

The Book of Beginnings

Genesis 1:1

Introduction

Today we were going to begin a study that will take us through the Bible, book by book. I can almost hear a sigh of, “Uh oh. Boy, this sounds kind of long.”

I will warn you, I do not know how long this will take. However, I did read that a pastor I admire, who has been preaching for twenty-five years, did the same thing and took seventeen years. Now I hear a real sigh!

We will not spend seventeen years in the same book, if it does take that long. I imagine this is a commitment that may take from five to seven years. It is something that I have personally struggled with and believe God wants me to do.

Why should we attempt to study the entire Bible?

This morning we are going to begin by laying a foundation as to the reason we are about to embark on this kind of journey. Let me give a couple of reasons why we are going to study the Bible in this way.

The Bible is entirely true

1. The first reason that we are going to study the entire Bible is because the Bible is entirely true.

There is no doubt that in our American society in the last ten to twenty years, there has been a battle raging as to whether or not the Bible is entirely true. If you have assumed that I believe the Bible is entirely true, you have assumed correctly. And because we do believe that all of the Bible is the word of God; all of

it is true; all of it is without error, we will begin a study of its entirety.

Reasons the Bible is entirely true

Now, there are several reasons why I believe that the Bible is entirely true. Let me give them to you.

Fulfilled prophecy

- The first one is fulfilled prophecy.

What does the Bible say about itself? If I were asked today, the primary reason I consider the Bible to be true, I would suggest immediately – the fulfilled prophecies of scripture.

We already know from previous studies that there are at least three hundred prophecies alone that prophesy the coming of Jesus Christ – His birth, His life, His death, His resurrection, and His ascension. Three hundred prophecies have already come true. They were written, of course, before the time of the events, so we consider them prophetic. More than one quarter of the Bible, when it was written, was prophetic.

Now, we all pick on weathermen. Sometimes they predict that it is going to rain and instead, it is sunny. We are happy then. Sometimes they say it will be sunny and instead, it rains. We are not happy then.

The Old Testament criteria for a prophet, however, was that he had to always be correct – one hundred percent of the time. In fact, the Old Testament records in the book of Deuteronomy that if a prophet was ever wrong, he was assumed to be a false prophet and was taken out of the city and stoned.

Now I am not suggesting we do that to the local weatherman, but you need to understand that the people would not place any credibility upon the prophet unless he was always correct.

There was also a certain thing that the prophets had to do. If they declared themselves to be a prophet of God, they first had to prophesy something that was to happen in the near future in their city and among their people. If that prophecy came true, then the people would trust them for a prophetic event to take place in the years to come.

For instance, Micaiah, a prophet we are told of in I Kings, chapter 22, told King Ahab that if he went to battle as he planned, he would not only lose the battle, but he would lose his life. Ahab's false prophets told him another story – that if he went to battle, he would win. And of course, Ahab being the humble man that he was, decided to believe the false prophets. He had Micaiah thrown in jail, telling the guardians to give him only bread and water until he returned from battle safely and victoriously. Micaiah's words, in verse 28, were,

. . . If you indeed return safely the Lord has not spoken by me. . . .

We know from the Old Testament recordings, that Ahab indeed lost the battle. The scripture says not only did he lose the battle, but as the battle was nearing an end, an enemy soldier took an arrow from his quiver and shot it at random into the air. It had Ahab's name on it. So, as the battle was coming to a close, this soldier at random; that is, "I have one arrow left, so why not?" just plunged that arrow into his bow and shot it. It finds Ahab and kills him.

We know then that the prophet Micaiah was a prophet of God.

Today, there is the question, and in fact, I have been asked this more than any other, "Are there prophets living today? Are there people receiving revelation today?"

Turn in your Bible for a brief answer to this question, before going on to another passage. Look at Hebrews, chapter 1, verses 1 and 2. It is as clear as on the nose on your face that there is no such thing as a prophet living today and receiving revelations from God, whether it is one who claims to know Christ or one from another religious belief system, because Hebrews writes,

God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers through the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days . . .

(Did you notice the phrase, "in these last days"? The prophets are past tense, but the "in these last days" is in the present tense. So, how has He spoken to us?),

. . . has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.

So, if someone suggests that there are prophets today, they are in opposition to the clear writing of scripture – that the prophets are past tense and that in the present tense, we have the living word and the written word of Jesus Christ. That is the revelation from God to us.

Ladies and gentlemen, may I suggest to you that if God would break the sound barrier and speak today, He would repeat something that He has already said. One of the reasons I think the Bible is entirely true is because of fulfilled prophecies.

Its Preservation

- Secondly, I think the Bible is entirely true because of its preservation.

This is an objective proof, but it is marvelous. Jeremiah tells us of one occasion when the king was handed a copy of the Old Testament writings and he took a knife, cut it into pieces, and threw it into the fire (Jeremiah 36). That attitude has come down through the centuries and even today, men outlaw Bibles from our schools, they attack and would outlaw the Bible from our courts, they attack and would outlaw the name of God from every institution in our land. They are still attacking this Book and yet, God miraculously continues to preserve His word.

I have in my library, a copy of two ancient manuscripts that go back to the time of John the apostle. There is no one who would question the writings of Homer and yet, you have to go more than a thousand years past the time of Homer before you find a manuscript of his writings. God's word goes all the way back to the time of the apostles. And from that time to this, God has miraculously preserved it. Although men have burned thousands of copies; although men have outlawed it; although men have tried to stamp it out, God has preserved His word.

Before we leave this point, may I suggest to you that Satan has another strategy for America. It is not stamping it out, it is flooding the market with something that is legal. In that way, you and I will take it for granted and read it as little as someone who does not own a copy. However, the word of God has been preserved.

I love the story of Voltaire, who was an atheist. He once bragged, “You have seen what a little fellow by the name of Paul has done for Christianity, now I will show you what a Frenchman will do to destroy Christianity.” Yet, to this very day, the Geneva Bible Printing Society has as its headquarters, Voltaire’s own home! They print Bibles in his former living room. God preserves His word.

Transformed lives

- The third thing that proves to me that the Bible is entirely true is the evidence of transformed lives. The Bible is the only book that can turn a sinner into a saint.

This past week, someone brought a book into the office of stories about men and poems they had written. I began paging through the book and found a story I remembered reading before. It was a story about John Newton.

John Newton was born in London in 1725. His father was a sea captain and his mother was a devout believer. His mother had an illness that she knew would take her life soon, so she invested every spare moment teaching her young son John God’s word. When John was seven, she in fact, died, and he became a cabin boy aboard a sailing vessel.

John Newton began a life of terrible sin that would one day see him captain of a slave ship. He was a drunken sinner, and in fact, his crew considered him nothing more than an animal. That was exemplified on one occasion when John Newton fell overboard. His crew did not even let down a boat to rescue him, but instead, took a whaling harpoon and threw it at him. It caught him in the hip and they pulled him back on board as they would a large fish.

John Newton limped the rest of the days of his life, but the grace of God gripped his heart. He one day, came to Christ, remembering the words of his mother from Ephesians, chapter 2, verse 8a,

For by grace you have been saved through faith . . .

As an act of appreciation and gratitude to his Lord, he would write the words that we sing so often,

Amazing grace! How sweet the sound,

That saved a wretch like me;

I once was lost, but now I’m found,

Was blind, but now I see.

One verse is no longer in our hymn books, but was in the original poem written by John Newton. I like it because it has a direct relation to the transforming power of God’s word. It says,

The Lord has promised good to me,

His word my hope secures;

He willed my shield and portion be,

As long as life endures.

The Bible can turn a sinner into a saint. The greatest illustration of that is not John Newton, but you. Is God’s word part of your life?

Archeological proof

- Let me suggest a fourth and final proof that the Bible is in fact, entirely true. One of the most beautiful proofs is archeology.

Now, this is not a proof to a nonbeliever, but it is an assurance to those who already believe. The reason for that is because there is only one way that you will ever come to the point where you believe that the Bible is God’s book, and that is by faith. But once you have that faith, then logic can impose and you can see all the reasons that men without faith are blind to.

I could preach on this archeological proof for a long time, but I will give just a couple of illustrations.

The first illustration is the city of Pithom that was recently uncovered. It was built by Rameses II, or actually by the Hebrew slaves during the reign of Rameses II. This was a period in their captivity known as hard labor. When this city was uncovered, it was discovered that the homes were made of sun baked bricks – some of which had straw in them, while some did not. In other words, this find displayed exactly what we find described in the book of Exodus, chapter 5, when the Hebrew slaves were commanded to make bricks without straw.

The Old Testament scriptures also speak of another city that we call Petra. This city was one that many liberals and infidels had longed mocked. The critics scoffed and asked, “Where is your city Petra

that the Bible mentions?” Then one day, archeologists discovered a city built into a mountain of stone, and it was as if gigantic mountains watched over it, as stone guards. It was a city built into solid rock, just as the Bible declared. When it was finally discovered, the archaeologists found within that stone tomb, a city with homes, theaters, temples, places of business, and a main street six miles long.

There is no need to be afraid of the archaeologist’s spade. They have done nothing but substantiate the words of scripture and declared that the Bible is entirely true.

The Bible is entirely profitable

2. Let me give a second reason that we study God’s word in its entirety – not only because it is entirely true, but because it is entirely profitable.

The Bible is the primary source for equipping the believer

Turn to II Timothy, chapter 3. Let us look at several passages that declare this to every believer. In verses 14 through 17, we will notice four things that the word does that make it profitable to the believer.

Look at verses 14 and 15. Paul writes to Timothy, his son in the faith,

You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

Then, Paul declares to him a truth about the word, in verse 16a.

All scripture is inspired by God . . .

The word “inspiration” means, “the breath of God”. So this literally means that God breathed through the author or the human instrument. It was the wind or breath of God. In fact, we find this same original word used in the book of Acts, when it talks about the wind blowing into the sails of a vessel. It is that same thought of the wind or the breath of God blowing through the author; the human instrument. It is God directing him to write exactly what we find here. All scripture then, is breathed by God.

Four things scripture is profitable for

Continue to verse 16b,

. . . and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;

All scripture is also profitable for four things. Let us briefly look at them.

Teaching or doctrine

- First it is profitable for teaching or doctrine, as your translation may read.

Doctrine is what you believe. Doctrine tells you how to think.

I have frequently heard, and believed until recent years, that we know enough about the Bible, we just do not apply enough of the Bible. I now reject that statement because I believe there is a famine in the land as to what the Bible teaches. We do not know enough about the Bible. And the Bible is profitable for doctrinal function; for truth.

Reproof or rebuke

- Secondly, the Bible is not only profitable for teaching or doctrine, but also for reproof or rebuke.

This tells you where you are wrong. Doctrine tells you what to think or how to believe; reproof tells you where you are wrong.

Correction

- Thirdly, Paul goes on to tell us that the Bible is also profitable for correction.

This tells you what is right.

Training in righteousness

- Finally, the Bible is profitable for training and righteousness.

This tells you how to do what is right.

Continue to verse 17.

so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

I think the main part of this scripture is that the Bible is the primary source for equipping the believer. Without it you stand naked against the attack of the

evil one in the world. It is this Bible that will equip you. It is profitable.

The Bible is the primary assurance for a credible testimony

Now turn to II Timothy, chapter 2. This gives us another thought about the profitability of the word of God. Let us read verse 15.

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling [or rightly dividing] the word of truth.

I heard one man say that this verse is the “bottom line” of Christianity. The bottom line is found in two questions, which are:

- Am I pleasing to Jesus Christ? We are to be a workman who is pleasing to God.
- Is my life measuring up to the standard of scripture? We are to be studying God’s word in such a way that we are not ashamed. In fact, the literal translation of verse 15 could be, “a workman whose work is never a disgrace”. That is the idea.

I think the main idea in this passage is that with the word as the primary assurance, there will be a creditability in your testimony. Without the study of scripture, your walk will never match up, as they say, to your talk.

I read a poem that says the gospel is written a chapter a day by the deeds that you do and the words that you say. Men read what you say whether faithless or true. What is the gospel according to you?

The only way the gospel will have creditability is if we are studying this book, the Bible.

The Bible is the primary guarantee for spiritual maturity

Turn to Hebrews, chapter 5. Here we are told that the Bible is the primary guarantee to spiritual maturity.

Look at verse 11.

Concerning him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.

There was a problem with this church – a hearing problem. It was a spiritual hearing problem. They

had to have things repeated over and over again. And as a result, he compares them to a child.

Continue to verses 12 and 13.

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. But solid food is for the mature, . . .

(Who are the mature?),

. . . who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.

This is saying that spiritual maturity is not simply learning about this book, but it is practicing this book. The spiritually mature individual is one who begins to live what he has learned. I think the only way we can have the guarantee that we will in fact, live what is learned, which is spiritual maturity, comes from this book, the Bible.

The Bible is the primary method for spiritual growth

Let me add one other passage that continues this same thought and gives the main idea that the Bible is the primary method for spiritual growth. Turn to I Peter, chapter 2.

Look at verses 1 and 2.

Therefore, putting aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation,

Why does God want you and I to study the Bible? For us to become smarter? Absolutely not. He wants us to study the Bible so that we can become transformed; so that we may grow up.

The implication in these verses is that it is possible to grow old in the Lord, without growing up in the Lord. I fear that there are many believers who are five, ten, fifteen, and twenty years old in the Lord, but are still in the nursery.

My friends, without this book, we stay in the crib; without understanding the words of scripture, we become or remain an infant. Someone always has to come along and burp us or change our diapers. Why?

Because we have long refused to allow this book to be part of our lives and to transform and renew our minds.

So, the Bible is the primary method for spiritual growth.

I would suggest to you not to pray anymore that God will help you grow, but to pray that God will give you diligence to study the word. When you do, you will grow.

Why do we study the Bible? Because the Bible is entirely true and because the Bible is entirely profitable. That gives us the foundation for the reason that I think we should begin at the beginning.

Exposition

Turn to Genesis, chapter 1. Today, we are going to take a few moments to introduce the first verse and then, in our next discussion, we will take a more detailed survey of the six days of creation.

Verse 1 of Genesis 1 stands by itself. It should – it is a foundational verse. Look at that verse.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

Let us dissect these words for the sake of study. We will look at the words individually and then, put them together into one unit.

In the beginning

- The first words are, “In the beginning . . .”. This could be translated literally as, “In the beginning of things”. In other words, before there was anything other than God – this is when He began.

Now I have got to admit to you, ladies and gentlemen, in my study, I so often scratch my head. It would have seemed so much better if God had written one hundred words instead of the ten that we have in our English translation. There are seven words in the original Hebrew language. We might think, “Lord, it would have been so much easier if You had just written a book on verse 1 and told us all of the details.” But He did not do that. Perhaps that is what the writer of Hebrews meant when he said in chapter 11, verse 3a,

By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God . . .

Whether there are ten words or a thousand, believing it is still a matter of faith. Questions will

never be completely answered and understood until we get to heaven and then, it will take all of eternity before we truly comprehend.

God

- The next word is, “In the beginning God . . .”. The original Hebrew word is the word “Elohim,” which is a beautiful, powerful name of God.

The word “Elohim” means, “God of Power”. This name will appear many times in the Old Testament. It is rightly used in this verse because this act of miraculously creating the worlds is an act of great power. So, when the writer seeks to express who this individual is; when God would express Himself through the writer, He chooses the name “Elohim,” or “the God of Power”. This name always pulls a response from us of trust and awe.

As I read, “In the beginning God . . .”, and read it and read it, it became clear to me again that things are left out. There is no proof for the existence of God in Genesis, chapter 1, verse 1. There is no argument, and in fact, the Bible is silent when it comes to arguing the proof of existence.

Why? I think we are given a clue as to why in the only verse that even remotely mentions this. Look at Psalm, chapter 14, verse 1,

The fool has said in his heart, “There is no God.”

In other words, it is not going to be discussed because it is the fool who does not believe that there is a God.

In Genesis, chapter 1, verse 1, it is a simple statement, not a deduction; it is a declaration, not an explanation; it is revelation. He is simply saying, “In the beginning God . . .”. We can take it or leave it; believe it or not believe it. This is a fundamental statement that needs no proof.

When we study the book of Romans, we will discover in chapter 1 that every man and every woman that has ever lived is without an excuse. Why? Because written on the heart of every human being is the fact that there is a God. In fact, if you go to some remote part of Africa and find some tribe in a jungle that has never before been discovered, guess what you would find them doing? Worshiping something. A missionary does not go to the field to tell people there

is a God, he goes to the field to tell them how to get to the true God.

So, He merely states, “In the beginning God . . .”.

Created

- Notice the next word, “In the beginning God created . . .”. The word in Hebrew is “bara,” which means, “created out of nothing”.

This is not a Hebrew word that means to form or to fashion, but one that means, “to create out of nothing”. God did not form something that already existed; He did not pattern after something already in existence, God created out of nothing, planet earth and the heavens.

The heavens and the earth

- The verse then says, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” “The heavens” could be translated as “space,” and “the earth” as a little reference to “this planet” or to “matter”.

So, in the first verse of Genesis, chapter 1, we find that God created space, matter, and time. “In the beginning” – time; “God created the heavens” – space; “and the earth” – matter.

No scientist could ever improve on Genesis, chapter 1, verse 1. If they by faith believe it, then they have the logical answer of the creation of everything that ever has been.

Oh, I know that scientists scrap for theories, and that even today, there is the theory of evolution. In fact, I read of one scientist who said that in the space of twenty or thirty years, that particular theory will be replaced by another.

Theories have always existed. The theory of evolution just happens to be one for our generation; one for our time. Theories of the origins of the earth and of space have changed through time because after thorough investigation, they have been shown to be untrue.

An unbeliever might suggest that this view of Genesis, chapter 1, verse 1, is narrow and there is no room for anything other than that God created the heavens and earth. I would say, “Yes, it is narrow. All truth is narrow. What would you think of a mathematician who said, ‘I am no good at

mathematics for I am liberal and open minded and $2 + 2$ could equal 3.999.’?”

You would think they were foolish, for $2 + 2$ will always equal 4. Never did a math teacher, including mine, give any credit for any answer that was only close to the correct one. It had to be dead on.

The truth of the scripture is very narrow, my friends. In the days of Noah, there was salvation and there was only one way. You were either in the ark or you were out of the ark. In the days of Moses, deliverance came only one way. You either had the blood on the door post or you did not have the blood on the door post. Today, the scripture tells us that if you believe in the Son of God, you will have eternal life; if you do not, you will have the wrath of God upon you. It is that narrow; it is that simple; it is that plain.

May I suggest to you that this verse, Genesis, chapter 1, verse 1, provides a foundation upon which every other verse in the Bible rests. If you can believe, ladies and gentlemen, the first ten words of scripture,

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

. . . then you will have no problem believing eleven other words in II Corinthians, chapter 5, verse 17a,

Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature . . .

If you can believe,

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

. . . then you can believe John, chapter 3, verse 16, that,

. . . God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

If you by faith can believe these first ten words, then you can believe all of scripture.

