impoverishing the people. Some have strangely criticized the plan that he carried into execution, but the people themselves appreciated it (v. 25). He had bought them and their land. Now he tells them he will give them seed to sow the land. For their labor they would receive four fifths of the crop. This arrangement would work remarkably well, only on condition that the rulers were fair-minded and considerate of the people, and that the people would act responsibly. How much better is this than our present day order of government (or disorder) with many thousands of people homeless and unemployed!

However, this strikingly pictures the coming rule of the Lord Jesus in His kingdom. As all the money of the Egyptians was gathered up by Joseph, so the Lord tells us in Haggai 2:8, "The silver and the gold are mine." Just as the livestock also became the property of Joseph, so the Lord says, "Every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills" (Ps. 50:10). Also, as Joseph bought all the land of Egypt for Pharaoh, so the Lord Jesus has by His sacrifice of Calvary bought "the field" (Matt. 13:44), that is, the world (Matt. 13:38), so that in the millennial age it will be declared, "the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof" (Ps. 24:1). More than this, Joseph bought the people themselves, and God tells us in Ezekiel 14:8, "All souls are mine."

Our natural selfishness in considering that what we have is strictly our own has been through the years a terrible detriment to our own happiness. For nothing really belongs to us, as Israel will learn in a very practical way in the millennium. Let believers now remember that we are only stewards, put in charge of what belongs to our Lord, and responsible to give Him some return for all the goodness He shows to us. Only this attitude will give true happiness.

Just as the famine in Egypt resulted in the people becoming the property of Pharaoh, so the great famine of the tribulation period will result in Jews and Gentiles realizing they are really the property of the Lord Jesus, the King of kings. Because of their great trouble they will become more content and happy than they have ever been before, just as the people of Egypt all found blessing through the wisdom and kindness of Joseph. Joseph's administration would make for more equality among the people, with all having at least sufficient for their needs. Present day governments certainly have no reputation like this! Tremendous numbers are suffering to the starvation point, while the number of billionaires in the world increases amazingly. The people of Egypt said they were willing to be Joseph's slaves (v. 25), but Joseph did not treat them like mere slaves.

ISRAEL STILL A DISTINCT PEOPLE (vv. 27-31)

Jacob's family was evidently not put under the same bondage as the Egyptians at this time. Pharaoh had given them land and Joseph had supplied their sustenance (vv. 11-12). They grew and multiplied greatly, not becoming assimilated into the Egyptian culture, but maintaining their identity as the children of Israel.

Jacob remained there until his death seventeen years after his arrival in Egypt. Thus his age at death was 147 years, not as long as were the ages of Abraham (175) or Isaac (180), but longer than Joseph (110). See Genesis 25:7; Genesis 35:28; and Genesis 50:26.

As Jacob knew he was nearing his end, he called for Joseph and asked him to put his hand under his thigh, evidently a symbol of his willingness to do as his father desired of him (v. 29). Jacob wants to be sure that he is not buried in Egypt, but in the burial place of his fathers in Canaan. This was the land of promise, the land God had sworn to give to the seed of Abraham (Gen. 15:7), confirming it to Isaac (Gen. 26:3) and also to Jacob himself (Gen. 28:13). Jacob and his children are not to forget their homeland. Joseph willingly agrees to bury his father in Canaan, and at Jacob's request confirms this with an oath (v. 31). "Then Israel bowed in worship at the head of the bed." How good it is, after a long checkered life of learning the hard way, to see this aged child of God subdued in lowly worship before the Lord of glory!

Genesis 48

ISRAEL'S BLESSING FOR JOSEPH AND HIS SONS (1-22)

A little later Joseph was told that his father was sick, so he brought his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim to visit him. Jacob strengthened himself to sit on the bed. Then Jacob speaks to Joseph of God's first recorded appearance to him (

Gen. 28:11-15) at Luz (or Bethel) in Canaan, giving him His special blessing, promising to multiply him into a multitude of people and to give that land to his descendants for an everlasting possession (vv. 3-4). Jacob was therefore not interested in any other land on earth. Though he would himself be in heaven and have no part of the earthly inheritance, he was deeply concerned about the welfare of his descendants, and Joseph too had the same concern.

