



### TEACHING OUTLINE FOR GENESIS 1-25

WEEK	DATES	TITLE	TOPIC	PASSAGE
1	Sept 6-8	<i>Before We Begin</i>	Introduction	Gen 1:1-2
2	Sept 13-15	<i>Off to a Good Start</i>	Creation begins	Gen 1:3-25
3	Sept 20-22	<i>Made in His Image</i>	The creation of man	Gen 1:26-2:25
4	Sept 27-29	<i>Good Gone Bad</i>	The fall & its aftermath	Gen 3:1-6:8
5	Oct 4-6	<i>A Royal Reboot</i>	The flood & its effects	Gen 6:9-11:9
6	Oct 11-13	<i>Back to Eden</i>	The call of Abram	Gen 11:10-15:21
7	Oct 18-20	<i>Waiting on God</i>	The promise of Isaac	Gen 16:1-18:15
8	Oct 25-27	<i>A Righteous Remnant</i>	The rescue of Lot	Gen 18:16-19:38
9	Nov 1-2	<i>God is With You</i>	The birth of Isaac	Gen 20:1-21:34
10	Nov 8-10	<i>The Lord Will Provide</i>	The sacrifice of Isaac	Gen 22:1-24
11	Nov 15-17	<i>A New Chapter Begins</i>	The death of Abraham	Gen 23:1-26:5





## OVERVIEW OF EACH WEEK'S LESSON

### WEEK 1: *Before We Begin* – Gen 1:1-2

This will be an introduction designed to set up the rest of the series. The intent is to establish the authorship, audience, and overall purpose of the book. This lesson will deal with some of the controversies associated with the book and set the expectations for how we will be approaching its sometimes controversial and confusing content. We will clarify that our study will take a historical/literal interpretive approach. One of the things we hope to emphasize is the relationship between the book of Genesis and the rest of the Pentateuch. It should not be taught as a separate book or divorced from its original audience.

### WEEK 2: *Off to a Good Start* – Gen 1:3-25

This lesson will begin our official study of the creation by focusing on the first six days of creation. The primary emphasis will be on the purpose behind the creation. Everything God made was intended to prepare the earth/Eden for man. Humanity was not just another part of the creation process but was intended to be the pinnacle or high point. Everything God made was good and perfectly planned for man's benefit and enjoyment.

### WEEK 3: *Made in His Image* – Gen 1:26-2:25

In this lesson, we will cover the creation of Adam and Eve, focusing our attention on the unique status they enjoyed as the only creatures made in the image of God. The emphasis will be on the fellowship they enjoyed with the Father and mandate God gave to them as his vice-regents and the stewards of all that He had made. One of the things we will highlight is the holiness of the seventh day. This is the only day in the narrative where the phrase, “and there was evening and morning, the \_\_\_\_\_ day” does not exist. It seems that the Sabbath “rest” was to have continued. God’s work was complete, and He had deemed His creation to be “very good.” There was nothing more to do. Man could not work and rest in the beauty of God’s garden – forever.

### WEEK 4: *Good Gone Bad* – Gen 3:1-6:8

But God’s good creation took a turn for the worse. Sin entered the scene. That will be the focus of this lesson. How did something so good turn out so bad? What happened? This lesson will

cover the fall and its ongoing ramifications. Of course, we will have to deal with topics as original sin, imputed sin, and the federal headship of Adam. The focus of this lesson will be on the rapid moral and spiritual decline of mankind as the effects of sin spread throughout God's creation. What God had deemed to be good has suddenly turned bad, to the point that God "saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Genesis 6:5 ESV). This lesson will set up the story of the flood and God's selection of Noah as "a righteous man" (Genesis 6:9 ESV).

#### *WEEK 5: A Royal Reboot – Gen 6:9-11:9*

This lesson will cover God's decision to destroy all that He had made and will explain why God chose to start over with Noah. With this one man and his descendants, God will begin again the process of filling the earth with those who bear His image. We will explore the relationship between the ark and Jesus, unpacking the salvific similarities between the two. One of the key themes will be the giving of the covenant to Noah and his sons. In a sense, God has established a new world governed by new rules. Yet, these chapters reveal that nothing had really changed after the flood. It was a case of *déjà vu* all over again. It wasn't long before sin ran rampant through the world again, culminating at a place called Babel.

#### *WEEK 6: Back to Eden – Gen 11:10-15:21*

In this week's lesson, we will explore God's choice of Abram, a Chaldean who lived in the land of Ur. One of the significant points in this lesson is the movement back toward God. The fall ended with Adam and Eve cast out of the garden and mankind headed in an easterly direction, away from God. But with Abram's calling, God sends him west, back towards the "garden" and into a relationship with Him. In a sense, Abram represents the prodigal son returning to his Father's side. And Genesis 13:10 describes the land He was giving to Abram to be "like the garden of the Lord." Yet, the land of Canaan was far from a paradise. There were enemies and difficulties to be faced. There were challenges that test Abram's faith and confidence in God's power. And yet, this section also includes a covenant and a powerful promise from God.

#### *WEEK 7: Waiting on God – Gen 16:1-18:15*

These chapters include some powerful lessons about trusting God. In them, we have the story of Sarai's barrenness and her plan to fulfill God's promise through human means. God had made a promise, but Sarai and Abram were growing impatient. Years had passed and she remained barren and unable to bear her husband a son. This lesson will emphasize the danger of trying to accomplish God's will through human means. Rather than wait on God, Sarai took matters into her own hands and the consequences would be painful and long-lasting. Yet, God made another covenant with Abram, reassuring His struggling servant that he would become "the father of a multitude of nations" (Genesis 17:4 ESV). And this lesson ends with the promise of a son – Isaac – because nothing is too difficult for God.

#### *WEEK 8: A Righteous Remnant – Gen 18:16-19:38*

The righteous Abram found himself surrounded by unrighteousness, and this lesson focuses on the extent of the wickedness in the land. The story of Sodom and Gomorrah provides a stark and

sobering example of mankind's capacity for sin and rebellion against God. And yet, in the midst of those two wicked cities, one man lived whom God deemed to be a righteous man. God sparing of Lot and His destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah point to the future redemption that will be made available through the death of Jesus Christ.

#### **WEEK 9: *God is With You* – 20:1-21:34**

The main focus of this lesson will be the birth of Isaac. After years of waiting, Sarah and Abraham are given the son for whom they have long waited. But surrounding this story of the divine promise fulfilled, we will see the doubt and faithlessness of Sarah and Abraham on full display. The birth of Isaac is sandwiched between two stories involving Abimelech, the king of Gerar. In the first instance, Abraham reveals that he still has doubts about God's providence and power to protect him. So, he stoops to using his old tricks once again. Yet the emphasis of this section of Genesis is on the sovereignty of God. He is all-powerful and fully capable of taking care of those whom He has chosen and who bear His name.

#### **WEEK 10: *The Lord Will Provide* – Gen 22:1-24**

This is one of the most confusing and controversial chapters in all the Bible. But we will attempt to explain the purpose behind God's command that Abraham sacrifice the son for whom he had so long waited. But this passage reveals how easy it is to misplace our hope. Isaac was the fulfillment of God's promise but was never intended to become a substitute for God. In a sense, Abraham had begun to place all his confidence in the gift rather than the Giver. The main point of the passage is found in the simple phrase: "The Lord will provide" (Genesis 22:14 ESV). God wanted Abraham to place all his confidence and hope in Him. Isaac was a blessing from God but was never meant to take the place of God in Abraham's life. God had provided Isaac and He also provided a substitute to die in Isaac's place.

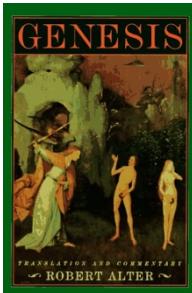
#### **WEEK 11: *A New Chapter Begins* – Gen 23:1-26:5**

This lesson will wrap up the first half of our study on Genesis and set up the Spring semester. In it, we see Moses driving the narrative to a conclusion and setting up a new chapter in his history of the people of Israel. The baton is being passed from one generation to another. Sarah dies and Abraham arranges to find a bride for his son, Isaac. With Abraham's eventual death, the narrative shifts to Isaac and the covenant promise passes on to the descendants of Abraham. This lesson will end with the reiteration of God's covenant promise: "I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and will give to your offspring all these lands. And in your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws" (Genesis 26:4-5 ESV). And with this statement, the next chapter in the story of Israel begins.





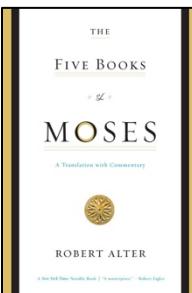
## BIBLIOGRAPHY FOR GENESIS 1-25



### *Genesis: Translation and Commentary*

by Robert Alter

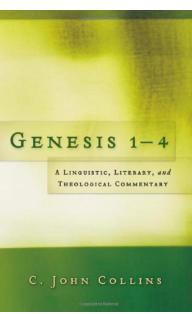
A new translation of the first book in the Bible honors the meanings and literary strategies of the ancient Hebrew language, while bringing the stories cohesively together in a narrative format that makes it read more like a fully realized book.



### *The Five Books of Moses: A Translation with Commentary*

by Robert Alter

Through a distinguished career of critical scholarship and translation, Robert Alter has equipped us to read the Hebrew Bible as a powerful, cohesive work of literature. In this landmark work, Alter's masterly translation and probing commentary combine to give contemporary readers the definitive edition of The Five Books.

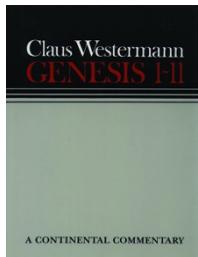


### *Genesis 1-4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary*

by C. John Collins

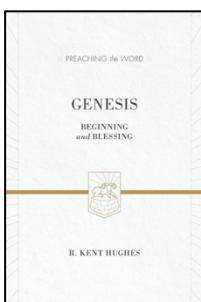
Much controversy surrounds the opening chapters of Genesis. They are front-loaded with all manner of vital topics—such as God's work of creating the world and mankind; what it means to be human; why our present experience is so different from what we find in Genesis 2; how we come to know God and to be sure of his love.

Collins employs a literary-theological method informed by contemporary discourse analysis in order to read passages as coherent wholes. He shows how later biblical and inter-testamental writers have used Genesis 1-4 and reflects on how these chapters shape a Christian worldview today.



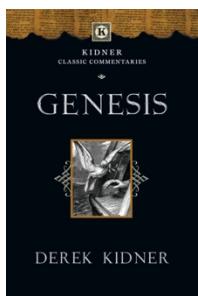
*Genesis 1-11: Continental Commentary Series*  
by Claus Westermann

As a work of scholarship, it is difficult to greet this commentary with anything but enthusiasm. It is certainly the most exhaustive and the very best treatment of these chapters available to us today. One can have little but praise for the breadth of Westermann's scholarship, and for the thoroughness, the clarity, and the fairness with which his discussion is presented. This is a commentary of outstanding usefulness which may be commended without reservation to all serious students of the Old Testament. It will stand as the definitive commentary on Genesis for years to come.



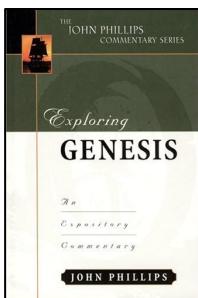
*Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*  
by R. Kent Hughes

Time and again in Genesis, God showers his grace upon undeserving humanity, giving us our first tastes of God's enduring faithfulness that shines throughout the entire Bible. R. Kent Hughes, respected pastor, and author of many other commentaries in this series, takes readers back to the beginning of the Bible and moves through Genesis with careful exegesis. He explores the superbly crafted structure of the book as well as the weighty themes it contains. For those who preach, teach, and study God's Word, this exceptionally detailed work will reveal much about the beginnings of God's great story.



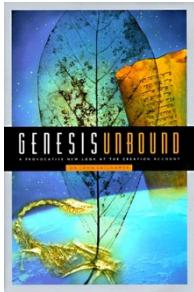
*Genesis*  
by Derek Kidner

There are few parts of Scripture over which so many battles—theological, scientific, historical, and literary—have been fought as the book of Genesis. In this classic work, Derek Kidner not only provides a verse-by-verse exegetical commentary but also lucidly handles the tough issues that Genesis raises. Focusing on the study of Genesis on its own terms, as "a living whole," he highlights the theological themes of the nature of God, humankind, and salvation. Kidner's clear prose and theological insight will expand readers' understanding of God's character and of humanity's nature and destiny.



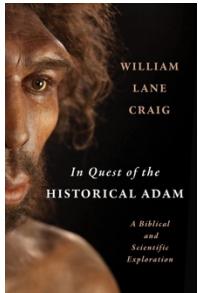
*Exploring Genesis: An Expository Commentary*  
by John Phillips

Working from the familiar King James Version, Dr. Phillips not only provides helpful commentary on the text, but also includes detailed outlines and numerous illustrations and quotations. Anyone wanting to explore the meaning of God's Word in greater depth—for personal spiritual growth or as a resource for preaching and teaching—will welcome the guidance and insights of this respected series.



*Genesis Unbound: A Provocative New Look at the Creation Account*  
by John Sailhamer

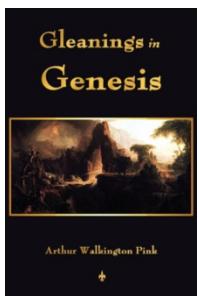
No matter what your position or background, you will be challenged to test your understanding of the Bible's critical opening sentences and reexamine your beliefs about the creation of the world through *Genesis Unbound*.



*In Quest of the Historical Adam: A Biblical and Scientific Exploration*  
by William Lane Craig

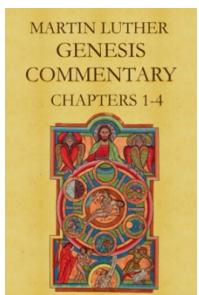
William Lane Craig sets out to answer these questions through a biblical and scientific investigation. He begins with an inquiry into the genre of Genesis 1–11, determining that it can most plausibly be classified as mytho-history—a narrative with both literary and historical value. He then moves into the New Testament, where he examines references to Adam in the words of Jesus and the writings of

Paul, ultimately concluding that the entire Bible considers Adam the historical progenitor of the human race—a position that must therefore be accepted as a premise for Christians who take seriously the inspired truth of Scripture.



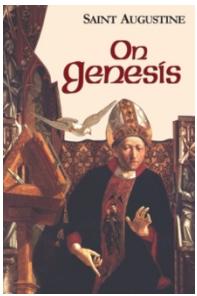
*Gleanings in Genesis*  
by Arthur W. Pink

A. W. Pink takes you on a journey through Genesis that shows Christ pictured through the patriarchs and salvation and grace depicted through God's sovereign hand over their lives. As I read, Pink revealed hidden truths that enriched my faith and love for Jesus. This amazing book will strengthen conviction about the sovereignty of God - a must read!



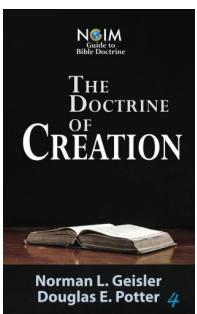
*Commentary on Genesis*  
by Martin Luther

Martin Luther's *Genesis Commentary* is the last (and perhaps greatest) work of Luther. Spanning the last ten years of his life and work, the *Genesis Lectures* capture the full wisdom of the Evangelical Reformer. This book is a publication of Luther's comments on Genesis chapters one through four, copied from the public domain text of Lenker (1904). This document and others in the Everyone's Luther Series may be downloaded for free at [wolfmueller.co/everyonesluther](http://wolfmueller.co/everyonesluther).



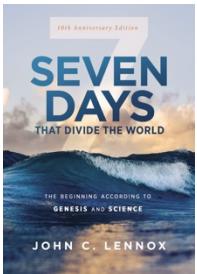
*On Genesis: The Works of Saint Augustine*  
By Saint Augustine

No other part of the Hebrew Scriptures, aside from the Psalter and sections of the prophet Isaiah, captured the interest and aroused the attention of the early Church as did the opening chapters of the Book of Genesis. Augustine of Hippo devoted three treatises to these chapters. The first two *On Genesis: A Refutation of the Manichees* and his *Unfinished Literal Commentary on Genesis* are early works. The third and longest *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* was produced at the height of Augustine's maturity and has been ranked with his *Confessions*, *The Trinity*, and *The City of God*. This volume brings these three works together for the first time in English and provides a valuable and comprehensive introduction to each one.



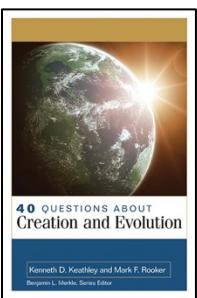
*The Doctrine of Creation:*  
by Norman L. Geisler and Douglas E. Potter

A popular introduction to the study of creation firmly rooted in the Bible and the evangelical tradition. Each chapter covers an area of the doctrine, stresses its basis, doctrinal importance, and interconnectedness to formulating a Christian view of creation and other doctrines. The study questions help reinforce the material and make it usable even for a formal study of the doctrine.



*Seven Days That Divide the World: The Beginning According to Genesis and Science*  
by John C. Lennox

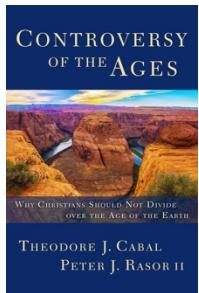
With examples from history, a brief but thorough exploration of the major interpretations, and a look into the particular significance of the creation of human beings, Lennox suggests that Christians can heed modern scientific knowledge while staying faithful to the biblical narrative. He moves beyond a simple response to the controversy, insisting that Genesis teaches us far more about the God of Jesus Christ and about God's intention for creation than it does about the age of the earth.



*40 Questions About Creation and Evolution*  
by Kenneth D. Keathley

This accessible volume evenly addresses the issues of modern science and the scriptural texts. The conservative evangelical authors are well-informed on contemporary scientific views of the universe and also carefully exegete the biblical texts that pertain to creation. They consider the various angles of the debate and make constructive suggestions to reconcile science and the Bible.

Those who are curious about the origins of life and the universe will want to read this book. Seminary students and serious college students will find this information critical, as an understanding of creation is vital to an effective apologetic in sharing the faith.



*Controversy of the Ages: Why Christians Should Not Divide Over the Age of the Earth*  
by Theodore Cabal

Few topics have generated as much heat amongst evangelicals as the age of the earth and the doctrine of creation. Three camps have emerged to offer solutions: young-earth creationists (Answers in Genesis), old-earth creationists (Reasons to Believe), and evolutionary creationists (BioLogos).

Controversy of the Ages carefully analyzes the debate by giving it perspective. Rather than offering arguments for or against a particular viewpoint on the age of the earth, the authors take a step back to put the debate in historical and theological context. The authors of this book demonstrate from the history of theology and science controversy that believers are entitled to differ over this issue, while still taking a stand against theistic evolution. But by carefully and constructively breaking down the controversy bit by bit, they show why the age issue is the wrong place to draw a line in the sand.

**A Daily Devotional  
on Genesis  
– Part I –**

By Ken Miller



[www.devotionary.libsyn.com](http://www.devotionary.libsyn.com)  
[www.vesselsofclay.org](http://www.vesselsofclay.org)

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## Before We Begin

<sup>1</sup> *In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.* <sup>2</sup> *The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.* – Genesis 1:1-2 ESV

The book of beginnings. That is how this first book of the Bible is often described, and that moniker is well deserved. The first three words of the opening chapter form a rather short and succinct thesis statement that establishes the author's intentions. This lengthy historical narrative was intended to provide a divinely inspired explanation for the existence of the universe. Within its pages, is found the creation story, describing God's sovereign act of forming the stars and planets, the earth, and all its inhabitants, with special emphasis placed upon one particular people group – the nation of Israel.

Genesis is both a book of history and theology. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, theology is “the study of God and of God’s relation to the world” (“Theology.” *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/theology>. Accessed 9 Dec. 2021.). And because Genesis opens with the words, “In the beginning, God...,” it reveals itself to be an unapologetically God-focused book. He serves as its primary protagonist, appearing on virtually every page and spanning its vast historical scope with sovereign authority and power.

The 50 chapters that comprise the book of Genesis cover a period of at least 2500 years – from the moment of creation to the death of the patriarch, Joseph. Of course, dating a book like Genesis is difficult, if not, impossible. As will become apparent in our exposition of the book, there has been much debate about the historicity of Genesis. Some regard it as nothing more than a collection of myths or fables. Others, who defend its authenticity, question its reliability when it comes to the accuracy of its dating and descriptions. The rise of the Enlightenment in the 18th-Century, with its emphasis on science and logic, reason and rationalism, led many Christians to question the accuracy of God’s Word. In the late 18th-Century, a new form of biblical study emerged from Germany that encouraged a more scientific approach to biblical interpretation. By the mid-nineteenth century, this historical-critical method of examining the biblical text had come to be known as higher criticism. Its influence was far-reaching, impacting seminaries and theological institutions across the world. With its emphasis on reason and rationalism, higher criticism tends to reject the supernatural aspect of the biblical text. Of course, to a proponent of higher criticism, the book of Genesis provides a treasure trove of evidence against the Bible’s reliability as a historical narrative.

There are many within evangelicalism today who remain influenced by this rationalistic approach to biblical interpretation. They reject the validity of a six-day creation narrative because it seems to contradict the scientific validation of the theory of evolution. They question the veracity of the many supernatural stories found on its pages, declaring them to be nothing more than oral traditions passed down from one unenlightened generation to another.

Whether they realize it or not, most modern Christians have been heavily influenced by this higher-critical method of biblical interpretation. Armed with science and reason, they approach the Bible with a pervading sense of skepticism and doubt. What cannot be reasonably explained is conveniently reinterpreted or simply rejected altogether. This hyper-critical and reductionistic approach to biblical interpretation renders the text devoid of the Spirit's inspiration and turns the content of the Bible into little more than a collection of moralistic tales and man-made myths.

While no intelligent Christian should reject the advances in human knowledge achieved through scientific research and exploration, there is a danger in allowing human reason to trump divine intervention. The God of the Bible is not the byproduct of man's fertile imagination. Man did not create God. According to the book of Genesis, it was the other way around. A Christian must approach the Bible in faith, understanding that what is contained within its pages is divinely inspired. It is not a collection of man-made myths or humanly concocted stories, but a Spirit-empowered book that provides us with a reliable retelling of mankind's past and a prophetic glimpse into our future. It is a book that provides insights into the unknown and unexplained. It contains divine guidance for navigating the vicissitudes of life. More than just another book, the Bible is the word of God to humanity. As the apostle Paul so clearly states:

*All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right.* – 2 Timothy 3:16 NLT

And because it is divinely inspired and beyond the reach of human reason, there is much about the Bible that remains inexplicable. God has clearly communicated the transcendent nature of His wisdom and His ways.

*For my thoughts are not your thoughts,  
neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord.  
For as the heavens are higher than the earth,  
so are my ways higher than your ways  
and my thoughts than your thoughts.* – Isaiah 55:8-9 ESV

And the apostle Paul provides us with a much-needed reminder of just ill-equipped we are to understand the unfathomable ways of God.

*Oh, how great are God's riches and wisdom and knowledge! How impossible it is for us to understand his decisions and his ways!* – Romans 11:33 NLT

So, as we approach this remarkable book, we need to do so with reverence and humility. If we attempt to use our highly limited resources of human reasoning and rationalism to explain the ways of God, we will only end up diminishing His glory and displaying our own hubris and arrogance. When we attempt to use our insufficient intelligence to explain the ways of God, we will soon find ourselves on the receiving end of God's divine disfavor and having to endure a

well-deserved lecture on His superiority and sovereignty. Like Job, who dared to question the ways of God, we will have to answer to the only One who has all the answers.

*"Who is this that questions my wisdom  
with such ignorant words?  
Brace yourself like a man,  
because I have some questions for you,  
and you must answer them."*

*"Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?  
Tell me, if you know so much.  
Who determined its dimensions  
and stretched out the surveying line?  
What supports its foundations,  
and who laid its cornerstone  
as the morning stars sang together  
and all the angels shouted for joy?" – Job 38:2-7 NLT*

Job, a mere man, dared to question God. The created questioned the Creator. And God was not amused by Job's arrogant attitude. The all-powerful, all-knowing God of the universe repeatedly confronted the fist-shaking, fulminating Job, sarcastically exposing the ridiculous nature of his resentment and anger.

*"Where does light come from,  
and where does darkness go?  
Can you take each to its home?  
Do you know how to get there?  
But of course you know all this!  
For you were born before it was all created,  
and you are so very experienced!" – Job 38:19-21 NLT*

As we begin this study of the book of Genesis, may we do so with a sense of humility, freely confessing the limited nature of our knowledge and willingly accepting the greatness of our God. There will be much we will never understand and even more that we will never be able to explain. This is going to be a journey of discovery, one that will require equal amounts of faith and faithfulness. We must trust God as we walk the pages of Genesis. Like the characters whose lives we will encounter, we too will have questions along the way. We will have doubts. But we must not allow the inexplicable and unexplainable to deter us from the path of discovery.

If we remain faithful, we will grow to know God better. He will not answer all our questions or solve all the conundrums of life. But He will reveal Himself to us along the way. We will see His power and sovereign will at work in the creation of all things. We will discover the incredible nature of His unrelenting love. His holiness and justice will be displayed alongside His wrath and judgment. Along the way, God will reveal to us His grace, goodness, glory, and greatness,

alongside His grand redemptive plan. The goal of the journey is to know God. After all, the entire Bible is the revelation of God to man. It is His gracious message of self-revelation that allows us to comprehend not only His identity but our own as well. Jesus stated that the objective of eternal life was not our escape from condemnation and death, but our knowledge of Him and His Heavenly Father.

*“And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.” – John 17:3 ESV*

It is my prayer that we may read the book of Genesis with the goal to know God better.

## The Light of the World

<sup>1</sup> *In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.* <sup>2</sup> *The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light.* – Genesis 1:1-3 ESV

Another way to translate the first three words of the book of Genesis is “when God created....” While God was “in the beginning,” this statement does not infer that He came into being at that moment in time. God is eternal and has always existed. His transcendent nature allows Him to operate free from the constraints of time and space. The “beginning” mentioned in the opening line of Genesis has to do with His creation of “the heavens and the earth.” According to His own divine prerogative, God made the executive decision to bring into existence that which had never existed before. And the opening chapters of Genesis record the amazing details of that epic and unprecedented event.

The opening two verses provide a summary statement of all that Moses describes in the verses that follow. Speaking of Moses, while there has been much debate as to the authorship of Genesis, I will be operating under the assumption that Jesus was right when He designated Moses as the one responsible for this book.

*“But that the dead are raised, even Moses showed, in the passage about the bush, where he calls the Lord the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.”*  
– Luke 20:37 ESV

Jesus repeatedly referred to Moses in association with the first five books of the Hebrew Scriptures. And it seems that Jesus shared the view of His Jewish contemporaries who believed Moses to have been the author of all five books.

As we shall see, Moses plays a key role in the evolving narrative of the Hebrew people. And his record of this seminal moment in humanity’s history will eventually reveal his decidedly Hebraic bias. While his creation record provides an explanation for the “beginnings” of all mankind, Moses was attempting to explain the unique relationship shared between the Creator-God and a particular group of human beings that would later become known as the people of Israel. The books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, commonly referred to as the Torah, form the first part of the Tanakh, the Hebrew term for their Scriptures. And throughout the pages of the Tanakh, the historical evolution of God’s chosen people is revealed in vivid and, sometimes, disturbing detail.

The book of Genesis, as its name implies, provides the genesis or beginning of the nation of Israel. Moses wrote this book to provide his own people with an explanation of their origins and to reveal to them the unique and unparalleled plan that God had for them as a nation. The story of their birth as a nation was unlike any other. And while they shared a common heritage with the rest of humanity that dated back to the creation account, they enjoyed a privileged position as God’s chosen people. The question was, how had they acquired their unprecedented

relationship with the God who made the heavens and the earth? What had they done to deserve such a favored position that set them apart from all the other nations of the earth?

The book of Genesis provides the answers to those questions and many more. It does so by returning its readers to the primordial darkness of the pre-creation age, long before anything existed including man.

*The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. – Genesis 1:2 ESV*

This verse appears to describe God's work of creation in mid-process. It is a summary verse that reveals that the earth had been created but was not yet fully formed or organized according to God's well-designed plan. Moses paints a rather bleak picture, describing the a pervading and foreboding darkness "over the face of the deep." The Hebrew word for deep is *תַהֲוֹם* (*təhōm*), and it means "the depths" or "a surging mass of water." It was typically used to refer to the oceans. But in this case, it seems to be a reference to the earth itself, which, according to verses 9-10, was covered with water.

*And God said, "Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear." And it was so. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. – Genesis 1:9-10 ESV*

Up until that moment, the earth had been an undefined and uninhabitable mass, completely submerged under an impenetrable layer of water. But there's hope in the midst of all the chaos and confusion: "...the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters" (Genesis 1:3 ESV). The imagery is that of a mother bird brooding over her eggs as she waits for them to hatch. While the earth was "without form and void," Moses describes the Spirit of God as lovingly brooding over this shapeless and humanly hostile environment. God had begun the creative process but was not yet finished. He had a divine plan in place that, when complete, would transform the earth into a literal garden of Eden.

It's almost as if Moses is telegraphing a message to his people in an attempt to remind them that they worship a God of order, not confusion. And their God has a plan for their future. While there might be times when everything around them appeared dark and confusing, they could trust that God was not done. Hundreds of years after Moses wrote the book of Genesis, the prophet Jeremiah would record the following words from God. They were a reminder that, even after 70 years of forced captivity in Babylon, God would do something remarkable that would suddenly dispel the darkness of their current condition and replace it with light.

*"For thus says the Lord: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope." – Jeremiah 20:10-11 ESV*

Verse 2 of the opening chapter of Genesis conveys the same sense of hope. God's creation plan had only just begun. The image of the Spirit of God hovering over the waters was meant to convey a sense of eager anticipation. Something incredible was about to take place that would escalate and expand to such a degree that the as-yet-unformed world would never be the same again.

And at this point in the narrative, Moses discloses, "And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light" (Genesis 1:3 ESV). The opening verses paint the picture of darkness and gloom but that depressing imagery is quickly replaced by the sudden appearance of light. But what is remarkable about this light is that it comes from an as-yet-undisclosed source. If we fast-forward to verses 14-18, we see that God has not yet created the sun, moon, or stars, so the source of the light mentioned in verse 3 cannot be cosmic in nature.

*And God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night. And let them be for signs and for seasons, and for days and years, and let them be lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light upon the earth." And it was so. And God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. And God set them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth, to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. — Genesis 1:14-18 ESV*

So, what was the source of this light? If it didn't emanate from the sun, what could be the explanation for its sudden presence? God seems to have spoken it into existence but that does not necessarily mean the light had not existed up until that point. God simply said, "Let there be light..." and, as Moses states, there *was* light. It appeared. The former darkness and its concomitant chaos were suddenly penetrated and completely eliminated by the illuminating presence of this light from God. And it is essential that we recognize the undeniable fact that God *was* the source of the light.

Referring to God, the prophet Daniel stated that "light dwells with him" (Daniel 2:22 ESV). The apostle John would later declare, "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5 ESV). And John would ascribe that same attribute of illuminating glory to the Son of God.

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. — John 1:1-5 ESV*

As this passage illustrates, light and the Godhead go hand-in-hand. In both the Old and New Testament Scriptures, light was used as a metaphor for such concepts as salvation, joy, knowledge, righteousness, and life. As John stated, Jesus was life and that life was the light of men. With His incarnation, He began the process of bringing true light and life to sinful men and women. His appearance brought the light of God into the spiritual darkness that permeated the

world. As the light of the world, Jesus made salvation possible, joy accessible, the knowledge of God available, righteousness achievable, and eternal life attainable.

What is fascinating to consider is how John references Jesus' role in the creation account. He states that all things were made through Him. In fact, he goes on to declare that "the world was made through him."

*The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him... – John 1:9-10 ESV*

The apostle Paul adds further details that explain Jesus' role in creation.

*...for through him God created everything in the heavenly realms and on earth. He made the things we can see and the things we can't see— such as thrones, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities in the unseen world. Everything was created through him and for him. – Colossians 1:16 NLT*

And it's no coincidence that Moses records God the Father declaring, "Let there be light..." and the light appeared. At the very beginning of the creation process God brings His "light" to bear. It would not be a reach to suggest that God called on His Son to join Him in the next phase of creation. And with His entrance into the scene, Jesus brought His light to bear as He "created everything in the heavenly realms and on earth" (Colossians 1:16 NLT).

One of the keys to understanding the source of this light that illuminated and eliminated the darkness can be found in the book of Revelation. There, the apostle John once again describes "the light of the world," but this time this divine light source will illuminate the future Kingdom of God.

*And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever. – Revelation 22:5 ESV*

Creation began with the light. Salvation was made possible by the light. And the light will be the source of illumination in the eternal state. As John put it so well, "In him was life, and the life was the light of men" (John 1:4 ESV).

## A Predetermined and Perfect Plan

<sup>4</sup> And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. <sup>5</sup> God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

<sup>6</sup> And God said, “Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.” <sup>7</sup> And God made the expanse and separated the waters that were under the expanse from the waters that were above the expanse. And it was so. <sup>8</sup> And God called the expanse Heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

<sup>9</sup> And God said, “Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.” And it was so. <sup>10</sup> God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good.

<sup>11</sup> And God said, “Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, on the earth.” And it was so. <sup>12</sup> The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. <sup>13</sup> And there was evening and there was morning, the third day. – Genesis 1:4-13 ESV

As Moses began his record of the creation account, he described a *darkness* being “over the face of the deep” (Genesis 1:2 ESV). The Hebrew word he used is הַדָּךְ (*hōšek*), which can be translated as “darkness, obscurity, or secret place.” It comes from the root word הַשָּׁקֵךְ (*hāšak*), which was used to refer to the absence of light. Unlike everything else Moses is about to describe, the darkness was not created by God. It was simply the void created by the absence of light. For the ancients, darkness became a symbol for evil. It came to represent such things as misery, destruction, death, ignorance, sorrow, and wickedness. In the Tanakh, the Hebrew Scriptures, darkness is used to represent all that stands in opposition to God. It was also associated with God’s judgment.

*Then the Lord said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand toward heaven, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, a darkness to be felt.” So Moses stretched out his hand toward heaven, and there was pitch darkness in all the land of Egypt three days. They did not see one another, nor did anyone rise from his place for three days, but all the people of Israel had light where they lived.* – Exodus 10:21-23 ESV

The prophet Isaiah wrote of a coming day when darkness would be invaded by another source of light.

*The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone.* – Isaiah 9:2 ESV

And the apostle Matthew would later reveal that Isaiah's prophecy had been predicting the coming of Jesus, the Messiah of Israel.

*Now when he [Jesus] heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee. And leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:*

*"The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali,  
the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—  
the people dwelling in darkness  
have seen a great light,  
and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death,  
on them a light has dawned." – Matthew 4:12-16 ESV*

God's great work of creation began with the coming of the light. And His grand plan of redemption began the same way. In Jesus, the light entered the darkness once again, setting in motion the divine plan for the re-creation of all things. The theme of darkness and light will continue all throughout the pages of Scripture, setting up an ongoing contrast between the forces of righteousness and wickedness, the godly and the ungodly.

But the glaring difference between darkness and light is not the only contrast found in the opening chapter of Genesis. As Moses presents the sequential nature of God's creation timeline, he records a number of important divisions or contrasts that seem to separate one thing from another.

On the first day, God invaded the darkness with His light, providing a stark contrast between that which was good and all that would later come to represent evil. Moses states that God "separated the light from the darkness" (Genesis 1:4 ESV). The Hebrew word is בָּדָל (*bādal*) and it refers to a separating or distinguishing of one thing from another. God set apart His light from the darkness and deemed it "good" or טוב (*tôb*). According to the *NET Bible* study notes, the Hebrew word *tôb* refers to "whatever enhances, promotes, produces, or is conducive for life." By contrast, the darkness was unproductive and incapable of promoting or sustaining life. It represented the absence of God's life-giving light and, therefore, was deemed as being the opposite of "good."

The separation of the light and the dark established the end of the first day of creation. But God was far from done. There was another separation or division to take place. On the beginning of the second day, God created the "expanse."

*"Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters..." – Genesis 1:6 ESV*

The Hebrew word is רָקִיעַ (*rāqîa*) and it refers to what we would call the upper atmosphere. But to the ancient Hebrews, it was used to describe "an expanse of air pressure between the

surface of the sea and the clouds, separating water below from water above” (*NET Bible Study Notes*). In we recall, the creation story began with the earth was shrouded by water.

*The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.* – Genesis 1:2 ESV

At this point in the story, God separates the waters and, in so doing, He creates the upper atmosphere or what is sometimes translated as the “firmament.” There are some biblical scholars who believe that this separating process created a band of water vapor around the earth that would later become one of the primary sources of water that helped to create the worldwide flood recorded in chapter 6-8 of Genesis. There we read, “on that day all the fountains of the great deep burst forth, and the windows of the heavens were opened. And rain fell upon the earth forty days and forty nights” (Genesis 7:11-12 ESV). It is believed that, at this time, the canopy of water surrounding the earth was released and acted as a major source of the water necessary to flood the entire earth in a very short period of time. It is also believed that this canopy served as a protective barrier from the sun’s harmful rays and helps to explain the longevity of human life prior to the flood.

But God separated the waters, creating yet another distinction between one thing and another. He “separated the waters that were under the expanse from the waters that were above the expanse” (Genesis 1:7 ESV) and He called His creation, “Heaven.” While the Hebrew word can be used to refer to heaven, in this context it makes more sense to translate it as “sky.” On this second day of creation, God separated the earth from the sky.

At this point, God turned His attention to the earth, where He performed another act of separation or division.

*“Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.”* – Genesis 1:9 ESV

The earth, which had been covered and obscured by water, was suddenly exposed. God separated the water, allowing the formerly hidden land masses to become visible for the first time. What is significant about this phase of God’s creative act was that the land was going to be necessary to sustain human life. Man would not be able to exist in an atmosphere of total darkness or in an environment consisting of nothing but water. So, God sovereignly separated one thing from another so that mankind might have a proper place in which to live. This was all preparatory work for God’s greatest act of creation: Humanity.

Moses states that “God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good” (Genesis 1:10 ESV). God deemed it good because it was all part of His perfect plan. It was all according to His sovereign will and just as it needed to be to support the human life He would soon be creating. He knew that humanity would need air to breath, water to drink, and dry land on which to live. And so, He created all this for

mankind's good, long before they even existed. But God was far from done. Humanity would also need food to eat. So, He began the next phase of His preparatory work.

*"Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, on the earth."* – Genesis 1:11 ESV

And, once again, God declared His work to be good. Everything He made was just as He had planned it and every aspect of His creative work had a purpose. There was nothing that God created that lacked a reason for being. It was all highly intentional and pointed to something even greater to come.

## The Blessing of Procreation

<sup>14</sup> And God said, “Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night. And let them be for signs and for seasons, and for days and years,” <sup>15</sup> and let them be lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light upon the earth.” And it was so. <sup>16</sup> And God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. <sup>17</sup> And God set them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth, <sup>18</sup> to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. <sup>19</sup> And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

<sup>20</sup> And God said, “Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the heavens.” <sup>21</sup> So God created the great sea creatures and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. <sup>22</sup> And God blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.” <sup>23</sup> And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day. – Genesis 1:14-23 ESV

At this point in his creation account, Moses describes God’s making of the sun, moon, and stars. This appears to be a summary statement that would include the entire solar system. But out of all the innumerable celestial bodies, Moses places special emphasis on the three that would be the most familiar to his Hebrew audience. While the average Israelite would have had no scientific knowledge of the vast source of energy emanating from the sun, he would have understood and appreciated its role in producing crops, providing warmth, and sustaining life. The moon, while considered a “lesser light,” would have been equally vital in Jewish thought, playing a special role in daily life. According to JewishEncyclopedia.com:

Like the other celestial bodies, the moon was believed to have an influence on the universe. Its injurious influence on man is referred to in Ps. cxxi. 6, which passage probably refers to the blindness which, according to Eastern belief, results from sleeping in the moonlight with uncovered face (Carne, “Letters from the East,” p. 77). It was also believed that the moon caused epilepsy (comp. the Greek σεληνιαζόμενος and the Latin “lunaticus”; Matt. iv. 24). On the other hand, there are “precious things put forth by the moon” (Deut. xxxiii. 14); that is to say, the growth of certain plants is influenced by it.

According to verse 14, God said, “Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night.” This Hebrew word for “lights” is different than the one used in verse 3 where God said, “Let there be **light**.” On the first day of creation, God made light – אֹר (‘ôr). But now, on the fourth day, He made the lights – מַאֲרָה (mā’ôr). The “light of day” was created three days before any physical sources of light even existed. This order of events establishes God as the source of all light and life and explains why the worship of the sun or moon was to be off-limits to God’s people. Worship of the sun and moon was common among the ancients, but it was forbidden for the Jews.

*“...when you look up into the sky and see the sun, moon, and stars—all the forces of heaven—don’t be seduced into worshiping them. The LORD your God gave them to all the peoples of the earth.” – Deuteronomy 4:19 NLT*

When the people of Israel were preparing to enter the land of Canaan, God had warned them again about the worship of the sun, moon, and stars.

*“When you begin living in the towns the LORD your God is giving you, a man or woman among you might do evil in the sight of the LORD your God and violate the covenant. For instance, they might serve other gods or worship the sun, the moon, or any of the stars—the forces of heaven—which I have strictly forbidden. When you hear about it, investigate the matter thoroughly. If it is true that this detestable thing has been done in Israel, **5**then the man or woman who has committed such an evil act must be taken to the gates of the town and stoned to death.” – Deuteronomy 17:2-5 NLT*

God provided the sun and moon as visible and tangible sources of light. Their regular appearance in the sky would help to determine the length of a day and the various seasons of the year. They would be regular reminders of God’s faithfulness and life-sustaining power. The wording of the original text seems to stress that the sun, moon, and stars were to be viewed as created entities to be appreciated, and not deities to be worshiped.

“The narrative stresses their function as servants, subordinate to the interests of the earth. . . . This differs significantly from the superstitious belief within pagan religion that the earth’s destiny is dictated by the course of the stars.” – Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*

God gave these greater and lesser lights specific roles to play. They were to separate day from night, provide divinely ordained signs, distinguish the seasons, and illuminate the earth. This brief synopsis of creation should have reminded Moses’ Hebrew audience that their God had created the so-called “gods” their pagan neighbors bowed down before and worshiped. He was the ultimate source of light and life, not the sun, moon, and stars. And yet, as the apostle Paul would later reveal, humanity has regularly mistaken the created order as the source of power, light, and life. Rather than recognizing the hand of God in all that has been made, they worshiped the creation instead.

*They know the truth about God because he has made it obvious to them. For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God.*

*Yes, they knew God, but they wouldn’t worship him as God or even give him thanks. And they began to think up foolish ideas of what God was like. As a result, their minds became dark and confused. Claiming to be wise, they instead became utter fools. And instead of worshiping the glorious, ever-living God, they worshiped idols made to look like mere people and birds and animals and reptiles.*

*They traded the truth about God for a lie. So they worshiped and served the things God created instead of the Creator himself, who is worthy of eternal praise! – Romans 1:19-23, 25 NLT*

Once again, Moses points out how God separated one thing from another. He used the sun and moon to separate the light from the darkness. There is a distinct differentiation established. From that point forward, there would be evening and morning, two diametrically opposite but integrally interwoven periods of time that, together, would form a single day. God had made land and sea. He had created earth and sky. Now He had formed day and night. Everything God created was to exist in a well-balanced and divinely ordered system that functioned according to His perfectly designed plan.

And it is at this point in the process that God begins to create new forms of life to populate the new environments He has made for them. First, He creates the fish and the birds.

*“Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the heavens.” – Genesis 1:20 ESV*

Then God gave these creatures a mandate: “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth” (Genesis 1:21 ESV). They were made to procreate and populate the planet and, in doing so, they would constantly demonstrate the ongoing nature of God’s life-giving power. God could have created a distinct number of each species and filled the earth with them. But He chose to give them the ability to mate and make more of their own kind. And with each new birth, they would illustrate the amazing nature of God’s power through His ongoing creation of life.

One of the primary ways in which God bestows His blessings on His creative order is through the birth process. Even the ability of plants to propagate more of their own is a reminder of God’s goodness and grace. Birth is a blessing and not a curse. Frunderfulness is a gift from God. It is, as God deemed it: Good.

God has given His creation the ability to procreate, to beget, to generate life. Every plant that sprouts from a seed, every oak that grows from an acorn, every chick that hatches from an egg, and every child that comes forth from a womb, is intended to shout the glory and goodness of God. His life-giving power is on display each and every day throughout His creation. And mankind, as the apex of His creative order, are to marvel in it and rejoice over it because it provides with undeniable proof of His power and presence.



## Image Bearers

<sup>24</sup> And God said, “Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds—livestock and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds.” And it was so. <sup>25</sup> And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the livestock according to their kinds, and everything that creeps on the ground according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

<sup>26</sup> Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

<sup>27</sup> So God created man in his own image,  
in the image of God he created him;  
male and female he created them.

<sup>28</sup> And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” — Genesis 1:24-28 ESV

God’s timeline for creation was unfolding according to His perfect plan. He was methodically replacing the former chaos and darkness with order and light. And every phase of the divine process was well-orchestrated and designed to prepare the way for what would be His crowning achievement: The creation of man.

God had created the land on which man would exist. He had prepared the oxygen-rich “heaven” or lower atmosphere that would be necessary for man’s survival. There was the sun and moon to determine the days and seasons of man’s life. The sun’s distance from the earth was perfectly planned so that the ambient temperature on earth would be conducive to human life. And God had even created a protective barrier in the upper atmosphere that would prevent the harmful rays of the sun from doing irreparable damage to His creation. And to top it all off, God had provided an abundant source of food and nourishment in the form of fruit-bearing trees and vegetation.

There was nothing haphazard or random about the creation. It was all well-ordered and highly intentional. God was preparing the perfect environment in which to place the crown jewel of His creation plan. The all-knowing God of the universe was not making this up as He went along, but it was all part of the well-designed strategy He had developed long before He had initiated the creation process.

Once again, Moses reveals a deliberate order to the events of creation. This next phase involves God’s creation of “living creatures” (Genesis 1:24 ESV). The Hebrew word is נֶפֶשׁ (*nepeš*), and while it can be translated as “soul,” the surrounding context dictates that it refers to animal life. Moses describes three different kinds of creatures: “livestock and creeping things and beasts of the earth” (Genesis 1:24 ESV). Livestock refers to what will come to be known as domesticated

animals such as cattle or sheep. Creeping things describes all those creatures whose physical stature place them close to the ground. This will include everything from reptiles to rodents. The final category, beasts of the earth, appears to indicate all remaining species of wild animals.

While the Hebrew word, נֶפֶשׁ (*nepeš*), can be translated as “soul,” it will soon become readily apparent that these “living creatures” are meant to be viewed as quite different from humanity. As Moses recorded the unfolding nature of God’s creation process, he kept his audience in mind. He wanted the people of Israel to understand the unprecedented role that they, as human beings, played in God’s plan for the universe. They were not just another form of animal. The living creatures, while conscious and capable of thought, were not made in the image of God.

Moses is very deliberate and specific when he writes, “God made the beasts of the earth **according to their kinds** and the livestock **according to their kinds**, and everything that creeps on the ground **according to its kind**” (Genesis 1:25 ESV). These creatures, while made by God, did not bear the image of God. They were of a completely different “kind.” They bear God’s handiwork but do not share in His character or nature. And their creation is followed by an important and relationship-defining statement from God.

*“Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.” – Genesis 1:26 ESV*

Here, for the first time in Moses’ narrative, we find God referring to Himself in the plural. Over the centuries, this verse has been used to defend the concept of the Trinity or God in three persons. While this verse does not explicitly teach a trinitarian doctrine, it does support the concept. And if this verse is viewed in relationship with other passages, it is easy to see the plurality of the Godhead displayed. In the opening lines of his gospel account, John declares that Jesus played a key role in the creation.

*In the beginning the Word already existed.  
The Word was with God,  
and the Word was God.  
He existed in the beginning with God.  
God created everything through him,  
and nothing was created except through him.  
The Word gave life to everything that was created,  
and his life brought light to everyone. – John 1:1-4 NLT*

The Godhead, consisting of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, enjoyed a unique three-in-one relationship that was totally non-replicable and inexplicable. Yet, man was created in such a way that he could emulate, albeit imperfectly, this divine co-dependency and relational intimacy. Humanity would be given the unique ability to mirror the Godhead and experience the joy of fellowship and the gift of God’s blessing. Man was to be a decidedly different form of “living creature.”

"First, God's deliberation shows that he has decided to create man differently from any of the other creatures—in his image and likeness. God and man share a *likeness* that is not shared by other creatures. This apparently means that a relationship of close fellowship can exist between God and man that is unlike the relationship of God with the rest of his creation. What more important fact about God and man would be necessary if the covenant at Sinai were, in fact, to be a real relationship? Remove this and the covenant is unthinkable." – John H. Sailhamer, "Genesis," in Genesis–Numbers, vol. 2 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*

Another key difference between man and the rest of creation was his dominion role. God clearly articulated the unique role that man would play in His newly created universe.

*"...let them have **dominion** over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."* – Genesis 1:26 ESV

The Hebrew word is נֶגֶד (*rādâ*), and it conveys the idea of rule or authority. God was delegating His sovereign authority to mankind. The King and creator of the universe was passing on to humanity a responsibility to care for all that He had made.

God's purpose in giving humankind his image is that they might rule the created order on behalf of the heavenly king and his royal court. So the divine image, however it is defined, gives humankind the capacity and/or authority to rule over creation. – NET Bible Study Notes

Once again, it must be remembered that this "history" of the creation was intended as a much-needed reminder for God's chosen people, the Israelites. Moses was trying to help them understand the unique role entrusted to humanity by God. From the very "beginning," mankind was to have acted as God's vice-regents, bearing His image and carrying out His divine will for His creation. They were to have been stewards over all that He had made. And, as God's precious possession, the Israelites had an even greater responsibility to reflect God's glory, power, and authority through their lives.

Moses was reminding his fellow Israelites that they had a two-fold responsibility to act as God's faithful stewards. They, along with all humanity, had been created with one purpose in mind: To rule as God's vice-regents over His creation. But as the heirs of the promises made to Abraham and the recipients of God's law, they had the extra-added responsibility to live in keeping with His divine will as His children. This entire retelling of the creation story was meant to remind them of their unique status as the apex of God's creative order and to encourage them to do what the first man and woman failed to do.

God had originally created a pair of individuals who would bear His image, share in His royal rule, and spread His glory across the face of the earth.

*God created man in his own image,  
in the image of God he created him;  
male and female he created them.* – Genesis 1:27 ESV

God created this first couple, blessed them, and then reiterated the divine mandate He had assigned to them.

*“Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”* – Genesis 1:28 ESV

They were to procreate, making more of their kind – those made in the image of God. In obeying this command, they would spread the glory of God throughout the earth. They would populate the planet with more godly image-bearers and, in so doing, the invisible God would be made visible throughout the earth. They would reflect His nature and demonstrate His goodness and glory through their daily lives and their interactions with one another and the rest of His creation.

## It Was Very Good

<sup>29</sup> And God said, “Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. <sup>30</sup> And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so. <sup>31</sup> And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day. – Genesis 1:29-31 ESV

After God made the first two humans, He blessed them by providing them with the capacity to “be fruitful and multiply” (Genesis 1:28 ESV). This blessing was not unique to mankind because God had done the same thing with the animal kingdom.

*And God blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.”* – Genesis 1:22 ESV

The Hebrew word for “blessed” is בָּרָךְ (*bârak*) and it can mean “to cause to prosper, to enrich, to endow.” God blessed all His living creatures, including humanity, with the capacity to reproduce and make more of their kind. And each time they did, they would extend God’s blessing by continuing the creative process He had begun.

Adam and Eve were blessed to be able to share in God’s creative capabilities by reproducing more of their kind. God could have made all the fish, birds, and animals at one time, but He chose to endow all “living creatures” with the ability to reproduce. This unique relationship between procreation and blessing is seen again when God pronounces His blessing on Abram and his wife Sarai.

*No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you.* – Genesis 17:5-6 ESV

*And God said to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. I will bless her, and moreover, I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall become nations; kings of peoples shall come from her.”* – Genesis 17:15-16 ESV

Abram was a 99-year-old man with a barren wife when God pronounced this blessing. But despite those seeming disadvantages, God assured Abram that He would multiply him greatly (Genesis 17:2) – and God kept that promise. God graciously allowed an elderly man and his barren wife to participate in the creation of a mighty nation whose number would exceed that of the stars in heaven.

*And he brought him outside and said, “Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.”* – Genesis 15:5 ESV

In chronicling the story of creation, Moses was providing his fellow Israelites with a much-needed lesson in God’s gracious provision of procreative capabilities. Like Adam and Eve, and Abraham and Sarai, the people of Israel had been given the opportunity to work alongside God and assist Him in fulfilling His divine mandate to “fill the earth.” But unlike the rest of the animal kingdom, humanity was given the unique responsibility to subdue the earth and have dominion over all that God had made. God had given mankind the job of stewarding or managing His creation. Everything God had made was ultimately for mankind’s use, including the plants. It seems that the original humans were herbivores, who subsisted on a completely vegetarian diet. The same was true of the rest of the animal kingdom.

*“Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.”* – Genesis 1:29-30 ESV

While this opening chapter contains no clear prohibition against eating meat, it would appear that the original state of creation was carnivore-free. None of the animals consumed one another, which meant there was no shedding of blood. And that would remain the case until “Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him” (Genesis 4:8 ESV). As a direct result of the fall, Cain, consumed by jealousy and anger, would spill the blood of his own brother and bring down a divine curse on his head.

*And the Lord said, “What have you done? The voice of your brother’s blood is crying to me from the ground. And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand.”* – Genesis 4:10-11 ESV

Up until that fateful moment when Cain slew Abel, there appears to have been no blood spilled. And it’s interesting to note that the whole reason Cain spilled the blood of his brother was that “the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard” (Genesis 4:4-5 ESV). The Genesis 4 account reveals that “Cain brought some of the fruit of the ground for an offering to the Lord. But Abel brought some of the firstborn of his flock—even the fattest of them” (Genesis 4:3-4 NET). While some scholars believe that Abel’s offering was accepted by God because it was a blood sacrifice, the text does not seem to support that conclusion. There is no mention of Abel taking the life of the animals he offered. It simply states that he offered the “fattest of them” – in other words, Abel gave God the best of what he had. And when he dedicated those animals to God, they were no longer his to breed. All of this took place long before God gave the Mosaic law with its painstaking instructions regarding animal sacrifice. Abel was simply offering to God the best of what he had. But Cain offered God “some of the fruit of the ground.” There was no real sacrifice involved. Cain didn’t give up the tree that

bore the fruit. He didn't dedicate to God the land that had produced the grain. It seems that Cain was guilty of giving God a small and somewhat stingy token of his appreciation. And God was not pleased. But it was not the offering that was the problem. It was Cain's heart or motivation behind his offering.

But back to the beginning. God had provided for all of Adam and Eve's nutritional needs. Before He had even created Adam, God had caused the earth to bring "forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind" (Genesis 1:12 ESV). He had prepared the environment to fully meet the needs of His future image-bearers. They would have air to breathe, plenty of food to eat, and an abundance of pure water to drink. He had created a veritable garden of delights for His first son and daughter.

And at the close of the sixth day of creation, after God had made man and woman, He looked over His handiwork and pronounced His divine delight.

*And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.* – Genesis 1:31  
ESV

For the last six days, God had declared His pleasure with His creation.

*God saw that the light was good.* – Genesis 1:4 ESV

*God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good.* – Genesis 1:10 ESV

*The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.* – Genesis 1:12 ESV

*And God set them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth, to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good.* – Genesis 1:17-18 ESV

*So God created the great sea creatures and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.* – Genesis 1:21 ESV

*And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the livestock according to their kinds, and everything that creeps on the ground according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.* – Genesis 1:25 ESV

But with His creation of man, God's work was complete and He deemed all that He had made as very good. This statement of satisfaction or approval does not portray God as egotistical or

boastful. It is simply a reminder that all of God's actions regarding the creation of the universe were righteous, holy, and flawless in every regard. The closing verse of chapter one sets up all that is to come in the rest of the book of Genesis. When God's work was complete, all was well – all was very good. And chapter two will pick up on that theme, providing a more detailed account of man's creation and setting the stage for the surprising events of chapter three and beyond. All was very good, but it would not stay that way for long.

## The Requirement of Rest

<sup>1</sup> Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. <sup>2</sup> And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. <sup>3</sup> So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation. – Genesis 2:1-3 ESV

With the opening of chapter two, Moses begins a more detailed synopsis of the seven days of creation with a special emphasis on the creation of the first man and woman. The first three verses provide a summary of all that was described in chapter one. In six days' time, God had finalized His creation plan. He had made everything that He had planned to make. And with His work done, God rested. But God was not in need of rest because He was exhausted from His efforts. He had spoken the entire universe into existence.

**And God said,** “Let there be light,” and there was light. – Genesis 1:3 ESV

**And God said,** “Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters”.... And it was so. – Genesis 1:6, 7 ESV

**And God said,** “Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.” And it was so. – Genesis 1:9 ESV

**And God said,** “Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, on the earth.” And it was so. – Genesis 1:11 ESV

**And God said,** “Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night.” ... And it was so. – Genesis 1:14, 15 ESV

**And God said,** “Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the heavens.” – Genesis 1:20 ESV

**And God said,** “Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds—livestock and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds.” And it was so. – Genesis 1:24 ESV

**Then God said,** “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.” – Genesis 1:26 ESV

God spoke, and what it was so. He sovereignly declared something to come into existence, and it happened just as He said. No effort was exhausted. No energy was expended. No rest was necessary. What God did on the seventh day was cease from any further act of creating. He had done all that He was going to do. His creation was complete and perfect. This divine pattern of work and rest was meant to set the standard for the first man and woman God created. Adam and Eve, made in the image of God, were to emulate His work ethic but also model His example of rest or cessation from work. God had given them a very clear mandate.

*“Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” – Genesis 1:28 ESV*

And as chapter two will reveal, Adam and Eve were given very specific instructions concerning their “work” of managing God’s creation. According to verse 5, they were to “work the ground.” God had created a lush garden filled with fruit trees, which became the first couple’s home and the primary focus of their stewardship.

*The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. – Genesis 1:15 ESV*

Moses indicates that “God blessed the seventh day and made it holy” (Genesis 2:3 ESV). He purposefully set that day apart from the other six. The Hebrew word translated as “holy” is קָדֵשׁ (*qādaš*), and it means “to consecrate, to set apart, to regard as sacred.” By resting on the seventh day and then declaring it to be holy or set apart, God was establishing His expectations for humanity. They would be expected to follow His pattern of work and rest. This explanation of the “genesis” of sabbath rest would have resonated with Moses’ original audience. He had repeatedly given the people of Israel God’s commands concerning the Sabbath.

*“This is what the Lord has commanded: ‘Tomorrow is a day of solemn rest, a holy Sabbath to the Lord; bake what you will bake and boil what you will boil, and all that is left over lay aside to be kept till the morning.’” – Exodus 16:23 ESV*

*You shall keep the Sabbath, because it is holy for you. Everyone who profanes it shall be put to death. Whoever does any work on it, that soul shall be cut off from among his people. Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, holy to the Lord. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day shall be put to death. – Exodus 31:14-15 ESV*

The real point of the Sabbath was to teach the people of Israel to rely upon God. They were not meant to live self-sufficient lives, depending solely upon their own resources or capabilities. By ceasing from work on the seventh day, they were demonstrating their complete dependence and reliance upon God. They were resting in His ability to provide for all their needs. God never intended mankind to be autonomous and self-reliant. While He gave them dominion over His creation and delegated to them the stewardship of all that He had made, He expected them to remain submissive to His will and subject to His gracious care. He could and would provide for them.

The entire creation had been designed with mankind in mind. The placement of the sun and moon to determine the times and seasons, the presence of life-giving oxygen in the atmosphere, the abundance of edible plants, and the provision of a day of rest, all point to God’s gracious care and concern for humanity, the pinnacle of His creation.

From the very beginning, God desired that His children would enjoy His rest. Their partnership with Him would be filled with responsibilities but marked by a constant supply of rest and

restoration. Adam was made in the image of God, but he was not divine. He could emulate God's work ethic but would require rest. He could steward God's creation but would need constant sustenance to maintain his energy.

From day one, God has desired to provide His children with rest. But the book of Genesis provides a sad recounting of mankind's refusal to remain in a state of rest and reliance upon God. The garden was meant to be a place of unbroken fellowship with God where every possible human need was graciously provided for. There would be no want. There would be no lack. There would be no need to seek sustenance from anywhere or from anyone else.

But mankind has repeatedly demonstrated a sad proclivity to seek rest and comfort from all the wrong places. Ever since the beginning, humanity has displayed a self-reliant tendency to stubbornly refuse God's offer of rest. Rather than humbly relying upon God's all-sufficient power to supply every need, mankind has chosen the path of autonomy and self-determination.

The author of Hebrews recounts a time when the people of Israel had stood on the brink of the land of Canaan but had refused to go in. God had promised to give them the land as their inheritance, but they would have to cross over the Jordan River and conquer the nations that occupied it. It was a land of abundance, flowing with milk and honey. But before they could enjoy the rest it offered, they would have to do the work God had called them to do. Yet, they refused. And the author of Hebrews warned the readers of his letter not to follow the example of the Israelites.

*"Today when you hear his voice,  
don't harden your hearts  
as Israel did when they rebelled,  
when they tested me in the wilderness.  
There your ancestors tested and tried my patience,  
even though they saw my miracles for forty years.  
So I was angry with them, and I said,  
'Their hearts always turn away from me.  
They refuse to do what I tell them.'  
So in my anger I took an oath:  
'They will never enter my place of rest.'"* – Hebrews 3:7-11 NLT

He goes on to use this Old Testament story as a lesson for his Christian audience. He reminds them that God has not reneged on His offer of rest.

*God's promise of entering his rest still stands, so we ought to tremble with fear that some of you might fail to experience it. For this good news—that God has prepared this rest—has been announced to us just as it was to them.* – Hebrews 4:1-2 NLT

Adam and Eve were meant to enjoy the rest provided for them in Eden. The Israelites were to enjoy the rest made possible in the land of Canaan. But the first couple, just like the chosen people of God, refused to take God at His word. Yet, as God's children, followers of Christ are extended the promise of God's rest.

*So God's rest is there for people to enter, but those who first heard this good news failed to enter because they disobeyed God. So God set another time for entering his rest, and that time is today.* – Hebrews 4:6-7 NLT

God has offered a Sabbath rest, made possible through the work of His Son. Jesus obeyed the will of His Heavenly Father, faithfully completing the assignment He had been given. He offered Himself as a sacrifice for the sins of mankind, satisfying the just demands of His Heavenly Father and providing the ultimate Sabbath rest for the wicked and weary.

*"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."* – Matthew 11:28-30 ESV

Jesus offers an invitation to find rest in Him. He invites the weary to cease from their labors and rely upon His finished work on the cross. When Jesus had completed His redemptive work on the cross, He stated, “It is finished!” (John 19:30). He had successfully completed His assignment and then entered His Father’s rest. And now, He offers sinful men and women the opportunity to enjoy the reward of never-ending rest through reliance upon the gift of God’s grace and forgiveness. And the author of Hebrews reminds us that this rest is real and readily available to all who will believe.

*Now if Joshua had succeeded in giving them this rest, God would not have spoken about another day of rest still to come. So there is a special rest still waiting for the people of God. For all who have entered into God's rest have rested from their labors, just as God did after creating the world. So let us do our best to enter that rest. But if we disobey God, as the people of Israel did, we will fall.* – Hebrews 4:8-11 NLT

God has done it all. The only thing required of mankind is reliance upon and rest in the work that Christ has already done. It is finished.

## The Real Dirt on Adam

<sup>4</sup> These are the generations  
of the heavens and the earth when they were created,  
in the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens.

<sup>5</sup> When no bush of the field was yet in the land and no small plant of the field had yet sprung up—for the Lord God had not caused it to rain on the land, and there was no man to work the ground, <sup>6</sup> and a mist was going up from the land and was watering the whole face of the ground—<sup>7</sup> then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature. — Genesis 2:4-7 ESV

In the opening chapter, Moses revealed that God made the first man and woman.

*So God created man in his own image,  
in the image of God he created him;  
male and female he created them.* — Genesis 1:27 ESV

But it's not until chapter two that he tells *how* God created them. As we saw in yesterday's post, God spoke the rest of the creation into existence. Repeatedly, Moses wrote, "God said...and it was so." But that was not the case when it came to God's creation of man.

*...then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.* — Genesis 2:7 ESV

The Hebrew word יָצַר (yatsar) means "to form" or "to fashion," and it was often used in the context of a potter using his hands to form a lump of clay into a particular shape. The intended connection between God forming man and a potter fashioning clay can be seen in the similarity between יָצַר (yatsar) and the Hebrew word for "potter" – יֹצֵר [yotser].

Moses' description of God's creation of man adds another intended pottery reference. He states that God formed **man**, אָדָם ('ādām), from the **dust**, עֲפָר ('āpār), of the **ground** אָדָמָה ('ădāmâ). Verse 7 could be translated, "And Yahweh God formed the man, soil, from the ground." The first man's name, Adam, has direct links to the soil from which he was made. Like a potter, God took common, lifeless clay and fashioned it into the form of a man. In a sense, He used the same process that mankind would later use to fashion their false gods. But rather than making a lifeless idol to be worshiped, God was creating a living human being whose sole purpose would be to worship Him.

God made the man, but something was missing. The 'ādām had form but no ability to function. He remained lifeless and useless 'ădāmâ until God "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life" (Genesis 2:7 ESV). This important distinction helps to set man apart from the rest of the creative order. God took the time to personally create man's form. Moses describes God as taking a "hands-on" approach to forming the one creature who would represent the pinnacle of

His creation. This living being would be different from all others. He would bear God's image and contain the "breath" of God.

Once the breath of God entered the lifeless clay form of man, life was generated, along with the attributes of understanding and conscience.

*But there is a spirit within people,  
the breath of the Almighty within them,  
that makes them intelligent. – Job 32:8 NLT*

*The spirit of man is the lamp of the Lord,  
searching all his innermost parts. – Proverbs 20:27 ESV*

The essential role of God's breath in the creation of man should not be overlooked. No other creature came into being through this unique life-giving action. And it brings to mind a similar scene portrayed in the book of Ezekiel. The prophet of God was given a vision of a valley filled with bones. Ezekiel describes the bones as being scattered all over the valley floor and dried out – as if they had been there for some time. But God spoke to the prophet.

*"Son of man, can these bones become living people again?" – Ezekiel 37:3 NLT*

Don't miss the image being conveyed. The bones, which represented former human life, were slowly turning back to dust. They were lifeless and without form and covered the ground all around Ezekiel's feet. And addresses Ezekiel as "son of man ('ādām), a reminder of his descent from the first 'ādām, who was made from the dust of the ground. God questions Ezekiel's faith in His creative power, and the prophet responds, "O Sovereign Lord, you alone know the answer to that" (Ezekiel 37:3 NLT).

Ezekiel hedged his bets and made no commitment. This was all out of his area of expertise. But God gave his prophet a faith-stretching assignment.

*"Speak a prophetic message to these bones and say, 'Dry bones, listen to the word of the Lord! This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Look! I am going to put breath into you and make you live again! I will put flesh and muscles on you and cover you with skin. I will put breath into you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the Lord.'" – Ezekiel 37:4-6 NLT*

God commanded Ezekiel to address the bones, declaring to them God's intentions to revive them. God was going to reform and refashion them, returning each scattered bone to its proper place in a particular body and covering them with organs, muscles, sinews, and skin. But the key to their restoration to life would be the breath of God.

And Ezekiel describes the somewhat macabre scene that took place.

*Suddenly as I spoke, there was a rattling noise all across the valley. The bones of each body came together and attached themselves as complete skeletons. Then as I watched, muscles and flesh formed over the bones. Then skin formed to cover their bodies, but they still had no breath in them.* – Ezekiel 37:7-8 NLT

The valley was now filled with a host of fully formed human beings, but they still lacked one thing: Life. So, God commanded Ezekiel to speak to the bones one more time.

*“Speak a prophetic message to the winds, son of man. Speak a prophetic message and say, ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Come, O breath, from the four winds! Breathe into these dead bodies so they may live again.’”* – Ezekiel 37:9 NLT

And when Ezekiel faithfully followed God's command, something truly incredible took place.