Application

Let me apply this foundation of study in three ways.

Preaching/teaching the Bible is not voluntary, it is imperative

1. First, I think and I hope it is obvious that preaching or teaching the Bible is not voluntary, it is imperative.

Let me suggest to you, ladies and gentlemen, that we are not to preach *about* the Bible. We live in a generation that has literally sapped the vitality out of the Christian world because pulpits are filled with men who preach about the Bible.

One of the things that I fear, is preaching something other than the very words of scripture. I had a professor in college who told us on one occasion, that his greatest fear was preaching error.

One of the questions I believe you should ask yourself as a Sunday school teacher, or as a preacher, or as a teacher is, “Did I preach/teach the word?”

Paul told Timothy, in II Timothy, chapter 4, verses 1 and 2, to preach the word – and there is an exclamation point after that in the original. It is imperative.

Studying the Bible is not optional, it is essential

2. Secondly, studying the Bible is not optional, it is essential.

If it is the only method for spiritual growth, it is the only guarantee for spiritual credibility. If it is the only promise or hope of spiritual maturity, this is all we have. The question is not “Should I study it?” but “How can I afford not to?”

Obedying the Bible is not suggested, it is demanded

3. Obedying the Bible is not suggested, it is demanded.

A recent archeological find in the biblical city of Heshbon (Joshua 21:39), presents an ironic twist – sixty-two pounds of cut up silver jewelry was discovered stored in five earthen jars. Even more significant is that this discovery was not found in some mount in the middle of nowhere, but eighteen inches under the earthen floor of a home that had been lived in by individuals over the past three centuries. There were people who had these valuable things within their grasp. You can almost imagine the reaction of someone who discovered that after they had moved out. They would probably say something like, “Oh, if I had only known! I would have dug down and gotten it for myself.”

My friends, I submit to you that we have in front of us, a treasure house filled with precious gems. I would encourage you to bring your Bible with you when you come to church on Sunday. And I would suggest that we are far more willing to do that than we are to walk across the living room floor and pick it up during the week. My friend did you dust your Bible off when you came to church this morning? Is the word at work in your life? Is this Book having a transforming power and a part in your daily existence?

The challenging thing is that when I get out of sorts; when my life gets out of balance, it is directly traceable to the fact that I either do not know what the word says, or I am not obeying what I know what the word says.

So, we begin a journey. I would suggest that you bring your Bible every Sunday as we begin studies of both the Old Testament and the New Testament. What a joy it will be to study the words of God.

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And God Said . . .

Genesis 1:1-23

Introduction

It is against the first few chapters of Genesis that Satan has launched his fiercest attack. And rightly so, because, as I suggested in our last discussion, if a person can believe the first two chapters of Genesis, he can believe all of scripture.

If a person can believe by faith that God created the heavens and the earth, as we are told in the first chapter of Genesis, he then by faith, can believe in the last few chapters of Revelation, where we are told that God will create a new heaven and a new earth. Genesis provides the basis for such faith.

May I remind you, ladies and gentlemen, that if Genesis, chapter 1, is wrong, then Jesus, who confirmed this record, and the prophets, who declared this record, and the apostles, who continued to teach this record are all pathological liars. And as well, our faith has become mere delusion.

All that we believe, men and women, hangs in the balance of Genesis, chapters 1 and 2. And Satan knows that full well. I think that is why he has kept up his attack using mirages and theories against these first two chapters in the beginning of the Bible.

Let me read a few theories. And, by the way, I want you to understand that theories are not new – they have been around as long as man, as you will soon learn.

In 1808, there were catalogued at least eighty theories of man's origin. There were theories that we came from seaweed; theories that we come from ape; and more recently, the theory propounded by a scientist that we evolved from garbage left on this earth by some prehistoric intelligence. Perhaps that is

why my kids always mess up their rooms – they inherited that from the garbage dump they evolved from!

After nearly two hundred years, scientists are now openly admitting their frustration. One Swedish botanist by the name of Dr. Herbert Nilsson, who is an evolutionist and not a believer, wrote these words,

My attempts to demonstrate evolution by experiment carried on for more than forty years have completely failed. It may be firmly maintained that it is not possible to find nor construct new classes (species). Deficiencies are real. They will never be filled. The idea of an evolution rests on pure belief.

You are lead to believe that this theory is based on fact and that Christian beliefs are based on mere faith, but both are based on faith.

The Texas Board of Education recently wrote an article, and I will quote David Hogg who said the following,

Teachers of undergraduate students; that is, junior and senior high, elementary and on up through college. Teachers are urged to stop brainwashing their students. You have legal and grave responsibility, teachers, to be truthful and honest and to fulfill your responsibility by presenting students with the facts that evolution is unproven. It is impossible that the universal natural laws of dynamics reversed themselves to accommodate the theory of evolution.

Now, in case your memory of science is like mine, let me remind you of something that you may have

learned and I was supposed to have learned. I learned it best this past week by review. One of the laws basically states that things go from good to bad. In other words, things begin with intelligence and become dumb; things begin strong and become weak. For example, look at a building; look at an oil painting; look at the human body. The evolutionist would declare that those laws were reversed so that some amoeba floating in some murky puddle decided to become more intelligent until it finally reached its peak of intelligence, and then the laws began digressing. No one would believe that. As if some amoeba wanted to become more intelligent.

An article in *Life* magazine concerning the origin of life said that at some indeterminate point – some say two billion years ago, while others say a billion and a half (they play with millions of years like we play with our budget!), something took form that science cannot specify. All that can be said is that through some agency, certain molecules acquired the ability to duplicate themselves.

Imagine that, a giant molecule one day said, “Hey, I think I’ll make another one of me.”

Poof! There was another molecule.

That is foolish. That is like putting a rooster in a hen house all by himself and saying, “Let’s wait a million years and we will get some eggs. We just need to wait and be patient.”

No one would believe that.

Let me read a recent article from UCLA at Berkeley that would fit the statement that I read by one scientist who said, “The data we have today fits the creation model better than the evolutionary model.”

The article said,

Biochemists have concluded by their study of mitochondria DNA that if family trees were charted indefinitely backward, they would ultimately converge on a small group of ancients who were ancestors of us all.

In other words, if we went back far enough, we would go back to one family. Boy, that is unique, isn’t it?

The article continued to say that they think a single female is an ancestor of everyone on earth today. Guess what they have nicknamed her? Eve.

Man searches for his origins; the world wants a beginning, and they search. What we have, ladies and gentlemen, in Genesis, chapter 1, is the beginning.

Three Reasons for the Creation Account

Now, as we approach this study, we should at least stop for a moment to answer three questions as to why God gave the creation account. Let me give three reasons for the creation account.

To encourage Israel’s faith

1. The first reason for the Genesis creation account is to encourage Israel’s faith.

This God, the God who claims to be their creator, is the same God who lead them into the promised land. And He told them to follow Him and they would conquer it. He had better be a powerful God. Moses declares His phenomenal omnipotence. God is powerful – and it bolsters their faith.

To refute the myths about origins

2. Secondly, this creation account refutes the myths about origins.

As I said, theories are not new. We have the Babylonian creation aspects that have come down through time. We can read that in the time of the Israelites, there were also evolutionary theories. There were theories that men were fallen gods; that somehow God procreated and came up with humanity. There were the myths then, and God wanted to set the record straight. So, He refutes all the myths.

To paint a portrait of God’s character

3. Thirdly, the creation account paints a portrait of God’s character.

Genesis, chapter 1, reveals God’s sovereignty, His power, His relationship to men and the world. In fact, Genesis, chapter 1, refers to God no less than thirty-two times in one chapter.

The Length of Days in the Creation Account

Now, as we study this chapter, let us divide it into two sections. We will study:

- The length of the days of the creation account;

- The activity found in each day of the creation account.

We will begin with the length of the days of the creation account. In Genesis, chapter 1, does the length of a day refer to a literally twenty-four hour solar day? In all of these events, do the days follow one after the other as day follows night and night follow day?

The theorist would suggest that these are not to be taken literally and that the word “day” represents age. So, a day could mean a million years or perhaps, a billion years, meaning a day does not refer to twenty-four hours.

There are many in churches, by the way, who preach that it is possible to have one foot in Genesis and one foot in evolution. It is called “theistic evolution”. This is the belief that God began and then, over a process of millions of years things would evolve.

So, it is very important that we understand whether the creation account “day” means a twenty-four hour day or millions of years for each day, which would allow evolution of all that is recorded in Genesis, chapter 1.

Three proofs for a literal interpretation

Let me give you three reasons why I believe this is literally twenty-four hour days. I might also add, these are days without any gaps.

Each day has an evening and a morning

1. First, each day has an evening and a morning.

Notice this, as you read through Genesis, chapter

1. Look at verse 5b.

. . . And there was evening and there was morning, one day.

Look at verse 8b.

. . . And there was evening and there was morning, a second day.

This is common Hebrew phraseology for a literal solar day. It is even foolish that we would take the time to declare such obvious truth.

Men and women, as we study the Bible, and we are beginning our study through the entire Bible with the book of Genesis, it is clear that God wrote what He meant. If He had not written what He meant, how

would we ever know what He meant? So, it is as simple as reading the account for yourself.

Each day is accompanied by a number

2. Secondly, each day is accompanied by a number.

Notice, as we read the phrase “there was evening and there was morning,” that it was accompanied by a number of the day; such as, “a second day.” Any time and every time we read the word “day,” or “yom” in the Hebrew, it is accompanied by a numerical adjective. It always refers to a literal day – never figurative.

God summarizes all the acts of creation

3. Thirdly, God summarizes all the acts of creation.

Look at two additional passages in Genesis, chapter 2, verses 1 and 2a.

Thus the heavens and the earth were completed, and all their hosts. By the seventh day God completed His work which He had done . . .

Notice the way God summarizes all the acts of creation. Some would say that there is a gap between chapters 1 and 2. I do not believe that as chapter 2, verse 1, says that the heavens and the earth were completed and all their hosts – that is the activity of Genesis chapter 1, verse 1 – and then, by the seventh day, God completed His work.

Look at Exodus, chapter 20, which contains the Ten Commandments. You probably did not realize they are proof of creation as well. Look at verses 9 through 11a.

Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of the Lord your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day . . .

This is conclusive and comprehensive. God did everything that He did in six literal days, and then, He rested on the seventh. It is as clear as scripture.

The Activity of Each Day in the Creation Account

Now let us look at the activity of each day in the creation account.

Day One (Genesis 1:1-5)

1. Day one is defined in verses 1 through 5 of Genesis, chapter 1.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light day, and the darkness He called night. And there was evening and there was morning, one day.

Let me give three things that occurred on the first day.

- God created light. This was not bodies that would give off light or reflect light, but simply light.
- God divided light from darkness. He drew the boundaries and divided light from darkness.
- God named the light day and the darkness night.

I could not help but notice, as I read this chapter, that God not only created objects, things, creatures, and later, mankind, but He also created a vocabulary. The first chapter of Genesis gives us the origin of many words that people use all of the time, whether they believe in creation or not. For example, we might say, "Boy, it is a beautiful day today." or "Tomorrow is Monday morning." or "Is it dark yet?" or "What are we having for supper this evening?" In this chapter, words were created; such as: light, darkness, day, evening, morning, water, heavens, the dry lands, sea, earth, vegetation, seeds, trees, plants, fruits, cattle. Everyone in this world borrows heavily from the Genesis account. In fact, if all of the words from the first few chapters of Genesis were taken out of your vocabulary, you would be linguistically stunted.

Day Two (Genesis 1:6-8)

2. Day two is described in verses 6 through 8.

Then God said, "Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the water from the waters. God made the expanse, and separated the waters which were below the expanse from the waters which were above the expanse; and it was so. God called the expanse heaven. And there were evening and there was morning, a second day.

Now God will create the firmament and He does that by dividing water. By now, all we have is earth covered by water.

This is not the appearance of dry land – that will happen a little later – and there is then a creation of the firmament whereby God creates heaven. This is the first heaven; this is where the birds fly and the clouds float by; this is the expanse. So, there is the water below covering the surface of the earth, the heaven, and then, He creates a body of water above, according to the text, which is a vaporous canopy.

This allowed for two things; two hidden things that God created as well.

- God created the conditions for paradise.

The conditions God created were paradise. The canopy of water above kept all the harmful rays of the sun away. In fact, there is only warmth. Because of this greenhouse effect, the world is a tropical region and the temperatures are constant and warm. There is no need for clothing, and in fact, Adam and Eve did not wear any. After the fall, they would wear clothing not because of the temperatures, but because of lost innocence. This is a world wide fertile region where the grasses would grow and the fruit trees would flourish. It was paradise.

It will one day be paradise again. There will be an absence of seasons and it will be constantly warm. That will mean a whole lot more to us when our winter season soon begins!

- God not only created the conditions for paradise, but He also created the potential for judgment.

When man's rebellion reached its horrible climax, God told Noah to build an ark. Why? Because He was going to flood the earth. This is, of course, after the dry land appeared and mankind is flourishing.

Now, where is God going to get the water to flood the earth? I read this past week, if all of the clouds surrounding this globe were to drop all of the water they carried, and if that water spread evenly around

this globe, it would only be as deep as about one and a half inches. Now where is God going to get enough water so that the it covers the face of the earth to in fact, fifteen cubits above the highest mountain? That is a few gallons of water!

In the Genesis account given in chapter 7, we are told that God nudges the vapor above, collapsing it, and water then deluges planet earth.

This thing that was created by God to allow fertile paradise living will now be that of which He judges planet earth. So He created this planet with the ability to produce and provide enjoyment, but also to destroy and to kill.

There is also another judgment coming. Turn to II Peter, chapter 3. I want you to notice a pattern that God established. II Peter, chapter 3, verse 6, tells us that the first judgment was water. Then verse 7 will tell us that the second judgment will be by fire. Look at verses 3 through 7.

Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts, and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just it was from the beginning of creation." For when they maintain this, it escapes their notice that by the word of God the heavens existed long ago and the earth was formed out of water and by water, through which the world at that time was destroyed, being flooded with water.

(Notice that God used the water He had created to destroy the world. Continue to verse 7.),

But by His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.

How is God going to destroy the present heaven and earth? I think He is going to nudge what He has already created and fire will burn earth to a cinder.

Now, I am considerably out of my field when I deal with scientific or mathematical facts. I did not do well in math and when I got to college, they looked at my records and said, "You need to repeat math."

So, they put me in a college course that we labeled as being for all of the "bone heads". I studied that math and barely squeaked out of there. However, I have been reminded this past week, of studying

several things that will explain why I believe God will destroy the world by fire.

Seventy four percent of the earth is covered with water. Now water is the liquid form of H₂O, and I can remember that. That would be one atom of oxygen and two atoms of hydrogen. Now, what if Christ were to remove His sustaining hand? We know from Colossians, chapter 1, verse 17,

He [Christ] is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.

He holds all things together and that includes molecules and atoms. What if God took His hand away? And what if that simple molecule of water was split so that the hydrogen was split from the oxygen? All waters, all seventy four percent that covers the face of this earth and exists as water vapor in the air would instantly turn to flammable gas. Then, it would only take one little spark somewhere on planet earth and the fire ball would destroy this planet inside and out.

Do you know what I think? I think there is a pattern here. God has created this earth with the ability to provide for life, but He has also preserved it for judgment because of sin.

Day Three (Genesis 1:9-13)

3. Day three is described in verses 9 through 13 of Genesis, chapter 1.

Then God said, "Let the waters below the heavens be gathered into one place, and let the dry land appear"; and it was so. God called the dry land earth, and the gathering of the waters He called seas; and God saw that it was good. Then God said, "Let the earth sprout vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees on the earth bearing fruit after their kind with seed in them"; and it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed after their kind, and trees bearing fruit with seed in them, after their kind; and God saw that it was good. There was evening and there was morning, a third day.

Notice there is no mention of oceans. Perhaps that is a remnant of the flood.

There are two key phrases in this text that I want you to note.

- The first key phrase is "bearing fruit".

I think He is obviously saying that the trees were created in their mature state. When God created anything on planet earth, He created it in its already mature state. When He created man and woman, He created them as mature adults. There was no little baby Adam or little baby Eve – they were adults. When God created or spoke into existence a fruit tree, it was already bearing fruit. This is in the present tense.

I think it is important to note that when God created this planet, it was in a mature state. So, there was an apple tree bearing apples, and there was an orange tree bearing oranges, and there was a peach tree bearing peaches, and there was a money tree . . . just seeing if you are awake and with me! I think that was the tree that God told Eve to stay away from myself, but I could be wrong . . . or at least in trouble!

- The second key phrase is “after their kind”.

The word “kind” is the word “phylum,” which means, “a direct line of descent within a group”. Why is this important? Because He is telling us that a peach tree will always bear peaches, a monkey will always bear monkeys. There is no such thing as a half beast, half man. God created this universe to reproduce “after their kind”.

Day Four (Genesis 1:14-19)

4. Day four is revealed in verses 14 through 19.

Then 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 for lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth; and it was so. God made the two great lights, the greater light to govern the day, and the lesser light to govern the night; He made the stars also. God placed them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth, and to govern the day and the night, and to separate the light from the darkness; and God saw that it was good. There was evening and there was morning, a fourth day.

So, God creates the sun, the moon, and the stars, and they were also created in their mature state. When He created the stars, their reflecting light was already reaching earth.

The evolutionist would declare earth to be an old earth. They would say, “You see that star out there?

We know that to be three million light years away, so it would take three million light years for its rays to reach to planet earth.”

However, if God created everything in its mature state, then when He created the star, He also created the trail of lights so that it was immediately reaching planet earth. So, we could still have, in effect, a young earth.

I think there are reasons other than just to give light that God created the lights. Let me give two reasons.

- The first reason is that the lights give constant illustrations to us.

In the word, Jesus Christ is referred to as the Light of the world. Christians are also lights.

Look at a fascinating passage of the scripture in Philippians, chapter 2, verses 14 and 15. Paul is writing to the church at Philippi and says of the believer,

Do all things without grumbling or disputing; so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world,

This literally could be translated as reflected lights.

- The second reason is that we reflect the light of the Son.

I think the stars and the moon of heaven remind us that we reflect the light of Jesus Christ.

I also think the created lights are constant reminders of the coming paradise. Revelation, chapters 21 and 22, tells us that one day, we will not have need of the sun or of the moon or of the stars to shine because the light of God’s glory and presence will pervade heaven and the new earth. Every time we look up, we can think that one day we will never need them again, because it will be the light of God that will light our world.

Day Five (Genesis 1:20-23)

5. Day five is described in verses 20 through 23 of Genesis, chapter 1.

We will stop after these verses as we will only deal with five days in our discussion today.

Then God said, "Let the waters team with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth in the open expanse of the heavens." God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarmed after their kind, and every winged bird after its kind; and God saw that it was good. God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth." There was evening and there was morning, a fifth day.