Now Jacob claims the two sons of Joseph as his own, calling them Ephraim and Manasseh rather than Manasseh and Ephraim in order of their birth (v. 5). This was not just a whim of Jacob's old age, but history has proved it to be an important matter. Jacob had 12 sons at the time, the exact number of administrative completeness. Why should he give Joseph an extra place among the tribes by naming them after his two sons? The wisdom of God was in this, for later we find that Levi was given no distinctive inheritance among the tribes (Num. 1:47-53) because that tribe was separated in order to do the service of God in the tabernacle and among all the tribes. Thus the 12 tribes were each given their distinct inheritance in the land of Canaan, while the Levites were dispersed among the tribes.

However, any sons that Joseph might have afterward would be considered connected with either Ephraim or Manasseh (v. 6).

Verse 7 is the only expression we hear from Jacob's lips as to the death of his favored wife, Rachel. The depths to which his heart was affected is not at all dwelt upon, but though he so restrained his feelings, the memory of it was still real and poignant as he tells Joseph of the exact location of her death and the place of her burial. These were things he would not forget.

By this time Jacob's eyesight had failed, so he did not recognize Ephraim and Manasseh (vv. 8-10), but when Joseph brought them near, Jacob kissed and embraced them, telling Joseph he had not expected to see him again, but that now God had allowed him to see Joseph's sons.

To receive the blessing of Jacob, Manasseh was presented by Joseph on Jacob's right hand side and Ephraim on his left (v. 13), but Jacob crossed his arms, putting his right hand on Ephraim's head and his left on Manasseh's head (v. 14). Verses 15-16 tell us that he blessed Joseph, then invoked the blessing of the God of his fathers, Abraham and Isaac upon both Ephraim and Manasseh, speaking of God as the One who had fed him all his life. Consistently with his claiming them as his own sons, he asks that his name would be upon them, and the names of Abraham and Isaac, stressing the continuity of the blessing of God upon that family. Also, he says, "may they grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth." This is clearly earthly blessing, not having anything to do with heaven.

Joseph was not pleased that Jacob had placed his right hand on Ephraim's head and took hold of his hand to change it to the head of Manasseh, telling him that since Manasseh was firstborn, Jacob should put his right hand on his head. But Jacob firmly refused, for he knew well what he was doing. It is natural to think that the firstborn should have the prime honor, but God often reverses such things. Adam had the place of the firstborn in creation, but Christ has rightly taken the place of having all the rights of the firstborn (Col. 1:15-16). Jacob too no doubt remembered that Esau was set aside so that Jacob would take first place (Gen. 25:23).

Another important feature of this is evident in the meaning of the names of these brothers. Manasseh means "forgetting" and Ephraim means "fruitful," because Joseph was caused to forget the natural blessings of his father's house, then became fruitful in Egypt. But forgetting is negative: fruitfulness is positive, and the positive must take the first place. Jacob says that Manasseh would become great, but Ephraim would be greater than he (v. 19). Both are blessed (v. 20), but Ephraim is set before Manasseh.

Jacob then calmly speaks of his death, but assures Joseph that God would be with him and bring him again into the land of promise. This referred, not to Joseph personally (except for his bones), but to Joseph's family. He reminds Joseph again that he had given him a portion double to that of his brothers, speaking of taking it by conquest from the Amorites, the enemies within the land of Canaan, though we are given no record of such warfare. But the sufferer, Joseph, is well repaid for all the affliction he had seen.

Genesis 49

JACOB'S PROPHECY AS TO THE TWELVE TRIBES (vv. 1-28)

After a life of many failures and troubles, the last days of Jacob stand our in bright relief. His perception of God's ways became much more clear and commendable as he neared the end of his life. Now at the age of 147 he called for all his sons in order to tell them their future that would reach much further than any of them personally would experience, but applies to each tribe, going on to "the last days" (v. 1). For each tribe borrows its character from the character of its head. His failing eyesight did not deceive Jacob, as did that of his father Isaac (Gen. 27:1-25).