*So I spoke the message as he commanded me, and breath came into their bodies. They all came to life and stood up on their feet—a great army.* – Ezekiel 37:10 NLT

This entire scene was intended as an object lesson for Ezekiel. He had just been given a visual metaphor for the spiritual state of God's chosen people.

*“Son of man, these bones represent the people of Israel. They are saying, ‘We have become old, dry bones—all hope is gone. Our nation is finished.’”* – Ezekiel 37:11 NLT

They were hopeless and helpless because they were missing the life-giving breath of God. Their ongoing rebellion and refusal to live in obedience to God had left them lifeless and as useless as dry bones scattered all over a valley floor. And even when God miraculously recreated them into fully formed human beings, they were missing the one thing they needed to go from being ‘ădāmâ to ‘ădām. They needed the breath of God. And God promised them that the day would come when He would restore them back to spiritual life by revitalizing them by His Spirit.

*“I will put my Spirit in you, and you will live again and return home to your own land. Then you will know that I, the Lord, have spoken, and I have done what I said. Yes, the Lord has spoken!”* – Ezekiel 37:14 NLT

The first man, while formed by the hand of God Himself, remained nothing but dirt. He was a lifeless and completely useless icon of God's creative capabilities because He lacked the one thing that would allow him to not only bear God's image but put it into action. By breathing life into Adam, God transformed ordinary clay into “a vessel for honor: sanctified, useful to the Master, and prepared for every good work” (2 Timothy 2:21 BSB). God had great plans for Adam and fashioned him in such a way that he would be able to accomplish all his divinely ordained responsibilities. But the primary ingredient that would make possible man's fulfillment of God's kingdom mandate was the breath of God. And the apostle Peter reminds us that all those who place their faith in Jesus receive the same life-giving, mission-empowering Spirit that gave God gave to Adam.

*By his divine power, God has given us everything we need for living a godly life. We have received all of this by coming to know him, the one who called us to himself by means of his marvelous glory and excellence. And because of his glory and excellence, he has given us great and precious promises. These are the promises that enable you to share his divine nature and escape the world's corruption caused by human desires.* – 2 Peter 1:3-4 NLT

We, like Adam, have all we need to accomplish all that God has called us to do. We have been given life and the Spirit-enabled ability to live in obedience to the will of our Creator. It is the Spirit of God that makes obedience to the will of God possible. And even Ezekiel was given a promise from God that guaranteed the future transformation of the disobedient people of Israel.

*"Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean. Your filth will be washed away, and you will no longer worship idols. And I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender, responsive heart. And I will put my Spirit in you so that you will follow my decrees and be careful to obey my regulations."* – Ezekiel 36:25-27 NLT

God made man in His likeness. But it would be the Spirit of God that transformed lifeless clay into a vessel of honor, capable of bringing glory to its Creator and pouring out His blessings on the rest of the creation. Without the Spirit of God, humanity remains as lifeless and useless as a valley filled with dry bones. And without the breath of God, ‘ādām would have remained nothing but ‘ādāmā.

## A Garden of Earthly Delights

<sup>8</sup> And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. <sup>9</sup> And out of the ground the Lord God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

<sup>10</sup> A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and there it divided and became four rivers.

<sup>11</sup> The name of the first is the Pishon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold. <sup>12</sup> And the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there.

<sup>13</sup> The name of the second river is the Gihon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Cush. <sup>14</sup> And the name of the third river is the Tigris, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

<sup>15</sup> The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. <sup>16</sup> And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, <sup>17</sup> but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.” – Genesis 2:8-17 ESV

Once again, Moses provides some much-needed context to set up the next phase of the creation account. He relates that God planted a garden in a region known as Eden. The Hebrew word of “garden” is *gan*, which was typically used to refer to an orchard. In this eastern section of Eden, God had prepared a grove filled with trees that were “pleasant to the sight and good for food” (Genesis 2:9 ESV). From the wording of the text, it appears that God did not create fully grown trees, but chose instead to have them grow from seeds.

*...out of the ground the Lord God made to spring up every tree... – Genesis 2:9 ESV*

In Hebrew, the term, “spring up,” means “to sprout, spring forth, to grow.” It should not be overlooked that God caused these trees to spring up from the “ground” (*ădāmâ*). God used the same ground from which He had formed Adam (*‘ădām*) to produce the food that would feed and sustain him. And Moses points out two particular trees that existed in the garden God had created: The tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. These two trees will become key factors in the unfolding story.

It was in this idyllic spot that God placed man. This location was intended to be much more than a home for the first couple. In a sense, it was to be a place of worship, a precursor to both the tabernacle and temple that God would later ordain as holy sites in which His presence might dwell and His people could worship Him. In this setting, Adam and Eve would enjoy unbroken fellowship with God. Chapter three reveals that God regularly made His presence known to the first couple.

*...the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God moving about in the orchard at the breezy time of the day... – Genesis 3:8 NLT*

And in that same chapter, it becomes clear that Adam and Eve were accustomed to communicating with God. This garden-temple was meant to be a place of intimate communion between man and his God. And its beautiful surroundings point to the glory and holiness of its designer and creator. There was a river that flowed into the garden, providing pure drinking water for Adam and nourishment for the trees. Moses describes the prevalence of gold, bdellium, and onyx stone – natural resources that would later become coveted for their rarity and subsequent value. These same precious metals and priceless stones would become key decorative elements in the tabernacle and temple that God would ordain.

*"Tell the people of Israel to bring me their sacred offerings. Accept the contributions from all whose hearts are moved to offer them. Here is a list of sacred offerings you may accept from them:*

*gold, silver, and bronze;  
blue, purple, and scarlet thread;  
fine linen and goat hair for cloth;  
tanned ram skins and fine goatskin leather;  
acacia wood;  
olive oil for the lamps;  
spices for the anointing oil and the fragrant incense;  
onyx stones, and other gemstones to be set in the ephod and the priest's chestpiece.*

*"Have the people of Israel build me a holy sanctuary so I can live among them."* –Exodus 25:1-8 NLT

While we can't know for certain the exact location of the garden, Moses' description of the four rivers provides a general idea of where this region may have been. Two of the rivers, the Tigris and Euphrates are located in what would become the land of Babylon. What is interesting to note is that these two rivers flow from the north to the south and encompass two regions that would later be associated with Abraham: Ur and Haran.

*Terah took Abram his son and Lot the son of Haran, his grandson, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife, and they went forth together from Ur of the Chaldeans to go into the land of Canaan, but when they came to Haran, they settled there.* – Genesis 11:31 ESV

God would call Abram and command him to travel to a land that would become an inheritance to his ancestors.

*Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who*

*bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”*

*So Abram went, as the Lord had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother’s son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people that they had acquired in Haran, and they set out to go to the land of Canaan.* – Genesis 12:1-5  
ESV

And God would later describe two rivers that would form the boundaries of the land that He would give to Abram’s descendants.

*On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, “To your offspring I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates...”* – Genesis 15:18  
ESV

The land that God promised to give Abram’s offspring, the nation of Israel, would stretch from the Nile in the west to the Euphrates in the east. So, the garden in which God placed Adam must have been somewhere within this vast region. And this insight was meant to provide Moses’ readers with a reminder that, from the very beginning, God had intended this land to be the home of His children and the place where He dwelled among them. But this recounting of the creation story was also meant to remind every Israelite who would read it of their own rebellion and subsequent rejection from the land.

Moses makes it clear that God placed man in this very spot and gave him a job to do.

*The Lord God took the man and placed him in the orchard in Eden to care for it and to maintain it.* – Genesis 2:15 NLT

This verse helps to explain one of the responsibilities that had come with the command that God had given to Adam and Eve:

*“Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”* – Genesis 1:28 ESV

Adam had been placed in the garden by God and ordered to manage and maintain it. But the garden would also provide for all of Adam’s needs. It was a place of complete sufficiency that was intended to sustain mankind for generations to come. It was in the garden that Adam and Eve were to be fruitful and multiply. But, ultimately, God expected them to leave the garden and fill the earth with more of their kind. They were to procreate and populate the entire earth and, in so doing, spread the image of God all throughout His creation.

But upon placing Adam in the garden, God gave him yet one more command that came with a sobering warning.

*Then the Lord God commanded the man, "You may freely eat fruit from every tree of the orchard, but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will surely die." – Genesis 1:16*

Adam was free to eat from every tree of the garden except one. That means he had free access to the tree of life, and it would appear that this one tree was to be the means by which God sustained and prolonged Adam's life. As long as he had access to the tree of life, he would live. But there was another tree that would produce the opposite effect. If Adam ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he would die. Here, for the first time, we see the disparate distinction between life and death, blessings and curses. As long as Adam obeyed the will of God, he would live. But if He chose to disobey, his actions would result in a deadly curse from God.

And as will soon become apparent, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil offered a tantalizing fruit that could give man the ability to self-govern. It would appeal to his desire for autonomy and self-rule. The knowledge of good and evil refers to man's inherent desire to decide for himself, to self-determine what is right and wrong. In essence, to be his own god and create his own sense of what is just and acceptable behavior. Adam had everything he needed to live in unbroken fellowship with God, but that relationship required that he constantly submit his will to that of God. As long as he did, he would thrive and enjoy the undiminished blessings of God. But, we know how the story ends, because Moses provides all the sordid details.

## A Match Made in Heaven

<sup>18</sup> Then the Lord God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.” <sup>19</sup> Now out of the ground the Lord God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. <sup>20</sup> The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. <sup>21</sup> So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. <sup>22</sup> And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. <sup>23</sup> Then the man said,

“This at last is bone of my bones  
and flesh of my flesh;  
she shall be called Woman,  
because she was taken out of Man.”

*Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.* – Genesis 2:18-25 ESV

During each phase of the creation process, God had repeatedly declared His divine satisfaction with His handiwork.

*And God saw that it was good.* – Genesis 1:25 ESV

And after “God created man in his own image...male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:27 ESV), He “saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was **very good**” (Genesis 1:31 ESV). The sixth day of creation ended with God’s resounding approval of all that He had made, including the first man and woman.

But in chapter two, Moses reveals that there was a moment in the creation story when God was not satisfied. He had formed Adam out of the dust of the ground and “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life” (Genesis 2:7 ESV). Then God had placed Adam in the garden He had created for him to live in and care for. Yet, while Adam bore God’s image, had been animated by God’s breath, and lived in an idyllic environment where He could enjoy God’s constant presence, there was something missing. God evaluated the situation and concluded, “It is not good that the man should be alone...” (Genesis 2:18 ESV).

This should not be construed as a mistake on God’s part. It was not a case of divine oversight or a sudden revelation on God’s part that His creation was somehow flawed. As chapter one revealed, it had always been God’s plan to create man (*‘ādām*) in His own image, and that image would include two genders: male and female. This biological diversity was absolutely

necessary if ‘*ādām* was going to obey God’s mandate to “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth” (Genesis 1:28 ESV).

In chapter two, Moses is simply revealing the underlying purpose behind God’s delay in making the female version of ‘*ādām*. Because God had endowed Adam with the ability to reason and the capacity to create, He assigned Adam the responsibility of naming every living creature He had made.

*The Lord God formed out of the ground every living animal of the field and every bird of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them, and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name.* – Genesis 2:19 NLT

While the creatures had been formed out of the ground just as Adam had been, that is where their similarity ends. They lacked the ability to name themselves because they had no capacity for reasoning or speech. They were driven by their natural animal instincts. But Adam, who had been made in the image of God, was able to think, discern, create, and comprehend in ways that set him apart from every other living creature. That is why God had assigned to him the sole responsibility of subduing and having dominion over the rest of creation.

Adam’s God-ordained assignment to name the animals had a secondary purpose behind it. As he observed each species of creature, Adam realized that each of them had a corresponding mate. There was a male and a female. But Adam quickly noticed that there was no one who looked like him.

*...but for Adam no companion who corresponded to him was found.* – Genesis 2:20 NLT

It seems quite likely that as Adam carried out his creature-naming assignment, he observed some of them carrying out God’s divine mandate to procreate. Yet, he had no companion or female counterpart. God had already recognized this void in Adam’s life and had predetermined to remedy it.

*“It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.”* – Genesis 2:18 ESV

But it was important that Adam recognize his own insufficiency. He was not meant to be alone. So, as this lone male observed the natural state of God’s creation and saw that every other male creature had a female counterpart, he developed a growing awareness of his need and of his own inability to do anything about it. According to the *NET Study Bible* notes, Adam suddenly realized “there was not found a companion who corresponded to him.”

God had always intended for Adam to have a companion. But this “helper” was meant to be far more than a friend. She was to complement and complete Adam. Only as male and female could they successfully bear God’s image and spread His glory across the earth. Without Eve, Adam would have been unable to carry out God’s Kingdom mandate. He could not have

multiplied and filled the earth. He would have been incapable of making more of his own kind. And as soon as Adam recognized his need, God stepped in to do something about it.

*So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man.* – Genesis 2:21-22 ESV

God performed the first surgery. He anesthetized Adam, removed one of his ribs, then miraculously closed up the wound. In Hebrew, the word translated as “rib” is צְלָע (*ṣēlā’*), and it can also be translated as “side.” It was used to refer to the ribs of a boat or the planks of a house. The imagery is meant to convey the woman’s intimate and interconnected relationship with Adam. God could have formed the woman out of the dust of the ground, just as He had done with Adam. But instead, God chose to make the woman *from* man. Unlike any other “companions” in God’s creation, the man and the woman would share a unique and irrevocable bond.

“... the woman was made of a rib out of the side of Adam; not made out of his head to rule over him, nor out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be beloved.” – Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*

They were the same, but very different. Adam was זָכָר (*zākār*) – a male. Eve was נָקָבָה (*nāqēbāh*) – a female. The Hebrew word for “female” is derived from another word, which means “to pierce.” It seems that Eve’s designation as a female has biological implications that demonstrate the complementary nature of her relationship with Adam. But while all the living creatures were given the ability to copulate and procreate, man and woman were to enjoy a relational intimacy that went far beyond the act of breeding and propagating their kind.

When Adam awoke from his divine surgical procedure, he was given his first glimpse of his new companion and he shouted, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man” (Genesis 2:23 ESV).

The Hebrew term הַפָּעָם (*happa‘am*) conveys a sense of extreme relief. It could be better translated, “now, finally, at last” (NET Bible study notes). During all the time he had spent naming the living creatures, Adam had grown increasingly more frustrated with his inability to find a mate. He knew something was wrong but had no way of fixing the problem. Yet, when Adam saw what God had done, he was blown away. And true to his original assignment, Adam immediately gave this striking creature a name, “Woman.”

The Hebrew word for “woman” is אִשָּׁה (*iššâh*), and, in the Old Testament, it is most often translated as “wife.” When spoken, this word sounds similar to the Hebrew word for “man” – אִישׁ (*išš*). It seems that Adam immediately recognized that this creature was meant for him. In a real sense, she was the answer to his prayers. And he knew that her link to him was more than simply biological – it was physiological. She came from him. She was “flesh of his flesh” (Genesis

2:23 ESV). They shared a unique and inseparable bond that was unmistakable and undeniable. Adam knew that they were meant for one another. Nothing else would do.

And Moses provides a summary statement to underscore the unique nature of the relationship between a man and a woman that would later manifest itself in the marriage union.

*Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.* – Genesis 2:24 ESV

Moses recognized the long-term implications of this first union between a man and a woman. It was far more than a sexual relationship. At this point in the story, Adam and Eve had not had time to consummate their union. The term “one flesh” speaks to their “blood” relationship. They literally shared the same “flesh and bone.” And Moses understood that this unique relationship shared by the first man and his wife was to be a model for all future couples. From that point forward, Adam and Eve were considered as one in God’s eyes. Their divine union was to be inseparable and indissoluble.

Jesus would refer to this very moment in time when giving His insights regarding marriage and divorce.

*“...from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female.’ ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.”* – Mark 10:6-9 ESV

God had made Eve from Adam. And God had returned to Adam what He had taken from him. According to God’s divine mathematical formula, these two individuals were no longer two but one. And Moses accentuates the “very good” nature of this God-ordained union.

*And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.* – Genesis 2:25 ESV

There is a sense of innocence and intimacy in this statement. At this point in the creation story, the first man and woman were completely content with everything about their circumstances. They lacked nothing. They had no need for clothing, food, water, or shelter. The world in which they lived was perfect. They were able to enjoy one another’s companionship and live in intimate and unbroken fellowship with God. And yet, we know how the story ends. This perfectly matched couple was about to experience the very real danger of discontentment and doubt. It was just a matter of time before they succumbed to the very thing that Jesus would later warn about in His sermon on the mount.

*“...do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And*

*which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?" – Matthew 6:25-27 ESV*

The peace and joy of the garden were about to be replaced by anxiety and discontentment. This perfectly paired couple would soon reveal humanity's predisposition for self-deception and self-determination. While God had provided them with everything they could ever need, including one another, they would soon reveal their dissatisfaction through an act of blatant disobedience. And the world would never be the same.



## The Short Journey from Doubt to Disobedience

<sup>1</sup> Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made.

*He said to the woman, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’”  
<sup>2</sup> And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, <sup>3</sup> but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’”<sup>4</sup> But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. <sup>5</sup> For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”<sup>6</sup> So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. <sup>7</sup> Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin cloths.* – Genesis 3:1-7 ESV

With the opening of chapter three, the story takes a sudden and decidedly dark turn. The preceding chapter ended with the first marriage ceremony, officiated over by God Himself, as He joined together as “one flesh,” the man and woman He had created. It had been an idyllic scene, as Adam welcomed his new wife.

*“At last!” the man exclaimed.*

*“This one is bone from my bone,  
 and flesh from my flesh!  
 She will be called ‘woman,’  
 because she was taken from ‘man.’”* – Genesis 2:25 NLT

And Moses ended that chapter by noting that “the man and his wife were both naked, but they felt no shame” (Genesis 2:25 NLT). They enjoyed a relationship built on innocence, transparency, and complete trust. They were just as God had intended them to be and, together, they enjoyed the bountiful and beautiful environment He had prepared for them. Yet, their state of unadulterated innocence and intimacy was about to change – forever.

One day, as Eve walked in the garden, she was confronted by one of the other “living creatures.” In a scene straight out of a Harry Potter novel, Eve is confronted by a beautiful and particularly beguiling serpent. Surprisingly, Eve does not seem to be shocked at the creature’s capacity to speak. Due to her recent arrival on the scene, Eve may have not yet interacted with any of the other animals, so she would have been unaware that the capacity of speech was solely restricted to humans. The fact that the serpent spoke to her does not seem to surprise her. But the words that come from the mouth of the serpent will have life-altering implications.

It is interesting to note the wordplay that takes place between verse 25 of chapter two and verse 1 of chapter three. In Hebrew, the word for “naked” is אָרֶם (*‘ārōm*), and the word used to

describe the craftiness of the serpent is מָרֵע ('ārûm). Moses, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, uses these two words to differentiate between Eve, the innocent protagonist, and the serpent, the clever and cunning antagonist. The serpent is going to make a full-frontal assault on the child-like innocence and inexperience of Eve.

But before proceeding, we have to address the issue of the serpent's identity. Was this *just* another snake in the garden? It would seem that the answer is no. This serpent displayed the capacity to reason and speak. Moses describes it as being "more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made" (Genesis 3:1 ESV). This statement could indicate that the serpent was not one of God's creations. Then where did it come from? Most biblical scholars agree that the serpent was a manifestation of Satan himself. The prophet Ezekiel describes Satan as being in Eden.

*You were in Eden, the garden of God;  
 every precious stone was your covering,  
 sardius, topaz, and diamond,  
 beryl, onyx, and jasper,  
 sapphire, emerald, and carbuncle;  
 and crafted in gold were your settings  
 and your engravings.  
 On the day that you were created  
 they were prepared.  
 You were an anointed guardian cherub.  
 I placed you; you were on the holy mountain of God;  
 in the midst of the stones of fire you walked.  
 You were blameless in your ways  
 from the day you were created,  
 till unrighteousness was found in you. – Ezekiel 28:13-15 ESV*

And Ezekiel describes the ignominious fall of this "anointed guardian cherub" who had been "full of wisdom and perfect in beauty" (Ezekiel 28:12 ESV).

*Your heart was proud because of your beauty;  
 you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor.  
 I cast you to the ground;  
 I exposed you before kings,  
 to feast their eyes on you. – Ezekiel 28:17 ESV*

And the prophet Isaiah provides further insights into Satan's epic fall from grace.

*"How you are fallen from heaven,  
 O Day Star, son of Dawn!  
 How you are cut down to the ground,  
 you who laid the nations low!"*

*You said in your heart,  
 'I will ascend to heaven;  
 above the stars of God  
 I will set my throne on high;  
 I will sit on the mount of assembly  
 in the far reaches of the north;  
 I will ascend above the heights of the clouds;  
 I will make myself like the Most High.'” – Isaiah 14:12-14 ESV*

Satan, desiring to be as God, had led an angelic insurrection against the Almighty. But his attempt to overthrow and replace God had failed and he was cast down to earth. In the book of Revelation, John provides an apt description of this former ministering angel. He refers to him as “that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world” (Revelation 12:9 ESV). Jesus described Satan as “a murderer from the beginning” (John 8:44 ESV). With this statement, Jesus seems to indicate Satan’s role in the fall. He played the part of the deceiver, using lies and half-truths to persuade Adam and Eve to rebel against God. And Jesus went on to explain that Satan “does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44 ESV).

It seems clear that the serpent was merely a tool, a deceptive prop in the hands of Satan. It could be that Satan even disguised himself in the guise of a serpent in order to infiltrate the garden and catch the unsuspecting Eve off guard. The apostle Paul, when calling the false teachers who were deceiving local congregations, he described them as “deceitful workman, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ” (2 Corinthians 11:13 ESV). Then, he went on to explain the source of their deception.

*And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds. – 2 Corinthians 11:14-15 ESV*

It doesn’t require a stretch of the imagination to consider Satan as disguising himself as a serpent. In that form, he was able to approach Eve and raise questions about the integrity and trustworthiness of God. He may have been cast down, but he had not yet given up his desire to replace God. This time, he chose to attack God’s chosen image-bearers in an effort to dissuade them from the kingdom mandate they had been given. And his weapon of choice was deceit, designed to produce doubt, which would eventually lead to disobedience. He began his conversation with Eve by asking a cleverly worded question:

*“Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden’?” – Genesis 2:1 ESV*

He was testing her knowledge and understanding of God’s command concerning the trees of the garden. But he was also subtly encouraging Eve to doubt the integrity of God’s word.

But Eve calmly responded, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die’” (Genesis 3:2-3 ESV). But Eve exposed her ignorance of God’s command by adding the inaccurate prohibition against touching the tree. Her answer was only partially correct, and this opened the door to Satan’s next salvo.

*“You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” – Genesis 3:4-5 ESV*

With this one statement, Satan planted the seeds of doubt that would soon spring forth into full-grown disobedience. He blatantly refuted the word of God by declaring that eating the fruit of the forbidden tree would result in life, not death. He insinuated to Even that God was holding out on them. The Almighty was trying to prevent them from experiencing all that they were meant to be. He asserted that if they actually disobeyed God and ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they would be like God. In other words, the fruit would give them the capacity to determine right from wrong. They would become autonomous and self-governing. In a sense, they would be like God in that they would be able to determine what was best for themselves. They would no longer have to live by God’s restrictive and repressive rules.

Satan portrayed God as the deceiver. He turned the tables and cast God as the villain in the story. It was Yahweh who was keeping them from enjoying their well-deserved freedom and right to self-determination.

And Eve quickly succumbed to Satan’s tempting ploy. Moses states that “the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise” (Genesis 3:6 ESV). She immediately experienced what the apostle John would later describe as “a craving for physical pleasure, a craving for everything we see, and pride in our achievements and possessions” (1 John 2:16 NLT). She fell in love with the fruit and all that it could offer. And she ate. She gave in to the temptation. Not only that, she shared the forbidden fruit with her husband. Yes, Adam was there. He had been the entire time. He had heard the entire conversation between Eve and the serpent and had never spoken up. It had been to Adam that God had given the original warning concerning the tree.

*“And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.” – Genesis 2:16-17 ESV*

He knew exactly what God had said and should have refuted the lies of the serpent. But, instead, Adam followed his wife’s lead and accepted her offer of the fruit. He too, doubted God’s word and made the fateful decision to disobey God’s command. And the rest, they say, is history. Moses sadly states, “the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked” (Genesis 3:7 ESV). They got exactly what the serpent had promised: Their eyes were opened. But what they saw disturbed them. Rather looking on one another’s innocence, they viewed themselves in the guise of guilt. They had sinned and they knew it. And they

immediately tried to cover their nakedness and hide themselves from the all-seeing eyes of God.



## A Rupture in the Cosmic Order

<sup>8</sup> And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. <sup>9</sup> But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, “Where are you?” <sup>10</sup> And he said, “I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.” <sup>11</sup> He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” <sup>12</sup> The man said, “The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.” <sup>13</sup> Then the Lord God said to the woman, “What is this that you have done?” The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.” – Genesis 3:8-13 ESV

The fruit that God had clearly forbidden, Eve had deemed as “good for food” and “a delight to the eyes” (Genesis 3:6 ESV). Under the nefarious influence of the serpent (a.k.a. Satan), Eve had rejected the divine prohibition concerning the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Both she and Adam went with their gut instinct and gave in to their base desire for self-satisfaction. Moses reveals that at the core of Eve’s decision-making process was the faulty understanding that “the tree was to be desired to make one wise” (Genesis 3:6 ESV). The Hebrew word translated as “wise” is שָׁקֵל (*sâkal*), and it can also mean “to give insight.” Eve was hoping to acquire an intuitive understanding of all things. Dictionary.com defines “intuition” as “direct perception of truth, fact, etc., independent of any reasoning process.” She desired an immediate and inner apprehension of right and wrong. In other words, she was not interested in adhering to God’s predetermined standard for obedience. William Ernest Henley could have been quoting Eve when he penned the last two lines of his poem, *Invictus*.

“I am the master of my fate. I am the captain of my soul.”

Eve was dissatisfied. Everything God had made and had deemed as “very good” was not good enough for Eve. She wanted more. She wanted what she could not have. She had an innate desire for that which had been denied. She and Adam had no need for additional food. There was no shortage of edible plants and fruit-bearing trees in the garden. But the one tree that God had declared as off-limits became the one tree Eve couldn’t stop thinking about.

“The heart wants what it wants. That’s as far as we get. That’s the conversation stopper. The imperial self-rules all. The inquiring into the causes of sin takes us back, again and again, to the intractable human will and the heart’s desire that stiffens the will against all competing considerations. Like a neurotic and therapeutically shelf-worn little god, the human heart keeps ending discussions by insisting it wants what it wants.” – Cornelius Plantinga Jr., *Not the Way It’s Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 62

It wasn’t so much the fruit that Eve desired as the promise of autonomy it supposedly held. She wanted to be wise – like God. She desired to be intuitively intelligent and capable of making her own determinations of right and wrong.

J. I. Packer describes sin as “essentially the resolve – the mad, utterly blameworthy, but nonetheless, utterly firm resolve – to play God and right the real God. Sinners resolve to treat themselves as the center of the universe and so they keep God at bay on the outer circumference of their lives” (J. I. Packer, “The Necessity of the Atonement,” in *Atonement*, ed. Gabriel N. E. Fluhrer). Eve had resolved to replace God’s standard with her own and, sadly, she convinced her husband to follow her lead.

And it’s interesting to note that the first “insight” Adam and Eve gained from eating the forbidden fruit was an awareness of their own nakedness. They made the sudden determination that what God had deemed as “very good” was unacceptable. Their decision to cover their bodies with make-shift garments reveals their new capacity for making self-determined moral judgments.

“...there is a never-ending drive to replace the triune God with infinitely inferior and more palpable gods along with a set of degenerate moral precepts as a further means of suppressing the truth. The unregenerate host of humanity hate the light of divine moral truth. They cannot bear to allow it to shine on them lest it expose the blackness of their shame, their dishonor, their guilt and rebellion (John 3:20).” – Scott Christensen, *What About Evil: A Defense of God’s Sovereign Glory*

It should not be overlooked that the very first thing Adam and Eve did, post-sin, was cover their “nakedness.” They inherently knew that they were exposed to the eyes of God, and they feared that He would see them for what they were. So, Moses indicates that the first couple attempted to hide from the presence of the Lord. In an almost humorous aside, Moses states that they hid “among the trees of the garden” (Genesis 3:8 ESV). Their newly acquired “wisdom” prompted them to seek shelter from God in the very place where they had committed the crime.

One of the ironic things about Satan’s offer of god-like wisdom is that it immediately renders any takers illogical and irrational. Adam and Eve really thought they could hide from God. And when He showed up, asking, “Where are you?” (Genesis 3:9 ESV), Adam reluctantly responded, ““I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself” (Genesis 3:10 ESV).

Fear, shame, and hiddenness. Those are just a few of the unhealthy byproducts of sin. They also reveal what Satan was really offering when he had declared that the forbidden fruit would make Eve “like God, knowing good and evil” (Genesis 3:5 ESV). His promise of god-likeness was a lie. What he was really offering was the antithesis of godliness. By eating the forbidden fruit, Eve and her easily manipulated husband didn’t become *like* God, they actually found themselves exhibiting characteristics that were diametrically opposed to God: *ungodliness, unrighteousness, injustice, and lawlessness*.

“...to fall short of the glory of God is to bare a shattered imago Dei. The reflection of the moral image of God within the fallen creature is irreparably broken apart from divine intervention. ‘Sin is a radical disruption in the core of our being.’” – Scott Christensen, *What About Evil: A Defense of God’s Sovereign Glory*

Notice that God began the conversation with His disobedient children by inquiring about their location. He knew where they were and He was fully aware of what they had done. But He seems to place the emphasis on their broken relationship with Him. They were in the garden, hidden among the trees, but they were actually far from God. Their sin had separated them from the very one who had made them. And notice that, when Adam heard the voice of God, he immediately confessed his nakedness, but not his sin. And, in an attempt to garner a full confession from Adam, God asked, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” (Genesis 3:11 ESV). Once again, God knew the answer to His own question. He was simply giving His disobedient son an opportunity to own his actions. But rather than admitting his culpability, Adam passes the buck. He blames his wife.

*“The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.”* – Genesis 3:12 ESV

He attempts to shift the blame by pointing out that Eve had been God’s idea. Had God not made Eve, none of this would have happened. Adam was declaring himself to be an innocent and unwitting victim in this disastrous affair. Playing along with Adam’s faulty line of reasoning, God asked Eve, “What is this that you have done?” (Genesis 3:13 ESV). To which she replied, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate” (Genesis 3:13 ESV).

Neither the man nor the woman took responsibility for their actions. They had both desired the benefits the fruit offered, but neither wanted to accept accountability or face the liabilities that came with their actions. Sin always has consequences. It offers an assortment of tempting perks, but they all come with a hefty price tag. And, as will become readily apparent, there was plenty of blame to go around. God would render judgment against all parties involved. He would hold everyone accountable for their actions.

Adam and Eve had been created as God’s image-bearers, but in choosing to disobey God, their ability to mirror His goodness and glory was shattered. On that fateful day, the light of God’s glory diminished in the lives of the two people He had created. Darkness entered the scene once again. Evil entered the garden. And as Os Guinness so aptly put it, “Evil is therefore in essence that which was not supposed to be, a rupture in the cosmic order of things, a cancer whose malignancy has spread to every part of life, a form of red-handed mutiny against life as it was supposed to be” (Os Guinness, *Unspeakable: Facing Up to Evil in an Age of Genocide and Terror*).



## Far As the Curse Is Found

<sup>14</sup> *The Lord God said to the serpent,*

*"Because you have done this,  
cursed are you above all livestock  
and above all beasts of the field;  
on your belly you shall go,  
and dust you shall eat  
all the days of your life.*

<sup>15</sup> *I will put enmity between you and the woman,  
and between your offspring and her offspring;  
he shall bruise your head,  
and you shall bruise his heel."* – Genesis 3:14-15 ESV

Adam and Eve refused to accept responsibility for their actions, choosing instead to cast themselves as innocent victims. Their desire to “like God, knowing good and evil” had not turned out quite the way they had expected. Their newly acquired “intuition,” or what they had believed would be god-like insight, had only left them feeling ashamed, dealing with guilt, and attempting to hide from their Creator.

But their efforts to avert God’s wrath by passing blame and avoiding His presence would prove ineffective. God was not fooled. He knew exactly what had taken place and the role that each participant had played. And He began the deliverance of His righteous retribution by focusing on the one who had instigated the entire affair: The serpent. Addressing the serpent for its role in Eve’s rebellion and Adam’s willful compliance, God pronounced the first of three curses. But before looking at the nature of these curses, it’s important to note that they have a direct correlation to the three blessings that God had pronounced earlier upon His creation.

*So God created great sea creatures and every living thing that scurries and swarms in the water, and every sort of bird—each producing offspring of the same kind. And God saw that it was good. Then God blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply. Let the fish fill the seas, and let the birds multiply on the earth.”* – Genesis 1:21-22 NLT

*So God created human beings in his own image.  
In the image of God he created them;  
male and female he created them.*

*Then God blessed them and said, “Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it. Reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the animals that scurry along the ground.”* – Genesis 1:27-28 NLT

*So the creation of the heavens and the earth and everything in them was completed. On the seventh day God had finished his work of creation, so he rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, because it was the day when he rested from all his work of creation.* – Genesis 2:1-3 NLT

On three separate occasions, God had blessed His creation. He had repeatedly deemed it good and pleasing to His sight. With the forming of the man and woman, God had declared His creation to be “very good.” But in one moment of time, through the deceptive lies of the enemy, God’s good creation had become marred by sin. With Eve’s self-willed decision to become like God, she allowed the darkness of sin to enter her heart and diminish her image-bearing and glory-reflecting capacity as a child of God. And like a contagious disease, her decision had infected her husband and would eventually spread throughout the creation. In a sense, what God had blessed, Adam and Eve had cursed. What had been a purely selfish decision would turn out to have long-lasting and far-spreading implications for the rest of the creative order.

“...morality makes sense only when it is grounded in the personhood of the triune God and the subsequent relationship that his image-bearing creatures have with him. Adam’s sin drove a wedge first and foremost between God and man. Then it severed the harmony between man and man, as well as man and creation.” – Scott Christensen, *What About Evil: A Defense of God’s Sovereign Glory*

According to Herman Bavinck, sin is a “fundamental reversal of all relationships, a revolution by which the creature detached himself from and positioned himself against God, an uprising, a fall in the true sense, which was decisive for the whole world and took it in a direction and on a road away from God” (Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*).

When God had told Adam, “of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat” (Genesis 2:17 ESV), He had meant it. The Creator had given His creation a clear-cut command that He expected to be followed. And it had come with a warning of serious consequences if disobeyed.

*“...for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”* – Genesis 2:17 ESV

Perhaps Adam had no way of processing God’s words. He had no mental category for processing the concept of death because He had never experienced it. Adam was surrounded by living creatures and lived in a garden filled with nothing but signs of abundant life. There is no indication that he had ever seen anything die. It would seem that, in those halcyon days of the pre-fall creation, death played no role. Everything had been blessed by God so that it might be fruitful and multiply. Death is nothing more than the expiration of life.

**“There is no such thing as cold, only lower degrees of heat (or the complete lack of it)....Death is not the opposite of life, but its privation. A cloth can exist without a hole, but the hole cannot exist without the cloth....A shadow in nothing but the obstruction of light – not light, no shadow.” – Randy Alcorn, *If God Is Good: Faith in the Midst of Suffering and Evil***

Satan, disguised in the form of a beautiful and beguiling serpent, had directly refuted the word of God. Adam had clearly heard God say what would happen if he ate the forbidden fruit: “you shall surely die” (Genesis 2:17 ESV). But Satan declared God to be a liar by promising Eve, “You shall not surely die” (Genesis 3:4 ESV). Satan’s denial of God’s word and his denunciation of any punishment for disobeying it would prove to be costly for all the parties involved. And God’s indictments started with him.

*“Because you have done this, you are cursed  
more than all animals, domestic and wild.  
You will crawl on your belly,  
groveling in the dust as long as you live.” – Genesis 3:14 ESV*

First, God curses the serpent for its role in the fall. Whether this creature had been possessed by Satan or the enemy had somehow taken on the form of a serpent, God held it accountable. There are some who believe that, according to this passage, snakes must have had created with legs, but were doomed to crawl on their bellies because of this curse. For the original readers of Moses’ book, the idea of groveling in the dust was intended to convey the idea of humiliation and subjugation. This same imagery is used elsewhere in the Scriptures to convey a defeated and demoralized people.

*For our soul is bowed down to the dust;  
our belly clings to the ground. – Psalm 44:25 ESV*

*The nations shall see and be ashamed of all their might;  
they shall lay their hands on their mouths;  
their ears shall be deaf;  
they shall lick the dust like a serpent,  
like the crawling things of the earth... – Micah 7:16-17 ESV*

But God had far more than humiliation in mind for the serpent. This is where Satan’s nefarious behind-the-scenes role is exposed. He had been the one behind the whole affair, and he would pay dearly for his actions.

*“And I will cause hostility between you and the woman,  
and between your offspring and her offspring.  
He will strike your head,  
and you will strike his heel.” – Genesis 3:15 NLT*

There has never been a love affair between snakes and humanity. But there is far more to this curse than a mutual and perpetual disdain between these two species. God is addressing Satan, and warning him of a future form of retribution that will result in his demise. This passage has been called the protoevangelium or first gospel. In delivering this curse upon Satan, God was declaring His intention to bring about a future seed of the woman who would fulfill the role that Adam had failed to carry out. Adam's participation in the eating of the fruit had brought death to humanity. But there would be a second Adam, who would ultimately defeat death and destroy the enemy. The apostle Paul would later reveal the far-reaching implications of Adam's sin.

*When Adam sinned, sin entered the world. Adam's sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned.* – Romans 5:12 NLT

But Paul clarifies that will be a second Adam, another man, who will bring forgiveness and replace the condemnation of death with the hope of eternal life.

*Now Adam is a symbol, a representation of Christ, who was yet to come. But there is a great difference between Adam's sin and God's gracious gift. For the sin of this one man, Adam, brought death to many. But even greater is God's wonderful grace and his gift of forgiveness to many through this other man, Jesus Christ.* – Romans 5:14-15 NLT

Adam and Eve listened to the lies of the enemy and rebelled against their good and gracious creator, and their capacity for sin was passed down to their descendants. And sin resulted in separation from God – both spiritually and physically. And yet, according to the protoevangelium, God already had a remedy in place.

*For the sin of this one man, Adam, caused death to rule over many. But even greater is God's wonderful grace and his gift of righteousness, for all who receive it will live in triumph over sin and death through this one man, Jesus Christ.*

*Yes, Adam's one sin brings condemnation for everyone, but Christ's one act of righteousness brings a right relationship with God and new life for everyone.* – Romans 5:17-18 NLT

The book of Genesis records the story of how sin entered the world. But as dark and depressing as these opening chapters of God's Word may appear, they are marked by hope. God was not done. He had not been caught off guard or taken by surprise. The actions of Adam and Eve did not cause God to come up with Plan B. The "offspring" of Adam and Eve had been the plan all along. God had always planned to send His Son to pay for the sins of mankind. Even before He had made the world, God had intended to send His Son to be the Savior of the world. The apostle Peter reminds us of the preordained nature of God's redemptive plan when he writes:

*For you know that God paid a ransom to save you from the empty life you inherited from your ancestors. And it was not paid with mere gold or silver, which lose their value. It*

*was the precious blood of Christ, the sinless, spotless Lamb of God. God chose him as your ransom long before the world began, but now in these last days he has been revealed for your sake.* – 1 Peter 1:18-20 NLT

Satan thought he had thrown a wrench into God's plans, but he was wrong. The fall was inevitable because humanity was incapable of remaining faithful to its calling. But God had a plan in place that would restore order, renew His fallen creation, and redeem His disobedient children. And it would all take place through "Christ's one act of righteousness" (Romans 5:18 NLT). The apostle Paul describes the difference between the first and last Adam.

*"The first man, Adam, became a living person." But the last Adam—that is, Christ—is a life-giving Spirit.* – 1 Corinthians 15:45 NLT

Jesus was destined to deliver fallen humanity from death to life, from cursed to blessed, and from the role of the enemy to that of an heir. And the third stanza of the Christmas carol, *Joy to the World*, sums it up well.

*No more let sins and sorrows grow  
nor thorns infest the ground;  
he comes to make his blessings flow  
far as the curse is found,  
far as the curse is found,  
far as, far as the curse is found.*



## A Costly Choice

<sup>16</sup> To the woman he said,

“I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing;  
in pain you shall bring forth children.  
Your desire shall be contrary to your husband,  
but he shall rule over you.”

<sup>17</sup> And to Adam he said,

“Because you have listened to the voice of your wife  
and have eaten of the tree  
of which I commanded you,  
‘You shall not eat of it,’  
cursed is the ground because of you;  
in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life;  
<sup>18</sup> thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you;  
and you shall eat the plants of the field.  
<sup>19</sup> By the sweat of your face  
you shall eat bread,  
till you return to the ground,  
for out of it you were taken;  
for you are dust,  
and to dust you shall return.” – Genesis 3:16-19 ESV

God cursed the serpent and, by extension, Satan, the one who had been behind the entire forbidden fruit incident. But now, He turns His attention to the two VIPs of His creation. Adam and Eve had been formed by the very hand of God and given the exclusive privilege of bearing His image. Not only that, but they had also been given the distinctive responsibility to act as God's vice-regents, ruling over and caring for all that He had made. They were to have been stewards over the vast and diverse earthly domain God had created.

Eve had succumbed to the serpent's temptation and eaten the fruit of the one tree God had decreed as off-limits. And it wasn't so much the act of fruit consumption that got Eve in trouble. It was the motivation behind the act. When Eve heard the serpent promise that eating the fruit would not lead to death, she had believed him.

*The woman was convinced. She saw that the tree was beautiful and its fruit looked delicious, and she wanted the wisdom it would give her. So she took some of the fruit and ate it.* – Genesis 3:6 NLT

Eve was out to satiate a hunger that had nothing to do with food. She wanted to “be like God, knowing both good and evil” (Genesis 3:5 NLT). Eve's brief exchange with the serpent had left

her with a seemingly insatiable desire for sovereignty and autonomy. Eve didn't suffer from a vitamin D deficiency. She wasn't born with a forbidden fruit fetish. No, she had an authority problem. She wanted to be in control. And it seems that her mate shared her predisposition for independence and self-rule because he quickly joined her in eating the fruit. And, according to the book of James, they had no one to blame but themselves.

*And remember, when you are being tempted, do not say, "God is tempting me." God is never tempted to do wrong, and he never tempts anyone else. Temptation comes from our own desires, which entice us and drag us away. These desires give birth to sinful actions. And when sin is allowed to grow, it gives birth to death. – James 1:13-15 NLT*

This raises a somewhat disconcerting question. Why did God place the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the garden in the first place? It seems that, in so doing, God provided a form of "temptation" for Adam and Eve. It seems only logical that had the tree not been there in the first place, Eve would not have been tempted to eat of its fruit. But this is an overly simplistic deduction. According to the Westminister Confession of Faith, God had preordained the potential for sin because He had also preordained the solution to the problem it would cause.

Our first parents, begin seduced by the subtlety and temptations of Satan, sinned in eating the forbidden fruit. This their sin God was pleased, according to His wise and holy counsel, to permit, having purposed to order it to His own glory. – *Westminster Confession of Faith, 6:1*

By placing the tree in the garden, God established a test, but not a temptation. Notice what the text states about the tree and its fruit.

*...the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes... – Genesis 3:6 ESV*

There was nothing inherently wrong with the quality of the fruit. It was not poisonous or potentially deadly. In fact, after Adam and Eve ate the fruit, they remained fully alive. Satan had been partially correct when he stated, "You will not surely die" (Genesis 3:4 ESV). The tree and its fruit were not the problems. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil was not, in and of itself, evil. It was as holy and pure as any other tree that God had placed in the garden. But God had set it apart and declared it off-limits to Adam and Eve. He deemed one tree as forbidden. And that one tree would become a test of Adam and Eve's obedience. Would they obey God's command and refrain from eating the fruit of that one tree? God knew the answer to that question because He had already come up with the solution to the problem it would cause. As was revealed in God's curse of the serpent, He had already pre-ordained the coming of the offspring who would eventually bruise the serpent's head.

God had created the universe and all that it contained, and He had declared it all to be "very good." Then He had placed Adam and Eve in that perfectly holy and sinless environment. Hermann Bavinck provides us with a somewhat head-scratching analysis of the situation in which Adam and Eve found themselves.

"The possibility of sinning is from God. The idea of sin was first conceived in his mind. God eternally conceived sin as his absolute polar opposite and thus, in that sense, included it in his decree, or else it would never have been able to arise and exist in reality. It was not Satan, nor Adam and Eve, who first conceived of the idea of sin; God himself as it were made it visible to their eyes. By means of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and the probationary command, he clearly showed human beings the two roads they could take. And before the fall he even permitted an evil power from without to insinuate itself into Paradise, using the snake as its medium, and to discuss with Eve the meaning of the probationary command. There is therefore no doubt that God willed the possibility of sin." – Hermann Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*

Notice his emphasis that God "willed the *possibility* of sin." God did not force Adam and Eve to eat the fruit. They made that decision on their own. God had provided them with more than enough food options to fulfill their daily nutritional requirements. But they wanted the one thing they were told they could not have. They made a choice. In choosing the forbidden fruit they were really choosing to doubt and disobey God. Their decision revealed their unwillingness to trust God and submit to His will for their lives.

God had created Adam and Eve with the capacity for reason and self-determination. They were not automatons, operating by pure animal instinct. Created in God's image, they bore an intelligence unequaled by any other living creature. They could speak, discern, process information, and make rational decisions. In other words, they had the ability to choose what they would do. Built into the kingdom mandate God had given Adam and Eve was the possibility that they might decide to disobey it. He had commanded them to be fruitful and multiply. But they could have chosen to disobey that command. The rest of the creative order procreated according to instinct. The other living creatures lacked the God-given capacity to think for themselves.

They did as God had designed them to do. But Adam and Eve had been equipped with the God-ordained capacity to obey or disobey.

And because they had chosen to exercise their option to disobey, they were doomed to suffer the consequences. The painful lesson Adam and Eve learned that fateful day was that, as finite creatures, they were completely dependent upon God for their very existence. They owed Him their lives and they were reliant upon Him for all their needs. And yet, they had chosen autonomy over dependency – a decision that would cost them dearly.

God communicated His displeasure with Eve by explaining the "fruit" of her sin.

*"I will sharpen the pain of your pregnancy,  
and in pain you will give birth.  
And you will desire to control your husband,  
but he will rule over you."* – Genesis 3:16 NLT

From this point forward, the woman would find obedience to God's command to be fruitful and multiply marked by pain and suffering. And the complementary and co-equal relationship God had given her and Adam would be replaced by a competitive and sometimes combative spirit. With the introduction of sin, the "one flesh" nature of the husband-and-wife relationship would be difficult to maintain. Selfishness would replace the symbiosis God had originally planned for marriage.

But God saved His harshest words and strongest punishment for Adam. Because Adam had chosen to listen to his wife and eat of the fruit that God had forbidden, he would find his role as steward of God's creation to become a burden rather than a blessing.

*"Since you listened to your wife and ate from the tree  
whose fruit I commanded you not to eat,  
the ground is cursed because of you.  
All your life you will struggle to scratch a living from it."* – Genesis 3:17 NLT

God had always intended for Adam to labor. Work was always intended to be a blessing, not a curse.

*The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.* – Genesis 2:15 ESV

But because Adam chose to disobey God, he would find His God-ordained mandate to be burdensome and back-breaking. God actually cursed the ground, causing it to sprout thorns and thistles. Planting would become difficult. Harvesting would be hit or miss. The ground would still provide the food man needed, but it would not release its bounty easily. God warned Adam:

*"By the sweat of your brow  
will you have food to eat  
until you return to the ground  
from which you were made.  
For you were made from dust,  
and to dust you will return."* – Genesis 3:19 NLT

For the first time since God placed Adam in the garden, He reveals the invading presence of death. He had warned Adam that eating the fruit of the forbidden tree would result in death. But the fruit would not be the source of Adam's demise. His body would now suffer the consequences of living in a fallen world where the ravages of time and toil would take their toll. Man, whom God had formed from the dust of the ground would return to from whence he came. The breath of life would be removed, and his body would be returned to its original state.

This section of the creation narrative paints a bleak and sobering picture. And with it, Moses provides the backdrop for all that will follow. The rest of the book will detail the subsequent and far-reaching ramifications of that one fateful decision. Sin had entered the world and its influence would be felt for generations to come.



## Banned For Life

<sup>20</sup> *The man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living.* <sup>21</sup> *And the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them.*

<sup>22</sup> *Then the Lord God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever—"*

<sup>23</sup> *therefore the Lord God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken.* <sup>24</sup> *He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.* — Genesis 3:20-24 ESV

Up until this point in the story, the woman, whom God had fashioned from and given to the man, remained nameless. The man, אָדָם ('ādām), had given her the more generic name of “woman.” The Hebrew word, נָשָׁה ('isšâ), carries the sense that she was the “opposite of man.” Genesis 5 reveals that immediately after creating the man and woman, God had referred to them as Adam ('ādām).

*Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and named them Man ('ādām) when they were created.* — Genesis 5:1-2 ESV

God called them “humanity” or “mankind.” He had always intended for there to be more of them. They were simply the first two who would multiply and fill the land with more of their kind – more “humanity” made in the likeness of God.

But, in the immediate aftermath of the fall, Adam decided to provide his mate with a name.

*The man called his wife's name Eve...* — Genesis 3:20 ESV

In Hebrew, her new name was הַעֲדָה (ha'âdâh), which means “life” or “living.” Although God had placed a curse upon the woman, there was still hope. While she was doomed to experience pain during childbirth, she would still be able to fulfill God’s kingdom mandate to “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth” (Genesis 1:28 ESV). And, in naming his wife, Eve, Adam displayed his belief that God was not done with them yet. They had violated the one prohibition God had given them, and yet, He was still going to graciously allow them to keep His command to fill the earth. Their decision to eat the forbidden fruit had not destroyed their ability to be fruitful and, for that, Adam was grateful.

Moses provides his readers with a brief note of explanation concerning Eve’s new name.

*The man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living...* — Genesis 3:20 ESV

In Hebrew, there is a clever wordplay going on in this verse. The name “Eve” (*haūâ*) is pronounced *khavvah* in Hebrew. It sounds remarkably similar to the Hebrew word for “living” (*hay*), which is pronounced *khah'-ee*. In a sense, Moses is stating that Eve’s God-given destiny would be that of “life-giver.” Though flawed and broken, she would be the vessel through whom God would bring the “offspring” who would bruise the head of Satan (Genesis 3:15 ESV).

The apostle Paul provides a compelling description of those who have placed their faith in Christ, and it could easily apply to Eve in her fallen—but-not-forgotten state.

*But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed... – 2 Corinthians 4:7-9 ESV*

Eve was a damaged clay jar and, yet, God was going to use her to bring about the ultimate solution to the problem she had helped to create. Adam and Eve had rebelled against a gracious and holy God. They had violated His command and directly disregarded His good and perfect will for them. But God had known from the very beginning that this would be their fate. He had already made provisions for their failure of faith. The fall of man should never be viewed as a wrench thrown by Satan into the well-tuned engine of creation. The Scriptures teach that this entire scenario had been pre-ordained by God “from before the foundation” of the world. He had made plans for it.

In the high-priestly prayer that Jesus offered up to His Father on the night He would be betrayed, He alluded to God’s pre-determined plan.

*Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me **before the foundation of the world.** – John 17:24 ESV*

Jesus had always enjoyed an eternal relationship with the Father. It had not begun on the night He was born in Bethlehem. He had been sent to earth by His Father to accomplish a very important mission, and the details of that mission had been developed long before God created the universe. The apostle Peter reminded his fellow believers of the unique and unbelievable nature of this pre-creation plan of God.

*...you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. **He was foreknown before the foundation of the world** but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you... – 1 Peter 1:18-20 ESV*

It had always been God's plan to send His Son as the sinless sacrificial lamb to pay the debt incurred by mankind ('ādām) at the fall. And the apostle Paul picks up on this theme in his letter to the believers living in Ephesus.

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will... – Ephesians 1:3-5 ESV*

Over and over, we read that God had planned all this "before the foundation of the world." In other words, long before He created the universe or had formed man out of the dust of the ground, God had a well-developed and infallible plan prepared for dealing with the inevitable fall of mankind.

"To put it very simply, the Cross of Christ was not an ambulance sent to a wreck. Christ was the Lamb who was slain before the foundation of the world because God knew all the time that Vernon McGee would need a Savior, and He loved him enough to provide that Savior." – J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible: Genesis through Revelation*

We know that the sin of Adam and Eve had serious consequences.

*When Adam sinned, sin entered the world. Adam's sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned. – Romans 5:12 NLT*

Paul goes on to note that "everyone died—from the time of Adam to the time of Moses" (Romans 5:14 NLT). God had cursed the first man and woman with death.

*"By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return." – Genesis 4:19 ESV*

In Romans 6:23, Paul records that "the wages of sin is death." And he pulls no punches in assigning the ultimate blame for this problem.

*For the sin of this one man, Adam, **brought death** to many. – Romans 5:15 NLT*

*Adam's sin **led to condemnation**... – Romans 5:16 NLT*

*For the sin of this one man, Adam, **caused death to rule over many**. – Romans 5:17 NLT*

*Adam's one sin **brings condemnation for everyone**... – Romans 5:18 NLT*

*Because one person disobeyed God, **many became sinners**. – Romans 5:19 NLT*

Paul is relentless. He heaps all the responsibility on Adam. And yet, we know from the Genesis account that “the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate” (Genesis 3:6 ESV). And, in his first letter to Timothy, Paul acknowledges Eve’s primary role in bringing sin and death into the world.

*For God made Adam first, and afterward he made Eve. And it was not Adam who was deceived by Satan. The woman was deceived, and sin was the result. – 1 Timothy 2:13-14 NLT*

They were both guilty. All mankind (*‘ādām*) stood before God as condemned and deserving of death. But Paul went on to write, “women will be saved through childbearing” (1 Timothy 2:15 NLT). This is most likely a reference to the fact that childbirth can be a death-like experience, bringing intense pain and suffering, but resulting in new life. Adam, all by himself, would have only death to look forward to. But because God had given him Eve, there would always be the hope of new life and the continuation of the human species.

God was not done with Adam and Eve. In fact, Moses reveals that God replaced their hand-made garments of leaves with “garments of skins” (Genesis 3:21 ESV). There is a foreboding sense to this verse. The Hebrew word for “skins” refers to the hide of an animal. What this somewhat innocuous-sounding verse conveys is that a sacrifice had been made. Blood had been spilled. An innocent animal had been slain in order to cover the shame and sin of two guilty humans. This entire event foreshadows a divine reality that would be canonized in God’s Law.

*...according to the law of Moses, nearly everything was purified with blood. For without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness. – Hebrews 9:22 NLT*

And it would also be modeled in the sacrifice of “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29 NLT).

But while properly clothed with the sacrificial garments provided by God, Adam and Eve still stood in a state of fallenness. The author of Hebrews reminds us “it is not possible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (Hebrews 10:4 NLT). Adam and Eve still stood condemned before God. The animal God had sacrificed to make their garments had not cleansed them from their guilt or alleviated their sense of shame. Those things would remain with them till death and be passed on to their progeny. Again, the author of Hebrews describes the inadequate nature of animal sacrifices to fix mankind’s problem.

*If they could have provided perfect cleansing, the sacrifices would have stopped, for the worshipers would have been purified once for all time, and their feelings of guilt would have disappeared. – Hebrews 10:2 NLT*

The next phase of God's judgment of Adam and Eve came in the form of their expulsion from the garden.

*...the Lord God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken.* – Genesis 3:23 ESV

And Moses provides the reason for their ban from the very place God had created for them.

*"Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever..."* – Genesis 3:22  
ESV

God had given them the freedom to eat of any tree found in the garden, save one. That means they had full access and permission to eat of the tree of life. It seems that the tree of life had been provided as a source of eternal sustenance. As long as they ate it, they would live. But, in contrast, if they ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they would die. It's interesting to note that the tree of life appears again in the book of Revelation. John was given a vision of the New Jerusalem, the place God will provide as humanity's future home – the eternal residence of all those who place their faith in the Lamb of God.

*Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.* – Revelation 22:1-2  
ESV

The tree of life reappears and, once again, it will be a source of life. But in Adam and Eve's fallen state, God did not want them to eat of the tree of life and "live forever." So, He ordered them out of the garden and then stationed angelic sentries to deny them any further access. And thus begins what will become an ongoing theme of man's perpetual movement away from God and His presence. The rest of the book of Genesis will chronicle mankind's steady migration from the beauty of the garden and into the world.



## The Curse Conceived

<sup>1</sup> Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, “I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord.” <sup>2</sup> And again, she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground. <sup>3</sup> In the course of time Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground, <sup>4</sup> and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, <sup>5</sup> but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell. <sup>6</sup> The Lord said to Cain, “Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? <sup>7</sup> If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it.” – Genesis 4:1-7 ESV

God had banned Adam and Eve from the garden, but He had not stripped them of their divine mandate to rule over His creation as His vice-regents.

*Then God blessed them and said, “Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it. Reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the animals that scurry along the ground.”* – Genesis 2:28 NLT

Even in their fallen condition, their ability to procreate remained intact. They were still free to produce more of their kind and fill the earth. But it will soon become evident that their capacity to reproduce would result in far more than pain in childbirth for Eve. The fruit of Eve’s womb would result in a harvest of sorrow and suffering as one of the lingering and all-pervasive side effects of sin began to manifest itself. Yet, chapter four opens up on a seemingly positive note.

*Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain...* – Genesis 4:1 ESV

The *New Living Translation* puts a bit less poetically.

*Now Adam had sexual relations with his wife, Eve, and she became pregnant.* – Genesis 4:1 NLT

The first couple began a family and gave birth to their first child, a son, whom Eve named Cain. There is an interesting and somewhat controversial debate over exactly what Eve meant when she declared the name of her son. The English Standard Version translates it as “I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord.” But the *New English Translation* provides a distinctively different take:

*“I have created a man just as the Lord did!”* – Genesis 4:1 NET

The reason for this disparity has to do with the Hebrew words Moses used to record her statement. The English phrase “I have gotten” is one word in Hebrew – קָנָה (*qanah*), and it has a variety of meanings, including “to get, to acquire, or to create.” When pronounced in Hebrew, it sounds similar to Cain’s name – קַיִן (*qayin*). It would seem, considering the context of the

creation account and Eve's original desire to be "like God," that she is displaying a bit of hubris over her life-giving power. In essence, she is declaring her god-like capacity to create life *ex nihilo* (out of nothing), just as God had done. That is what leads her to exclaim, "I have created a man just as the Lord did!"

The English Standard Version translates the Hebrew preposition, תְּאֵן ('et) as "with the help of the Lord." But it could just as easily be translated as "along with," which would give it a more comparative meaning. In a sense, Eve is expressing that, due to her ability to create life, she bears a likeness to God. They have this one thing "in common": The ability to create life. This interpretation of the verse makes much more sense considering the context of all that has happened thus far in the narrative, and all that will happen in the verses that follow.

Cain's name means "possession," and it would seem that Eve believed her son belonged to her. She had created him and, therefore, he was her possession. But it would not be long before Eve realized the folly of that assumption. Cain would grow to be a self-possessed young man who had inherited his parent's predilection for autonomy and self-rule. He would be owned by no one, including God.

Not long after the birth of Cain, Adam and Eve welcomed a second son into the world, whom they named Abel – הַבָּل (hebel). In Hebrew, his name carries a somewhat ominous and foreboding character. It can be translated as "breath," but also as "vapor" or "vanity." It seems likely that Eve had a more positive thought in mind when she named her second child, but there is a prophetic character to her words. As will become readily evident from the context, Abel's life will be short-lived. His "breath" will abruptly cease due to the possessive nature of his brother, Cain.

As Moses prepares his readers for what is to come, he provides them with a brief description of the two brothers.

*Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground.* – Genesis 4:2 ESV

Moses provides no decisive chronology in the text. There is no indication as to the age of the two brothers when this event took place, but both are old enough to share in the responsibility to care for God's creation. It's important to note that, of the two brothers, Cain was actually doing exactly what God had originally commanded his father to do.

*The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.* – Genesis 2:15 ESV

Each brother was carrying out God's mandate to "have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth" (Genesis 1:28 ESV). Abel had become a shepherd. Cain had become a farmer. Moses makes no attempt to compare one to the other or to give any sense of superiority to either man's choice of occupation. They were both doing the will of God.

But at some point in time, both brothers made the decision to bring an offering to God. Nowhere in the text does it indicate that God required this of them. It simply states, “In the course of time Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions” (Genesis 4:3-4 ESV).

Both men brought an “offering” – מִנְחָה (*minhâh*). This is a rather generic term that could include any type of gift or tribute. There is nothing to suggest that God had demanded a particular type of offering. As will soon become evident, the problem lie not in the nature of the offering but in the heart of the giver. Moses points out that “the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard” (Genesis 4:4-5 ESV). Another way to put this is that God accepted one brother and his gift while rejecting the other. Cain got snubbed by God. But why? What was the problem?

The author of Hebrews provides us with insight into what happened that day.

*By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commanding him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks.* – Hebrews 11:4 ESV

It seems that the sole differentiator between the two sacrifices was the faith of the two brothers. One exhibited faith while the other did not. But how is that displayed in the context of Genesis 4? To understand what is going on, one must take a close look at what the two brothers brought to God. The nature of their gift reveals the character of their faith.

Cain brought “an offering of the fruit of the ground” (Genesis 4:3 ESV). Moses doesn’t elaborate as to the nature of the “fruit,” but simply reveals that it came from the ground. It could have been some form of grain, grapes, figs, or even olives. Cain was a horticulturalist, so he brought a portion of what he had raised. But Abel brought “the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions” (Genesis 4:4 ESV). This phrase could just as easily be translated as “from the fattest of the firstborn of the flock” (NET Bible Study Notes). There is nothing to indicate that Abel offered a blood sacrifice. At this stage in man’s relationship with God, there had been no decree given that required the death of an animal as some form of atonement. These were both meant to be offerings of gratitude to God for His goodness and provision.

But what stands out is that Abel offered up the fattest of the firstborn of his flock. And when he gave these animals to God, they became the Lord’s possession. Abel was making a permanent commitment of his most prized possessions. Once given to God, they would no longer be available to Abel for food, breeding, or the manufacture of wool for clothing. He was giving up a prime source of future sustenance. In so doing, he was committing his future care to God. He would no longer have those animals as resources on which to rely. That is why the author of Hebrews described Abel’s offering as “a more acceptable sacrifice.” His gift was an outward expression of faith, displaying his determination to trust God for his future well-being.

Yet Cain gave God a *portion* of his produce. In other words, he offered God some of the fruit his plants had produced. But notice that he did not give God the *plants* themselves. Cain did not give God his best fruit-bearing tree or most productive vine. There was no ultimate sacrifice of future fruit-bearing potential. He still had all his trees, crops, and vines. Whatever he gave up could be easily replaced with the next harvest. So, in a sense, Cain was placing his faith in his own fruit-producing capabilities. He would meet his own needs. Cain exhibited his proclivity for self-sustenance and autonomy. He was not going to give to God what he believed to be rightfully his.

So, when God rejected his offering, Cain grew hot under the collar. He literally burned with anger. This response reveals a lot about Cain's inner disposition. He had expected God to bless him on his own terms. Yet God had rejected his self-prescribed offering. Moses doesn't reveal how God displayed His favor for one and not the other. But it is clear that Cain knew his offering had not measured up to God's expectations. What he failed to comprehend was that his heart was the problem. So, God asked him, "Why are you so angry?...Why do you look so dejected?" (Genesis 4:6 NLT). And then God followed up His questions with the following lesson on godly living in a fallen world.

*"You will be accepted if you do what is right. But if you refuse to do what is right, then watch out! Sin is crouching at the door, eager to control you. But you must subdue it and be its master."* – Genesis 4:7 NLT

God wanted Cain to know that acceptance by God was based on faithful obedience to His will and humble reliance upon His provision. Cain needed to need God. But he desired self-reliance and self-sufficiency. He wanted to be the master of his own fate. And God warned him that the path of autonomy would never lead to self-control. It would always result in slavery to sin and captivity to the flesh. The apostle John would later explain what was at the root of Cain's problem.

*We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous.* – 1 John 3:12 ESV

Cain was already under the mastery of sin, and his behavior reflected the scope of his captivity. He was a man trapped and controlled by evil. And it would not be long before his anger turned more violent and deadly.

## Innocent Blood Spilled

<sup>8</sup> Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him. <sup>9</sup> Then the Lord said to Cain, “Where is Abel your brother?” He said, “I do not know; am I my brother’s keeper?” <sup>10</sup> And the Lord said, “What have you done? The voice of your brother’s blood is crying to me from the ground. <sup>11</sup> And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand. <sup>12</sup> When you work the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength. You shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth.” <sup>13</sup> Cain said to the Lord, “My punishment is greater than I can bear. <sup>14</sup> Behold, you have driven me today away from the ground, and from your face I shall be hidden. I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me.” <sup>15</sup> Then the Lord said to him, “Not so! If anyone kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold.” And the Lord put a mark on Cain, lest any who found him should attack him. <sup>16</sup> Then Cain went away from the presence of the Lord and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden. – Genesis 4:8-16 ESV

As a child of Adam and Eve, Cain had inherited the mandate given to them by God. Like his mother and father, he was to “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion...” (Genesis 1:28 ESV). The Hebrew word for dominion is רְדָא (rādâ), and it conveys the idea of rule or reign. God had created mankind with the expectation that they would rule over and care for the world He had created for them. That capacity to serve as His designated caretakers was to reflect their close association with Him. They bore His image.

*Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” – Genesis 1:26 ESV*

But once sin entered the world, man’s ability to reflect the glory of God became dimmed and diminished. At the core of man’s problem was the desire to rule according to his own standards. By eating the forbidden fruit, Eve had fulfilled her longing to be like God, knowing good from evil. She sought autonomy, the freedom to run her own life on her own terms. But she soon found out that she couldn’t even “rule over” her base desires. “She saw that the tree was beautiful and its fruit looked delicious, and she wanted the wisdom it would give her. So she took some of the fruit and ate it” (Genesis 3:6 NLT).

Now, her first-born son, Cain, finds himself struggling with his own incapacity to control his inner desires. After having his offering rejected by God, Cain became filled with rage and consumed by bitter jealousy against his brother, Abel. And God warned him, “sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you, but **you must rule over it**” (Genesis 4:7 ESV).

God described sin as a deadly predator, waiting to pounce on its unsuspecting prey. And Peter would later describe Satan in similar terms.

*Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. Stand firm against him, and be strong in your faith.*  
– 1 Peter 5:8-9 NLT

It's interesting to note that God told Cain he must "rule over" sin. The Hebrew word is מָשָׁל (*māšal*), and it means "to rule, have dominion, reign." Like the rest of creation, this deadly "beast" crouching at Cain's door should have been under his dominion. Cain had been given "dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth" (Genesis 1:26 ESV).

But as the story unfolds, it becomes clear that Cain had no ability to control the raging beast that crouched outside the door of his heart. Rather than be the subduer, he would become subdued and find his life consumed by the "desires" תְּשֻׁקָּה (*təš'ûqâ*) of sin. What happens next is the first recorded occurrence of premeditated murder.

*One day Cain suggested to his brother, "Let's go out into the fields." And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother, Abel, and killed him.* – Genesis 4:8 NLT

The oldest extant manuscripts of the book of Genesis (Smr, LXX, Vulgate, and Syriac) record this brief but extremely insightful statement from Cain to his brother Abel. He had a plan in mind. Sin had already consumed his heart and was had taken full control of his faculties. At that moment, he had become a slave to sin. Any hope he had of experiencing autonomy and the free expression of his will was gone. It was Jesus who told the self-righteous Pharisees, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin" (John 8:34 ESV).

And the apostle Paul echoed the words of Jesus when he warned the believers in Rome, "Don't you realize that you become the slave of whatever you choose to obey? You can be a slave to sin, which leads to death, or you can choose to obey God, which leads to righteous living" (Romans 6:16 NLT). Then Peter provides another sobering statement regarding sin: "whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved" (2 Peter 2:19 ESV). The proof of these words is lived out in the life of Cain.