These verses provide fantastic illustrations for the believer as well. Look at the bird, which illustrates that God cares for us, as Matthew, chapter 6, tells us. Solomon tells us in the Proverbs to go to the animal kingdom and learn wisdom by their activity.

However, I think we are to learn something else from the animal kingdom. Look at Job, chapter 12, verses 7 through 10. Man speculates about origins; man searches for the beginnings, but Job says,

But now ask the beasts, and let them teach you; and the birds of the heavens, and let them tell you. Or speak to the earth, and let it teach you; and let the fish of the sea declare to you. Who among all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this. In whose hand is the life of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind?

That is really clear, isn't it? If the fish could speak, they would tell you that we were created by the hand of God. If a bird could speak, he would speak to you of God's hand in creating you. If even the animals know, why is man the one that has been given a logical reasoning faculty that declares something else. Even the animals know better than that.

Darwin, in fact, admitted the human eye was so complex that he wondered if he should even believe

his theory of evolution. He could not even figure out the eye, because it was so complex.

John Wesley, writing of God's display of power in creating the world said, "God created the heavens and the earth and He did not even half try."

I have read that people of old wrote three words above their doorways in Latin, "nice dominus grustra," which translated means, "without God, frustration".

Is it any wonder today that man is frustrated in his attempts to discover his origin, when he is doing it without God? Is it any wonder that men, women, and young people are frustrated in trying to find a fulfilling life? Why? Because they are doing it without God.

When I think of evolution, as chapter 1 of Genesis so comparably combats, I think of the tragedy of what this is teaching the young people of this country as to their worth. What kind of value do you have if your ancestor is an amoeba from some murky puddle? What kind of worth do you have if you trace your ancestry far enough back and find your great, great . . . ancestor is an ape? No wonder man is frustrated.

My friend, you learn your value and worth when you discover by faith that you have been created by a loving God who created you in His own image. That is fulfillment.

Application

I will end with only one application as we continue our study of Genesis, chapter 1. The application is, if God is indeed our Creator, He has every right, every ability to be our Savior.

My friends, God is your designer, but He wants to be your redeemer.

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The Climax of Creation

Genesis 2:1-23

Introduction

Genesis, chapter 1, is focused on God's creative acts of creating the universe. And the last few verses of chapter 1 into chapter 2, verses 4-23, focus on God's climactic creative act in creating man and woman.

It is interesting that, as I studied these passages in Genesis, chapters 1 and 2 again, it struck me that the name used for God in chapter 1 is the Hebrew name "Elohim," which is the name that speaks of God's power; His majestic strengths. And, as I mentioned in our last discussion, John Wesley wrote, "God created the heavens and the earth and He did not even half try."

That is so true – for God, with all of His power, snapped everything into being and into existence by His word. The name "Elohim" is used for Him in this text, and it refers to His power.

However, when we read the accounts of God creating man and woman, we are introduced to a new name – the name "Jehovah". Your English translations will probably, in chapter 2, add the word "Lord" to God, so we read, "Lord God".

Two meanings of the name "Jehovah"

Jehovah refers to two things worth noting.

The personal God

1. Jehovah refers to the personal God.

Jehovah speaks to God's loving covenant care for mankind. Isn't it interesting that as He moves to the

account of His creation of man and woman, the name changes. Now the name is not referring to the majestic powerful God, but the loving God, the personal God. You will see Him directly involved in creating man and woman.

The covenant keeping God

2. Jehovah also refers to the covenant keeping God.

This is the name that emphasizes God's covenant with mankind. It is a covenant that is not fragile nor self-centered; it is one that will last forever; it is sacrificing. That is the thought used in this passage, because God created man and woman, knowing they would sin; knowing they would fall. God knew man and woman would need a redeemer. The covenant keeping God still brought them into existence, as if to say, "I will provide a redeemer for you."

Now, at the end of chapter 2, He will bring man and woman together with the same idea. The covenant between man and wife should resemble the same as the covenant of God to man. It is not fragile, it is permanent; it is not self-centered, it is self-sacrificing. We, as man and wife, represent the covenant that Jehovah God has for His creatures. So, there is a name change that means so much.

The triune God created male and female "in Our image"

Now, I want you to notice that there is going to be a change as we read through Genesis, chapter 1. You may remember, as we have been studying through Genesis, chapter 1, that it talks about every thing

being spoken into existence. Repeatedly – in verses 3, 6, 9, 14, and 20 – it says,

Then God said, “Let there be . . .”

However, in verse 26, notice the difference as it says,

Then God said, “Let Us make man . . .”

It is as if the triune God was calling into a conference the fact that They were about to create man.

We know from the New Testament writings that it was actually Jesus Christ and that the words of Christ formed and created the universe and man. He was the person in this triune God that did the creative act.

However, it is interesting that He changes the wording and then, notice the next phrase,

Let Us make man in Our image . . .

This is not a physical image, for God is spirit. He is speaking to the fact that man will be created with a mind, with emotions, with a will, with immortality, just like God. Man is made in the image of God.

Ladies and gentlemen, the reason you are able to laugh is because God can laugh. He created you like Himself, with the ability to laugh. The reason you can cry is because God can weep. He created you in His own image, with the ability to weep. The reason that you decide, love, choose to do all that you do is because you are created like your creator God in His image. You are capable of doing the things that He has given you to do that resemble His own character.

Now notice verse 27,

God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; . . .

(note this and underline it),

. . . male and female He created them.

God created both male and female in His own image. They are both immortal souls. They are not toys; they are not objects, they are immortal beings, both male and female.

Notice also, in this verse, that God strikes a death blow to the unisex idea that there is no difference in males and females. I have been startled at things that I have read that suggest the reason boys act like boys and girls act like girls is because the parents condition them culturally when they are little. Parents always give a little boy a hammer – and regret that they did! They give a little girl a doll. And because of this, parents cause them to act the way they do. This verse

tells us that God created them male, with all the inherent masculine traits, and female, with all the feminine traits.

It has been a real joy for my wife and I to parent both boys and girls. It is fascinating to notice the differences in our children. The boys act a certain way – they are different and yet, they follow the same pattern – usually destructive! They are so much like little boys. Our girls are on an entirely different wavelength. Even at a young age they begin to reveal the feminine qualities inherent in the female nature; inherited from their mother and on back to their mother Eve.

Seeing the differences in our boys and our girls is fascinating. One of the boys will fall down and my one-year-old daughter will rush over and pat him on the head. You can almost hear her saying, “Can I get you anything – milk, juice? Do you want to borrow my pacifier?” She is such a little mother. In fact, what really worries me is that she is beginning to flirt. We are talking about a one-year-old girl! She looks at me and wrinkles up her nose and bats her eyelids, as if she can get her way by doing that with me. She can. Her mother says that she has me wrapped around her finger. That is not true. I am eating out of the palm of her hand, but I am not wrapped around her finger!

The differences are so obvious, even at very young ages. Why is it that way? Because God designed it that way. He made them, male and female.

This also strikes a death blow to the theory that homosexuality can be a satisfying relationship. If a man could satisfy a man, God would have created another man. But He created a woman.

All of the distinctive characteristics that make man and woman so different are part of God’s design. So, do not blur the differences; do not try to blend them together. Exemplify and make much of the differences.

This is an election year in America and I laughed out loud last week as a man told me an election joke. He said that we really do need a woman for President of the United States because they would not spend billions of dollars on nuclear arms. They would shop around until they found them on sale!

We will talk more about the differences and the way they compliment each other in the weeks ahead.

The Forming of Adam (Genesis 2:1-7)

Now notice in chapter 2, verse 7, the creation of man.

Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; . . .

(the immortal soul),

. . . and man became a living being.

Man became a living being, or literally, he became living lives; he would never die. Though the clay carrier of his soul would pass away, his soul would live forever. He is immortal. He will live one day either in hell or in heaven.

The words “dust from the ground” could literally be translated, “a lump of earth”. God literally took a lump of earth and from it, formed man.

The word “formed” is the same precious word used by the prophet Jeremiah as he talks about the potter taking a lump of clay and putting it on the potter’s wheel and forming a vessel. God took infinite care and the nuances of mankind are from the fingers of God, as He created man.

I read this past week that our bodies are actually made up of the same fifteen or sixteen chemical elements that are found in the earth. That is one of the reasons why the soul departs and we go back to the dust of the ground – we are made up of the same chemical elements. In fact, one man wrote that if you boiled man down to those chemical elements, separated them, and sold them on the market, you would get about \$4.50. The next time you and I are prone to be proud, remember the elements in our body are worth a little less than \$5.00 on the market.

Now I spent a lot of time reading this past week and I appreciate that opportunity. Let me give some of the results of a particular book that I read and would encourage you to read. The book is entitled, *Fearfully and Wonderfully Made*. I do not want to take a lot of time reading this to you, but I do not by any means have all of this memorized.

Let me give what I discovered about the human body that is so fascinating. And this is where I want to center our attention today. I want to give us a greater appreciation for the creative act of God in the way that He took the time and care to design us. Let me read a few things about different parts of our bodies.

The body comes equipped with an eternal police force of about fifty billion white cells.

They attack all of the bacterial forms that invade the body. This is an internal thing that takes place every day.

Inside the human eye, there are one hundred seven million cells. Seven million are cones, each loaded to fire off a message to the brain when a photon of light crosses its path. The other one hundred million cells are called rods. They are capable of distinguishing a thousand shades of color. The human brain will receive millions of reports simultaneously from eye cells. The brain absorbs, sorts, and organizes them all to give you an image of what you are looking at.

The normal ear is astounding. It can detect sound frequencies as faintly as one billionth of a centimeter. The vibration is transmitted into your inner ear by three bones. For instance, when a note is struck on the piano, the piston of bones in your inner ear vibrates two hundred fifty six times a second. The brain sorts and records the vibrations that in turn, produce impulses you perceive as someone is striking middle C.

A relatively new study that has exploded the world of genetics is the study of DNA molecules, the strand chemically coiled in a rope like fashion inside each cell. Now we are breaking it down or actually getting inside each individual cell; the nucleus of the cell. Each cell has a specific purpose inside the body, but yet each one contains in each DNA all of the instructions for the bodies one hundred thousand genes. That is, of the DNA inside your body, each one of them has a specific purpose and yet, included in the information each DNA knows is the specific purposes of every DNA in your body. They tell us that the DNA can contain enough instructions to fill six million pages. The DNA is so small that all of the genes in your body could fit into an ice cube. Yet, if the DNA were unwound and joined together end to end, the strand would literally stretch from the earth to the sun and back again four hundred times.

Your bones, though unappreciated at times, are created to withstand enormous wear and tear. A normal person will stalk on

his poor feet nearly three times around the world in a lifetime. It is interesting to know that no engineer has been able to match the simple human bone. They would love to be able to develop a substance as strong and light and efficient as bone. Imagine, it grows continuously, lubricates itself, requires no shutdown time, and repairs itself when damage occurs.

These are only a few facts. We do not have time to get into the miracle of the skin, the senses of touch and taste, or the way that our hand is created. We are, by the way, the only living creature that has the thumb shaped as it is and able to grasp like it does. In fact, Isaac Newton wrote, “If there was no other evidence than the human thumb, I would believe in the existence of God.”

It is interesting that we can make a machine and know, even as the machine is being made and before it is even put to work, that we will have to work out all the “bugs” until it finally works. One engineer was looking at a chart of the anatomy of an individual – at all the nerves, muscles, tendons, and all of the different things that make up the human body – and he was heard to exclaim, “Imagine, when God put it together, it worked the first time!”

Imagine that! There were no “bugs” in God’s creation of the human body – before the fall.

The Planting of Eden (Genesis 2:8-17)

Now notice verses 8 and 9 of Genesis, chapter 2. This is the planting of the garden of Eden.

The Lord God planted a garden toward the east, in Eden; . . .

(the word “Eden” means “delight” – this was paradise),

. . . and there He placed the man whom He had formed. Out of the ground the Lord caused to grow every tree that is pleasing to the sight and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Then, the next few verses will talk about the different rivers, the water, and the location. Some, in fact, think Eden may have been located near the Persian Gulf because of the geographical references to the rivers.

Skip to verse 15.

Then the Lord God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden, to cultivate it and keep it.

The word “garden” is the Hebrew word “gan,” which literally means, “enclosure”. This was paradise – in fact, the planet earth was paradise itself, and yet, within paradise, God created an enclosure; it had boundaries. It was fertile; it was the place where man would spend his life managing, ruling, dominating, enjoying. This was Eden; this was the garden inside of paradise where man and woman were to live.

The importance of two trees

Now we have already read the references to two specific trees. Let me give the importance or the significance of these two trees.

The tree of life is the symbol of immortality

1. First, the tree of life is the symbol of immortality.

This tree is the symbol whereby man and woman could live forever. Now we know that the ability to live forever was directly given from God and yet, He used the tree as the symbol of that. Eating of that fruit would be the means, the method, the vehicle through which we would live forever.

The tree of the knowledge of good and evil is the symbol of choice

2. Secondly, there is another tree called the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and that is the symbol of choice.

Why did God give man and woman choice? Because God did not want robots, even in the garden. He created man and woman with the ability to choose.

Now, in His sovereignty, God knew what the man and woman’s choice would be. Yet, in His wisdom, He gave the ability to choose whether to obey Him or to disobey Him.

God wanted a relationship, even back in the garden with Adam and Eve. A relationship is a two-way street – they would love Him and He would love them.

This tree, of course, was the test and, as you know, after man ate, he was kept from the tree of life.

I always wondered why. I think perhaps I have discovered the answer – because of what it represented. Adam and Eve had eaten of this tree, therefore becoming sinners. If they had then eaten the tree of life, they would have lived forever confined in their wicked state.

One of the blessings that God has given us is death. We will not live forever as sinners. Forgiven as we are, it would be a tragic thing to live forever like we live today. Death will open the gate to heaven where we will be given glorified, perfect bodies and our souls will match the Savior's in its perfection.

So God kept them from that and then, gave them another symbol – the symbol of forgiveness. In the coats that He gave them to wear, the animals died evidently in atonement for their sin; the blood of the animals was shed.

The Sculpturing of Eve (Genesis 2:18-23)

Now notice in verse 18a, God's first statement of displeasure.

Then the Lord God said, . . .

(note God's displeasure for the first time),

. . . "It is not good for man to be alone; . . ."

What struck me about this verse was the fact that man was living in a perfect environment. He has a perfect occupation – one that he loves. He gets up in the morning ready to go; ready to take care of the garden. He has a perfect relationship, as perfect as it can be with God. He communes with God and God sums all of this up and says, "It is not good . . .".

So God, in His perfect timing, plans to create a woman. What I like about God is His timing. He did not rush up to Adam, and say, "Adam, you need a wife. I'm going to create one for you."

Adam would have said, "I need a what? I need a wife? I'm not so sure I do."

Then God, as a perfect matchmaker, sets him up.

Will you notice what God does in the next few verses. Look at verse 19a,

Out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast . . .

Now note that God, in verse 18b, has already decided to make him a mate.

. . . I will make him a helper suitable for him.

He has not told Adam yet. But first, in verses 19b through 20a, He,

. . . formed every beast of the field and every bird of the sky, and brought them to the man, . . .

(obviously in pairs),

. . . to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name. The man gave the names to all the cattle, and to the birds of the sky, and to every beast of the field, . . .

Here is Adam, just naming them off. Here comes two more and he, in his brilliance, notes the characteristics. In fact, the original text gives the implication that he gave them names matching their characteristics. He was brilliant and he is naming all of them. Then, Adam comes to the very end, and almost as if it were his thoughts, in verse 20b,

. . . but for Adam there was not found a helper suitable for him.

In other words, Adam is starting to look now. He has named a few hundred animals and is now on the lookout, "Let's see. There is only one of me and there are two of them."

What is God doing? He is setting him up! He is making Adam come to the point where he realizes he is alone; he does not have the other half. Then, in verses 21 and 22a,

So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that place. The Lord God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, . . .

Now, the word translated "fashioned," in verse 22, "The Lord God fashioned" or "formed," is different than that used when God formed man. This word is a beautiful word that could be translated "sculptured". It is as if God, as any master who would paint a beautiful portrait, knelt over that rib, that flesh and sculptured a beautiful woman – one who would become the counterpart of Adam.

The importance of the rib

We need to answer the question, "Why the rib? Why was it the rib that God took to fashion or sculptor a woman?" Let me give three reasons.

To show the unity of the human race

1. First, to show the unity of the human race.

We all come from Adam. This is a tremendous theological truth that will come out in our study of the book of Romans. Because we are all in and out of and from Adam, we are all sinners; we all have Adam's nature. But the second Adam will come, who is Jesus Christ. And we who are in Him, the second Adam, will be forgiven. So this truth will be revealed later in the New Testament and is a beautiful theological truth.

To guarantee the dignity of woman kind

2. Secondly, to guarantee the dignity of womankind.

Woman is not made from an inferior substance. She is made from the same thing that man is made from. Do not picture in your mind that God just took a bone, a rib, He actually took flesh and blood around that rib. He took a chunk, as it were, and fashioned her in the same substance He had used to create the man.

To illustrate the closest of kinship

3. Thirdly, to illustrate the closest of kinship.

God did not take a bone from the foot, as you may have read or heard, as if man would tread upon her; as if man were above her. God did not take something from his head, as if she was to be superior or above him. God did not take a bone from Adam's hand, as if she was to be a servant of man and do his work. God took a bone from his side, to illustrate the closest of companionship. She would be by his side. She would serve as queen of the garden, of paradise, and Adam would serve as king. We will develop this further in our next discussion.

I love the next part, in verses 22 through 23a,

The Lord God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man. The man said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; . . .

Now just use your imagination in this. I really do not think this was the first thing Adam said. The text does not say this is the first thing Adam said. I think

the first thing that happened was man probably looked at his counterpart and said, "Wow!"

This is the first time man whistled in the history of mankind! What a beautiful lady. And then, I think they probably talked for hours, as if they were long lost best friends. I think what is happening in verse 23 is that the man is introducing her to all of the other creatures. It is as if he says, "Now listen up. "This is now . . .

(in fact, the literal Hebrew can be translated, "This is now *at last* . . .),

" . . . bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh; . . .".
Continue to verse 23b,

. . . she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.

I believe that this was the introduction of woman to everything that God had created.

Application

This is as far as we are going to go in the text today. Let me apply a couple of things that strike me from this chapter.

The garden of Eden – a place where mankind would choose who he would obey

1. The first application is found in the garden of Eden itself. The garden of Eden, men and women, would represent a place where mankind would choose who he would obey – the tempter or the creator.

It reminds me of another garden where Jesus Christ struggled with the will of His Father. We are told in Luke, chapter 22, that He sweat drops as if it was blood. And finally, in verse 42b, He said, in the agony of His soul,

. . . not My will, but Yours be done.

No, we are not in the garden of Eden and we are not in Gethsemane, but ladies and gentlemen, I believe you and I are in a garden, as it were. We are in a place of choosing who we will follow, who we will obey – the tempter or the creator.