REUBEN (vv. 3-4)

Reuben was Jacob's firstborn, portraying Jacob's might and strength, preeminent in dignity and power. But by his glaring failure in self-discipline he forfeited all title to the rights of the firstborn. He stands for the boasted strength of man in the flesh, which eventually (as in the case of King Saul) turns out to be pathetic weakness. The tribe of Reuben then symbolizes Israel's first coming as a nation into the land of Canaan, but very soon forfeiting all title to that land by the corruption of the flesh. As Reuben defiled Jacob's property, so the nation Israel has defiled God's property. This is the history of natural humanity in all ages. The flesh is as unstable and uncontrolled as the water of the seas.

SIMEON AND LEVI (vv. 5-7)

These two brothers are considered together, and united in cruelty and violence. Nothing favorable is said about them at all, and Jacob desired not to have any identification with them in their rampage of murder because of their bitter anger. He refers to their slaughter of all the men in the city of Hamor and Shechem (Gen. 34:25-26). A prophetic sentence is then passed, "I will divide them in Jacob and scatter them in Israel." Their unity in evil would result in division even among the tribes.

Jacob's words here are prophetic of the condition of Israel from the time of the Judges until David. After being established in the land by Joshua, it was not long until the nation began to depart from the living God, practically with one accord giving themselves up to idol worship and the gross moral abuses that this involved. Though God delivered them a number of times, they reverted back again to the same low level. Later, when Saul became king, the condition of Israel did not improve, and Saul himself was guilty of glaring murder, even of the priests of God (1 Sam. 22:11-19), and of plotting the murder of David. Under these conditions the people were constantly in discord, divided and scattered.

JUDAH (vv. 8-12)

The prophecy as to Judah is in great contrast to that as to Simeon and Levi, for all is favorable. Though Judah had been guilty of very serious wrong too, his deeply felt repentance evident in Genesis 44:18-34 was such that God was free to bless him greatly. His brothers would praise him (Judah means “praise”). He would subjugate his enemies. His father's children would bow to his authority. He is likened to a lion, the king of beasts, feeding on the spoils of his conquest. The scepter of kingly authority would not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver, until the coming of Shiloh, the Lord Jesus. To Him (Shiloh) would be the obedience of the people.

Verse 11 however intimates His lowly character of identifying Himself with the godly in Israel. For a king was not expected to ride a donkey, but a horse, yet the Lord Jesus is prophesied of in Zechariah 9:9 as coming to Jerusalem riding on a donkey, and the Gospels give the history of this (Matt. 21:1-9; Mark 11:1-10; Luke 19:35-38). But the vine and the “blood of the grapes” in which He washes His clothes is typical of the voluntary sacrifice of the Lord Jesus on Calvary. His eyes red with wine are a contrast to “His eyes like a flame of fire” in Revelation 1:14, where He is presented as judging in righteousness. In Genesis 49:12 He is seen in grace, for also His teeth are white with milk, which speaks of gentle nourishment of the Word of God, a contrast to the sharp sword going out of His mouth (Rev. 1:16), which also refers to the Word of God, but in terrible judgment.

The prophecy concerning Judah then denotes Israel's history from David until the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus. David was of the house of Judah, a “man after God's heart,” not because he was without sin, but because he had a character that confessed and judged his sin (as did Judah). He was a type of Christ the King of Israel, and this prophecy therefore goes right on to the time of Christ's coming in grace and His sacrifice. So far as the flesh is concerned, Judah himself was the same as his brothers, Simeon and Levi. It is not because he was better than they that his prophecy is favorable, but rather, their history signifies the ruin of Israel under law, while God makes Judah typical of the answer to Israel's sin, that is, the coming and sacrifice of the Lord Jesus.