*And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him.* – Genesis 4:8 ESV

The text provides no indication as to how much time had passed since Cain's offering had been rejected by God and his decision to commit this heinous crime. But enough time had passed for him to calm down and regain control of his overheated emotions. Yet, instead, Cain had grown increasingly more incensed over the rejection of his offering and what appeared to be his brother's favored status with God. So, he took matters into his own hands and made a determination to eliminate the competition. In taking his brother's life, Cain exhibited his desire to "like God, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:5 ESV). He had designated himself the sole arbiter of right and wrong. Cain had become the judge, jury, and executioner. And it's interesting to note that, at his birth, Cain's mother had declared, "I have created a man just as

the Lord did!" (Genesis 4:1 NET). She had taken credit for giving her son life. Now, that very same son had given himself the prerogative to take life. Cain spilled the innocent blood of his brother.

And, once again, God steps into the scene, posing a simple, yet illuminating question.

*"Where is Abel your brother?" – Genesis 4:9 ESV*

God was not looking for information. He was seeking a confession. He wanted Cain to take responsibility for his egregious actions. But instead, Cain feigns ignorance and displays a fair amount of insolence.

*"I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?" – Genesis 4:10 ESV*

Cain's response to God is filled with irreverence and pride. He displays no fear of or respect for the Almighty. In fact, he actually questions God's divine capacity to care for His own creation. By stating, "am I my brother's keeper," Cain was suggesting that the guardianship of Abel was God's responsibility, not his. In a way, Cain was blaming God for Abel's death. He was accusing the Almighty of failing to keep track of His own creation.

But, unwilling to play Cain's little game of rhetoric, God posited a second question: "What have you done?" (Genesis 4:10 ESV). Once again, God is not asking for insight or information. He knew exactly what had happened and why. This question was meant to cause Cain to consider the ramifications of his actions. In Cain's mind, with the killing of his brother, he had accomplished his objective. But now, God was letting this overconfident, self-obsessed man know that his actions would have long-lasting and devastating consequences.

*"Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground! Now you are cursed and banished from the ground, which has swallowed your brother's blood. No longer will the ground yield good crops for you, no matter how hard you work! From now on you will be a homeless wanderer on the earth." – Genesis 4:10-11 NLT*

As the sins of man increase, so does the intensity of God's curse. This indictment from God against Cain and his descendants is an extension of the curse God had leveled against Adam.

*"...cursed is the ground because of you;  
in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life;  
thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you;  
and you shall eat the plants of the field.  
By the sweat of your face  
you shall eat bread..." – Genesis 3:17-19 ESV*

Because of Adam's sin, God had cursed the ground. But now, God was cursing Cain and banishing him from the ground. This man, who had been "a worker of the ground" (Genesis 4:2

ESV) and had “brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground” (Genesis 4:3 ESV), would now find the ground unproductive and unfruitful. The one who had placed all his faith in his capacity to provide for himself would now be ejected from the very land that had met his needs. He was cast out.

Just as Adam and Eve had been banished from the garden because of their disobedience, Cain was exiled from his family because of the murder of his brother. He was cast adrift and doomed to “be a homeless wanderer on the earth” (Genesis 4:12 NET). In murdering his brother, Cain had destroyed his relationship with his mother and father. He had forfeited his right to benefit from the bounty of God’s creation. This imagery of being cast from the land is found throughout the Old Testament. In the book of Leviticus, God provided Moses with a series of sober warnings concerning the land of Canaan, the land of milk and honey that He was giving to the people of Israel as their inheritance.

*“So do not defile the land and give it a reason to vomit you out...” – Leviticus 18:28 NLT*

Cain had defiled the land by spilling his brother’s blood. Now, he was having to pay for it. And, in a statement of regret, but not repentance, Cain declared his punishment to be more than he could handle.

*“My punishment is greater than I can bear.” – Genesis 4:13 ESV*

Cain feared retribution. He distinctively knew that there might be payback for his crime against Abel. But God assured Cain that his punishment would be far more difficult than death at the hands of an avenger. God was going to spare Cain and allow him to live with his guilt and condemnation for the rest of his life. In a rather strange turn of events, God pledges to become Cain’s “keeper.” In His infinite grace and mercy, God would spare the murderer and prolong his life. He would protect the guilty one who had chosen to take the life of the innocent one. And all of this points to the coming of a future Son of God whose innocent blood would be spilled so that condemned sinners might find life.

*For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood. This sacrifice shows that God was being fair when he held back and did not punish those who sinned in times past, for he was looking ahead and including them in what he would do in this present time. God did this to demonstrate his righteousness, for he himself is fair and just, and he makes sinners right in his sight when they believe in Jesus. – Romans 3:25-26 NLT*

## The Bearer of Bad Fruit

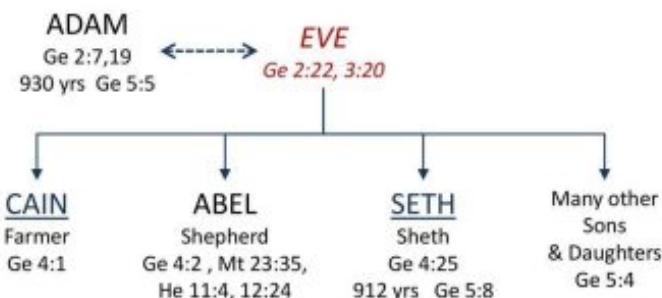
<sup>17</sup> Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch. When he built a city, he called the name of the city after the name of his son, Enoch. <sup>18</sup> To Enoch was born Irad, and Irad fathered Mehujael, and Mehujael fathered Methushael, and Methushael fathered Lamech. <sup>19</sup> And Lamech took two wives. The name of the one was Adah, and the name of the other Zillah. <sup>20</sup> Adah bore Jabal; he was the father of those who dwell in tents and have livestock. <sup>21</sup> His brother's name was Jubal; he was the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe. <sup>22</sup> Zillah also bore Tubal-cain; he was the forger of all instruments of bronze and iron. The sister of Tubal-cain was Naamah.

<sup>23</sup> Lamech said to his wives:

“Adah and Zillah, hear my voice;  
you wives of Lamech, listen to what I say:  
I have killed a man for wounding me,  
a young man for striking me.  
<sup>24</sup> If Cain's revenge is sevenfold,  
then Lamech's is seventy-sevenfold.”

<sup>25</sup> And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and called his name Seth, for she said, “God has appointed for me another offspring instead of Abel, for Cain killed him.” <sup>26</sup> To Seth also a son was born, and he called his name Enosh. At that time people began to call upon the name of the Lord. – Genesis 4:17-26 ESV

Adam → Cain / Abel / Seth



One of the key themes found in the opening chapters of the book of Genesis is that of fruitfulness. God expected His creation, both plant and animal, to multiply and spread across the face of the earth.

*The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind. – Genesis 1:12 ESV*

It would appear from the preceding verse, that God started the entire process with plants that grew from seeds. In other words, the plants didn't suddenly appear as fully grown and mature specimens.

*Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed... – Genesis 1:11 ESV*

The Hebrew word Moses used is נִזְתַּח (dāšā'), and it means “to sprout, to cause to shoot forth.” God created the seeds, planted them in the ground, and then caused them to grow. It is likely that the whole process took place in record time as God miraculously sped up the entire growth cycle.

When it came to the living creatures, God created them *ex nihilo* – out of nothing – forming them as fully grown and completely mature. It was necessary to create the adult male and female of each species for them to procreate and make more of their own kind. But while God made only one male and one female human, He appears to have made countless living creatures.

*“Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the heavens.”* – Genesis 1:20 ESV

*“Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds—livestock and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds.”* – Genesis 1:24 ESV

And in both cases, God commanded all the living creatures to “be fruitful and multiply” (Genesis 1:22 ESV). They were to fill the seas, the sky, and the earth with more of their kind. And Adam and Eve were given the same mandate, which they faithfully obeyed. The first couple used their God-ordained gift of procreation to produce two sons: Cain and Abel. Eve’s earlier decision to disobey God and eat the forbidden fruit had not impaired her own fruit-bearing capacity. But according to the curse God placed on Eve and her female descendants, childbirth would always be accompanied by pain. And, in the case of Eve, her fruitfulness was accompanied by the unexpected specter of death, as her firstborn son went on to kill his younger brother. She and Adam had faithfully multiplied their kind, but in taking the life of his innocent brother, Cain had committed an act of treacherous subtraction. From this point forward, life and fruitfulness would be accompanied by death and barrenness. Sin had entered the scene and nothing would be the same anymore. The creation had been marred. And as the book of Genesis unfolds, the darkness that had once held sway would return.

Even Cain, the convicted murderer, was capable of producing more of his own kind. One of the questions that always comes up at this point of the creation story is “Where did Cain find a wife?” According to Genesis 5:4, Adam and Eve “had other sons and daughters.” So, it would seem that Cain eventually ended up marrying one of his own sisters. While God would later ban such inter-family relationships (Leviticus 18:9), there was no such prohibition at this time. God had clearly intended for Adam and Eve’s descendants to intermarry and populate the planet.

Cain’s wife proved fruitful and bore him a son, whom Cain named Enoch. And then the text provides an interesting aside, stating that Cain built a city, which he named after his son. This decision to construct a city in which to dwell appears to fly in the face of the curse that God had placed on Cain.

*“Now you are cursed and banished from the ground, which has swallowed your brother’s blood. No longer will the ground yield good crops for you, no matter how hard you work! From now on you will be a homeless wanderer on the earth.” – Genesis 4:11-12 NLT*

Cain decided to ignore God’s curse and built himself a permanent home. And it was in this location that his son carried on the divine mandate and made more of “their kind.”

*Enoch had a son named Irad. Irad became the father of Mehujael. Mehujael became the father of Methushael. Methushael became the father of Lamech. – Genesis 4:18 ESV*

This one simple sentence contains five generations of Cainites. This branch of Adam’s family tree proved to be fruitful in more ways than one. Not only did they procreate, but they proved to be creative. Lamech’s son, Jubal, became “the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe” (Genesis 4:21 ESV). His other son, Tubal-Cain, became a “forger of all instruments of bronze and iron” (Genesis 4:22 ESV).

Mankind was not only expanding but exploring all the myriad possibilities available to it as God’s vice-regents. They display a divinely sanctioned enablement for ingenuity and creativity that was unavailable to the rest of the living creatures. Humanity, made in the image of God, was capable of accomplishing great things. But because of the fall, man’s capacity for good would always be accompanied by a penchant for evil. According to the apostle Paul, the sin of Adam was passed down from generation to generation.

*For the sin of this one man, Adam, brought death to many. – Romans 5:15 NLT*

*Yes, Adam’s one sin brings condemnation for everyone... – Romans 5:18 NLT*

Every child born to Adam and Eve came into the world bearing their proclivity for sin and rebellion. And it hadn’t taken long for Cain to exhibit his inherited propensity for evil. And some six generations later, Lamech would display a striking resemblance to his ancient forebearer. He would follow in his patriarch’s footsteps, committing yet another act of fruit-less-ness. Lamech would boastfully brag about his murder of an adversary.

*“I have killed a man who attacked me,  
a young man who wounded me.  
If someone who kills Cain is punished seven times,  
then the one who kills me will be punished seventy-seven times!” – Genesis 4:23-24  
NLT*

There is no sorrow or regret in Lamech’s words. He is justifying his actions and even threatening to do the same thing again, with God’s blessing. He seems to believe that if God was willing to avenge a murderer like Cain, then God would certainly excuse his justified act of self-defense. Lamech is claiming to have God on his side. But he misses the whole point behind the story of

Abel's death. In killing his brother, Cain had arrogantly abrogated God's right to determine life and death. He had spilled the blood of his brother and God had declared His dissatisfaction.

*"What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground!" – Genesis 4:10 NLT*

The branch of Adam's family tree that led through Cain was producing bad fruit. In His sermon on the mount, Jesus delivered a powerful lesson concerning the fruit-bearing properties of trees.

*"A good tree produces good fruit, and a bad tree produces bad fruit. A good tree can't produce bad fruit, and a bad tree can't produce good fruit. So every tree that does not produce good fruit is chopped down and thrown into the fire. Yes, just as you can identify a tree by its fruit, so you can identify people by their actions." – Matthew 7:17-20 NLT*

And, in Genesis 4, Moses traces the lineage of Adam and Eve through a different branch of the same family tree that would prove to produce a different quality of fruit.

*Adam had sexual relations with his wife again, and she gave birth to another son. She named him Seth, for she said, "God has granted me another son in place of Abel, whom Cain killed." – Genesis 4:25 NLT*

God graciously replaced what Cain had taken away. Adam and Eve continued to be faithful and fruitful, producing yet another son who filled the void left by Abel. And this son, Seth, would go on to father his own son, a man named Enosh. And then Moses reveals the dramatic difference between these two branches of the same family tree.

*At that time people first began to worship the Lord by name. – Genesis 4:26 NLT*

While Lamech, the arrogant descendant of Cain, was busy glorying over his taking of another man's life, the descendants of Seth were glorying in the author of life. In these two distinctively different branches of Adam's family tree, we see the grace of God displayed in all its glory. God was going to faithfully keep the promise He had made concerning the seed of the woman. In keeping with the *protoevangelium*, or first gospel, recorded in Genesis 3:15, God would see to it that a godly offspring would "spring forth" from the line of Adam.

*"And I will cause hostility between you and the woman,  
and between your offspring and her offspring.  
He will strike your head,  
and you will strike his heel." – Genesis 3:15 NLT*

For every Lamech, there would be an Enosh. For every lost Abel, God would provide a Seth. He would maintain the line of Adam and keep the hope alive.

*For the sin of this one man, Adam, caused death to rule over many. But even greater is God's wonderful grace and his gift of righteousness, for all who receive it will live in triumph over sin and death through this one man, Jesus Christ. – Romans 5:17 NLT*



## Like Father, Like Son

<sup>1</sup> This is the book of the generations of Adam. When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. <sup>2</sup> Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and named them Man when they were created. <sup>3</sup> When Adam had lived 130 years, he fathered a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth. <sup>4</sup> The days of Adam after he fathered Seth were 800 years; and he had other sons and daughters. <sup>5</sup> Thus all the days that Adam lived were 930 years, and he died.

<sup>6</sup> When Seth had lived 105 years, he fathered Enosh. <sup>7</sup> Seth lived after he fathered Enosh 807 years and had other sons and daughters. <sup>8</sup> Thus all the days of Seth were 912 years, and he died.

<sup>9</sup> When Enosh had lived 90 years, he fathered Kenan. <sup>10</sup> Enosh lived after he fathered Kenan 815 years and had other sons and daughters. <sup>11</sup> Thus all the days of Enosh were 905 years, and he died.

<sup>12</sup> When Kenan had lived 70 years, he fathered Mahalalel. <sup>13</sup> Kenan lived after he fathered Mahalalel 840 years and had other sons and daughters. <sup>14</sup> Thus all the days of Kenan were 910 years, and he died.

<sup>15</sup> When Mahalalel had lived 65 years, he fathered Jared. <sup>16</sup> Mahalalel lived after he fathered Jared 830 years and had other sons and daughters. <sup>17</sup> Thus all the days of Mahalalel were 895 years, and he died.

<sup>18</sup> When Jared had lived 162 years, he fathered Enoch. <sup>19</sup> Jared lived after he fathered Enoch 800 years and had other sons and daughters. <sup>20</sup> Thus all the days of Jared were 962 years, and he died.

<sup>21</sup> When Enoch had lived 65 years, he fathered Methuselah. <sup>22</sup> Enoch walked with God after he fathered Methuselah 300 years and had other sons and daughters. <sup>23</sup> Thus all the days of Enoch were 365 years. <sup>24</sup> Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him.

<sup>25</sup> When Methuselah had lived 187 years, he fathered Lamech. <sup>26</sup> Methuselah lived after he fathered Lamech 782 years and had other sons and daughters. <sup>27</sup> Thus all the days of Methuselah were 969 years, and he died.

<sup>28</sup> When Lamech had lived 182 years, he fathered a son <sup>29</sup> and called his name Noah, saying, “Out of the ground that the Lord has cursed, this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the painful toil of our hands.” <sup>30</sup> Lamech lived after he fathered Noah 595 years and had other sons and daughters. <sup>31</sup> Thus all the days of Lamech were 777 years, and he died.

<sup>32</sup> After Noah was 500 years old, Noah fathered Shem, Ham, and Japheth. – Genesis 5:1-32 ESV

Chapter four ended with the disclosure of two disparate branches of Adam's family tree. One flows through the line of Cain, while the other will make its way through the lineage of Seth, the third son born to Adam and Eve. God had graciously replaced the son whom Cain had murdered.

*She named him Seth, saying, "God has given me another child in place of Abel because Cain killed him." – Genesis 4:25 NET*

These two branches of Adam's family tree had veered off in diametrically opposite directions. Six generations later, Lamech would demonstrate that Cain's anger-management problem had been hereditary. He followed in his forefather's footsteps, murdering a man for having wounded or "bruised" him. He claimed it was a case of self-defense but boasted that he would do it again if anyone else threatened his life.

But through the line of Seth came a people who "began to call upon the name of the Lord" (Genesis 4:26 ESV). Rather than boasting in their own self-sufficiency and autonomy, they "call out" to God. The Hebrew word קָרְאָה (*qārā'*) carries the idea of crying out in reverence and dependence. It is the same word used to describe how Abram worshiped God after having received the covenant promise.

*From there he moved to the hill country on the east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. And there he built an altar to the Lord and called upon the name of the Lord. – Genesis 12:8 ESV*

The author of the book of Genesis (most likely Moses) is attempting to help his contemporary readers (fellow Jews) understand how the world went from "very good" to extremely bad. And chapter five is intended to provide a condensed genealogical overview that helps to explain mankind's meteoric fall from grace. The content of chapter five is bracketed by two verses that act as parenthesis for all that happens in between. The first is found at the end of chapter four.

***At that time people began to call upon the name of the Lord. – Genesis 4:26 ESV***

The second appears in the opening section of chapter six.

***The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. – Genesis 6:5 ESV***

In the middle of these two verses, Moses provides a detailed but not exhaustive description of Adam's family tree through the line of his son, Seth. The chapter begins with Adam and ends with the birth of Noah. For the Jews to whom Moses originally penned the words of this book, the appearance of Noah's name would have been familiar. His name and exploits would have been passed down from generation to generation through their oral traditions. They were intimately acquainted with the story of Noah and the flood. What Moses wants them to

understand is how the flood became a necessity, to begin with. How did things get so bad that God had to destroy the entire world?

But a close look at the genealogical listing will reveal another name that was meant to stand out. It pops up, almost unexpectedly, in the very middle of the chapter and at the midway point of the genealogy.

*Jared lived after he fathered Enoch 800 years and had other sons and daughters. Thus all the days of Jared were 962 years, and he died.*

*When Enoch had lived 65 years, he fathered Methuselah. **Enoch walked with God** after he fathered Methuselah 300 years and had other sons and daughters. Thus all the days of Enoch were 365 years. **Enoch walked with God**, and he was not, for God took him.* – Genesis 5:19-24 ESV

Throughout the chapter, Moses has described the steady progression of mankind as father begets son, and son begets grandson. Man, made “in the likeness of God” (Genesis 5:1 ESV), continued to make more of his own kind, in keeping with the kingdom mandate. But there is a subtle, yet significant, change that takes place in verse 3 of chapter five. It states that Adam “fathered a son *in his own likeness, after his image*” (Genesis 5:3 ESV). Seth mirrored his father’s image. He bore his father’s likeness. Because of the fall, mankind’s ability to bear God’s image has been damaged. While originally created in pristine perfection, Adam and Eve chose to violate God’s command concerning the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. No longer content to reflect God’s image and serve as stewards over His creation, they chose to be “like God” and rule their own kingdom. And for their rebellion, God cast them out of the garden and away from His presence. The book of Genesis chronicles mankind’s steady and deliberate journey out of Eden and away from the glorious light of God’s glory.

And throughout chapter five, Moses clarifies what it means to be made in “the likeness” of man.

*Adam lived were 930 years, **and he died.** – Genesis 5:5 ESV*

*Thus all the days of Seth were 912 years, **and he died.** – Genesis 5:8 ESV*

*Thus all the days of Enosh were 905 years, **and he died.** – Genesis 5:11 ESV*

*Thus all the days of Kenan were 910 years, **and he died.** – Genesis 5:14 ESV*

*Thus all the days of Mahalalel were 895 years, **and he died.** – Genesis 5:17 ESV*

*Thus all the days of Jared were 962 years, **and he died.** – Genesis 5:20 ESV*

Each generation suffered the results of the curse that God had placed on Adam.

*“By the sweat of your face  
you shall eat bread,  
till you return to the ground,  
for out of it you were taken;  
for you are dust,  
and to dust you shall return.” – Genesis 3:19 ESV*

Death had become inevitable and unavoidable. Sin had separated man from God’s presence and prevented him from accessing the tree of life. As the ages listed in the genealogy reflect, the average lifespans were incredibly long. But they all ended in death. No one was able to escape the condemnation that God had decreed for mankind’s rebellion against Him.

Yet there is an outlier in the list. One individual stands out among all the others. Moses states that “all the days of Enoch were 365 years” (Genesis 5:23 ESV). Enoch doesn’t even make it to middle age, and Moses explains why.

*Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him. – Genesis 5:24 ESV*

This verse was meant to stand out. After all the repeated occurrences of “and he died,” Moses states that Enoch “was not.” The Hebrew word is לֹא (*’in*), and it comes from a primitive root that means “to be nothing” or “to not exist.” In a sense, Moses is suggesting that Enoch just disappeared. He didn’t die, he just simply ceased to exist in his former condition. Why? Because God “took him.” He literally “snatched” or “fetched” Enoch away. God rewarded Enoch for his faithfulness by allowing him to forego the curse of death. Enoch was miraculously transported into God’s presence.

Twice in this passage, Moses points out that Enoch “walked with God.” The Hebrew word is הָלַךְ (*hālak*), and it is often used metaphorically to refer to human behavior. It is the same word that God used when He called Abraham into a covenant relationship.

*When Abram was ninety-nine years old the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, “I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless, that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly.” – Genesis 17:1-2 ESV*

God was calling Abraham to “conduct his life” as if God was watching. He was to live in such a way that his behavior reflected his awareness of God’s constant presence. And that is exactly how Enoch had lived his 365 years of life. He lived with a constant awareness of God’s nearness and confidence in God’s goodness.

“‘Walked with God’ is metaphorical and indicates that Enoch had a lifestyle characterized by his devotion to God. The sense of ‘walk’ (*halak*) in its verbal stem indicates a communion or intimacy with God.” – Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*

Enoch is meant to be an anomaly, a glaring point of light in what will quickly become a darkening tale of human sin and degradation. And the chapter ends with another glimmer of hope. It's revealed in the birth of a man named Noah. His entrance into the world is accompanied by a fatherly premonition that this young man will be unlike all the others. He will have a unique and God-ordained role to play in the ongoing saga of humanity's destiny.

*"Out of the ground that the Lord has cursed, this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the painful toil of our hands."* – Genesis 5:29 ESV

Moses provides no explanation for this blessing. He simply ends the chapter with a brief but encouraging note of hope. Something is about to transpire. After centuries of human procreation, resulting in a burgeoning population, the situation on earth is about to come to a head. The curse placed on Adam will reach a resounding crescendo. But there will also be an unexpected form of relief, provided for by the gracious hand of God.



## A Divine Intervention

<sup>1</sup> When man began to multiply on the face of the land and daughters were born to them, <sup>2</sup> the sons of God saw that the daughters of man were attractive. And they took as their wives any they chose. <sup>3</sup> Then the Lord said, “My Spirit shall not abide in man forever, for he is flesh: his days shall be 120 years.” <sup>4</sup> The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of man and they bore children to them. These were the mighty men who were of old, the men of renown.

<sup>5</sup> The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. <sup>6</sup> And the Lord regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. <sup>7</sup> So the Lord said, “I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens, for I am sorry that I have made them.” <sup>8</sup> But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord. – Genesis 6:1-8 ESV

Once again, Moses reveals that mankind was keeping the divine mandate to “multiply and fill the earth.” They were doing what God had commanded them to do. But the problem was that, because of the fall, mankind was no longer able to bear God’s image as He had intended. They had become damaged goods. Like a dirty mirror, their ability to accurately reflect His divine glory had been marred. Yet, according to chapter five, there was a still remnant of individuals who still chose to worship God. The ungodly line of Cain was balanced out by the more faithful line of Seth, illustrated in the life of Enoch, a man who “walked with God” (Genesis 5:21 ESV).

The genealogy of Adam, recorded in chapter five, provides an explanatory backdrop upon which to view the dark and depressing events of chapter six. Moses ends the genealogy with an introduction to Noah, who will play a major role in the next phase of God’s pre-ordained plan for mankind. Noah is not just one more name in a long list of Adam’s descendants. He is the whole point of the genealogy. Moses wants us to know that God planned for the coming of this one who would play the role of “savior,” bringing rest to those who had grown weary living under the curse that God had imposed because of Adam’s sin. Even Noah’s father somehow recognized that his infant son would play the role of a deliverer.

*“Out of the ground that the Lord has cursed, this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the painful toil of our hands.”* – Genesis 5:29

When pronounced in Hebrew, Noah’s name sounded like the Hebrew word for “rest” or “comfort.” Lamech believed that his son would bring some form of relief from the constant struggle of attempting to eke out a living from the ground that God had cursed. He and his fellow inhabitants of the earth were looking for some form of salvation from the divine condemnation under which they suffered.

But even under the curse, mankind seemed to flourish. They continued to procreate and produce more of their kind. Moses declares that “man began to multiply on the face of the land

and daughters were born to them" (Genesis 6:1 ESV). Due to the extended life spans experienced prior to the flood, the reproduction cycle of humanity was greatly extended. As a result, they were able to "fill the earth" in a relatively short period of time. The lines of Cain and Seth both expanded rapidly, creating a perfect storm. These two divergent branches of Adam's family tree would soon find themselves interacting with one another. The godly and the godless would inevitably end up crossing paths and even intermarrying with one another.

The next section of chapter six has developed a controversial reputation. In it, Moses states that "the sons of God saw that the daughters of man were attractive. And they took as their wives any they chose" (Genesis 6:2 ESV). There are those who interpret this verse to mean that fallen angels procreated with the daughters of men. They arrive at this conclusion because every other time the phrase, "sons of God," is used in the Old Testament, it refers to angels (Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7). Proponents of this view also claim that the New Testament books of 2 Peter and Jude provide support for their assertion.

*For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment; if he did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly; if by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes he condemned them to extinction, making them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly... – 2 Peter 2:4-6 ESV*

*And the angels who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day—just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which likewise indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural desire, serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire. – Jude 6-7 ESV*

But it would appear that these two passages refer to the original fall of Satan and the angels who joined him in his failed coup attempt against God. There is no other reference in the Genesis passage to angels. In fact, the very next verse reflects God's anger with mankind, not angelic beings.

"*My Spirit shall not abide in man forever...*" – Genesis 6:3 ESV

It seems much more likely that "the sons of God" and "daughters of men" are intended as references to the godly line of Seth and the ungodly line of Cain. These two branches of Adam's family tree had begun to merge through intermarriage, and the result was a further degradation of the spiritual seed of Seth. The appearance of men like Enoch became increasingly rarer. And God's anger with mankind is reflected in His decision to dramatically shorten the average lifespan. The reference to 120 years, found in verse 3, is most likely a warning concerning the pending judgment of God. It refers to the length of time before God would destroy the earth with a flood. And as a result of this cataclysmic event, human lifespans will begin to drop precipitously. No longer would humans live for seven to eight centuries.

These protracted periods of existence had produced many children, but few faithful followers of God.

And it seems that with the longer lifespans, humans had enjoyed prolonged growing periods. Each stage of life, including adolescence, lasted longer in those days. As a result, men not only lived longer but grew larger. That seems to be the best explanation for Moses' reference to the Nephilim. These were so-called "giants" who intermarried with the daughters of men and became "the mighty men who were of old, the men of renown" (Genesis 6:4 ESV). There is only one other reference to the Nephilim in the Bible and it is found in Numbers 13:33. While some assert that the Nephilim were the offspring of angels who procreated with humans, this seems unlikely, since the Scriptures seem to teach that angels do not marry or reproduce (Matthew 22:30).

The entire focus of this passage is on humanity and not on fallen angels or some antediluvian super-species. Verse 5 clearly states the problem.

*The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.* – Genesis 6:5 ESV

This isn't about disreputable angels performing despicable acts with human beings. It's not about a race of superhuman X-Men polluting the DNA of humanity. The problem is wickedness – pure and simple. The wickedness of man was great in the earth. And this wickedness included attitudes as well as actions. In fact, "everything they thought or imagined was consistently and totally evil" (Genesis 6:5 NLT).

And what follows is one of the saddest statements found in Scripture.

*And the Lord regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart.* – Genesis 6:6 ESV

With this emotionally charged statement, Moses attempts to describe God's sorrow over the state of His creation. Humanity's downward spiritual spiral has come to the point of no return. God is not second-guessing Himself. He is not questioning the goodness of His original creation of man. At that time, He had declared all that He had made as "very good" (Genesis 1:31), including Adam and Eve. But their rebellion had brought death into the world. It had permanently marred their relationship with God and damaged the entire creative order. And the longer man lived and the more of his own kind he created, the worse the situation became. Until God intervened.

*"I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens, for I am sorry that I have made them."* – Genesis 6:7 ESV

The one who had created it all would choose to destroy it all and start over. God would begin again. The Creator would re-create. The life-giver would choose to destroy all life and then reanimate and rejuvenate His creation once again. But His destruction would not be complete. He would graciously spare some. God would preserve a remnant of His creation in order to fulfill the plan of redemption He had developed long before He pierced the pre-creation darkness with the light of His glory. God would use a man named Noah to act as His agent of redemption and recreation. In the midst of all the moral darkness and spiritual apathy of his age, this one man found favor in the eyes of the Lord. He would become the vessel through whom God was spare a remnant of fallen humanity and carry out His grand plan of redemption.

## The Right Man for the Task

<sup>9</sup>These are the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation. Noah walked with God. <sup>10</sup>And Noah had three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

<sup>11</sup>Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence. <sup>12</sup>And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth. <sup>13</sup>And God said to Noah, "I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence through them. Behold, I will destroy them with the earth. <sup>14</sup>Make yourself an ark of gopher wood. Make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and out with pitch. <sup>15</sup>This is how you are to make it: the length of the ark 300 cubits, its breadth 50 cubits, and its height 30 cubits. <sup>16</sup>Make a roof for the ark, and finish it to a cubit above, and set the door of the ark in its side. Make it with lower, second, and third decks. <sup>17</sup>For behold, I will bring a flood of waters upon the earth to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life under heaven. Everything that is on the earth shall die. <sup>18</sup>But I will establish my covenant with you, and you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you. <sup>19</sup>And of every living thing of all flesh, you shall bring two of every sort into the ark to keep them alive with you. They shall be male and female. <sup>20</sup>Of the birds according to their kinds, and of the animals according to their kinds, of every creeping thing of the ground, according to its kind, two of every sort shall come in to you to keep them alive. <sup>21</sup>Also take with you every sort of food that is eaten, and store it up. It shall serve as food for you and for them." <sup>22</sup>Noah did this; he did all that God commanded him. – Genesis 6:9-22 ESV

Despite the seemingly detailed genealogy found in chapter five, it is impossible to know exactly how much time had elapsed before God made the determination to destroy mankind. At least six generations had transpired, leaving a legacy of moral corruption and spiritual degradation. God's assessment of mankind's condition was not flattering or hopeful.

*The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.* – Genesis 6:5 ESV

The problem was pervasive and it permeated to the very core of man's existence. Far more than just a behavioral problem, the wickedness of humanity emanated from the heart. This was not a case of good people occasionally doing bad things. It was a pandemic of wickedness that flowed directly from the rebellious hearts of those whom God had created. And the prophet Jeremiah provides God's further assessment of the fallen state of the human heart.

*"The human heart is the most deceitful of all things,  
and desperately wicked.  
Who really knows how bad it is?  
But I, the Lord, search all hearts  
and examine secret motives.  
I give all people their due rewards,  
according to what their actions deserve."* – Jeremiah 17:9-10 NLT

As God surveyed the state of affairs on earth, He discovered one man whose life found favor in His eyes. But this revelation did not come as a shock to God. He was not surprised or relieved by Noah's seemingly inexplicable existence. In the midst of all decadence, immorality, and unrestrained evil, "Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation" (Genesis 6:9 ESV). And God had sovereignly ordained Noah's existence. From before the foundation of the world, God had a plan in place that included Noah's birth, his faithful life, and his role as the future "savior" of mankind. Even Lamech, Noah's father, had somehow understood that his infant son was destined to be some kind of deliverer who would rescue humanity from the curse. At his son's birth, Lamech offered up a prayer of hopeful anticipation.

*"May he bring us relief from our work and the painful labor of farming this ground that the Lord has cursed."* – Genesis 5:29 NLT

Noah was an anomaly. He was an alien and stranger who stood out from the rest of humanity. In reality, he was the sole image-bearer of God. In fact, Moses compared Noah to another godly man when he declared that "Noah walked with God" (Genesis 6:9 ESV). Noah was cut from the same cloth as Enoch (Genesis 5:22). In Enoch's case, he had lived his life in faithful obedience to God and, as a reward for a life well-lived, God graciously transported him from earth to heaven.

*Enoch lived 365 years, walking in close fellowship with God. Then one day he disappeared, because God took him.* – Genesis 5:23-24 NLT

But God had other plans for Noah. This righteous and blameless man had a divine assignment to fulfill. Because of His justice and holiness, God was obligated to punish wickedness. But because of His infinite love and mercy, God had a plan in place that would allow Him to redeem and rescue a remnant of humanity.

In some sense, Noah was an aberration, a departure from the norm. But in reality, he was a reflection of what God had always intended for mankind. Despite Moses' description of him as "blameless," Noah was not a sinless or perfect man. He too suffered from the effects of the fall. Like every other human being, Noah had inherited a sinful nature from Adam.

*...just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned...* – Romans 5:12 ESV

Noah's blamelessness refers to his wholeness. The Hebrew word is תְּמִימָה (*tāmîm*) and it means "complete, whole, entire, sound." It has to do with integrity. Noah was not duplicitous or deceitful. He refused to live a compartmentalized life, attempting to hide things from God or displaying a false outer piety that camouflaged an impure heart.

Yes, because Noah was a descendant of Adam, he was a sinner just like all his peers. But despite his sinful disposition, Noah was able to maintain a vibrant relationship with God. He lived His life in keeping with the will of God, refusing to follow the example of his friends and neighbors. While "everything they thought or imagined was consistently and totally evil" (Genesis 6:5 NLT),

Noah's mind and heart were fixed on God. According to Moses, Noah was "the only blameless person living on earth at the time" (Genesis 6:9 NLT). And it will become increasingly clear just how willing Noah was to obey God – at any cost.

The situation was dire. The moral state of mankind had reached an all-time low. And their sinfulness had infected the entire creative order.

*Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence. And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth.* – Genesis 6:11-12 ESV

God assessed His creation as having been ruined by mankind's sinfulness. The Hebrew word, **שָׁחַט** (*šāḥat*), can mean "spoiled, ruined, corrupted, or rotted." The pervasive presence of wickedness, particularly in the form of "violence," had permanently damaged what God had made. Mankind had un-made God's beautiful creation. This Hebrew word is the same one used by the prophet Jeremiah when referring to a loincloth that God had commanded him to bury then later retrieve. He writes:

*Then I went to the Euphrates, and dug, and I took the loincloth from the place where I had hidden it. And behold, the loincloth was **spoiled** (*šāḥat*); it was good for nothing.* – Jeremiah 13:7 ESV

That is exactly how God viewed the earth. It had been ruined or spoiled by the damaging effects of sin. Humanity had been given the divine mandate to "fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth" (Genesis 1:28 ESV). But rather than steward and care for God's creation, mankind had contaminated and condemned it. To the point that it was "good for nothing."

So, God divulged His plan to Noah.

*"I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence through them. Behold, I will destroy them with the earth."* – Genesis 6:13 ESV

But God followed up this less-than-happy news with the rest of His plan. He let Noah in on the role he would play in the redemption of creation. And this information must have left Noah's head spinning. He was given very detailed instructions by God for the construction of an ark or large boat. And Noah is informed that first-of-its-kind vessel will become the key to God's redemption of creation. And as if that wasn't enough pressure for Noah to bear, God sealed the entire agreement with a legal contract.

*"I will establish my covenant with you, and you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you. And of every living thing of all flesh, you shall bring two of every sort into the ark to keep them alive with you."* – Genesis 6:18-19 ESV

But this covenant was not the terms of an agreement between God and Noah. God was not obligating Noah to uphold his end of the contract. This was a divine statement of promise, whereby God was guaranteeing to deliver Noah, his family, and all flesh from judgment. They would be graciously and miraculously spared.

All Noah had to do was believe and obey. His part was to build the ark and then to fill it with “two of every sort.” Not an easy task to be sure. But Noah’s construction of the ark was an act of faith, not a form of works. He didn’t earn his salvation. He received it as a gift from God. And the author of Hebrews makes this point quite clear.

*It was by faith that Noah built a large boat to save his family from the flood. He obeyed God, who warned him about things that had never happened before. By his faith Noah condemned the rest of the world, and he received the righteousness that comes by faith.*  
 – Hebrews 11:7 NLT

And Moses confirms that Noah obeyed God.

*So Noah did everything exactly as God had commanded him.* – Genesis 6:22 NLT

God had promised salvation, and Noah believed Him. And Noah proved his belief through faithful adherence to God’s command. Despite the formidable nature of the assignment and the countless questions that must have filled his head, Noah did exactly what he was told to do. And in doing so, he proved himself to be the right man for the task. The man of God’s own choosing.

## God Begins Again

<sup>1</sup> Then the Lord said to Noah, “Go into the ark, you and all your household, for I have seen that you are righteous before me in this generation. <sup>2</sup> Take with you seven pairs of all clean animals, the male and his mate, and a pair of the animals that are not clean, the male and his mate, <sup>3</sup> and seven pairs of the birds of the heavens also, male and female, to keep their offspring alive on the face of all the earth. <sup>4</sup> For in seven days I will send rain on the earth forty days and forty nights, and every living thing that I have made I will blot out from the face of the ground.” <sup>5</sup> And Noah did all that the Lord had commanded him.

<sup>6</sup> Noah was six hundred years old when the flood of waters came upon the earth. <sup>7</sup> And Noah and his sons and his wife and his sons’ wives with him went into the ark to escape the waters of the flood. <sup>8</sup> Of clean animals, and of animals that are not clean, and of birds, and of everything that creeps on the ground, <sup>9</sup> two and two, male and female, went into the ark with Noah, as God had commanded Noah. <sup>10</sup> And after seven days the waters of the flood came upon the earth.

<sup>11</sup> In the six hundredth year of Noah’s life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on that day all the fountains of the great deep burst forth, and the windows of the heavens were opened. <sup>12</sup> And rain fell upon the earth forty days and forty nights. <sup>13</sup> On the very same day Noah and his sons, Shem and Ham and Japheth, and Noah’s wife and the three wives of his sons with them entered the ark, <sup>14</sup> they and every beast, according to its kind, and all the livestock according to their kinds, and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth, according to its kind, and every bird, according to its kind, every winged creature. <sup>15</sup> They went into the ark with Noah, two and two of all flesh in which there was the breath of life. <sup>16</sup> And those that entered, male and female of all flesh, went in as God had commanded him. And the Lord shut him in.

<sup>17</sup> The flood continued forty days on the earth. The waters increased and bore up the ark, and it rose high above the earth. <sup>18</sup> The waters prevailed and increased greatly on the earth, and the ark floated on the face of the waters. <sup>19</sup> And the waters prevailed so mightily on the earth that all the high mountains under the whole heaven were covered. <sup>20</sup> The waters prevailed above the mountains, covering them fifteen cubits deep. <sup>21</sup> And all flesh died that moved on the earth, birds, livestock, beasts, all swarming creatures that swarm on the earth, and all mankind. <sup>22</sup> Everything on the dry land in whose nostrils was the breath of life died. <sup>23</sup> He blotted out every living thing that was on the face of the ground, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens. They were blotted out from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those who were with him in the ark. <sup>24</sup> And the waters prevailed on the earth 150 days. – Genesis 7:1-24 ESV

For the second time in his narrative of Noah’s life, Moses asserts that he “did all that the Lord had commanded him.” And while it is easy to take this statement at face value, it’s sometimes difficult to understand just how remarkable a feat Noah’s obedience really was. So, three times in chapter seven alone, Moses attempts to emphasize the incredible nature of Noah’s faithful adherence to the far-from-simple assignment given to him by God.

In chapter six, Moses recorded the detailed instructions given by God to Noah for constructing a massive ark.

*Make for yourself an ark of cypress wood. Make rooms in the ark, and cover it with pitch inside and out. This is how you should make it: The ark is to be 450 feet long, 75 feet wide, and 45 feet high. Make a roof for the ark and finish it, leaving 18 inches from the top. Put a door in the side of the ark, and make lower, middle, and upper decks. – Genesis 6:14-16 NET*

It has been estimated that, when completed, this giant boat contained 1 million cubic feet of space. It was the length of 1-1/2 football fields and as tall as a 4-story building. It was less a navigable vessel than a floating shipping container. Having no rudder or sail, this boat was designed to weather the coming floodwaters and provide shelter for Noah, his immediate family, and all the pairs of living creatures God was commanded Noah to collect and protect.

The scale of this project was massive and, even by today's modern construction standards, it would have posed an impossible feat for one man to pull off. Yet, Noah did it. And nowhere along the way does Noah balk at God's far-fetched and seemingly impossible assignment. At no point does he question God's wisdom, second-guess God's plan, or express doubt in his own ability to pull off such a strange and seemingly impossible task. Noah simply did as he was told.

Moses described Noah as a righteous and blameless man who "walked with God" (Genesis 6:9 ESV). This was a man who lived his life in keeping with God's will. Over his lifetime, Noah had developed an intimate relationship with God and had learned to trust God for all his needs. Unlike his peers, Noah's life was not marked by unbridled wickedness and unrighteousness. He was far from perfect, but when compared to the rest of humanity, he was blameless in his generation. It seems that Noah had developed a track record of obeying God. Even the author of Hebrews points out Noah's penchant for taking God at His word and faithfully following His command.

*He obeyed God, who warned him about things that had never happened before. – Hebrews 11:7 NLT*

The sheer scale of this project would suggest a rather lengthy construction timeline. The number of trees that had to be harvested and milled would have been staggering. There is no way to ascertain how Noah managed to accomplish a project of this magnitude, even with the help of his three sons. Perhaps God intervened and miraculously provided the materials required to construct the ark. But the text doesn't seem to indicate any kind of divine superintendence. Even the collecting of the creatures was left up to Noah and his family.

This entire project took time, patience, and years of dogged determination on Noah's part. And it's important to remember that Noah was motivated by what he believed to be God's pending judgment. The whole reason he was building a giant boat far from any body of water was that God had declared His plan to destroy the earth.

*“Look! I am about to cover the earth with a flood that will destroy every living thing that breathes. Everything on earth will die.” – Genesis 6:17 NLT*

He believed God and, as a result, he obeyed God. And for however many years it took Noah to complete his assignment, he labored faithfully and unceasingly. And the apostle Peter indicates that, while Noah worked, God withheld His judgment.

*God waited patiently while Noah was building his boat. Only eight people were saved from drowning in that terrible flood. – 1 Peter 3:20 NLT*

But the day finally came when Noah put the finishing touches on the ark. His work was done and now it was time for God to fulfill His covenant commitment.

*“Go into the ark, you and all your household, for I have seen that you are righteous before me in this generation.” – Genesis 7:1 ESV*

Noah had proven his faith in God. Against all odds and contrary to human reasoning, Noah had taken God at His word and obeyed. And the author of Hebrews includes Noah among those who are enshrined in his great “Hall of Faith.”

*By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith. – Hebrews 11:7 ESV*

While Noah’s ungodly neighbors continued to live in open rebellion to God, he faithfully submitted his life to the will of God. He demonstrated his complete reliance upon God by hearing and obeying the word of God. And, because of his faith, Noah was declared righteous by God. Even before commanding Noah for his faith, the author of Hebrews declared the non-negotiable role that faith plays in mankind’s relationship with God.

*...without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. – Hebrews 11:6 ESV*

Noah had spent his life drawing near to God. The building of the ark was just the latest and greatest example of his complete reliance upon God. And because Noah trusted God, he was rewarded with the gift of life while everyone else around him was experiencing the judgment of death.

*God did not spare the ancient world—except for Noah and the seven others in his family. Noah warned the world of God’s righteous judgment. So God protected Noah when he destroyed the world of ungodly people with a vast flood. – 2 Peter 2:5 NLT*

For 150 days, Noah and his family weathered the storm that deluged the earth. They floated safely above the waters, as the rest of sinful humanity perished. This faithful man and his family

were protected and preserved by God. They were graciously spared the judgment that had come upon the earth. But everything and everyone else was subjected to God's righteous and holy wrath.

*Everything on the dry land in whose nostrils was the breath of life died. He blotted out every living thing that was on the face of the ground, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens. They were blotted out from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those who were with him in the ark. – Genesis 7:22-23 ESV*

## A Case of Déjà Vu

<sup>1</sup> But God remembered Noah and all the beasts and all the livestock that were with him in the ark. And God made a wind blow over the earth, and the waters subsided. <sup>2</sup> The fountains of the deep and the windows of the heavens were closed, the rain from the heavens was restrained, <sup>3</sup> and the waters receded from the earth continually. At the end of 150 days the waters had abated, <sup>4</sup> and in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, the ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat. <sup>5</sup> And the waters continued to abate until the tenth month; in the tenth month, on the first day of the month, the tops of the mountains were seen.

<sup>6</sup> At the end of forty days Noah opened the window of the ark that he had made <sup>7</sup> and sent forth a raven. It went to and fro until the waters were dried up from the earth. <sup>8</sup> Then he sent forth a dove from him, to see if the waters had subsided from the face of the ground. <sup>9</sup> But the dove found no place to set her foot, and she returned to him to the ark, for the waters were still on the face of the whole earth. So he put out his hand and took her and brought her into the ark with him. <sup>10</sup> He waited another seven days, and again he sent forth the dove out of the ark. <sup>11</sup> And the dove came back to him in the evening, and behold, in her mouth was a freshly plucked olive leaf. So Noah knew that the waters had subsided from the earth. <sup>12</sup> Then he waited another seven days and sent forth the dove, and she did not return to him anymore.

<sup>13</sup> In the six hundred and first year, in the first month, the first day of the month, the waters were dried from off the earth. And Noah removed the covering of the ark and looked, and behold, the face of the ground was dry. <sup>14</sup> In the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, the earth had dried out. <sup>15</sup> Then God said to Noah, <sup>16</sup> “Go out from the ark, you and your wife, and your sons and your sons’ wives with you. <sup>17</sup> Bring out with you every living thing that is with you of all flesh—birds and animals and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth—that they may swarm on the earth, and be fruitful and multiply on the earth.” <sup>18</sup> So Noah went out, and his sons and his wife and his sons’ wives with him. <sup>19</sup> Every beast, every creeping thing, and every bird, everything that moves on the earth, went out by families from the ark. – Genesis 8:1-19 ESV

The ark had been God’s idea all along, and He had graciously shared the plans for its construction with Noah. And when Noah had faithfully completed his work on the massive project, God had extended a gracious invitation for him and his family to enter the safety and security of the ark.

*“Come into the ark, you and all your household, for I consider you godly among this generation.”* – Genesis 7:1 NET

After years of faithful and obedient service to God, constructing the vessel that would be the means of his own salvation, Noah was offered a chance to cease from his labors and enter into the rest that God had ordained for him. Noah had proven his reverence for God by doing all that the Lord commanded him to do. And the reward for all his work was rest and refuge from the coming storm.

This divine invitation, offering Noah a chance to rest in the safety and security of God's chosen means of salvation, is echoed in the words spoken by Jesus as He inaugurated His earthly ministry.

*"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."* – Matthew 11:28  
NET

The ark had always been intended to foreshadow the coming of Christ. In a sin-stained world, condemned to suffer the wrath of God's just and righteous judgment, a means of salvation had graciously been provided. God had invited a weary and worn-out Noah to enter into His rest and find salvation from the coming judgment.

One of the fascinating things to consider is how many trees Noah would have had to cut down to build the ark. Created by God, these fully mature trees would have been cut down in the prime of their lives, so that Noah and his family might be saved. They sacrificed their lives so that others might live. And, in the same way, Jesus would offer up His life so that others might find salvation. It was Isaiah who later prophesied of the Messiah's selfless sacrifice on behalf of sinful humanity.

*Unjustly condemned,  
he was led away.  
No one cared that he died without descendants,  
that **his life was cut short in midstream.**  
But he was struck down  
for the rebellion of my people.* – Isaiah 53:8 NLT

The ark provided Noah and his family with protection from the judgment of God. He invited them in and then closed the door behind them. And there, in the safety of God's preordained vessel of salvation, a remnant of humanity found refuge from the flood of divine judgment. And Moses paints a vivid picture of God's mercy and grace when he writes, "God remembered Noah and all the beasts and all the livestock that were with him in the ark" (Genesis 8:1 ESV). The waters rose and covered the face of the earth. And most of God's creation was destroyed in the process. But God remembered (זָכַר – *ākar*) Noah. In other words, God had not forgotten the covenant promise He had made.

*"Look! I am about to cover the earth with a flood that will destroy every living thing that breathes. Everything on earth will die. But I will confirm my covenant with you."* – Genesis 6:17-18 NLT

The ark was not intended to be Noah's final destination. It was simply the means by which he and his family would find access to the preferred future God had in store for them. In the same way, Jesus became the ark of mankind's salvation, offering His life as a ransom for many. As He Himself stated, "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly" (John 10:10 ESV).

Noah wasn't meant to stay on the ark. He had been delivered from death so that he might enjoy abundant life in a new, recreated world. The old was gone. God was giving humanity a new opportunity to begin again. But it took time for the waters to recede. This period of waiting provided time for the planet to be cleansed from all the death and decay caused by the flood.

Moses puts a great deal of emphasis on the steady decline of the deadly floodwaters.

*...the waters receded from the earth continually.* – Genesis 8:3 ESV

*And the waters continued to abate...* – Genesis 8:5 ESV

*Then he sent forth a dove from him, to see if the waters had subsided from the face of the ground.* – Genesis 8:8 ESV

*So Noah knew that the waters had subsided from the earth.* – Genesis 8:11 ESV

The time came when the waters of destruction receded and the formerly sin-saturated world was cleansed of all wickedness.

*In the six hundred and first year, in the first month, the first day of the month, the waters were dried from off the earth.* – Genesis 8:13 ESV

It was time for Noah and his family to exit the ark and re-enter the world. So, God extended yet another invitation to His faithful servant.

*"Leave the boat, all of you—you and your wife, and your sons and their wives. Release all the animals—the birds, the livestock, and the small animals that scurry along the ground—so they can be fruitful and multiply throughout the earth."* – Genesis 8:16-17 NLT

In a way, Noah was invited by God to enjoy the resurrected life. For months, he and his family had been “entombed” in the ark. But the day came when they were invited to walk out of the “grave” and into the light of God’s new day. The apostle Paul would later write about the vicarious death-to-life experience that comes to all who place their faith in Christ.

*What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.* – Romans 6:1-4 ESV

God invited Noah to exit the ark and reenter the world. He and his family were to fulfill the original kingdom mandate given to Adam and Eve. God expected them to be fruitful and fill the earth. He was starting over with a man who walked with Him, and whom He had deemed to be

righteous and blameless. This was to be a new beginning. And Moses records that “Noah, his wife, and his sons and their wives left the boat. And all of the large and small animals and birds came out of the boat, pair by pair” (Genesis 8:18-19 NLT). When they stepped out of the ark, they were beginning a new chapter of the human story. This man and his wife were the new Adam and Eve. They were the divinely ordained pair who would be given the opportunity to act as God’s vice-regents, bearing His image, and faithfully stewarding the vast resources He had placed at their disposal.

But this passage is filled with a sense of *déjà vu*. It seems that a new chapter in the play has begun, but has anything really changed? With the floodwaters gone and the judgment of God fulfilled, will the story of humanity take a sudden turn for the better? Will Noah succeed where Adam failed? Will righteousness fill the earth? Will the godly remnant replicate and spread the image of God across the planet? Sadly, those questions have all been answered. Humanity was given a chance to begin again. Noah was provided with an opportunity to raise up a new generation that would walk with God. But as chapter five pointed out, Noah was a direct descendant of Adam. And as the apostle Paul later revealed, Noah had inherited the same sinful predisposition as his ancestor.

*Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned... – Romans 5:12 ESV*

## A New World with New Rules

<sup>20</sup> Then Noah built an altar to the Lord and took some of every clean animal and some of every clean bird and offered burnt offerings on the altar. <sup>21</sup> And when the Lord smelled the pleasing aroma, the Lord said in his heart, “I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the intention of man’s heart is evil from his youth. Neither will I ever again strike down every living creature as I have done.” <sup>22</sup> While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease.”

<sup>1</sup> And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. <sup>2</sup> The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth and upon every bird of the heavens, upon everything that creeps on the ground and all the fish of the sea. Into your hand they are delivered. <sup>3</sup> Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. And as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything. <sup>4</sup> But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood. <sup>5</sup> And for your lifeblood I will require a reckoning: from every beast I will require it and from man. From his fellow man I will require a reckoning for the life of man.

<sup>6</sup> “Whoever sheds the blood of man,  
by man shall his blood be shed,  
for God made man in his own image.

<sup>7</sup> And you, be fruitful and multiply, increase greatly on the earth and multiply in it.” – Genesis 8:20-9:7 ESV

Upon exiting the ark, Noah immediately demonstrates his immense gratitude for God’s salvation of him and his family. He erects an altar and offers sacrifices to God. But this response stands out as rather odd considering the context of chapter eight. Noah has just been spared from death. And he had been used by God to protect the lives of “animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens” (Genesis 6:7 ESV). God had given him the responsibility of gathering pairs of animals and placing them on the ark so that they might survive the flood.

“And of every living thing of all flesh, you shall bring two of every sort into the ark to keep them alive with you. They shall be male and female. Of the birds according to their kinds, and of the animals according to their kinds, of every creeping thing of the ground, according to its kind, two of every sort shall come in to you to keep them alive.” – Genesis 6:19-20 ESV

And yet, chapter eight closes with Noah taking the lives of some of the animals he just helped save. This all seems so counterproductive. And where did Noah get the idea of constructing an altar and offering burnt offerings to God? This is the first mention of the term “altar” in the entire Bible, and it comes long before God gave to Moses His commands concerning the sacrificial system. It seems doubtful that this costly act of animal sacrifice was something Noah came up with on his own. God had obviously made preparations for just such an occasion because He had commanded Noah to “Take with you seven pairs of all clean animals, the male and his mate, and a pair of the animals that are not clean, the male and his mate, and seven

pairs of the birds of the heavens also, male and female, to keep their offspring alive on the face of all the earth" (Genesis 7:2-3 ESV).

In Hebrew, the term translated as "clean" is נָתָר (nâr), and it means "pure." It was used to refer to that which was pure or clean physically, but also those things that were considered ceremonially and morally pure. God had specifically provided Noah with two different lists of animals to collect and protect on the ark. Of the "clean" animals, Noah was to gather seven pairs. But of those animals deemed "unclean" by God, Noah was to gather only one pair of each – a male and a female.

God was obviously making plans for the future. And He must have given Noah strict instructions as to how to differentiate between the clean and unclean animals. It is likely that God provided Noah with a similar list as that found in Leviticus 11.

*"Of all the land animals, these are the ones you may use for food. You may eat any animal that has completely split hooves and chews the cud. You may not, however, eat the following animals that have split hooves or that chew the cud, but not both. The camel chews the cud but does not have split hooves, so it is ceremonially unclean for you. The hyrax chews the cud but does not have split hooves, so it is unclean. The hare chews the cud but does not have split hooves, so it is unclean. The pig has evenly split hooves but does not chew the cud, so it is unclean. You may not eat the meat of these animals or even touch their carcasses. They are ceremonially unclean for you."* – Leviticus 11:2-8 NLT

God went on to give Moses a detailed list of all the sea creatures, birds, and winged insects that were to be considered clean and good for food. And it seems only logical that God provided Noah with a similar list. Otherwise, he would not have known which species required seven pairs rather than two. Since God had deemed these living creatures as clean and approved for eating, He was ensuring that humanity would have an ample post-flood food source. When Noah exited the ark, God gave him express permission to consume animals as well as plants.

*"Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. And as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything."* – Genesis 9:3 ESV

While this verse placed no restriction on the eating of unclean animals, it is inferred by the surrounding context. The whole purpose behind God differentiating between the clean and unclean creatures was so that Noah and his family knew which animals were approved as sources of food. But God had a second reason for setting apart the clean animals and instructing Noah to collect more of their kind. He had obviously given Noah instructions regarding the offering these pre-approved creatures as animal sacrifices. All the way back in Genesis four, the two sons of Adam inherently knew that they were to bring offerings to God.

*In the course of time Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions.* – Genesis 4:3-4  
ESV

Now, centuries later, and after God had spared Noah and his family. the offerings were to continue. This time, God must have instructed Noah to build an altar and offer up a portion of the clean animals as an offering of thanksgiving. But there is something more to this act of sacrifice. In giving up these particular animals, Noah was willingly diminishing his food source. He was letting go of the very thing that was supposed to ensure the future well-being of him and his family. And, in doing so, he was displaying his trust in God. Those animals sacrificed would never breed again. They would never serve as a source of food or clothing. Noah effectively gave them back to God. And God was pleased.

*“...when the Lord smelled the pleasing aroma, the Lord said in his heart, ‘I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the intention of man’s heart is evil from his youth.’”* – Genesis 8:21 ESV

God made a categorical decision to never destroy the earth again, although nothing had really changed. God reveals that, despite Noah’s obedient sacrifice, the heart of man remained as wicked and fallen as ever. God was starting over with Noah and his family, but He knew that they were damaged goods. In a way, the sacrifice of the “pure” animals was a foreshadowing of the sacrificial system God would ordain for the people of Israel. Because of their sinful dispositions, He would provide them with an ongoing means of atonement for sin, in the form of animal sacrifice. In time, those pure and undefiled animals would be necessary, not just for food, but for cleansing from sin. Why? Because despite the purging and purifying effects of the flood, the heart of man remained permanently marred by evil.

But God made a covenant commitment to Noah, promising to never repeat the devastating destruction of the flood. Instead, He would give humanity a second chance. God chose to give Noah and his family an opportunity to fulfill the same kingdom mandate given to Adam and Eve.

*“Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.”* – Genesis 9:1 ESV

Everything was starting over. The old world had been destroyed. God was beginning again with a new vice-regent: Noah. This “second Adam” was given dominion over all the creatures of the earth. He was awarded stewardship of God’s creation, but this time, God provided Noah with some new stipulations concerning his role.

*“Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. And as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything. But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood. And for your lifeblood I will require a reckoning: from every beast I will require it and from man. From his fellow man I will require a reckoning for the life of man.”* – Genesis 9:3-5 ESV

Unlike Adam and Eve, Noah and his family were given divine permission to use the animals as an alternate food source. But this alteration to their daily diet came with restrictions. They were not allowed to consume the blood of the animal. Much later, God would give the people of Israel further instructions and clarification regarding this ban on the consumption of blood.

*“For the life of every creature is its blood: its blood is its life. Therefore I have said to the people of Israel, You shall not eat the blood of any creature, for the life of every creature is its blood. Whoever eats it shall be cut off.” – Leviticus 17:14 ESV*

According to the creation account, every beast of the earth, every bird of the heavens, and everything that creeps on the earth contained the breath of life (Genesis 1:30). And when God had breathed the breath of life into Adam, he had become a living creature (Genesis 2:7). But the life of every creature is contained in its blood. This incredible substance, created by God, is what sustains the life of every living creature.

The main job of red blood cells, or erythrocytes, is to carry oxygen from the lungs to the body tissues and carbon dioxide as a waste product, away from the tissues and back to the lungs. Hemoglobin (Hgb) is an important protein in the red blood cells that carries oxygen from the lungs to all parts of our body.

Blood carries the following to the body tissues:

- Nourishment
- Electrolytes
- Hormones
- Vitamins
- Antibodies
- Heat
- Oxygen
- Immune cells (cells that fight infection)

Blood carries the following away from the body tissues:

- Waste matter
- Carbon dioxide

– <https://www.urmc.rochester.edu/encyclopedia>

Life cannot exist without blood. And so, God put a prohibition on the consumption of blood. In the animal kingdom, this restriction is regularly ignored, and they suffer the consequences. Wild animals are destined to live in a perpetual cycle marked by carnivorous consumption. But for man, it was to be different. He was not to kill an animal and eat its blood. If he did, he would suffer the consequences. And if a man spilled the blood of a fellow human being, he would pay dearly.

*"If anyone takes a human life, that person's life will also be taken by human hands. For God made human beings in his own image." – Genesis 9:6 NLT*

Things were going to be different in the post-flood world. In the antediluvian world, Cain had killed Abel and had lived to tell about it. Lamech had murdered a man and had bragged about it. But now, God would deliver stern judgment upon all those who took it upon themselves to play god and take human life.

And, having laid out the new rules of engagement in His recreated world, God reiterated His original mandate to humanity.

*"...be fruitful and multiply, increase greatly on the earth and multiply in it." – Genesis 9:7  
ESV*



## The Just and the Justifier

<sup>8</sup>Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, <sup>9</sup>“Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your offspring after you, <sup>10</sup>and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the livestock, and every beast of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark; it is for every beast of the earth. <sup>11</sup>I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.” <sup>12</sup>And God said, “This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: <sup>13</sup>I have set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. <sup>14</sup>When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, <sup>15</sup>I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh. And the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. <sup>16</sup>When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.” <sup>17</sup>God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth.” – Genesis 9:8-17 ESV

God had just destroyed most of the human population because “the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Genesis 4:5 ESV). Yet, because “Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord” (Genesis 4:8 ESV), he and his family were spared. And after delivering Noah from the floodwaters of judgment, God had “blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth’” (Genesis 9:1 ESV).

God was beginning again. He had preserved a remnant of His original creation in the form of a single human family and an assortment of living creatures, all of whom He had protected on the ark. Now, it was time to restart the process of repopulating the planet. So, God reiterated His kingdom mandate a second time.

*“And you, be fruitful and multiply, increase greatly on the earth and multiply in it.”* – Genesis 9:7 ESV

Noah, “a righteous man, blameless in his generation,” who “walked with God” (Genesis 6:9 ESV), was given the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to become the new father of the human race. This descendant of Adam was charged with the responsibility of procreating and repopulating the earth with more of his kind. And because Noah had proven himself faithful to God by doing everything he had been commanded to do, the future for humanity seemed bright. Surely this man would fare better than his ancestor. But as “righteous” and “blameless” as Noah may have been, he was far from perfect. As a descendant of Adam, Noah had inherited the same sinful disposition. He was faithful but still fallen.

In the Adamic genealogy recorded in chapter five, it opens with the words:

*This is the book of the generations of Adam. When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and named them Man when they were created. – Genesis 5:1-2 ESV*

“Adam”(אָדָם – *ādām*) had been the name God gave to all mankind, and all mankind had been created in God’s likeness. When He had formed the first man and woman, they bore His image. They were intended to reflect His glory and to spread His image all across the planet by creating more of their own kind. More image-bearers. But Adam and Eve were not content to be mirrors reflecting God’s glory. Instead, they succumbed to the temptation of Satan and the desires of their own hearts. Rather than obey God, they chose to rob Him of glory by declaring themselves to be gods, with the sovereignty to decide for themselves what was right and wrong.

Adam and Eve dishonored God by disobeying Him. They rebelled against His divine authority and attempted to preempt His sovereign power with their own. And the apostle would later describe the nature of their crime.

*For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. – Romans 1:21-23 ESV*

And Paul goes on to sum up the sin of Adam and Eve in far-from-flattering terms.

*...they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator... – Romans 1:25 ESV*

This predisposition for self-worship was passed on to the next generation. Their son, Cain chose to play god and took the life of his brother, Abel. And the genealogy recorded in Genesis chapter five reveals that Adam and Eve attempted to fill the void left by their murdered son.

*When Adam had lived 130 years, he fathered a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth. – Genesis 5:3 ESV*

But something has changed. It’s subtle but highly significant. More than a century after God had created Adam to bear His image, Adam fathered a son in his own likeness. Seth proved to be the spitting image of his father, Adam. He was born under the curse and, as a result, inherited his father’s sinful disposition. Adam’s “one trespass led to condemnation for all men” (Romans 5:18 ESV), including his own progeny.

All those who descended from Adam were guilty of exchanging “the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man...” (Romans 5:23 ESV). And that list included Noah and his sons. They had been delivered by God but still remained damaged goods. And God understood

the future of mankind was far from bright. He knew exactly what was going to happen. This is why He declared His covenant commitment to Noah and his sons.

*"Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your offspring after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the livestock, and every beast of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark; it is for every beast of the earth. I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth."* – Genesis 9:9-11 ESV

Inherent in this promise is God's understanding of mankind's condition. He knew that humanity would continue to rebel against Him. It was only a matter of time before the wickedness of man spread through the earth like an infectious disease. Noah and his sons would soon father children, made in their own likeness. And the pre-flood moral conditions would be replicated all over again. But God made a covenant commitment to not repeat the judgment of the flood.

God is not suggesting that mankind will never again deserve His judgment. He is simply giving His commitment that He will never again punish mankind's inevitable wickedness through a cataclysmic, worldwide flood. And what sets this covenant apart is that it is universal in scope and unconditional in nature. It applies to all humanity, and not just Noah and his sons. And it comes with no conditions or requirements on man's part.

This covenant is based on the faithfulness of God. He knew all along that Noah and his descendants would fail to live up to their calling as His vice-regents. He had given them authority to rule over His creation as His stewards. But like Adam, they would prove to be less-than-faithful in their oversight of God's kingdom. Inevitably, the descendants of Noah would repeat the sins of their ancestors. It was only a matter of time before God looked down and saw "that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Genesis 6:5 ESV). And while humanity would deserve God's righteous judgment, He would refrain from destroying them.

And as a symbol of His covenant commitment, God provided Noah with a sign. He established the rainbow as a reminder of His glory and goodness. When the storm clouds of God's judgment appeared in the sky, the rainbow would form, providing a powerful sign of God's covenant commitment. Man would continue to sin, but God would refrain from meting out the full measure of His righteous indignation against them. Why? Because He had a plan in place that would one day resolve the problem of mankind's obsession with sin and the divine requirement to deliver justice. Once again, the apostle Paul provides insight into this divine strategy for mitigating the problem of sin and the need for judgment.

*For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard. Yet God, in his grace, freely makes us right in his sight. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins. For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood. This sacrifice shows that God was being fair when he held back and did not punish those*

*who sinned in times past, for he was looking ahead and including them in what he would do in this present time. God did this to demonstrate his righteousness, for he himself is fair and just, and he makes sinners right in his sight when they believe in Jesus. – Romans 3:23-26 NLT*

According to His covenant with Noah, God would hold back and not pour out His judgment on sinful humanity. It would be well-deserved, but God was willing to delay it until He could send His Son as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. In sending Jesus, God would prove Himself “just and the justifier” (Romans 3:26 ESV). Through the sacrifice of His Son’s innocent life, God would satisfy His righteous judgment against sin and provide a way for sinful men to be made right with Him.

*He sent his own Son in a body like the bodies we sinners have. And in that body God declared an end to sin's control over us by giving his Son as a sacrifice for our sins. – Romans 8:3 NLT*

The sins of mankind would continue, and God’s obligation to judge sin would remain. But He was willing to delay that judgment until such a time that He could pour it out on His Son. Adam’s sin left humanity under the curse of God’s wrath. But God had a plan in place that would fully satisfy His need for justice and His desire to justify.