The tree – symbol of the choice of eternal healing through Christ or eternal death

2. The garden is not the only thing in this chapter that points to Jesus Christ – a tree does also. A tree has been used throughout

scripture to symbolize some powerful truths.
The tree in the garden represented choice.

Another time, when Moses was in the wilderness, the children of Israel were being very rebellious. We are told in Numbers, chapter 21, that God sent poisonous vipers to bite them. He then told Moses to make a serpent and lift it up on a tree, and whoever would look at the tree would be healed. That represented healing, and those who looked were healed.

Of course I also think of Calvary. I Peter, chapter 2, verse 24, records,

And He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross [tree], so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.

My friend there is a tree in your life as well. You either stand before the tree called Calvary as a forgiven individual or you stand before it as an unrepentant unbeliever. The tree is lifted up today bearing Christ, and it is ours to choose. We may choose to accept Him; to accept that atonement as our own; to take Him as our personal savior.

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God's Design for Marriage

Genesis 2:23-25

Introduction

Turn in your Bible to Genesis, chapters 1 and 2, as we continue our study of this book. We have embarked on a journey that will take us through the Bible, and we are not even going to guess how long it will take. It may take five to seven years. We have started at the beginning, which has been an exciting thing, and I appreciate the response that I have had from you. I see you bringing your Bibles; I see you taking notes, and it thrills my heart to know that you have the desire to study and learn God's Word.

In Genesis, chapter 1, we have discovered the amazing truths of the perfectly designed creation of God – especially in our last discussion, while looking at the human body. We learned that over and over and over again, as God saw what He had made,

... God saw that it was good...

God saw and, "It was good! It was good! It was good! It was very good!" – as He summarized the six days of creation. However, in chapter 2, verse 18a,

Then the Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone..."

Then God says, "But something is not good –and that is that man is alone." And He says, in verse 18b,

... I will make a helper suitable for him.

The name Adam comes from the Hebrew word that means "earth". God created man out of earth. The same chemical elements that make up mankind are in the ground. He then takes a portion of Adam's side and creates, or literally sculpts, a woman. "He will build her" is the literal translation of the Hebrew words.

If your translation reads "a helpmeet," then draw a line between the words "help" and "meet". These are two Hebrew words that could be translated literally, "a helper suitable". They mean, "one who complements; one who fills up the empty spaces of man; one who fits". Note, it is not "one who gives fits," it is "one who is fit to". In fact, the Hebrew, I recently discovered, could literally be translated in this fashion, "one answering back to". But do not take that too literally!

God knew exactly what He was doing when He sculpted into existence the first woman, Eve. He introduces her to man in verse 22 of chapter 2.

The Lord God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man.

And the man caught his breath – that is in between the lines! I think it took him a while before he could speak. In fact, I think perhaps they talked for hours, until finally, as we previously discussed, Adam makes an introduction of this woman to the rest of creation. In verse 23a, He perhaps stands up, quiets the animals, and says, "Look,"

... This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh...

After the word "now," the words "at last!" could be inserted. Adam is literally saying, "This is now, at last, finally, bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh. I now have, at last, a counterpart, one answering to, one who will fill up the void. Flesh of my flesh!"

Adam continues in verse 23b,

... she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.

Principles of the Marriage Relationship

Now, in our discussion today, I want to give some principles relating to the marriage relationship. These are taken from the text and will make the marital relationship firm and enduring. They still apply today and are as powerful and as timely as they were centuries ago. It is interesting that God will move directly into this after introducing Eve to Adam.

The Principle of Consideration

1. Let us call the first principle, the principle of consideration. Look at verse 24a,

For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother . . .

Now understand that God, in this verse, is not speaking in reference to the relationship with the mother and father. In fact, wise is the individual who recognizes when he or she gets married that it is really two worlds merging into one larger one. The relationships of your wife or husband are brought into that marriage and become your relationships. So, at that point, you are involved with uncles and aunts, nieces and nephews, mothers and dads-in-law, brothers and sisters-in-law, perhaps sons and daughters, and all of these are involved in this larger world.

God is not saying to abandon your mother and father, which is a literal translation of the word leave.

He is not saying to abandon them in terms of your relationship with them – that is going to continue. In fact, you are creating relationships with another family; another entire world.

God is also not referring, ladies and gentlemen, to the sense of responsibility. We do not abandon our sense of responsibility toward our father and mother. In fact, Jesus' harshest words were toward the Pharisees who were abandoning their parents in taking care of them in their aged state (Mark 7). They were hoarding their finances so that moms and dads who were unable to take care of themselves were left alone and were in poverty. The Pharisees were saying, "Well, we've dedicated this money to God, so we can't give it away."

Jesus Christ pointed a finger through their façade and said, "If you cannot take care of them, you are not religious. In fact, you don't even know God."

God, in this passage, is not referring to abandoning a relationship or the responsibility. So, what does He mean when He talks of leaving? Let me give what I think He is saying.

God is referring to priority; to the sense of direction. So, a man and a woman leave the nest and create for themselves their own purpose; their own direction. Their marital relationship takes priority over any other relationship. The responsibility to the wife or husband now has priority over every other relationship in existence. No human relationship then, ladies and gentlemen, should have priority over your marital relationship.

This means that you may strike out on a different course than Mom and Dad would want. You may try some things that they may never try. You may go places that they might never go.

I think this verse also involves the parents of those who marry. This is the painful part because this means that fathers will have to suffer the pain of knowing their little daughters are now looking to another man. I get choked up thinking about it. Can you imagine what it will be like? When my little girls marry – forty years from now? They are going to look toward another man for strength and guidance. It is great being first place in their little lives. I love it! But there is going to come a day when they are going to say, "Dad, I want to introduce you to this guy. He now is my life; my world."

He will be unworthy, of course! And, there will come a day when I may hear that they have purchased an automobile that I do not think is a good deal. The temptation for all dads is to just march over there and give them that lecture. You know, the one on Fiscal Responsibility 332. But you have to bite your tongue, because they have to learn.

One difficulty, I have been told, is that many couples live with their parents' values in mind, rather than formulating their own. You may be married and afraid to develop your own direction; your own values, because more than anything in the world, you want to hear Dad say, "You're doing a great job!" and you want to hear Mom say, "I'm pleased with your direction."

Do you know what God says? God says that what your parents say is now secondary. You, as husband and wife, together are to strive to hear *Him* say, "I'm pleased!"

It means, moms, that your son is now going to be cared for by a woman of different tastes. You know he does not like to eat that food, but you had better not tell her – let her find out. You know how he likes to have his shirts washed and pressed, do not dare advise – let that girl find out for herself.

What I am suggesting is that this message of abandonment is not just for the husband and wife – it is also for the parents. And the message is, “Let them go!!” In fact, you will be doing a great service to your young people, if you will allow them to develop their own values, priorities, and direction.

There are several periods in a marriage, I have read and have experienced a few of them, of course, that create a tremendous amount of stress on a marriage. The first few years and the birth of a child, to name a couple. It is in those situations that moms and dads who watch their married kids can really help their direction. When that daughter comes to you and says, “Dad, I don’t know what to do.”

You could ask her, “Did you ask your husband? What does he think?”

When your son says, “Mom, I’m not sure what I should do in this situation.”

Your response could be, “Did you ask your wife?”

It is in times such as these that parents can have a tremendous impact in developing the direction of their young people. I know it is hard to let go. I will discover that one day. Some of you could tell me by experience.

I cannot believe this is true and you probably will not believe it either, but I read recently of a situation where a mother did not want to let go of her newlywed son. This mother called her son three times on his wedding night! Now that is kind of funny, but I thought about it and wondered, what kind of mother would call her son on his wedding night? Then, I thought about it a little longer and wondered, what kind of dummy would leave his phone on the hook?

God is saying, in the first manual on marriage, that your marital relationship takes priority. It may mean disagreeing with mom and dad at times. It may mean taking a different direction and establishing different values. But the marital relationship takes priority. That is the principle of considering that wife above all other women; that husband above all other men; above all other relationships. That is the principle of consideration.

The Principle of Commitment

2. Let me give the second key principle that I see in this text. It is found in the word “cleave,” and is the principle of commitment. Look again at chapter 2, verse 24, at the second part of the verse.

For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother, and be joined [cleave] to his wife . . .

The word “cleave” could be literally translated, “weld or grip”.

The marital scene in America today would change drastically if couples would come into marriage with one basic proposition – that there is absolutely no way out! As one man wrote, “Commitment is taking your hand off the doorknob to the back door of your marriage.”

There is no way out, but there is a way through. If you have in your marriage a fire escape, there will come a time when you are going to run for it. So, you had better seal it up.

Fulfilling marriage involves three commitments

One man wrote that there are three very important commitments in marriage. In fact, these are right out of Scripture. Let me give these three commitments that are important in a marriage and are included in this principle of commitment. They involve three relationships.

The commitment between you and the Lord

- The first commitment is between you and the Lord.

If you are going to have the principle of commitment in your marriage, it means you are committed to the Lord. This is crucial. Before you ever talk about a relationship with another human being, talk about your relationship with God. The reason for this, husbands, is that there is no way in the world that you could ever love your wife without first understanding and experiencing the love of Jesus Christ. How else are you to love your wife like Christ loved the church (Ephesians 5:25)?

The commitment between your spouse and the Lord

- The second commitment is, of course, the relationship between your spouse and the Lord.

You had better encourage it. Bless your heart if you get in the way of your spouse's relationship with the Lord. God help you if your spouse has to wake you up and get you out of the bed in the morning to go to church. You are hindering the potential relationship. If your breakfast is late because she or he is reading God's word, *fantastic!* Encourage that relationship that they have with the Lord.

A young man walked into my office recently, and asked if I would perform his wedding. He had never attended this church. In fact, I had never seen him before. So, I just asked him a few questions about his relationship with the Lord. It was nonexistent.

I explained to him the truth. I said, "Look, how can the Lord not be involved in your marriage? He is the One who designed your marriage. He is the One who has the manual for it. In fact, if you build it without the Lord, according to David, in Psalm, chapter 127, verse 1, you are going to labor in vain."

He was not very interested. I shocked the daylight out of him by looking him in the eye and saying, "Look, man, why don't you just skip the marriage and live with your girlfriend?"

"What? What are you suggesting that for?"

I simply told him, "Since God's idea is marriage, and since God is not a part of your marriage, He's not going to be involved. Why worry with appearances? Having a ceremony in a church is absolutely meaningless. You want it your way, do it your way. But if you want to do it God's way, then God has to be involved. You need a right relationship with Jesus Christ if you're ever going to pull it off. Your spouse needs to have a right relationship with the Lord if you are to ever experience the kind of commitment He wants."

The commitment between you and your spouse

- Finally, the commitment needs to exist between you and your spouse.

Notice that I placed this relationship last. That is because it hangs upon the balance of the other two. Show me a woman who is out of fellowship with Jesus Christ, and I will show you a woman who is out of fellowship with her husband. Show me a man who is in rebellion to the word of God, and I will show you a

man who is impossible to live with. Marriage hangs upon the first two commitments being in proper perspective.

A respected professor of mine said that eighty-five percent of his marital counseling, as a man who has been teaching God's word for nearly forty years, involves a man or woman who walks into his office and says these words, "I'm not getting out of my marriage what I deserve."

He knows that they are already in phase three in the deterioration of the marriage. That is when spouses begin to concentrate on "I, me, my," and never say the words "we, us".

How could we ever circumvent the selfish nature of our own being? By having a relationship with Jesus Christ and learning to die to self and to live to Him. Then we can live in the proper perspective of our horizontal relationship.

The Principle of Companionship

3. One more principle relating to the marriage relationship is the principle of companionship. Look at verses 24 and 25.

For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

Now this union obviously involved physical intimacy, but it involves much more. That is why I call this the principle of companionship. It also involves spiritual, emotional, and mental unity. It involves two people going in the same direction. That is the principle of companionship.

One man writes that this involves the complete identification of one personality with the other in a community of interests and pursuits.

Do you know what is happening today? People get married and the husband goes this way and the wife goes that way. They go in separate directions after separate pursuits. Days off are spent alone. There is no pursuit of developing this companionship. At night, when they are together, the television is on and very little conversation takes place. Then, they separate to go to work, come home tired, and the day off is for themselves.

I want to say something that may shock you, but I believe it is true. I believe many husbands and wives

today are lonely. I believe an evaluation of most marriages in America would find the missing ingredient of companionship; would find husbands and wives who are lonely. It is possible to live under the same roof with someone and still not have a companion; still not have that close friend that God designed.

One clinic took a survey and found that nearly ninety-five percent of those interviewed expressed that they did not feel close to their mate. That is sad. Do you know why that is so sad? Because the basis, the first thing that God said He would do for man was alleviate loneliness. Man is lonely and that is not good. And on the basis of that, He built someone, He formulated, created, sculpted someone who would fill in the void, fill the need, answer back to, complement.

Isn't it interesting, my friends, that when God sought to alleviate the loneliness of man, He did not create ten good friends? He created a woman; a wife.

Now that implies something, men and women. Let me speak to just the men for a moment. If you are bored and lonely today, the solution is not a hobby – the solution is not a bag of golf clubs; the solution is not another friend. The solution is developing a companionship, a warm and vital friendship with your wife.

Ladies, if you are lonely today, do you know what the solution is that is implied in this text? You are to develop a companionship with your husband; a warm and vital friendship with the man that God intended to fill in your void and lonely places.

Three ways to develop marital companionship

Let me give three ways to develop companionship in your marriage; three words that will develop companionship with your spouse.

Confidence

- The first word is confidence.

Confidence is a key ingredient to developing companionship with your spouse. Turn to Proverbs and look at chapter 17, verse 9, which says,

He who conceals a transgression seeks love, but he who repeats a matter separates intimate friends.

Who is separated? "Intimate friends" or companions.

The longer you live with your spouse, the more you will understand and know their weaknesses, faults, and shortcomings. That is information that God intended for you to know. So many times, however, when couples argue, the first thing that comes out is something that is used as a weapon directed at one of the weaknesses.

For instance, a man may open up to his wife and admit to her that he is incapable of or finding it difficult to handle finances. The next time they have an argument, guess what comes out? "You never have a penny in your pocket."

What do you think happens after that? He is going to clam up.

A wife may admit to her husband that she really feels intimidated about being compared to her mother. Oh boy! We have got a weapon now. When the next argument erupts and reaches a peak, out comes, "You're just like your mother!"

Guess what – you have just broken confidence.

Wives, sometimes you know things about your husbands that you share with other ladies at work. And men, you share things about your wives with other men at work. My friends, you are destroying the potential for companionship – because there is no confidence; because you cannot trust each other.

Solomon says, in this Proverbs verse, that in order to have companionship or confidence, you must cover transgressions and not repeat them.

Communication

- Let me give you another word that I think is crucial in developing companionship, and that word is communication.

Let me give you two thoughts concerning communication. All of these begin with "C's," so hopefully, we will be able to remember them a little more easily.

Communication through confrontation

- First is confrontation – that is part of communication.

You might say, "Wait a second, I thought I wasn't supposed to criticize my spouse."

I am not suggesting that you be critical, but let me turn your attention to Proverbs, chapter 27, to look at what Solomon says. Now, you might say that the

reason you never say anything to your mate is because you love them; the reason that you never confront them about something is because you love them. And aren't you just supposed to accept everything?

Well, what does Proverbs, chapter 27, verses 5 through 6a, say?

Better is open rebuke than love that is concealed. Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but deceitful are the kisses of an enemy.

In other words, the wounds of rebuke are more productive in developing character than the kisses of an enemy, which are deceitful.

I have seen couples where the wife does not say a word; where she is the model of passivity. Some husbands might say, "Well, I'd like to learn the secret of that one."

No, you would not. The reason you would not is because of what happened behind closed doors, behind the scenes. It may have even happened out in the open. The wife suggested something to the husband, and *bang*, "Don't you give me advice. I'm the commander of this ship."

The husband has squelched the potential confrontation that would ultimately sharpen him. The same is true of the husband advising the wife, but I have seen it more with wives advising husbands. The husbands do not want to hear it and would rather their wives remain silent. And yet, they have been robbed of one of the best things a marriage provides. That is a sharpening impact of that mate toward you in confronting you with things that you cannot see; that you are blind to.

I read a story that is kind of humorous and yet, it is not. A husband and wife were celebrating their fiftieth wedding anniversary. Everyone always admired their relationship because she was just the kindest thing and he could do just about anything he wanted to do and she would never say a word. They asked her one day, "How did this happen? What's your secret?"

She replied, "Well, it happened on our honeymoon. We went to the Grand Canyon and were taking two mules down the side of the Grand Canyon. My husband's mule stumbled, and he grabbed him by the ears and shook him and said, 'That's once.' A few yards further, the mule stumbled again and my husband took him by the ears and said, 'That's twice.'

Finally, the third time the mule stumbled, my husband got off the mule, got out a pistol, and shot the mule. I started to protest, but he ran over to me, grabbed me by the ears and said, 'That's once.'"

Would you look at verse 17 of Proverbs, chapter 27? If this isn't talking about the marital relationship, I don't know what is.

Iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.

The spouse, the mate that God has given you is iron. Someone said that a good marriage creates enough friction that it is like sandpaper in rounding off the rough edges. That is what this verse is talking about when it says, "Iron sharpens iron".

Husbands, when you cause your wives to clam up, and wives, when you are advised by your husbands on something you cannot see and you respond, "I don't want to hear that," you have drawn lines around your marriages. You have seen it, perhaps you have been involved in it – there is a line and, buddy, don't step across that line. If you do, you're on my turf. That's mine and don't say anything about that. As a result, you have a blind spot in your life that your mate cannot help you with because you refuse to hear. Confrontation is crucial and sharpening.

Communication through counsel

- Let me give you the second word, and that is counsel. Counsel is also a part of communication.

Look at Proverbs, chapter 27, verse 9. I like this verse.

Oil and perfume make the heart glad, so a man's counsel is sweet to his friend.

God has given the husband and wife an excellent source of objective wisdom. In fact, I think a marriage is strong when the couple is literally counseling one another.

Now, when you, as a husband, want advice and ask your wife and she responds, do not say, "Well, that's kind of dumb. I'll do it my way after all."

No, accept the counsel. Solomon says the counsel is sweet. I think he implies, of course, in this verse, that the attitude in which we counsel our mate and as well, the attitude in which we confront our mate, is

sweet. Confronting is never intended to tear down, it is always intended to build up.

Now, you may think, “Well, my wife never listens to my counsel,” or, “My husband never listens to my advice.” Perhaps you should look at the way you give it. Is it sweet like perfume? Is it laced with love?

So, in order to develop companionship, we need confidence and communication.

Caring

- Let me give you one more word, and that is caring.

The word “care” comes from the Gothic root that means, “to lament, to grieve”. Isn’t it interesting that we get our word “care” from that? Why? Because to lament, or to grieve is to be emotionally involved with the effects, the situation, the life of another human being. So, if I am to care for my spouse, that means I am emotionally involved in that which hurts, that which helps, that which brings joy into his or her life.