ZEBULON (v. 13)

Zebulon was Leah's sixth son, and for some reason is mentioned before Issachar, her fifth son. He would dwell at the seashore, which indicates the time of Israel's being dispersed among the Gentiles, as they have been since their rejection of Christ, for the sea is a type of the Gentile nations, and being a haven for ships implies Israel's trade and commerce with the Gentiles.

ISSACHAR (vv. 14-15)

Issachar is said to be a donkey lying down between two burdens, becoming content to be a slave. Thus, when Israel has been mixed up with Gentiles, she has become a virtual slave to them rather than having Gentiles subservient to her. This condition of things continues through “the times of the Gentiles,” so will not change until the time of the great tribulation.

DAN (vv. 16-18)

Dan was the first son of Rachel's maid Bilhah. “Dan shall judge his people as one of the tribes of Israel.” Prophetically this brings us to the time when self-government is resumed in Israel. To some degree this has been true since 1948. But it is added that “Dan shall be a serpent by the way, a viper by the path, that bites the horse's heels so that its rider shall fall backward” (v. 17). This prophecy specifically refers to the tribulation period when satanic activity rises to a dreadful height in the proud, deceitful reign of the antichrist in Israel. When we compare this verse with Revelation 7, it seems likely the antichrist will come from the tribe of Dan, for in Revelation 7 Dan is omitted from the 144,000. Well may Jacob add here, “I have waited for Your salvation, O Lord!” Yet even though Dan is missing from the 144,000 sealed in Revelation 7, he will have his place in the blessing of the millennium, for it is plainly declared that he will judge his people as one of the tribes of Israel.

GAD (v. 19)

Gad was the first son of Zilpah, Leah's maid. His name means “a troop,” and this name is used in the prophecy that a troop (armies of enemy nations) would trample Gad (representing Israel) underfoot, as will be fulfilled in the tribulation period, but that Gad will in the end overcome the troop. God will give Israel the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

ASHER (v. 20)

Asher was Zilpah's second son, his name meaning “happy.” The prophecy concerning him implies the rich provision that God will make for the nation Israel, even “royal dainties,” when they are restored to their land in the millennium, a wonderful contrast to their years of deprivation and desolation!

NAPHTALI (v. 21)

Naphtali was the second son of Bilhah, and is here called “a deer let loose; he uses beautiful words.” This describes another side of Israel's blessing in the coming kingdom. After being restrained in bondage for centuries, she will be like a deer let loose in the open to enjoy the liberty she has forgotten was ever possible. This freedom too will bring beautiful words to her lips. Instead of bitter cursing, her mouth will be filled with praise and thanksgiving to the Lord. In the Church of God today we are already blessed with such experience, as Ephesians 4:8 tells us, “When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men.” The marvelous death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus has set believers free from a state of captivity; and to express that liberty we are given gifts from God to speak “beautiful words,” words that could never have been spoken before the Lord Jesus died and rose again.

JOSEPH (vv. 22-26)

The two sons of Rachel are left for the last consideration, though they are actually first in importance. For they are both types of the Lord Jesus. Joseph speaks of Christ as the One through whom all blessing in the Millennium will be secured both for Israel and the nations. He is a fruitful bough by a well, drawing refreshment from the well of the Word of God, and his branches running over the wall, the wall of separation between Israel and the Gentiles. His branches run over for the blessing of Gentiles.

This fruitfulness was not hindered by the fiercest opposition that the enemy could mount against Him. Joseph in his many afflictions remained firm and decided in his stand for God, in this way being a lovely type of Christ, who suffered far more than Joseph, His hands being made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob. To press this typical character more fully, it is said in verse 24, “From there is the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel.” As the Shepherd Christ is the example of faithful, tender care. As the Stone He is the solid basis of all blessing.

Verses 25-26 indicate the widespread fullness of the blessing of the Almighty resting upon the Lord Jesus. There are blessings of heaven above, implying, though only faintly, that He would have a heavenly company, as in fact He does today, “blessed with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places in Christ” (Eph. 1:3). “Blessings of the deep that lies beneath” implies the blessing of Gentile nations through the Messiah of Israel (Rev. 17:15). The heavens speak of that which is above Israel, and the deep that which is in a lower place, as Gentiles will rightly be.