*For Adam's sin led to condemnation, but God's free gift leads to our being made right with God, even though we are guilty of many sins. For the sin of this one man, Adam, caused death to rule over many. But even greater is God's wonderful grace and his gift of righteousness, for all who receive it will live in triumph over sin and death through this one man, Jesus Christ. – Romans 5:16-17 NLT*

## The Legacy of Autonomy

<sup>18</sup> *The sons of Noah who went forth from the ark were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. (Ham was the father of Canaan.)* <sup>19</sup> *These three were the sons of Noah, and from these the people of the whole earth were dispersed.*

<sup>20</sup> *Noah began to be a man of the soil, and he planted a vineyard.* <sup>21</sup> *He drank of the wine and became drunk and lay uncovered in his tent.* <sup>22</sup> *And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father and told his two brothers outside.* <sup>23</sup> *Then Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid it on both their shoulders, and walked backward and covered the nakedness of their father. Their faces were turned backward, and they did not see their father's nakedness.* <sup>24</sup> *When Noah awoke from his wine and knew what his youngest son had done to him,* <sup>25</sup> *he said,*

*"Cursed be Canaan;  
a servant of servants shall he be to his brothers."*

<sup>26</sup> *He also said,*

*"Blessed be the Lord, the God of Shem;  
and let Canaan be his servant.*

*<sup>27</sup> May God enlarge Japheth,  
and let him dwell in the tents of Shem,  
and let Canaan be his servant."*

<sup>28</sup> *After the flood Noah lived 350 years.* <sup>29</sup> *All the days of Noah were 950 years, and he died.* – Genesis 9:18-29 ESV

God has pronounced His blessing upon Noah and his family. He has issued His mandate to multiply and fill the earth. And He has communicated His covenant commitment to never use a worldwide flood to destroy mankind again.

At this point, Noah’s three sons “went forth from the ark” (Genesis 9:18 ESV). They left the safety of the ark behind because they had a new assignment. No longer were they to seek refuge in the massive boat they had helped their father build. The floodwaters had receded and the threat of death had passed. Now, they were to obey the Lord’s command to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth (Genesis 1:28).

There is a hint of irony in the statement that these three young men “went forth,” because it doesn’t appear that they went very far. Even their father appears to have stayed within close proximity of the ark’s final resting place. But Moses relates that from the three sons of Noah, “the people of the whole earth were **dispersed**” (Genesis 9:19 ESV). The Hebrew word translated as “dispersed” is γαρ (nāpāš) and it was used to refer to something that was smashed and its pieces abruptly scattered. It conveys the idea that these “people” did not disperse willingly but were forced to do so by God. God had commanded Noah and his sons to “fill the

earth." And yet, we read that Noah "began to be a man of the soil, and he planted a vineyard" (Genesis 9:20 ESV).

Why did Moses feel this detail was pertinent to the story? Of course, it becomes painfully clear that the fruit of Noah's vineyard eventually produced the wine with which he became drunk. But there seems to be more to the story than that. Noah made an executive decision and chose to settle down and become a farmer. There is nothing inherently wrong with his career choice, but nowhere in the passage does Noah receive a directive from God to become a farmer. This appears to be an autonomous decision on Noah's part. Perhaps he wanted to ensure that he and his family would have enough food to eat. One of the consequences of the flood was that all vegetation had been destroyed. So, it made sense that Noah would see farming as a viable and logical pursuit in the denuded post-flood landscape. But Moses' choice of words is significant. He states that Noah "began to be a man of the soil." The Hebrew word for "soil" is הָדָם ('ădāmâ), the very same word used for the "ground" from which God had formed Adam. And it's important to note that, when God cursed Adam, He stated:

"...cursed is the ground ('ădāmâ) because of you;  
 in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life;  
 thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you;  
 and you shall eat the plants of the field.  
 By the sweat of your face  
 you shall eat bread,  
 till you return to the ground ('ădāmâ),  
 for out of it you were taken;  
 for you are dust,  
 and to dust you shall return." – Genesis 2:17-19 ESV

In his decision to become a farmer, Noah had chosen to embrace the curse. He had returned to the ground from which Adam had been formed. In a sense, he had returned to his roots. But that ground had been cursed by God. It would produce fruit, but only through hard work and accompanied by thorns and thistles. Noah had chosen the difficult path. He had decided to feed his family by working the cursed ground rather than enjoying the "clean" animals that God had graciously provided.

It's important to recall what God told Noah immediately after releasing him from the ark.

"Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. And as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything." – Genesis 9:3 ESV

God had expanded man's diet by providing the "clean" creatures as a food source. Noah had been instructed by God to place seven pairs of these animals on the ark and, now, in the post-flood world, they would have needed Noah's care and protection. So, it would have made more sense for Noah to become a keeper of flocks and herds. And it shouldn't be overlooked that

Noah chose the career path of Cain. Chapter four revealed that “Cain was a worker of the ground” (Genesis 4:2 ESV), while his brother Abel “was a keeper of sheep.”

Again, there is nothing about shepherding that makes it more righteous than farming. The question is whether Noah was following the will of God in his choice of profession. And the context tends to indicate that Noah’s decision was not according to God’s will because it produced bad “fruit” that would have long-term implications for mankind.

Noah planted a vineyard and then waited for his first harvest. This process would have taken time, and while Noah waited for the vines to grow and the eventual grapes to ripen, he was failing to fulfill God’s mandate to “fill the earth.” And rather than disperse, Noah’s sons stayed right by his side. They created a little commune in which to live. There is mention of Noah’s grapes, but no word regarding Noah’s grandchildren.

And in time, Noah harvested the fruit of his labors. He turned his first season of ripened grapes into wine, and then drank himself drunk.

*He drank of the wine and became drunk and lay uncovered in his tent.* – Genesis 9:21  
ESV

Over the centuries, there has been a lot of speculation as to what this verse actually means. What exactly happened that fateful day? Moses simply states that, in his drunken stupor, Noah left himself uncovered in his tent, and his son, Ham, saw him in this compromised state. There are those who suggest that Ham committed an immoral act with his father. They make this determination based on the phrase, “Ham...**saw the nakedness** of his father” (Genesis 9:22 ESV). There were occasions when those words were used to refer to immoral acts. But there is nothing in the context of Genesis 9 to suggest that Ham committed a homosexual act with his father. There is also nothing that would support another purely speculative conclusion that Ham committed incest with his mother. The most logical explanation for what happened is that Ham, a grown man who would have been 100 years old at the time, walked into his father’s tent and saw him lying drunk and naked. But rather than show his father respect by covering his nakedness, Ham decided to have fun at his father’s expense.

“Literally, the ancient Hebrew says that Ham “told with delight” what he saw in his father’s tent. He determined to mock his father and undermining his authority as a man of God. ” – Guzik, David. “Study Guide for Genesis 9.” Blue Letter Bible. 21 Feb, 2017. Web. 3 Jan, 2022. <[https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/guzik\\_david/StudyGuide2017-Gen/Gen-9.cfm&gt;](https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/guzik_david/StudyGuide2017-Gen/Gen-9.cfm&gt;)>

Ham shamed his father. He maliciously maligned the patriarch of the family in front of his two brothers. And these two sons, rather than joining Ham in his ridicule of their father, choose to salvage their father’s dignity by covering his sin.

*Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid it on both their shoulders, and walked backward and covered the nakedness of their father. Their faces were turned backward, and they did not see their father's nakedness.* – Genesis 9:23 ESV

Notice the emphasis on their refusal to see their father's nakedness. This seems to eliminate any thought that this phrase carries hidden meaning. They simply chose to respect their father's privacy and maintain his dignity, while he was in a compromised state. And when Noah eventually sobered up, he discovered Ham had done and was incensed. Moses states that Noah "learned what Ham, his youngest son, had done" (Genesis 9:24 ESV) and immediately leveled a curse against Ham's son.

*"Cursed be Canaan;  
a servant of servants shall he be to his brothers."* – Genesis 9:25 ESV

As retribution against Ham, Noah pronounced a curse upon his own grandson. This action by Noah does not suggest that God was punishing Canaan for his father's sin. Noah was unwittingly declaring a prophetic declaration that the sin of Ham would be passed down to his future generations. Ham's propensity for wickedness would be inherited by his progeny.

For Moses' original audience, the mention of Canaan would have been a sobering reminder of the Canaanites who had occupied the land of promise. These people were particularly wicked and immoral, and they proved to be a constant source of temptation and trials for the Israelites as they attempted to occupy the land given to them by God. The descendants of Ham would be cursed to live in constant opposition to the descendants of Shem and Japheth. And Noah prophesied about this ongoing state of internecine conflict.

*"Blessed be the Lord, the God of Shem;  
and let Canaan be his servant.  
May God enlarge Japheth,  
and let him dwell in the tents of Shem,  
and let Canaan be his servant."* – Genesis 9:26-27 ESV

But all of this could have easily been prevented. Had Noah not made the fateful decision to settle down and plant a vineyard, no grapes would have grown, no wine would have been made, and no drunkenness would have taken place. Had Noah followed the path of Abel and become "a keeper of sheep" (Genesis 4:2 ESV), none of this would have happened. But even in Noah, the man who walked with God, we see a post-fall propensity for doing things his own way. He had spent years faithfully constructing an ark and now he was ready to settle down and enjoy the "fruits" of his labors. But the flood had not cleansed the curse God had placed on the ground. This new Adam (*ādām*) would find the soil ('*ādāmâ*) just as difficult to cultivate as the first Adam. And the fruit it produced would be accompanied by difficulties and heartache.

From this point forward, the Genesis account will display mankind's consistent trajectory away from God. The temptation to "be like God, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:5 ESV), will grow

stronger with each passing generation. And even the righteous and blameless Noah proved to be a man who struggled with a desire to live life on his own terms. After the flood, Noah would live an additional 350 years and then die. He would experience the very fate that God had prescribed for Adam and his descendants.

*"By the sweat of your brow  
will you have food to eat  
until you return to the ground  
from which you were made.  
For you were made from dust,  
and to dust you will return." – Genesis 3:19 NLT*



## The Unfathomable Ways of God

<sup>1</sup> These are the generations of the sons of Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Sons were born to them after the flood.

<sup>2</sup> The sons of Japheth: Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech, and Tiras. <sup>3</sup> The sons of Gomer: Ashkenaz, Riphath, and Togarmah. <sup>4</sup> The sons of Javan: Elishah, Tarshish, Kittim, and Dodanim. <sup>5</sup> From these the coastland peoples spread in their lands, each with his own language, by their clans, in their nations.

<sup>6</sup> The sons of Ham: Cush, Egypt, Put, and Canaan. <sup>7</sup> The sons of Cush: Seba, Havilah, Sabtah, Raamah, and Sabteca. The sons of Raamah: Sheba and Dedan. <sup>8</sup> Cush fathered Nimrod; he was the first on earth to be a mighty man. <sup>9</sup> He was a mighty hunter before the Lord. Therefore it is said, "Like Nimrod a mighty hunter before the Lord." <sup>10</sup> The beginning of his kingdom was Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar. <sup>11</sup> From that land he went into Assyria and built Nineveh, Rehoboth-Ir, Calah, and <sup>12</sup> Resen between Nineveh and Calah; that is the great city. <sup>13</sup> Egypt fathered Ludim, Anamim, Lehabim, Naphtuhim, <sup>14</sup> Pathrusim, Casluhim (from whom the Philistines came), and Captorim.

<sup>15</sup> Canaan fathered Sidon his firstborn and Heth, <sup>16</sup> and the Jebusites, the Amorites, the Gergashites, <sup>17</sup> the Hivites, the Arkites, the Sinites, <sup>18</sup> the Arvadites, the Zemarites, and the Hamathites. Afterward the clans of the Canaanites dispersed. <sup>19</sup> And the territory of the Canaanites extended from Sidon in the direction of Gerar as far as Gaza, and in the direction of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboiim, as far as Lasha. <sup>20</sup> These are the sons of Ham, by their clans, their languages, their lands, and their nations. – Genesis 10:1-20 ESV

Noah lived a long and fruitful life. For 950 years, this righteous and blameless man had walked with God. No, he had not been perfect or sinless. But he had stood out from the rest of his generation as a man who had a heart for God. And, as a result, Noah found favor with God. He and the members of his immediate family were chosen by God and graciously given a chance to survive the judgment that God poured out on the world. They alone had lived before and after the devastation of the flood. After assessing the pervasive presence of wickedness amongst mankind, God had decided to destroy His creation and start over. With this small remnant of humanity and a relative sampling of the rest of the living creatures, God rebooted the entire creation project.

In Genesis 10, Moses provides another genealogical listing designed to emphasize this new phase of God's plan. The first genealogy is found in chapter five and covers the family tree of Adam all the way to Noah. Now, Moses picks up the story of mankind's expansion by chronicling the family trees of Noah's three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

Noah eventually died, but his three sons would continue to fulfill God's mandate to be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth. Humanity would continue to use its God-given capacity to procreate. Just as Adam and Eve had born children, so would these three men. And, as Moses makes clear,

"Sons were born to them after the flood" (Genesis 10:1 ESV). Life continued. But as will soon become readily evident, so did sin.

From this one man, Noah, would come all the nations of the world. And though he was a man who walked *with* God, his descendants would show a stubborn capacity to walk away *from* God. The further the narrative gets away from the story of Eden, the greater the distance grows between God and mankind. As humanity multiplies and spreads across the earth, its desire for autonomy and independence from God will increase exponentially.

Yet, God had a strategy in place. He was working behind the scenes to preserve a faithful remnant through whom He could bring about His ultimate redemptive plan for the world. The genealogical lists found in Genesis 10 are intended to display God's sovereign power and glory. The births recorded in this chapter are meant to emphasize God's providential orchestration of all things. He was divinely determining the trajectory of mankind, creating from the three sons of Noah all the future nations of the world. In the book of Deuteronomy, Moses encouraged the people of Israel to consider God's sovereign authority over the nations.

*Remember the days of old;  
consider the years of many generations;  
ask your father, and he will show you,  
your elders, and they will tell you.  
When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance,  
when he divided mankind,  
he fixed the borders of the peoples  
according to the number of the sons of God.* – Deuteronomy 32:7-8 ESV

And many centuries later, the apostle Paul would reemphasize the undeniable sovereignty of God over the affairs of mankind.

*And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, for*

*"In him we live and move and have our being"; as even some of your own poets have said, "For we are indeed his offspring."* – Acts 17:26-28 ESV

In the lengthy list of names found in Genesis 10, Moses provides a series of not-so-subtle hints, designed to explain to his readers the origins of some of the nations of their day. In the family tree of Ham, Moses reveals the genesis of Babel, the city that would later become known as Babylon. Of course, that same family tree contains the name of Canaan, the son of Ham whom Noah had cursed. From this son would come the Canaanites, the people group who would occupy the land that God would later promise to Abraham as his inheritance. In verse 12 is mentioned the city of Nineveh, which would later become the capital of the Assyrian empire,

the nation that God would eventually use to destroy the northern kingdom of Israel. Verse 14 contains the name of the Philistines, another people group that would prove to be a constant thorn in the side of God's chosen people.

Moses also points out that Canaan became the father of "the Jebusites, the Amorites, the Gergashites, the Hivites, the Arkites, the Sinites, the Arvadites, the Zemarites, and the Hamathites" (Genesis 10:16-18 ESV). This list of names would have been very familiar to Moses' audience. Among this list are the names of the nations that God had promised to defeat so that Moses and the people of Israel could occupy the land of Canaan.

*The Lord said to Moses, "Depart; go up from here, you and the people whom you have brought up out of the land of Egypt, to the land of which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, 'To your offspring I will give it.' I will send an angel before you, and I will drive out the Canaanites, the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. Go up to a land flowing with milk and honey; but I will not go up among you, lest I consume you on the way, for you are a stiff-necked people." – Exodus 33:1-3 ESV*

Moses is assuring his people that God had been behind the creation of these various nations. Their formation had not been a byproduct of chance or serendipity. They had been divinely ordained. And while many of these nations would eventually become the enemies of Israel, they would be completely under the authority and dominion of God Almighty. There was a purpose for their existence and it had been determined by God.

And Moses provides one last "hint" in his genealogical record of Ham's family tree. In verse 19, he describes the eventual territorial boundaries of the Canaanites. And in his description, he includes the names of two infamous cities that would play an important role in the history of Israel: Sodom and Gomorrah.

The family tree of Ham includes such names as Egypt, Canaan, Babel, Assyria, Nineveh, Canaan, Sodom, and Gomorrah. The Jewish readers to whom Moses wrote would have flinched at the mention of these names. They were laden with significance and represented important milestones in the history of the Jewish people. And yet, Moses is painstakingly proving that these various nations and cities were the byproduct of God's sovereign will. A point he emphasizes when he writes, "These are the sons of Ham, by their clans, their languages, their lands, and their nations" (Genesis 10:20 ESV).

"The table of nations is a 'horizontal' genealogy rather than a 'vertical' one (those in chapters 5 and 11 are vertical). Its purpose is not primarily to trace ancestry; instead, it shows political, geographical, and ethnic affiliations among tribes for various reasons, most notable being holy war. Tribes shown to be 'kin' would be in league together. Thus this table aligns the predominant tribes in and around the land promised to Israel. These names include founders of tribes, clans, cities, and territories." – Allen P. Ross, *Genesis*

The Jews, who were designated as God's chosen people, had to constantly question why God had allowed such nations as Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon to exist. Why did God permit the presence of wicked cities like Sodom and Gomorrah? Wouldn't the world have been a better place without the Canaanites, Amorites, and Jebusites?

But this chapter was intended to display and explain the sovereignty of God. As Paul so clearly asserted, "From one man he created all the nations throughout the whole earth. **He decided beforehand when they should rise and fall, and he determined their boundaries**" (Genesis 17:26 NLT).

The sin committed by Ham (Genesis 9) produced some significant consequences. His genealogical line is filled with a rogue's gallery of names and locations that would have struck fear into the hearts of the Jewish people. But these individuals and nations each existed for a reason. They would have divinely ordained roles to play in God's unfolding redemptive plan. Yes, from Ham would come the Canaanites. But as chapter 11 will reveal, from Shem would come Abram, the father of the Hebrew people.

When dealing with the question of God's sovereignty, it's essential that we accept the bad with the good. The existence of the Canaanites, Ninevites, Babylonians, Egyptians, and Sodomites may cause us to question the wisdom of God, we must always remember that God's ways are not always understandable or even logical to our finite minds. And the sovereign God of the universe has warned us that trying to comprehend His ways is well beyond our limited capacity.

*"My thoughts are nothing like your thoughts," says the Lord.  
"And my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine.  
For just as the heavens are higher than the earth,  
so my ways are higher than your ways  
and my thoughts higher than your thoughts."* – Isaiah 55:8-9 NLT

Mankind was procreating and filling the earth, but all the while, God was fulfilling His sovereign, infallible will.

## The Hidden Hope of Salvation

<sup>21</sup> To Shem also, the father of all the children of Eber, the elder brother of Japheth, children were born. <sup>22</sup> The sons of Shem: Elam, Asshur, Arpachshad, Lud, and Aram. <sup>23</sup> The sons of Aram: Uz, Hul, Gether, and Mash. <sup>24</sup> Arpachshad fathered Shelah; and Shelah fathered Eber. <sup>25</sup> To Eber were born two sons: the name of the one was Peleg, for in his days the earth was divided, and his brother's name was Joktan. <sup>26</sup> Joktan fathered Almodad, Sheleph, Hazarmaveth, Jerah, <sup>27</sup> Hadoram, Uzal, Diklah, <sup>28</sup> Obal, Abimael, Sheba, <sup>29</sup> Ophir, Havilah, and Jobab; all these were the sons of Joktan. <sup>30</sup> The territory in which they lived extended from Mesha in the direction of Sephar to the hill country of the east. <sup>31</sup> These are the sons of Shem, by their clans, their languages, their lands, and their nations.

<sup>32</sup> These are the clans of the sons of Noah, according to their genealogies, in their nations, and from these the nations spread abroad on the earth after the flood. – Genesis 10:21-32 ESV

Compared to his younger brother's genealogy, Shem's lineage is far more pedestrian in nature. It contains no names that might raise eyebrows or elicit a sense of shock. And yet, within this list of obscure and difficult to pronounce names Moses provided a subtle, yet powerful, reminder of God's sovereign authority over the affairs of mankind.

For most modern readers, this list of names seems rather superfluous. The individuals listed are unknown to us and, therefore, carry little weight. Yet, for the Jewish audience to whom Moses penned the book of Genesis, these names would have had a great deal of significance. At the mention of Arpachshad, Shelah, Eber, and Peleg, Moses would have had his reader's undistracted attention, because these men were part of the family tree of Abraham, the father of the Hebrew nation. In fact, Moses will provide a more detailed and complete genealogy of Abraham in the very next chapter. He will go on to trace the lineage of Shem through the line of Peleg, all the way to the man who would become the patriarch of the Jewish people.

But in chapter nine, Moses chose to ignore the line of Peleg and traced the lineage of his brother, Joktan instead. Moses provides a rather strange aside when describing these two brothers.

*To Eber were born two sons: the name of the one was Peleg, for in his days the earth was divided, and his brother's name was Joktan.* – Genesis 10:25 ESV

There has been much debate regarding the meaning of the phrase, “the earth was divided.” The Hebrew word is פָּלָג (pālaḡ), and it means “to split, cleave, or divide.” Based on the context of chapter 11, the most logical explanation is that Moses is referring to God’s dividing of the nations by the creation of languages. It seems that the events recorded in Genesis 11:1-9 occurred during the lifetime of Peleg. It was in Peleg’s lifetime that God decided to “divide or split” the earth by confusing the languages of the people. And Moses provides a detailed description of God’s momentous decision.

*“Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another’s speech.” – Genesis 11:6-7 ESV*

And Moses goes on to describe how God “dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth” (Genesis 11:8 ESV). God literally “divided” or “split” the earth by creating new people groups with different languages. Their inability to communicate with one another caused an immediate parting of the ways, indirectly fulfilling God’s command that mankind “fill the earth.” In “dispersing” them, God was breaking humanity in pieces and scattering them abroad. That is the literal meaning of the Hebrew word, פָּשַׁׁע (*pûṣ*).

It would appear that Moses split the genealogy found in chapter 10 at the juncture of Peleg and Joktan because he was going to provide further details about Peleg’s lineage in the following chapter. During the lives of these two brothers, something significant and earth-shattering took place. And Moses will provide further insights into that momentous occasion. But it seems safe to conclude that when Moses states “in his days the earth was divided,” he is referring to the events surrounding the tower of Babel, as described in the opening verses of chapter 11. Another reason for reaching this conclusion is found in a psalm written by David. In it, he uses the very same word, (*pālaḡ*), to describe the dividing and confusion of languages.

*Destroy, O Lord, divide (*pālaḡ*) their tongues;  
for I see violence and strife in the city. – Psalm 55:9 ESV*

So, hidden within this somewhat meaningless and uninteresting genealogy is a subtle reminder of God’s sovereign will. As the sons of Noah procreate and populate the planet, God is operating behind the scenes, sovereignly orchestrating His divine will. With the birth of each new son, another branch in the human family tree begins. Peleg and Joktan, while brothers, would produce two distinctively different progeny. From Joktan would come the various Arabic tribes, the Yemenites, Assyrians, Lydians, and Aramaens. These “clans of the sons of Noah, according to their genealogies, in their nations, and from these the nations spread abroad on the earth after the flood” (Genesis 10:32 ESV).

God was orchestrating the creation of all those nations that were destined to play vital roles in His future plans for the world. By sovereignly forming such diverse groups as the Egyptians, Assyrians, Babylonians, and Canaanites, God was putting in place all the pieces to His divine plan for mankind’s redemption. There was a method to the seeming madness. God had a reason for creating each of these distinct people groups. And Moses wanted his readers to understand that the existence of each of these nations had been decreed by God’s will. They didn’t just happen. They were planned by God Almighty. And while each of them would eventually become an enemy of Israel, God had a divinely ordained role for them to play.

There is no cosmic karma in the universe. Nothing happens by chance. Nations rise and fall by the sovereign will of God. The existence of languages was part of God’s plan. The birth of great

nation-states was His idea. Each of the men listed in the genealogy of chapter 10 would go on to father a multitude of descendants. And these people would eventually form various nations, representing a diverse mix of ethnicities with each speaking their own unique language and displaying their own cultural distinctiveness. And it would be into this diverse and divisive milieu that God would sovereignly raise up a single man who would become the next “Adam” in the story of mankind’s eventual redemption from the fall.

This all takes us back to the protoevangelium (first gospel) found in Genesis 3:15. In pronouncing His curse against the serpent, God provided the promise of an offspring or seed, that would come from the woman.

*“I will put enmity between you and the woman,  
and between your **offspring** and her **offspring**;  
he shall bruise your head,  
and you shall bruise his heel.” – Genesis 3:15 ESV*

There is far more to this statement than the prediction of mutual hatred between mankind and snakes. This was a divinely decreed promise of payback for Satan’s role in Adam and Eve’s rebellion against God. There would one day come a descendant of Eve who would restore fallen mankind to a right relationship with God. Jesus Christ, as outlined in the gospel of Luke, would be born a descendant of Adam (Luke 3:23-38). But as Matthew records in his gospel account, Jesus would also be the descendant of Abraham, who would be born from the line of Peleg.

*...Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. – Matthew 1:1 ESV*

Hidden within these somewhat obscure genealogical lists is the message of God’s sovereign plan to restore what Satan had attempted to destroy. When God sent the flood as a form of judgment against the wickedness of humanity, He could have destroyed Noah and his sons, and been completely just and right in doing so. While Noah found favor with God, he was not sinless. While Moses describes him as righteous and blameless “in his generation” (Genesis 6:9 ESV), this was intended as a statement of comparison, not commendation. In other words, Noah had not earned his salvation from God. God did not spare Noah because he was righteous. No, according to the book of Hebrews, God spared Noah because he believed and obeyed. He took God at His word and heeded the warning that judgment was coming.

*By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith. – Hebrews 11:7 ESV*

Noah’s faith was in the salvation of God. Even though none of God’s commands made much sense or the likelihood of a worldwide flood seemed remote at best, Noah believed and obeyed. He put his faith in God’s promise of deliverance. But in stepping on the ark he had helped to construct, Noah was foreshadowing a greater deliverance to come. And the author of

Hebrews ends chapter 11, his great “Hall of Faith,” with the following words of encouragement and insight.

*All these people earned a good reputation because of their faith, yet none of them received all that God had promised. For God had something better in mind for us, so that they would not reach perfection without us.* – Hebrews 11:39-40 NLT

Out of all the offspring born to Adam and Noah, there would eventually come one “seed” that would provide a means of restoring broken humanity to a right relationship with its Creator.

## A Monument to Man's Futility

<sup>1</sup> Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. <sup>2</sup> And as people migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. <sup>3</sup> And they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly." And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. <sup>4</sup> Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth." <sup>5</sup> And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of man had built. <sup>6</sup> And the Lord said, "Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. <sup>7</sup> Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another's speech." <sup>8</sup> So the Lord dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. <sup>9</sup> Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth. And from there the Lord dispersed them over the face of all the earth. – Genesis 11:1-9 ESV

With the opening verses of chapter 11, Moses provides an explanation of an earlier comment he made regarding Peleg, a descendant of Shem.

*To Eber were born two sons: the name of the one was Peleg, **for in his days the earth was divided...*** – Genesis 10:25 ESV

The genealogy of Shem found in chapter 10 contains no lineage for Peleg. It simply mentions his name, then moves on to his brother Joktan. But Moses had a good reason for leaving out Peleg. He wanted to emphasize another major turning point in mankind's story of expansion and moral degeneration. The sons of Noah were filling the earth, just as God had commanded. But as the genealogy of Ham revealed, the spread of mankind was accompanied by a rising number of people groups who would later be characterized as idolatrous, licentious, and evil. The existence of nations like Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon was the direct result of Noah's sons fulfilling God's mandate to be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth. Their efforts had been successful.

*...the nations spread abroad on the earth after the flood.* – Genesis 10:32 ESV

And Moses opens chapter 11 with a stunning revelation. There had been a time when all the nations of the earth shared a common language. This never-disclosed-before insight would have come as a shock to Moses' Jewish audience. They were already having to deal with the fact that all mankind shared the same lineage. Their enemies, the Egyptians, Assyrians, Canaanites, and Babylonians, were actually their long-lost brothers. And now, they were learning for the first time, that there had been a point in time when all these disparate people groups had shared the same language.

One of the underlying and often overlooked themes in the book of Genesis is mankind's reticence to obey God's command to fill the earth. After the fall, the two sons of Adam and Eve chose domestication over migration and expansion.

*Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground.* – Genesis 4:2 ESV

There is nothing inherently wrong with either of these professions. But it is apparent from the context that the two sons had both chosen to remain close to home. They had settled down not far from their mother and father. And their close proximity proved to be deadly. It was not long before "Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him" (Genesis 4:8 ESV). And, as a result, God cursed Cain.

**"When you work the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength. You shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth."** – Genesis 4:12 ESV

As part of his divine punishment, Cain was cast out of the comfort of his familial surroundings. He was forced to leave home. And his ban from his homeland is reminiscent of Adam and Eve's expulsion from the garden.

*Then the Lord God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever—" therefore the Lord God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.* – Genesis 3:22-24 ESV

Adam and Eve had been cast out of Eden, but the divine mandate remained intact. They were to fill the earth. Ever since the fall, the trajectory of mankind was always intended to be away from Eden and into the world. But it seems that Adam and Eve didn't wander far from the border of Eden. And their two sons chose to remain nearby as well. But after his sin, Cain was cursed to live the life of a wanderer – a nomad.

Yet, Cain ignored God's edict and "settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden" (Genesis 4:16 ESV). He blatantly refused to live under God's curse, choosing instead to settle down.

*Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch. When he built a city, he called the name of the city after the name of his son, Enoch.* – Genesis 4:17 ESV

Rather than wander, Cain settled down once again. And this same predisposition to ignore God's mandate can be seen in Noah. When the floodwaters had receded and Noah was able to exit the ark, he and his three sons were assigned the task of fulfilling the divine mandate to fill the earth. But Noah decided to settle down instead.

*Noah began to be a man of the soil, and he planted a vineyard.* – Genesis 9:20 ESV

And Noah's seemingly innocuous decision had devastating consequences. It resulted in the cursing of his own grandson and a growing division among all his progeny.

As each new generation came into existence, they continued the slow but steady movement away from Eden. Moses indicates that "as people migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there" (Genesis 11:2 ESV). Whether they realized it or now, they were filling the earth. But, once again, mankind's inherent desire for autonomy and self-determination raised its ugly head.

During Peleg's lifetime, some of his relatives made the same fateful decision that Cain and Noah had made. They chose to settle down.

*Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth."* – Genesis 11: 4 ESV

These industrious individuals decided to make bricks and build a tower to the sky – intended as a monument to their own ingenuity and industry. Their ambitious building project was motivated by a desire to "be like God, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:5). They wanted to be the determiners of their own fate and to control their collective destiny. Nowhere in this passage does Moses relate a command issued from God that they should construct a city. This had been their decision and it was purely self-centered and aimed at self-glorification. They wanted to make a name for themselves. Rather than choosing to glorify God, they attempted to glorify themselves. That same attitude is reflected in the words of one of their descendants, a powerful man who would build a great city and then one day proclaim:

*"Look at this great city of Babylon! By my own mighty power, I have built this beautiful city as my royal residence to display my majestic splendor."* – Daniel 4:30 NLT

Nebuchadnezzar, the great king of Babylon, would attempt to rob glory from God and suffer the consequences. He gloried in his greatness as a self-made man. But God would give this egotistical king a painful lesson in humility and divine sovereignty. Nebuchadnezzar would have to learn "that the Most High rules over the kingdoms of the world and gives them to anyone he chooses" (Daniel 4:32 NLT).

And the overly ambitious and egotistical builders of the tower would learn a similar lesson about God's sovereignty. When the Almighty saw what they were doing, He reacted immediately.

*"Look!" he said. "The people are united, and they all speak the same language. After this, nothing they set out to do will be impossible for them! Come, let's go down and confuse the people with different languages. Then they won't be able to understand each other."* – Genesis 11:6-7 NLT

There are some who believe that these people were attempting to build a tower that would allow them to access God. But up until this point in the story, mankind had always considered Eden to be the home of God. It's interesting to note that Adam and Eve had been banned from the garden, the place where they had enjoyed unbroken fellowship with God. And when their son, Cain, had been cursed by God, he "**went away from the presence of the Lord**" and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden" (Genesis 4:16 ESV).

The story of mankind is characterized by a constant movement away from God. Made in His image and designed to reflect His glory, humanity has made a habit out of distancing itself from God. And the apostle Paul paints a rather bleak portrait of the fallen state of mankind.

*Since they thought it foolish to acknowledge God, he abandoned them to their foolish thinking and let them do things that should never be done. Their lives became full of every kind of wickedness, sin, greed, hate, envy, murder, quarreling, deception, malicious behavior, and gossip. They are backstabbers, haters of God, insolent, proud, and boastful. They invent new ways of sinning, and they disobey their parents. They refuse to understand, break their promises, are heartless, and have no mercy. They know God's justice requires that those who do these things deserve to die, yet they do them anyway. Worse yet, they encourage others to do them, too.* – Romans 1:28-32 NLT

To disrupt the self-aggrandizing efforts of the tower builders, God created an instant source of confusion by confounding their ability to communicate. In an instant, God turned their call to make a name for themselves into a cacophony of disparate languages. They could no longer understand one another. And with no common language, their ability to conspire against God evaporated.

Moses indicates that "the Lord scattered them all over the world, and they stopped building the city" (Genesis 11:8 NLT). This was a divine punishment that had sovereign consequences. God knew what He was doing. He was forcing humanity to obey His kingdom mandate and fill the earth. It was only in the fulfillment of that command that humanity could act as His image-bearers and bring glory to His name. His will would be done, whether they wanted to participate or not. And Moses states that "in this way, he scattered them all over the world" (Genesis 11:9 NLT).

But while the people dispersed, the tower and the city remained. The site became known as Babel. There is a powerful sense of irony in this story because the name Babel would become synonymous with the future nation of Babylon. In their language, Babel came to mean "the gate of God." But in Hebrew, the word meant "confusion." The site of Babel would become the future home of the mighty city of Babylon, the resplendent capital of Nebuchadnezzar's vast domain. The very city over which he gazed and proudly proclaimed, "Look at this great city of Babylon! By my own mighty power, I have built this beautiful city as my royal residence to display my majestic splendor."

Man's incessant pride is nothing more than misplaced glory that always results in confusion and conflict. Man's consistent attempts to dethrone God have always produced nothing but chaos. The psalmist provides a sobering assessment of humanity's ill-fated and futile attempts to replace God.

*Why are the nations so angry?  
Why do they waste their time with futile plans?  
The kings of the earth prepare for battle;  
the rulers plot together  
against the Lord  
and against his anointed one.  
"Let us break their chains," they cry,  
"and free ourselves from slavery to God."*

*But the one who rules in heaven laughs.  
The Lord scoffs at them.  
Then in anger he rebukes them,  
terrifying them with his fierce fury. – Psalm 2:1-5 NLT*



## The Fine Line from Cursing to Blessing

<sup>10</sup> These are the generations of Shem. When Shem was 100 years old, he fathered Arpachshad two years after the flood. <sup>11</sup> And Shem lived after he fathered Arpachshad 500 years and had other sons and daughters.

<sup>12</sup> When Arpachshad had lived 35 years, he fathered Shelah. <sup>13</sup> And Arpachshad lived after he fathered Shelah 403 years and had other sons and daughters.

<sup>14</sup> When Shelah had lived 30 years, he fathered Eber. <sup>15</sup> And Shelah lived after he fathered Eber 403 years and had other sons and daughters.

<sup>16</sup> When Eber had lived 34 years, he fathered Peleg. <sup>17</sup> And Eber lived after he fathered Peleg 430 years and had other sons and daughters.

<sup>18</sup> When Peleg had lived 30 years, he fathered Reu. <sup>19</sup> And Peleg lived after he fathered Reu 209 years and had other sons and daughters.

<sup>20</sup> When Reu had lived 32 years, he fathered Serug. <sup>21</sup> And Reu lived after he fathered Serug 207 years and had other sons and daughters.

<sup>22</sup> When Serug had lived 30 years, he fathered Nahor. <sup>23</sup> And Serug lived after he fathered Nahor 200 years and had other sons and daughters.

<sup>24</sup> When Nahor had lived 29 years, he fathered Terah. <sup>25</sup> And Nahor lived after he fathered Terah 119 years and had other sons and daughters.

<sup>26</sup> When Terah had lived 70 years, he fathered Abram, Nahor, and Haran.

<sup>27</sup> Now these are the generations of Terah. Terah fathered Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran fathered Lot. <sup>28</sup> Haran died in the presence of his father Terah in the land of his kindred, in Ur of the Chaldeans. <sup>29</sup> And Abram and Nahor took wives. The name of Abram's wife was Sarai, and the name of Nahor's wife, Milcah, the daughter of Haran the father of Milcah and Iscah. <sup>30</sup> Now Sarai was barren; she had no child.

<sup>31</sup> Terah took Abram his son and Lot the son of Haran, his grandson, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife, and they went forth together from Ur of the Chaldeans to go into the land of Canaan, but when they came to Haran, they settled there. <sup>32</sup> The days of Terah were 205 years, and Terah died in Haran. – Genesis 11:10-32 ESV

With the opening verses of chapter 11, Moses provides an explanation of an earlier comment he made regarding Peleg, a descendant of Shem.

*To Eber were born two sons: the name of the one was Peleg, **for in his days the earth was divided...*** – Genesis 10:25 ESV

Bookending the story of the tower of Babel are two genealogical lists. In chapter 10, beginning in verse 11, Moses provides an abbreviated version of Shem's lineage, because it provides no branch for Peleg, the son of Eber. In reference to Peleg simply states: "in his days the earth was divided" (Genesis 10:25 ESV). The story of Babel is what follows. When humanity decided to settle down in the land of Shinar, build a city, and erect a tower as a monument to their own glory, God took action. They shared a common ancestry and enjoyed the benefits of a common language. This unified connection gave them a sense of invincibility and fueled their desire for autonomy. That is why God said, "Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them" (Genesis 11:6 ESV).

Rather than obeying God's mandate to fill the earth, they had determined to remain in one place and construct a city that would reflect their own greatness. Rather than honor God, they chose to glorify themselves. So, God stepped in and "confused" their language. He miraculously divided their number by creating a barrier to further communication. Suddenly, they found themselves unable to understand one another. This God-enforced diversity resulted in their dispersal across the face of all the earth.

And it is at this point, that Moses picks back up the genealogical record of Shem's descendants. With the story of Babel explained, Moses is able to reveal what happened to Peleg after "the earth was divided" (Genesis 10:25 ESV).

Back in chapter five, Moses recorded another genealogical record that began with Adam and ended with Noah and his three sons. This list contains the names of all those who descended from Adam and Eve and vividly portrays the life-altering consequences of the first couple's sin and the divine curse it incurred.

First of all, it states that Adam "fathered a son in his own likeness, after his image" (Genesis 5:3 ESV). This statement stands in stark contrast to the creation account where God had said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" (Genesis 1:26 ESV). Because of the entrance of sin into the perfect environment of Eden, mankind was permanently damaged. Adam and Eve would pass on to their descendants their proclivity for sin and the divine decree of death as its punishment. The original man and woman were to be God's image-bearers. But like a marred mirror, this first couple and all their progeny would be incapable of perfectly reflecting the glory of God – all because of sin. Their children would be born in their image and bear their likeness.

And the list found in chapter five contains another sober reminder of the consequences of the fall. With each successive generation, Moses repeatedly and intentionally states "he fathered" and "he died." While the creation story in chapter one emphasizes the glory and wonder of new life, the genealogical list in chapter five provides the new post-fall reality of death.

But Moses leaves out that dark and depressing aspect of mankind's fate in the genealogy of Shem recorded in chapter 11. While the age of each father is listed, there is no mention of death. This distinction is subtle, yet significant. Moses is attempting to paint a more hopeful future for humanity. Even after the debacle of Babel, when "the earth was divided" by God (Genesis 10:25) because of the pride and arrogance of man, this second genealogy of Shem is intended to reveal a new line of humanity that will result in another new beginning.

The first part of this list is much like the one found in chapter 10. But this time, Moses traces the branch of Eber's family tree through his son, Peleg. According to the list, Eber had other sons and daughters. In other words, there were other branches to his family tree that could have been traced, but Moses concentrated all his attention on Peleg and the line of descent that flowed through his son, Reu. Moses is very specific and has an end in mind. His methodical record of Peleg's lineage has been reverse-engineered and intended to trace the ancestral pedigree of a particular offspring of Adam. Notice where the genealogy ends.

*When Terah had lived 70 years, he fathered Abram, Nahor, and Haran. – Genesis 11:26  
ESV*

After listing generations of descendants from Shem, the list suddenly stops. Moses has reached his desired destination. And the name of Abram would have caught the attention of Moses' Hebrew audience. After all, he was their revered patriarch, the father of the Hebrew nation. This entire exercise in genealogical authentication was meant to validate Abram as a descendant of Noah and an offspring of Adam. And one of the reasons this is so important is because of the curse God had leveled against the serpent for his role in the fall of man.

*"And I will cause hostility between you and the woman,  
and between your offspring and **her offspring**.  
He will strike your head,  
and you will strike his heel." – Genesis 3:15 NLT*

Of all the genealogical lists contained in Genesis, this one is intended to provide a sense of hope and anticipation. The world is broken and marred. And with the birth of each new generation, mankind is slowly moving further away from God. And yet, here in chapter 11, an offspring of Eve is born who will play a significant role in fulfilling the divine curse that God had leveled on the enemy. Satan would pay dearly for his attempt to dethrone God by deceiving and damaging His image-bearers. Despite the subsequent generations that flowed from the first couple and the track record of wickedness that plagued them, God had a plan for restoring them. He had a preconceived strategy for redeeming fallen humanity even before He had breathed life into the first man.

This chapter is intended to be a turning point in what has been a somewhat bleak story. Moses is preparing to reveal the next chapter in his history of mankind by introducing a new character who will play a vital role in God's redemptive plan. Up to this point in the Genesis account, there have been two primary protagonists: Adam and Noah. One represents humanity in its

pre-fall and post-fall states. The other spans the pre-flood and post-flood periods of mankind's existence. But now, Moses introduces a third character whose life will greatly influence the unfolding story of God's redemptive plan.

What should stand out in all of this is God's sovereignty. He is operating behind the scenes, orchestrating, and overseeing every aspect of His creation. Nothing escapes His notice or happens outside of His sovereign and providential will. The birth of Abram was not a case of blind luck, fate, or cosmic karma. It was the preordained will of God Almighty. God had predetermined the birth of Abram because He had always planned to use this one man as a conduit through whom He would one day pour out His blessings on humanity. As will become evident as the story unfolds, God had grand plans for this seemingly insignificant descendant of Adam. The One who ordained Abram's birth would one day divulge Abram's calling.

*"Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."* – Genesis 12:1-3 ESV

That last line speaks volumes. God was going to use a solitary offspring of Eve to reverse the curse and pour out His blessings on all the families of the earth. This one man, Abram, would prove to be the divinely ordained conduit thought whom God would bring hope to a sin-damaged world and the gift of life to all those living under the curse of death.

And Moses ends chapter 11 with Abram moving from his home in Ur to the distant land of Haran. Moses describes Abram's slow but steady migration east, bringing him ever closer to the land of Canaan. And Moses intended this far-from-subtle insight into Abram's former home and ultimate destination to remind his Jewish readers of their roots. They hailed from the land of Shinar, the infamous site of Babel and the future home of Babylon. Their patriarch was a Chaldean and not a Jew. And their distinct Hebraic language had been the result of God's judgment against the rebellious people of Babel. Their heritage was marred. Their patriarch was far from pristine. But their God had a plan that would put all these pieces together to form a perfect plan so that He might bless the nations of the earth.

## A Call and a Commitment

<sup>1</sup> Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. <sup>2</sup> And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. <sup>3</sup> I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” – Genesis 12:1-3 ESV

With the opening verses of chapter 12, Moses provides his Hebrew readers with an important history lesson that solidifies their unique role in God’s redemptive plan for all mankind. For generations, the Jews had rightfully viewed themselves as God’s chosen people. They considered themselves to be a people who had been set apart by God and declared to be His “treasured possession.” Those were the very words that Moses had communicated to them not long after God delivered them out of captivity in Egypt.

*“Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel: ‘You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’”* – Exodus 19:3-6 ESV

Years later, when the people of Israel were standing on the border of Canaan, preparing to enter into the land that God had promised to give them, Moses reminded them of their privileged position as God’s set-apart people.

***“For you are a holy people, who belong to the LORD your God. Of all the people on earth, the LORD your God has chosen you to be his own special treasure.”*** – Deuteronomy 7:6 NLT

When reading the story of Abram’s call, it is essential to keep this unique relationship between God and the nation of Israel in mind. The original audience to whom Moses wrote would have relished this retelling of their storied history, but it’s likely that they missed some of the key messages that God had intended for them to hear. They would have brightened at the mention of Abram’s name. This would have been the part of the story where they sat up and took notice. God’s call of Abram had been the impetus for their very existence.

And while that was true, there is something far more significant in the story of Abram’s call than the formation of a single, set-apart nation. For generations, the descendants of Abram had missed the divine purpose behind their existence. They had not earned their favored status with God. The Almighty had not looked down from heaven, noticed their righteous behavior, and decided to reward them with a promotion. In fact, Moses had fully dispelled any thought of their favored status being a reward.

*"The LORD did not set his heart on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other nations, for you were the smallest of all nations! Rather, it was simply that the LORD loves you, and he was keeping the oath he had sworn to your ancestors."* – Deuteronomy 7:7-8 NLT

That last line is the key to understanding Genesis 12. The Hebrews, as descendants of Abram, had been created by God. Despite their long and storied history, they had not always existed. There had been a time when not a single Jew walked the face of the earth. Even Abram was not of Jewish descent. He was a Chaldean. But from this one man came a people whom God would set apart. Like the rest of the universe in Genesis 1, the Hebrew people would be created by God, *ex nihilo* (out of nothing). And the 12th chapter of Genesis begins the story of this “new creation” by God.

The apostle Peter picked up on this theme when writing his first letter. He was addressing Christians who were living in Asia Minor and suffering persecution because of their faith. At one point in his letter, he describes them as “aliens and strangers” (1 Peter 2:11), living in the midst of the spiritual darkness that surrounded them. And he used language that compared them to the people of Israel.

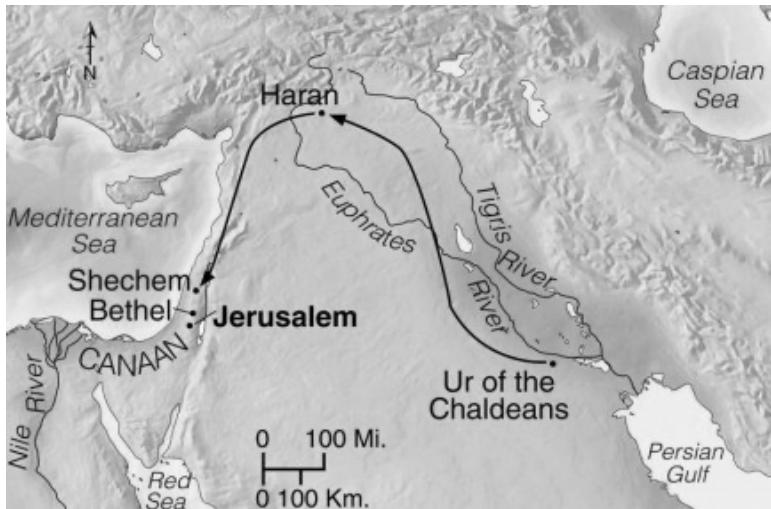
*But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.* – 1 Peter 2:9-10 ESV

That last line is critical. At one time, these people had not been “a people.” Oh, they existed, but they lacked a relationship with God. The apostle Paul addressed the Gentile believers in Ephesus with a similar thought.

*...remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.* – Ephesians 2:12 BSB

And Paul went on to remind them of the dramatic transformation that God had brought about in their lives.

*Therefore you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of God's household...* – Ephesians 2:19 BSB



So, back to Genesis 12. With the opening line of the chapter, Moses describes God as sovereignly inserting Himself into the affairs of humanity once again. After all the genealogical lists describing the various lines of Shem, Ham, and Japheth, God focuses His attention on one man: Abram. And to this one individual, God issues a call and provides a promise.

*"Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."* – Genesis 12:1-3 ESV

According to chapter 11, Abram had been born in Ur of the Chaldeans, located in the land of Shinar. But at one point, his father had made the decision to move his entire family to Canaan. The text provides no explanation for this costly and difficult relocation. But it is not difficult to see the sovereign hand of God orchestrating this entire affair.

It would have taken a great deal of time and effort to make the long journey from Ur to Canaan. Because the arid and impassable Arabian Desert was located immediately east of Ur, Terah was forced to take a time-consuming detour that eventually led them to Haran. And, once in Haran, Terah had a change of heart and decided to settle down. but God had other plans for Abram. In time, Haran became home to Abram. He too settled down and began to put down roots. But at some point, God commanded him to leave everything behind.

*"Leave your native country, your relatives, and your father's family, and go to the land that I will show you."* – Genesis 12:1 NLT

This was a huge “ask” on God’s part. In those days, family ties were essential to survival. By this time in human history, the world had become a hostile place occupied by disparate people groups based on clans and tribal relationships. After God had scattered the nations across the face of the earth (Genesis 11:9), territorial boundaries and indigenous communities had become commonplace. Everyone had staked out their claims and was protecting their particular piece of the global pie. So, it would not have been easy for Abram to leave the safety and security of his clan behind.

But God's command came with a promise. He was going to provide Abram with a new home in a new land. And it just happened to be the very same land that Terah had intended as his family's destination. Perhaps Terah had given up on Canaan because he heard it was already occupied by other, more powerful clans. But this would prove to be no problem for God. For the first time since God had placed Adam in Eden, a man was going to be given a specific tract of land to occupy. And like Eden, Canaan was a beautiful and fruitful land, "a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey" (Exodus 3:8 ESV).

According to God, this new land would become the sole possession of Abram's descendants. In a sense, Canaan had Abram's name on the deed. And it would be in this land that God would bless Abram and produce through him "a great nation."

But there is a problem. It was mentioned in chapter 11 but only in passing. In the listing of Terah's descendants, Abram is described as taking a wife for himself – a woman named Sarai. And then, almost as an aside, the text reveals, "Now Sarai was barren; she had no child" (Genesis 11:30 ESV). Abram would have been completely unaware of Sarai's condition. But God knew. And yet, knowing that Sarai was incapable of bearing children, God declared that Abram would become the father of a great nation. God was going to bless Abram by giving him offspring. And those offspring would become a blessing to all the nations of the earth. An undeserving man and his barren wife would become the means by which God would pour out His blessings on all humanity.

And this is the point that the Hebrew people tended to miss. They considered themselves to be blessed by God because they were descendants of Abram. But they neglected to remember that their blessing came with a responsibility: They were to have been a blessing to the nations. God had set apart Abram and all his descendants so that they might serve as His representatives to the nations. God had promised to make them His "treasured possession among all peoples" (Exodus 19:5 ESV). But they had a job to do.

*...you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation... – Exodus 19:6 ESV*

Priests were intended to be the mediators between God and man. The Hebrew people had been set apart by God so that they might minister on His behalf to all the nations of the earth. But they had proved to be unfaithful priests and far from a holy nation. But God's promise would still be fulfilled. Because it would be through the line of Abram that He would bring the offspring through whom all the nations of the earth would be blessed. Jesus would accomplish what the nation of Israel had failed to do.

*"I am the Lord; I have called you in righteousness;  
I will take you by the hand and keep you;  
I will give you as a covenant for the people,  
a light for the nations..." – Isaiah 42:6 ESV*

*"It is too light a thing that you should be my servant  
to raise up the tribes of Jacob  
and to bring back the preserved of Israel;  
I will make you as a light for the nations,  
that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth." – Isaiah 49:6 ESV*

That is what sets this chapter apart. In it is contained the hope of all eternity. The coming of the Messiah is weaved into the fabric of Abram's call and provides the underlying foundation for God's promise of future blessing for all mankind.



## The Name Above All Names

<sup>4</sup>So Abram went, as the Lord had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. <sup>5</sup>And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people that they had acquired in Haran, and they set out to go to the land of Canaan. When they came to the land of Canaan, <sup>6</sup>Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. <sup>7</sup>Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built there an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him. <sup>8</sup>From there he moved to the hill country on the east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. And there he built an altar to the Lord and called upon the name of the Lord. <sup>9</sup>And Abram journeyed on, still going toward the Negeb. – Genesis 12:4-9 ESV

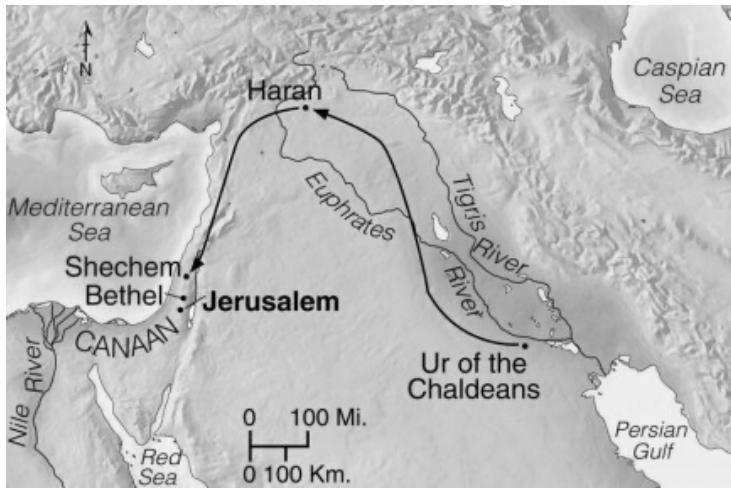
Abram followed in the footsteps of his ancestor Noah, who “walked with God” (Genesis 6:9 ESV). When God told Abram to “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you” (Genesis 12:1 ESV), he went. And the text makes it clear that Abram went, “as the Lord had told him” (Genesis 12:4 ESV). He not only proved to be compliant but comprehensive in his obedience. He did everything just as God had commanded him to do. But there is one small detail that stands out.

When it came time for Abram to comply with God’s command, he “took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother’s son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people that they had acquired in Haran, and they set out to go to the land of Canaan” (Genesis 12:5 ESV). It all sounds good, except for the fact that God had clearly told Abram to leave behind his country and his kindred. The Hebrew word for “kindred” is *נָתַח* (*môledet*), and it can refer to “offspring” or “relatives.” Considering the context, it seems clear that God was telling Abram to leave his extended family behind. Abram and his wife, Sarai, had no children because she was barren.

And yet, the text reveals that Abram brought along his nephew, the son of his brother, Haran. A look back at the genealogy in chapter 11 reveals that Haran had fathered a son named Lot while the clan was still living in Ur of the Chaldeans. But Haran died, leaving his son, Lot, without a father. Under the circumstances, Terah, the boy’s grandfather, assumed responsibility for his care and protection. He became a surrogate father to Lot. So, when Terah moved his entire extended family to the land of Haran, Lot accompanied him. But in time, Terah died as well, leaving Lot fatherless once more. It seems that Abram and Sarai, without children of their own, assumed responsibility for the boy’s well-being. And when they packed up their belongings to follow God’s will and move to Canaan, Lot was in their company.

Abram was not explicitly violating the command to leave his kindred behind. Lot had become part of his immediate family. It is almost as if he and Sarai had made the decision to adopt this young man. After all, she was barren, and they were doomed to a life without children of their own.

But what can't be ignored is the distinct possibility that Abram and Sarai viewed Lot as a possible heir and the means by which God would fulfill His promise to produce a great nation from them. In a way, Lot could have been Abram's ace in the hole – a security blanket that helped mitigate any doubts he may have had about God's plan and promise. If one believes in the sovereignty of God, then it seems obvious that the death of Haran and Terah was no surprise to God. And the fact that this young man had twice been rendered fatherless was not a byproduct of chance or bad luck. There was a divine strategy in play in which God was providentially orchestrating the details surrounding Abram's life. Terah's decision to leave Ur had been God-ordained. The birth of Lot and his father's eventual death were also part of God's plan. And Abram's "adoption" of Lot when Terah died in Haran must also be seen as the handiwork of God.



There is no indication as to how long the journey from Haran to Canaan took. But it would have been an arduous and extremely lengthy trip as Abram and his retinue made their way through strange lands occupied by many of those foreign-speaking nations that had been scattered by God after His judgment at Babel (Genesis 11:1-9).

Evidently, Abram was leading a rather large caravan, transporting all the possessions and people he had "acquired" while living in Haran (Genesis 12:5). It would appear that Abram had livestock and slaves in tow. A few of these unnamed servants or slaves will play important roles as the story unfolds. But their presence in the traveling party would have made progress slow and demanded greater resourcefulness when it came to provisions and protection.

But eventually, Abram arrived in the land of Canaan, just as God had commanded. And Moses indicates that Abram "passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh" (Genesis 12:6 ESV), where "he built there an altar to the Lord" (Genesis 12:7 ESV). While there's no indication from the text that God directed Abram's steps by providing him with detailed navigational instructions, it seems only logical that God was guiding His servant all along the way. Once again, the sovereign hand of God was determining every aspect of Abram's pilgrimage from Haran to Canaan, even choosing Shechem as the place where Abram would erect an altar. Two times in verse 7, Moses discloses that God had appeared to Abram. These divine theophanies or manifestations of God's presence had probably occurred all along the way, providing Abram with guidance and assurance that he was not alone.

Shechem was located in the center of Canaan, and it was there, in the heart of this foreign land that God instructed Abram to build an altar and offer sacrifices. Most likely exhausted by the

long and arduous journey, Abram still obeyed God and did just as he was told. He “called upon the name of the Lord” (Genesis 12:8 ESV). This phrase refers to much more than just worship. It reveals an underlying awareness of the holy and righteous character of God as embodied in His divine name. The first occurrence of this phrase is found in Genesis 4:26, where it reads, “To Seth also a son was born, and he called his name Enosh. At that time **people began to call upon the name of the Lord.**”

The “name of the Lord” is synonymous with His character. To devalue God’s name is tantamount to profaning His character. To call upon His name is to recognize that God alone is God. He is the transcendent and holy “other.” There is no other god besides Him. Man was made in the image of God and given the unique role of glorifying His great name by living in humble submission to His will. To call upon His name is to acknowledge one’s complete reliance upon Him and trust in Him. That is why God would later command the Israelites to treat His name with respect.

*“You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.” – Exodus 20:7 ESV*

To treat God’s name vainly or flippantly has much more to do with behavior than speech. Later on, God would provide His people with an example of what it meant to treat His name vainly.

*You shall not give any of your children to offer them to Molech, and so profane the name of your God: I am the Lord. – Leviticus 18:21 ESV*

Proverbs 30:8-9 indicates that a life of self-sufficiency is a way to profane the name of the Lord.

*Remove far from me falsehood and lying;  
give me neither poverty nor riches;  
feed me with the food that is needful for me,  
lest I be full and deny you  
and say, “Who is the Lord?”  
or lest I be poor and steal  
and profane the name of my God.*

When men make the false assumption that they can be their own benefactor and provider, they rob God of glory and profane His name. The prophet Isaiah described the anger of God against those who give Him lip-service, but whose actions reveal that they have no respect for His name and character.

*“These people say they are mine. They honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. And their worship of me is nothing but man-made rules learned by rote.” – Isaiah 29:13 NLT*

At this point in the story of Abram's life, he is revealing his deep dependence upon God. He recognizes that his journey from Haran to Canaan has been the work of God and he wants to express his gratitude through sacrifice and praise. And having completed his sacrifice to God, Abram continued to his journey to "the hill country on the east of Bethel" (Genesis 12:8 ESV). And there, he pitched his tent, erected a second altar, and called upon the name of the Lord. Here we have a picture of the nomadic lifestyle that Abram would come to know. He would spend his entire life on the move, relocating from one place to another within the land of Canaan. Even after pitching his tent in Bethel, Abram would eventually break camp and continue his tireless trek through the land God had promised to give him as a possession. And the author of Hebrews reveals that Abram's transient lifestyle was motivated by a firm belief that God had something great in store for him.

*By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. – Hebrews 11:8-10 ESV*

He was a man on the move, but with a faith that was firmly founded on the faithfulness of God.

## All In God's Timing

<sup>10</sup> Now there was a famine in the land. So Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land. – Genesis 12:10 ESV

Abram was on the move. He had built a second altar in the hill country near Bethel, but then had “journeyed on, still going toward the Negeb” (Genesis 12:9 ESV). Once again, the text provides no reason for Abram’s choice of destinations, but since the entire book showcases the sovereignty of God, it makes perfect sense to assume that these excursions were divinely ordained and directed. Abram was being led by God.



And, after having passed through Shechem in central Canaan, Abram had traveled further south to the region just east of Bethel. And while Abram had pitched his tent there, he did not stay long, choosing instead to continue his journey to the southernmost tip of Canaan, a desert region known as the Negeb. This name, in Hebrew, is נֶגֶב (*negeb*), which literally means “south.” For some undisclosed, but sovereignly ordained reason, Abram was moving away from the heart of Canaan, the very land that God had promised to give to his descendants. And verse 10 provides the first hint at what might be behind God’s rather strange navigational directions to Abram.

*Now there was a famine in the land. – Genesis 12:10 ESV*

For some seemingly inexplicable reason, God had directed Abram to leave behind the rich and fertile heart of Canaan and travel to the most arid region in the entire land. But there was a method to God’s madness. He was sovereignly orchestrating the entire scene and putting into place all the factors that would lead to Abram’s brief but consequential “sojourn” to Egypt.

*So Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land. – Genesis 12:10 ESV*

The Hebrew word for “sojourn” is גַּר (gûr), and it means “to temporarily dwell.” To be a “sojourner” was to live temporarily as a “stranger” in another land. Because of the severity of the famine, Abram was forced to seek refuge and sustenance in the land of Egypt. But, once again, this decision appears to be God-ordained and orchestrated. For the Jews who read

Moses' account, this retelling of Abram's flight into Egypt would have helped to explain their own historical ties to the land of the Pharaohs. There had been a time when their patriarch, Jacob, had made a similar decision to seek shelter in Egypt. Genesis 42 retells the story of Jacob's fateful decision to send his sons to Egypt to buy grain because there was a famine in the land of Canaan.

*"Behold, I have heard that there is grain for sale in Egypt. Go down and buy grain for us there, that we may live and not die." So ten of Joseph's brothers went down to buy grain in Egypt.* – Genesis 42:2-3 ESV

But when the brothers arrived in Egypt, they discovered far more than grain. They reconnected with their younger brother, Joseph, whom they had sold into slavery years earlier. Much to their surprise, the brother whom they had assumed to be dead, was very much alive and had risen to the second-highest position in the land of Egypt. And rather than seeking revenge on his brothers, Joseph chose to bless them, inviting them to fetch their father and return to Egypt where they could live out the famine.

The brothers did as they were told. They traveled back to Canaan, broke the news to Jacob that his long-lost son was alive, and issued Joseph's invitation to relocate the entire family to Egypt. And Genesis 46 reveals that Jacob "came to Beersheba, and offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac"

Jacob did as his grandfather had done before him. He called upon the name of the Lord, worshiping the Almighty for his goodness and grace. And while at Beersheba, God visited Jacob in a dream, providing him with a powerful promise.

*And God spoke to Israel in visions of the night and said, "Jacob, Jacob." And he said, "Here I am." Then he said, "I am God, the God of your father. Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for there I will make you into a great nation. I myself will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up again, and Joseph's hand shall close your eyes."* – Genesis 46:2-4 ESV

The similarities are undeniable and fully intentional. Abram's relationship with Pharaoh and the land of Egypt was meant to foreshadow the future of his own descendants. Egypt would end up playing a significant role in the redemptive history of the people of Israel. This land of Abram's sojourn would become the God-ordained source of Israel's future, serving as a divine petri dish in which God would cultivate a nation and fulfill the promise He had made to Abram.

*"I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing."* – Genesis 12:2 ESV

Whether Abram realized it or not, his decision to seek shelter in Egypt was ordained by God. There was going to be a long and, sometimes, tumultuous relationship between Abram's descendants and this land located to the east of Canaan. In fact, not long after Abram's

temporary foray into Egypt, Abram would receive one of those “I’ve-got-good-news-and-bad-news” announcements from God.

*“Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions.” – Genesis 15:13-14 ESV*

God had promised to give the land of Canaan to Abram’s ancestors, but now there was a famine in the land. This “unexpected” natural disaster forced Abram to temporarily relocate his family, and Egypt seemed to be the only logical location. Famine-stricken Canaan lay to the north and the arid and barren Negeb to the west was out of the question. So, Abram had only one option: Seek refuge in Egypt. This “choice” by Abram foreshadows Jacob’s future flight into the Valley of the Nile, but it also points to another divinely orchestrated escape from certain death.

In Matthew 2, the apostle records the story of the birth of Jesus, whom he describes as “the son of Abraham” in the opening verse of his book (Matthew 1:1). According to the genealogy recorded in chapter 1, Jesus was a direct descendant of Abram. And, not long after Jesus’ birth, Joseph, the stepfather of Jesus, received a vision from God, warning him of King Herod’s plans to kill the boy.

*...the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.” And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, “Out of Egypt I called my son.” – Matthew 2:13-15 ESV*

It was not safe for Joseph and his young family to remain in the land. Death loomed over them but God had already planned a way of escape. For a time, they “sojourned” in Egypt, while Herod enacted his pogrom of infanticide, aimed at eliminating “he who has been born king of the Jews” (Matthew 2:2 ESV).

But Herod’s attempts to kill Jesus would fail. And in time, this human “famine” would come to his own ignominious end, paving the way for Joseph, Mary, and Jesus to return to the land of promise.

*But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, “Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child’s life are dead.” And he rose and took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. – Matthew 2:19-21 ESV*

For the people of Israel, the land of Egypt would always be a place marked by refuge and heartache. At times, it would prove to be a haven of hope and safety, while at other times it would be a place associated with great pain and sorrow. In the case of Abram, Egypt was a logical alternative to remaining in famine-plagued Canaan. Egypt also provided a source of sustenance from certain starvation to Jacob and his family. But it was also the place where Jacob's beloved son, Joseph, was restored to him. He who was once thought dead was "resurrected" and restored to life. And Joseph, the stepfather of Jesus, would find Egypt to be a safe haven from the deadly plans of Herod. His young son would live to see another day because God had provided refuge in the land of Egypt.

God had promised to bless Abram, and He was going to do so by sending him to the unlikely land of the Pharaohs and the pyramids. This trip into Egypt had not been a mistake by Abram. His actions do not reflect a lack of faith any more than Jacob's or Joseph's did. He was simply following the directions of God. But that does not mean that his time in Egypt would be without problems. The fact that God led him into Egypt is no guarantee that Abram would find himself well-fed and completely free from pain or suffering. His days as a stranger in a strange land would be a time of testing. But it would also be a time of great blessing, as God sovereignly orchestrated His plan to make of Abram a great nation.

## The Flawed Hope of Self-Salvation

<sup>11</sup> When he was about to enter Egypt, he said to Sarai his wife, “I know that you are a woman beautiful in appearance, <sup>12</sup> and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, ‘This is his wife.’ Then they will kill me, but they will let you live. <sup>13</sup> Say you are my sister, that it may go well with me because of you, and that my life may be spared for your sake.” <sup>14</sup> When Abram entered Egypt, the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful. <sup>15</sup> And when the princes of Pharaoh saw her, they praised her to Pharaoh. And the woman was taken into Pharaoh’s house. <sup>16</sup> And for her sake he dealt well with Abram; and he had sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male servants, female servants, female donkeys, and camels.

<sup>17</sup> But the Lord afflicted Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram’s wife. <sup>18</sup> So Pharaoh called Abram and said, “What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? <sup>19</sup> Why did you say, ‘She is my sister,’ so that I took her for my wife? Now then, here is your wife; take her, and go.” <sup>20</sup> And Pharaoh gave men orders concerning him, and they sent him away with his wife and all that he had. – Genesis 12:11-20  
ESV

Due to a severe famine in the land of Canaan, Abram was forced to seek refuge in Egypt. But upon his arrival, Abram immediately began to second guess the wisdom of his decision. He was far from home and way out of his comfort zone. Find himself in unfamiliar surroundings yet again. Abram quickly recognized that his new neighbors looked and sounded nothing like him. And his reaction to these uncomfortable circumstances reveals a great deal about Abram’s current mindset.

Even before arriving in the land, Abram began to develop a plan for dealing with what he believed would be a far-from-friendly welcome. Just as he was about to cross the border into Egypt, he came up with a strategy for dealing with what he expected would be a culture of questionable morals.