Caring is the tangible expression of love. Love is intangible. You can say, “I love my mate,” until you are blue in the face, but until you make tangible expressions by caring – which might include taking the garbage out, washing the dishes, sending a card or writing a note, calling on the phone unexpectedly – it has no meaning. Caring is the tangible expressions of love such as these, and that develops companionship.

Conclusion

I think we could best illustrate marriage by watching a child learn to walk. It has been a joyful thing to see my children learn to walk. Many of you have seen it happen.

First, they sit on the ground and all of a sudden, they get the bright idea to start crawling. After a while, they get down on their hands and knees, but they do not have the motor running yet. They just kind of sit there and rock back and forth. Finally, the motor starts and they start crawling all over the house.

Then, they get the idea that, “Hey, there’s a couch over there. If I crawl over to the couch, maybe I can pull myself up and stand up like my dad or mom or brother or sister.”

And would you believe it, they finally pull themselves up and they are standing. Boy, the celebration begins. You break out the camera. You take thirty-five shots. Ten years later, you wonder,

“What are all those shots of this little kid standing at the couch?” But that was when it happened.

Finally, the child sees dad or mom sitting across the living room floor and they think, “It’d be great if I could walk across to them.”

And do you know what happens? They take their first step. Bang! And they sit there awhile, and they think, “Well, let’s back up and try that again.”

So, they take a couple of steps. Over a process of days and weeks, although after they start walking, you wish it had taken years, but they finally take two or three steps into your open arms. You rejoice and have another celebration. They have learned to walk!

No matter how long you have been walking though, you always have the capacity to stumble and fall. No matter how long you have been married, that is also is a process in which you crawl, you pull yourself up, you take a step, and bang, you fall. Then, you pull yourself up again and walk a couple of steps, and you fall again, you blow it. Now, wouldn’t it be foolish for that child to sit on the floor, after trying about five hundred times, and saying, “Well, Dad, I guess I’m not called to walk.”

So many couples fall and stumble and get up and fall again, and then, some may come to the conclusion, “Well, I guess God doesn’t want us to walk together.”

My friend, when you fall and stumble, and you will, because you will always have the capacity, the difference will be that you are developing a relationship. Built into it are the principles of consideration, commitment, companionship.

Where do we start? First of all, we start with our relationship to the Lord. Then we stop with our relationship with our spouse. We leave it up to the Lord how they will respond, but we do what is right.

May our marriages be characterized with the ingredients: consideration, commitment, companionship, confidence, counsel, and caring.

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Goodbye to Paradise

Genesis 3

Introduction

We discovered in our last discussion of Genesis, chapter 2, that God created a beautiful relationship between husband and wife. No sooner had God created that relationship than Satan set the wheels in motion to destroy it. And, we will find in chapter 3 of Genesis, the tragic fall of man.

I think Genesis, chapter 3, is the saddest, most tragic chapter in all of the Bible. Yet, as we study this chapter today, we will find interwoven into its tragic tapestry, the threads of hope and salvation.

In verse 1a of chapter 3, we are told,

Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. . . .

Oh, Satan is indeed crafty. In fact, two times we are warned of Satan in scriptures by the apostles.

In II Corinthians, chapter 2, verse 11, Paul exhorts the church in Corinth,

so that no advantage would be taken of us by Satan, for we are not ignorant of his schemes.

In other words, we are not to be ignorant of Satan's schemes. The word "scheme" is the original word "agnumen," which means, "mindset or mentality". Satan has a mentality, a mindset, a way of thinking, and I think he would discover that type of thinking in the humanistic philosophy of today's society.

Paul will also warn the church in Ephesus, in Ephesians, chapter 6, verse 11, to,

Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil.

The word "schemes," or it may be "wiles" in your translation, comes from a different original word. It is the word "methodios," from which we get our word "method".

So, we discover from the writings of scripture that Satan has a mindset, a mentality, and he also has a method. We will discover in chapter 3 of Genesis, the methodology of Satan and its five-faceted deception.

Satan's Five-fold Deceit in Tempting Eve

Look at Genesis, chapter 3, and we will see the five-fold deceit of Satan in tempting Eve.

Satan appeared in a form to deceive

1. The first of this five-fold scheme by Satan in tempting Eve is that he appeared in a form to deceive.

Look at verse 1a again.

Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. . . .

Evidently, Satan took the form of the serpent. This was one of the creations of God and it was beautiful.

Now understand that this was before the fall. The serpent, like any being or beast, had a wonderful relationship with mankind. It was a beautiful thing and its skin gave off beautiful colors. So, there was

no need to fear. Perhaps the beautiful colors were attractive to the woman, so Satan chose to inhabit the serpent.

Satan inhabited a serpent because he wanted to take a form that would deceive. You need to understand that he is not running around town wearing a bright, red suit with a long tail, carrying a pitchfork, showing fangs, and shoveling coal. He is an angel of light. He will take whatever appearance necessary in order to deceive. With Eve, it was the form of a serpent.

Satan displayed cunning in two ways

I want to point out Satan's cunning ways. I asked myself the question, when I looked at verse 1, "Why did Satan come to Eve alone? Why did he pick on her?" I think his cunning ways are revealed in two ways.

Satan understood the pattern of God's creation

- First, Satan knew and understood the pattern of God's creation.

Satan was there and knew that woman was created the weaker vessel. He understood that she was the one easily led, the one prone to follow. So he was cunning in coming to her.

Satan understood the principle of divide and conquer

- Secondly, Satan understood the principle of divide and conquer.

He came to Eve when she was all alone. Look at Ecclesiastes, chapter 4, verses 9 through 12a.

Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up. Furthermore, if two lie down together they keep warm, but how can one be warm alone?

(notice this phrase in verse 12a),

And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him. . . .

Satan understood the principle of dividing and conquering.

I believe we find in this, an emphasis on the necessity of mutual accountability in marriage. The importance for mutual accountability and unity in marriage is discovered in this temptation of Eve. I think you will find that a person who is unwilling to live in unity with their spouse, is unwilling to follow the guidelines of the word of God in relation to her or him.

The individual who is in rebellion to the institution of the local New Testament church; who is ostracizing himself from the fellowship, from institutions that God has ordained; who is living apart from unity in that relationship, is a person who is a susceptible person. I think that person is a "sitting duck".

There is an interesting verse that the apostle Peter gives us when he talks about husbands and wives living in unity together. Look at I Peter, chapter 3, verse 7b.

. . . So that your prayers will not be hindered.

That has a fascinating implication. He is implying that, if you as a husband and wife, are not in a harmonious relationship, your prayers are being hindered.

Let me suggest something startling. If you are at odds with your husband or wife, you might as well not pray. It does not matter if you get up at four o'clock in the morning. If you are at odds with your husband or wife, God is interested in the prayer of confession. He is interested in the harmonious relationship between husband and wife. So, forget the religious façade. Get it right with your spouse, and then pray. Your prayers then, will not be hindered – God can answer.

Satan cast doubt on the word of God

2. Secondly, Satan not only appeared in a form to deceive, but he cast doubt on the word of God.

Look at the last part of verse 1 of Genesis, chapter 3.

And he said to the woman, "Indeed, has God said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden?'"

He casually suggests, "Eve, has God said this?" And, if a serpent can smile, he smiled. He says, "Do you really think God meant you couldn't eat from every tree?"

Understand that Satan is not coming across as some brash, rude character. Shakespeare said it well when he wrote, “The prince of darkness is a gentleman.”

The serpent came in to beguile her and asked a simple polite question, “Did God say that?”

However, he was sowing in her mind, a seed of doubt.

Notice the response of woman in verses 2 and 3.

The woman said to the serpent, “From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, ‘You shall not eat from it or touch it, . . .

(God did not say that – He only said they could not eat it),

“ . . . or you will die.”

Satan denied the truth of God’s word

3. Notice the third thing in Satan’s temptation; that is, he denied the truth of God’s word.

Look at verse 4, and notice that now he is a little brash.

The serpent said to the woman, “You surely shall not die!”

Ladies and gentlemen, every temptation is an opportunity to either believe the words of Satan or the words of God. God said, in Genesis, chapter 2, verse 17b,

. . . eat from it you will surely die.

Satan said,

. . . You surely shall not die.

Understand, men and women, that when you sin, you are either believing the words of God or the lies of Satan. God always tells the truth. In John, chapter 8, verse 44b, Jesus declares,

. . . [Satan is] the father of lies.

One of the things Satan will do, as he did with Eve, is pull you from the words of God, sow seeds of doubt in your mind about the words of God, so that you will one day, deny the words of God and follow the words of Satan.

Satan attributed evil motives to God

4. Fourthly, Satan attributed to God evil motives.

Look at the first part of verse 5 of Genesis, chapter 3. This is the amazing thing about the entire temptation to me. Satan suggests; he dares to imply,

For God knows that in the day you eat from it, your eyes will be opened, . . .

Now, it is God who is jealous; it is God who is the one who in a cowardly manner, protects His throne. Satan would suggest to the woman, “Look, if you eat, God is afraid. He knows that you will be like Him and He trembles at that thought. He is an envious God. He is jealous of His character.”

Satan attributes to God the evil motives, when God holds our best interest at heart. Satan is doubting the goodness of God.

Men and women, when you and I face temptation, we come to that same conclusion. We think, “Is God really good in withholding this from me? Could He be better to me if He allowed this for me?”

Satan says, “Oh, God isn’t as good to you as He could be, because He’d give you this if He were.”

So, Satan doubts the goodness of God and attributes to God evil motives.

Satan promised blessings through disobedience

5. Lastly, number five, Satan promised blessings through disobedience.

Look at the last part of verse 5.

. . . and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.

Satan says, “Sin will pay off. It’ll bring dividends.”

And it will, for a season. Make no mistake, however, where obedience to the words of Satan does offer benefits, they are only temporary. Obedience to the word of God offers benefits, but they are eternal.

That is the difference we find in Genesis, chapter 3. “Eat it,” Satan says, “and you will be like your Creator; eat it, and you will be like God.”

That is not happening today, is it? Yes, it is. In fact, the truth is, Satan is offering to mankind this very same thing. He is saying, “You are divine.”

You might say, “I haven’t heard that.”

Well, if not, you have been in the closet. Have you heard about channeling lately? It is sweeping

America and is one of the arms of the New Age Movement. The New Age Movement is the repackaging of humanism. I think in its final form, it will literally win America. We will become like one of the eastern countries with all of its mysticism and many gods, unless God brings revival to America.

I was watching a talk show and on the program, a woman was channeling. If you are not aware of what that is, it is where some spirit from some other planet or some other universal life, inhabits the body of a human and speaks through them. That human becomes the channel through which the spirit speaks. This is not something new – it is as old as sin.

I was watching this particular talk show and the woman was channeling a spirit that had a strange Scottish type of accent. If I had been from Scotland, I think I would have been offended. Finally, someone from the audience raised the question, “Why did you come to planet Earth?”

Think about it, if you rule some universal planet out there, if you have your own kingdom, why take the time to come to Earth?

I will never forget the channeler’s answer. Without even a blink of the eye, she said in that strange accent, “I have come to let man know that he is divine.”

It is the lie of Satan. He says, “Man/woman, you are God.”

Satan has transgressed the boundary between the Creator and the creature.

You say, “But I don’t believe in channeling.”

Let me ask a question of you. Would you espouse the words of one man who wrote the following that basically states the same thing? “Our responsibility is to direct our own lives, and we do not claim to be in need of forgiveness or salvation.”

In other words, “I am the authority in my life. I run my life. I call the shots in my life.”

What are you saying? That I am the God in my life; there is no other authority, no higher being. I live as if God does not exist. That is possible not only for an unbeliever, but for a believer as well.

Look at verse 6.

When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, . . .

(that is the physical lure),

. . . and that it was a delight to the eyes,

(that is the emotional lure),

. . . and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, . . .

(that is the intellectual lure),

. . . she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate.

Do you notice the three things? The emotional, the physical, and the intellectual lures? There will be times when it will make perfect sense to disobey God.

There will be times in your life when it will just make common sense to do something other than what God declares. If you talk to someone who does not follow God, you will find that they always have their logic. God says that though it may make sense to you now, there is a coming judgment that ultimately brings death.

A Three-fold Discovery After Sinning

Now, I want to give a three-fold discovery after sinning.

They discovered their nakedness

1. First, Adam and Eve discovered their nakedness because of their sin.

Look at the first part of verse 7.

Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; . . .

The word “knew” in this verse, is the Hebrew word that could be translated, “they had intellectual insight”. All of a sudden, they knew something was wrong.

They discovered self-effort

2. The second thing that they discovered was self-effort.

Look at the last part of verse 7.

. . . and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings.

This, ladies and gentlemen, is the first religious act of human history. This is the first act of self-effort to somehow cover over sin; to somehow make oneself better than you know you are. Adam, knowing that there is something wrong, something

amiss, takes it into his own hands to remedy the situation.

My friend, let me suggest that if you do not know Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, you can come to church, but that is a fig leaf. You can pray prayers, but they are fig leaves. You can give money to church; you can give money away; you can attend a Bible study; you may even teach one, but they are all fig leaves. It is human self-effort to pull yourself up, to salve your conscience when you have never dealt with sin. That is what Adam and Eve did.

They discovered fear

3. They also discovered, thirdly, fear.

Look at the first phrase of verse 8.

They heard the sound of the Lord God . . .

That is not the sound of His voice, by the way, that is the literal sound of the Lord God walking. Evidently, He had taken some kind of human form or some kind of form that could make Him known to the senses of man. We do not know what kind of form that was. It may not have been a human form. Continue in verse 8,

They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and the wife . . .

(notice what they did),

. . . hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden.

Adam and Eve discovered fear. Imagine, “Adam, I hear God. He’s coming.”

“Eve, I hear Him too. Let’s run.”

They run and hide behind some tree. There they are cowering and trembling in fear. Before the fall, they had perfect openness and communion with God. Now, they are hiding behind some shrub.

This is the nature of man. Because of sin, you and I do not run *to* God, we run *from* Him.

There is something beautiful, though, in the expression in the next verse, verse 9.

Then the Lord God called the man, and said to him, “Where are you?”

You run from Him, but, ladies and gentlemen, God has come to you; God has come to remedy the situation. And though you do not want Him, though you may not know Him, God in the person of Jesus

Christ, who declared in the gospel of Luke (Luke 19:10), . . .

. . . [I am] come to seek and to save that which was lost.

. . . seeks after us. We would remain behind the shrub, if it were not for His grace.

The tragedy of this whole situation is that Adam and Eve, hiding behind the tree, thought they could get away from God. They thought that somehow God did not know. They are about to learn a lesson that you and I often forget. That is – God knows everything. They have not been clued in on that yet. They thought that they could hide behind the bark of a tree and get away from it.

You and I often forget that God knows our sin, as well. We start at a very young age revealing the lack of understanding that God knows all. We try it out on our parents first. We did not have to have anyone teach that to us either.

I was sitting in the living room this past week, and one of my little boys walked in with the silliest grin on his face. Kids are so dumb! If he had done something wrong, he should have just acted normally, but he was giving me a silly little grin. And, he walks by me with his hands behind his back. His silly little grin got my attention, and then I noticed his hands were behind his back. Bright kid!

We are just as silly when we sin and give God some pious smile, as if He will not see; as if He will not know. Hebrews, chapter 4, verse 13b, says,

. . . all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him . . .

A Four-fold Disintegration Resulting From Sin

I want to give a four-fold disintegration resulting from sin.

The disintegration of fellowship with God

1. The first is the disintegration of fellowship with God.

Look at verses 9 and 10.

Then the Lord God called the man, and said to him, “Where are you?” He said, “I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; . . .

(that is a lie),

“... so I hid myself.”

He should have said, “I heard the sound of You in the garden and I have sinned,” but he said, “I was naked, so I hid myself.”

Before the sin, there was openness and communication. Now, there is hiding in guilt.

The disintegration of marital unity

2. Secondly, there is the disintegration of marital unity.

Continue to verses 11 and 12, and note this carefully.

And He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?”

Boy, God is just like a parent, isn't He? Did you do what I told you not to do?

Adam has been called in on the carpet. There is no way out. So, what did he do? Verse 12 tells us.

The man said, “The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate.”

In other words, “Well, Lord, she, the one You gave me, she did it.”

Now, use your imagination for a moment. We do not have it in the text, but I doubt Eve took that sitting down. I think the blood started going up in her neck; that little vein in her neck got ten times the normal size; her face flushed. She probably stomped her foot and said, “What?! What do you mean I made you do it? I can't make you do anything.”

Adam said, “Well, you gave me the fruit.”

They are having the first spat in marital history – and it is a “lulu”.

Then she probably looked at the Lord and said, “Lord, I can't believe this man blames me.” And God says, in verse 13a,

... What is this you have done? ...

Now Eve is on the carpet. So she says, in the last part of the verse,

... The serpent deceived me, and I ate.

In other words, “Uh, the serpent, he made me do it.”

Now Adam is hot. Oh boy. “What do you mean the serpent? You got on me because I blamed you, and now you're blaming the serpent.”

Here they go. Yap! Yap! Yap! Yap! Yap! It is a good one.

How did they learn these techniques? Before this sin, they had never argued; they had perfect harmony. Now, at the drop of a hat, “bang,” they are at each other's throats.

I will tell you why. It is because sin brought about a loss in marital harmony.

Three things were lost between husband and wife

Three things drastically changed and were lost between husband and wife.

Marriage lost its harmony

- The first is, marriage lost its harmony.

Adam and Eve blamed each other. I do not know where they learned the techniques of arguing, but they were masters at it all of a sudden.

I read of one newlywed couple who told some friends, “We decided we wouldn't go to sleep at night mad at one another. We haven't had any sleep for three weeks now.”

That is so true. Why? Because it just comes naturally. What was unnatural in the garden; that is, arguing and a complaining spirit, is now natural.

Woman lost her naturally submissive spirit

- A second thing that drastically changed as a result of this sin is, woman lost her naturally submissive spirit.

Look at the first part of verse 16, which is a result of the sin or the fall. We will get back to verse 15 in a moment.

To the woman He said, “I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth, in pain you will bring forth children; yet your desire will be for your husband ...

Now the word “desire” could be translated, “crave”. It is a pursuit. You could translate this phrase, “Your craving will be over your husband.”

In other words, now because of the fall, it comes naturally for a woman to desire to form, manipulate, and move her husband. The reason that you, ladies,

do that is because it is part of your nature now; because of sin. Her desire, that means her emotional being, is now exaggerated. Where once her husband was His, now she would seek to possess him. She now seeks to manipulate, to fashion, to form him after her own will.

Man lost his naturally loving headship

- The third drastic change as a result of this sin is, man lost his naturally loving headship.

Notice the last part of verse 16.

. . . and he will rule over you.

The implication in this verse, of course, is the exaggerated sense that man will no longer lovingly lead. Now, man will tyrannically rule; will subjugate woman; will press her down.