As to Israel, the Lord will share with her “blessings of the breasts and of the womb. The blessings of your father have excelled the blessing of my ancestors, up to the utmost bound of the everlasting hills.” The breasts speak of nourishment, and the womb, of fruitfulness, thus showing that the land will produce abundantly. Israel's blessing in Christ will excel the blessings of Jacob's ancestors, Abraham and Isaac, with widespread earthly blessing, “to the utmost bound of the everlasting hills.” This completes the three spheres of the great blessing connected with the Messiah, the heavens, the deep, and the hills of earth.

All are on the head of Joseph, the one who was separated from his brothers, typical of Christ, blessed after suffering. All blessing then in the coming day will be seen to depend on the One who has suffered total rejection and the ignominious death of the cross, but who has been raised from among the dead and exalted above all heavens.

BENJAMIN (v. 27)

In contrast to Joseph, only one short verse is devoted to Benjamin. He speaks of Christ also, not as the Sufferer, but as “the Man of God's right hand,” who will, as a wolf, strike fear into the heart of His enemies, judging in perfect righteousness all who rebel against divine authority. This will be seen in the judgments of the tribulation and also at the Great White Throne, where at last every enemy will be fully put under His feet. He will gain “the spoil” also, and divide it among believers. In other words, there will be results in blessing for Him and for believers because evil has finally received its just judgment.

Verse 28 concludes the subject of Israel's blessing each of the tribes. It may not sound as though Simeon and Levi were blessed (vv. 5-7), but the honest exposure of their sin is in itself a blessing if they would simply accept it in a spirit of self-judgment.

THE DEATH OF JACOB (vv. 29-33)

Jacob, maintaining full possession of his senses to the end, calmly gives instructions to his sons to bury him with his fathers, Abraham and Isaac, in the cave of Machpelah that Abraham bought from Ephron the Hittite (Gen. 23:16-20). Jacob was thus indicating that he had the same faith as his fathers in the resurrection power of God. He mentions that Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah and Leah had been buried there. Also, he reminds his sons that the purchase of the cave and the field had been made from the children of Heth, which means “fear.” Those unsaved are the children of fear, who, through fear of death, are all their lifetime subject to bondage (Heb. 2:15).

The evidence of Jacob's being at this time led by the Spirit of God is beautiful. All seems to be ordered with calm deliberation, every necessary thing attended to in perfect time, so that his death was the expected culmination of all. How different was this than the disorder of much of his earlier life!

Genesis 50

JACOB'S BURIAL (vv. 1-14)

The sorrow of Joseph over his father's death is seen in verse 1. It is an interesting study to consider the times in which Joseph is recorded as weeping. In contrast to burial, as in other countries, Joseph gives orders to the physicians to embalm his father. This required forty days, and he was mourned for 70 days (v. 3). Much later than this, Egyptian history records that 30 days were required for embalming and 72 days of mourning were held for a king, which are not significant changes, but the implication is evident that someone did not invent this story later in history, for he would have given the figures he was acquainted with.

Joseph then gained a favorable response from Pharaoh as to burying his father's body in Canaan, as he had sworn to Jacob (vv. 4-6). This called for a tremendous sized funeral procession all the way from Egypt to Canaan, including all the elders of the house of Pharaoh and the elders of the land of Egypt, as well as Joseph's brothers and families except for their little ones (vv. 7-8). Not only this, but chariots and horsemen accompanied them (v. 9). There was nothing like this at the funerals of Abraham or Isaac, but here God is showing to us the sovereignty of His great power and grace in producing sympathy among the Gentiles for His people Israel. Though Israel's immediate father dies, his descendants remain, God giving them favor among the Gentiles.