*...he said to Sarai his wife, “I know that you are a woman beautiful in appearance, and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, ‘This is his wife.’ Then they will kill me, but they will let you live.” – Genesis 12:11-12 ESV*

Abram feared that his wife’s stunning beauty would make her an object of desire to the Egyptians. And he feared that once they discovered that Sarai was his wife, one of them would simply kill him so he could have her as his own. In ancient cultures, women were often seen as little more than the personal property of their husbands. It was usually considered illegal to take a man’s wife. But if the husband were to die “unexpectedly,” then she would become available for purchase.

So, fearing the worst, Abram orders Sarai to tell anyone who asks that she is his sister.

*“Say you are **my** sister, that it may go well with **me** because of you, and that **my** life may be spared for your sake.” – Genesis 12:13 ESV*

Notice Abram's self-obsessed outlook. He can't stop talking about the need to protect his personal well-being. He wanted things to “go well” for him, but he shows little concern for how his little ruse might impact the life of Sarai. And as soon as they crossed the border into Egypt, Abram's worst fears were realized.

*When Abram entered Egypt, the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful. And when the princes of Pharaoh saw her, they praised her to Pharaoh. And the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house. – Genesis 12:14-15 ESV*

Now, to be fair, when Abram commanded Sarai to say that she was his sister, it was technically true. According to Genesis 20:12, Sarai was Abram's half-sister because they shared the same father but different mothers. And Abram would use this convenient half-truth as a clever means of self-protection when dealing with those of less scrupulous character. But little did Abram know that his plan would backfire in such a dramatic fashion. Pharaoh himself developed an eye for the lively Sarai and had her taken into his house. And, strangely enough, Abram actually benefited from his self-centered strategy.

*And for her sake he [Pharaoh] dealt well with Abram; and he had sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male servants, female servants, female donkeys, and camels. – Genesis 12:16 ESV*

Believing Abram to be Sarai's older brother and official guardian, Pharaoh offered Abram what was essentially a bride price for having taken Sarai into his harem. She became Pharaoh's property and Abram was reward for it. All along, it had been Abram's hope that things would “go well” for him, and now it had. He had benefited greatly from Sarai's compromising situation.

But, as has been the case all along in the book of Genesis, God was operating in the background, unseen by Abram, Sarai, or Pharaoh. But it wasn't long before He made His presence known.

*...the Lord afflicted Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife. – Genesis 12:17 ESV*

This leader of the nation of Egypt had used his great power and wealth to purchase another trophy for his harem. And Abram had experienced a sizeable boost to his financial net-worth. But both of these men were in for a shock. Pharaoh suddenly found his royal house facing a series of devastating plagues. Unknowingly, he had taken the bride of Abram and enslaved her as one of his servants. She had gone from being the wife of Abram to just one of the many concubines in Pharaoh's royal harem.

Once again, the original Jewish audience to whom Moses wrote this book would have sat up and taken notice upon hearing this story from the lives of Abram and Sarai. They would have immediately seen the parallels between the enslavement of Sarai and that of their ancestors. Years later, 70 descendants of Abram would seek refuge in the land of Egypt, attempting to escape a famine in the land. They would enter Egypt as the “bride” of Yahweh. But in time, they would become the personal slaves of Pharaoh. And God would bring upon Pharaoh and his royal house a series of ten plagues, each designed to force the release of His people. The prophet Isaiah would later remind the nation of Israel of their unique status as God’s bride.

*For your Maker is your husband,  
the Lord of hosts is his name;  
and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer,  
the God of the whole earth he is called.* – Isaiah 54:5 ESV

So, there are tremendous similarities between the story found in Genesis 12 and that of the Israelites recorded in the book of Exodus. Unlike his successor, the Pharaoh in Abram’s day proved to be teachable and ready to rectify the grave mistake he has made.

*So Pharaoh called Abram and said, “What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? Why did you say, ‘She is my sister,’ so that I took her for my wife? Now then, here is your wife; take her, and go.”* – Genesis 12:18-19 ESV

Pharaoh, suffering under the judgment of God, was ready to repent and make restitution. Rather than punishing Abram for his deceitfulness and the pain he had brought upon the royal house, Pharaoh released Sarai, and sent Abram on his way with his wife restored and his newly acquired wealth intact.

You would think that Abram learned a valuable lesson from this potentially devastating encounter with Pharaoh. But amazingly, he would live to lie another day. Just a few chapters later, Moses records yet another incident where Abram pulled this highly flawed strategy out of his bag of tricks. Despite its highly questionable efficacy, Abram would utilize this same plan years later when dealing with Abimelech, the king of Gerar. He seems to have learned nothing from his former attempt at self-preservation.

*And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, “She is my sister.” And Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah.* – Genesis 20:2 ESV

As before, God intervened and delivered a terrifying message to Abimelech in a dream.

*“Behold, you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is a man’s wife.”* – Genesis 20:3 ESV

Fearful for his life, Abimelech declared his innocence to God and was told to return Sarai to Abraham. Essentially, God told the petrified king, “No harm done.” He had sovereignly protected Abimelech from doing anything to Sarai. But when the king confronted Abram and demanded to know why he had done such a thing, Abram was quick to justify his actions and explain his warped rationale.

*“Besides, she is indeed my sister, the daughter of my father though not the daughter of my mother, and she became my wife. And when God caused me to wander from my father’s house, I said to her, ‘This is the kindness you must do me: at every place to which we come, say of me, ‘He is my brother.’”* – Genesis 20:12-13 ESV

And like the earlier story, Abram walks away blessed rather than chastened by God.

*Then Abimelech took sheep and oxen, and male servants and female servants, and gave them to Abraham, and returned Sarah his wife to him. And Abimelech said, “Behold, my land is before you; dwell where it pleases you.”* – Genesis 20:14-15 ESV

God was not rewarding Abram for his deception and dishonesty. Nor was He condoning Abram’s methods. He was simply fulfilling the promise He had made to bless Abram (Genesis 12:2). And he was slowly teaching His stubborn servant a much-needed lesson about divine sovereignty and providential care. Even Abram’s ill-fated attempts to act as his own god could not jeopardize God’s plans or prevent God’s promise from being fulfilled. This was so much bigger than Abram. He was simply a conduit through whom God would bring a blessing to all the nations of the earth. And God was not going to allow Abram to derail the divine plan for mankind’s redemption.

Mankind’s constant attempts at self-salvation will always fall short. But God’s promise of future blessing will never fail to come to fruition.

## Generous to a Fault

<sup>1</sup> So Abram went up from Egypt, he and his wife and all that he had, and Lot with him, into the Negeb.

<sup>2</sup> Now Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold. <sup>3</sup> And he journeyed on from the Negeb as far as Bethel to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai, <sup>4</sup> to the place where he had made an altar at the first. And there Abram called upon the name of the Lord. <sup>5</sup> And Lot, who went with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents, <sup>6</sup> so that the land could not support both of them dwelling together; for their possessions were so great that they could not dwell together, <sup>7</sup> and there was strife between the herdsmen of Abram's livestock and the herdsmen of Lot's livestock. At that time the Canaanites and the Perizzites were dwelling in the land.

<sup>8</sup> Then Abram said to Lot, "Let there be no strife between you and me, and between your herdsmen and my herdsmen, for we are kinsmen. <sup>9</sup> Is not the whole land before you? Separate yourself from me. If you take the left hand, then I will go to the right, or if you take the right hand, then I will go to the left." – Genesis 13:1-9 ESV

After Abram's close call with Pharaoh, he decided to leave Egypt behind and return to the land of Canaan. The text doesn't mention whether the famine there had come to an end, but it seems safe to assume that Abram returned because he had received permission from God to do so. According to verse 1, Abram made his way back to the Negeb, located on Canaan's southernmost tip. But this arid region would prove to be an inhospitable environment for Abram's newly acquired flocks and herds. He had received as a bride price for Sarai, whom Pharaoh had added to his harem as a concubine. When Pharaoh learned that Sarai was actually Abram's wife, he released her and had Abram and his family escorted from the land of Egypt.

Abram walked out of Egypt far wealthier than when he had entered. Despite his deception and narcissistic attempts at self-preservation, he ended up being rewarded.

*Pharaoh gave Abram many gifts because of her—sheep, goats, cattle, male and female donkeys, male and female servants, and camels.* – Genesis 12:16 NLT

And Moses opens chapter 13 with what appears to be a parenthetical statement, designed to set up and explain the rest of the chapter's story.

*Now Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold.* – Genesis 13:2 ESV

But not only did Abram have additional herds and flocks in his possession, he was still accompanied by his nephew, Lot. And the text reveals that Lot had also prospered during their stay in Egypt.

*And Lot, who went with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents, so that the land could not support both of them dwelling together; for their possessions were so great that they could not dwell together.* – Genesis 13:5-6 ESV

Lot had benefited greatly from his association with Abram. He had been blessed vicariously and undeservedly, just for being Abram's nephew. But sometimes blessings can end up being a curse. Prosperity, while highly beneficial in so many ways, can also bring about unexpected conflicts and temptations. You see the potential for this outcome in Moses' instructions to the people of Israel as they prepare to enter the land of Canaan. God has promised to bless them with a rich and fertile land filled with well-fortified and well-stocked cities equipped with modern conveniences like hand-carved cisterns designed for storing rainwater.

*"The LORD your God will soon bring you into the land he swore to give you when he made a vow to your ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It is a land with large, prosperous cities that you did not build. The houses will be richly stocked with goods you did not produce. You will draw water from cisterns you did not dig, and you will eat from vineyards and olive trees you did not plant. When you have eaten your fill in this land, be careful not to forget the LORD, who rescued you from slavery in the land of Egypt. You must fear the LORD your God and serve him."* – Deuteronomy 6:1-13 NLT

There was high probability that the people of Israel would find their newfound prosperity to be a temptation to become prideful and forgetful. Rather than focusing on the gracious Giver, they would end up obsessing on the gifts He had given. Agur, the author of Proverbs 30, reveals an insightful degree of self-awareness when he asks God for two favors.

*O God, I beg two favors from you;  
let me have them before I die.  
First, help me never to tell a lie.  
Second, give me neither poverty nor riches!  
Give me just enough to satisfy my needs.  
For if I grow rich, I may deny you and say, "Who is the Lord?"  
And if I am too poor, I may steal and thus insult God's holy name.* – Proverbs 30:7-9  
NLT

Abram and Lot had both been blessed by God. Now, the question would be whether they would allow those blessings to become a curse. Would they become fat and happy, self-consumed, and overly self-sufficient? Would their good fortune lead to further dependence upon God or a growing sense of independence and self-sufficiency?

Sandwiched in-between the disclosure that Abram was “very rich” (Genesis 13:2), and Lot “had flocks and herds and tents” (Genesis 13:5), Moses states that Abram “journeyed on from the Negeb as far as Bethel to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai, to the place where he had made an altar at the first. And there Abram called upon the name of the Lord” (Genesis 13:3-4 ESV). And Lot went with him.

Abram, despite his less-than-stellar showing in Egypt, returns to the site where he had built the altar, and he offers sacrifices to God. It seems that Abram understood that his timely departure from Egypt, with his wife by his side, had been the work of God. And he wanted to express his appreciation by offering some of his newfound wealth as a thank offering to God. There is no indication that Lot participated in this selfless display of thanksgiving. He had been equally blessed by God but displayed no awareness of God's gracious benevolence, and he offered no gifts of gratitude. But, in time, he will display an unflattering tendency toward self-interest and self-indulgence.

Moses describes the situation between Abram and his nephew as untenable.

*...the land could not support both of them dwelling together; for their possessions were so great that they could not dwell together... – Genesis 13:6 ESV*

This is an interesting statement because it portrays the land of promise as rather unpromising. Perhaps the famine had decimated the available pastureland, rendering the current location as an insufficient source of food for the enlarged herds of Abram and Lot. But there seems to be something more significant going on in this passage.

When God had issued His original call, He had made the conditions of that call clear: "Leave your native country, your relatives, and your father's family, and go to the land that I will show you" (Genesis 12:1 NLT). Yet, as the text reveals, "Abram departed as the Lord had instructed, and Lot went with him" (Genesis 12:4 NLT).

The land had been promised to Abram, not Lot. In a sense, Lot should not have been there and his presence was proving to be problem. The land was sufficient for the flocks and herds of Abram, but not for both. Somewhere along the way, in keeping with the command of God, Abram should have separated himself from Lot. But he had failed to do so. Now, God was stepping in and forcing these two men to part company. As the herdsmen of Abram and Lot attempted to shepherd their respective flocks on the same parcel of land, tempers flared.

*...there was strife between the herdsmen of Abram's livestock and the herdsmen of Lot's livestock. – Genesis 13:7 ESV*

And, at this point in the story, Moses provides another parenthetical aside.

*At that time the Canaanites and the Perizzites were dwelling in the land. – Genesis 13:7 ESV*

This is intended as a reminder that the land was already occupied. God had led Abram to a country where other people groups had settled and put down roots. Their presence would have further limited the available pastureland. This disclosure by Moses was also meant to foreshadow the miracle that God will have to perform to make this already-occupied land available to Abram's descendants.

Verses 8-13 reveal Abram's solution to the dilemma. In an effort to appease Lot and his disgruntled herdsmen, Abram gave his nephew his choice of permanent pastureland.

*"Take your choice of any section of the land you want, and we will separate. If you want the land to the left, then I'll take the land on the right. If you prefer the land on the right, then I'll go to the left."* – Genesis 13:9 NLT

This is viewed by many as a sign of Abram's magnanimity. He takes the high road and gives his undeserving nephew first dibs on the available land. But in some sense, this reflects a lack of reverence for God's promise. God had clearly told Abram, "To your offspring I will give this land" (Genesis 12:7 ESV). While Lot was Abram's blood relative, he was not his offspring. It's highly likely that Abram's decision to share the land with Lot was driven by his belief that Lot would eventually be his heir. After all, Abram wasn't getting any younger and his wife was still barren. So, he probably believed that this young man would end up being the means by which God fulfilled His promise to make of Abram "a great nation" (Genesis 12:2).

But that was not God's plan. And it will soon become clear that Abram's gracious offer to Lot was going to end up backfiring on him. This young man would display a disregard for the well-being of his uncle and a myopic preoccupation with his own success. Lot was out to make of himself a great nation. He was choosing the best land so that he might enjoy the best possible outcome. But his choices would prove to be far from wise and less than beneficial. And Abram's decision to pacify Lot by parcelling out the land given to him by God would only lead to greater turmoil in the days ahead.

## A Tale of Two Travelers

<sup>10</sup> And Lot lifted up his eyes and saw that the Jordan Valley was well watered everywhere like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt, in the direction of Zoar. (This was before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.) <sup>11</sup> So Lot chose for himself all the Jordan Valley, and Lot journeyed east. Thus they separated from each other. <sup>12</sup> Abram settled in the land of Canaan, while Lot settled among the cities of the valley and moved his tent as far as Sodom. <sup>13</sup> Now the men of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against the Lord.

<sup>14</sup> The Lord said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, “Lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward, <sup>15</sup> for all the land that you see I will give to you and to your offspring forever. <sup>16</sup> I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth, so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted. <sup>17</sup> Arise, walk through the length and the breadth of the land, for I will give it to you.” <sup>18</sup> So Abram moved his tent and came and settled by the oaks of Mamre, which are at Hebron, and there he built an altar to the Lord. – Genesis 13:10-18 ESV

After Abram gave Lot the offer of a lifetime, his much-younger nephew took full advantage of the opportunity. In order to settle their dispute over pastureland, Abram had given Lot choice to claim any of the land of Canaan as his own.

“Take your choice of any section of the land you want, and we will separate. If you want the land to the left, then I’ll take the land on the right. If you prefer the land on the right, then I’ll go to the left.” – Genesis 13:9 NLT

You would think that Lot would have refused this magnanimous gesture out of gratitude to his uncle for taking him under his wing. But that thought never entered Lot’s mind. No, he took Abram up on his offer and secured for himself a prime piece of real estate.

*Lot took a long look at the fertile plains of the Jordan Valley in the direction of Zoar. The whole area was well watered everywhere, like the garden of the Lord or the beautiful land of Egypt.* – Genesis 13:10 NLT

This wasn’t a case of Lot taking a quick scan of the local surroundings. No, he looked long and hard. He literally “gazed” at the landscape in order to assess which tract of land would prove to be preferable and, ultimately, the most profitable. His look was evaluative in nature. In fact, it is the same word used to describe God’s assessment of His creation.

*Then God looked over all he had made, and he saw that it was very good!* – Genesis 1:31 NLT

In the same way, Lot “looked over” the fertile plains of the Jordan Valley and deemed them good. And Moses adds an interesting aside. He states that the valley was comparable to “the garden of the Lord” (Genesis 13:10 NLT). In other words, this land was fertile and fruitful, just

like Eden had been. It was well-watered and abounding in lush pasture lands, the perfect setting for raising domesticated livestock. So, after a careful search, Lot made his decision.

*Lot chose for himself the whole Jordan Valley to the east of them. He went there with his flocks and servants and parted company with his uncle Abram. – Genesis 13:11 NLT*



But Moses provides another parenthetical statement that foreshadows the dark cloud looming on the horizon. The Jordan Valley was a beautiful and bountiful place, but “This was before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah” (Genesis 13:10 10 ESV). At this point in the story, everything was “good,” but that was about to change. A darkness would soon descend upon the Jordan Valley. Its God-ordained beauty would become marred by sin and scarred by divine judgment.

There is an eerily familiar feel to this story, that should remind the reader of the dramatic change that took place between chapters 2 and 3 of Genesis. God had deemed His creation as “very good” and then sin entered the scene and everything suddenly changed. Curses were leveled and circumstances took a dramatic turn for the worst. Soon sin began to spread like an infectious disease, until God “observed the extent of human wickedness on the earth, and he saw that everything they thought or imagined was consistently and totally evil” (Genesis 6:5 NLT). The “very good” had become very bad. All because of sin.

Moses records that the two men, Abram and Lot, parted ways with Abram settling in the land of Canaan and Lot settling “among the cities of the valley” (Genesis 13:12 NLT). And, as if to telegraph the plot of the story, Moses indicates that Lot eventually “moved his tent as far as Sodom” (Genesis 13:12 NLT).

The original readers of Moses’ book would have been very familiar with the histories of Sodom and Gomorrah. These two ancient cities had storied and sordid pasts. They were legendary among the Hebrew people. And the names, Sodom and Gomorrah had become synonymous with wickedness and immorality. But just in case anyone might have forgotten, Moses opines, “Now the men of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against the Lord” (Genesis 13:13 ESV).

Lot had gone from admiring the fertile plains of the Jordan Valley to gazing upon the immoral city of Sodom and moving ever closer to its gates. He was slowly edging his way toward wickedness and away from God.

But, unexpectedly, Moses shifts the story away from Lot and back to Abram. This rather abrupt shift in the narrative was meant to provide a stark contrast between the two men. Abram settled in Canaan, while Lot made himself at home near Sodom. And while Lot was pitching his tent, Abram was receiving a message from the Lord.

*"Look as far as you can see in every direction—north and south, east and west. I am giving all this land, as far as you can see, to you and your descendants as a permanent possession. And I will give you so many descendants that, like the dust of the earth, they cannot be counted!" – Genesis 13:14-67 NLT*

Notice that God did not speak until Abram had separated himself from Lot. This parting of the ways finally left Abram in compliance with the original conditions God had placed on His call of Abram.

***"Leave your native country, your relatives, and your father's family, and go to the land that I will show you."*** – Genesis 12:1 NLT

With Lot out of the picture, God reiterated His original promise to Abram, declaring that all the land of Canaan would belong to he and his descendants. And not only that. God would provide Abram with so many descendants that their number would be incalculable. And despite Abram's decision to reward Lot with his choice of the best land, God restated His promise to give it all the Abram and his descendants. Even the Jordan Valley, containing the immoral cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, would eventually become the inheritance of Abram's ancestors.



It would be centuries later that the descendants of Abram, the nation of Israel, made their way back to the land of Canaan after their 400-year hiatus in Egypt. And when they returned to the land, they would divide it among the 12 tribes. But they were forbidden by God from occupying the lands of Moab and Edom. He warned them, “Do not bother the Moabites, the descendants of Lot, or start a war with them. I have given them Ar as their property, and I will not give you any of their land”

(Deuteronomy 2:9 NLT). And as far as the Edomites were concerned, God told the Israelites, “Do not detest the Edomites...because the Edomites are your relatives” (Deuteronomy 23:7 NLT).

To understand this divine get-out-of-jail-free card that God extended to the Moabites and Edomites, it is essential to understand their relationship with Israel. The Edomites were the descendants of Esau, the firstborn son of Isaac. Esau was the grandson of Abram.

And the Moabites descendants of Moab, the son of Lot, the byproduct of Lot’s incestuous relationship with his oldest daughter. These two people groups ended up settling in the land near where Lot had pitched his tent. And despite some poor choices on Lot’s part, that land would end up being occupied by relatives of Abram.

This one little corner of the world where Lot chose to sink down roots was nothing compared to the vast tract of land that God would give to Abram. And God instructed Abram to “walk through the land in every direction” (Genesis 13:17 ESV), and take in all the beauty and abundance reserved for him. God flatly and confidently asserted, “I am giving it to yo” (Genesis 13:17 NLT).

So, Moses did as he was told, and after scoping out the land, he pitched his tent at the Oaks of Mamre, near Hebron, and there he built another altar to the Lord. He offered sacrifices of

praise and thanksgiving to God for His gracious gift. Lot pitched his tent near Sodom. But Abram pitched his tent in the middle of the land of Canaan, as an expression of faith in God's promise.



It's fascinating to consider that Lot was quickly associated with a city, the infamous city of Sodom. But Abram was a man who never owned a house or occupied a city. In fact, the author of Hebrews states that when Abram "reached the land God promised him, he lived there by faith—for he was like a foreigner, living in tents. And so did Isaac and Jacob, who inherited the same promise. Abraham was confidently looking forward to a city with eternal foundations, a city designed and built by God" (Hebrews 11:9-10 NLT).

As the story unfolds, we will discover that Lot eventually moved into the city of Sodom, and with less-than-stellar consequences. But Abram continued to live the life of a nomad, patiently waiting for the city that God had in store for him. According to the author of Hebrews, Abram and all the other Old Testament saints mentioned in chapter 11, "were looking for a better place, a heavenly homeland. That is why God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them" (Hebrews 11:16 NLT).

While Lot struggled with "the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life" (1 John 2:16 ESV), Abram kept his eye on the true prize. Rather than settle down and settle for less than God had promised, he kept moving, waiting, and hoping. And he would be recognized and greatly rewarded for his faith.

*Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the people of old received their commendation.* – Hebrews 11:1-2 ESV



## The Battle is the Lord's

<sup>1</sup> In the days of Amraphel king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, Chedorlaomer king of Elam, and Tidal king of Goiim, <sup>2</sup> these kings made war with Bera king of Sodom, Birsha king of Gomorrah, Shinab king of Admah, Shemeber king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar). <sup>3</sup> And all these joined forces in the Valley of Siddim (that is, the Salt Sea). <sup>4</sup> Twelve years they had served Chedorlaomer, but in the thirteenth year they rebelled. <sup>5</sup> In the fourteenth year Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him came and defeated the Rephaim in Ashteroth-karnaim, the Zuzim in Ham, the Emim in Shaveh-kiriathaim, <sup>6</sup> and the Horites in their hill country of Seir as far as El-paran on the border of the wilderness. <sup>7</sup> Then they turned back and came to En-mishpat (that is, Kadesh) and defeated all the country of the Amalekites, and also the Amorites who were dwelling in Hazazon-tamar.

<sup>8</sup> Then the king of Sodom, the king of Gomorrah, the king of Admah, the king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar) went out, and they joined battle in the Valley of Siddim <sup>9</sup> with Chedorlaomer king of Elam, Tidal king of Goiim, Amraphel king of Shinar, and Arioch king of Ellasar, four kings against five. <sup>10</sup> Now the Valley of Siddim was full of bitumen pits, and as the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, some fell into them, and the rest fled to the hill country. <sup>11</sup> So the enemy took all the possessions of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all their provisions, and went their way. <sup>12</sup> They also took Lot, the son of Abram's brother, who was dwelling in Sodom, and his possessions, and went their way.

<sup>13</sup> Then one who had escaped came and told Abram the Hebrew, who was living by the oaks of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol and of Aner. These were allies of Abram. <sup>14</sup> When Abram heard that his kinsman had been taken captive, he led forth his trained men, born in his house, 318 of them, and went in pursuit as far as Dan. <sup>15</sup> And he divided his forces against them by night, he and his servants, and defeated them and pursued them to Hobah, north of Damascus. <sup>16</sup> Then he brought back all the possessions, and also brought back his kinsman Lot with his possessions, and the women and the people. – Genesis 14:1-16 ESV

Abram and Lot have separated, with Lot taking up residence near the city of Sodom, while Abram continued his nomadic lifestyle, setting up a temporary camp by the oaks of Mamre in Hebron. But Abram's separation from Lot would not last long. His nephew's presence in the land would come back to haunt him.

This new season of Abram's more independent life was going to be rocked by unexpected events that were outside of his control. What chapter 14 reveals is that Abram was far from alone in the land of Canaan. Up to this point in the narrative, there has been little mention of other nations, but the story recorded in this chapter will reveal that Abram has company and lots of it.

The chapter opens with news of a coalition of four kings whose nations lie outside the boundaries of Canaan. It's difficult to determine with any certainty the exact locations of these ancient realms, but it seems that they each were located within the fertile crescent, an area

known as the land of Shinar. It is important to recall that Shinar was the location of the tower of Babel (Genesis 11). It was there that God decided to confuse the language of the people who attempted to build a tower that would reach to the sky. As a result of the confusion caused by the proliferation of new languages, the region became known as “Babel,” a word that literally means “confusion.” This region would later bear the name of “Babylon” and play a vital role in the history of the Hebrew people.

These kings all hailed from the region of Mesopotamia that stretched from the northern tip of the Mediterranean Sea to the Persian Gulf. One of these kings, Chedorlaomer, had earlier invaded southern Canaan and forced its occupants to become his vassals. The people living in Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim, and Bela (Zoar), had found themselves subjugated to a foreign power for 13 long years. But at one point their kings had decided to throw off the yoke of this foreign oppressor. And their decision had forced King Chedorlaomer to form a coalition with three of his fellow kings from Mesopotamia and invade Canaan yet again.



This entire scene is meant to display the interconnected nature of all that has gone on before. Every event that has happened up to this point is linked together in God's plan. There are reasons for everything. And there are repercussions for every decision made by men and consequences for every act of a sovereign God. Nothing happens by chance. The ill-fated decision of the people to disobey God and construct a tower to glorify their own greatness had produced a myriad of nations that were dispersed across the earth. And the confusion

created by their disparate languages would eventually turn into conflict.

In chapter 13, Moses recorded God's reiteration of His promise to Abram.

*“Lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward, for all the land that you see I will give to you and to your offspring forever.” – Genesis 13:14-15 ESV*

And yet, here we have nine different kings vying for the right to control the land that God had given to Abram and his descendants. Ever since the gates to Eden had been slammed shut, mankind had been busy trying to grab up the remaining territory. Rather than steward that which belonged to God, they had been attempting to claim it as their own. Instead of acknowledging God as King, they had chosen to set up their own petty kingdoms here on earth.

And here in this story, nine of these would-be gods were facing off in a battle of will and weapons, all to control what really belonged to God.

This coalition of four Mesopotamian kings slowly made their way south, defeating various clans, tribes, and nations along the way. They were successfully demonstrating their superior strength and telegraphing to the five kings of southern Canaan that their prospects for victory were dim. But refusing to consider surrender, the five kings joined forces and faced their enemy in the Valley of Siddim. Things did not go well. The tar pits that covered the valley floor proved to be their undoing. Many of the soldiers became mired in the sticky muck and were captured. As a result, the five kings were unable to put up a fight and their forces were easily defeated. And Moses provides a summary of this demoralizing debacle.

*So the enemy took all the possessions of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all their provisions, and went their way. They also took Lot, the son of Abram's brother, who was dwelling in Sodom, and his possessions, and went their way.* – Genesis 14:11-12 ESV

What makes this rather brief recap of the battle stand out is its focus on Sodom and Gomorrah, and its mention of Lot, the nephew of Abram. If you recall, chapter 13 chronicled Lot's decision to choose the well-watered lands near Zoar as the place to pasture his flocks. But he actually "settled among the cities of the valley and moved his tent as far as Sodom" (Genesis 13:12 ESV). This nephew of Abram made a determined choice to seek refuge among "the men of Sodom," who "were wicked, great sinners against the Lord" (Genesis 13:13 ESV).

Somewhere along the way, Lot had given up his tent and sought shelter within the walls of Sodom. Moses makes it clear that he "was dwelling in Sodom" (Genesis 14:12 ESV). And that decision would prove to be far from wise. When the four Mesopotamian kings looted Sodom, Lot was taken captive along with all his possessions. He was enslaved.

But news of his capture eventually reached the ears of his uncle. Abram was about to discover that his separation from Lot had been anything but permanent. And his decision to give Lot his choice of the land as his own had probably been a mistake. Now, Abram had a decision to make. Would he intervene and rescue Lot from his predicament or allow him to suffer the consequences? Moses records that Abram spent no time deliberating over his decision.

*When Abram heard that his kinsman had been taken captive, he led forth his trained men, born in his house, 318 of them, and went in pursuit as far as Dan.* – Genesis 14:14 ESV

One can debate the wisdom of Abram's decision, but there is an overwhelming sense of God's sovereignty woven throughout this entire event. The actions of the five kings, while autonomous and self-determined, are actually the byproducts of God's providential will. Nothing happens outside His control or in opposition to His predetermined plan. These events came as no surprise to God. They were simply part of the sovereign strategy He was

orchestrating so that His will might be done “on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10). What He had preordained was coming to fruition, just as He had planned.

Abram and his 318-man army went to battle against the coalition of kings and their superior forces, and he won. That outcome would have come as no surprise to Moses’ readership. They knew that, for them to exist as a people, Abram had to have won. His victory was assured because God had promised to make of him a great nation. And nothing was going to stand in the way of that promise being fulfilled. Whether the number of enemy kings was four or forty, it didn’t matter. Regardless of the size of the foe, God could give victory.

This story should recall another battle fought by a servant of God against superior forces. Years later, Gideon, one of the judges of Israel, would find himself going up against the Midianites. He was outnumbered and outgunned. But much to Gideon’s surprise, God informed him that he had too many soldiers. In a series of bizarre events, God whittled down Gideon’s force until he only had 300 men left. And with that diminutive army, Gideon defeated the Midianites.

And, in a similar fashion, Abram defeated the five kings of Mesopotamia. His “surprising” victory allowed him to rescue Lot and bring back all the possessions that had been stolen. Lot had been redeemed by Abram. He didn’t deserve it and he hadn’t earned it. Abram simply extended unmerited mercy and grace to his young nephew. And this story provides a foreshadowing of another undeserved rescue that will take place in the lives of Abram’s descendants after another army from the north will invade Canaan and take God’s people captive. God will graciously and dramatically rescue them, returning them to the land and fulfilling the promise He had made to Abram.

This event is simply one of many illustrations of God’s goodness, grace, and sovereignty as displayed in the life of Abram. And there are many more to come.

## The King of Righteousness

<sup>17</sup> After his return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley). <sup>18</sup> And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. (He was priest of God Most High.)

<sup>19</sup> And he blessed him and said,

“Blessed be Abram by God Most High,  
Possessor of heaven and earth;  
<sup>20</sup> and blessed be God Most High,  
who has delivered your enemies into your hand!”

And Abram gave him a tenth of everything. <sup>21</sup> And the king of Sodom said to Abram, “Give me the persons, but take the goods for yourself.” <sup>22</sup> But Abram said to the king of Sodom, “I have lifted my hand to the Lord, God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth, <sup>23</sup> that I would not take a thread or a sandal strap or anything that is yours, lest you should say, ‘I have made Abram rich.’ <sup>24</sup> I will take nothing but what the young men have eaten, and the share of the men who went with me. Let Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre take their share.” – Genesis 14:17-24 ESV

Having won a God-ordained victory over the four kings of Mesopotamia, Abram returned home with his nephew, Lot, and all the plunder that had been taken from Sodom by King Chedorlaomer. Upon his return, Abram was greeted by two kings. One was Bera, the king of Sodom, while the other was Melchizedek, the king of Salem. While Bera was introduced in verse two of this same chapter, Melchizedek makes his first appearance. It seems obvious why Bera would come out to meet Abram and his troops as they returned from battle. His city had been sacked and plundered by the coalition of kings from Mesopotamia and Abram had “brought back all the possessions” (Genesis 14:16 ESV) that had been taken. Abram has rescued all of the city’s stolen treasure and the citizens who had been taken captive, and Bera wanted to express his appreciation. He even offered to let Abram keep all the plunder as a payment for his efforts.

“Give back my people who were captured. But you may keep for yourself all the goods you have recovered.” – Genesis 14:21 NLT

But it seems that Abram wanted nothing to do with Bera or his treasure. He firmly, but graciously refused the offer, stating, “I solemnly swear to the Lord, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth, that I will not take so much as a single thread or sandal thong from what belongs to you. Otherwise, you might say, ‘I am the one who made Abram rich.’ I will accept only what my young warriors have already eaten, and I request that you give a fair share of the goods to my allies—Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre” (Genesis 14:22-24 NLT).

Moses has already made it clear that “the men of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against the Lord” (Genesis 13:13 ESV). Even the king’s name bore witness to his own immorality and evilness. In Hebrew, his name, בֶּרְאָה (*berā’ah*) means “son of evil.” This raises the question of how

any parent could burden their child with such a harsh and almost prophetic name. And interestingly enough, the king of Gomorrah was saddled with a similarly unflattering name. His was בִּרְשָׁע (*birša'*) which can be translated “with iniquity.” These two men ended up ruling over two of the most wicked and godless communities on the face of the earth. They were the epitome of the attitude that had pervaded the earth right before God destroyed it.

*...everything they thought or imagined was consistently and totally evil. – Genesis 6:5*  
NLT

So, Abram’s decision to refuse an offer from this corrupt king makes sense. He didn’t want anything to do with Bera or his treasure. And Abram had already made a vow to God that he would not accept any reward for his services. He knew that to do so would place him in a position of subservience to Bera. This godless, pagan king could claim that he was the one who made Abram wealthy and use that as a future bargaining chip to obligate Abram for additional help when needed. Abram would owe Bera.

The reward Bera was offering Abram must have been substantial because it would have made Abram wealthier than he already was. According to Genesis 13, Abram was well-off.

*Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold. – Genesis 13:2 ESV*

But while Abram was unwilling to accept any compensation, he allowed his men to choose their share of the reward. He didn’t attempt to burden his men with the requirements of the personal vow he had made to God. Rather than force his convictions on them, Abram graciously allowed them to decide for themselves.

This now brings us back to the second king mentioned in the narrative: Melchizedek, the king of Salem. As if out of nowhere, this king shows up in the story without introduction and with no explanation as to who he was. His name appears nowhere in the opening verses of the chapter. He was not one of the nine kings involved in the battle. And his name appears in none of the genealogies recorded in the earlier chapters of Genesis. There are only three other places in Scripture where Melchizedek is mentioned. The first is in a psalm written by King David. In it, David states that God has declared him to be “a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek” (Psalm 110:4 ESV). Jesus would later use this same psalm to prove His claim to be the Christ, the Messiah of Israel (Matthew 22:41-46). So, he believed this song of David to be a prophetic statement about Himself. He was that priest after the order of Melchizedek. The fact that Melchizedek appears on the scene with no apparent genealogy and then disappears with no mention of his death makes him a type of Christ. He was the king of Salem, the future site of Jerusalem. Melchizedek, which was likely his title and not his name, means “King of Righteousness.” This appellation is meant to stand in stark contrast to that of Bera, the “son of evil.”

In the midst of the predominantly pagan Canaanite culture, this “righteous” king suddenly appears on the scene, offering bread and wine to Abram and his men. Moses describes him as

“a priest of God Most High” (Genesis 14:18 ESV). In other words, he was far more than just another king. He was a servant of Yahweh, the God who had called Abram and who had promised to make of him a great nation. This would have been the first time that Abram encountered another human being who also worshiped *El Elyon* (God Most High).

Once again, Melchizedek receives little mention in the Scriptures, but where his name does appear, it is associated with Jesus. In the book of Hebrews, the author presents Jesus as the better high priest, stating:

*...no one can become a high priest simply because he wants such an honor. He must be called by God for this work, just as Aaron was. That is why Christ did not honor himself by assuming he could become High Priest. No, he was chosen by God, who said to him,*

*“You are my Son.  
Today I have become your Father.”*

*And in another passage God said to him,*

*“You are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek.” – Hebrews 5:4-6 NLT*

In the very next chapter, the author declares that Jesus “leads us through the curtain into God’s inner sanctuary” and “has already gone in there for us. He has become our eternal High Priest in the order of Melchizedek” (Hebrews 6:19-20 NLT). And then the author provides some much-needed explanation as to Melchizedek’s identity and his relationship with Jesus.

*This Melchizedek was king of the city of Salem and also a priest of God Most High. When Abraham was returning home after winning a great battle against the kings, Melchizedek met him and blessed him. Then Abraham took a tenth of all he had captured in battle and gave it to Melchizedek. The name Melchizedek means “king of justice,” and king of Salem means “king of peace.” There is no record of his father or mother or any of his ancestors—no beginning or end to his life. He remains a priest forever, resembling the Son of God. – Hebrews 7:1-3 NLT*

Melchizedek was meant to foreshadow the great high priest who would come to earth offering bread and wine in the form of His own body. In an upper room in the city of “Salem” (Jerusalem), Jesus would share a final Passover meal with His disciples and, just like Melchizedek, offer His disciples bread and wine.

*As they were eating, Jesus took some bread and blessed it. Then he broke it in pieces and gave it to the disciples, saying, “Take this and eat it, for this is my body.”*

*And he took a cup of wine and gave thanks to God for it. He gave it to them and said, “Each of you drink from it, for this is my blood, which confirms the covenant between*

*God and his people. It is poured out as a sacrifice to forgive the sins of many.” – Matthew 26:26-28 NLT*

Melchizedek fed Abram and his men, then pronounced a blessing.

*“Blessed be Abram by God Most High,  
Possessor of heaven and earth;  
and blessed be God Most High,  
who has delivered your enemies into your hand!” – Genesis 14:19-20 ESV*

In doing so, he confirmed Abram’s desire to honor God with his victory. Melchizedek emphasized the sovereign power of Abram’s God. It was God Most High who had brought about the defeat of the four kings. Abram had enjoyed victory over his enemies only because God had ordained it. This blessing was meant to encourage Abram in his faith. His God was great and fully capable of doing the impossible. This reminder was going to come in handy in the days ahead when Abram found himself doing battle with doubt rather than waging war with human kings. He was going to need constant reminding that His God was truly great. The days ahead were going to require great faith. And Jesus, like Melchizedek, would provide His followers with similar words of encouragement.

*“...truly, I say to you, if you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you.” – Matthew 17:20 ESV*

And because of Melchizedek’s gracious gift of bread and wine and the comforting words of his blessing, “Abram gave him a tenth of everything” (Genesis 14:20 ESV). Once again, the author of Hebrews provides an explanation for Abram’s actions.

*Consider then how great this Melchizedek was. Even Abraham, the great patriarch of Israel, recognized this by giving him a tenth of what he had taken in battle. – Hebrews 7:4 NLT*

Abram recognized the superior nature of this priest/king and gave to him a tenth of all the spoil he had brought back from the battle. He honored this man as a servant of God and returned the blessing by sharing a portion of the riches that God had allowed him to recover. But as great as Melchizedek was, he stands in the shadow of the greater high priest.

*...a different priest, who is like Melchizedek, has appeared. Jesus became a priest, not by meeting the physical requirement of belonging to the tribe of Levi, but by the power of a life that cannot be destroyed. And the psalmist pointed this out when he prophesied.*

*“You are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek.” – Hebrews 7:15-17 NLT*

There is no mention of Melchizedek's death. And the author of Hebrews states that "He remains a priest forever, resembling the Son of God" (Hebrews 7:3 NLT). He points to the one to come who will offer Himself as the bread of life and whose blood will be "poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matthew 26:28 ESV). God blessed Abram through Melchizedek, but God would bless the nations through Jesus, the offspring of Abram.

*But because Jesus lives forever, his priesthood lasts forever. Therefore he is able, once and forever, to save those who come to God through him. He lives forever to intercede with God on their behalf.*

*He is the kind of high priest we need because he is holy and blameless, unstained by sin. He has been set apart from sinners and has been given the highest place of honor in heaven. Unlike those other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices every day. They did this for their own sins first and then for the sins of the people. But Jesus did this once for all when he offered himself as the sacrifice for the people's sins. – Hebrews 7:24-27 NLT*



## The Promise Maker

<sup>1</sup> After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: “Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.” <sup>2</sup> But Abram said, “O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” <sup>3</sup> And Abram said, “Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir.” <sup>4</sup> And behold, the word of the Lord came to him: “This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir.” <sup>5</sup> And he brought him outside and said, “Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” <sup>6</sup> And he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness. – Genesis 15:1-6 ESV

Abram has just received a blessing from Melchizedek, priest of the Most High God.

*Blessed be Abram by God Most High,  
Creator of heaven and earth. – Genesis 14:19 NLT*

Sometime after his encounter with the king-priest Melchizedek, God provided his servant with a confirmation and explanation of that blessing in the form of a vision. The Most High God referred to Himself as Abram’s shield or protector. In the same way that Abram had protected and delivered his nephew Lot during his time of captivity, God would be Abram’s defender and deliverer. And while Abram had turned down the king of Sodom’s offer of all the plunder taken from Sodom, he could be certain that God would reward him with something of far greater value.

One of the questions this passage raises is why God opened up His address to Abram with the words, “Fear not.” What was it that Abram feared? Some believe that, upon receiving an unexpected vision of the Most High God, Abram was filled with fear and awe. This would have been a normal and natural reaction to such an encounter with God. When Moses was given a vision of God in the form of a burning bush, “he hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God” (Exodus 3:6 ESV).

But based on the context of chapter 14, it makes more sense to see Abram’s fear as horizontal in nature, rather than vertical. Due to his victory over the four Mesopotamian kings, Abram had just made himself some powerful enemies. Not only that, by displaying his military might, he had inadvertently placed a target on his back. Whether he liked it or not, he was the new sheriff in town, and everyone would be gunning for him. Abram was essentially a shepherd and not a warrior, and the thought that his enemies might seek retribution on him and his household was keeping him up at night. So, God assured his fearful servant that he had nothing to worry about. Abram could rest in the knowledge that God would protect and provide for him. It is the same message that God would give to Abram’s descendants centuries later.

*“Don’t be afraid, for I am with you. Don’t be discouraged, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will hold you up with my victorious right hand.” – Isaiah 41:10 NLT*

Abram's response to God's words of comfort and encouragement is less than confident.

*"O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" – Genesis 15:2 NLT*

With this statement, Abram reveals that his greatest fear was that of failure. He knew that God had promised to bless him. He couldn't stop thinking about the words God had spoken when he was still living in Haran.

*"I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." – Genesis 12:2-3 ESV*

Abram had been 75 years old when God made that promise. And now, years later, he had only grown older and his wife's fertility problem had not improved. All the way back in Genesis 11:30, Moses had disclosed the sad state of Sarai's reproductive health: "Now Sarai was barren; she had no child."

All these factors weighed heavily on Abram's mind. Based on the circumstances, he could see no way that God's promise could ever come to fruition. Abram had resigned himself to the fact that one of his household servants would end up as his heir. He informed God about the desperate nature of his situation and even blamed Him for it.

*"You have given me no descendants of my own, so one of my servants will be my heir." – Genesis 15:3 NLT*

It appears that Abram was growing impatient. During his time in the land of Canaan, he had seen his financial prospects improve. He had grown rich and his herds had grown in number. And here was God promising to shower him with further rewards. But what difference would it make if he had no one to whom he could leave his great wealth?

It's not difficult to ascertain how Abram had assessed his situation and come up with a possible solution. He had given up on Sarai ever giving birth to a son and had assumed that they would end up adopting one of their household servants as their son and making him the rightful heir to their estate. There had probably been a time when Abram had believed Lot, his nephew, would be the logical choice. But there had been a fallout between the two of them. So, at this point, Abram had determined that his heir would end up being Eliezer of Damascus.

What is ironic about Abram's conclusion is that Eliezer's name means "God is help." Yet, it would appear that Abram was the one who was attempting to help God. He was offering God a logical solution to the whole fruitlessness problem. Abram was willing to settle for less. He was willing to accept a foreign-born "member" of his house as his heir rather than wait on God to do the impossible. But God had other plans. He was not going to compromise. And Sarai's barrenness was not going to be a problem. So, God gently but firmly broke the news to Abram.

*“No, your servant will not be your heir, for you will have a son of your own who will be your heir.” – Genesis 15:4 NLT*

In essence, God said, “Thanks for the tip, but no!” The Creator-God didn’t need Abram’s help or advice. If anything, Eliezer’s presence in Abram’s house was meant to be a constant reminder that “God is help.” Eliezer wasn’t intended to *be* the solution. No, every time Abram said Eliezer’s name, it should have reminded him that *God* was the solution. And to stress the miraculous nature of His promise, God took Abram outside and told him to “look up into the sky and count the stars if you can” (Genesis 15:5 NLT). Then, as Abram stood staring up into the night sky, overwhelmed by the sheer number of stars, God boldly proclaimed, “That’s how many descendants you will have!” (Genesis 15:5 NLT).

This was not the first time Abram had heard such an outlandish prediction from God. Earlier, when Abram had separated from Lot, God had assured him that all the land of Canaan would be his and that land would be filled with his descendants.

*“I will give you so many descendants that, like the dust of the earth, they cannot be counted!” – Genesis 13:16 NLT*

This blessing would not come through Eliezer or any other substitute. God had promised to give Abram a son, and He was aware of Sarai’s barrenness. In fact, as the sovereign God of the universe, her barrenness had been part of His plan all along. The improbability and impossibility of it all had been baked into the cake. God wanted Abram to understand that everything about this promise would be miraculous and supernatural.

And then Moses adds a somewhat surprising conclusion. Despite all of Abram’s former doubts and fears, he “believed the Lord, and the Lord counted him as righteous because of his faith” (Genesis 15:6 NLT). Suddenly, Abram’s mental state went from doubt to assurance. He went from trying to help God out to having hope in God’s promise. His confidence in God grew deeper and richer.

It’s interesting to note that Abram had always believed that God would give him an heir. His doubts had been focused on how God would fulfill that promise. He had been hung up on Sarai’s barrenness. That’s why he had come up with what he believed to be an acceptable and logical alternative solution. But now, his belief focused in on the power of God to accomplish the impossible. He went from believing in the promise to believing in the God who made the promise. And there is a huge difference.

In the great “Hall of Faith” found in chapter 11 of the book of Hebrews, the author states, “without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him” (Hebrews 11:6 ESV). Abram was learning that his faith in God was the key to the promise of God. That does not mean that faith is what determines our reward, but that faith or belief in God is how we appropriate the

promises of God. We must believe, trust in, and place our confidence in the God behind the promise.

The author of Hebrews goes on to explain how Abram displayed faith in God. And he describes how Abram's faith developed and deepened over time until it influenced even his wife, Sarai.

*By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore. – Hebrews 11:8-12 ESV*

Moses declares that God counted or credited Abram's faith as righteousness. Abram was justified or made right with God because he chose to believe and trust, not only in the promises of God but in the God behind the promises. Abram had transferred his hope in the promise to the divine promise maker. And the author of Hebrews goes on to point out that faith in the God of the promise is what sets His people apart. Whether a child of God ever sees the promise fulfilled in their lifetime, they will continue to trust in the word and reliability of the promise maker.

*All these people earned a good reputation because of their faith, yet none of them received all that God had promised. – Hebrews 11:39 NLT*

Abram would eventually see a son born to his barren wife. But he would never own any land in Canaan. He would never live to see the day when his descendants, as numerous as the stars in the sky, would occupy that land. But he would continue to believe that His God was good and could be trusted to do what He promised, whether Abram lived to see it or not. That is the essence of faith.

*Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. – Hebrews 11:1 ESV*

## God of the Impossible

<sup>7</sup> And he said to him, “I am the Lord who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to possess.” <sup>8</sup> But he said, “O Lord God, how am I to know that I shall possess it?” <sup>9</sup> He said to him, “Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon.” <sup>10</sup> And he brought him all these, cut them in half, and laid each half over against the other. But he did not cut the birds in half. <sup>11</sup> And when birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.

<sup>12</sup> As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram. And behold, dreadful and great darkness fell upon him. <sup>13</sup> Then the Lord said to Abram, “Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. <sup>14</sup> But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions. <sup>15</sup> As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. <sup>16</sup> And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.”

<sup>17</sup> When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. <sup>18</sup> On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, “To your offspring I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates, <sup>19</sup> the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, <sup>20</sup> the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, <sup>21</sup> the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Gergashites and the Jebusites.” – Genesis 15:7-21 ESV

Abram “believed the Lord” (Genesis 15:6 ESV). In other words, he trusted that God would fulfill the promise He had made. Abram’s attempt to number the stars in the night sky had been quickly followed by God’s bold assertion, “So shall your offspring be” (Genesis 15:5 ESV). And Abram had taken God at His word.

Then, after declaring His plan to give Abram innumerable descendants, God reiterated His promise to provide Canaan as their future homeland.

*“I am the Lord who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to possess.” – Genesis 15:7 ESV*

God was simply reminding Abram of the promise that He had earlier made.

*“Look as far as you can see in every direction—north and south, east and west. I am giving all this land, as far as you can see, to you and your descendants as a permanent possession. And I will give you so many descendants that, like the dust of the earth, they cannot be counted! Go and walk through the land in every direction, for I am giving it to you.” – Genesis 13:14-17 NLT*

But while Abram believed that God could and would fulfill those promises, he was still filled with apprehension and nagging doubts. As a finite human being, he couldn't help but look at the circumstances surrounding his life and wonder how God was going to pull off what appeared to be an impossible feat. From Abram's limited perspective, it appeared as if the odds were against him. He was old and his wife was barren. And, while he had successfully defeated the armies of the four kings of Mesopotamia, he knew the land of Canaan was occupied by more nations than he could ever hope to defeat with his small militia. In fact, God would even accentuate the impossible odds that Abram faced when He later declared, "To your offspring I will give this land...the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites and the Jebusites" (Genesis 15:19-21 ESV).

That's a formidable list of potential foes that will have to be defeated before Abram can occupy the land. And, according to Genesis 14:14, Abram had only 318 trained fighters at his disposal. The deck was stacked against him. And add to that the problem of Sarai's infertility, and it is no wonder that Abram had questions for God.

*"O Sovereign Lord, how can I be sure that I will actually possess it?" – Genesis 15:8 NLT*

Abram needed proof. It wasn't that he no longer believed God, it was just that he desperately needed a tangible sign to help fortify and solidify his belief. Abram's struggle was normal and natural, and he was not the only God-follower who needed a sign to bolster their faith. Moses, the man who was recording the life of Abram, knew what it was like to struggle with doubts. When he had received his call to deliver the people of Israel from their captivity in Egypt, Moses had declared his doubts that the people would believe he had been sent by God.

*"What if they won't believe me or listen to me? What if they say, 'The Lord never appeared to you'?" – Exodus 4:1 NLT*

In response, God told Moses to take his shepherd's staff and throw it on the ground. When Abram obeyed, the staff transformed into a snake. Then, God told Moses to pick the snake up by the tail. Once again, Moses did as he was told.

*"So Moses reached out and grabbed it, and it turned back into a shepherd's staff in his hand." – Exodus 4:4 NLT*

This "sign" was meant to provide Moses with faith, and it was to serve as proof to the people of Israel that Moses had been sent by God.

*"Perform this sign," the Lord told him. "Then they will believe that the Lord, the God of their ancestors—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob—really has appeared to you." – Exodus 4:5 NLT*

Belief and unbelief can coexist at the same time. And nowhere is this idea better illustrated than in the gospel of Mark. He records an encounter between Jesus and a man whose son was possessed by a demon. In Jesus' absence, the disciples had attempted to cast out the demon but had failed. So, Jesus asked the father how long the boy had been possessed. To which the father replied, "From childhood...it has often cast him into fire and into water, to destroy him. But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us" (Mark 9:21-22 NLT). This man was desperate. He wanted to see his boy set free from this devastating and life-threatening disorder. And he hoped that Jesus might be able to do what the disciples had failed to do.

While the man had sought out the rabbi from Nazareth, believing that He had the power to heal and cast out demons, Jesus sensed the man's lingering doubt. In earshot of the man, the disciples, and the rest of the crowd that had assembled, Jesus declared, "All things are possible for one who believes" (Mark 9:23 NLT). To which the father immediately responded, "I believe; help my unbelief! (Mark 9:24 NLT).

This honest statement from a grieving father represents the heart cry of every child of God. Saddled by a finite perspective and equipped with a faith that is burdened down by a sinful nature that is predisposed to doubt and disobey God, every believer finds himself struggling with unbelief. But God the Father, just like God the Son, is always willing to bolster unbelief. And so, rather than chastising Abram for his request for a sign, God patiently and powerfully obliged His reluctant servant.

But God didn't simply perform a miracle like He had with Moses. Instead, He involved Abram in the process, by ordering him to gather "a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old female goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon" (Genesis 15:9 NLT). After checking off all the items on his God-ordained shopping list, Abram brought the animals to God and proceeded to prepare them for sacrifice.

God was commanding Abram to prepare a covenant ceremony. This would have been a common occurrence in Abram's day that was meant to seal a bilateral covenant between two parties. The animals were killed then split down the middle. The two halves were then separated, forming a pathway between them. To seal their agreement, the two parties would walk together between the lifeless bodies of the sacrificed animals, signifying their commitment to remain faithful to the covenant agreement or face the same fate as the animals. It was a blood covenant.

But after completing his assignment, Abram had to spend the next hours fending off the birds of prey that were attempting to consume the carcasses of the sacrificed animals. Exhausted by the effort, Abram eventually fell asleep. His attempts to drive off the "unclean" scavengers proved too much for him. And this failure to preserve the sacrifice was meant to reveal Abram's complete dependence upon God. As Abram slept, "a terrifying darkness came down over him" (Genesis 15:12 NLT). Even in his unconscious state, Abram sensed a feeling of dread. Something terrible was about to happen. He had fallen asleep with the disturbing image of the

dismembered animals being attacked by ravenous birds seared in his brain. And this seemed to conjure up a foreboding sense of dread.

*“...Abram driving off the birds of prey from the dismembered pieces portrays him defending his descendants from the attacks of foreign nations. Genesis itself tells of a number of attacks by foreigners against the children of Abraham and it already looks forward to the sojourn in Egypt.” – Thomas L. Constable, Notes on Genesis*

During Abram's fitful and fearful sleep, God spoke to him, affirming that his feelings of dread were well justified. There were difficult days in store for His descendants. God's fulfillment of the promise to give the land of Canaan to Abram's descendants would be delayed by a seeming tragedy.

*“You can be sure that your descendants will be strangers in a foreign land, where they will be oppressed as slaves for 400 years.” – Genesis 15:13 NLT*

This was probably not the sign Abram had been seeking. It only seemed to confirm his lingering doubts and fears about the promises of God. But God followed this dose of bad news with a confident assurance of a glorious outcome.

*“But I will punish the nation that enslaves them, and in the end they will come away with great wealth. (As for you, you will die in peace and be buried at a ripe old age.) After four generations your descendants will return here to this land, for the sins of the Amorites do not yet warrant their destruction.” – Genesis 15:14-16 NLT*

God was letting Abram know that His plans and His promise were long-term in nature, and their fulfillment was not up to Abram. In fact, as Abram slept, God ratified the covenant between them. In a normal covenant ceremony, both parties would have walked together between the carcasses, forming a bilateral agreement. But this covenant was unilateral in nature. When the sun went down and darkness descended on the land, “a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces” (Genesis 15:17 ESV). The presence of God, symbolized by smoke and fire, passed along the pathway, and ratified the covenant. God was holding Himself accountable to keep the covenant He was making with Abram and his descendants. And this imagery of smoke and fire would become a recurring theme for the Israelites as God led them from Egypt to the promised land by a pillar of fire by night and a pillar of smoke by day (Exodus 13:21).

God gave Abram a glimpse into the future. And while it would have its fair share of dark days, Abram could rest in the knowledge that God was in full control of the outcome. It would all happen according to His sovereign will and by virtue of His unwavering faithfulness. None of it hinged on Abram's faith. God was going to do what He promised to do. His plan was perfect and infallible. The promise of a seed and an inheritance would be fulfilled, whether Abram believed or not. The covenant ceremony was intended to assure Abram that the outcome was completely up to God, and He would not disappoint. Yes, the future would be filled with dark

days and disappointing setbacks, but they were all part of God's plan. A barren wife, a 400-year delay, and the presence of powerful foes would not be enough to thwart the plans of God.



## The Perilous Plans of Man

<sup>1</sup> Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. She had a female Egyptian servant whose name was Hagar. <sup>2</sup> And Sarai said to Abram, "Behold now, the Lord has prevented me from bearing children. Go in to my servant; it may be that I shall obtain children by her." And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai. <sup>3</sup> So, after Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her servant, and gave her to Abram her husband as a wife. <sup>4</sup> And he went in to Hagar, and she conceived. And when she saw that she had conceived, she looked with contempt on her mistress. – Genesis 16:1-4 ESV

To understand this chapter, one must remember the promise that God reiterated to Abram at the beginning of chapter 15.

*"This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir."* – Genesis 15:4  
ESV

Abram had become convinced that, due to his wife's barrenness, the only way God could fulfill His promise to give Abram more descendants than there are grains of sand on the seashore, was if Abram adopted his servant, Eliezer as his heir. But God deemed that option as unacceptable. The divine plan would not be based on a household servant or even a blood-relative such as Lot. God was emphatic that the heir He had in mind would be a child born to Abram and Sarai.

Abram had expressed his strong doubts about God's plan by stating, "Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir" (Genesis 15:3 ESV). In other words, he had reached the conclusion that, for God's plan to be fulfilled, there would need to be a work-around. Yet, that's when God had informed Abram that his very own son would be his heir. And that's when God confirmed His statement by commanding Abram: "number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he assured Abram, "So shall your offspring be" (Genesis 15:5 ESV).

With this as a backdrop, chapter 16 begins to make more sense. Moses opens the chapter begins with a statement that is, excuse the pun, pregnant with meaning.

*Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children.* – Genesis 16:1 ESV

Despite all the assurances from God, Abram still found himself fatherless and struggling with doubt concerning the promise of abundant offspring. At this point in his life's journey, he had no children and, therefore, no tangible evidence that God was going to do what He had promised to do. If anything, from Abram's point of view, he continued to face a hopeless situation that appeared to have no chance of fulfillment. At this point in the story, Abram had been living in Canaan for an extended period of time. Yet, he still owned no property and his wife had born him no heir. In other words, not much had changed since the day he had arrived in the land of Canaan from his home in Haran.

This where it gets interesting. Sarai, the one whose infertility seemed to be throwing a wrench into God's plan, decided to come up with her own solution to the problem. There is a palpable sense of guilt in this passage. Sarai felt personally responsible for the predicament in which her husband found himself. As his wife, she had, quite literally, failed to deliver. She had given him no son. In a sense, she was burdened by her inability to produce an heir and felt compelled to come up with an alternative plan. And Moses reveals the logic behind her thinking.

*She had a female Egyptian servant whose name was Hagar.* – Genesis 16:2 ESV

Since God had refused to consider Eliezer because he was not a blood-born son of Abram, she reasoned that there was another way to fulfill God's requirement with a little ingenuity. If Abram was to impregnate Hagar, any son she delivered would be a true son of Abram and not an adopted servant or nephew like Lot. Since she viewed herself as the problem, she decided to remove herself from the equation.

But up to this point, Sarai had been a major player in the story of Abram's call and commission to move his family to Canaan. Chapter 12 reveals that "Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. And Abram took Sarai his wife..." (Genesis 12:4 ESV). Sarai had always been part of the plan. And God knew all about her inability to bear children. In fact, Moses made it clear in chapter 11 that, even before Abram left Haran, Sarai's problem was readily apparent.

*Sarai was unable to become pregnant and had no children.* – Genesis 11:30 NLT

None of this was a surprise to God. He knew and had planned for Sarai's infertility. As the sovereign God of the universe, he knew her physical disability was a preordained circumstance through which He would reveal His power and presence. He was going to prove to Abram and Sarai that He was the God of the impossible.

But in a sincere attempt to help God out, Sarai shared her ingenious idea with Abram.

*"The Lord has prevented me from having children. Go and sleep with my servant. Perhaps I can have children through her."* – Genesis 16:2 NLT

And according to Moses' account, "Abram agreed with Sarai's proposal" (Genesis 16:2 NLT). One can almost get the impression that Abram quickly and, rather eagerly, bought into his wife's plan. He doesn't question her suggestion or argue with the potential efficacy of the arrangement. He simply decides to play along.

*So Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian servant and gave her to Abram as a wife. (This happened ten years after Abram had settled in the land of Canaan).* – Genesis 16:3 NLT

To bring about the fulfillment of God's promise, Sarai decided to share her husband with another woman.

"It was a serious matter for a man to be childless in the ancient world, for it left him without an heir. But it was even more calamitous for a woman: to have a great brood of children was the mark of success as a wife; to have none was ignominious failure. So throughout the ancient East polygamy was resorted to as a means of obviating childlessness. But wealthier wives preferred the practice of surrogate motherhood, whereby they allowed their husbands to 'go in to' . . . their maids, a euphemism for sexual intercourse (cf. 6:4; 30:3; 38:8, 9; 39:14). The mistress could then feel that her maid's child was her own and exert some control over it in a way that she could not if her husband simply took a second wife." – Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, pg. 7

But unbeknownst to Sarai, her decision would have long-term ramifications, not only for she and Abram, but for their future descendants as well, and for generations to come. As Eve convinced Adam to disobey God and eat the forbidden fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, so Sarai convinced Abram to question God's word and fulfill the promise through purely human and fleshly means. Hagar was never intended to be the vessel through whom God would work. She was a surrogate or substitute, chosen by a barren woman who was so desperate to have a child that she would do anything.

Sarai truly believed this was a good idea. But when her husband "had sexual relations with Hagar, and she became pregnant" (Genesis 15:4 NLT), Sarai quickly discovered just how flawed her plan really was. Abram's encounter with Hagar produced immediate results, which must have enhanced Sarai's feelings of inadequacy. And, to make matters worse, Hagar flaunted her pregnancy in Sarai's face.

*...when Hagar knew she was pregnant, she began to treat her mistress, Sarai, with contempt. – Genesis 16:4 NLT*

Hagar sensed that, with her pregnancy, she had been elevated to a position of primacy in Abram's household. No longer a mere maidservant, Hagar relished her new role as the seed-bearer to Abram. She believed she would be the one to fulfill the promise of God and bring Abram the offspring for whom he long been waiting. Jealousy and an unhealthy atmosphere of competition crept into Abram's household, and it was not long before his wife's clever plan produced some disheartening and difficult decisions for God's servant.



## The Mysterious Ways of God

<sup>5</sup> And Sarai said to Abram, “May the wrong done to me be on you! I gave my servant to your embrace, and when she saw that she had conceived, she looked on me with contempt. May the LORD judge between you and me!” <sup>6</sup> But Abram said to Sarai, “Behold, your servant is in your power; do to her as you please.” Then Sarai dealt harshly with her, and she fled from her.

<sup>7</sup> The angel of the LORD found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, the spring on the way to Shur. <sup>8</sup> And he said, “Hagar, servant of Sarai, where have you come from and where are you going?” She said, “I am fleeing from my mistress Sarai.” <sup>9</sup> The angel of the LORD said to her, “Return to your mistress and submit to her.” <sup>10</sup> The angel of the LORD also said to her, “I will surely multiply your offspring so that they cannot be numbered for multitude.” – Genesis 16:5-10 ESV

The story of Sarai’s decision to give her maidservant, Hagar, to Abram as a surrogate birth mother for their future inheritance, brings an old hymn comes to mind. The events surrounding her clever solution to her own barrenness problem seem to be headed in a decidedly troubled direction. And yet, as this timeless song so aptly states, God was in full control of the entire situation.

*God moves in a mysterious way  
His wonders to perform  
He plants His footsteps in the sea  
And rides upon the storm*

*Deep in unsearchable mines  
Of never-failing skill  
He treasures up His bright designs  
And works His sovereign will*

– William Cowper, “God Moves in a Mysterious Way” – 1774

Every detail recorded in this story seems to be taking place outside of God’s preordained will. Nowhere in the narrative does Sarai receive orders from God instructing her to implement His “Plan B.” And yet, as William Cowper so elegantly put it, God was treasuring up His bright designs and working His sovereign will.

From Sarai’s perspective, things had gone terribly wrong. Her bright idea had produced some decidedly dark outcomes. What should have been a joyous occasion, had turned into a toxic scene filled with jealousy, envy, and deep resentment. Sarai had given Hagar to Abram so that she might bear the offspring he was so desperately seeking. But when her wish came true and Hagar became pregnant with Abram’s child, she began to have a case of buyer’s remorse. Sarai’s lowly maidservant suddenly found herself in the envious position of serving as the future mother of Abram’s long-awaited son. She considered herself to be the “chosen” vessel through

whom God would fulfill His promise to produce from Abram a great nation. And she flaunted her newfound celebrity status in Sarai's despondent face.

Sarai suddenly found herself in a dramatically diminished role. She was still Abram's wife, but she was damaged goods – unable to conceive and, therefore, of little value. But rather than blame herself for this unpleasant predicament, she lashed out at Abram.

*"This is all your fault! I put my servant into your arms, but now that she's pregnant she treats me with contempt. The Lord will show who's wrong—you or me!"* – Genesis 16:5  
NLT

She admits that the idea had been hers, but she demanded that Abram take responsibility for the unfortunate outcome. After all, he was the one who got Hagar pregnant. But Sarai seems to be suffering from a severe case of selective memory. It was she who gave Abram both the idea and the permission to impregnate Hagar.

*"Go and sleep with my servant. Perhaps I can have children through her."* – Genesis 16:2  
NLT

Her plan had worked to perfection. Abram had faithfully (and, most likely, with great eagerness) followed her instructions and accomplished his assignment. He had successfully gotten Hagar pregnant but, in doing so, he had inadvertently made Sarai mad.

Sarai portrayed herself as the innocent victim, even suggesting that God would not hold her culpable or blameworthy for this disastrous situation. Fueling her unbridled anger and resentment was the arrogant attitude exhibited by Hagar. Moses identifies this newly elevated servant an Egyptian. It is most likely that Hagar had become a part of Abram's family when, 10 years earlier, he had taken his family to Egypt to escape the famine in the land of Canaan. Upon his departure from Egypt, Abram had been rewarded by Pharaoh with great wealth.

*Pharaoh gave Abram many gifts because of her—sheep, goats, cattle, male and female donkeys, male and female servants, and camels.* – Genesis 12:16 NLT

Hagar had probably been among the many male and female servants who accompanied Abram back to the land of Canaan. And, at some point, she had been elevated to her position as Sarai's personal maidservant, which eventually led to her selection as the surrogate birth mother for her mistress.

It is fascinating to consider the intricate and interconnected plot lines that permeate the story of Abram's life. Early on, even before God called Abram and commanded him to move to Canaan, Abram's father had already decided to uproot his family from Ur and relocate them to the very same spot. It was while they were temporarily residing in Haran, that God shared His plan and promise to Abram.



Later on, Abram made a decision to escape a famine in Canaan by seeking food and shelter in Egypt. Little did he know at the time that the famine had been God's doing. Once in Egypt, Abram feared the Egyptians would kill him in order to gain access to his attractive wife. So, he concocted a misguided plan to save his own skin declaring Sarai to be his sister. This resulted in Pharaoh confiscating Sarai as his own personal property and placing her in his harem. But paid a handsome bride price to Sarai's "brother." Abram ended up a much wealthier man despite his deceit and deception. And God graciously rescued Sarai from her captivity, returning her

to Abram, and sending the two of them back to Canaan.

God had been working behind the scenes "in a mysterious way His wonders to perform." All along, God had been working His sovereign will – despite Abram's selfish and self-centered actions. And the same thing was true for Sarai's misguided attempt to do God a favor by implementing her own plan to fulfill His long-delayed promise.

Both Sarai and Abram were oblivious to what God was going. She was mad and blamed Abram. Abram simply shrugged his shoulders and told her to do what she thought best.