In countries without the word of God, you will find women who are nothing more than beasts or objects. Even in America, where the word is not learned and loved, you will find women as objects, toys, beasts of burden.

Why? Why does man find it so easy to subjugate? Why does man find it so easy to tyrannically rule? It is because of sin. It now comes naturally to mankind to rule; to dominate without love.

The disintegration of man's paradise

3. The third disintegration resulting from sin is the disintegration of man's paradise.

Look at verse 17.

Then to Adam He said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat from it'; cursed is the ground because of you; . . ."

In other words, what came naturally to the ground will be an unnatural thing. That is why when you plant tomatoes, what do you get? You get tomatoes and weeds. When you plant flowers, what do you get? You get flowers and weeds. Why? Because for every weed that grows, the earth is bearing witness that it is also under the curse. That which was unnatural is now natural.

Continue to the last part of verse 17.

. . . in toil you will eat of it all the days of your life.

Notice verse 18a,

Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you; . . .

The Hebrew, in fact, could read, "Both thorns and thistles shall grow for you by themselves."

Look at verses 18b through 19a.

. . . and you will eat the plants of the field; by the sweat of your face you will eat bread . . .

I used to think that man would have to sweat to get bread, until I had the privilege of studying the original text. This literally means that man toils and he sweats, and interspersed between man sweating and toiling, he sits down to eat. In other words, work is broken up by his meals. Even when he sits down to eat, he is still sweating. Man is now cursed by being forced to plow an unyielding soil to work. Even in his eating, he does not rest.

The disintegration of physical immortality

4. Notice also, the disintegration of physical immortality.

Look at the last part of verse 19.

. . . Till you return to the ground, because from it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.

God's Four-fold Deliverance for Mankind

Let me give God's four-fold deliverance for mankind.

Victory is promised

1. First, victory is promised.

Look at verses 13 through 14.

Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" And the woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." The Lord God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you more than all cattle, and more than every beast of the field; on your belly you will go, and dust you will eat all the days of your life;"

Now, however, notice the promise. This is called the “protoevangelium”. It is the first promise of the gospel. Look at verse 15a.

And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed;

...

There are two ways to interpret this, and I think both are correct. One is immediate and the other is prophetic.

The first interpretation is that the seed of the woman; that is, the woman following God, will be at enmity with the seed of the serpent. There is a clash, from this point until God reigns, between those who believe God and those who do not believe God. They will be at war.

Notice there is a prophetic utterance, as well. There is a change from the plural to the singular (“He,” not “they”), in verse 15b,

. . . He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel.

Who is “He”? “He” is Jesus Christ.

Now, what does this verse mean when it says that the serpent will bruise His heel? I have been told and I would guess it to be true, although I never want to experience it, that if a serpent bites you, the best place to be bitten with the least results is the heel. In other words, what He is saying to the serpent is, “You’re going to prick the coming Savior, but it will have no effect. And He will crush your head.”

Now, if you want to kill a serpent, you do not cut off its tail. You do not crush a serpent’s tail, you crush its head. This means that ultimately, he is brought to ruin. That is the promise of Jesus Christ.

Where would this take place? Where would the crushing occur? Where would the bruising of the heel take place? On the cross!! On the cross, the Savior’s heel was pricked, but to no effect because He gained the victory over the grave. In that act He forever broke the power of sin that the serpent had over mankind. The promise is given.

Marital unity can be experienced

2. Secondly, marital unity can be experienced.

Look at the writings of Paul in Ephesians, chapter 5. He writes some unusual words in verse 18.

. . . do not get drunk with wine, . . . but be filled with the Spirit

This does not make a lot of sense unless you go back into history and understand the thinking of the Greeks. They taught in their mythology that their god Zeus, had a son one day. His son’s name was Dionysius, and he was called the god of wine. In their religious system, the Greeks believed they must become drunk with wine. They would, of course, practice all kinds of perversion and filthiness and call it religion. In order to be able to practice such heinous crimes and sins against one another, they would become drunk to dull the senses and quiet the conscience.

This practice was evidently pervasive in the Ephesian society. So Paul comes along and says, “Now look, in worshipping God, don’t become drunk with wine; don’t be controlled by wine; don’t be filled with that substance. Instead, be controlled by the spirit of God.”

Guess what the first thing out of the bag is, as a result of being submissive to the Spirit of God? Wives submitting to husbands; husbands loving their wives. Marital unity can be experienced only if the power of Satan is quenched in the life of the believer in his practice by yielding to the Spirit of God.

Paradise will be re-established

3. Thirdly, paradise will be re-established.

This is a promise. Look at Revelation, chapter 21, verse 1a.

Then I saw a new heaven . . .

(and guess what else),

. . . and a new earth . . .

You and I think heaven is a floating cloud up there. It is also the re-establishment of paradise. Planet Earth is once again made like the days of creation for man to enjoy.

Physical immortality will be assured

4. Fourthly, physical immortality will be assured.

Look at Revelation, chapter 22, and we will read some wonderful verses of scripture.

For all who believe in Jesus Christ (this is the promise), you are no longer under Satan’s dominion, but are now serving the kingdom of God and His future coming kingdom.

Look at what it is going to be like, according to chapter 22, verses 1 through 5 of Revelation. Notice the reference with implications that go back to Genesis, chapter 3.

Then he showed me a river of water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the middle of its street. On either side of the river was the tree of life, . . .

Now, at the end of Genesis, chapter 3, man is kept from the tree of life. However, once again, according to verse 2b, it is available,

. . . yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

Continue to verses 3 through 5.

There will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His bond-servants will serve Him; they will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads. And there will no longer be any night; and they will not have need of the light of the lamp nor the light of the sun because the Lord God will illumine them; and they . . .

(that is, the blood bought redeemed ones),

. . . will reign forever and ever.

In Genesis, chapter 3, there is the curse, the fall, the expulsion, and “Goodbye to paradise.” God closes the door on Eden. Revelation, chapter 22, promises the coming paradise; the coming kingdom. And those who believe in the Lamb will be able to participate in that coming kingdom.

Application – Lessons to be Learned From the Fall!

Let me give three applications; three lessons that we can learn from the fall.

In the final analysis, sin never pays

1. First, in the final analysis, sin never pays, it costs.

Look at Genesis, chapter 3, verses 23 and 24. Was it worth it for Adam and Eve to eat, to believe the lie of Satan?

Therefore, the Lord God sent him out from the garden of Eden, to cultivate the ground from which he was taken. So He drove the man out; and at the east of the garden of Eden He stationed the cherubim and the flaming sword which turned every direction to guard the way to the tree of life.

Literally, this does not mean there a sword that was on fire, but that there was a flame that was shaped like a sword, and it moved in every direction. That is as if it were lightning that flashed all around that tree as quickly as you could see. It is an awesome thing to think that there were cherubim, or angels, stationed around that tree, and a flashing of light all about it to keep man from coming in. It turned in every direction to guard the way to the tree of life.

Harmony in the home begins in the heart

2. Secondly, harmony in the home begins in the heart.

Every Christian; every believer has the Holy Spirit dwelling within. To be controlled by the Holy Spirit is the key. It is that control that brings that harmonious state back to the home once again.

Paradise is designed for sinners – but those who have been forgiven

3. Thirdly, paradise is designed for sinners – but those who have been forgiven.

In a cemetery in Strasburgh, Pennsylvania, is the tomb of a soldier who died during the Civil War. Around that tombstone, of course, are many others. Abraham Lincoln sought to honor a soldier in a particular way. So, he chose one particular soldier's tombstone. Underneath his name and date of birth and death, Lincoln had written into the stone these words, “Abraham Lincoln's substitute.” That soldier symbolized the fact that those who died in battle, died so others could live.

Men and women, you are either living under the curse of Genesis, chapter 3, or you have the promise of Revelation, chapter 22. What makes the difference that you can look at the cross of Christ, that you can think in your mind that Jesus Christ died one day for you, so that you can live and can you put your name on the cross, “Stephen Davey's substitute”? If you cannot see your name; if you have never gone to the

cross, you are under the curse. If you have gone to the cross, then paradise and abundant life, marital harmony, and forgiveness for sin will be once again experienced.

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The Curse of Cain

Genesis 4

Introduction

Today, we are going to discuss Genesis, chapter 4. It is a good illustration of sin because all men are sinners, all men are condemned, all men are without excuse, and in this chapter, we will find depravity rearing its ugly head just outside the garden of Eden.

Genesis, chapter 4, provides the only authoritative account of early civilization. It is a little different of course, than scientists' accounts or anthropological writings that would suggest that early man was a cave man who walked around carrying a club and dragging his woman by the hair on her head. Such accounts are not exactly true.

As a matter of fact, early man was incredibly intelligent; they were geniuses. We will find in the ancestors of Cain, the first and second generation of Adam and Eve, that they were creating incredible things. They were inventing such things as musical instruments and metallurgy. They were inventing all kinds of things that would rapidly move a primitive society toward the kind of society that you and I enjoy in many ways today.

So, do not be fooled by society's accounts of early man. Early men were not dumb cave men, but were brilliant, as we will discover in this chapter.

Now, in the study of the life of Cain in Genesis, chapter 4, the first question I usually hear is, "Where did Cain get his wife?" Usually, that question comes from a person who does not want to talk about anything related to the gospel. They will say, "Where did Cain get his wife? Explain that to me and I will believe the rest of the Bible."

Let me answer that briefly, before we continue to the rest of Cain's biography. Cain married his sister. Before the law came, when God gave the genetic boundaries and the penalty for breaking the boundaries, men and women were married within the family.

It was the command of God to multiply and fill the earth. Obviously, Adam and Eve were the only parents. We know from Genesis, chapter 5, verses 4 and 5, that Adam lived for nine hundred thirty years. Notice what happened during those hundreds of years – he had a lot of children. Look at verse 4.

Then the days of Adam after he became the father of Seth were eight hundred years, and he had other sons and daughters.

Adam multiplied his little corner of the earth. His quiver was full. So, Cain had quite a selection. He chose one of his sisters.

Why God Refused Cain's Offering

Now, the more important question is addressed in chapter 4. Let us begin with verse 1.

Now the man had relations with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain, and she said, "I have gotten a manchild with the help of the Lord."

That is interesting because I believe that that is a simple statement of faith; that Eve is resting on the promise of God to bring a man, a seed, from her womb that would be the Savior. Of course, it is not Cain. Continue to verse 2.

Again she gave birth to his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of flocks, but Cain was a tiller of the ground.

Abel was the first herdsman or shepherd and Cain was the first farmer. Both of these occupations were worthy and ones that they chose.

Look at verses 3 through 5a.

So it came about in the course of time that Cain brought an offering to the Lord of the fruit of the ground. Abel, on his part also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering; but for Cain and for his offering, He had no regard. . . .

Let me answer one question, “Why did God refuse Cain’s offering?” I will give three reasons.

Cain’s offering was bloodless

1. First, because Cain’s offering was bloodless.

In the New Testament book of Hebrews, in chapter 9, verse 22, we read that there is no atoning or remission for sin apart from the shedding of blood.

Now, there are some views that I will not take the time to address, that suggest Cain came to God with a bad attitude and it was because of his attitude that God rejected his offering. I think the text would indicate otherwise.

- First, notice both Cain and Abel brought an offering.

That is not a coincidence. Verse 3 says,

So it came about in the course of time that Cain [and Abel] brought an offering to the Lord . . .

These terms are related to the giving of an offering. I think it is implied in this verse that Abel and Cain built an altar. On that altar, they placed their offerings. How did Cain know and learn that they were to bring an offering to God? This is an argument of course, without text, but I think God instructed them by their parents, Adam and Eve.

Let me give another reason why I believe Cain’s offering was rejected because it was without blood.

- Secondly, they both came at an appointed time.

Notice again the phrase in verse 3, “in the course of time”. What I am trying to do is prove that God gave Cain and Abel revelation about bringing

sacrifices to God. The phrase “it came about in the course of time,” could be literally translated, “at the end of days,” which is a reference to the Sabbath day. These men brought their offerings on the seventh day. Was that coincidental? Absolutely not. It was a result of revelation.

- Thirdly, I think that revelation would be given in chapter 3, verse 21,

The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife, and clothed them.

As we studied earlier, Adam and Eve, in the garden, tried to cover their sin with fig leaves. That was not sufficient because that was the work of their own hands. God kills some animals and takes the skins and clothes Adam and Eve. I think in that clothing, He gave them added revelation.

There is only one way to atone for sin. Atonement, by the way, means covering. You cannot cover sin with the leaf of a tree. You must cover or atone for it by the shedding of blood; by the giving of another life. Fig leaves will never atone.

So, I think God refused Cain’s offering because first of all, it was bloodless.

Cain’s offering was the fruit of his own hands

2. Secondly, God refused Cain’s offering because it was the fruit of his own hands.

This is the religion of the world from the time of Cain; that is, we will approach God by the works of our hands; we will seek to satisfy a holy God by something that we do. That was insufficient because our own works can never atone for sin.

Cain’s offering was the fruit of the ground

3. Thirdly, I think Cain’s offering was refused by God because it was the fruit of ground.

Cain ignored the curse. Look at a passage we studied earlier in chapter 3, verse 17.

Then to Adam He said, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying, ‘You shall not eat from it’; . . .

(note the curse),

“cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you will eat of it all the days of your life.”

The earth had been cursed. There is nothing from this earth by the works of our hands that will ever satisfy a holy God. Cain tried. I think he rebelled against known revelation – revelation from God, in that they both brought an offering on the Sabbath day.

Now, notice what happens when God confronts Cain. Look at verses 5 and 6 of chapter 4.

but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard. So Cain became very angry and his countenance fell. Then the Lord said to Cain, “Why are you angry? Why is your countenance fallen?”

It is almost as if God says, “Cain, you know what you’re supposed to do. Why, now that you’ve disobeyed, are you angry at me?”

Notice what God says in verse 7a.

If you do well, . . .

(What would that be? Obviously God is saying, “If you do what I tell you to do.”),

. . . will not your countenance be lifted up? And if you do not well, sin is crouching at the door; . . .

The word “crouch” is used by the ancients to mean a lion who is crouching and ready to pounce on his prey. God is saying, “If you disregard My will, My revelation, My word, sin, like a lion, is crouching at your door ready to pounce. You are open prey.”

Notice what He says in the next phrase of verse 7.

and its [sin’s] desire is for you, . . .

Does that ring a bell? Do you remember in chapter 3, verse 16, what God told the woman?

To the woman He said, “I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth, in pain you will bring forth children; yet your desire will be for your husband . . .

The same phrase that is used in this verse is used in referring to Cain’s sin. In other words, “Your sin has the desire to control you.”

Because of the fall, women try to control their husbands. That is part of the curse. It is part of sin that a woman now tries to manipulate and control her husband.

So, God is saying to Cain, “If you disregard My will, sin will manipulate you. Sin will control you, if you disregard My will.”

The Five-fold Result of Cain’s Sin

Now, notice the five-fold result of Cain’s sin. By the way, Cain’s sin was not murder; Cain’s sin was disobedience. Murder is the first of five results of his sin. Five things happen because Cain disobeyed God’s revelation.

Cain murdered his brother

1. The first result of Cain’s sin is that he murdered his brother.

Look at verse 8 of chapter 4.

Cain told Abel, his brother. . . .

(What was he telling him? He was telling him about God. Perhaps he was arguing that God was playing favorites. We do not know.),

. . . And it came about when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him.

Perhaps, if we could go back in time, we could watch two men out in the field. We cannot hear what they are saying, but we note that there is a heated argument going on. Cain is raising his fist to heaven. Abel is perhaps, pleading that he repent. Finally, Cain in his heated passion, picks up a blunt instrument or even takes his hands and beats Abel to death there in the field. He rose up and he killed him.

Cain lied to God

2. Notice the second result of Cain’s sin; that is, he lied to God.

Look at verse 9a.

Then the Lord said to Cain, “Where is Abel your brother?”

You may remember that when Adam sinned, God came and asked him a question. Well, in this verse, He is talking to the second generation and He asks a question and gives him a chance to repent. He says,

. . . “Where is Abel your brother?” . . .

Note Cain’s response in the next phrase of verse 9.

And he said, “I do not know.” . . .

That is a lie. Cain knows the exact spot where he has buried Abel so that no one will discover his sin. So he lies and says,

. . . “I don’t know.” . . .

And then he asks the question in the last part of verse 9,

... ***“Am I my brother’s keeper?”***

By the way, let me ask a question of you. What is the answer to that question? “Am I my brother’s keeper?” Is the answer, “Yes,” or “No”? The answer is “Yes,” you are your brother’s keeper. You do have a responsibility for your brother. Not only do we have responsibility for that family member, but of course, in the New Testament, in the body of Christ, you and I have a responsibility for one another as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Yes, I am my brother’s keeper. There is a great sense that I am to know and I am to be concerned about where my brother is spiritually; where his life is; where he resides in his relationship with God. Yes, I am my brother’s keeper.

Then, in verse 10,

He [God] said, “What have you done? The voice of your brother’s blood is crying to Me from the ground.”

Cain murders his brother and then lies to God. Isn’t that true of all of us? One of the first things to follow sin is a lie. Children lie to parents because they are living in sin. Parents lie to children to perhaps justify their sin. Husbands lie to wives, and wives lie to husbands. Why? Because there is sin at the door. To cover it, to clothe it, we begin telling one lie after another. Soon, it multiplies and becomes a tangled web, and we begin wondering, “What did I say?”

Someone said, “You never have to worry about what you said if you tell the truth.”

So Cain began lying.

Cain lost his first love

3. Notice the third result of Cain’s sin; that is, he lost his first love.

Look at verses 11 and 12a.

Now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand. When you cultivate the ground, it will no longer yield its strengths to you; . . .

Now, we can only understand this if we try to understand Cain. There is a breed of men called farmers, and they love the earth. Their greatest joy is watching the stalks of corn wave in the breeze. They

get no more satisfaction out of anything other than knowing that their barns are filled with fresh hay. They love the ground. It is their love, their life.

Cain chose the occupation of farmer because he loved the ground; he loved the earth. It was his greatest joy to plant seed and see it grow and multiply. He brought to God the best things his hands had produced by his labor. He loved it, and God took it away from him. In effect, God said, “Cain, the earth is cursed, but now, the earth is going to ignore your hand. That means, Cain, that you’re going to go out there and plant seed, and nothing is going to happen.”

That would be the nightmare of a farmer. I can imagine that Cain probably went out immediately to test this. He probably planted some seed and watered it and watched over it for a few months. He perhaps, knelt and tried to coax it out of the ground, watering the ground with his tears, saying, “Please grow.”

Yet, the curse stood true. The earth ignored Cain, a man who loved it so much. This was a result of the tragedy of sin.

Cain lost his sense of permanence and direction

4. Notice fourthly that Cain lost his sense of permanence and direction.

Look at the last part of verse 12.

. . . you will be a vagrant and a wanderer on the earth.