Coming to the threshing floor of Atad, the company mourned deeply for seven days (v. 10). On the threshing floor the chaff is separated from the grain. It speaks of blessing resulting from suffering, a picture of the nation Israel being eventually blessed through the tribulation (the threshing).

The Canaanites inhabiting the land were so impressed by this sight that they named the place Abel-mizraim, meaning, “the mourning of the Egyptians” (v. 11). Because Joseph had saved Egypt, the Egyptians recognized that salvation came from Israel (John 4:22), and therefore Gentiles have every reason to show deep respect for Israel. We today (Christians) must never forget that our Savior came from Israel.

The sons of Jacob then buried him in the place he had designated (v. 13), which we have seen implies Jacob's faith in a God of resurrection. Then Joseph and his brothers returned to Egypt.

JOSEPH'S CHARACTER REMAINS CONSTANT (vv. 15-21)

When their father had died, the brothers of Joseph were fearful that Joseph's attitude toward them would change to one of hostility in recalling the way they had treated him (v. 15). But it was not his father's mediatorship that caused Joseph to show kindness to them for their ill treatment. It was rather his relationship to God that moved him. He had shown the kindness of God to them, just as the Lord Jesus, in a higher way, has manifested the love and grace of God to sinners who had rebelled against Him. More than that, Joseph's words to them had only been good (

Gen. 45:4-8). Could they not simply trust his word? Sometimes those who have trusted the Lord Jesus have lingering fears as to whether they might yet possibly be lost. Why is this? Because they do not take simply at face value the truth of His word, such as John 5:24.

The brothers send a message to Joseph telling him that their father had told them to request Joseph that he would forgive the trespass and sin of his brothers. Joseph was so deeply moved by this that he wept (v. 17). Why? Because he was saddened to think that his brothers were doubting his faithfulness. How much more is the Lord Jesus saddened by our doubts of the fullness of His forgiveness! But the brothers even humble themselves to the point of coming to bow down to Joseph and tell Him they are his slaves (v. 18).

Joseph's reply is beautiful: “Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God?” (v. 19). Joseph would not think of judging his own case, for only God is Judge. Also, in spite of his exaltation in Egypt, he faithfully maintained his relationship as brother to all Jacob's sons. He did not excuse their evil thoughts against him (v. 20), but insisted that God had used their evil to produce great good in saving many people from death. So also, the Jewish leaders in Israel meant only to do harm to the Lord Jesus in crucifying Him, but they actually fulfilled God's great counsels of love toward mankind in the accomplishing of a perfect redemption. Many have been saved by this from eternal destruction, though others, sadly, have maintained cold hatred against the Lord, and can only expect judgment.

For those who have repented there is not only the fullest forgiveness, but a provision of great blessing, together with words of kindness and comfort, as is seen in Joseph's assurance of blessing for his brothers (v. 21). He desired simply that they should trust him and believe his word. This is what the Lord Jesus desires of us.

THE DEATH OF JOSEPH (vv. 24-26)

Joseph remained in Egypt till his death at 110 years of age, far beyond the end of the famine. Before his death he became a great, great grandfather of Ephraim's descendants and also of those of Manasseh (v. 23). But his years in Egypt did not change his attitude as regards the promise of God. He still had his heart set on the land of Canaan, as has been the case with Jacob's descendants for centuries, though dispersed throughout the whole world. Though personally Joseph would not enjoy the land, yet he fully desired that the nation Israel would do so, as was true of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Therefore Joseph, calmly speaking of his death, commanded that the children of Israel should carry his bones to Canaan for burial when God had fulfilled His promise that He would bring them back to the land. When he died, his remains were embalmed and put in a coffin in Egypt (v. 26). There they remained for centuries till being brought out with Moses in the Exodus (Ex. 13:19), and finally buried along with the remains of his fathers in Shechem (Joshua 24:32).

This vitally interesting book of Genesis, the book of life and of origins, ends in great contrast to its beginning — “in a coffin in Egypt.” For it is only the beginning of God's revelation. How much more wonderful and beautiful is the last word from God in the book of Revelation, “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.”

THE END

L. M. Grant.