*"Look, she is your servant, so deal with her as you see fit."* – Genesis 16:6 NLT

He wasn't about to come between his disgruntled wife and her pregnant maid-servant. In fact, he wanted no part of what he considered to be a no-win situation. Abram displays a disappointing lack of leadership and integrity throughout this ordeal. He had been willing to "go into" Hagar, but now he refused to *stand up* for her. He was abandoning his responsibilities as a husband and a father. He placed Hagar at the mercy of his disgruntled and vengeful wife. And Moses makes it clear that Sarai wasted no time enacting her revenge.

*Then Sarai treated Hagar so harshly that she finally ran away.* – Genesis 16:6 NLT

But as before, God's sovereign, all-knowing will reveals itself again. Hagar fled into the desert to escape the wrath of her mistress but, while there, she encounters the mercy of gracious God. Moses indicates that "The angel of the Lord found Hagar beside a spring of water in the wilderness, along the road to Shur" (Genesis 16:7 NLT). This does not mean the angel had been

sent on a search-and-rescue mission from God, hoping to find this missing pregnant woman. God knew Hagar's exact whereabouts, and that is right where the angel found her.

The angel asked Hagar two questions that were designed to elicit the rationale behind her flight. The angel already knew the answers, but he wanted Hagar to consider the absurdity of her decision to seek refuge in the wilderness. She was an abandoned and unprotected pregnant woman attempting to fend for herself in the most inhospitable of places. She was hopeless and helpless. Or so she thought. In her mind, she had gone from the prized position as the mother of Abram's offspring to a social pariah preparing to give birth to a bastard child in the middle of nowhere. Yet, God had news for Hagar.

When Hagar acknowledged that she was running from the wrath of Sarai, the angel gave her the surprising and somewhat disconcerting instructions to return. And then he added a shocking addendum to his command.

*"I will surely multiply your offspring so that they cannot be numbered for multitude."* – Genesis 16:10 ESV

This was the angel of the Lord speaking on behalf of His Master. He was delivering to Hagar the very same God-guaranteed promise that Abram and Sarai had received. This transplanted and recently abandoned Egyptian slave girl had just received a promise from God that she would be the mother of a great nation. Abram and Sarai had condemned she and her yet-born son to a certain death, but God had chosen to reward her with progeny and a fruitful posterity.

God even assured Hagar that she could safely return to her mistresses' side and fear no repercussions. He would go with her and protect her. At this point, Hagar has no idea what God has in store. The prospect of returning to the unfriendly and potentially hostile atmosphere of Abram's household must have frightened her. Would she be welcomed with open arms or clenched fists? Upon his birth, would her son be accepted or rejected? She had no way of knowing how God would fulfill the promise He made, but as the following verses will make clear, she eventually took God at His word and obeyed.

Despite Sarai's plotting and scheming and Abram's spineless leadership, Hagar had a future, because God had a plan – a plan even included her.

## When Men (and Women) Play God

<sup>11</sup> And the angel of the Lord said to her,

"Behold, you are pregnant  
and shall bear a son.  
You shall call his name Ishmael,  
because the Lord has listened to your affliction.  
<sup>12</sup> He shall be a wild donkey of a man,  
his hand against everyone  
and everyone's hand against him,  
and he shall dwell over against all his kinsmen."

<sup>13</sup> So she called the name of the Lord who spoke to her, "You are a God of seeing," for she said, "Truly here I have seen him who looks after me." <sup>14</sup> Therefore the well was called Beer-lahai-roi; it lies between Kadesh and Bered.

<sup>15</sup> And Hagar bore Abram a son, and Abram called the name of his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael. <sup>16</sup> Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram. – Genesis 16:11-16 ESV

A pregnant and homeless Hagar found herself in the middle of the wilderness having an unexpected conversation with the angel of the Lord. And much to her surprise, this divine messenger has just commanded Hagar to return home and submit herself to the Sarai, the very woman who had cast her out like unwanted trash. This disheartened and fearful woman must have reeled at the thought of risking further alienation and possible retribution from an angry and vengeful Sarai. But the angel of God provided a doubtful Hagar with a shocking revelation that was meant to elicit faith and produce obedience.

*"I will surely multiply your offspring so that they cannot be numbered for multitude."* – Genesis 16:10 ESV

God was assuring Hagar that the child she carried in her womb would not only live, but he would produce an abundance of offspring. This female Egyptian slave had been made the unwitting participant in Sarai's clever scheme to fulfill God's promise through human means. When Sarai's barrenness continued to stifle any hope of her bearing a son for her husband, Abram, she had turned to Hagar as a possible and practical solution. It had been her idea to have Abram impregnate her personal handmaid. And when her plan worked, and Hagar became pregnant with Abram's child, Sarai regretted her decision and ordered the threat removed.

But, as always, God had bigger plans in store for Hagar and, more importantly, for the baby she carried in her womb. In the middle of the inhospitable wilderness, the forlorn and forgotten Hagar was given new hope.

*"You are now pregnant and will give birth to a son. You are to name him Ishmael (which means 'God hears'), for the Lord has heard your cry of distress."* – Genesis 16:11 NLT

This announcement was meant to assure Hagar that her child would live. And God would not only give her a son, but He would give that boy a name: Ishmael. This name is a compound word in Hebrew (*yišmā'ē'l*). It stems from the word for “hear” and the word for “God.” So, the boy’s God-given name would mean “God hears.” His name would reflect the reality that Yahweh had heard Hagar’s desperate cries for help and had determined to answer them. One can only imagine the fear-driven pleas of this abandoned woman as she pondered her own fate and that of her child. Was she destined to die in the wilderness, pregnant and alone? Would she live long enough to witness the birth of her child, but then be forced to watch its life slip away due to hunger and exposure to the elements? Was this some kind of divine punishment for her role in the whole affair surrogate birth mother affair?

What is interesting to consider is that, due to her identity as an Egyptian, it is highly likely that Hagar was not a follower of Yahweh. Her ten-year exposure to Abram and his family may have resulted in her conversion, but it is just as likely that she remained a worshiper of one of the many gods of Egypt. And her cries in the wilderness could have been directed at one of these false deities.

But who heard her? And who responded to her pleas for help? It was Yahweh, the very same God who had called her former master out of Haran. It had been this God’s messenger who had shown up in the wilderness and delivered the good news about her son and his future descendants. But not everything about the angel’s message would have sounded positive to Hagar. He also delivered what must have come across to her as bad news.

*"This son of yours will be a wild man, as untamed as a wild donkey! He will raise his fist against everyone, and everyone will be against him. Yes, he will live in open hostility against all his relatives."* – Genesis 16:12 NLT

At first glance, this pronouncement comes across as anything but good news. But to a woman who had been faced with the possible death of her unborn son, this news was hopeful. He would grow up to be a man who lived independently. He would be powerful and resourceful. And, while he would end up alienated from his own relatives, he would father a sizeable nation of his own that would have a lasting impact on the world.

In time, the descendants of Ishmael would end up as the mortal enemies of their blood relatives, the Israelites. Islamic lore teaches that Ishmael would become the patriarch of the Muslim people. But the Bible simply states that Ishmael and his descendants would live in open hostility to the descendants of Abram through his son, Isaac. Ishmael and Isaac had the same father, but two different birth mothers. And their family trees would branch off in two distinctively different directions. But God was behind it all. In fact, Paul picks up on this story when writing to the believers living in the Roman-ruled province of Galatia. He would use the

disparate relationship between these two half-brothers as an illustration of those who live as slaves to the law and those who enjoy the freedom brought about by God's promise.

*Tell me, you who want to live under the law, do you know what the law actually says? The Scriptures say that Abraham had two sons, one from his slave wife and one from his freeborn wife. The son of the slave wife was born in a human attempt to bring about the fulfillment of God's promise. But the son of the freeborn wife was born as God's own fulfillment of his promise. These two women serve as an illustration of God's two covenants.* – Galatians 4:21-24 NLT

Paul uses this Old Testament story to drive home a very important point to his Christian readers who are struggling with the difference between law and grace. He points out that Ishmael was born to a slave woman, while Isaac was born to Sarai, a free woman. The status of the two boys would dramatically impact their positions in the family of Abram. In fact, Moses makes clear that Ishmael would end up being alienated from and at odds with the other children of Abraham.

Secondly, Paul stresses the difference between their two births. Ishmael was the result of a purely human relationship. There was no miracle involved. Abram impregnated Hagar, she ended up pregnant, and eventually gave birth. There was nothing supernatural about it. But, in comparison, Sarai's pregnancy was divinely ordained and ordered. She was old and barren, but God miraculously intervened and produced a child in fulfillment of His promise to Abram. Isaac was a son born to Sarai and not Hagar. That had been God's plan all along. He is the God of the impossible, and He had never needed Sarai's help or advice.

And Paul elaborates further on the distinction between these two women and their respective seed.

*The first woman, Hagar, represents Mount Sinai where people received the law that enslaved them. And now Jerusalem is just like Mount Sinai in Arabia, because she and her children live in slavery to the law. But the other woman, Sarah, represents the heavenly Jerusalem. She is the free woman, and she is our mother.* – Galatians 4:24-26 NLT

Paul is not suggesting that the story of Sarai and Hagar is mythical or purely metaphorical. But he does suggest that it contains an important allegorical lesson. These two women were very real, but their lives also served as powerful illustrations of a much deeper truth that would apply in the not-so-distant future. Much to the chagrin of any Jews in his readership, Paul uses the slave-born son of Hagar as an illustration of the Jewish people who refused to believe in Christ. They were stuck relying upon the law for their salvation. They considered themselves to be legitimate sons of Abram, but God viewed them differently. In Paul's analogy, Isaac becomes a representative of those born under freedom from the law. This is a direct reference to Christians, those whom Jesus has set free from the burden of the law.

Hagar represents the Mosaic Covenant, with all its laws and legal requirements. But Sarai represents the New Covenant, made possible through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross. It is fascinating to consider that Jesus, the Savior of the world, also entered the world through the means of a miraculous, Spirit-enabled birth.

The promises of God will always be fulfilled by the divinely ordained means of God. Hagar had never been intended to be the mother of the offspring of Abram through whom God would bless all the nations. Human means never produce spiritual outcomes. And, while God would end up blessing Ishmael, and produce from him a great number of descendants. There would be no future Messiah or Savior born from his family tree. That was reserved for the son of the promise: Isaac.

In response to the message of the angel, Hagar declares that this God of Abram is a “God who sees.” He had seen her plight and responded to her plea. He had graciously given her a promise and a hope, and she believed. And the chapter ends on a somewhat anticlimactic note with the simple declaration:

*So Hagar gave Abram a son, and Abram named him Ishmael. Abram was eighty-six years old when Ishmael was born. – Genesis 16:15-16 NLT*

God was far from done because the promise had not yet been fulfilled. But it would be, according to His terms, and right on time with His preordained schedule.

## Life Under the Gracious Gaze of Almighty God

<sup>1</sup> When Abram was ninety-nine years old the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, “I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless, <sup>2</sup> that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly.” <sup>3</sup> Then Abram fell on his face. And God said to him, <sup>4</sup> “Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. <sup>5</sup> No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. <sup>6</sup> I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you. <sup>7</sup> And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. <sup>8</sup> And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God.” – Genesis 17:1-8 ESV

Hagar eventually obeyed God, leaving the wilderness behind and returning to the household of Abram. In due time, God fulfilled His promise to the slave girl and she gave birth to a son, whom she named Ishmael, in keeping with God’s command.

*“Behold, you are pregnant  
and shall bear a son.  
You shall call his name Ishmael,  
because the Lord has listened to your affliction.” – Genesis 16:11 ESV*

Yet, just a few verses later, Moses seems to indicate that it was Abram who named the boy.

*So Hagar gave Abram a son, and Abram named him Ishmael. Abram was eighty-six years old when Ishmael was born. – Genesis 16:15-16 NLT*

Rather than considering this as some sort of biblical contradiction, it makes more sense to view it as an example of God’s sovereign, behind-the-scenes activity. It was He who had decreed that the boy would be born, and it was He who had selected his name. And whether God used Hagar as the instrument through which He communicated His divine wishes to Abram, or He visited Abram in a dream, He ensured that His decree would be followed. The boy’s name would be Ishmael (God hears).

The birth and naming of Ishmael were meant to send a message to Abram. That God had heard the cries of the abandoned Hagar in the wilderness should restore Abram’s confidence in God’s ability to hear his cries of fear and doubt. Abram and his wife Sarai were God’s chosen couple, and He had clearly indicated His intentions to use them as the vessels through whom He would make a great nation and shower blessings on the rest of the world. But the whole reason Ishmael existed was that Sarai had doubted God’s ability to pull off His promise through her. She was old and beyond child-bearing age. And to make matters worse, she was barren. So, she had decided that the only way the promise could be fulfilled was if Abram fathered a child with her Egyptian maid-servant.

Sarai's plan had accomplished her goal but had failed to fulfill God's promise. Abram had a son but, according to God, he was still lacking a divinely approved heir. Ishmael would end up siring a multitude of descendants (Genesis 15:10), but they would not be the ones through whom God would bless the nations. In fact, according to God's message to Hagar, Ishmael's descendants would "live in open hostility against all his relatives" (Genesis 16:12 NLT).

So, Abram had a son, but he was still waiting for the fulfillment of God's promise. And, as Abram watched Ishmael grow from infancy to adolescence, he would continue to wait – 13 long years. At the ripe old age of 99, Abram received a message from God.

*"I am El-Shaddai—'God Almighty.' Serve me faithfully and live a blameless life. I will make a covenant with you, by which I will guarantee to give you countless descendants."*  
– Genesis 17:1-2 NLT

This encounter with God would prove to be a watershed moment in the life of Abram. While this was not the first time he had heard from God, it would be the one occasion that left the deepest impression on his life. For 13 years, he had most likely been assuming that Ishmael would be his heir. From his perspective, Hagar's return from the wilderness was a sign from God that Ishmael was to be the long-awaited offspring through whom God would work. Abram had received no divine message to the contrary.

So, after what appears to be 13 years of divine silence, Abram receives a visit from God. For the first time in their lengthy relationship, God introduces Himself to Abram as *'el shadday*, (El Shaddai), a name that is most often translated as "God Almighty." In using this divine appellation, God was letting Abram know that He was fully capable of accomplishing His will and fulfilling His promises without human assistance. He was the Almighty, all-powerful God of the universe. He had created the heavens and the earth. He held all things together. And God wanted Abram to know that old age and barrenness would prove to be no problem for Him.

At 13 years of age, Ishmael was on the cusp of becoming a man. And in His omniscience, God knew exactly what Abram was thinking. This 99-year-old father of a teenager had assumed that Ishmael would be his heir. But he was about to discover just how wrong he was and just how great God is.

Back in chapter 15, God had made a covenant with Abram. It had been a unilateral and unconditional covenant. In other words, God had declared His intentions but had placed no requirements on Abram. On this particular occasion, Abram had expressed his disappointment with God's plan.

*"You have given me no descendants of my own, so one of my servants will be my heir."* – Genesis 15:3 NLT

He had already decided that he was going to have to make Eliezer, his manservant, his adopted son, and heir. But God had rejected that option and reiterated His plan.

*“No, your servant will not be your heir, for you will have a son of your own who will be your heir.” – Genesis 15:4 NLT*

God had reconfirmed His commitment to give Abram a son, but He would do it on His terms. That son would not be adopted. He would be the biological offspring of Abram. And God had let Abram know that, from that one son, He would provide Abram with more descendants than there are stars in the sky (Genesis 15:5).

God had sealed His covenant commitment to Abram by walking through the divided carcasses of the animals that Abram had sacrificed. He had made a blood commitment to fulfill the promise He had made. But He had demanded nothing of Abram. Now, years later, God once again confirmed His commitment to multiply Abram greatly. But this time, He includes an interesting addendum to the agreement.

*“I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless, that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly.” – Genesis 17:1-2 ESV*

This statement from God must have left the 99-year-old Abram stunned and shaking in his sandals. The almighty God seemed to be placing a condition on the covenant He had made with Abram. And this condition was anything but easy. God was demanding that Abram live a blameless life. And the impossible nature of this command did not escape Abram. As soon as he heard them, he fell on his face. He knew he was completely incapable of pulling off this divine demand. But he failed to grasp what God was really saying to him.

God was not demanding sinless perfection from His fallen and flawed servant. He was not placing a condition on the covenant that required Abram to live in unwavering obedience and moral purity. But, based on Abram's reaction, that's likely how he interpreted it. And sadly, that's how many Christians view this passage today. We hear in God's words a requirement that we live without sin and in perfect obedience to all His commands. And we wrongly assume that, if we don't, we will miss out on His blessings for us. We make His promises to us and love for us conditional.

That's why it is essential that we understand what God was saying to Abram. The Hebrew word for “walk” is הָלַךְ (*hālak*) and it means to “to walk back and forth; to walk about; to live out one's life.” Abram is being encouraged to conduct his life with the constant awareness that Almighty God is watching. Nothing escapes His notice. He is the all-seeing, all-knowing God. Abram was to have a constant awareness of God's presence that would influence every area of his life.

But what about God's demand that Abram “be blameless?” Was He requiring sinless perfection? Once again, the Hebrew language sheds some light on these questions. God demanded that Abram be תָּמִימָן (*tāmîm*), a word that is rich in meaning. It conveys the idea of completeness, wholeness, and integrity. God is not requiring Abram to live a life free from all sin. He is demanding that Abram recognize the wholeness of his calling. God wanted all of

Abram. He had not chosen him simply as a biological vessel through whom He would create a mighty nation. No, God wanted every area of Abram's life: body, mind, soul, and spirit. There was to be no compartmentalization. Abram was not free to hold back any area of his life from God's control or use. In other words, Abram was being told to live the entirety of his life before God's all-seeing eyes. There was nothing that God could not see. There was no area of Abram's life that he was to consider as off-limits to God's control.

And as Abram lay prostrate on the ground, God reiterated His covenant and His promise.

*"This is my covenant with you: I will make you the father of a multitude of nations! What's more, I am changing your name. It will no longer be Abram. Instead, you will be called Abraham, for you will be the father of many nations. I will make you extremely fruitful. Your descendants will become many nations, and kings will be among them!" – Genesis 17:4-6 NLT*

Abram received a confirmation of the original covenant, as well as a new name. And that new name carried powerful significance.

*"...its significance is in the wordplay with אָבִהַמּוֹן ('av hamon, "the father of a multitude," which sounds like אַבְרָהָם, 'avraham, "Abraham"). The new name would be a reminder of God's intention to make Abraham the father of a multitude." – NET Bible Study Notes*

God was letting Abram know that the promise still stood firm but it would not be fulfilled through Ishmael. Sarai's plan had not accomplished God's will. There would be another son, and through him, God would fulfill every aspect of the covenant He had made with Abram. As proof of His commitment, God promised to give Abram a sign to go along with his new name. And that sign would be perpetual and permanent, passed down from generation to generation, long after Abram was gone. And once again, God reassures His doubting and sometimes disobedient servant of the incredible nature of the covenant and the promise attached to it.

*"This is the everlasting covenant: I will always be your God and the God of your descendants after you. And I will give the entire land of Canaan, where you now live as a foreigner, to you and your descendants. It will be their possession forever, and I will be their God." – Genesis 17:7-8 NLT*

God wasn't requiring Abram to live a sinless life to receive the covenant promises. Abram was being invited to conduct every aspect of his life under the watchful, loving, and covenant-keeping eyes of God Almighty.

## The Cost of Commitment

<sup>9</sup> And God said to Abraham, “As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations. <sup>10</sup> This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. <sup>11</sup> You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. <sup>12</sup> He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised. Every male throughout your generations, whether born in your house or bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring, <sup>13</sup> both he who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money, shall surely be circumcised. So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant. <sup>14</sup> Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant.” – Genesis 17:9-14 ESV

Up to this point in the story, the covenant between God and Abram had been non-binding. The agreement had been unilateral in nature, obligating God to keep all that He had promised to Abram. Even when God had ordered Abram to sacrifice and divide the animals, God had walked through the midst of them alone (Genesis 16:1-21). He had not required Abram to join him in this covenant ratification ceremony. God, in the form of a smoking pot and a flaming torch, passed through the midst of the dismembered animals, signifying His commitment to keep all the promises He had made to Abram. In a sense, God was saying, “May what happened to these animals be my own fate should I fail to honor my word.” This action by God ratified or sealed the agreement, but nothing was required of Abram. Until now.

Thirteen years after Ishmael’s birth, God visited Abram again and revisited the covenant agreement between them. But this time, God revealed to Abram that he could no longer be a non-participant in the covenant. He too would have a binding and costly obligation to uphold. Gone were the days of simply waiting on God to fulfill His commitment. Other than delay and possible disappointment, Abram had no skin in the game (excuse the pun). So, God upped the ante and placed upon Abram a sobering obligation.

*“...walk before me, and be blameless, that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly.”* – Genesis 17:1-2 ESV

God had already committed Himself to shower this obscure individual from Ur of the Chaldees with blessings beyond his wildest imaginations.

*“I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”* – Genesis 12:2-3 ESV

But now, decades later, Abram was still waiting for a son so that this amazing future might come to fruition. And as Abram waited and wondered about the future, God called him to live his life in the present with a sold-out commitment to and trust in the trustworthiness of El

Shaddai, God Almighty. Abram had been set apart by God for a divine purpose and God wanted Abram to conduct his life in keeping with His calling.

But this call to a committed life was going to be far more costly than Abram could have imagined, and it would be perpetual in nature, being passed down to Abram's descendants. While Abram was still waiting for an heir, God had already confirmed His covenant commitment to Abram's progeny.

*"I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you."* – Genesis 17:7 ESV

God's promise was unconditional. He would do what He said He would do. But, as His chosen people, the descendants of Abram were to walk before Him and be blameless. They were to conduct their lives in keeping with their calling and set-apart status – just like Abram. They would belong to God. And as a reminder of their status as His prized possession, God provided them with a sign, a very intimate and extremely painful sign: The rite of circumcision.

This latest directive from God must have left Abram slack-jawed and a bit confused. It had to have sounded strange and unnecessary. As far as can be discerned from the text, this was an unprecedented command from God. There is no indication that this rite was practiced by any other people group at the time. But God had made it a non-negotiable requirement for Abram and all his male descendants.

*"As for you, you must keep the covenantal requirement I am imposing on you and your descendants after you throughout their generations."* – Genesis 17:9 NET

This was an addendum to the original covenant agreement. But it did nothing to alter God's previous commitment to fulfill His covenantal obligations. In other words, God was not attempting to move the goal post or change the rules in the middle of the game. He would still do what He had promised to do. But He was placing a binding requirement on Abram and his descendants.

*"This is my requirement that you and your descendants after you must keep: Every male among you must be circumcised. You must circumcise the flesh of your foreskins. This will be a reminder of the covenant between me and you."* – Genesis 17:10-11 NET

Even to the modern mind, this rite or ritual sounds strange and difficult to rationalize. Why was God demanding such a painful and personal "sacrifice" on the part of Abram's male descendants? What possible reason could God have for commanding the removal of the foreskin of every male's sexual organ? How would that be a "sign," when no one would ever see it?

The key to understanding this rite is found within the nature of God's promise to Abram. God had told Abram that he would be a *father* and that he would *fruitful*. He would produce seed or offspring. Just as God had commanded Adam to be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth, so too, He was expecting Abram to obey the divine mandate to procreate and populate the earth with more of his kind. And the male genitalia would play a vital role in the fulfillment of that command to be *fruitful*.

In commanding the circumcision of the flesh of their foreskin, God was providing a very personal and intimate sign to each and every male descendant of Abram and Adam. This sign would be invisible to the rest of the world. But those who bore it would have an unavoidable and daily reminder of its meaning. Even when fulfilling their divine mandate to "be fruitful," they would be forced to recognize the set-apart nature of their relationship with God.

And it's important to recognize that this ritual was not reserved for Abram's blood descendants alone. He was told to circumcise every male in his household.

*"This applies not only to members of your family but also to the servants born in your household and the foreign-born servants whom you have purchased."* – Genesis 17:12  
NLT

This would have included Abram's man-servant, Eliezer of Damascus, as well as Ishmael, the son of Hagar, the Egyptian handmade to Sarai. Every male associated with Abram was to undergo this "surgical" procedure. No one was exempt. Their bodies were to bear the mark of God's everlasting covenant.

And God makes it clear that anyone who fails to be "cut" will be "cut off" from His people.

*"Any male who fails to be circumcised will be cut off from the covenant family for breaking the covenant."* – Genesis 17:14 NLT

There is a rather subtle but obvious wordplay going on here. In Hebrew, the word for "circumcised" is מַלְּאֵל (*mâlēl*) and it literally means "to cut" or "to cut off." God is declaring that those who refuse to cut off their foreskins will face equally painful consequences. They will be "cut off" (ברָתָ – *kārat*) from the household of Abram. In other words, failure to be circumcised will result in their physical expulsion from the covenant community. They were to be excommunicated. Some Old Testament scholars speculate that this punishment may have included execution, not just expulsion. Whatever the case, it was intended as a strong incentive to obey God's command and submit to the sign of the covenant. The fact that God decreed that this rite take place on the eighth day of an infant's life, ensures that it was adhered to without the risk of refusal. It was mandatory and not optional. One can only imagine what went through the mind of a grown man like Eliezer when Abram informed him of this new requirement. It would be easy to see how someone might want to avoid this painful and humiliating ritual. But, as the text will reveal, Abram obeyed the command of God and the men of his household complied.

It is essential to understand that this caveat or condition to the covenant in no way altered God's commitment. If a man refused to undergo circumcision, he would be forfeit his right to the blessings of the covenant. But God would remain fully committed to keeping the promises He had made to Abram. He would make of Abram a great nation, and that nation would enjoy the blessings of God. And through that nation, God would raise up an offspring of Abram who would one day bestow divine blessings on all the nations of the earth – even upon the uncircumcised. And the apostle Paul points out the staggering implications of God's commitment to His covenant promises.

*Don't forget that you Gentiles used to be outsiders. You were called "uncircumcised heathens" by the Jews, who were proud of their circumcision, even though it affected only their bodies and not their hearts. In those days you were living apart from Christ. You were excluded from citizenship among the people of Israel, and you did not know the covenant promises God had made to them. You lived in this world without God and without hope. But now you have been united with Christ Jesus. Once you were far away from God, but now you have been brought near to him through the blood of Christ. – Ephesians 2:11-13 NLT*

## Walking with and Waiting on God

<sup>15</sup> And God said to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. <sup>16</sup> I will bless her, and moreover, I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall become nations; kings of peoples shall come from her.” <sup>17</sup> Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed and said to himself, “Shall a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?” <sup>18</sup> And Abraham said to God, “Oh that Ishmael might live before you!” <sup>19</sup> God said, “No, but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him. <sup>20</sup> As for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, I have blessed him and will make him fruitful and multiply him greatly. He shall father twelve princes, and I will make him into a great nation. <sup>21</sup> But I will establish my covenant with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this time next year.”

<sup>22</sup> When he had finished talking with him, God went up from Abraham. <sup>23</sup> Then Abraham took Ishmael his son and all those born in his house or bought with his money, every male among the men of Abraham’s house, and he circumcised the flesh of their foreskins that very day, as God had said to him. <sup>24</sup> Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. <sup>25</sup> And Ishmael his son was thirteen years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. <sup>26</sup> That very day Abraham and his son Ishmael were circumcised. <sup>27</sup> And all the men of his house, those born in the house and those bought with money from a foreigner, were circumcised with him. – Genesis 17:15-27 ESV

This has proven to be a momentous day for the 99-year-old Abram. His most recent encounter with God has resulted in him receiving a new name and the newly established rite of circumcision. No longer will Abraham be allowed to live his life as he sees fit, simply waiting for God to come through and fulfill His covenant commitments. This entire chapter reveals God’s determination that Abram and his descendants will be expected to live their lives in keeping with their status as His chosen people. God has assured Abraham time and time again that He will be faithful to fulfill His covenant promises. Now, God demands that Abraham conduct his life in a manner that displays his set-apart status. And as a not-so-subtle reminder, God commanded Abraham and his male descendants to seal their commitment with the costly and painful “sign” of circumcision. This “visible” sign would be hidden and unknown by everyone except the one who bore it and the all-seeing God who had ordered it. Only a man’s parents, his wife, and Yahweh would know whether he had been circumcised.

This hidden sign helps explain God’s earlier command to Abraham: “I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless” (Genesis 17:1 ESV). God was giving Abraham and his male descendants a sign that would be virtually invisible to all. Yet, God would know. His all-seeing eyes would be able to tell if a man had chosen to live a blameless or upright life, wholly committed to God’s will and ways.

On that very same day, God informed Abraham that his wife Sarai would receive a new name as well. She would now be called Sarah. Both names mean “princess,” so it would appear that God altered the spelling of her name to signify a break with the past. Things were going to be different from this point forward. And God confirms this new future by assuring Abraham of Sarah’s role in His plan to bless the nations.

*“I will bless her, and moreover, I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall become nations; kings of peoples shall come from her.” – Genesis 17:16 ESV*

God had always intended for Sarah to be the “princess” who would become the “queen mother” of a great nation. Despite her old age and barrenness, God was going to bless her and make her fruitful.

But this “good news” was difficult for Abraham to accept. While he seemed to believe that God could provide him with more descendants than there are stars in the sky, he couldn’t see how Sarah would play a role in making it happen. And, as he reverently bowed before the Lord, he silently scoffed, saying, “Shall a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?” (Genesis 17:17 ESV). For Abraham, God’s promise was believable, but it was His plan that was questionable. And this is when he reveals his stubborn belief that the son Hagar had born to him would be a more logical alternative.

*“Oh that Ishmael might live before you!” – Genesis 17:18 ESV*

Abraham was campaigning for Ishmael and attempting to convince God that Sarah’s Plan B was not only workable but preferable. Abraham was asking God to alter His plan and bless the son Hagar had already delivered, rather than hopelessly waiting for the son Sarah seemed incapable of bearing. But God would have none of it, and He delivered His firm and unwavering ultimatum to Abraham.

*“No, but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac.” – Genesis 17:19 ESV*

Sarah’s old age was not going to be a problem for God. Her barrenness would not stand in the way of the all-powerful, sovereign God of the universe. The God who created the universe *ex nihilo* (out of nothing), would have no trouble producing a child from an elderly woman with a barren womb. This would be a miracle child who would be the key to God fulfilling His supernatural plan for mankind’s redemption.

God confirms that Ishmael will be fruitful and produce many nations. But he would not be the son of the covenant. That privilege was reserved for the child that had not yet been conceived or born. But that child already had a name: Isaac. And, throughout the rest of his life, every time Abraham heard that name, he would receive a painful reminder of that day when he scoffed at God’s promise of a son through Sarah. Isaac’s name means “he laughs,” and God

would use the birth of this child to turn Abraham's derisive laughter into heartfelt expressions of joy and delight.

God made it clear that Isaac, the son not yet born, would be the one through whom the covenant promise would be fulfilled.

*"I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him."* – Genesis 17:19 ESV

And God assured Abraham that Sarah would miraculously deliver this son within a year's time. God committed Himself by putting it on the calendar. And then He departed. So, for the next 12 months, Abraham was going to have to wait and see if God would do what He said He would do. And each day, Abraham would be faced with the unwavering reality that not only were he and Sarah growing older but that her barrenness remained. It seems logical to assume that, during that 12-month delay, Abraham and Sarah would have continued to try and produce a son. But month after month would pass without any change in their circumstance. And as time passed, their doubt and despair would have intensified. That year would have passed by with excruciating slowness, and all Abraham and Sarah could do was worry and wait.

But Moses reveals that Abraham obeyed God's command to circumcise all the males in his household. And he points out that Abraham underwent the rite at the age of 99. Even Ishmael, the son of an Egyptian maid-servant, was circumcised at the age of 13. The doubter was still diligent to do what God had commanded him to do.

*"That very day Abraham and his son Ishmael were circumcised. And all the men of his house, those born in the house and those bought with money from a foreigner, were circumcised with him."* – Genesis 17:26-27 ESV

For the next year, Abraham, Sarah, and the members of their household would be expected to walk before God and be blameless. But as Thomas L. Constable makes clear, "Blameless does not mean sinless but with integrity, wholeness of relationship. God requires a sanctified life of those who anticipate His promised" (Thomas L. Constable, *Notes on Genesis*). Over the next 12 months, other sons would be born into Abraham's household. His slaves and servants would bear sons, and each of them would need to be circumcised. And every time a child was born and underwent the rite of circumcision, Abraham and Sarah would receive a painful reminder that they remained barren and childless. Their integrity would be challenged. Their faith in God's promise would be tested. And with each passing day, His call to walk in wholeness of relationship with Him, despite their doubts and despair, would become increasingly difficult to obey.



## Nothing Is Too Hard for God

<sup>1</sup> And the Lord appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the door of his tent in the heat of the day. <sup>2</sup> He lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing in front of him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them and bowed himself to the earth <sup>3</sup> and said, “O Lord, if I have found favor in your sight, do not pass by your servant. <sup>4</sup> Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree, <sup>5</sup> while I bring a morsel of bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on—since you have come to your servant.” So they said, “Do as you have said.” <sup>6</sup> And Abraham went quickly into the tent to Sarah and said, “Quick! Three seahs of fine flour! Knead it, and make cakes.” <sup>7</sup> And Abraham ran to the herd and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to a young man, who prepared it quickly. <sup>8</sup> Then he took curds and milk and the calf that he had prepared, and set it before them. And he stood by them under the tree while they ate.

<sup>9</sup> They said to him, “Where is Sarah your wife?” And he said, “She is in the tent.” <sup>10</sup> The Lord said, “I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife shall have a son.” And Sarah was listening at the tent door behind him. <sup>11</sup> Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in years. The way of women had ceased to be with Sarah. <sup>12</sup> So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, “After I am worn out, and my lord is old, shall I have pleasure?” <sup>13</sup> The Lord said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh and say, ‘Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?’ <sup>14</sup> Is anything too hard for the Lord? At the appointed time I will return to you, about this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son.” <sup>15</sup> But Sarah denied it, saying, “I did not laugh,” for she was afraid. He said, “No, but you did laugh.” – Genesis 18:1-15 ESV

This next encounter between God and Abraham took place not long after Abraham had been given a new name from God, as well as instructions to institute the rite of circumcision. Abraham had also received a divine confirmation that Sarah, his wife, would bear him a son, and God had been very specific about the timing.

*“I will establish my covenant with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this time next year.”* – Genesis 17:21 ESV

When God made this commitment to Abraham, Sarah had been nowhere in sight. And there seems to be no indication that Abraham ever shared this good news with his barren wife. In fact, when Abraham had heard this promise from God, he had laughed to himself in disbelief.

*“How could I become a father at the age of 100?” he thought. “And how can Sarah have a baby when she is ninety years old?”* – Genesis 17:17 NLT

But rather than punish Abraham for his doubt and disbelief, God simply restated His intentions for Sarah to give birth to a son, and He even provided a name for this miracle baby: Isaac. Yet, not long after Abraham received God’s promise of an heir, and after he and the male members of his household had healed from their circumcisions, God visited him again.

Abraham was still living in the region of Hebron, by the oaks of Mamre. This was the spot where he had settled after he and his nephew Lot had parted ways (Genesis 13:14-18). On that occasion, Abraham had attempted to settle a dispute between himself and Lot by allowing his nephew to choose any of the land of Canaan for himself. As a result, Lot had chosen the well-watered Jordan Valley. But despite Abraham's generous offer to Lot, God had assured him that all the land would be his.

*"Look as far as you can see in every direction—north and south, east and west. I am giving all this land, as far as you can see, to you and your descendants as a permanent possession."* – Genesis 13:14-15 NLT

In gratitude, Abraham had built an altar, so that he might call on the name of Yahweh. And this very spot would be where Abraham received yet another divine visit and further confirmation concerning God's intentions to provide him an heir through Sarah.

This time, God appears to Abraham in the form of a theophany, a visible manifestation of His presence, but in human form. As Abraham sat by the door of his tent, he looked up and saw three men in the distance. Due to the isolated nature of his location, visitors would have been a few and far between. And there must have been something that led Abraham to believe that these men were dignitaries of some kind. It is difficult to assess whether Abraham immediately understood this to be a divine manifestation or whether he assumed these to be three men of importance passing through his land. But either way, Abraham went out of his way to welcome them and offer them food and shelter.

*"My lord," he said, "if it pleases you, stop here for a while. Rest in the shade of this tree while water is brought to wash your feet. And since you've honored your servant with this visit, let me prepare some food to refresh you before you continue on your journey."*  
– Genesis 18:3-5 NLT

What makes this passage so fascinating is the way the conversation is recorded by Moses. It is clear that there are three men. And as Abraham converses with them, it appears as if all three speak in unison. When Abraham offered to provide them with water and food, the text reads, "So **they** said, 'Do as you have said'" (Genesis 18:5 ESV). A few verses later, Moses records another question that seems to come from all three men: "**They** said to him, 'Where is Sarah your wife'" (Genesis 18:9 ESV). And yet, in the very next verse, Moses records a statement that he attributes to the Lord.

**The Lord said,** *"I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife shall have a son."* – Genesis 18:9 ESV

It seems that this trio of visitors was made up of the Angel of the Lord and two other angelic beings. There are many who believe this Angel of the Lord was actually a Christophany, a manifestation of the pre-incarnate Christ. But there is no way to prove this with any certainty. But Moses seems to be indicating that all three of these visitors spoke on behalf of God and had

full authority to act as His agents. At what point Abraham discerned their divine status is difficult to ascertain.

After greeting his guests and offering them his hospitality, Abraham entered his tent and ordered Sarah to prepare food. Then he instructed one of his servants to slaughter and cook a calf. When the food was ready, Abraham served his guests but did not join them. He treated them with utmost dignity and honor, refusing even to recline at the table with them. But as he stood nearby watching them eat, Abraham was probably a bit surprised when they asked the whereabouts of Sarah. He must have been shocked that these strangers knew his wife's name. But he simply replied that she was in the tent. At this point, Abraham heard those very familiar words, "I will return to you about this time next year, and your wife, Sarah, will have a son!" (Genesis 18:10 ESV). It was probably at this point that Abraham recognized the divine nature of his visitors. Those were the very same words God had spoken to him just days earlier.

So, why was God making a special point to reiterate this promise yet again? The rest of the verse provides the answer.

*Sarah was listening to this conversation from the tent. – Genesis 18:10 NLT*

Sarah was eavesdropping. Her curiosity had gotten the best of her, and she couldn't resist the temptation to hear what was going on between her husband and these three visiting dignitaries. But what she overheard left her incredulous. She had no idea who these men were, but she found the content of their news to be not only highly improbable but totally impossible. And Moses records why.

*Abraham and Sarah were both very old by this time, and Sarah was long past the age of having children. – Genesis 18:11 NLT*

It seems apparent that Abraham had not shared with Sarah the previous promise he had received from God. Perhaps he knew her well enough to know that she would not take the news well. For Sarah, who had waited decades to experience the joy of childbirth, any promise that she might finally bear a son would ring hollow and be nothing more than another painful reminder of her helpless and hopeless condition. So, when she heard the words spoken outside the folds of her tent, she mirrored the response of her own husband. She treated this too-good-to-be-true news with disbelief and scorn.

*"How could a worn-out woman like me enjoy such pleasure, especially when my master—my husband—is also so old?" – Genesis 18:12 NLT*

Sarah was 90 years old and her body was well beyond the point of being able to conceive a child. Over the years, she and Abraham had faithfully attempted to get pregnant, but with no success. It was painfully clear that she was barren and incapable of ever having a child. That was the reason behind her decision to give her maidservant to Abraham as a surrogate or

stand-in. She had hoped that this might be an acceptable workaround to God's seemingly failed promise to provide Abraham with an heir.

But here was God restating His commitment to do things His way – despite Sarah's well-reasoned doubts and the seemingly impossible odds that were stacked against her and Abraham. They were old, but God was powerful. The outlook looked grim, but God was great. The prospect of Sarah becoming pregnant appeared impossible, "but with God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26 ESV). And that is exactly what God communicated to Sarah as she hid behind the folds of her tent and cowered behind fears and doubts of her heart.

*Then the Lord said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh? Why did she say, 'Can an old woman like me have a baby?' Is anything too hard for the Lord." – Genesis 18:13-14 NLT*

Notice that the Lord addressed Abraham and not Sarah. God had overheard her response, but He addressed His question to her husband. It is almost as if God was holding Abraham responsible for his wife's incredulity and insolence. He had failed to pass on God's earlier promise and had left his wife struggling with doubt and disbelief. Abraham's confidence in God's word had not been strong enough to convince him to tackle his wife's lingering apprehension and uncertainty.

Like Adam, who stood by and watched his wife succumb to the temptation of the serpent in the garden, Abraham had allowed his wife to wallow in her pity and self-doubt. Rather than encouraging her to trust in the faithfulness of God, he had withheld the promise of God, and her resentment and refusal to believe withered like her womb. Her faith had become as impotent as her body. She had allowed her doubts to turn to disbelief and her disbelief, if left unchecked, would eventually turn to disobedience. And God was holding Abraham, her husband, responsible.

Sarah, still believing that she was hidden from view within the confines of her tent, denied the accusation that she had laughed. She refused to acknowledge her doubt and disbelief. But the all-knowing, all-seeing God refuted her claim and declared, "No, but you did laugh" (Genesis 18:15 ESV). God knew and He understood. He was well aware of Sarah's physical disability and fully cognizant of the paralyzing disbelief it had produced. Her infertility had produced incredulity. But God wanted her to know that neither her barrenness nor her disbelief would prove too difficult for Him to overcome.

## Blessed to Be a Blessing

<sup>16</sup> Then the men set out from there, and they looked down toward Sodom. And Abraham went with them to set them on their way. <sup>17</sup> The Lord said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, <sup>18</sup> seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? <sup>19</sup> For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice, so that the Lord may bring to Abraham what he has promised him." <sup>20</sup> Then the Lord said, "Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great and their sin is very grave, <sup>21</sup> I will go down to see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry that has come to me. And if not, I will know." – Genesis 18:16-21 ESV

From a cursory reading of this text, it appears that the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah was intended as a graphic illustration to Abraham of what happens to those who fail to walk before the Lord blamelessly. The city of Sodom was of special interest to Abraham because his nephew was a resident there. As detailed in chapter 14, Lot had chosen to leave the fertile Jordan Valley and move his wife and two girls into the urban environment of Sodom. And in chapter 13, Moses gave a brief, but telling synopsis of the moral conditions within Sodom.

*Now the men of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against the Lord.* – Genesis 13:13 ESV

Yet, when Lot and many of his fellow citizens of Sodom had found themselves taken captive by the four kings who had invaded the Jordan Valley, Abraham had come to their rescue. With a small army of 380 men, Abraham had defeated the far superior forces of the enemy and made it possible for the captives to go free and return to their homes in Sodom. That had included Lot and his family.

Now, in chapter 18, the Sodomites enter into the story of Abraham's life once again. This time, as the three visiting angels of the Lord prepare to part ways with Abraham, they cast their eyes on the city of Sodom, lying in the valley below. As Abraham walked alongside his departing guests, he was unaware of the conversation going on between them. But the question they considered was whether they should inform Abraham about God's plans for Sodom.

*"Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him?"* – Genesis 18:17-18 ESV

The three visitors had dropped in on Abraham to reassure him of God's plan to give them a son through Sarah, his wife. And it "just so happened" that their reiteration of God's promise was overheard by Sarah. This was not a case of luck or fate, but part of the sovereign will of God. He had planned all along for Sarah to eavesdrop on the conversation and hear the divine pronouncement concerning her future pregnancy and delivery. God was letting His doubtful daughter know that she was the chosen vessel through whom His promise would be fulfilled.

It would be through this future offspring of Abraham and Sarah that God would eventually bring blessings upon the nations of the earth. But God intended Abraham's descendants to live holy lives, conducting their lives with integrity and displaying a sold-out commitment to His will and ways. He had even given them the covenant sign of circumcision as a visual reminder that they were to be distinctively different than all the other nations around them. God had promised to give to Abraham's offspring the land of Canaan and He had added the divine commitment, "I will be their God" (Genesis 17:8 ESV).

And as God's angelic messengers looked out over Sodom, they were instructed to inform Abraham of the divine plans for this godless community. And God's reason for divulging His plans was so that Abraham might understand the gravity of refusing to keep the way of the Lord by doing what was right and just.

*"For Abraham will certainly become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth will be blessed through him. I have singled him out so that he will direct his sons and their families to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just. Then I will do for Abraham all that I have promised."* – Genesis 18:17-18 NLT

Abraham and his family had been set apart by God, and they now bore the sign of their set-apart status as God's possession. All the males of his household had undergone the rite of circumcision. But one of his blood relatives, his nephew Lot, had not been included in the ceremony because he had chosen to live amongst the wicked of Sodom. In a real sense, Lot had chosen to live set apart from Abraham and his God.

*Lot chose for himself the whole Jordan Valley to the east of them. He went there with his flocks and servants and parted company with his uncle Abram. So Abram settled in the land of Canaan, and Lot moved his tents to a place near Sodom and settled among the cities of the plain.* – Genesis 13:11-12 NLT

And, eventually, Lot had set aside his tend for the comfort and security of a home within the walls of Sodom. The uncircumcised Lot had made himself at home with the uncircumcised and unrighteous people of Sodom.

God wanted Abraham to know that obedience was going to be a non-negotiable requirement for His set-apart people. They would not be free to live anywhere they liked or to conduct their lives according to their own wills. They were His possession and were expected to live in keeping with that one-of-a-kind designation. They were "to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just" (Genesis 18:19 NLT). It was not their behavior that would determine their set-apart status. It was their set-apart status that would dictate their just and right behavior. And God was going to provide Abraham with a powerful visual lesson regarding the fate of all those who have not been set apart and whose lives reflect their unholy status.

*So the Lord told Abraham, "I have heard a great outcry from Sodom and Gomorrah, because their sin is so flagrant. I am going down to see if their actions are as wicked as I*

*have heard. If not, I want to know.” – Genesis 18:20-21 NLT*

God seems to indicate that He has just become aware of the sordid situation in Sodom and Gomorrah. But the sovereign, all-knowing God of the universe hadn't just discovered the rampant wickedness going on among the inhabitants of these two urban enclaves of immorality and sin. He had known all along. It was Abraham who was ignorant and misinformed. He had no idea just how bad things really were in his nephew's hometown. So, God's report must have caught Abraham by surprise.

Having never set foot in Sodom, Abraham had no way of knowing what was taking place inside the city's walls. And it is unlikely that Lot had ever divulged any of the disreputable and immoral activities of his neighbors.

There's an interesting note in the second letter of Peter that provides some insight into Lot's life as he lived among the wicked of Sodom. While it would be easy to assume that Lot's constant exposure to the evil taking place within his community eventually compromised his convictions and led to his complicity with their immoral behavior, Peter suggests otherwise.

*God condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah and turned them into heaps of ashes. He made them an example of what will happen to ungodly people. But God also rescued Lot out of Sodom because he was a righteous man who was sick of the shameful immorality of the wicked people around him. Yes, Lot was a righteous man who was tormented in his soul by the wickedness he saw and heard day after day. – 2 Peter 2:6-8 NLT*

Two times in these verses, Peter declares Lot to be a righteous man. In fact, it states that he was “sick of the shameful immorality” of his neighbors. Their wicked behavior left him “tormented in his soul.” And, as the story in Genesis 18 will soon reveal, it would take a divine act of God to rescue Lot from his predicament.

But don't miss the other point that Peter is making. God used the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah as “an example of what will happen to ungodly people” (2 Peter 2:6 NLT). And this example was intended for Abraham's benefit. The reason God had set Abraham apart was to that He might make from him a great nation. And God had promised to bless that nation so that it might be a blessing to the rest of the nations, including wicked people like those living in Sodom and Gomorrah. Without the blessing of God, they were destined to live their lives under the curse that came as a result of the fall and faced with the condemnation of death for their sins.

God wanted to bless. But for His blessings to eventually reach the lost living in places like Sodom and Gomorrah, His chosen people would need “to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just” (Genesis 18:19 NLT). God wanted Abraham to be an eyewitness to the

destructive power of His justice and holiness. And He wanted to Abraham to share His heart for all those living under the curse of death and the condemnation of divine judgment for sin.

## How Many Righteous Does It Take to Save the World?

<sup>22</sup> So the men turned from there and went toward Sodom, but Abraham still stood before the Lord. <sup>23</sup> Then Abraham drew near and said, “Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? <sup>24</sup> Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city. Will you then sweep away the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous who are in it? <sup>25</sup> Far be it from you to do such a thing, to put the righteous to death with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?” <sup>26</sup> And the Lord said, “If I find at Sodom fifty righteous in the city, I will spare the whole place for their sake.”

<sup>27</sup> Abraham answered and said, “Behold, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes. <sup>28</sup> Suppose five of the fifty righteous are lacking. Will you destroy the whole city for lack of five?” And he said, “I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there.” <sup>29</sup> Again he spoke to him and said, “Suppose forty are found there.” He answered, “For the sake of forty I will not do it.” <sup>30</sup> Then he said, “Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak. Suppose thirty are found there.” He answered, “I will not do it, if I find thirty there.” <sup>31</sup> He said, “Behold, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord. Suppose twenty are found there.” He answered, “For the sake of twenty I will not destroy it.” <sup>32</sup> Then he said, “Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak again but this once. Suppose ten are found there.” He answered, “For the sake of ten I will not destroy it.” <sup>33</sup> And the Lord went his way, when he had finished speaking to Abraham, and Abraham returned to his place. – Genesis 18:22-33 ESV

As Abraham prepared to say goodbye to his divine visitors, two of them made their way to the city of Sodom, while one stayed behind. And Moses indicates that the one guest who stayed behind was actually Yahweh Himself, in human form. Abraham found himself standing face to face with God Almighty, and he decided to take full advantage of this unique, once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

The two angels who had left were headed to Sodom, and Abraham knew the purpose of their mission. God had made it perfectly clear.

*So the Lord told Abraham, “I have heard a great outcry from Sodom and Gomorrah, because their sin is so flagrant. I am going down to see if their actions are as wicked as I have heard. If not, I want to know.” – Genesis 18:20-21 NLT*

It seems highly likely that Abraham was aware of the goings on in Sodom and Gomorrah. These two cities had a well-deserved reputation for being “dens of iniquity.” So, he was had little doubt that the two angels were going to find ample evidence of wickedness and full justification for God’s judgment. But Abraham had a problem. His nephew Lot was a resident of Sodom.

This passage reveals a lot about Abraham’s concept of God. He understood God to be holy, just, and righteous. He viewed Him as a just judge who sits in judgment over the affairs of men.

*"Should not the Judge of all the earth do what is right?" – Genesis 18:25 NLT*

And Abraham also knew that mankind was made of two basic groups of people: The godly and the ungodly. Or, as he put it, the righteous and the wicked.

*Abraham approached him and said, "Will you sweep away both the righteous and the wicked?" – Genesis 18:23 NLT*

Though by this time, the world consisted of a variety of diverse ethnic-based cultures and people groups, there were really only two categories of humanity: Those who believed in God and those who did not. The righteous (**שָׁדִيق** – *šadîq*) were the just and lawful, the ones who lived in keeping with the will of God. They were considered Yahweh worshipers. We first learn of them in Genesis 3, when Eve gave birth to a son who would serve as a replacement for Abel, who had been murdered by his brother, Cain. Moses records, "When Seth grew up, he had a son and named him Enosh. At that time **people first began to worship the Lord by name**" (Genesis 3:26 NLT). Through the line of Seth came a group of people who would call upon the name of the Lord. The apostle Paul explains that, because God's "eternal power and divine nature" had been made visible through His creation (Romans 1:20 NLT), mankind had no excuse for failing to recognize and reverence their Creator. But Paul goes on to state that, despite their recognition of God presence, they chose to withhold their worship of Him.

*...they knew God, but they wouldn't worship him as God or even give him thanks. And they began to think up foolish ideas of what God was like. As a result, their minds became dark and confused. Claiming to be wise, they instead became utter fools. And instead of worshiping the glorious, ever-living God, they worshiped idols made to look like mere people and birds and animals and reptiles. – Romans 1:21-23 NLT*

So, by the time this event takes place in the life of Abraham, there were those who considered themselves Yahweh worshipers, and there were those who had chosen to turn their back on Him. They were the righteous because they were aligned with the "right God." This does not mean that their behavior was pure and sinless. The apostle Paul would later state that "No one is righteous— not even one" (Romans 3:10 NLT). And his less-from-flattering evaluation was based on the Old Testament Scriptures.

*Only fools say in their hearts,  
"There is no God."  
They are corrupt, and their actions are evil;  
not one of them does good!*

*The Lord looks down from heaven  
on the entire human race;  
he looks to see if anyone is truly wise,  
if anyone seeks God.  
But no, all have turned away;*

*all have become corrupt.  
No one does good,  
not a single one! – Psalm 14:1-3 NLT*

So, when Abraham differentiates between the righteous and the wicked (**רָשָׁא** – *rāšā'*), he is really acknowledging that there are two kinds of people: The innocent and the guilty. And he is concerned that, in His determination to punish the guilty living in Sodom and Gomorrah, God is going to inadvertently take the life of Lot.

Of course, it is easy to question Abraham's assessment of his prodigal nephew. After all, Lot is the one who made the fateful decision to trade in his tent in the Jordan Valley for the comforts and conveniences of Sodom. And, in doing so, he exposed his entire family to the wickedness that marked this godless community. Shouldn't he be held responsible for his poor judgment and the unwise stewardship of his family?

And yet, the apostle Peter provides a rather surprising revelation concerning Lot.

*God condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah and turned them into heaps of ashes. He made them an example of what will happen to ungodly people. But God also rescued Lot out of Sodom because he was a righteous man who was sick of the shameful immorality of the wicked people around him. Yes, Lot was a righteous man who was tormented in his soul by the wickedness he saw and heard day after day. – 2 Peter 2:6-8  
NLT*

Peter is not suggesting that God saved Lot because he was a sinless and perfectly blameless man. No, he is differentiating between the “ungodly people” of Sodom and the “godly” or Yahweh-worshiping Lot. It was Lot’s relationship with Yahweh that formed the basis of his salvation.

Abraham wants to know if God is going to spare the innocent or allow them to die along with the wicked in Sodom and Gomorrah. In doing what was just – punish the wicked – will God end up doing what was unjust – destroy the innocent? And to drive home his point, Abraham puts a number to his question.

*Suppose you find fifty righteous people living there in the city—will you still sweep it away and not spare it for their sakes? – Genesis 18:24 NLT*

There is no way to determine how many people lived in the two cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, but it is safe to say that 50 people would have made up a small percentage of their overall populations. Abraham wanted to know if there were as few as 50 innocent people in Sodom, would God spare the city? Notice that Abraham doesn’t ask whether God would save the 50. For some reason, he expected God to spare the guilty for the sake of the innocent. In his mind, the presence of even as few as 50 innocent people would justify the preservation of town’s

entire population. He is not denying the fact that the wicked deserve what's coming to them, but he is questioning the potential destruction of those who are undeserving.

This passage has always fascinated me. I have wrestled with the motivation behind Abraham's repeated requests, and I have wondered why God was willing to play this ridiculous game of "What if...?" But there is something very significant going on here, and the key to understanding it begins in verse 19. Consider what the Lord said to the two angels.

*"I have singled him [Abraham] out so that he will direct his sons and their families to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just."* – Genesis 18:19 NLT

God had set apart Abraham and his descendants for a special purpose. They were to be His chosen people and were expected to live distinctively different lives than all the other nations on earth. But at this point in the story, Abraham's family was small. He had one son, Ishmael, born to him through his wife's handmaid, Hagar. He had male and female servants. But compared to all the other people groups on earth, Abraham's clan was quite small and insignificant.

Now, consider what must have been going through Abraham's mind. As he thought about Sodom and the pending judgment of God, he couldn't help but think about the insignificant, yet innocent family of Lot. And it seems highly likely that Abraham began to ponder his own family's status as the innocent few living among the guilty masses. If God was willing to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, what would keep Him from wiping out the rest of Canaan and its godless inhabitants? Abraham wanted to know if God was going to spare the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah so that a righteous remnant might be spared.

Abraham would have been aware of the flood story. And while he would have known about God's promise to never destroy the earth by flood again, he would have understood that this left God a lot of other options for bringing judgment against the wicked. So, this led Abraham to question just how few of the "righteous" it would take to prevent God from wiping out humanity again. And he used Sodom as a case study.

But notice how Abraham keeps moving the goal post. He starts out with a quantity of 50 and then slowly works his way down. And notice that each time, as Abraham lowers the number, God continues to assure Abraham that He will spare the city.

*"If I find fifty righteous people in Sodom, I will spare the entire city for their sake."* – Genesis 18:26 NLT

He will spare the city, including all the wicked within it – all for the sake of 50 righteous people. But, hedging his bets, Abraham reduces the number from 50 to 45, from 45 to 40, from 40 to 30, and then, ultimately, all the way down to 10. And, once again, God confirms His commitment.

*"I will not destroy it for the sake of the ten."* – Genesis 18:32 NLT

Again, Abraham's emphasis is on the city itself. He wants to know how many righteous it will take to save the city. And what appears to be driving his line of thinking is his awareness that the world in which he was living was growing increasingly wicked while the size of his family remained remarkably small. Abraham knew the story of Noah and would have recalled that he too had been a righteous man.

*Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation. Noah walked with God.* – Genesis 6:9 ESV

And yet, despite that fact, God had ended up destroying the entire earth, sparing only Noah and his family. It seems that Abraham feared this happening again. Would he, like Noah, be forced to begin again? Or would the presence of a faithful few spare the earth from judgment?

As this story unfolds, it will become clear that there were far fewer innocents in the city of Sodom than Abraham could have known. Things were far worse than he thought possible.



## Blinded by the Light

<sup>1</sup> *The two angels came to Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom. When Lot saw them, he rose to meet them and bowed himself with his face to the earth* <sup>2</sup> *and said, "My lords, please turn aside to your servant's house and spend the night and wash your feet. Then you may rise up early and go on your way."* They said, "No; we will spend the night in the town square." <sup>3</sup> *But he pressed them strongly; so they turned aside to him and entered his house. And he made them a feast and baked unleavened bread, and they ate.*

<sup>4</sup> *But before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both young and old, all the people to the last man, surrounded the house.* <sup>5</sup> *And they called to Lot, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, that we may know them."* <sup>6</sup> *Lot went out to the men at the entrance, shut the door after him,* <sup>7</sup> *and said, "I beg you, my brothers, do not act so wickedly.* <sup>8</sup> *Behold, I have two daughters who have not known any man. Let me bring them out to you, and do to them as you please. Only do nothing to these men, for they have come under the shelter of my roof."* <sup>9</sup> *But they said, "Stand back!" And they said, "This fellow came to sojourn, and he has become the judge! Now we will deal worse with you than with them."* Then they pressed hard against the man Lot, and drew near to break the door down. <sup>10</sup> *But the men reached out their hands and brought Lot into the house with them and shut the door.* <sup>11</sup> *And they struck with blindness the men who were at the entrance of the house, both small and great, so that they wore themselves out groping for the door.* – Genesis 19:1-11 ESV

Moses indicates that after Abraham had completed his rather strange conversation with God, "the Lord went his way" (Genesis 18:33 ESV), and Abraham returned to his tent near Hebron. But that very same evening, the two angels of the Lord arrived at Sodom and discovered Lot "sitting in the gate" (Genesis 19:1 ESV). This phrase will take on special importance as the story unfolds. Typically, it was used to refer to someone who served in the capacity of a municipal judge. The city gate was where the community conducted its business. Markets were located at the entrance to the city where vendors plied their wares. But it was also where disputes among the city's residents were settled by the appointed judges.

Lot, who had initially "moved his tents to a place near Sodom" (Genesis 13:12 NLT), had eventually relocated his family to more permanent housing within the city's walls. And, apparently, Lot had become an active member of the community, even managing to garner the coveted position of a judge. His title and job description would have exposed Lot to all the immoral and unethical behavior taking place within the city. He would have well aware of the ungodly lifestyles of his neighbors. Which would explain his rather determined insistence that the two visitors spend the night under his roof.

*"My lords," he said, "come to my home to wash your feet, and be my guests for the night. You may then get up early in the morning and be on your way again."* – Genesis 19:2 NLT

There is no indication that Lot was aware that these two men were actually angels or messengers from God. He simply discerned them to be strangers who appeared to be men of importance.

But when the two visitors turned down his gracious offer of hospitality and revealed that they were planning to spend the night in the town square, Lot became insistent. He knew that decision would not end well. So, at his extreme urging, the two men made their way to Lot's home, where he had a meal prepared for them.

It's at this point in the story that the plot takes a dark and perverted twist. As Lot and his guests feasted inside his home, the men of Sodom gathered outside the door. The rumors had quickly spread that there were two prominent and well-to-do visitors spending the night with Lot. Moses goes out of his way to reveal how the perversity within Sodom was all pervasive. He indicates that "all the men of Sodom, young and old, came from all over the city and surrounded the house" (Genesis 19:4 NLT). Every red-blooded male Sodomite had flocked to Lot's doorstep with one thing in mind. And it was not to shower Lot's guests with a display of civic hospitality.

Moses foreshadowed this scene when he earlier indicated the moral state of the men of Sodom.

*...the men of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against the Lord.* – Genesis 13:13 ESV

And the diverse makeup of the crowd reveals that the wickedness of Sodom spanned the generations and was evident within every stratum of Sodomite society. From the young and the old to the rich and the poor, every single male had made their way to Lot's house, each driven by the same immoral passion. And they quickly made their intentions known.

*"Where are the men who came to spend the night with you? Bring them out to us so we can have sex with them!"* – Genesis 19:5 NLT

This is not a case of hyperbole. Moses is not utilizing literary exaggeration to drive home a point. He is revealing the full extent of Sodom's wickedness. It was all-pervasive and far beyond the scope of acceptable behavior for any society. And, sadly, none of this came as a surprise to Lot. His fervent efforts to house the two men in his home reveal his awareness of the dangers that lurked just outside the walls of his home. But despite all he knew about his adopted hometown, Lot had chosen to remain in Sodom, even becoming a prominent and well-respected city leader.

And, in his role as judge, Lot attempted to arbitrate a "cease fire" with his impassioned, hormone-driven neighbors. To prevent any harm coming to his guests, Lot even offered them a shocking compromise. He offered up his two virgin daughters as substitutes. As the story will reveal, both girls had both been betrothed Sodomite men, but they had not yet consummated their marriages. To the Middle Eastern mind, hospitality was a sacred responsibility. To fail to

care for and protect someone taking shelter in your home was a crime. And Lot's behavior, while shocking to our modern sensibilities, was in keeping with the relational protocols that ruled his day. These men were his guests, and he was personally responsible for their well-being.

But Lot's negotiations proved fruitless. Driven by their uncontrollable sexual urges, the mob refused his offer and increased their efforts to gain access to the two visitors. And they revealed their disdain and dislike for Lot.

*"This fellow came to sojourn, and he has become the judge! Now we will deal worse with you than with them."* – Genesis 19:9 ESV

This sentence says a lot about what they thought of Lot. They claim that Lot came to "sojourn." The Hebrew word carries the idea that Lot had shown up in Sodom, intending to "dwell for a time." He had planned on being a temporary resident but, instead, he had become a permanent fixture in the community. Not only that, but he also had "become the judge" or law-giver. They express their frustration with this outsider who had set himself up as the sole determiner of right and wrong. Who was he to decide what was acceptable behavior in Sodom?

Things were getting out of hand. Tempers were flaring. Hormones were raging. And Lot found himself in a difficult and potentially deadly predicament. But little did he know that his guests were angelic beings. As the angry crowd pushed in on Lot, threatening to do him bodily harm, a hand reached out and pulled him inside.

And then something incredible took place. The text simply states, "And they struck with blindness the men who were at the entrance of the house, both small and great..." (Genesis 19:11 ESV). But the wording in Hebrew is vital to understanding the miraculous nature of what took place. As soon as the angels drew Lot into the safety of his own home, they "struck with blindness" those outside the door. The way this sentence reads in Hebrew is that the angels struck the men and the result of blindness. Whatever happened left every member of the unruly crowd unable to see. They were left groping around in darkness. But notice that their altered state did not alter their desires.

*...they wore themselves out groping for the door.* – Genesis 19:11 ESV

They had arrived that night, under cover of darkness, with the intentions of doing something grievous. Their hearts darkened by sin; they were incapable of seeing the error of their ways. No amount of pleading or bargaining on Lot's part was going to prevent them from fulfilling their perverse desires. But now they found themselves suffering from literal blindness. Now their physical state matched their spiritual state.

It was Jesus who said, "I entered this world to render judgment—to give sight to the blind and to show those who think they see that they are blind" (John 9:39 NLT). What the angels did to the spiritually blind men attempting to beat down Lot's door was remove their capacity to fulfill

their sinful desires. But the sinful desire remained. Their hearts were unchanged. And their pitiful groping for fulfillment and satisfaction would continue unabated.

So, how did the angels blind these men? While the passage does not answer this question, there will be clues provided as the story unfolds. This story recalls another encounter between a messenger of God and the ungodly. It is recorded in the book of Acts and involves a man named, Saul, who was a Pharisee and paid bounty hunter who made his living rounding up and arresting followers of “The Way.” In other words, he was a professional persecutor of Christians.

But one day, as he was making his way to the city of Damascus to arrest Christ-followers, he was suddenly exposed to a very bright light, in the middle of the day. As he later told the story: “...about noon a great light from heaven suddenly shone around me” (Acts 22:6 ESV). This unexpected encounter left Saul blind.

*“I could not see because of the brightness of that light...” – Acts 22:11 ESV*

This persecutor of the church was blinded by the light of Christ’s glory. He had encountered the resurrected Son of God, the very light of life (John 1:4) and the light of the world (John 8:12). In the midst of the darkness of his sin-controlled life, Saul encountered the light that shines in the darkness (John 1:5) and was changed forever. He walked away blind, but later lived with an enlightened awareness of God’s goodness and grace as revealed in His Son.

It could be that the very thing that left the men of Sodom blinded and groping for the door was the light of God’s glory. But unlike Saul, their encounter with “the light of the world” left them blinded but unenlightened and unchanged. They remained stubbornly persistent in their desire to live according to the desires of the flesh. And, as the story will reveal, their spiritual blindness would be the death of them.

## The Mask of Zoar

<sup>12</sup> Then the men said to Lot, “Have you anyone else here? Sons-in-law, sons, daughters, or anyone you have in the city, bring them out of the place. <sup>13</sup> For we are about to destroy this place, because the outcry against its people has become great before the Lord, and the Lord has sent us to destroy it.” <sup>14</sup> So Lot went out and said to his sons-in-law, who were to marry his daughters, “Up! Get out of this place, for the Lord is about to destroy the city.” But he seemed to his sons-in-law to be jesting.

<sup>15</sup> As morning dawned, the angels urged Lot, saying, “Up! Take your wife and your two daughters who are here, lest you be swept away in the punishment of the city.” <sup>16</sup> But he lingered. So the men seized him and his wife and his two daughters by the hand, the Lord being merciful to him, and they brought him out and set him outside the city. <sup>17</sup> And as they brought them out, one said, “Escape for your life. Do not look back or stop anywhere in the valley. Escape to the hills, lest you be swept away.” <sup>18</sup> And Lot said to them, “Oh, no, my lords.

<sup>19</sup> Behold, your servant has found favor in your sight, and you have shown me great kindness in saving my life. But I cannot escape to the hills, lest the disaster overtake me and I die. <sup>20</sup> Behold, this city is near enough to flee to, and it is a little one. Let me escape there—is it not a little one?—and my life will be saved!” <sup>21</sup> He said to him, “Behold, I grant you this favor also, that I will not overthrow the city of which you have spoken. <sup>22</sup> Escape there quickly, for I can do nothing till you arrive there.” Therefore the name of the city was called Zoar. — Genesis 19:12-22 ESV

As the crowd of blinded deviants groped helplessly outside Lot’s door, his angelic guests warned him of the seriousness of the situation. They wanted him to know that the most pressing problem he faced was not his sex-crazed neighbors but the wrath of a holy God.

“...we are about to destroy this city completely. The outcry against this place is so great it has reached the Lord, and he has sent us to destroy it.” — Genesis 19:13 NLT

Despite Abraham’s aggressive negotiation efforts and God’s promise to spare the city for the sake of 10 righteous residents, destruction was coming. The moral situation in Sodom was so bad that there was less than half that number of righteous individuals living in the city.