In other words, “You are going to leave this place and spend the rest of your life wandering around.”

Again, we cannot understand this unless we think in terms of what a farmer is like. Most farmers are born, grow up, live and die in the same town.

I was born in Worthington, Minnesota, just next to Butterfield, Minnesota. It is a farming community. I have not been back in ten years. We used to go back every summer, and I can still remember in my mind’s eye, that little main street and the general store that was run for many decades by my aunt and uncle. All of the people in town knew each other. They were people of the earth; they farmed. In fact, my father was raised in a farmer’s home, and he sold his inheritance and joined the Air Force and moved to the city. That is how I was raised in the city.

There in the little towns of Worthington and Butterfield, life is so simple. The farmers live close to the ground, and the roots are deep. They have lived there all their lives. There is a real sense of

permanence. Nothing exciting in our definition, ever happens. In fact, their version of a crime wave would be some teenagers riding through town at eleven o'clock at night on their motorcycles or something. Nothing really flamboyant ever occurs. It is simply – you get up, you farm, you eat, you go to bed. And yet, they love it that way. You could not pull them into the city if you tried.

Think in terms of that when you think of Cain. Perhaps you have read or heard about all of the farmers over the last decade that have lost their farms. Unless you have been raised on a farm, you will never understand the agony of their hearts. To auction off what has been in the family for decades, generations, years – this is their life; their roots! They live in the same home where grandpa and grandma lived, and now, they are losing it.

That is the way Cain felt. That is the tragedy of sin. Because God would virtually tell Cain, “Yank up all the roots. From now on, you wander. No more permanence; no more stability.”

Cain lost his fellowship with God

5. Fifthly, the last result Cain's sin was that he lost his fellowship with God.

Look at verses 13 through 15.

Cain said to the Lord, “My punishment is too great to bear! Behold, You have driven me this day from the face of the ground; and from Your face I will be hidden, and I will be a vagrant and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me. So the Lord said to him. “Therefore whoever kills Cain, vengeance will be taken on him sevenfold.” And the Lord appointed a sign for Cain, so that no one finding him would slay him.

This sign was not a mark, but a sign for Cain. We do not know what it was, but it was something that when others saw it, they knew they were not to touch Cain.

Cain was to live under the curse for his entire life. Continue to verse 16 and notice the first phrase.

Then Cain went out from the presence of the Lord, and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

“Nod” is the Hebrew word which means, “the land of wandering”. Cain would wander the rest of his life.

It is interesting that Cain rebelled against the curse because the text tells us, in verse 17, that he tried to build the city to gain some kind of permanence. The Hebrew text indicates there is not a completion of the work. In other words, he began to build, but he never finished. His children probably finished for him.

Cain continued wandering – a fugitive from God. There was no sign of repentance; no sign of confession. You never hear Cain say, “Okay, Lord, just a second. I'll go and get a lamb and be right back.”

No. Cain took his basket of fruit, and we have every indication that he walked away from God forever.

We are told in verses 18 through 26, of his family.

Now to Enoch was born Irad, and Irad became the father of Mehujael, and Mehujael became the father of Methushael, and Methushael became the father of Lamech.

Lamech took to himself two wives: the name of one was Adah, and the name of the other, Zillah.

Adah gave birth to Jabal; he was the father of those who dwell in tents and have livestock.

(this guy invented the tent and he took us home with him),

His brother's name was Jubal; he was the father of all those who play the lyre and the pipe.

As for Zillah, she also gave birth to Tubal-cain, the forger of all implements of bronze and iron; and the sister of Tubal-cain was Naamah.

(notice that it did not take millions of years for people to discover how to use iron and bronze),

Lamech said to his wives . . .

(in his proud heart),

“Adah and Zillah, listen to my voice, you wives of Lamech, give heed to my speech, for I have killed a man for wounding me; and a boy for striking me;

“if Cain is avenged sevenfold, then Lamech seventy-sevenfold.”

(in other words, “I am more wicked than my father, and I am proud of it.”),

Adam had relations with his wife again; and she gave birth to a son, and named him Seth, for, she said, “God has appointed me another offspring in place of Abel, for Cain killed him.”

To Seth, to him also a son was born; and he called his name Enosh. Then men began to call upon the name of the Lord.

Application – Two Thoughts From the Life of Cain

Let me give two thoughts from the life, the biography of Cain. It is brief, yet it is painful. The man who rejected the revelation of God took his own approach to God in his own hands and said, “I’ll come to You, God, in my way.” Like those today, who say they will approach God their way, God rejects them.

Disobedience to God never makes sense

1. The first thought is that disobedience to God never makes sense.

The price of disobedience to God is too great. The penalty is more severe than any enjoyment you or I could ever receive from sin. Disobeying God never, never makes sense.

I can remember, as I was growing up, listening to my father at the Friday night Bible study for military men. He would ask the question, and I used to chuckle because I knew what was coming, “Men, give me three logical reasons why you sin.”

The guys would pop up their hands and say things like, “The devil made me do it.”

They would give all the excuses. Then, my father would prove to them that there is no logical reason, no sensible reason why you or I would ever disobey God. Disobedience never, never makes sense.

Obedience to God begins with a choice

2. Secondly, obedience to God begins with a choice.

Notice, although I have not spent any time on this and it is probably a sermon in itself, both Cain and Abel were born into the same home. Both boys had the same advantages and had the same amount of revelation from God. However, they proved to us that obedience is dependent upon choice.

One chose to follow the revelation of God, while the other chose to disobey the revelation of God. One came with humility, while the other came with pride. One came the way God suggested, while the other came his own way.

Let me close with a story that I love. Charlotte Elliott was a very troubled young lady. She was not a Christian, and in fact, was rebelling against what she knew was true.

Charlotte was raised in a godly home. Her parents, out of desperation one evening, invited a visiting preacher into their home for dinner. He came in and began talking about the Lord at the table. They were asking questions for him to answer that would perhaps, probe into the heart of their daughter so that she would come to Christ. Finally, she blew up and, in a rage, stomped off. They finished their meal in silence.

After awhile, Charlotte, sorry for her outburst, came back to the table. The family had been dismissed and only the preacher was there. He began urging her to choose Christ. She was so overwhelmed with all of her pride, with all of her sense of worth, that it took some talking to reveal to her that she was in fact, a sinner. She finally, after an hour or two of discussion, broke down.

Then, the greatest obstacle to Charlotte’s mind and heart was the fact that she was too sinful for God to ever accept her. She was too filled with herself, her own works. The pastor began saying, “Charlotte, you’ve got to come to God just like you are. Come to God just like you are.”

Still, the light did not break. The preacher left.

Charlotte stayed up all night with those words ringing in her mind, until finally, the Spirit of God made it clear. Her own testimony is written in a way that we sing. Let me read the words that Charlotte Elliott wrote.

Just as I am, without one plea,

But that Thy blood was shed for me,

And that Thou bidst me come to thee,

O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

*Just as I am, and waiting not
To rid my soul of one dark blot,
To Thee whose blood can cleanse each spot,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.*

*Just as I am, though tossed about
With many a conflict, many a doubt,
Fightings and fears within, without,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.*

*Just as I am, Thou wilt receive,
Wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve;*

*Because Thy promise I believe,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.*

The hope for our lives, men and women, is the hope that Abel found in coming to God in His way, just as he was – a sinner. We have found the acceptance due to the obedience of one and the rejection of another because he came in the way that he wanted.

Oh, what a delight to know that, when I come to God by the way of the cross, just as I am (and Jesus continually accepts us on that same basis that we, just as we are, have gone to Him), we can rest, just as we are, in Christ, forgiven, pardoned, and relieved. What a relief that is.

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Truths From an Ancient Record

Genesis 5

Introduction

If you have decided to read through the Bible from cover to cover, and you have started in the book of Genesis, the first major hurdle you have had to overcome is Genesis, chapter 5. In fact, many people have never hurdled it and have stopped in their reading at that point.

In one sense Genesis, chapter 5, seems unimportant to the twentieth century Christian. In another sense it seems almost discouraging or despondent. In this chapter, you are walking through a cemetery viewing the headstones of the deceased patriarchs.

Why would God spend time recording this ancient obituary column for us in Genesis, chapter 5? I must admit or confess that those thoughts have crossed my mind. In fact, I considered skipping chapter 5 with only a few comments, and then getting into the more exciting chapter 6 of Genesis. We know the story of Noah and the flood.

However, as I plowed into Genesis, chapter 5, it was not long before I discovered many precious gems. In fact, when I finished the week of study, I even entertained the thought of making this a two or three part sermon. We will never get through Genesis that way, right? And all of you want to get through Genesis eventually. So, we will cover some of the key thoughts in Genesis, chapter 5.

Why Did God Record an Obituary Column?

Let us answer the first question. I will give three answers to the question, "Why would God take the

time to record this chapter of the generation of Adam? Why did God record an obituary column?"

Let us begin by looking at verses 1 through 3a of Genesis, chapter 5.

This is the book of the generations of Adam. In the day God created man, He made him in the likeness of God. He created them male and female, and He blessed them and named them Man in the day when they were created. When Adam had lived one hundred and thirty years, he became the father . . .

Now we begin making our way through the graveyard. Why take the time to give us this? Let me give three suggestions.

God is keeping His word

1. I think God is implying first, that He is keeping His word.

God had promised a deliverer through the godly seed of woman. He is listing the names of those in the godly line of Seth. Chapter 4 of Genesis lists the ungodly line of Cain. God is taking time to remind Israel that, "I have kept a godly seed alive through Seth, and here are their names."

God always has a remnant of believers

2. The second implication along that same line, is that God always has a remnant of believers.

The God-fearing may be a tiny minority. In fact, at the writing of this, man was becoming increasingly immoral. Yet God is letting us in on the fact that

there are those who have not “thrown in the towel”; there are still some who follow God.

I think of Elijah, who, when he took on the prophets of Baal, won the great victory on Mount Carmel. The fire fell and he was on the mountaintop experience of victory. Then he had all of the false prophets rounded up and they were all killed. He had also been praying for three years that no rain would come, and it had not. God had answered his prayer as the prophet.

However, after Mount Carmel, Jezebel says these words in I Kings, chapter 19, verse 2b,

. . . So may the gods do to me and even more, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them [prophets of Baal] by tomorrow about this time.

In other words, she is saying, “You’ve got twenty-four hours to live, and then it’s curtains; you’re done. I’ve put a contract out on your head, and I’m going to make sure this time tomorrow, you’re dead.”

You may remember the story that Elijah runs for his life. He is tired and discouraged. This is what he prays to God, in I Kings, chapter 19, verses 4b and 10. Have you ever prayed this?

It is enough; now, O Lord, take my life, for I am not better than my fathers. . . . I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the sons of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars and killed Your prophets with the sword. . . .

(note this),

. . . And I alone am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.

God, I think, chuckles under His breath and then, moves closer to Elijah and whispers in his ear these words, “Son, there are seven thousand people in Israel alone who have never bowed their knee to Baal. Seven thousand – unknown, unnamed – believers in Me. You don’t know who they are; you don’t know where they are, but I want you to know that I have a remnant. And they have never bowed their knee to the false gods.” (I Kings 19:18)

I think of what Paul wrote to the Philippians in chapter 4, verse 22. He said these words,

All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar’s household.

We are never given their names, but in the ungodly household of this emperor lived a believing remnant – those who were following God.

And how about that long list of names in Romans, chapter 16? There are names like Aristobulus, and Junias, and Phlegon, and others that we have never even heard of. They were unnoticed and unnamed, but they were not forgotten. They might have been in the minority, but they were never overwhelmed.

Let me apply this thought to you. Perhaps this past week, you have had the thought that you are alone in your walk with the Lord – but you are not. You might even find yourself in the minority in your family. When Thanksgiving and Christmas family reunions come along, the last thing they do is lighten your load; refresh your heart. Instead, they increase the burden of your heart. You are the tiny minority in that realm of relatives that you see every year or every other year. You might be in the minority at your job, where it seems that you are the only one that has not bowed his knee to the gods of materialism and pleasure. So, you get to the point where you bow your knee to the Lord, and say, “Lord, this isn’t worth it. I am the only one.”

I want you to hear today, my friend, from Genesis, chapter 5, God whispering in your ear, “Son [or daughter], you are not alone. I have a godly remnant out there – thousands here, hundreds there, one or two tucked away over there that you do not know about. You’re not alone.”

God never forgets His own people

3. The third implication, along that line, is that God never forgets His own people.

Now, chapters 1 through 11 in the book of Genesis cover two thousand years. There are two thousand years to cover in eleven chapters. Do you know what you and I would have done? For heaven sake, we would never have taken an entire chapter to list peoples’ names. There is too much to cover; too much ground in the history of the world. He has two thousand years to cover and He stops to give us a list of names.

It is interesting that God is particularly concerned to record the names of those who follow Him. One illustration would be Malachi, chapter 3, verse 16, where the prophet writes,

Then those who feared the Lord spoke to one another, and the Lord gave attention and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the Lord and who esteem His name.

Revelation, chapter 20, verses 11 through 15, tell us that the names of those who believe in the Lamb are written in the book of life. Isn't it an interesting thought, ladies and gentlemen, that God is interested in you? He is so interested that He has recorded your name. You and I have a hard time remembering names, but God never forgets. If you believe in Him, He will never forget you.

Do you know what it is like to be forgotten? Perhaps some husband this past week, forgot a birthday and is in trouble today. Or perhaps you forgot an anniversary – that is worse.

I grew up in a rather large family of four boys and our parents. In the afternoons, my father, my brothers and I would frequently play basketball at the public school. One day, when my youngest brother was about four years old, we were at the school playing. We played and had a great time and then, piled back into the car and headed home. About ten blocks down the street, someone asked, "Hey, where's Jonathan?"

We had forgotten the poor kid! So, we turned around and went back, and there was Jonathan walking down the street with his hands tucked in his pockets. He looked so forlorn; so forgotten. I can remember my father trying to explain to him, "I love you, son, I just forgot you."

Perhaps you know what it is like to be forgotten at the airport. Someone did not come and pick you up – they forgot.

It is easy for us to forget, but God never does. He is letting us know in Genesis, chapter 5, that, "I remember all those who believe in My name."

Two Notable Mentions

Now that we have discovered a few general principles, let us look at some specifics. We will not take the time to study all who are mentioned in Genesis, chapter 5, but He makes notable mention of two men in this long list. These men are kind of the salutatorians of the graduating class of patriarchs. The two men are Enoch and Methuselah. Since God took special time with them, let us spend some time with them as well.

Enoch

1. Enoch is the first notable mention.

Four phrases about Enoch

Enoch appears five times in Scripture and four different phrases or thoughts are connected with this man. Let me give them to you.

Enoch was the seventh generation from Adam

- In Jude, verse 14, it is recorded of Enoch that he is the seventh generation from Adam.

Turn to Jude, the small book with only one chapter that is just before Revelation, the last book of the Bible. Jude, verse 14, says,

. . . Enoch, in the seventh generation from Adam . . .

Why is this mentioned? If you go back to Genesis, chapter 4, verse 17, you discover that in the line of Cain, there is an Enoch. There are two Enochs that are contemporaries living at the same time. God is saying, "I want you to know about the godly Enoch, the one who followed Me, not the one in the line of Cain. This Enoch, in the line of Seth, is the seventh generation from Adam. He is the godly one."

That gives us an illustration that during the course of world history, there will be the Enochs who follow God and the Enochs who follow the way of Cain.

Enoch was a preacher of righteousness

- The second thing that is said about Enoch is that he was a preacher of righteousness.

Look again at Jude, verses 14 through 15.

It was also about these men that Enoch, in the seventh generation from Adam, prophesied, saying, "Behold the Lord came with many thousands of His holy ones, to execute judgment upon all, and to convict all the ungodly of all their ungodly deeds which they have done in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him."

You should underline the word "ungodly," as it appears four times in these two verses.

Enoch was a preacher, and his sermons were two-fold, or had two themes: the current ungodliness and the coming judgment. Boy, Enoch was a popular

preacher – he preached about those things. It was so known of Enoch that he preached on ungodliness that, when it lists his autobiographical statement, he used the word “ungodly” four times.

The interesting thing is, you know who his audience was – his relatives; those related to him. He did not have an easy task, and yet he preached righteousness.

Enoch walked with God

- Turn back to Genesis, chapter 5, verse 22a, and notice the phrase that you are probably familiar with, which gives us the third thing that is said about Enoch,

Then Enoch walked with God three hundred years . . .

This was not just for a day, a week, a year – no, Enoch walked with God three hundred years.

The original stem of the word “walk” would indicate close and intimate communion. Enoch fellowshiped with God. Notice this is a walk, not a hundred yard sprint. It is not a mad dash, but a walk. It is also not a casual “take it or leave it” stroll. No, this is an intimate walk; this is a pursuit.

Two things necessary for a walk with God

This is a subject for an entire sermon, but let me at least suggest two things that are necessary for you to walk with God.

Harmony

- The first thing necessary for a walk with God is harmony.

You cannot take a walk with someone you are at odds with, there must be harmony. A walk with someone in an intimate fellowship means that your hearts are in harmony.

Agreement

- The second thing I would suggest is agreement.

You are agreeing, as Enoch did, with the direction God is going. I think the reason more of us do not want to walk consistently with God is because there come times in our lives when we do not like the direction He is taking us. We say, “turn left; He

says, “turn right”. We say, “stop”; He says, “continue”. So we say, “Well, Lord, I don’t like the direction of this walk. I can’t agree.”

For three hundred years, Enoch obviously agreed.

Enoch was taken up so that he would not see death

- The fourth descriptive thought concerning Enoch is found in Hebrews, chapter 11, verse 5. I believe this is even more powerful in its implication than his walk with God. It is obviously a synonymous thought, and yet it is a different thought.

By faith . . .

(that was the key),

. . . Enoch was taken up so that he would not see death; and he was not found because God took him up; for he obtained the witness that before his being taken up he was pleasing to God.

Note that Enoch’s reputation before his being taken up was that he was pleasing to God. Enoch pleased God.

You might think, “Well that’s great for Enoch. He was a great man of the faith. He was one of the patriarchs. He had an extra dose of grace. I mean, God kind of padded the way for him. He could please God. Is it really up to me to please God today?”

Well, there are several times in the New Testament that the word “ambition” is used. One of these texts is in II Corinthians, chapter 5, verse 9, where Paul says,

. . . we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him [God].

We are ambitious to please God.

How do we please God? This again is a subject for another study, but let me point out one thought. Turn to I Kings, chapter 3. I want to take you to an incident in Scripture where a man did something and then, we hear God saying, “Hey, that pleased me.”

I think we can learn what it takes to please God from this one incident. Look at I Kings, chapter 3, verse 5,

In Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream at night; and God said, “Ask what you wish Me to give you.”

How would you like that for Christmas?
Anything you want – you wish for it, you have got it.
Boy, I can think of three or four things, right away!