The angels ordered Lot to gather his family and prepare to leave the city before the wrath of God fell. It is interesting to note that they posed this command in the form of a question.

“Have you anyone else here? Sons-in-law, sons, daughters, or anyone you have in the city, bring them out of the place.” — Genesis 19:12 ESV

As messengers of God, they would have known exactly who was on the divine list of designated survivors. Yet, they give Lot an opportunity to choose those whom he would consider worthy of salvation. And Lot included the two Sodomite men to whom he had betrothed his daughters. Considering Moses’ earlier revelation that “the men of Sodom were wicked, great sinners

against the Lord" (Genesis 13:13 ESV), and that "the men of the city...to the last man, surrounded the house" (Genesis 19:4 ESV), it is difficult to believe that Lot's two son-in-laws-to-be were righteous. And when he attempted to warn them of God's pending judgment, they refused to take him seriously.

As the morning sun broke over the horizon, the angels pleaded with Lot to take his wife and two daughters and escape for their lives. For the second time, they warned Lot of the looming judgment of God. The entire city and all its inhabitants were to be completely destroyed. "But he lingered" (Genesis 19:16 ESV). Consider the gravity of that three-word sentence. And to truly appreciate its implications, one must take into account their meaning in Hebrew. The word "lingered" is מָהָה (māhah), and it carries the idea of reluctance or doubtful hesitation. This wasn't a case of Lot delaying his exit so he could pack another bag. It's almost as if he too found the words of his two guests to be a bit hyperbolic and overblown. Or perhaps he couldn't bring himself to believe that God would actually destroy all his friends and neighbors. But whatever his reasons, Lot's hesitation revealed a reluctance to obey the word of the messengers.

*So the men seized him and his wife and his two daughters by the hand, the Lord being merciful to him, and they brought him out and set him outside the city.* – Genesis 19:16  
ESV

Once again, consider the implications of that sentence. In the face of divine judgment, Lot hesitated. He couldn't bring himself to accept the gravity of the moment or the veracity of the warning. So, in His mercy, God had the two angels drag Lot and his family out of Sodom. We're not told how the angels managed to navigate their way through the city streets undetected and unmolested. But there is a hint of the miraculous in this scene. And for the Jewish audience to whom Moses had written this book, the salvation of Lot would have reminded them of the liberation of their ancestors from Egypt.

When Moses declares that the angels "brought him out," he uses the Hebrew word יְאַשֵּׁא (yāṣā'), which means "to bring out" or "to lead out." It is the very same word that God had spoken to Moses when He delivered His plan to redeem Israel from their captivity.

*"Look! The cry of the people of Israel has reached me, and I have seen how harshly the Egyptians abuse them. Now go, for I am sending you to Pharaoh. You must **lead my people Israel out** (yāṣā') of Egypt."* – Exodus 3:9-10 NLT

The other word Moses used was יְנַחֵה (yānah), a word that means "to cause to rest." Lot and his family were led to a place of rest and security – outside the city walls and away from the pending judgment of God. They had been delivered from imminent danger and destruction and awarded with redemption and rest.

Standing outside the gates of the city, Lot found himself in a strange predicament. One doesn't get the impression that he felt a sense of peace or rest. He had just packed up his belongings, dragged his wife and two daughters out of their home, and was now facing an uncertain future.

And, once again, the angels were forced to deal with Lot's continued reluctance to leave Sodom behind.

*"Run for your lives! And don't look back or stop anywhere in the valley! Escape to the mountains, or you will be swept away!" – Genesis 19:17 NLT*

Their message was crystal clear. Lot was not safe as long as he remained anywhere in the vicinity of Sodom or Gomorrah. He may have been standing outside the gate but he remained well within the impact zone of God's judgment. Time was running out and it was time for Lot to run for his life. God had done His part by mercifully delivering Lot out of harm's way. But now Lot needed to leave Sodom behind.

Lot found himself facing the most important decision of his life. He had been saved by God, but now he needed to live out that salvation by taking advantage of the freedom he had been graciously given. His situation is similar to that of every Christ-follower. The apostle Paul provides a powerful admonition that could have proved beneficial to Lot.

*...throw off your old sinful nature and your former way of life, which is corrupted by lust and deception. – Ephesians 4:22 NLT*

Lot could have used the word of warning that Paul gave to his young protege, Timothy.

*Run from anything that stimulates youthful lusts. Instead, pursue righteous living, faithfulness, love, and peace. Enjoy the companionship of those who call on the Lord with pure hearts. – 2 Timothy 2:22 NLT*

But rather than running for the hills, Lot delayed his departure once again by running his mouth. He chose to bargain with his rescuers. Instead of taking their advice and seeking refuge in the mountains, Lot expressed his preference for a less primitive and desolate destination. He had grown accustomed to the city life and feared that exile to the mountain wilderness would be the death of him.

*"You have been so gracious to me and saved my life, and you have shown such great kindness. But I cannot go to the mountains. Disaster would catch up to me there, and I would soon die. See, there is a small village nearby. Please let me go there instead; don't you see how small it is? Then my life will be saved." – Genesis 19:19-20 NLT*

What Lot failed to realize was that the same God who had just rescued him was fully capable of protecting and providing for him in the wilderness. Lot had grown comfortable living in the city, where all his needs could be easily met. He found the thought of returning to his former nomadic lifestyle unappealing and unacceptable. So, he bargained for an alternative landing place. And the angel of the Lord agreed to Lot's request.

*All right,” the angel said, “I will grant your request. I will not destroy the little village. But hurry! Escape to it, for I can do nothing until you arrive there.” (This explains why that village was known as Zoar, which means “little place”). – Genesis 19:21-22 NLT*

Lot got his wish. But there is a profound lesson to be found in Lot's little victory. He had chosen a small village as his final destination. He even emphasized its diminutive size. It wasn't really a city, it was just a small, insignificant village. But there lies the lesson. Through his bargaining to escape to Zoar, Lot was relegating himself to a life of insignificance. In Hebrew, the name, Zoar, comes from a root word that means “to be brought low, to grow insignificant.” By choosing Zoar over the mountains, Lot was dooming himself to irrelevance. By refusing God's will for his life, Lot would never experience the power and provision of God for his life. To Lot, the mountains had appeared unattractive and foreboding. But the little village of Zoar seemed to offer just enough of the pleasures and comforts he had grown to love and appreciate. But God's people were not meant to live lives of insignificance in Zoar. And it would be just a matter of time before Lot learned the painful reality of that truth.

## When We Pitch Our Tent Toward Sodom

<sup>23</sup> *The sun had risen on the earth when Lot came to Zoar.* <sup>24</sup> *Then the Lord rained on Sodom and Gomorrah sulfur and fire from the Lord out of heaven.* <sup>25</sup> *And he overthrew those cities, and all the valley, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground.* <sup>26</sup> *But Lot's wife, behind him, looked back, and she became a pillar of salt.*

<sup>27</sup> *And Abraham went early in the morning to the place where he had stood before the Lord.*

<sup>28</sup> *And he looked down toward Sodom and Gomorrah and toward all the land of the valley, and he looked and, behold, the smoke of the land went up like the smoke of a furnace.*

<sup>29</sup> *So it was that, when God destroyed the cities of the valley, God remembered Abraham and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow when he overthrew the cities in which Lot had lived.*

<sup>30</sup> *Now Lot went up out of Zoar and lived in the hills with his two daughters, for he was afraid to live in Zoar. So he lived in a cave with his two daughters.* <sup>31</sup> *And the firstborn said to the younger, "Our father is old, and there is not a man on earth to come in to us after the manner of all the earth.* <sup>32</sup> *Come, let us make our father drink wine, and we will lie with him, that we may preserve offspring from our father."* <sup>33</sup> *So they made their father drink wine that night. And the firstborn went in and lay with her father. He did not know when she lay down or when she arose.*

<sup>34</sup> *The next day, the firstborn said to the younger, "Behold, I lay last night with my father. Let us make him drink wine tonight also. Then you go in and lie with him, that we may preserve offspring from our father."* <sup>35</sup> *So they made their father drink wine that night also. And the younger arose and lay with him, and he did not know when she lay down or when she arose.* <sup>36</sup> *Thus both the daughters of Lot became pregnant by their father.* <sup>37</sup> *The firstborn bore a son and called his name Moab. He is the father of the Moabites to this day.* <sup>38</sup> *The younger also bore a son and called his name Ben-ammi. He is the father of the Ammonites to this day.* – Genesis 19:23-38 ESV

Lot departed from Sodom and made his way to the small village of Zoar, with his wife and two daughters accompanying him. And Moses provides a rather sterile and sketchy description of the life-altering experience this small family had to endure. Their world had been rocked by the arrival of the two strangers. Lot and his family had been enjoying their comfortable life in Sodom until the night the two visitors showed up unexpectedly. Lot had been a well-respected city leader. His wife had probably been busy planning their two daughters' pending weddings. Both girls had been betrothed and fully expected to celebrate and consummate their marriages. But all that had changed.

Now, they were running for their lives. And Lot's two daughters must have been devastated by the news that their future husbands had chosen to remain behind in Sodom. It seems likely that both young women would have wrestled with thoughts of returning to Sodom but they had an allegiance to obey their father. They may have harbored doubts about the veracity of the

message of doom delivered by the two visitors. And the thought of abandoning their home and their futures must have left them confused and conflicted.

Moses provides only a small glimpse into the tumultuous emotional state of Lot and his family. As he briefly describes the devastating destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, he mentions Lot's wife turning back to look at the shocking scene. Moses provides no explanation for her actions. But one can only guess that her curiosity was piqued by the sounds that accompanied the massive display of firepower that rained down from heaven. The destruction of these two cities was an unprecedented event of cosmic proportions.

*...the Lord rained down fire and burning sulfur from the sky on Sodom and Gomorrah. He utterly destroyed them, along with the other cities and villages of the plain, wiping out all the people and every bit of vegetation. – Genesis 19:24-25 NLT*

One might describe her interest as nothing more than a simple case of “rubbernecking.” There are some commentators who read more into her actions and label her backward glance as an expression of longing and regret. Moses simply states that, as Lot made his way to Zoar, his wife “looked back, and she became a pillar of salt” (Genesis 19:26 ESV). The Hebrew word that is translated “looked back” is נִבְּאַת (*nābat*) and it can mean “to look intently; to gaze.” The thought is that, in looking back, Lot’s wife displayed sorrow for the destruction of her former home. She still harbored strong emotional ties to Sodom.

But it seems more likely that this poor woman, shocked by all that had just happened over the last 24 hours, was distracted by the earth-shattering sounds of God’s divine judgment against Sodom and Gomorrah. But regardless of her motivation, her actions violated the warning of the two angels. They had clearly warned Lot: “Escape for your life. **Do not look back** or stop anywhere in the valley. Escape to the hills, lest you be swept away” (Genesis 19:17 ESV).

Once again, Moses provides little in the way of explanation. He mentions nothing about Lot’s reaction to his wife’s sudden and gruesome death. One minute she had been right behind him, alive and well. The next, she was a lifeless pillar of salt. Had Lot turned back? If he did, why was he not struck down by God? Had he continued to run, not realizing his wife’s fate until he arrived in Zoar? Moses provides no answers to these questions. In fact, he changes the subject altogether. In a rather frustrating and seemingly ill-placed aside, Moses refocuses the narrative on Abraham.

Abraham had been the one who negotiated with the Lord, hoping to spare the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah from destruction. But as he stood on the hillside overlooking the valley, he saw the smoke rising from the burning ruins of the two cities. He must have been shocked at the sight because God had clearly promised to spare the cities if He could find ten righteous individuals living in them. Abraham’s thoughts must have gone to Lot and his family. Were they still alive or had God destroyed there? Moses does not reveal whether God shared with Abraham the fate of his nephew. He simply states that “God remembered Abraham and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow when he overthrew the cities in which Lot had lived”

(Genesis 19:29 ESV). Abraham had believed that the cities would need to be spared in order to keep Lot alive. But God had something else in mind. He was going to visit judgment upon the wicked while providing a way of escape for the righteous. There had not been ten righteous people living in Sodom. According to the apostle Peter, there had been only one.

*God also rescued Lot out of Sodom because he was a righteous man who was sick of the shameful immorality of the wicked people around him. Yes, Lot was a righteous man who was tormented in his soul by the wickedness he saw and heard day after day. So you see, the Lord knows how to rescue godly people from their trials, even while keeping the wicked under punishment until the day of final judgment. He is especially hard on those who follow their own twisted sexual desire, and who despise authority.* – 2 Peter 2:7-10 NLT

God rescued Lot but refused to turn a blind eye to the wickedness of Sodom and its sister city, Gomorrah. And delivering Lot, God was demonstrating His faithfulness to fulfill the wish of Abraham. God delivered and destroyed. He demonstrated grace and justice at the same time. He spared the righteous and punished the wicked.

But the story doesn't end there. When Moses turns the narrative back to Lot and his fate, he has him leaving the village of Zoar and moving into the hills. There is no mention of Lot's wife. He is now a widower, trying to raise two adult children on his own. For some unexplained reason, Lot felt unsafe living in Zoar. Perhaps the inhabitants saw this stranger's arrival in their village as some kind of omen. After all, he had been the only one to escape the devastation that had happened in the valley. And these people lived near enough to Sodom and Gomorrah to know all about what had happened. But regardless of his reasons, Lot relocated his dwindling family to a cave. And there the action takes another dark twist.

These two young women now found themselves as damaged goods. They had been betrothed but now their fates were uncertain. In that culture, betrothal was tantamount to marriage. It was based on a binding contract between the two families. A betrothed couple was considered to be married. The only thing missing was the final consummation of the marriage that would take place on their wedding night. So, Lot's daughters probably considered themselves to be damaged goods. That likely played a part in their fateful decision.

*"There are no men left anywhere in this entire area, so we can't get married like everyone else. And our father will soon be too old to have children. Come, let's get him drunk with wine, and then we will have sex with him. That way we will preserve our family line through our father."* – Genesis 19:31-32 NLT

Everything about this decision is wrong. It reveals their fatalistic and flawed outlook on life. According to them, their best years were behind them. There was nothing good that could come out of this latest chain of events. Their husbands were dead. Their home had been destroyed. They had lost all their friends in the destruction of Sodom. And their mother had been turned into a pillar of salt by their father's God. So, faced with the prospect of an

uncertain future, they decided to take matters into their own hands. They followed through with their perverse plan. And over the course of two consecutive evenings, each of the girls committed incest with their drunken father.

Moses did not relate this rather X-rated story to titillate and arouse his audience. He was providing them with a history of the Moabites and Ammonites. The unholy union between Lot and his daughters would produce two people groups that would become the perennial and persistent enemies of Israel. It is interesting to consider that God had spared Lot because of the pleadings of Abraham. But His rescue of Lot resulted in the creation of these two nations who would become perpetual thorns in the side of Abraham's descendants. The Moabites and Ammonites were idolatrous and immoral. In fact, the book of Numbers reveals the sordid story of how the Moabite women lured the men of Israel into immorality and idolatry.

*While the Israelites were camped at Acacia Grove, some of the men defiled themselves by having sexual relations with local Moabite women. These women invited them to attend sacrifices to their gods, so the Israelites feasted with them and worshiped the gods of Moab. In this way, Israel joined in the worship of Baal of Peor, causing the Lord's anger to blaze against his people. – Numbers 25:1-3 NLT*

For the people of Israel, this recounting of Lot's rescue was meant to remind them that the actions of the righteous have implications. God considered Lot to be a righteous man, but he made some very unrighteous decisions. He had no business living in Sodom. He should have never agreed to betroth his daughters to two Sodomite men. Lot had been driven by "the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life" (1 John 2:16 ESV). Even when he had become "sick of the shameful immorality" (2 Peter 2:7 NLT) in Sodom, he had remained. He didn't flee immorality. He cozied up to it. He compromised his convictions and ended up paying severe and long-lasting consequences. Yet, Moses ends the story of Lot with the last verse of chapter 19. One man's decision to settle among the cities of the valley and move his tent as far as Sodom (Genesis 13:12) had produced a lasting legacy of immorality and idolatry that would haunt the descendants of Abraham for generations to come.

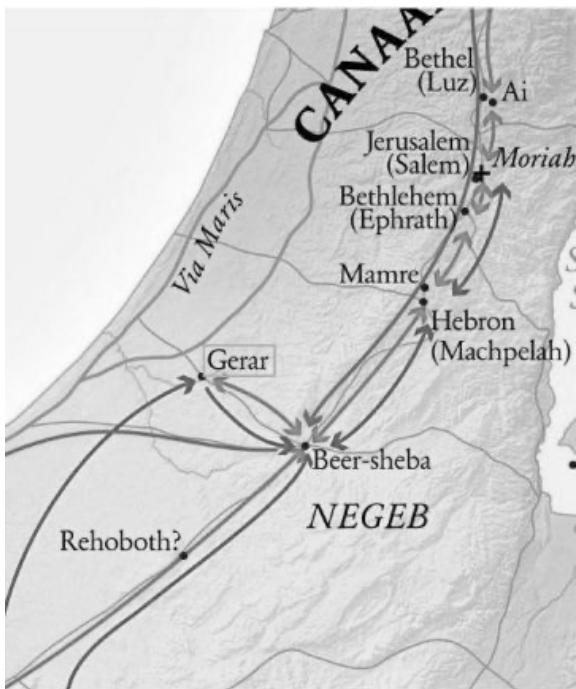
## A Barren Faith

<sup>1</sup> From there Abraham journeyed toward the territory of the Negeb and lived between Kadesh and Shur; and he sojourned in Gerar. <sup>2</sup> And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, "She is my sister." And Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah. <sup>3</sup> But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night and said to him, "Behold, you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is a man's wife." <sup>4</sup> Now Abimelech had not approached her. So he said, "Lord, will you kill an innocent people? <sup>5</sup> Did he not himself say to me, 'She is my sister'? And she herself said, 'He is my brother.' In the integrity of my heart and the innocence of my hands I have done this." <sup>6</sup> Then God said to him in the dream, "Yes, I know that you have done this in the integrity of your heart, and it was I who kept you from sinning against me. Therefore I did not let you touch her. <sup>7</sup> Now then, return the man's wife, for he is a prophet, so that he will pray for you, and you shall live. But if you do not return her, know that you shall surely die, you and all who are yours."

<sup>8</sup> So Abimelech rose early in the morning and called all his servants and told them all these things. And the men were very much afraid. <sup>9</sup> Then Abimelech called Abraham and said to him, "What have you done to us? And how have I sinned against you, that you have brought on me and my kingdom a great sin? You have done to me things that ought not to be done." <sup>10</sup> And Abimelech said to Abraham, "What did you see, that you did this thing?" <sup>11</sup> Abraham said, "I did it because I thought, 'There is no fear of God at all in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife.' <sup>12</sup> Besides, she is indeed my sister, the daughter of my father though not the daughter of my mother, and she became my wife. <sup>13</sup> And when God caused me to wander from my father's house, I said to her, 'This is the kindness you must do me: at every place to which we come, say of me, "He is my brother."'"

<sup>14</sup> Then Abimelech took sheep and oxen, and male servants and female servants, and gave them to Abraham, and returned Sarah his wife to him. <sup>15</sup> And Abimelech said, "Behold, my land is before you; dwell where it pleases you." <sup>16</sup> To Sarah he said, "Behold, I have given your brother a thousand pieces of silver. It is a sign of your innocence in the eyes of all who are with you, and before everyone you are vindicated." <sup>17</sup> Then Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelech, and also healed his wife and female slaves so that they bore children. <sup>18</sup> For the Lord had closed all the wombs of the house of Abimelech because of Sarah, Abraham's wife. – Genesis 20:1-18 ESV

With the opening of chapter 20, Moses returns the focus of his narrative to Abraham. And, despite God's repeated acts of faithfulness and His assurances that Sarah will bear Abraham a child, we find Abraham has reverted to his old ways. This story bears a striking resemblance to the one found in chapter 12. In the early days of his time in Canaan, a famine plagued the land. So, this prompted Abraham to seek refuge in Egypt. But when he arrived in the land of the Pharaohs, he feared that Sarah's beauty would attract the interest of the Egyptians, so he came up with a plan.



*When he was about to enter Egypt, he said to Sarai his wife, “I know that you are a woman beautiful in appearance, and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, ‘This is his wife.’ Then they will kill me, but they will let you live. Say you are my sister, that it may go well with me because of you, and that my life may be spared for your sake.” – Genesis 12:11-13 ESV*

Abraham's fears were justified because the Pharaoh himself found Sarah attractive, and he offered Abraham a bride price to make her a part of his harem. But while Abraham's plan had been successful in sparing his own life, he had put Sarah in a very uncomfortable predicament. And it was only by the grace of God that she was spared humiliation at the hands of Pharaoh. The Almighty intervened and delivered Sarah back to Abraham. It had been a close call, but a valuable

lesson was learned. Or so you would think.

Fast forward to chapter 20 and we find Abraham reliving one of his least flattering moments. He has journeyed from Hebron to Gerar and, once again, he has decided to spread the rumor among the inhabitants that Sarah is his sister. As before, he is telling a half-truth. Sarah is Abraham's half-sister. But she is also his wife and the woman through whom God has promised to deliver a son. Yet, everywhere Abraham went, he declared of Sarah, “She is my sister” (Genesis 20:2 ESV). It seems likely that the motivation behind this charade was the same as it had been in Egypt. Abraham was out to protect his own skin. Because he was a stranger entering into potentially hostile territory, he feared that his wife's beauty would attract the interest of the locals. If they discovered she was Abraham's wife, they might decide to kill Abraham so that they might have a legal claim on her as a widow. Even in the pagan cultures of Canaan, marriage was a respected institution.

But what is amazing to consider is that Sarah is 90 years old. We would find it difficult to imagine that anyone would find a woman of that age particularly attractive. But Sarah must have been striking, even at her advanced age, because the story goes on to say that Abimelech, the king of Gerar, took Sarah. The woman whom God had chosen to bear the offspring of Abraham was now relegated to the role of a concubine in the harem of a pagan king. Abraham's plan had backfired again, producing a potentially devastating outcome.

Yet, just as before, God intervened. He came to Sarah's rescue and turned Abraham's ill-conceived and ill-fated ploy into a blessing instead of a curse. Nothing was going to prevent God's sovereign plan from taking place.

Abimelech, oblivious to the truth concerning Sarah, received a disturbing vision from God, in which he was told, “you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is a man’s wife” (Genesis 20:3 ESV). As proof of God’s providence and His divine protection of Sarah, Moses reveals that Abimelech had not laid a hand on her. And the panicked king pleads his innocence before God.

*“Lord, will you kill an innocent people? Did he not himself say to me, ‘She is my sister’? And she herself said, ‘He is my brother.’ In the integrity of my heart and the innocence of my hands I have done this.” – Genesis 20:4-5 ESV*

How could he have known that Sarah was Abraham’s wife? He had been lied to and, therefore, had done nothing wrong. He had not intended to take another man’s wife.

This entire exchange is fascinating because, as a pagan, Abimelech would have had no prior knowledge of Yahweh, the God of Abraham. This was likely his first encounter with the Almighty, but he knew that he was dealing with a divine being of great power. And God let Abimelech know just how omnipotent and omniscient He was. He revealed to the frightened monarch that He was fully aware of what had happened and had actually prevented Abimelech from doing any harm to Sarah.

*“Yes, I know you are innocent. That’s why I kept you from sinning against me, and why I did not let you touch her.” – Genesis 20:6 NLT*

Abraham had lied. Abimelech had lusted. But God had the last say. He was in full control of the entire situation and had been divinely orchestrating the outcome. A fearful and faithless Abraham and a lustful and godless king would not prevent God from accomplishing His plan. This story illustrates the truth of the proverb: “Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the LORD that will stand” (Proverbs 19:21 ESV). This same thought is expressed in Proverbs 16:9: “The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps.”

If anyone is guilty in this story, it is Abraham. He knew that God had promised to give him a son through Sarah, and he should have understood that God would not allow anything to prevent that promise from being fulfilled. No harm was going to come to Abraham or Sarah. But Abraham was still having a difficult time believing that God was powerful enough to pull off this unlikely miracle. God had set the date for Sarah’s delivery and even provided a name for the son she would bear, but Abraham was still operating in fear and displaying a lack of faith. But God continued to display patience to Abraham, and even referred to him as His prophet. He commanded Abimelech to do the right thing and return Sarah to her husband.

*“Now return the woman to her husband, and he will pray for you, for he is a prophet. Then you will live. But if you don’t return her to him, you can be sure that you and all your people will die.” – Genesis 20:7 NLT*

As soon as Abimelech woke up from his disturbing nightmare, he shared the Lord's message with his servants. Then he ordered Abraham to be brought into his presence and proceeded to vent his well-justified frustration.

*"What crime have I committed that deserves treatment like this, making me and my kingdom guilty of this great sin? No one should ever do what you have done! Whatever possessed you to do such a thing?" – Genesis 20:9-10 NLT*

Abimelech was livid and rightfully so. Abraham's deception had almost resulted in the annihilation of Abimelech and his people. This man's little half-truth could have resulted in the deaths of many innocent people. But rather than apologize, Abraham attempted to justify his actions and even blamed his behavior on his circumstances.

*"I thought, 'This is a godless place. They will want my wife and will kill me to get her.' And she really is my sister, for we both have the same father, but different mothers. And I married her. When God called me to leave my father's home and to travel from place to place, I told her, 'Do me a favor. Wherever we go, tell the people that I am your brother.'" – Genesis 20:11-13 NLT*

Abraham reveals that this strategy had been in place since the very beginning. He had implemented it in Egypt and had continued to use it wherever he went. This seems to be an admission that Abraham had been lying about Sarah the entire time he had been in Canaan. He had displayed a habit of deception that had been motivated by doubt and fear. Only on two occasions did Abraham's lie produce negative consequences. But even those "close calls" did not stop him from relying on deceit rather than trusting in God.

Yet, despite Abraham's revealing admission, God chose to bless him. Not only did God return Sarah unharmed, but He also directed Abimelech to give Abraham "some of his sheep and goats, cattle, and male and female servants" (Genesis 20:14 NLT). Not only that, he offered Abraham his choice of land in Gerar and provided him with 1,000 pieces of silver as a form of compensation for the indignity shown to Sarah.

This pagan king showed great discernment and integrity. And his behavior stands in stark contrast to the "righteous prophet" of Yahweh. As a prophet of God, Abraham should have been a source of light in the darkness of Gerar, but instead, he had almost brought down the wrath of God on the unsuspecting citizens of that community.

Verses 17-18 reveal an interesting detail about this story. It appears that God had struck all the women of Gerar with barrenness. When Abimelech had taken Sarah as his concubine, he had inadvertently and unknowingly doomed his city to a future of fruitlessness. The disability that had plagued Sarah her entire adult life was visited upon the women of Gerar. Moses makes it clear that "the Lord had closed all the wombs of the house of Abimelech because of Sarah, Abraham's wife" (Genesis 20:18 ESV). And it wasn't until the doubtful and deceptive Abraham prayed for them, that God lifted the curse.

*Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelech, and also healed his wife and female slaves so that they bore children. – Genesis 20:17 ESV*

Think about the irony of that moment. The man who had continually doubted God's ability to provide him a son through his barren wife was praying for God to heal the barren women of Gerar. And God heard and answered that prayer. What a powerful lesson this must have been for Abraham and Sarah. God has just rejuvenated the wombs of an entire city of barren women. So, could He not do the same for Sarah? And, as the next chapter will reveal, that is exactly what God was preparing to do.



## And the Lord Did as He Had Promised

<sup>1</sup> *The Lord visited Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did to Sarah as he had promised.* <sup>2</sup> *And Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age at the time of which God had spoken to him.* <sup>3</sup> *Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore him, Isaac.* <sup>4</sup> *And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him.* <sup>5</sup> *Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him.* <sup>6</sup> *And Sarah said, "God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh over me."* <sup>7</sup> *And she said, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age."* – Genesis 21:1-7 ESV

Moses opens this epic chapter with the simple, yet profound words, “the Lord visited Sarah.” After all that has transpired in the preceding chapters, they come across as rather anticlimactic. This is the moment for which Abraham and Sarah have long-awaited and about which they had their fair share of doubts. God had repeatedly promised that Sarah would bear a son, and now the time had come. The long wait was over. The promise was to be fulfilled. And while Moses’ words may lack an air of excitement, they display a strong sense of God’s sovereignty and faithfulness. And three separate times in the first two verses, Moses emphasizes the faithfulness of God.

*The Lord visited Sarah as he had said...*

*...the Lord did to Sarah as he had promised...*

*And Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son...of which God had spoken to him...*

That simple statement, “and Sarah conceived” is (excuse the pun) pregnant with meaning. God had done the impossible. He had performed a miracle by creating life in Sarah’s lifeless womb. The odds had been against Sarah. When Moses first introduced her in chapter 11, he had declared her unfortunate condition.

*Now Sarai was barren; she had no child.* – Genesis 11:30 ESV

Yet, in the very next chapter, God had issued His call to Abraham and announced His promise to produce through him and Sarah a great nation. Abraham was 75 and Sarah was 65 at the time. And 25 years later, God had reconfirmed His promise to Abraham.

*Then Abraham bowed down to the ground, but he laughed to himself in disbelief. "How could I become a father at the age of 100?" he thought. "And how can Sarah have a baby when she is ninety years old?"* – Genesis 17:17 NLT

So, now Sarah’s barrenness was complicated by the curse of fruitlessness that accompanies old age.

*Abraham and Sarah were both very old by this time, and Sarah was long past the age of having children.* – Genesis 18:11 NLT

And Sarah seemed to believe that her long struggle with infertility had been God's doing.

*So Sarai said to Abram, “The Lord has prevented me from having children.”* – Genesis 16:2 NLT

Yet, at just the right moment, according to God's sovereign plan, Sarah conceived and bore a son. Against all odds and contrary to everything we know about human anatomy and physiology, a 90-year-old barren woman became impregnated by her 100-year-old husband and carried that baby for nine months. And Moses makes it clear that this pregnancy was the work of God. He had done what He had promised to do and He had done it according to His divine timeline. The 25-year delay had been a part of the plan. At no point along the way had God been exasperated by Sarah's inability to get pregnant. He had not made a mistake in choosing Abraham. Sarah's barrenness had not been an oversight on God's part. Even when Sarah and Abraham kept attempting to come up with alternate plans to fulfill God's promise, He kept reiterating His intentions to use the two of them.

God displayed His power and confirmed His covenant faithfulness through the miracle of Sarah's pregnancy and her baby's eventual birth. A year earlier, God had predicted that this moment would come, and He had even provided a name for the son who would be born to Abraham and Sarah.

*“Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him.”* – Genesis 17:19 ESV

When Sarah had heard this promise from God, she had reacted with disbelief and scorn, saying, “How could a worn-out woman like me enjoy such pleasure, especially when my master—my husband—is also so old?” (Genesis 18:12 NLT). And God had calmly and patiently responded, “Is anything too hard for the Lord?” (Genesis 18:14 NLT).

Now, God had answered His own question with an irrefutable demonstration of His power that should have clearly ended all speculation regarding His faithfulness. Sarah's barrenness proved to be no problem for God. Yes, it had caused Sarah great pain and left her questioning the faithfulness and trustworthiness of God. It had frustrated Abraham, causing him to consider and, at times, implement other strategies for becoming the father of a multitude of nations. Both Sarah and Abraham wanted what God had promised, but her barrenness seemed to be an insurmountable barrier to achieving their desire. And a quarter-century of waiting only made matters worse.

But at just the right moment, according to God's sovereign timeline, the Creator spoke into the darkness of Sarah's despair and brought about life. And with that life, a light broke into the

darkness that permeated Abraham's world. It would be through this child that God would fulfill His promise to Abraham.

*"I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing."* – Genesis 12:2 ESV

God had clearly promised to do something significant through the offspring of Abraham. He had added, "in you **all the families of the earth** shall be blessed" (Genesis 12:3 ESV). This boy was destined for great things. And while he would bring great joy and comfort to Abraham and Sarah, he would become the hope of the nations. Through Isaac would come another son, whose birth would also come about through miraculous means. Centuries later, the prophet Isaiah would predict the coming of this child.

*Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.* – Isaiah 7:14 ESV

And Isaiah would go on to describe the circumstances in which this child would be born.

*The people who walked in darkness  
have seen a great light;  
those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness,  
on them has light shone.  
You have multiplied the nation;  
you have increased its joy;  
they rejoice before you  
as with joy at the harvest,  
as they are glad when they divide the spoil.* – Isaiah 9:2-3 ESV

The birth of Isaac brought great joy and hope to Abraham and Sarah. And in a similar, yet even more significant way, the birth of this future offspring of Abraham would bring joy to the entire world.

*For to us a child is born,  
to us a son is given;  
and the government shall be upon his shoulder,  
and his name shall be called  
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.  
Of the increase of his government and of peace  
there will be no end,  
on the throne of David and over his kingdom,  
to establish it and to uphold it  
with justice and with righteousness*

*from this time forth and forevermore.  
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.* – Isaiah 9:6-7 ESV

At the moment of Isaac's miraculous birth, the 90-year-old Sarah and her 100-year-old husband found themselves basking in the joy of that momentous and long-awaited occasion. Sarah's derisive and scornful laughter had been transformed into joyful hilarity at the sight of her miracle baby. As she held her bundle of joy in her arms, she exclaimed, "God has brought me laughter. All who hear about this will laugh with me. Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse a baby? Yet I have given Abraham a son in his old age!" (Genesis 21:6-7 NLT). And the grin on Abraham's face must have stretched from ear to ear.

What a sense of relief and gratitude this elderly couple must have felt. And you can sense Abraham's thankfulness in the way he faithfully subjected his newborn son to the God-ordained rite of circumcision.

*Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him.* – Genesis 21:4 ESV

God had done His part, now it was Abraham's turn. In circumcising Isaac, Abraham was dedicating his son to God. This rite was meant to be a sign of the covenant relationship between God and Abraham's descendants.

*"This is the covenant that you and your descendants must keep: Each male among you must be circumcised. You must cut off the flesh of your foreskin as a sign of the covenant between me and you."* – Genesis 17:10-11 NLT

And God had made it clear that all those who remained uncircumcised would have no part in His future blessings.

*"All must be circumcised. Your bodies will bear the mark of my everlasting covenant. Any male who fails to be circumcised will be cut off from the covenant family for breaking the covenant."* – Genesis 17:13-14 NLT

Abraham wasn't taking any chances. He wasn't about to curse his newborn son to a lifetime of alienation from God. He had waited too long for this moment, and he knew that Isaac was the key to all that God had promised.

*"I will make you extremely fruitful. Your descendants will become many nations, and kings will be among them!"* – Genesis 17:6 NLT

And though Abraham had no way to comprehend the significance of this promise, the gospel of Matthew provides the future fulfillment to which it pointed.

*The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, **the son of Abraham.** –*  
Matthew 1:1 ESV

Isaac would be a means to an end. He would be the conduit through which God would bring the ultimate blessing to the nations: Jesus Christ.



## Fear Not, For God Has Heard

<sup>8</sup> And the child grew and was weaned. And Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned. <sup>9</sup> But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, laughing. <sup>10</sup> So she said to Abraham, “Cast out this slave woman with her son, for the son of this slave woman shall not be heir with my son Isaac.” <sup>11</sup> And the thing was very displeasing to Abraham on account of his son. <sup>12</sup> But God said to Abraham, “Be not displeased because of the boy and because of your slave woman. Whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for through Isaac shall your offspring be named. <sup>13</sup> And I will make a nation of the son of the slave woman also, because he is your offspring.” <sup>14</sup> So Abraham rose early in the morning and took bread and a skin of water and gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, along with the child, and sent her away. And she departed and wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba.

<sup>15</sup> When the water in the skin was gone, she put the child under one of the bushes. <sup>16</sup> Then she went and sat down opposite him a good way off, about the distance of a bowshot, for she said, “Let me not look on the death of the child.” And as she sat opposite him, she lifted up her voice and wept. <sup>17</sup> And God heard the voice of the boy, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, “What troubles you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is. <sup>18</sup> Up! Lift up the boy, and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make him into a great nation.” <sup>19</sup> Then God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water. And she went and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink. <sup>20</sup> And God was with the boy, and he grew up. He lived in the wilderness and became an expert with the bow. <sup>21</sup> He lived in the wilderness of Paran, and his mother took a wife for him from the land of Egypt. – Genesis 21:8-21 ESV

The birth of Isaac brought great joy to Sarah and Abraham. But his long-awaited arrival also rekindled some bitter animosities that lay hidden in Sarah's heart. For the last 14 years, she had been forced to put up with the presence of Ishmael, the son that Hagar, her handmaiden, had born to Abraham. Every time she saw him, she was reminded of her ill-fated plan to have Hagar serve as her surrogate, providing Abraham with the son she was incapable of providing. But his presence soon became a constant irritant to her. In fact, not long after his birth she had forced Abraham to send he and his mother away, hoping to rid herself of this unfortunate reminder of her own insufficiency. But God had other plans. He demanded that Hagar and her newborn son return to Abraham's household. And while that prospect probably didn't sit well with Hagar, God provided her with a powerful promise that served as ample motivation for her to obey.

*The angel of the Lord also said to her, “I will surely multiply your offspring so that they cannot be numbered for multitude.”* – Genesis 16:10 ESV

Hagar did return, and for the next 14 years she raised her son in Abraham's household. But with the birth of Isaac, things would take a dramatic turn for the worse. Moses mentions Isaac's weaning, which would have taken place some two to three years after his birth. So, when Ishmael had reached the age of 16 or 17, he suddenly found himself facing Sarah's full wrath. It all took place at a celebratory feast in honor of Isaac's weaning.

During this festive occasion, Sarah saw Ishmael “laughing.” While the Hebrew word can refer to mocking or coarse jesting, it was most commonly used to refer to laughter. There is nothing in the text that would suggest that Ishmael was making fun of Isaac. Since the overall atmosphere was that of a festival, it seems much more likely that Ishmael was simply enjoying himself. But the embittered Sarah took exception to his presence and found his behavior irritating and unacceptable. So, once again, she demanded that Abraham get rid of this thorn in her flesh.

*“Get rid of that slave woman and her son. He is not going to share the inheritance with my son, Isaac. I won’t have it!” – Genesis 21:10 NLT*

Sarah’s strongly worded statement speaks volumes about the state of her heart. She was a jealous and angry woman. She was vengeful and vindictive. Despite God’s incredible blessings and the miraculous gift of a son, she displayed a remarkable level of animosity and ungratefulness. While it seems quite obvious that she despised Hagar and Ishmael, her real motivation was an unwillingness to give Ishmael any hope of sharing in Isaac’s inheritance. She could care less that Ishmael was a son of Abraham and a rightful heir to the family inheritance. She was demanding that Abraham disinherit Ishmael and kick he and his mother to the curb.

Abraham’s joyful feast had suddenly turned into a disturbing family feud, and it left him troubled and torn. After all, Ishmael was his son and he had been a part of the family ever since his birth. Yet now, Abraham was facing the prospect of having to case aside one of his own children or refuse and face the wrath of his highly volatile wife.

There had been a time when Abraham thought Ishmael would be the son through whom God would fulfill all His promises. But God had made it clear that His plan would not include Ishmael. And yet, God promised to bless Abraham’s first-born son.

*“No—Sarah, your wife, will give birth to a son for you. You will name him Isaac, and I will confirm my covenant with him and his descendants as an everlasting covenant. As for Ishmael, I will bless him also, just as you have asked. I will make him extremely fruitful and multiply his descendants. He will become the father of twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation.” – Genesis 17:19-20 NLT*

And, in an effort to comfort Abraham, God reiterated this promise concerning Ishmael.

*“Do not be upset over the boy and your servant. Do whatever Sarah tells you, for Isaac is the son through whom your descendants will be counted. But I will also make a nation of the descendants of Hagar’s son because he is your son, too.” – Genesis 21:12-13 NLT*

Basically, God was informing Abraham that Sarah’s jealousy-motivated demand was all part of His grand plan. In order for God to fulfill His plans concerning Isaac, there needed to be a physical separation of the two sons. And now, some 16-17 years after his first exile from Abraham’s home, Ishmael was old enough to survive life in the outside world. And God assured

Abraham that Ishmael would not only survive, but he would thrive, eventually fathering a great nation of his own.

In a disheartening case of déjà vu, Hagar suddenly found she and her son wandering in the wilderness yet again. Abraham had graciously provided them with food and water but it was not long before those provisions ran out.

*When the water was gone, she put the boy in the shade of a bush. Then she went and sat down by herself about a hundred yards away. "I don't want to watch the boy die," she said, as she burst into tears. – Genesis 21:15-16 NLT*

Moses' description of this heart-wrenching scene almost portrays Ishmael as a small child, but he was likely a strapping young teenager. Yet, regardless of his age, Hagar, like any loving mother, viewed her son as innocent and helpless. She knew that it was just a matter of time before she and Ishmael succumbed to the harsh conditions of the wilderness. So, she removed herself some distance and waited for the inevitable to happen. But God had other plans.

It's interesting to note that Moses describes Hagar as lifting her voice and weeping. Yet, in the very next verse, he states that "God heard the voice of the boy" (Genesis 21:17 ESV). Perhaps Ishmael, like his father, had learned to call upon the name of the Lord (Genesis 13:4). But rather than speaking to Ishmael, God addressed Himself to Hagar.

*"What troubles you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is. Up! Lift up the boy, and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make him into a great nation." – Genesis 21:17-18 ESV*

God was letting Hagar know that He was watching over her son. He knew what was happening and He had a plan in place. She had no reason to worry or fear. God assured this loving mother that she could hold fast to her son because he was in the highly capable hands of his loving heavenly Father. Abraham may have disinherited Ishmael, but God had not.

Amid her heartache and despair, just when she thought all was lost, God showed up. And the gracious and all-merciful God gave this Egyptian handmaiden a powerful promise of future blessings on her son. He would make of Ishmael a great nation. And, as God opened Hagar's ears to hear His promise, He opened her eyes to see the miraculous presence of a well in the middle of the wilderness.

God protected and provided for Hagar and her son. They both lived to see another day. He grew to become a mighty warrior and eventually found a wife who was an Egyptian just like his mother. Ishmael would go on to father 12 sons, just like Isaac (Genesis 25:13-16). And his descendants would eventually become the Arab nations that would prove to be a constant source of conflict for the people of Israel. This was all in keeping with the promise that God had made to Abraham sometime earlier.

*“He shall father twelve princes, and I will make him into a great nation.”* – Genesis 17:20  
ESV

And Ishmael would fulfill the promise that God had made to Hagar some 16-17 years earlier.

*“This son of yours will be a wild man, as untamed as a wild donkey! He will raise his fist against everyone, and everyone will be against him. Yes, he will live in open hostility against all his relatives.”* – Genesis 16:12 NLT

God was working His plan to perfection. And little did Sarah understand that her hatred for Hagar and Ishmael would produce a centuries-long feud between their two nations.

But all throughout this passage, we see the sovereign will of God being displayed as He accomplishes His plan and distributes His blessings as He sees fit. There is a method to God's seeming madness. He knows exactly what He is doing and is not caught off guard or forced to change plans based on the actions of His fallen creatures. God sees. He hears. He acts. He orchestrates. And He methodically and systematically accomplishes His righteous purposes.

## The Everlasting, Ever Faithful God

<sup>22</sup> At that time Abimelech and Phicol the commander of his army said to Abraham, “God is with you in all that you do. <sup>23</sup> Now therefore swear to me here by God that you will not deal falsely with me or with my descendants or with my posterity, but as I have dealt kindly with you, so you will deal with me and with the land where you have sojourned.” <sup>24</sup> And Abraham said, “I will swear.”

<sup>25</sup> When Abraham reproved Abimelech about a well of water that Abimelech’s servants had seized, <sup>26</sup> Abimelech said, “I do not know who has done this thing; you did not tell me, and I have not heard of it until today.” <sup>27</sup> So Abraham took sheep and oxen and gave them to Abimelech, and the two men made a covenant. <sup>28</sup> Abraham set seven ewe lambs of the flock apart. <sup>29</sup> And Abimelech said to Abraham, “What is the meaning of these seven ewe lambs that you have set apart?” <sup>30</sup> He said, “These seven ewe lambs you will take from my hand, that this may be a witness for me that I dug this well.” <sup>31</sup> Therefore that place was called Beersheba, because there both of them swore an oath. <sup>32</sup> So they made a covenant at Beersheba. Then Abimelech and Phicol the commander of his army rose up and returned to the land of the Philistines.

<sup>33</sup> Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba and called there on the name of the Lord, the Everlasting God. <sup>34</sup> And Abraham sojourned many days in the land of the Philistines. – Genesis 21:22-34 ESV

During the time in which Sarah gave birth to Isaac, Abraham was living in land provided to him by Abimelech, the king of Gerar. Abimelech had issued this generous land grant to Abraham as part of the restitution package he had paid for having mistakenly taken Sarah into his harem. Even though Abraham had deceived him, claiming Sarah to be his wife, Abimelech wanted to make things right in order to forestall any judgment from God for his actions.

*Then Abimelech took sheep and oxen, and male servants and female servants, and gave them to Abraham, and returned Sarah his wife to him. And Abimelech said, “Behold, my land is before you; dwell where it pleases you.”* – Genesis 20:14-15 ESV

Having accepted this generous offer, Abraham had settled somewhere within the boundaries of Abimelech’s domain. In time, the king took notice of Abraham’s apparent success. This stranger from Ur of the Chaldees was actually prospering and experiencing significant growth. His family and flocks were expanding, and Abimelech began to have second thoughts about his decision to award Abraham with some of his most valuable real estate.

So, the king and his military commander made a surprise visit to Abraham, where this pagan monarch made a rather startling acknowledgement.

*“God is obviously with you, helping you in everything you do...”* – Genesis 21:22 NLT

Abimelech could sense that Abraham had the blessing of whatever God he worshiped. And the king feared that this unknown deity might continue to reward Abraham with further growth,

creating a potential point of conflict over the land. This confession on the part of Abimelech further illustrates God's commitment to keep His covenant promise to Abraham.

*"I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing."* – Genesis 12:2 ESV

*"And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God."* – Genesis 17:8 ESV

God was faithfully and methodically keeping His promise to Abraham, and Abimelech couldn't help but notice. And his reaction is like that of Pharaoh when he later discovered the remarkable growth of the Israelites living in Egypt. The book of Exodus records that, when the descendants of Abraham first arrived in Egypt, they were only 70 in number. But "the people of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong, so that the land was filled with them" (Exodus 1:7 ESV). And Pharaoh, viewing their rapid expansion as a threat to his domain, took steps to mitigate the problem.

*"Look, the people of Israel now outnumber us and are stronger than we are. We must make a plan to keep them from growing even more. If we don't, and if war breaks out, they will join our enemies and fight against us. Then they will escape from the country."*  
– Exodus 1:9-10 NLT

One can almost sense that Abimelech shared Pharaoh's concern. While Abraham had only fathered two sons, he had many servants and at least 318 trained fighting men who had been born into his household (Genesis 14:14). All these individuals would have done their part in expanding the size of Abraham's "family." But, unlike Pharaoh, Abimelech sought to make a non-aggression treaty with Abraham.

*"Swear to me in God's name that you will never deceive me, my children, or any of my descendants. I have been loyal to you, so now swear that you will be loyal to me and to this country where you are living as a foreigner."* – Genesis 21:23 NLT

Abimelech seemed to know that Abraham was under some form of divine favor and was reticent to oppose him. So, he proposed that they make a bilateral covenant between them. He had been gracious enough to allow Abraham to live in his land, and now he was asking that Abraham return the favor by promising to remain loyal to their relationship. And Abraham agreed to the proposal.

But, as part of the negotiations, Abraham lodged a complaint. In a land where water was the key to survival, a dispute arose between the servants of Abimelech and the servants of Abraham over water rights. The servants of Abimelech had unlawfully seized a well that had been dug by Abraham's servants on land that belonged to their master. So, Abraham decided to

bring this matter to Abimelech's attention. But the king was slightly irritated that he was just now hearing about this problem.

*"This is the first I've heard of it," Abimelech answered. "I have no idea who is responsible. You have never complained about this before."* – Genesis 21:26 NLT

Abimelech claimed ignorance, and he wondered why Abraham had not mentioned this problem before. But it would appear that Abraham was taking advantage of the king's desire to sign a peace treaty between them. Sensing that Abimelech was attempting to avoid conflict, Abraham offered to settle the matter by purchasing the land on which the well was located. Up to this point, Abraham had been living on land that actually belonged to Abimelech. But this situation provided a means by which Abraham could gain property rights that would ensure use of the well for generations to come.

Abraham and Abimelech "cut a covenant" with the sacrifice of sheep, goats, and cattle. The carcasses of these slain animals were divided in half and separated with a pathway passing between them. Then Abraham and Abimelech would have walked together from one end to the other, signifying their commitment to keep their end of the agreement or suffer a similar fate. This was often referred to as a blood covenant.

But once the treaty was sealed, Abimelech was surprised when Abraham "also took seven additional female lambs and set them off by themselves" (Genesis 21:28 NLT). When Abimelech questioned the nature of this gift, Abraham answered, "Please accept these seven lambs to show your agreement that I dug this well" (Genesis 21:30 NLT). In a sense, Abraham was adding a rider to their agreement, committing Abimelech to support his ownership of the well.

The treaty signed and the addendum approved, Abraham "named the place Beersheba (which means "well of the oath"), because that was where they had sworn the oath" (Genesis 21:31 NLT).



Moses states that, upon the ratification of the treaty, King Abimelech and his military commander returned to the land of the Philistines. Since the Philistines did not arrive in the land of Canaan until 800 years after this event, it seems likely that Moses was using this name to refer to a geographic region and not a particular people group. His readers would have been very familiar with the land the Philistines would eventually occupy, so they would have been able to understand the exact location to which Moses referred. King Abimelech returned to the east, leaving Abraham to occupy the region around Beersheba.

Moses wraps up his telling of this event by describing Abraham's ceremonial planting of a tamarisk tree. According to Thomas L. Constable, "This tree was an appropriate symbol

of the enduring grace of the faithful God whom Abraham recognized as "the Everlasting God" (El Olam). Abraham now owned a small part of the land God had promised him" (Thomas L. Constable, *Notes on Genesis*).

An evergreen tree that was recognized for its longevity even in arid climates, the tamarisk would serve as a long-term reminder to Abraham and his descendants. It was a living altar at which Abraham called upon the name of the Eternal God. And it was there at Beersheba that Abraham "lived as a foreigner in Philistine country for a long time" (Genesis 21:34 NLT). He remained a sojourner and a stranger in the land, but God graciously provided him with a source of sustenance and a reminder of His faithfulness.

## The Danger of Misplaced Hope

<sup>1</sup> After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, “Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.”  
<sup>2</sup> He said, “Take your son, 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.”<sup>3</sup> So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. – Genesis 22:1-3 ESV



Due to over-familiarity and poor hermeneutics, this well-known biblical story has lost a lot of its impact on many Christians. It has been turned into nothing more than a simplistic tale of one man's struggle with maintaining his faith in God against all odds. There is a tendency to make the story prescriptive rather than descriptive. In other words, we want to find some aspect of Abraham's difficult encounter with God and use it as a model for our own faith journey. But

this story was not intended to provide us with a do-as-Abraham-did moralistic lesson that we can simply emulate and expect similar results.

Yes, this chapter recounts the story of Abraham's faith being put to the test, but because we know how the story ends, we fail to recognize and appreciate the gravity of the situation he faced. One must always keep in mind that the original audience for whom Moses recorded this story would have been familiar with its outcome. They were the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and so they would have known that this story has a happy ending. But they would have found the details surrounding Abraham's encounter with God to be both shocking and sobering.

As the descendants of Abraham, they had inherited the God of Abraham, and this story was meant to focus their attention on Him. Their God was great and fully expected His chosen people to live in obedience to His commands. But chapter 22 of Genesis is less about the faith-filled exploits of Abraham than it is about the faithfulness of God. As we do with so many of the stories found in the Scriptures, we tend to make this one about us. Because we're human, we seek out the moral lessons, both good and bad, that we can learn from the human characters found in the stories the Bible contains. We teach our children to “dare to be a Daniel,” using his faithfulness in the face of difficult circumstances as a model for our own godliness. We read about Joseph and assume that if we emulate his can-do attitude in the midst of trials, we will

enjoy similar blessings from God. And while there certainly are valuable lessons to be learned from the lives of the characters found in the Scriptures, the real hero of each of the stories is God.

Moses opens chapter 22 with the simple statement: “After these things.” This likely refers to all the events found in the preceding chapters, including the birth and weaning of Isaac, the disinheriting and casting out of Ishmael, and the purchase of the well by Abraham. But, in a sense, it points all the way back to God’s original call of Abraham found in chapter 12. In the ten chapters that follow, Moses has recorded the unique and constantly evolving relationship between Yahweh and this man from Ur of the Chaldees. The one consistent factor in this decades-long relationship is God’s unwavering commitment to bless Abraham.

*“Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”* – Genesis 12:1-3 ESV

*“Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.”* – Genesis 15:5 ESV

*“Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations.”* – Genesis 17:4 ESV

For more than 25 years, Abraham waited to see these promises fulfilled. But as the years passed, he grew older, and his wife’s barrenness remained an insurmountable obstacle. Yet, Moses records that Abraham “believed the Lord, and he [God] counted it to him as righteousness” (Genesis 15:6 ESV). Abraham truly believed that God would do what He had promised to do, even though he had doubts concerning how and when. At one time, he had considered Lot to be a viable means by which God would fulfill the promise. But God had eliminated that possibility. Then, Abraham had shifted his hope to Ishmael, the son born to him through Hagar, his wife’s Egyptian handmaid. But God had removed Ishmael as an option.

And then, when Abraham was 100 and his wife was 90, God had miraculously opened Sarah’s womb and she conceived and gave birth to a son. And this highly improbable and physically impossible blessing occurred just as God had promised.

*“I will bless her, and moreover, I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall become nations; kings of peoples shall come from her.”* – Genesis 17:16 ESV

*“Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him.”* – Genesis 17:19 ESV

And God kept His word.

*The Lord visited Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did to Sarah as he had promised. And Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age at the time of which God had spoken to him. Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore him, Isaac. – Genesis 21:1-3 ESV*

What a happy ending. After all the years of waiting and hoping, Abraham and Sarah finally had that for which they had so anxiously and eagerly longed: A son. Their dream had come true. And it's not difficult to spot the high value they placed in this miracle baby. Sarah's pregnancy and delivery had left her filled with joy over the dramatic shift in her fortunes.

*"God has brought me laughter. All who hear about this will laugh with me. Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse a baby? Yet I have given Abraham a son in his old age!" – Genesis 21:6-7 NLT*

On the day that Isaac was weaned, Abraham had celebrated the occasion with a feast. He was beside himself with pride and wanted everyone to join him in honoring his son and future heir.

But Sarah, driven by her maternal instincts and her strong dislike for Abraham's other son, ordered the immediate expulsion of Ishmael and his mother.

*"Get rid of that slave woman and her son. He is not going to share the inheritance with my son, Isaac. I won't have it!" – Genesis 21:10 NLT*

She was taking no risks. In her mind, Isaac was the only legitimate heir to the family inheritance, and, with Ishmael out of the way, all competition had been effectively eliminated.

But to understand what is happening here, one has to return to the command that God had issued to Abraham in his 90th year.

*"I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless, that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly." – Genesis 17:1-2 ESV*

God was calling Abraham to a life of integrity or moral wholeness. Every area of his life was to be dedicated to God and he was to live with the constant awareness that God was always watching. In other words, God was to be the sole focus of his life. And what is interesting to note is that, shortly after issuing this command, God declared, "**I have made** you the father of a multitude of nations" (Genesis 17:5 ESV). The Hebrew word is what is known as a Qal Perfect verb, which generally designates a completed action. In other words, it expresses an event in the past tense. It has already taken place. Long before Isaac was born, God declared that He **had already made** Abraham the father of a multitude of nations. It was a future event that was as good as fulfilled because it was guaranteed by God.

So, what's the point? In demanding that Abraham conduct his life with moral integrity and a constant awareness of His presence, God was issuing a call to total dependence and reliance upon Him. God didn't need Isaac to exist to prove His faithfulness. The assurance that God's will would be done was not to be found in Isaac. This young boy was not to be mistaken as the promise. He was simply a conduit through whom God would fulfill His covenant commitment to make from Abraham a great nation. But even that aspect of the promise was not dependent upon Isaac. God had already made it clear that Abraham's other son, Ishmael, would produce a multitude of offspring. He had told Hagar, "I will surely multiply your offspring so that they cannot be numbered for multitude" (Genesis 16:10 ESV). And God had reiterated that promise to Abraham.

*"As for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, I have blessed him and will make him fruitful and multiply him greatly. He shall father twelve princes, and I will make him into a great nation."* – Genesis 17:20 ESV

There was more to God's promise than the guarantee of many descendants. He could and would fulfill that aspect of the promise through Ishmael. No, God had something far greater in mind and it all goes back to the original call of Abraham.

*"I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."* – Genesis 12:2-3  
ESV

God was going to do something great, and it would be accomplished *through* Abraham and his offspring. And the apostle Paul provides a Spirit-inspired insight into this future fulfillment of God's promise.

*"Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, 'And to offsprings,' referring to many, but referring to one, 'And to your offspring,' who is Christ.* – Galatians 3:16 ESV

God did not need Abraham to father a lot of descendants in order that He might bless the nations. There was only one offspring necessary for God to fulfill His covenant commitment. But because the arrival of that one offspring was scheduled for centuries later, there would be many other descendants of Abraham born along the way, including Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and David. Isaac was not the fulfillment of the promise. And yet, Abraham and Sarah had managed to make Isaac the focal point of their lives. With his birth, Isaac had become the center of their universe and the focus of their future hopes. So, God decided to test Abraham's allegiance and realign his priorities. And He did so in a jaw-dropping, faith-shaking manner.

*"Take your son, 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."* – Genesis 22:2 ESV

Don't miss the gravity of this moment. God was commanding Abraham to sacrifice his hope, to put to death the one in whom all his dreams and ambitions for the future were based. Or so he thought. Would Abraham be willing to walk before God and be blameless? Would he trust the God who made the promise or place his hope in the son who seemed to be the key to the promise being fulfilled? Was God dependent upon Isaac? Would Abraham allow this young boy to become an indispensable necessity for God's future blessings? Or would he put His hope and trust in God?



## The Lord Will Provide

<sup>4</sup> On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar. <sup>5</sup> Then Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you." <sup>6</sup> And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together. <sup>7</sup> And Isaac said to his father Abraham, "My father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." He said, "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" <sup>8</sup> Abraham said, "God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." So they went both of them together.

<sup>9</sup> When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. <sup>10</sup> Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. <sup>11</sup> But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." <sup>12</sup> He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." <sup>13</sup> And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. <sup>14</sup> So Abraham called the name of that place, "The Lord will provide"; as it is said to this day, "On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided." – Genesis 22:4-14 ESV



Three days into their journey to the region of Moriah, Abraham saw their final destination in the distance and decided to leave his servants behind. He and Isaac would travel alone to the place of sacrifice. Abraham, perhaps hoping to hide his true intentions from his unwitting son, told his servants, "The boy and I will travel a little farther. We will worship there, and then we will come right back"

(Genesis 22:5 NLT). Some have determined this to be a statement of faith on Abraham's part, suggesting that he was confident that God would spare his son. But it seems more likely that Abraham was waiting until the last minute to let Isaac in on the true nature of their journey.

Moses describes how Abraham took all the elements he would need for the sacrifice, including a knife, a blazing torch, and wood. Then he adds the heart wrenching notation: "And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son" (Genesis 22:6 ESV). Isaac was carrying the very wood upon which his young life would be consumed.

For those of us living on this side of the crucifixion, it should be easy to recognize the similarities between Isaac and Jesus. Both entered the world through miraculous, God-ordained births. Isaac was born to an elderly and barren woman. Jesus was born to a young virgin girl. Each of them was deeply adored by their respective fathers. And just as Abraham was facing the prospect of sacrificing his son, centuries later, God would offer up His one and only Son as the Lamb who takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29). There is even a striking similarity between Isaac bearing the wood for his own sacrifice and Jesus carrying the cross upon which He would be crucified.

But for the Jews for whom Moses recorded this story, none of these links to the future death of the Messiah would have been apparent. For them, this story would have had significance because it involved Isaac, who would later become the father of Jacob, the man whom God later renamed, Israel. And it was from this one man that they owed their very existence. To hear the story of how Jacob's father was almost put to death by order of Yahweh must have left them appalled and confused. How could their God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, order such a thing? And, of course, they would have been viewing this entire scene through the lens of the Mosaic Law. They had been given clear instructions to avoid the religious rituals and customs of their pagan neighbors.

*You must not worship the Lord your God the way the other nations worship their gods, for they perform for their gods every detestable act that the Lord hates. They even burn their sons and daughters as sacrifices to their gods.* – Leviticus 12:31 NLT

And yet, Abraham had no written law to guide his actions. He was operating according to the spoken word of God Almighty, and His instructions had been very clear.

*"Take your son, your only son—yes, Isaac, whom you love so much—and go to the land of Moriah. Go and sacrifice him as a burnt offering on one of the mountains, which I will show you."* – Genesis 22:2 NLT

The disconcerting nature of this divine command would have left them filled with questions. Why would God require the sacrifice of the very son whom He had miraculously provided to Abraham and Sarah? What possible good could come from something so seemingly wicked? But the key is found in three words found in the opening verse of this chapter: God tested Abraham.

The people of Israel were very familiar with the concept of divine testing. In fact, their ancestors had spent 40 years wandering in the wilderness, enduring ongoing tests from Yahweh that were designed to increase their dependence upon Him. The book of Deuteronomy records Moses' powerful words spoken to the people of Israel as they prepared to enter the land of Canaan for the first time.

*"Remember how the LORD your God led you through the wilderness for these forty years, humbling you and testing you to prove your character, and to find out whether or*

*not you would obey his commands. Yes, he humbled you by letting you go hungry and then feeding you with manna, a food previously unknown to you and your ancestors. He did it to teach you that people do not live by bread alone; rather, we live by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. For all these forty years your clothes didn't wear out, and your feet didn't blister or swell. Think about it: Just as a parent disciplines a child, the LORD your God disciplines you for your own good.” – Deuteronomy 8:2-5 NLT*

So, it seems highly likely that they would have understood this test that Abraham was having to face. They knew that Yahweh expected obedience from His people because obedience was a sign of dependence and faith. And they knew what disobedience looked like because they had grumbled and whined about their dislike for manna. During their years wandering in the wilderness, they had spent more time complaining to Moses than they spent worshiping and expressing gratitude to God.

As Abraham and Isaac made their way to the site of the sacrifice, Isaac couldn't help but notice that something was missing.

*He said, “Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” – Genesis 22:7 ESV*

To the young Isaac, this was a glaring oversight. Why had his father failed to select an unblemished lamb before they left home? How were they going to find a suitable animal out in the wilderness? But Abraham calmly answered, “God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son” (Genesis 22:8 ESV). Once again, there are those who believe this was an expression of Abraham's faith. They suggest that Abraham somehow knew that God would provide a substitute. But, according to the author of Hebrews, Abraham was declaring his belief that Isaac was the lamb that God had provided. The sacrifice would take place. But Abraham still believed that God would fulfill His covenant promise, even if it meant raising Isaac from the dead.

*It was by faith that Abraham offered Isaac as a sacrifice when God was testing him. Abraham, who had received God's promises, was ready to sacrifice his only son, Isaac, even though God had told him, “Isaac is the son through whom your descendants will be counted.” Abraham reasoned that if Isaac died, God was able to bring him back to life again. And in a sense, Abraham did receive his son back from the dead. – Hebrews 11:17-19 NLT*

Abraham fully intended to go through with God's command. He did not delay, hoping for a last-minute reprieve. He did not scan the horizon, hoping for a lamb to miraculously appear. No, Moses records that “Abraham built an altar and arranged the wood on it. Then he tied his son, Isaac, and laid him on the altar on top of the wood. And Abraham picked up the knife to kill his son as a sacrifice” (Genesis 22:0-10 NLT).

One can only imagine the turmoil going on in Abraham's mind and heart. Every fiber of his being must have been conflicted as his fatherly instincts waged war against his desire to walk before God and be blameless (Genesis 17:1). Interestingly enough, Moses provides no insight into Isaac's reactions. The young boy appears to remain eerily silent throughout this ordeal. He asked no further questions. He refused to put up a struggle. And, just as Abraham prepared to shed the blood of his own innocent son, God intervened.

*"Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me."* – Genesis 22:21  
ESV

Abraham clearly loved Isaac. But he revered God. The Hebrew word for "fear" is יָרֵא (yārē'ā) and, in this context, it refers to reverent awe for God that is expressed through obedience. Abraham did not do what he did out of fear of God's wrath, but out of reverence for God's holiness and power. His obedience was an expression of his faith in an all-powerful and perfectly righteous God.

As the author of Hebrews suggests, "Abraham did receive his son back from the dead" (Hebrews 11:17 NLT). In Abraham's mind, Isaac's death was a foregone conclusion. But, at the very last second, his son's life was spared. God provided a substitute.

*Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son.* – Genesis 22:17  
ESV

This verse foreshadows another sacrifice that would take place centuries later. It too would involve a loving Father and His precious Son. But this time, there would be no last-minute reprieve. There would be no substitute. In fact, the Son would serve as the substitute for sinful mankind. And the apostle Paul reminds us of the tremendous cost that our Heavenly Father paid so that we might live to see another day.

*He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?* – Romans 8:32  
ESV

Abraham had his son returned to him, and out of gratitude and a growing reverence for this gracious and compassionate God, he named the place Yahweh-Yireh (which means "the Lord will provide"). Isaac was spared, not because he deserved it. But because God had plans to offer a far more significant and superior sacrifice. And the apostle Paul declares the glory of this future gift the Lamb who would take away the sins of the world.

*For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard. Yet God, in his grace, freely makes us right in his sight. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins. For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood.*

*This sacrifice shows that God was being fair when he held back and did not punish those who sinned in times past, for he was looking ahead and including them in what he would do in this present time. God did this to demonstrate his righteousness, for he himself is fair and just, and he makes sinners right in his sight when they believe in Jesus. –*

Romans 3:23-26 NLT



## Blessings and Obedience

<sup>15</sup> And the angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven <sup>16</sup> and said, "By myself I have sworn, declares the Lord, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, <sup>17</sup> I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, <sup>18</sup> and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice." <sup>19</sup> So Abraham returned to his young men, and they arose and went together to Beersheba. And Abraham lived at Beersheba.

<sup>20</sup> Now after these things it was told to Abraham, "Behold, Milcah also has borne children to your brother Nahor: <sup>21</sup> Uz his firstborn, Buz his brother, Kemuel the father of Aram, <sup>22</sup> Chesed, Hazo, Pildash, Jidlaph, and Bethuel." <sup>23</sup> (Bethuel fathered Rebekah.) These eight Milcah bore to Nahor, Abraham's brother. <sup>24</sup> Moreover, his concubine, whose name was Reumah, bore Tebah, Gaham, Tahash, and Maacah. – Genesis 22:15-24 ESV



Abraham had fully intended to follow through with God's command to sacrifice his son, Isaac. But God had graciously intervened and provided a ram to replace Isaac as the sacrifice. This imagery of a substitute is found throughout the Scriptures and foreshadows the coming of Jesus, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29).

1:29). In the book of Exodus, the Israelites were spared the devastating consequences of the final plague if they followed Yahweh's command to sacrifice a lamb and place its blood on the doorposts and lintels of their homes (Exodus 12:7). He gave them detailed instructions for preparing and consuming the lamb and promised to spare their firstborn sons if they did as He commanded them.

*"For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the Lord. The blood shall be a sign for you, on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt."* – Exodus 12:12-13 ESV

These Passover lambs served as substitutes for the people of Israel, providing a gracious and undeserved means of escaping the wrath of God. The Israelites had not earned God's deliverance from judgment. While their suffering at the hands of the Egyptians was unwarranted, so was their salvation. God's offer to spare them was in spite of them, not because of them. And God's provision of a substitute for Isaac was not based on Abraham's obedience or Isaac's innocence. According to God's Word, there is no one who stands before God as righteousness and deserving of His grace and mercy.

*They are corrupt, and their actions are evil;  
not one of them does good!*

*God looks down from heaven  
on the entire human race;  
he looks to see if anyone is truly wise,  
if anyone seeks God.  
But no, all have turned away;  
all have become corrupt.  
No one does good,  
not a single one! – Psalm 53:1-3 NLT*

Don't overlook the fact that God still required a sacrifice. He had demanded the death of Isaac but had willingly provided a ram to serve as the boy's proxy. This ram, which appeared at just the right moment and had somehow been ensnared in a thicket, had been preapproved and preordained by God. Its sacrificial, substitutionary death provided Isaac with life. Once again, this scene foreshadows another Lamb whose life would provide victory over death and the grave.

*“Worthy the Lamb for sinners slain,”  
Cry the redeemed above,  
“Blessing and honor to obtain,  
And everlasting love.”*

*“Worthy the Lamb,” on earth we sing,  
“Who died our souls to save;  
Henceforth, O Death, where is thy sting?  
Thy victory, O Grave?”*

– James Montgomery, “Worthy the Lamb for Sinner’s Slain,” 1825, 1853

One can only imagine the extreme joy that Abraham experienced as he untied the ropes that held his son and embraced him in his arms. And on the altar he had constructed, Abraham and Isaac placed the body of the ram God had provided. This lifeless animal became a token of Abraham's gratitude and an expression of his reverence for his gracious and merciful God.

And having completed the sacrifice, Abraham received a second message from the Lord.

*"By myself I have sworn, declares the Lord, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice."* – Genesis 22:16-18 ESV

God reiterated the promise He had made when He called Abraham out of Haran.

*"Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."* – Genesis 12:1-3 ESV

But this time, God seems to indicate that the blessings are conditional.

"Here again God promised Abraham that he would become the recipient of the covenant blessings. The covenant was not based on obedience, nor was the perpetuity of the covenant based on obedience—but rather the reception of covenant blessings was conditioned on obedience. Remember, an unconditional covenant may have conditional blessings." – J. Dwight Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom Come*

God was recommitting Himself to His covenant obligations. He assured Abraham that He would do what He said He would do. He would make of Abraham a great nation, and Isaac would be the means through which that promise was fulfilled. But He was also reminding Abraham that the blessings associated with the covenant would be conditional. They would require obedience. In order for Abraham to experience the blessings of Canaan, he had been required to leave Haran and his kinsmen behind. God had forbidden Abraham from declaring Eliezer, his servant, to be his heir. And Abraham had been required to obey God's command and disinherit Ishmael. The result of all of this was God's commitment to bless Abraham through Isaac. Obedience always precedes blessing.

Centuries later, when the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were preparing to enter the land of Canaan after their 400-years of captivity in Egypt, Moses had delivered God's clear call to obedience.

*"And if you faithfully obey the voice of the Lord your God, being careful to do all his commandments that I command you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, if you obey the voice of the Lord your God."* – Deuteronomy 28:1-2 ESV

God had kept the promise He had made to Abraham nearly half a century earlier.

*"Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions. As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. And they shall come back here in the fourth generation..."* – Genesis 15:13-16 ESV

And God would ensure that Abraham's offspring received the inheritance He had promised them. But to fully enjoy all the blessings the land had to offer; they would have to live in obedience to His commands. And Moses had been very specific.

*"Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the field. Blessed shall be the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground and the fruit of your cattle, the increase of your herds and the young of your flock. Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl. Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out."* – Deuteronomy 28:3-6 ESV

The blessings were contingent upon obedience. And Moses made it painfully clear that disobedience would result in severe and costly consequences.

*"But if you will not obey the voice of the Lord your God or be careful to do all his commandments and his statutes that I command you today, then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you. Cursed shall you be in the city, and cursed shall you be in the field. Cursed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl. Cursed shall be the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground, the increase of your herds and the young of your flock. Cursed shall you be when you come in, and cursed shall you be when you go out."* – Deuteronomy 28:15-19 ESV

They would find themselves living in the land of promise, but unable to enjoy all the blessings the land afforded. And Moses warned them that their continued failure to live in obedience would result in their eventual removal from the land.

*"Whereas you were as numerous as the stars of heaven, you shall be left few in number, because you did not obey the voice of the Lord your God. And as the Lord took delight in doing you good and multiplying you, so the Lord will take delight in bringing ruin upon you and destroying you. And you shall be plucked off the land that you are entering to take possession of it."* – Deuteronomy 28:62-63 ESV

Abraham had been willing to obey the command of God and offer up his son as a sacrifice. And, according to God, Abraham's obedience was the reason the blessings associated with the covenant would be fulfilled

*“...because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore.” – Genesis 22:16-17 ESV*

Abraham had not **earned** God's blessings. God is simply stating that His blessings are always contingent upon obedience. Adam and Eve enjoyed the blessings of Eden as long as they obeyed God's command to abstain from eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But as soon as they disobeyed God's command and ate of the tree, they were cursed and eventually cast out of the garden. But their disobedience did not keep God from fulfilling His preordained plan to redeem the world through the seed of Adam and Eve. In fact, their disobedience set in motion the grand redemptive plan that God had put in place before the foundation of the world.

In choosing to obey God, Abraham received his son back. But even more importantly, Abraham secured the arrival of another “offspring” who would become a blessing to the nations. Abraham had no way of knowing what God had in store for him and his descendants. He could only take his son and return to his recently purchased property in Beersheba.

Moses closes out this chapter with a short genealogy of Abraham's brother, Nahor. And his intent for including this list of obscure and difficult-to-pronounce names is simple. He is beginning to shift the focus from Abraham to Isaac. From this point forward, Moses will begin to chronicle the lives of Abraham's descendants. And one name should stand out in the family tree of Nahor: Rebekah. Through a series of God-ordained events, she will become the wife of Isaac. And with their marriage, the stage will be set for Abraham to pass on his inheritance to his son, whose very life he owed to God.

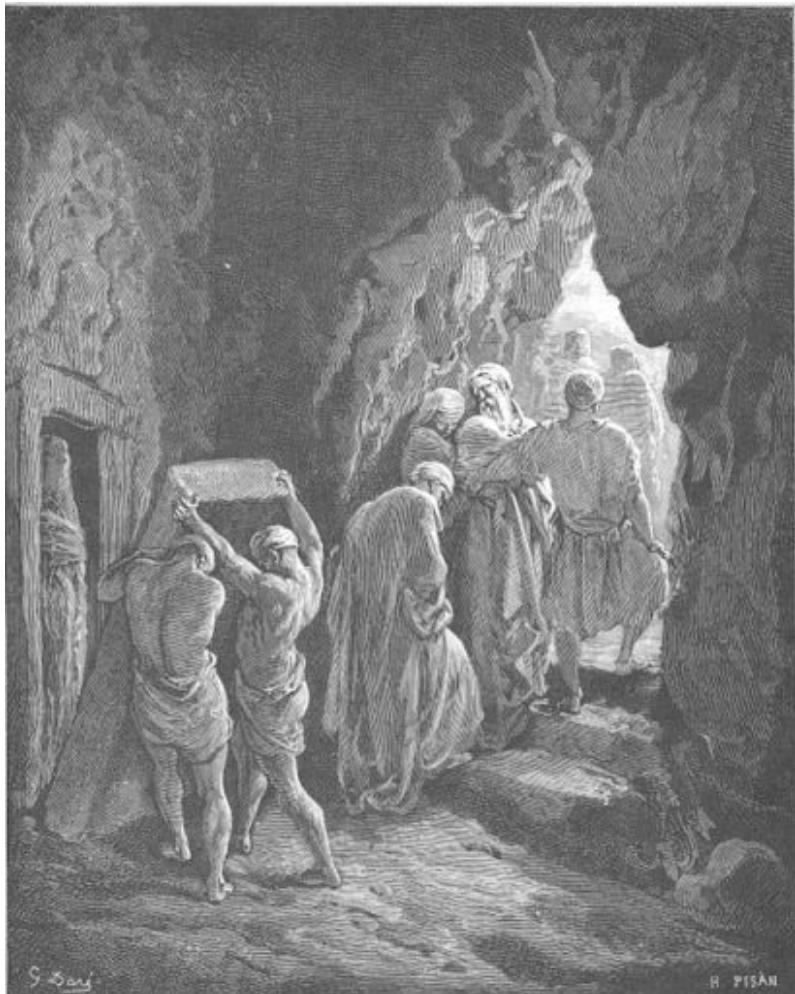


## Buried in the Land of Promise

<sup>1</sup> Sarah lived 127 years; these were the years of the life of Sarah. <sup>2</sup> And Sarah died at Kiriath-arba (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan, and Abraham went in to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her. <sup>3</sup> And Abraham rose up from before his dead and said to the Hittites, <sup>4</sup> “I am a sojourner and foreigner among you; give me property among you for a burying place, that I may bury my dead out of my sight.” <sup>5</sup> The Hittites answered Abraham, <sup>6</sup> “Hear us, my lord; you are a prince of God among us. Bury your dead in the choicest of our tombs. None of us will withhold from you his tomb to hinder you from burying your dead.” <sup>7</sup> Abraham rose and bowed to the Hittites, the people of the land. <sup>8</sup> And he said to them, “If you are willing that I should bury my dead out of my sight, hear me and entreat for me Ephron the son of Zohar, <sup>9</sup> that he may give me the cave of Machpelah, which he owns; it is at the end of his field. For the full price let him give it to me in your presence as property for a burying place.”

<sup>10</sup> Now Ephron was sitting among the Hittites, and Ephron the Hittite answered Abraham in the hearing of the Hittites, of all who went in at the gate of his city, <sup>11</sup> “No, my lord, hear me: I give you the field, and I give you the cave that is in it. In the sight of the sons of my people I give it to you. Bury your dead.” <sup>12</sup> Then Abraham bowed down before the people of the land. <sup>13</sup> And he said to Ephron in the hearing of the people of the land, “But if you will, hear me: I give the price of the field. Accept it from me, that I may bury my dead there.” <sup>14</sup> Ephron answered Abraham, <sup>15</sup> “My lord, listen to me: a piece of land worth four hundred shekels of silver, what is that between you and me? Bury your dead.” <sup>16</sup> Abraham listened to Ephron, and Abraham weighed out for Ephron the silver that he had named in the hearing of the Hittites, four hundred shekels of silver, according to the weights current among the merchants.

<sup>17</sup> So the field of Ephron in Machpelah, which was to the east of Mamre, the field with the cave that was in it and all the trees that were in the field, throughout its whole area, was made over <sup>18</sup> to Abraham as a possession in the presence of the Hittites, before all who went in at the gate of his city. <sup>19</sup> After this, Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave of the field of Machpelah east of Mamre (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan. <sup>20</sup> The field and the cave that is in it were made over to Abraham as property for a burying place by the Hittites. – Genesis 23:1-20 ESV



For 62 years, Abraham and Sarah had lived together as husband and wife in the land of Canaan. Since the day God had called Abraham out of Haran, this couple had spent over a half-century wandering through the land that God had promised to give Abraham as an inheritance. But other than a small plot and a well that he had purchased from Abimelech in Beersheba, Abraham never owned any real estate of significance. The author of the book of Hebrews describes Abraham's nomadic lifestyle, living in tents and caring for his flocks and herds.

*...when he reached the land God promised him, he lived there by faith—for he was like a foreigner, living in tents. — Hebrews 11:9 NLT*

And yet, God had repeatedly promised to give Abraham all the land of Canaan as his inheritance.

*"Look as far as you can see in every direction—north and south, east and west. I am giving all this land, as far as you can see, to you and your descendants as a permanent possession." — Genesis 13:14-15 NLT*

*"I have given this land to your descendants, all the way from the border of Egypt to the great Euphrates River — the land now occupied by the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites, and Jebusites." — Genesis 15:18-21 NLT*

Now, 62 years after arriving in the land that was to be his inheritance, Abraham lost the woman who had been his constant companion. She had born him the son through whom the promises of God would be fulfilled. This woman had endured decades of infertility. She had put up with Abraham's occasional displays of lousy leadership. In fact, on two separate occasions, her husband had sold her as a concubine to save his own skin. Of course, Sarah had not been an icon of virtue and righteousness. As she had grown increasingly more frustrated with her own

barrenness and God's apparent inability to fulfill His promise, she had attempted to provide a solution. Her bright idea to have Abraham sire a son through her Egyptian handmaid had worked, but it only resulted in conflict and not an heir. Sarah grew jealous of Hagar and her son, eventually having them exiled and disinherited – twice.

But despite Sarah's many malevolent machinations, God eventually rewarded her with a son of her own. At the ripe old age of 90, she had given birth to Isaac. And now, 37 years later, Sarah breathed her last. Her death took place at Kiriath-arba, which would later become known as Hebron. Her death, while probably not unexpected, hit Abraham hard. After a proper period of mourning, he made an appeal to the local occupants of the land, requesting permission to purchase a burial site. This request is significant because it reveals Abraham's commitment to the land of promise. Since Abraham and Sarah were both natives of Ur in Mesopotamia, it would have been acceptable for him to return to their native land and bury her body there. Yet, he wanted to inter his wife's remains in Canaan, the land that God had promised to give him as an inheritance.

Moses reveals that Abraham approached the sons of Heth. According to Genesis 10, these would have been the direct descendants of Canaan, the grandson of Noah.

***Canaan fathered Sidon his firstborn and Heth, and the Jebusites, the Amorites, the Girgashites, the Hivites, the Arkites, the Sinites, the Arvadites, the Zemarites, and the Hamathites. Afterward the clans of the Canaanites dispersed. And the territory of the Canaanites extended from Sidon in the direction of Gerar as far as Gaza, and in the direction of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboiim, as far as Lasha.*** – Genesis 10:15-19  
ESV

While the English Standard Version refers to these occupants of Canaan as Hittites, they should not be confused with the much-later Hittite Empire that came out of Asia Minor. These were Canaanites, the descendants of Ham's son, and they occupied and controlled the land surrounding Hebron. So, Abraham was forced to negotiate with the sons of Heth in order to purchase a burial site.

***"Here I am, a stranger and a foreigner among you. Please sell me a piece of land so I can give my wife a proper burial."*** – Genesis 23:4 NLT

This entire transaction, while conducted with civility and politeness, is actually little more than a protracted case of bartering over a purchase price for the land. As a foreigner, Abraham had no right to own land in Hebron and was totally subject to the whims of the sons of Heth. What makes this story so intriguing is that land was one of the greatest assets a man could own. The ownership of land was critical to a family's survival, and it was carefully passed down from generation to generation. So, Abraham knew that his request for land was going to cost him dearly. He would have to pay a premium and was more than willing to do so. And what makes

this so ironic is that, according to God, all this land was Abraham's rightful inheritance. He was having to purchase what was already rightfully his.

But Abraham played the game and negotiated with the sons of Heth. What takes place appears to be a well-orchestrated legal transaction between Abraham and Ephron, the property's legal owner. According to local custom, Abraham attempts to broker the deal in full view of the elders of the community. They will serve as witnesses to the agreement. And, with the sons of Heth acting as mediators, Abraham negotiated the details of the transaction with Ephron.

What takes place next is a kind of dance between the two men. Abraham offers to pay full price for the land, but Ephron plays the part of the gracious and overly generous patron by offering to give it to Abraham as a gift. But Abraham knew this offer was insincere and simply a bargaining tool. Ephron was attempting to portray himself as disinterested in profiting from Abraham's loss. But Abraham reiterated his offer to pay full price for the land. This led Ephron to respond with a highly inflated asking price. Despite all his outward displays of feigned sorrow and sympathy, Ephron was taking full advantage of Abraham's predicament. He knew he had the unfortunate widower right where he wanted him. And his price of 400 shekels of silver must have brought a sly grin to the faces of his neighbors. They knew this was highway robbery. But Abraham didn't bat an eye.

*So Abraham agreed to Ephron's price and paid the amount he had suggested—400 pieces of silver, weighed according to the market standard. The Hittite elders witnessed the transaction. – Genesis 23:16 NLT*

And Moses points out that, upon the exchange of the 100 pounds of silver, the land "was transferred to Abraham as his permanent possession in the presence of the Hittite elders at the city gate" (Genesis 23:18 NLT). At this point in his long tenure in Canaan, Abraham owned two pieces of land. He owned a well and the plot on which it was located in Beersheba, and he owned a burial cave in Hebron. One represented life while the other was a symbol of death.

Abraham had already experienced much life in the land of Canaan. Now, he was experiencing the pain and sorrow of death. But he remained committed to the land because he believed in the promises of God. Over the years, this burial plot would be put to good use. Abraham, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob, and Leah would all be buried there. And this burial site would remain the property of Abraham for generations to come. So, almost half a millennium later, when the descendants of Abraham returned to the land of Canaan from their 400 years of captivity in Egypt, "the cave of the field of Machpelah east of Mamre (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan" (Genesis 23:19 ESV), would still belong to Abraham. And, in time, God would expand the landholdings of Abraham to include all of Canaan, just as He had promised.

In life and in death, Abraham would remain fully committed to the promise of God. This great patriarch of the Hebrew nation would eventually die and be buried alongside his wife in Hebron. But the author of Hebrews portrays Abraham as having died in faith, resting, even in death, on the future promises of God.

*These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.* – Hebrews 11:13-16 ESV



## The Wonderful Ways of God

<sup>1</sup> Now Abraham was old, well advanced in years. And the Lord had blessed Abraham in all things. <sup>2</sup> And Abraham said to his servant, the oldest of his household, who had charge of all that he had, “Put your hand under my thigh, <sup>3</sup> that I may make you swear by the Lord, the God of heaven and God of the earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell, <sup>4</sup> but will go to my country and to my kindred, and take a wife for my son Isaac.” <sup>5</sup> The servant said to him, “Perhaps the woman may not be willing to follow me to this land. Must I then take your son back to the land from which you came?”

<sup>6</sup> Abraham said to him, “See to it that you do not take my son back there. <sup>7</sup> The Lord, the God of heaven, who took me from my father’s house and from the land of my kindred, and who spoke to me and swore to me, ‘To your offspring I will give this land,’ he will send his angel before you, and you shall take a wife for my son from there. <sup>8</sup> But if the woman is not willing to follow you, then you will be free from this oath of mine; only you must not take my son back there.” <sup>9</sup> So the servant put his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master and swore to him concerning this matter.

*Then the servant took ten of his master’s camels and departed, taking all sorts of choice gifts from his master; and he arose and went to Mesopotamia to the city of Nahor. And he made the camels kneel down outside the city by the well of water at the time of evening, the time when women go out to draw water.* – Genesis 24:1-11 ESV



With the death of Sarah, Abraham found himself an elderly widower attempting to raise his 37-year-old unmarried son. At least 137-years-old himself, Abraham would have recognized that he faced yet another challenge in his long and storied life. While God had given him a son through whom all the divine promises would be fulfilled, there was still a need for Isaac to find a mate.

God’s promise to produce a great nation through Abraham would come to a screeching halt if Isaac failed to marry and bear the next generation of descendants.

Sarah’s death marked the end of Abraham’s role in producing that great nation. He would father no more sons. But he knew that God was far from finished when it came to fulfilling His promises, and he remembered the words God spoke concerning Isaac more than 37 years earlier.

*“Sarah, your wife, will give birth to a son for you. You will name him Isaac, and I will confirm my covenant with him and his descendants as an everlasting covenant.” – Genesis 17:19 NLT*

So, he prepared to pass the mantle of leadership and responsibility to Isaac. And because Abraham viewed himself as an alien and a stranger in the land of Canaan, he determined to find a bride for his son from among his own people living back in Mesopotamia. But, unlike so many other episodes from the life of Abraham, this one is not an example of Abraham operating solo and trying to make things happen on his own. He is simply playing the role of the loving father and attempting to ensure that his son finds the right kind of wife. Yet, in all his decisions concerning the matter, one can sense that Abraham recognized the sovereign will of God. After 137 years of life, he had come to trust that God would providentially operate behind the scenes and ensure that Isaac found just the woman through whom all His promises would be fulfilled.

Chapter 24 is the longest of all the chapters in the book of Genesis, and it is a love story. But it is less about the love that develops between Isaac and Rebekah than it is about the love of God for Abraham and his descendants. Moses opens the chapter by stating that “the Lord had blessed Abraham in all things” (Genesis 24:1 ESV). He had given Abraham a faithful and loving wife. He had showered him with great riches and abundant flocks and herds. For more than 60 years, God had protected and provided for Abraham as he wandered through the countryside of Canaan. And now, He would guide the steps of Abraham’s servant as he made the long journey back to Mesopotamia. This entire chapter is meant to remind Abraham’s future descendants, the people of Israel, of God’s love for them. The details contained in this story provide insights into their very existence. Had these events not taken place, just as God ordained them, there would be no nation of Israel.

But it all began with Abraham’s decision to send his servant back to his homeland of Mesopotamia. And Abraham forced his servant to swear a binding oath.

*“...swear by the Lord, the God of heaven and God of the earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell, but will go to my country and to my kindred, and take a wife for my son Isaac.” – Genesis 24:3-4 ESV*

As part of the oath, the servant was required to place his hand under Abraham’s thigh. This rather strange gesture was probably meant to signify that the oath was all about the continuation of Abraham’s line. But placing his hand near Abraham’s genitals, the servant would be making an intimate and binding commitment to the future of his master’s house.

But before taking this solemn oath, Abraham’s servant expressed his reservations. He questioned what he was to do if the woman he found refused to return with him to Canaan. This was a legitimate concern because most residents of Mesopotamia would have viewed Canaan as an unsophisticated backwater occupied by unruly and unfriendly nations. Abraham had tasked this man with a formidable task, and he wanted to know what he was supposed to

do when the women he approached turned him down. Was there an option involving the return of Isaac to Mesopotamia? But Abraham flatly rejected any notion of Isaac leaving Canaan.

*"See to it that you do not take my son back there."* – Genesis 24:6 ESV

Abraham understood that this trip and the task of finding a bride for Isaac could take a very long time, and there was a high likelihood that he would not live long enough to attend his son's wedding or see the birth of his first grandson. So, Abraham made sure his servant knew the terms of his assignment and the reason for its uncompromising rigidity.

*"For the Lord, the God of heaven, who took me from my father's house and my native land, solemnly promised to give this land to my descendants. He will send his angel ahead of you, and he will see to it that you find a wife there for my son. If she is unwilling to come back with you, then you are free from this oath of mine. But under no circumstances are you to take my son there."* – Genesis 24:7-8 NLT

This statement reveals Abraham's unwavering faith in God's promise. He recalled the day that God commanded him to leave Mesopotamia and relocate his family to Canaan. If God had done it once, He could do it again. And Abraham assured his servant that Yahweh would prepare the path before him. He even declared that God would guide the servant to just the right woman. And, if that God-ordained woman should refuse to accompany the servant to Canaan, the binding nature of the oath would be automatically rescinded.

Abraham was letting his servant know that this trip was going to have God's hands all over it. Yes, his task appeared daunting and even dangerous. It's likely that this servant was a foreigner, just like Sarah's handmaiden, Hagar. Perhaps he too was an Egyptian. And he was being asked to make a long journey through hostile territory and somehow convince a Mesopotamian father to give the hand of his daughter to a man he had never met – who just happened to live in Canaan. But Abraham was assuring his reluctant servant that God was in full control. So, the servant swore the oath and prepared to make the journey to Mesopotamia.



Moses provides no timeline for the trip. One minute, the servant is standing in the presence of Abraham somewhere near Hebron, and then he suddenly appears by a well outside of Nahor. The journey itself, while obviously long and arduous, was unimportant. It was the destination that mattered. Abraham had sent his servant to the region of Haran, the place where he had been living when God had called him. These names are significant because they reflect the family members of Abraham.

*Now these are the generations of Terah. Terah fathered Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran fathered Lot. Haran died in the presence of his father Terah in the land of his kindred, in Ur of the Chaldeans. And Abram and Nahor took wives. The name of Abram's wife was Sarai, and the name of Nahor's wife, Milcah, the daughter of Haran the father of Milcah and Iscah.* – Genesis 11:27-29 ESV

This area of Mesopotamia had become the home of Abraham's extended family. His brothers, Haran and Nahor, had settled and raised their families there. Of course, Haran had died, forcing Abraham to take on Haran's son, Lot, as his ward. But Nahor had remained in Mesopotamia where he eventually married his late brother's daughter, Milcah. And she would bear Nahor a son named Bethuel, who would father a daughter named Rebekah. So, all the while Abraham had been living in the land of Canaan, God had been working behind the scenes to prepare the woman who would become the future bride of the long-awaited son of the promise.

Little did Abraham's servant know that his path had been sovereignly directed to the very well where he would meet the very woman whose very life God had ordained years earlier.

## And It Just So Happened...

<sup>12</sup> And he said, “O Lord, God of my master Abraham, please grant me success today and show steadfast love to my master Abraham. <sup>13</sup> Behold, I am standing by the spring of water, and the daughters of the men of the city are coming out to draw water. <sup>14</sup> Let the young woman to whom I shall say, ‘Please let down your jar that I may drink,’ and who shall say, ‘Drink, and I will water your camels’—let her be the one whom you have appointed for your servant Isaac. By this I shall know that you have shown steadfast love to my master.”

<sup>15</sup> Before he had finished speaking, behold, Rebekah, who was born to Bethuel the son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham’s brother, came out with her water jar on her shoulder. <sup>16</sup> The young woman was very attractive in appearance, a maiden whom no man had known. She went down to the spring and filled her jar and came up. <sup>17</sup> Then the servant ran to meet her and said, “Please give me a little water to drink from your jar.” <sup>18</sup> She said, “Drink, my lord.” And she quickly let down her jar upon her hand and gave him a drink. <sup>19</sup> When she had finished giving him a drink, she said, “I will draw water for your camels also, until they have finished drinking.” <sup>20</sup> So she quickly emptied her jar into the trough and ran again to the well to draw water, and she drew for all his camels. <sup>21</sup> The man gazed at her in silence to learn whether the Lord had prospered his journey or not.

<sup>22</sup> When the camels had finished drinking, the man took a gold ring weighing a half shekel, and two bracelets for her arms weighing ten gold shekels, <sup>23</sup> and said, “Please tell me whose daughter you are. Is there room in your father’s house for us to spend the night?” <sup>24</sup> She said to him, “I am the daughter of Bethuel the son of Milcah, whom she bore to Nahor.” <sup>25</sup> She added, “We have plenty of both straw and fodder, and room to spend the night.” <sup>26</sup> The man bowed his head and worshiped the Lord <sup>27</sup> and said, “Blessed be the Lord, the God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken his steadfast love and his faithfulness toward my master. As for me, the Lord has led me in the way to the house of my master’s kinsmen.” <sup>28</sup> Then the young woman ran and told her mother’s household about these things. — Genesis 24:12-28 ESV

Having completed his long journey to Mesopotamia, Abraham’s servant stopped at a well in order to slack the thirst of his camels. His arrival could not have been more timely because it was in the evening, when the local women came to the well to draw water. Sensing the sovereign nature of his timing, the servant offered up a quick prayer to Yahweh, asking for His divine assistance.

“O Lord, God of my master Abraham, please grant me success today and show steadfast love to my master Abraham.” — Genesis 24:12 ESV



Moses provides little insight into the background of this unnamed servant of Abraham. Other than his prayer, there is nothing in the passage that would indicate that he was a worshiper of Yahweh. In fact, in his prayer, he addresses “Jehovah Elohim” as his master’s God. This seems to indicate that the servant worshiped his own god but, since this trip was involved Abraham’s son, he was going to rely upon Abraham’s God. And the servant offers a rather specific proposal to assure himself of God’s involvement in the matter.

*“Behold, I am standing by the spring of water, and the daughters of the men of the city are coming out to draw water. Let the young woman to whom I shall say, ‘Please let down your jar that I may drink,’ and who shall say, ‘Drink, and I will water your camels’—let her be the one whom you have appointed for your servant Isaac. By this I shall know that you have shown steadfast love to my master.” – Genesis 24:13-14 ESV*

One can almost sense that this man was unaccustomed to interacting with Abraham’s God. He has no experience in these kinds of matters and seems unsure as to how he will know which of the women gathered at the well might be the right one for Isaac. Rather than taking the time to interview each and every woman, his plan provides a fool-proof method of determining the exact woman Abraham’s God had preordained.

This man was convinced that God had already predetermined the identity of Isaac’s future wife and she would be found at this well. And Moses points out that before the servant had finished his prayer, a young woman appeared carrying a water jar on her shoulder. But she was not just any woman. “She was the daughter of Bethuel, who was the son of Abraham’s brother Nahor and his wife, Milcah” (Genesis 24:15 NLT). This was the granddaughter of Abraham’s brother Nahor.

This servant had traveled hundreds of miles and managed to find the very well used by Abraham’s extended family. And one of the first women to show up just happened to be Abraham’s grandniece. Then Moses adds a few other pertinent details that provide further proof that this was a God-ordained moment.

*Rebekah was very beautiful and old enough to be married, but she was still a virgin. – Genesis 24:16 NLT*

This woman was the perfect candidate. She was the right age, still unmarried, and easy on the eyes. It appears that this young girl was the first to arrive at the well and fill her water jug. So, the servant made a beeline to her and set his plan in motion.

*Running over to her, the servant said, “Please give me a little drink of water from your jug.” – Genesis 24:17 NLT*

The test had begun. You can almost hear the servant’s heart beating in his chest as he anxiously waited for her to respond. This was way too easy. Could she really be the one?

Moses deliberately draws out the details of the story, creating in his readers a sense of anxious anticipation. Upon hearing the stranger’s request, Rebekah lowered her jar and offered the man a drink. This fulfilled the first part of the servant’s test. But what would happen next? Would she offer to water the camels as well? Much to his reader’s delight and the servant’s relief, Rebekah responded, “I will draw water for your camels also, until they have finished drinking” (Genesis 24:19 NLT).

Regrettably, Moses tells us nothing about the servant’s reaction. He simply states that “she quickly emptied her jug into the watering trough and ran back to the well to draw water for all his camels” (Genesis 24:20 NLT). But it doesn’t take a lot of imagination to picture the wide-eyed wonder on the face of the servant as he watched this miracle take place right in front of him. This girl wasn’t just agreeable, she was enthusiastic, and her actions revealed a great deal about her character. Abraham’s servant must have been beside himself with excitement as he took it all in. His task had been fulfilled at the very first well he came to and with the first woman he met.

You can almost sense the smile on the face of Moses as he wrote the words: “The servant watched her in silence, wondering whether or not the Lord had given him success in his mission” (Genesis 24:21 NLT). It was too overwhelming to believe. But eventually, the servant came to his senses, and recognized that Rebekah was very one he had been sent to find. And he immediately reached into his bag and pulled out the gifts he had been given to present to Isaac’s future bride. But little did Rebekah know that these gifts were anything more than a token of appreciation for her generosity and hospitality.

Recognizing his need to know more about this young girl, the servant inquired as to the identity of her father. And, once again, the servant must have been blown away by her answer. She was the daughter of Abraham’s nephew. In other words, she was family. But unaware of who the servant was, she graciously offered him a place to stay for the evening.

The servant was blown away by the miraculous nature of the entire encounter. And he couldn’t help but drop to his knees in reverence and awe for the power of his master’s God.

*The man bowed low and worshiped the Lord. “Praise the Lord, the God of my master, Abraham,” he said. “The Lord has shown unfailing love and faithfulness to my master, for he has led me straight to my master’s relatives.” – Genesis 24:26-27 NLT*

As the servant worshiped Yahweh, Rebekah ran home to inform her family about their guest and all that had happened at the well. There is no way to know if she was aware of the servant's intentions or his relationship to Abraham. It could be that Rebekah was simply excited to tell her family about the generous stranger who rewarded her with expensive gifts. But, whatever the case, Moses has set the scene for what will take place next.

## A Smooth Operator

<sup>29</sup> Rebekah had a brother whose name was Laban. Laban ran out toward the man, to the spring.

<sup>30</sup> As soon as he saw the ring and the bracelets on his sister's arms, and heard the words of Rebekah his sister, "Thus the man spoke to me," he went to the man. And behold, he was standing by the camels at the spring. <sup>31</sup> He said, "Come in, O blessed of the Lord. Why do you stand outside? For I have prepared the house and a place for the camels." <sup>32</sup> So the man came to the house and unharnessed the camels, and gave straw and fodder to the camels, and there was water to wash his feet and the feet of the men who were with him. <sup>33</sup> Then food was set before him to eat. But he said, "I will not eat until I have said what I have to say." He said, "Speak on."

<sup>34</sup> So he said, "I am Abraham's servant. <sup>35</sup> The Lord has greatly blessed my master, and he has become great. He has given him flocks and herds, silver and gold, male servants and female servants, camels and donkeys. <sup>36</sup> And Sarah my master's wife bore a son to my master when she was old, and to him he has given all that he has. <sup>37</sup> My master made me swear, saying, 'You shall not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, in whose land I dwell, <sup>38</sup> but you shall go to my father's house and to my clan and take a wife for my son.' <sup>39</sup> I said to my master, 'Perhaps the woman will not follow me.' <sup>40</sup> But he said to me, 'The Lord, before whom I have walked, will send his angel with you and prosper your way. You shall take a wife for my son from my clan and from my father's house. <sup>41</sup> Then you will be free from my oath, when you come to my clan. And if they will not give her to you, you will be free from my oath.'

<sup>42</sup> "I came today to the spring and said, 'O Lord, the God of my master Abraham, if now you are prospering the way that I go, <sup>43</sup> behold, I am standing by the spring of water. Let the virgin who comes out to draw water, to whom I shall say, 'Please give me a little water from your jar to drink,' <sup>44</sup> and who will say to me, 'Drink, and I will draw for your camels also,' let her be the woman whom the Lord has appointed for my master's son.'

<sup>45</sup> "Before I had finished speaking in my heart, behold, Rebekah came out with her water jar on her shoulder, and she went down to the spring and drew water. I said to her, 'Please let me drink.' <sup>46</sup> She quickly let down her jar from her shoulder and said, 'Drink, and I will give your camels drink also.' So I drank, and she gave the camels drink also. <sup>47</sup> Then I asked her, 'Whose daughter are you?' She said, 'The daughter of Bethuel, Nahor's son, whom Milcah bore to him.' So I put the ring on her nose and the bracelets on her arms. <sup>48</sup> Then I bowed my head and worshiped the Lord and blessed the Lord, the God of my master Abraham, who had led me by the right way to take the daughter of my master's kinsman for his son.' <sup>49</sup> Now then, if you are going to show steadfast love and faithfulness to my master, tell me; and if not, tell me, that I may turn to the right hand or to the left."

<sup>50</sup> Then Laban and Bethuel answered and said, "The thing has come from the Lord; we cannot speak to you bad or good. <sup>51</sup> Behold, Rebekah is before you; take her and go, and let her be the wife of your master's son, as the Lord has spoken." – Genesis 24:29-51 ESV



In this section of chapter 24, Moses introduces yet another character who will play a major role in the unfolding plot surrounding Abraham and his descendants. After his “chance” encounter with the young woman at the well, Abraham’s servant accepted her gracious offer of food and lodging. It seems that Rebekah had hurried home to tell her family about what had happened and to help them to prepare for their unexpected guest. But the servant

remained at the well with his retinue of ten camels.

Out of breath and filled with excitement, Rebekah shared the details of her conversation with the stranger and showed off her new jewelry. When her brother Laban saw the expensive gifts his sister had received from this stranger, he decided to roll out the red carpet.

*...he rushed out to the spring, where the man was still standing beside his camels. Laban said to him, “Come and stay with us, you who are blessed by the Lord! Why are you standing here outside the town when I have a room all ready for you and a place prepared for the camels?” – Genesis 24:30-31 NLT*

Laban went out of his way to extend hospitality to their guest, unloading the man’s camels and providing them with food and water. He even supplied the camel drivers with clean water to wash their feet. He was the consummate host, even ordering a meal to be served for his famished guests. But the servant refused to eat until he had declared the purpose for his visit.

At this point, Moses provides a retelling of the events that took place at the well, but through the eyes of Abraham’s servant. First, he disclosed his relationship with Abraham, their long-departed relative. And then he gave them a Cliff Notes recap of Abraham’s life since leaving Haran. But he prefacing the whole historical narrative surrounding Abraham’s life by accentuating his tremendous wealth. He wanted his hosts to know that Abraham had become a very wealthy man. This information was intended to soften up Rebekah’s father and brothers and make them more amenable to the proposal he was about to make.

He revealed some of the details surrounding Isaac’s birth and then emphasized how Abraham had made Isaac the sole heir of all his possessions. In other words, Isaac was also a wealthy man. But this wealthy, unmarried son of Abraham was in need of a wife. And the servant revealed that his presence in Haran was due to an oath he had sworn to his master. He had vowed not to return home until he had found a suitable wife for Isaac. And then the servant disclosed Abraham’s addendum to the oath.

*“...you must find a wife for my son from among my relatives, from my father’s family. Then you will have fulfilled your obligation. But if you go to my relatives and they refuse to let her go with you, you will be free from my oath.” – Genesis 24:40-41 NLT*

By this time, Rebekah’s father and brothers had put two and two together. They understood the purpose behind this man’s mission and knew exactly what he was about to ask them. But the servant was far from done. He continued to describe the divine nature of his meeting with Rebekah. He wanted his audience to know that this entire sequence of events had been ordained by Yahweh, the God of Abraham. He even revealed his own shock at discovering Rebekah’s identity. She wasn’t some random stranger fetching water from the well. No, she was the daughter of Abraham’s nephew and the granddaughter of his brother, Nahor.

This faithful servant of Abraham proved to be a deft negotiator. He did a masterful job preparing Rebekah’s family for the ask. By the time he finished describing this divinely orchestrated encounter at the well, it would be virtually impossible for Rebekah’s father to say no to the request he was about to make. He flatly declared, “the Lord, the God of my master, Abraham...led me straight to my master’s niece to be his son’s wife” (Genesis 24:48 NLT). But to further enhance his prospects of success, the servant placed all the pressure on Bethuel and Laban by insisting that they make the final call.

*“So tell me—will you or won’t you show unfailing love and faithfulness to my master? Please tell me yes or no, and then I’ll know what to do next.” – Genesis 24:49 NLT*

What was Bethuel supposed to do? If he said no, it would appear as if he was opposing the will of God. So, having heard the details of the servant’s story, Bethuel and Laban gave their wholehearted consent.

*“The Lord has obviously brought you here, so there is nothing we can say. Here is Rebekah; take her and go. Yes, let her be the wife of your master’s son, as the Lord has directed.” – Genesis 24:50-51 NLT*

And just like that, the oath was fulfilled, and the son of Abraham had a wife. God had miraculously intervened yet again, paving the way for His promise to make of Abraham a great nation to become a reality.



## A Divine Love Story

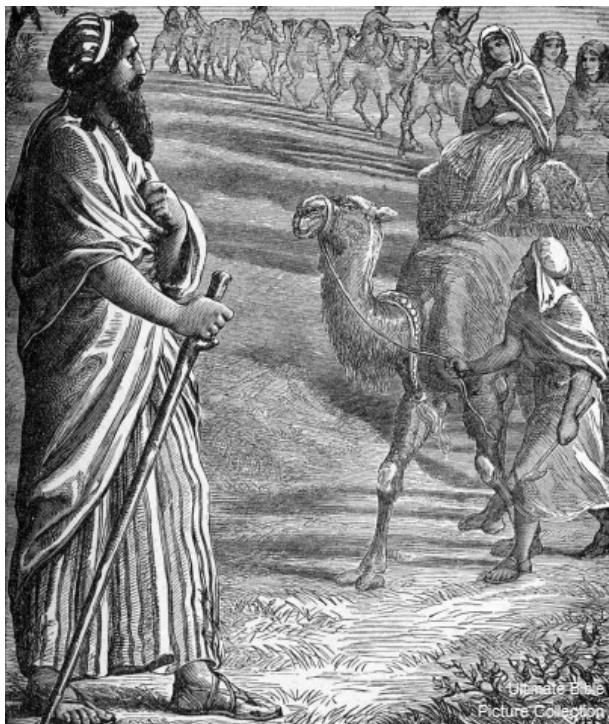
<sup>52</sup> When Abraham's servant heard their words, he bowed himself to the earth before the Lord. <sup>53</sup> And the servant brought out jewelry of silver and of gold, and garments, and gave them to Rebekah. He also gave to her brother and to her mother costly ornaments. <sup>54</sup> And he and the men who were with him ate and drank, and they spent the night there. When they arose in the morning, he said, "Send me away to my master." <sup>55</sup> Her brother and her mother said, "Let the young woman remain with us a while, at least ten days; after that she may go." <sup>56</sup> But he said to them, "Do not delay me, since the Lord has prospered my way. Send me away that I may go to my master." <sup>57</sup> They said, "Let us call the young woman and ask her." <sup>58</sup> And they called Rebekah and said to her, "Will you go with this man?" She said, "I will go." <sup>59</sup> So they sent away Rebekah their sister and her nurse, and Abraham's servant and his men. <sup>60</sup> And they blessed Rebekah and said to her,

"Our sister, may you become  
thousands of ten thousands,  
and may your offspring possess  
the gate of those who hate him!"

<sup>61</sup> Then Rebekah and her young women arose and rode on the camels and followed the man. Thus the servant took Rebekah and went his way.

<sup>62</sup> Now Isaac had returned from Beer-lahai-roi and was dwelling in the Negeb. <sup>63</sup> And Isaac went out to meditate in the field toward evening. And he lifted up his eyes and saw, and behold, there were camels coming. <sup>64</sup> And Rebekah lifted up her eyes, and when she saw Isaac, she dismounted from the camel <sup>65</sup> and said to the servant, "Who is that man, walking in the field to meet us?" The servant said, "It is my master." So she took her veil and covered herself. <sup>66</sup> And the servant told Isaac all the things that he had done. <sup>67</sup> Then Isaac brought her into the tent of Sarah his mother and took Rebekah, and she became his wife, and he loved her. So Isaac was comforted after his mother's death. – Genesis 24:52-67 ESV

Having received a warm welcome from Laban and a positive response from Rebekah's father concerning her betrothal to Isaac, Abraham's servant worshiped Yahweh once again. He was deeply grateful for the way God had interceded on his behalf and orchestrated this picture-perfect outcome. Everything had turned out better than he could have ever imagined. And having thanked Yahweh for His divine assistance, the servant dispensed the treasures he had carried all the way from Hebron. First, he lavished the bride to be with additional gifts of jewelry and clothing. Then he handed out the gifts that Abraham had included for Rebekah's family members.



What followed next was a celebration. With the agreement reached and sealed by the giving of gifts, the servant and his men enjoyed a feast put on by the father of the bride. But the next morning, having completed his assignment, Abraham's servant was ready to begin the long journey home. He couldn't wait to tell Abraham all that had happened and see the look on Isaac's face when he saw his future wife for the very first time.

But when Bethuel and Milcah heard that the servant was making plans to leave right away, they tried to buy time, and that is understandable. Their daughter was about to walk out the door and there was a good chance they might never see her again. So, they tried to delay her departure for ten days. But the servant resisted their impassioned pleas.

*"Don't delay me. The Lord has made my mission successful; now send me back so I can return to my master."* – Genesis 24:56 NLT

One can almost sense the servant's fear that something might go horribly wrong. He seemed bent on accelerating their departure so no one would have time for to change their mind. And Rebekah's parents, overcome with sadness at the thought of losing their daughter, decided to leave the decision up to her. And she simply replied, "Yes, I will go" (Genesis 24:58 NLT).

Rebekah was loaded onto one of the camels and, accompanied by her childhood nurse, she began the long journey to Canaan and to her uncertain future as the wife of a man she had never laid eyes on. Moses does not reveal Rebekah's age but this departure from her family and her homeland had to have been difficult. She was willingly entering into a marriage covenant with a complete stranger who lived in a foreign land. She was leaving everything she had ever known behind her and venturing into uncharted territory. And perhaps sensing her reticence and fear, her family pronounced a blessing upon her.

*"Our sister, may you become thousands of ten thousands, and may your offspring possess the gate of those who hate him!"* – Genesis 24:60 ESV

Little did they know that their blessing coincided with the promise that God had expressed to Abraham more than 37 years earlier.

*“As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. I will bless her, and moreover, I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall become nations; kings of peoples shall come from her.” – Genesis 17:15-16 ESV*

*“Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him.” – Genesis 17:19 ESV*

Young Rebekah was the chosen instrument through whom God would fulfill His promise. She had been preordained by God to become the wife of Isaac and the future mother of Jacob. And all the events surrounding her encounter with the servant of Abraham reveal the sovereign hand of God. This was literally a marriage made in heaven.



servant announced, “It is my master” (Genesis 24:65 ESV).

Rebekah, realizing that she was about to meet her future husband, took her veil and covered her face. Meanwhile, the servant eagerly informed Isaac of all that had taken place in Haran. He was beside himself with excitement as he shared the miraculous nature of the journey and how God had provided just the right woman for Isaac.

Having heard the details surrounding Rebekah’s divine selection, Isaac, “brought Rebekah into his mother Sarah’s tent, and she became his wife. He loved her deeply, and she was a special comfort to him after the death of his mother” (Genesis 24:67 NLT). Still mourning the loss of his mother, Isaac was comforted by the knowledge that God had provided him with a wife and a means for fulfilling the covenant promises made to Abraham. Rebekah would take the place of Sarah and become the mother of a great nation. Through she and Isaac the nations of the world would be blessed.

The caravan slowly made its way back to Canaan, and it appears that Abraham’s servant had set his final destination as the Negeb, where Isaac was living. It’s interesting to note that he didn’t make his way to his master’s home, but instead, chose to deliver Rebekah directly to Isaac. Moses indicates that Isaac looked up and saw a caravan headed his way. As he made his way to intercept the travelers, Rebekah him from a distance and inquired who this stranger might be. The



## A New Chapter Begins

<sup>1</sup> Abraham took another wife, whose name was Keturah. <sup>2</sup> She bore him Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah. <sup>3</sup> Jokshan fathered Sheba and Dedan. The sons of Dedan were Asshurim, Letushim, and Leummim. <sup>4</sup> The sons of Midian were Ephah, Epher, Hanoch, Abida, and Eldaah. All these were the children of Keturah. <sup>5</sup> Abraham gave all he had to Isaac. <sup>6</sup> But to the sons of his concubines Abraham gave gifts, and while he was still living he sent them away from his son Isaac, eastward to the east country.

<sup>7</sup> These are the days of the years of Abraham's life, 175 years. <sup>8</sup> Abraham breathed his last and died in a good old age, an old man and full of years, and was gathered to his people. <sup>9</sup> Isaac and Ishmael his sons buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron the son of Zohar the Hittite, east of Mamre, <sup>10</sup> the field that Abraham purchased from the Hittites. There Abraham was buried, with Sarah his wife. <sup>11</sup> After the death of Abraham, God blessed Isaac his son. And Isaac settled at Beer-lahai-roi.

<sup>12</sup> These are the generations of Ishmael, Abraham's son, whom Hagar the Egyptian, Sarah's servant, bore to Abraham. <sup>13</sup> These are the names of the sons of Ishmael, named in the order of their birth: Nebaioth, the firstborn of Ishmael; and Kedar, Adbeel, Mibsam, <sup>14</sup> Mishma, Dumah, Massa, <sup>15</sup> Hadad, Tema, Jetur, Naphish, and Kedemah. <sup>16</sup> These are the sons of Ishmael and these are their names, by their villages and by their encampments, twelve princes according to their tribes. <sup>17</sup> (These are the years of the life of Ishmael: 137 years. He breathed his last and died, and was gathered to his people.) <sup>18</sup> They settled from Havilah to Shur, which is opposite Egypt in the direction of Assyria. He settled over against all his kinsmen. – Genesis 25:1-18 ESV



The 25th chapter marks the midway point in the book of Genesis. And while the chapter designations came long after the book was written, the details recorded in this section of Moses' chronicle serve as a turning point in the narrative. For the last 14 chapters, Abraham has served as the story's central character. Since the moment God called him out of Haran and disclosed the terms of the covenant, Abraham has been the protagonist and the promised progenitor of God's grand plan. It would be through Abraham that God would fulfill His covenant promise to establish a great nation. And yet,

here at the midway point of the Genesis account, Abraham is old and quite wealthy, but he has

only one son. It would be a gross understatement to say that Abraham's quiver was full. And even that one son is 37-year-old, newly married, and currently childless. Where is this great nation that God had promised?

But 24 chapters remain, and God is far from done. It is as if God is turning a page in the storyline and beginning something new. Isaac has found and married his bride – with the help of God. Sarah has died and, as these verses reveal, Abraham is not long for this world. He has reached the ripe old age of 175 and yet, Moses describes him in terms that belie his elderly status. He may not be a spring chicken, but he is far from a doddering old man. When Sarah had died, Abraham had been 137 years old. And while he mourned the loss of his wife, he eventually married a woman named Keturah. Up to this point in the story, Abraham had fathered only two children, Ishmael and Isaac. But his marriage to Keturah would result in the births of six additional children.

This insight into Abraham's procreative capabilities seems intended to underscore the unique nature of Isaac's birth. Abraham had always been capable of fathering children. He had no trouble in impregnating his wife's handmaiden, Hagar. And even as he neared the latter days of his life, he proved to be fully capable of producing descendants. But the text makes it clear that children were not to be heirs of the promise. After providing the identities of Abraham's latest offspring, Moses states:

*All these were the children of Keturah. Abraham gave all he had to Isaac.* – Genesis 25:5  
ESV

These children were not destined to be part of the “great nation” that God had promised to produce from Abraham and Sarah. God had even told Abraham that Ishmael, the son born to him by Hagar, was not to be an heir of the covenant.

*“As for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, I have blessed him and will make him fruitful and multiply him greatly. He shall father twelve princes, and I will make him into a great nation. But I will establish my covenant with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this time next year.”* – Genesis 17:20-21 ESV

It is important to remember that Sarah always resented the presence of Ishmael. Even though his very existence had been the result of her bright idea to have Hagar bear a son for Abraham, Sarah despised this son of a slave woman (Galatians 4:22-23). And the day had come, after the birth of Isaac, that she demanded that Ishmael be disinherited.

*“Cast out this slave woman with her son, for the son of this slave woman shall not be heir with my son Isaac.”* – Genesis 21:10 ESV

While Abraham found his wife's anger to be unjust and disturbing, God encouraged him to give in to her demands.

*“Be not displeased because of the boy and because of your slave woman. Whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for through Isaac shall your offspring be named. And I will make a nation of the son of the slave woman also, because he is your offspring.” – Genesis 21:12-13 ESV*

And, just like always, God kept His word. Moses records that Abraham sent away each of the sons born to his concubine, Keturah. He provided them with gifts, but they would not share in the inheritance of Isaac. They suffered the same fate as that of Ishmael. They were cast out but they were far from forgotten by God. Notice how Moses records the children born to Ishmael. Why would he bother to add that seemingly unimportant detail?

*These are the generations of Ishmael, Abraham’s son, whom Hagar the Egyptian, Sarah’s servant, bore to Abraham. These are the names of the sons of Ishmael, named in the order of their birth: Nebaioth, the firstborn of Ishmael; and Kedar, Adbeel, Mibsam, Mishma, Dumah, Massa, Hadad, Tema, Jetur, Naphish, and Kedemah. – Genesis 25:12-15 ESV*

These names mean nothing to us. And yet, their very mention is designed to prove the integrity of God’s word. Remember what God had said to Sarah: “As for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, I have blessed him and will make him fruitful and multiply him greatly. He shall father twelve princes, and I will make him into a great nation” (Genesis 17:20 ESV).

Now, look closely at the list of obscure and difficult-to-pronounce names recorded in verses 12-15 of Genesis 25. There were twelve sons born to Ishmael. Despite Sarah’s ill-treatment of this young man, God had chosen to keep His word and bless him. He would make of Ishmael a great nation. The whole point seems to be that Abraham had always been fully capable of procreating and producing a long line of descendants. Ishmael had been prolific and produced 12 sons. In the same way, the six sons born to Keturah would go on to produce many offspring. But only the descendants of Isaac would become the nation through whom the other nations of the earth would be blessed. Only the line of Isaac would produce a chosen people, set apart by God, and destined to become the conduit through which He would pour out His divine blessing on humanity.

God fulfilled His promise and made Ishmael the father of “12 princes.” It is interesting to note the correlation between these 12 “tribes” and the 12 tribes that would eventually come through the line of Isaac. Moses indicates that Ishmael’s descendants “settled from Havilah to Shur, which is opposite Egypt in the direction of Assyria. He settled over against all his kinsmen” (Genesis 25:18 ESV). The Ishmaelites eventually settled in the region of Arabia, southeast of Canaan, and would have a less-than-ideal relationship with their distant relatives, the Israelites. But God had kept His word. He had faithfully fulfilled His promise.

And with the fate of Ishmael’s descendants established, Moses records that, at the age of 175, “Abraham breathed his last and died in a good old age, an old man and full of years, and was gathered to his people” (Genesis 25:8 ESV). The life of Abraham came to an end. But the

fulfillment of God's promises had only just begun. The story is far from over. And verse 19 will begin a new chapter in God's grand redemptive plan as Moses records the births of Esau and Jacob. But this story will contain many familiar features and themes. Yet another woman will find herself cursed by barrenness. There will be seemingly irreconcilable conflicts between siblings. Glaring examples of jealousy, anger, deceit, and disobedience will fill the storyline. But through it all, God will be operating behind the scenes, orchestrating His sovereign plan to fulfill the covenant he made with Abraham. Yahweh is fully committed to His promise to bless the nations.

## Why Is This Happening?

<sup>19</sup> These are the generations of Isaac, Abraham's son: Abraham fathered Isaac, <sup>20</sup> and Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Paddan-aram, the sister of Laban the Aramean, to be his wife. <sup>21</sup> And Isaac prayed to the Lord for his wife, because she was barren. And the Lord granted his prayer, and Rebekah his wife conceived.

<sup>22</sup> The children struggled together within her, and she said, "If it is thus, why is this happening to me?" So she went to inquire of the Lord. <sup>23</sup> And the Lord said to her,

"Two nations are in your womb,  
and two peoples from within you shall be divided;  
the one shall be stronger than the other,  
the older shall serve the younger."

<sup>24</sup> When her days to give birth were completed, behold, there were twins in her womb. <sup>25</sup> The first came out red, all his body like a hairy cloak, so they called his name Esau. <sup>26</sup> Afterward his brother came out with his hand holding Esau's heel, so his name was called Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them.

<sup>27</sup> When the boys grew up, Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field, while Jacob was a quiet man, dwelling in tents. <sup>28</sup> Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his game, but Rebekah loved Jacob. – Genesis 25:19-28 ESV



Ultimately, the book of Genesis traces the history of a single man, Abraham, and his subsequent descendants. But along the way, the author has provided an essential background story to Abraham's life by chronicling God's creation of mankind and the entrance of sin into the plotline. It was the ubiquitous and all-pervasive

presence of sin that led God to destroy the world with a flood. But in His grace and mercy, God spared one man, Noah, and his family, charging them with the divine mandate to multiply and fill the earth. The following chapters of Genesis reveal that from that one man and his family came a multitude of nations that spread over the face of the earth. But sadly, as they spread, so did sin. So, God chose a man named Abram, who lived in the land of Mesopotamia and promised to make of him a great nation. God called Abram out of his homeland and led him to the land of Canaan, which He promised to give to him as an inheritance.

But by this time in the story, Abraham has died and his son, Isaac, is married but childless. The “great nation” that was to have come through Abraham’s line consists of one man. Yet, Ishmael, Isaac’s disinherited stepbrother has fathered 12 sons. Even Abraham fathered six more sons after the birth of Isaac, but they would not share in the inheritance with their stepbrother. It seems that the non-elect nations of the earth were continuing to grow and spread, while the elect line of Abraham remained stalled and facing yet another case of barrenness that would result in more fruitlessness.

Everything about this story screams futility and failure. Yet, behind the scenes, God is working His sovereign plan. While, at first glance, it may appear like that plan has hit another roadblock, these verses reveal that God is in full control. Yes, the patriarch of the family is dead, and Isaac, the sole heir of the family inheritance remains childless. To make matters worse, his wife Rebekah is barren. And this sad state of affairs will remain unchanged for 20 long years. For two decades Isaac and Rebekah would long for the fulfillment of the promise that God had made to Abraham.

*“I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you. And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God.” – Genesis 17:6-8 ESV*

*“Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him.” – Genesis 17:19 ESV*

God had kept His word and Isaac had been born. But 60 years later, Isaac and his wife were still waiting to have a child of their own. Where was the offspring that God had promised? How was Isaac to share the inheritance of the land if he and his wife could have no children?

It is essential to understand the futility of Isaac’s circumstances. He was living in the land of Canaan, the land God had promised as an inheritance to Abraham’s descendants. But Isaac was still living a nomadic lifestyle, just as his father had. He owned no land, occupied no cities, and remained an insignificant minority surrounded by much larger clans, tribes, and nations. And, year after year, the seasons would come and go and Isaac’s flocks would bear new lambs, but he remained childless.

And how did Isaac handle the repeated disappointment of childlessness? The text indicates that he prayed. And it seems unlikely that this was a one-time occurrence. Isaac repeatedly and passionately pleaded with God.

*Isaac prayed to the Lord for his wife, because she was barren. – Genesis 25:21 ESV*

He knew what the problem was, and he took it straight to Yahweh. Moses doesn't divulge the content of Isaac's intercessions, but it doesn't take much imagination to figure out what this man prayed year after year. With each new spring, he must have called out to God, asking for Him to open Rebekah's womb. Isaac would have known the miraculous nature of his own birth. His father and mother had waited years before God stepped in and caused Sarah to conceive.

*The Lord visited Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did to Sarah as he had promised. And Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age at the time of which God had spoken to him. Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore him, Isaac.* – Genesis 21:1-3 ESV

But while Isaac was familiar with the story, he still longed to see his own wife's battle with barrenness broken. He desperately desired to have a son. And for 20 years Isaac prayed and waited. And God heard those prayers. He was not ignoring Isaac or punishing him for some sin he had committed. He was simply following His preordained timeline. And, one day, at just the right time, God answered Isaac's prayer.

*And the Lord granted his prayer, and Rebekah his wife conceived.* – Genesis 25:21 ESV

God opened Rebekah's womb. To Isaac, this would have appeared to be a 20-year delay. But to God, it was all according to His providentially prepared timeline.

The news of Rebekah's pregnancy must have thrilled Isaac. He would have been beside himself with joy and eager anticipation as he waited for the nine months to pass and the baby to be born. But things took a turn for the worse. Rebekah ended up having a difficult pregnancy. She didn't know it at the time, but she was carrying twins, and the two babies "struggled together within her" (Genesis 25:22 ESV). The pain must have been unbearable, leaving Rebekah concerned about the viability of the baby and worried about her own health. She took the matter to God, asking, "why is this happening to me?" (Genesis 25:22 ESV). She couldn't understand what was going on. Her joy had turned to fear and apprehension. Thoughts of losing the baby must have crossed her mind. But God reassured her.

*"The sons in your womb will become two nations. From the very beginning, the two nations will be rivals. One nation will be stronger than the other; and your older son will serve your younger son."* – Genesis 25:23 NLT

God informed Rebekah that she was carrying two sons. This news must have thrilled her and helped to calm her fears. And God went on to explain that the "struggle" taking place within her womb was a sign of the future struggle that would take place between her two sons. In a sense, Rebekah was bearing two future nations that would end up in a perpetual state of conflict and acrimony.

This announcement from God must have left Rebekah as perplexed and confused as ever. While she was comforted to know that her difficult pregnancy was the result of twins and not a

serious medical problem, she would have been displeased to hear that the relationship between her two sons was destined to be adversarial.

God was informing Rebekah and Isaac that they would be used to produce two nations through whom He would accomplish His divine plan of redemption. God could have blessed this couple with a single child, but He had other plans. At this point, His purpose for placing two sons in Rebekah's womb remains obscure and difficult to ascertain. And His plan for those two sons to result in two nations that stand diametrically opposed to one another remains a mystery.

Rebekah and Isaac are given little in the way of explanation. So, they simply had to wait and see what God was going to do. It's not clear from the text just how much of God's message Rebekah shared with Isaac. Other than the news that she was carrying twins, she might have withheld the details concerning the prophecy concerning sibling rivalry.

But the day finally came when Rebekah gave birth, and just as God had said, she delivered two healthy boys. But there was something unique about this delivery. The two babies, while twins, appeared to be nothing alike.

*The first one was very red at birth and covered with thick hair like a fur coat. So they named him Esau.* – Genesis 25:25 NLT

Not exactly a flattering description. And it doesn't appear that Moses was using hyperbole in describing the baby's appearance, because Isaac and Rebekah named him Esau, which means "hairy one."

And when the second baby appeared, hanging on to one of Esau's hairy heels, they named him, Jacob, which means "God will protect." But in Hebrew, Jacob sounds like the word for "heel." So, Jacob would earn the nickname of "heel-grabber."

With the births of these two boys, the scene is set for the next phase of the story. And Moses fast-forwards past the early days of their lives and straight to their adulthood. And the differences between the two young men become increasingly more pronounced with time. Esau became an outdoorsman and a hunter, while Jacob was more of a homebody. They displayed different temperaments and dispositions. Over time, they looked and acted less and less like siblings. No one would have ever guessed that they were twins. And even their relationships with their parents reveal a growing familial conflict brewing.

*Isaac loved Esau because he enjoyed eating the wild game Esau brought home, but Rebekah loved Jacob.* – Genesis 25:28 NLT

The stage is set. God has established the next set of players in His grand drama and the story is about to take yet another dramatic and decisive turn. And as the events unfold, the readers of this story will echo the words of Rebekah: "Why is this happening?"

## Hunger for all the Wrong Things

<sup>29</sup> Once when Jacob was cooking stew, Esau came in from the field, and he was exhausted.

<sup>30</sup> And Esau said to Jacob, “Let me eat some of that red stew, for I am exhausted!” (Therefore his name was called Edom.) <sup>31</sup> Jacob said, “Sell me your birthright now.” <sup>32</sup> Esau said, “I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me?” <sup>33</sup> Jacob said, “Swear to me now.” So he swore to him and sold his birthright to Jacob. <sup>34</sup> Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew, and he ate and drank and rose and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright.

<sup>1</sup> Now there was a famine in the land, besides the former famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went to Gerar to Abimelech king of the Philistines. <sup>2</sup> And the Lord appeared to him and said, “Do not go down to Egypt; dwell in the land of which I shall tell you. <sup>3</sup> Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you and will bless you, for to you and to your offspring I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath that I swore to Abraham your father. <sup>4</sup> I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and will give to your offspring all these lands. And in your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed,<sup>5</sup> because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws.” – Genesis 25:29-26:5 ESV



Esau and Jacob all the stories of his past, including God's promise to give all the land of Canaan to his descendants as their inheritance.

For Abraham, the normal joy of seeing his grandsons born was coupled with the extreme excitement of knowing that the promise of God was going to be fulfilled. His son had been blessed with sons, and the line of Abraham was slowly expanding. But fortunately for Abraham, he died before he could witness the strife that took place within his own household. During his lifetime, he had been forced to send away Ishmael and the six sons born to him through Keturah. But little did he know that his two grandsons would end up alienated and separated for years. And it would be in direct fulfillment of the words spoken by God to Rebekah during her pregnancy.

According to Moses' narrative timeline, Isaac was 60-years-old when his twin sons were born. If, as Moses records, Abraham was 100-years-old when Isaac was born, and he died at the age of 175, that means he would have had 15 years to watch his grandsons grow. It seems likely that Abraham and his second wife, Keturah, lived with Isaac in Beer-lahai-roi, which would have given him time to tell

*“Two nations are in your womb,  
and two peoples from within you shall be divided;  
the one shall be stronger than the other,  
the older shall serve the younger.” – Genesis 25:23 ESV*

The two boys, while twins, could not have been any different. For nine months, they had shared the same womb, but when they were born, their appearance and temperaments were visibly apparent. Even in the womb, the two boys “struggled together” (Genesis 25:22). And that struggle seemed to intensify as they grew older.

And the day came when the conflict between these two siblings reached a boiling point. Moses relates an occasion when Esau arrived home after a long day of hunting. Evidently, it had been an unsuccessful trip and he was famished. When he walked into the tent he shared with his brother, Esau demanded to have a portion of the stew Jacob was eating. One can almost sense that there might have been a pattern of bullying between these two young men. It seems that Esau, the older and stronger brother, seems quite comfortable bossing his younger brother around. But this time, Jacob decided to take advantage of the situation. And it appears that he had been looking for this opportunity for some time.

It's important to recall how Moses described an unhealthy rift that had developed in Isaac's household, not just between the two boys but between their parents. Moses states that “Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his game, but Rebekah loved Jacob” (Genesis 25:28 ESV). In a sense, the two parents had chosen sides, and this was going to cause a further fracturing of the relationship between the two sons.

There is little doubt that Rebekah had remembered the words that God had spoken: “the one shall be stronger than the other, the older shall serve the younger” (Genesis 25:23 ESV). And, as she watched the two boys grow, she probably bristled as she watched the older, stronger Esau pushing around her more delicate and refined Jacob. And it seems likely that somewhere along the way she had shared with Jacob the words that God had spoken. So, when Esau demanded a portion of his stew, Jacob decided to use his brother's impulsiveness and unbridled physical appetites against him. Jacob craftily offered Esau a deal he couldn't refuse.

*“All right,” Jacob replied, “but trade me your rights as the firstborn son.” – Genesis 25:31 ESV*

To any reasonable person, this would appear to be a ludicrous and unreasonable offer. But Jacob knew his brother well. For years he had witnessed Esau's tendency to allow his physical appetites to control him. Jacob knew that Esau would let his stomach override his brain. It seems that Esau suffered from what John calls a love affair with the world. Something he describes as “a craving for physical pleasure, a craving for everything we see, and pride in our achievements and possessions” (1 John 2:16 NLT).

Esau's impulsive and ill-reasoned decision is clear for all to see.

*“Look, I’m dying of starvation!” said Esau. “What good is my birthright to me now?” – Genesis 25:32 NLT*

He overexaggerates the “threat” to his life and, in doing so, he undervalues his birthright. So, what was it that Esau so flippantly traded away? The birthright was reserved for the firstborn son and came with the promise that he would one day become the head of the household and inherit his father’s estate. According to Deuteronomy 21:17, the birthright guaranteed the oldest son a double portion of whatever the father left behind. Driven by his love affair with food and penchant for satisfying his physical appetites, Esau made an unwise decision. And the author of Hebrews declares that what Esau did was ultimately immoral and godless.

*Make sure that no one is immoral or godless like Esau, who traded his birthright as the firstborn son for a single meal. You know that afterward, when he wanted his father’s blessing, he was rejected. It was too late for repentance, even though he begged with bitter tears. – Hebrews 12:16-17 NLT*

But what Jacob did was no better. He willingly took advantage of his brother’s weakness and deceived him. Before handing over the bowl of stew, Jacob forced Esau to swear an oath concerning the birthright, which Esau willingly did. And then, Esau consumed the stew and “despised his birthright” (Genesis 25:34 ESV).

It’s interesting to note that as chapter 25 ends, Esau has a full stomach but an empty future. And as the next chapter opens, Moses describes yet another “famine in the land” of Canaan (Genesis 26:1). This is the second famine to have struck the land God had promised to Abraham. During the first one, Abraham had made the fateful decision to seek refuge in the land of Egypt. That is where he had convinced Sarah to introduce herself as his sister instead of his wife. And that little white lie resulted in Sarah becoming a concubine in Pharaoh’s harem. It took a divine intervention to rescue and restore Sarah to Abraham’s side. So, this time, God warns Isaac to avoid going down to Egypt. Instead, Isaac is to remain in Canaan.

*“Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you and will bless you, for to you and to your offspring I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath that I swore to Abraham your father.” – Genesis 26:3 ESV*

Isaac was to stay right where he was, despite the famine. And God reminds Isaac that the land was his birthright. What God had promised to Abraham was now his – by right. And no famine was going to prevent God from fulfilling His promise. The close proximity of this story with Esau’s selling of his birthright is intentional. Esau, driven by hunger, made an immoral and ungodly decision. He was motivated by his physical senses rather than a devotion to God. He despised his birthright by trading it away for a meal. And God did not want Isaac to do the same thing. Running to Egypt might temporarily put bread on the table, but it would result in Isaac despising his birthright. The famine was not to be viewed as a setback but as an opportunity to see God work.

Esau had traded away his birthright for a single meal of stew. His hunger would eventually return, and he would come to recognize that he had squandered away his inheritance for nothing. Esau's famished condition is meant to coincide with the famine that Isaac faced. Esau could have rejected his brother's deceitful offer, but he didn't. Now, Isaac was going to have to reject the temptation to seek temporary relief in Egypt and trust God instead. Would he value his birthright and remain in Canaan? Time will tell.