So, in verse 6,

Then Solomon said, “You have shown great lovingkindness to Your servant David my father, according as he walked before You in truth and righteousness and uprightness of heart toward You; and You have reserved for him this great lovingkindness, that You have given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day.”

Well, get to the wish, Solomon. Continue to verses 7 and 8.

Now, O Lord my God, You have made Your servant king in place of my father David, yet I am but a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. Your servant is in the midst of Your people which You have chosen, a great people who are too many to be numbered or counted.

Here is the wish in verse 9.

So give Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people to discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?

Continue to verse 10.

It was pleasing in the sight of the Lord that Solomon had asked this thing.

Now, in the next verse, God will put His finger on the three wishes that you and I would normally ask. Look at verse 11.

God said to him, “Because you have asked this thing and have not asked for yourself long life, . . .

(that is the first thing – health),

. . . nor have asked riches for yourself, . . .

(that is the second thing – wealth),

. . . nor have you asked for the life of your enemies, . . .

(that is the third thing – no enemies; popularity),

. . . but have asked for yourself discernment to understand justice,

Health, wealth, and fame – those are the three wishes that we would have made. God said, “Because you didn’t ask for these three, but instead asked for

discernment to understand justice,” – continue to verse 12a,

behold, I have done according to your words. . . .

What pleases God, ladies and gentlemen, from this little incident? It is when you and I pray, “Lord, I don’t ask for help, I just ask for the discernment to understand when sickness comes. Lord, I’m not going to ask or wish for wealth, I just ask for the prudence and the wisdom to steward what you have given me. Lord, I don’t ask for popularity or fame, I just ask for grace to handle my enemies.”

Then, God says to you and me, “I’m pleased.”

Methuselah

2. Note one other honorable mention in Genesis, chapter 5. God mentions another man, just briefly, and yet there is so much about this one character. Methuselah is the second honorable mention in verse 22.

Then Enoch walked with God three hundred years after he became the father of Methuselah, and he had other sons and daughters.

Three thoughts about Methuselah

Let me give three thoughts about Methuselah.

Methuselah’s birth changed his father’s life

- First, Methuselah’s birth evidently brought about a change in his father’s life.

Look at verse 22 again, and note the word “after”.

Then Enoch walked with God three hundred years after he became the father of Methuselah . . .

The cry of his newborn son pierced Enoch’s heart. God used that to cause the understanding and desire in his heart that, “Now my son is watching. He is here and I must now walk with God.”

For three hundred years after Methuselah’s birth, Enoch followed God and pleased God.

There is a story of the alcoholic who lived a terrible life of sin. He abused his wife, never took care of things around the home, and spent most of his money on liquor. Into their home a baby boy was born, and all the town thought it was a tragedy for a

baby boy to be born into a home like that. And indeed, this man continued his carousing and drinking, never giving any thought to his son and wife.

One winter, however, when the boy was five, the father slammed out of the house and began walking across the freshly driven snow toward the local tavern. As he was walking, he heard the door close behind him and someone call out, “Daddy, slow down.”

The father turned around and found his son taking large strides so he could step where his father had already pressed the snow down. His father angrily said, “Son, get back in the house. What are you doing?”

The son stopped and kind of stuck out his chest and said, “Daddy, I’m big enough now, so that wherever you step, I can step. Now I can follow in your footsteps.”

That man turned and came back to his son, and he knelt in the snow, gathered his boy into his arms, and said to his son, “In that case, I need to change directions.”

Now we do not know what Enoch was like before the birth of his son. However, something about his birth told Enoch, “Even though you’re in the godly line, you have not been godly and you need to change direction; you need to begin walking with God.”

The best thing that you and I can do for our children, men and women, is not provide for them the most expensive education, not give them the finest clothes and automobiles. The best thing that we can do for our children is to walk with God. We need to press down the ground where we are not ashamed if they should follow step after step.

Methuselah’s name means “when he is dead, it will come”

- The second thing about Methuselah is the meaning of his name. The name means, “when he is dead, it will come”.

That is a great name to have. Names were always chosen according to meaning, so Enoch saw his baby boy and thought, “What should I name this boy so that the meaning will ring into the ears of all who hear it? Methuselah means, ‘when he is dead, it will come’.”

That is a strange name, unless you understand the chronological history. History reveals that the year Methuselah died, the flood covered the earth. Now,

according to Jude, verse 14, Enoch was a prophet. God must have given him revelation that when his little boy died – and he would not know if that would be in two weeks, two years, two hundred years – but when Methuselah died, it would come, meaning the judgment.

Methuselah lived longer than any other person ever lived

- Let me give the third thing that is even more powerful because of this point, and that is, Methuselah lived longer than any other person has ever lived.

Do you get this? God said, “When this boy dies, judgment is coming.”

However, in order to illustrate His grace and patience towards humanity, he made it so that Methuselah would live longer than anyone ever lived. When Methuselah died, judgment came.

“And He Died”

One phrase receives repeated attention in Genesis, chapter 5. It is the phrase, “and he died”.

In:

- verse 5 – *So all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years, and he died.*
- verse 8 – *So all the days of Seth were nine hundred and twelve years, and he died.*
- verse 11 – *So all the days of Enosh were nine hundred and five years, and he died.*
- verse 14 – *So all the days of Kenan were nine hundred and ten years, and he died.*
- verse 17 – *So all the days of Mahalalel were eight hundred and ninety-five years, and he died.*
- verse 20 – *So all the days of Jared were nine hundred and sixty-two years, and he died.*
- verse 27 – *So all the days of Methuselah were nine hundred and sixty-nine years, and he died.*
- verse 31 – *So all the days of Lamech were seven hundred and seventy-seven years, and he died.*

Lamech, the last in this genealogical record, lived seven hundred and seventy-seven years and guess what happened? And he died.

God told Adam, in Genesis, chapter 2, verse 17b,
. . . in the day that you eat from it [the tree of the knowledge of good and evil] you will surely die.

In Genesis, chapter 5, verse 5, we are told,

So all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years, and he died.

God kept His word. And, by the way, ladies and gentlemen, that is why one day, you and I will grace the column of some obituary in the newspaper. We, like Adam, will die. We cannot avoid it, except for the coming of Jesus Christ for the church.

There is a fable of a wealthy merchant who sent his servant to the market in Samaria to purchase goods that were needed. The servant went to the market in obedience to his master and began making purchases. He then decided to take a little shortcut through an alley. Halfway there, he ran face to face with lady death. The fable tells that this servant was so startled that he turned and ran. Lady death must be after him! He ran back to his master and said, "Please loan me one of your fastest horses. I must flee to Baghdad tonight."

The master could tell his servant was distraught. He said, "Okay, take the horse, it's yours."

So, the servant fled to Baghdad. The master then went to the market in Samara and finished buying the needed goods. He also went back through the alley, and came face to face with lady death. He, perhaps knowing that his time had not come, said to lady death, "Why have you startled my servant?"

Lady death said to him, "Actually it was I who was startled. I couldn't understand why he was in Samaria. I have an appointment with him tonight in Baghdad."

The writer of Scripture tells us, in Hebrews, chapter 9, verse 27,

. . . it is appointed for men to die once . . .

That could be literally translated, "It is the destiny of everyone to die."

We do not like to think about that. And yet, one of the godliest men who ever lived said, in Psalm, chapter 90, verse 12a,

[Lord] teach us to number our days . . .

We are not ready to live, until we are prepared to die.

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Ingredients of Integrity

Genesis 6:1-9:17

Introduction

We live in a world of violence and corruption. In 1900, there was one murder for every 100,000 people in the United States of America. By 1974, that statistic had risen to one for every 10,000 people. That means that every year, one out of every 10,000 people in America die a victim of murder. In 1987, there were over 10,000,000 property crimes. In fact, the FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation) stated that the likelihood of a person in America experiencing a violent crime has increased fifty percent in the last decade alone.

Violence has become a way of life. In fact, it is promoted in the standard media. By the time the average child reaches twelve years of age, he has watched 13,500 hours of television. That is twice as much time as he will spend in school. By the time he finishes that exposure, he has seen 14,000 deaths. That is one every hour. He has observed over 100,000 violent crimes. That is one every eight minutes. We are breeding a violence saturated generation.

Even the popular music of today and the rock culture is filled with lyrics suggesting violence. If you have believed the lie that every generation has its music, and this is the music for this generation, you need to see me, because I will let you see the lyrics. They have changed dramatically and evidently, you are unaware. Perhaps that is why last year, there were over 70,000 assaults against teachers in our public schools.

Violence is not the only problem in America. We have a problem with corruption, immorality, adultery,

homosexuality, nudity, profanity and all are considered acceptable and are even portrayed by the media as legitimate lifestyles.

The unwed pregnancy rate among girls under the age of sixteen has increased eighty percent in the past ten years. In America, there are 10,000,000 alcoholics, and 1,000,000 of them are junior high kids. White collar crime has also risen dramatically in the last ten years. It is not surprising to hear of a banker, a financial investment group, an investor, or a religious leader being indicted for fraud, tax evasion, manipulation of interest, and downright embezzlement.

Now I have not listed these sins to get our sermon off to a great start or to be dramatic. I really want to answer a question that comes as a result of hearing of just a few of the things that are happening in this country. The question is, "How in the world could I as an individual or us as a family survive the immorality of this generation? And not just survive, but how can we impact our generation for Jesus Christ?"

Four Essential Ingredients of Integrity

The solution is found in a story in the Bible. It is in Genesis, chapter 6 – the story of Noah and his family. I want to discover with you today, ingredients of integrity that will help us not only survive the immorality and ungodliness of our generation, but help us to make a difference. We are not here to coast our way to heaven; we are here to make an impact as salt and light. How do we do that? We find the

solution in Genesis, chapter 6. We will begin with verses 1 and 2.

Now it came about, when men began to multiply on the face of the land, and daughters were born to them, that the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves, whomever they chose.

Now there may be some who would like me to state a position on the debate that has been raised as to whether these were fallen angels or humans. Perhaps you have heard or been involved in such a discussion. I do not want to preach a sermon on this debate, but let me at least give a couple of reasons why I do not believe this is the demonic world.

- First, if they were demons, they would not have been referred to as “the sons of God”.
- Furthermore, if they were good angels that had not yet fallen, they would not be looking or “on the prowl” for women. Satan and his horde had had to leave heaven, and the angels remaining in heaven were being confirmed in their goodness by remaining with God.
- Thirdly, angels, according to Jesus in Matthew, chapter 22, do not have the ability to procreate – I believe that is the intention of that text. Procreation is a human phenomenon, a human miracle. God has given us the ability to procreate; to bear children. Why? Because God promised that through this would come a Redeemer. Angels have no reason to procreate, they are created beings to worship God.

I think, the context in these verses would indicate that God has a problem not with fallen angels, but with men.

Notice verse 3.

Then the Lord said, “My spirit shall not strive with men forever, because he also is flesh; nevertheless his days shall be an hundred and twenty years.”

I think this is a reference to the sons of God; the “ben Elohim”; the godly line of Seth. It is a godly line that is becoming weak. Why? Because they are intermarrying with ungodly women of the flesh – the ungodly line of Cain (that we are given in Genesis, chapter 4). So there is the intermingling of these two races that will bring about the necessity of judgment.

Well, enough of answering a question you probably you were not asking anyway. Let us continue to verses 5 through 9.

Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

The Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart.

The Lord said, “I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, from man to animals to creeping things and to birds of the sky; for I am sorry that I have made them.”

(now notice the word “But” in verse 8),

But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord.

These are the records of the generation of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his time; Noah walked with God.

The word “blameless” could be translated, “a person of integrity”. “Integrity” is defined as, “uprightness of character”. Noah had it. However, that does not really tell us much about Noah, other than he was a man of great character.

I want to give four ingredients of integrity that we can discover from this text. These ingredients are essential in your life and mine, if we are to ever survive the lure, the pull, the temptation, the obstacles to living a godly life in America today.

Integrity is purity in the midst of immorality

1. The first ingredient is this – integrity is purity in the midst of immorality.

Look again at verse 5, and notice several characteristic words of this generation.

Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

What a sad lot. They never had a good thought about them. Every thought continually was only evil. This was the record of that generation.

Right in the middle of this corrupt, sinful world is a flickering light – Noah and his family, who were

godly. His godliness was an indictment. In fact, I am convinced that a person of integrity will follow God even when it is unpopular. Noah discovered, in effect, when God was going to move, and he decided, when God came to him, that he would move with Him.

Hebrews, chapter 11, which we have studied in detail at an earlier date, discusses this. Let us refresh our memories with the fact that Noah was entered into the “hall of faith”. Look at verse 7 of Hebrews, chapter 11.

By faith Noah, being warned by God about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.

There Noah was, an indictment upon his ungodly society. The words “he condemned the world,” do not mean much to us, yet we use similar phrases all the time. We might say that, “we’ve got to fight the world” or “we’re against the world”.

What do they mean? These phrases are a reference to the world system. What is the world system engineered by? The desires of perhaps fame, health, popularity, pleasure. All of these things grind the wheels of this world system into full gear. When we are an indictment on our world, what are we doing? We are living in such a way that we are not after these things or after these pleasures.

It says in this verse, that Noah rebuked or “condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith”. Why? Because Noah was willing to consider the approval of God more important than the applause of men.

How did Noah do that? Well, we know, through the chapters in Genesis, that he did it by what he did; that is, building an ark, and by what he said. The New Testament refers to Noah as “a preacher of righteousness” (II Peter 2:5). So, he not only lived a godly life, but he spoke the word.

There is a great debate today as to what generates the best kind of evangelism? Is it lifestyle evangelism or is it confrontational evangelism? Do you just live it and hope people get saved or do you pound people into the corner and ask them all the questions? Which do you appreciate most?

A man I respect was asked that question one time. He answered, “Well, let me ask you this question, ‘Have you ever flown?’”

“Yeah, I have.”

“Well, when you’re 30,000 feet up, which do you appreciate most, the left wing or the right wing?”

“You appreciate both.”

Noah did both, as seen in his life.

Integrity is obedience in the midst of ridicule

2. Let me give a second ingredient – integrity is obedience in the midst of ridicule.

Look at Genesis, chapter 6, again. Let us begin reading at verse 13 and read to the end of the chapter.

Then God said to Noah, “The end of all flesh has come before Me; for the earth is filled with violence because of them; and behold, I am about to destroy them with the earth.

“Make for yourself an ark of gopher wood [or cedar wood]; you shall make the ark with rooms [could be translated nests], and shall cover it inside and outside with pitch.

“This is how you shall make it: the length of the ark three hundred cubits, its breadth fifty cubits, and its height thirty cubits.

(we do not know for certain what that measurement is, but we know that the ark will measure longer than one football field),

“You shall make a window for the ark, and finish it to a cubit from the top; and set the door of the ark in the side of it; you shall make it with lower, second, and third decks.”

Now this boat looks a little bit different from the kind you and I have seen in our Sunday school material. This boat, when it was finished, looked more like a floating barge. It was almost square and was three stories high. It was like a box that floated. It has been discovered, when these measurements were put to the test, that this vessel was almost impossible to capsize. That was important, because the tidal wave, the torrential rains, the hurricane-like weather was going to come, and this boat had to remain upright. Now continue to verse 17.

“Behold, I, even I am bringing the flood of water upon the earth, to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life, from under

heaven; everything that is on the earth shall perish.

“But I will establish My covenant with you; and you shall enter the ark – you and your sons and your wife, and your sons’ wives with you.

(this is perhaps, an indication that the rest of the family will believe as well),

“And of every living thing of all flesh, you shall bring two of every kind into the ark, to keep them alive with you; they shall be male and female.

(by now, Noah is scratching his head),

“Of the birds after their kind, and of the animals after their kind, of every creeping thing of the ground after its kind [or species], two of every kind will come to you to keep them alive.

“As for you, take for yourself some of all food which is edible, and gather it to yourself; and it shall be for food for you and for them.”

Then Noah said, “You must be joking. Are you serious, Lord?”

“I’m not joking.”

Noah has just been asked to build a boat longer than a football field, and three stories high (approximately forty-five feet high). And, by the way, they were not building buildings with stories until the tower of Babel. It is also going to weigh about 18,000 tons and sit in his back yard somewhere. That is what God said to do.

(Chuck) “Right!!”

Notice, as we continue to the last verse of chapter 6, or verse 22, that Noah’s obedience was comprehensive.

Thus Noah did; according to all that God had commanded him, so he did.

Also notice chapter 7, verse 5.

Noah did according to all that the Lord had commanded him.

Look as well, at the last part of verse 9 of chapter 7:

... as God had commanded Noah.

This was comprehensive obedience by Noah. In fact, the word “build” is the same Greek word used in

the Septuagint and in the New Testament that is translated “prepared”. Turn to Hebrews, chapter 9, verse 1.

Now even the first covenant had regulations of divine worship and the earthly sanctuary.

Now, there is a tabernacle and as we continue in Hebrews, chapter 9, to verses 2 through 5, the word “prepared” is used, which is the same word used of Noah. Notice the way the tabernacle is prepared.

For there was a tabernacle prepared, the outer one, in which were the lampstand and the table and the sacred bread; this is called the holy place.

Behind the second veil there was a tabernacle which is called the Holy of Holies,

having a golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden jar holding the manna, and Aaron’s rod which budded, and the tables of the covenant;

and above were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat; but of these things we cannot now speak in detail.

In other words, there was such comprehensive detail that, when they came to make exactly what God specified, they did it with such care. That is the idea of Noah building an 18,000 ton boat.

You would think Noah would get some scraps and just put the thing together. He might staple and scotch tape and think, “We’re going to make it – God will take care of us.”

Absolutely not. Noah built that ark in such a way that the word used means he comprehensively obeyed every detail. And, nothing was lost.

Now, use your imagination for a moment. I can just hear a neighbor coming along, and I am sure Noah had them coming all the time, to see this thing Noah was building. This was the eighth wonder of the ancient world. This was on the tour maps of all the people in that area. I can just hear the neighbors, “What are you building, Noah?”

“I’m building an ark.”

“What’s an ark?”

“Well, I won’t know until I finish it. I’ve never seen one before.”

“Why are you building it, Noah?”

“It’s going to rain.”

“What’s rain, Noah?”

“Well, I don’t know. I haven’t seen it yet.”

“What does an ark do, Noah?”

“Well, I do know that, it floats on water.”

“Floats on water? Noah, the nearest body of water, the Mediterranean Sea, is five hundred miles away. You missed it by a few miles. Wait. Did you say it floats like a boat? Let me see the specs to that thing.”

I can just see the neighbor. Noah wrote it all down on the clay tablet because he did not want to miss a thing. This guy probably picks it up and says, “Ha! Who gave you these things?”

“God did.”

“A lot God knows about building boats. He’s left some things out.”

“He did? Like what?”

“Well, there’s no mention here of sails or oars. How you gonna move this thing?”

“Never thought about that.”

“And also, you’re missing probably the most important thing on a boat – you’re missing a rudder. No mention of a rudder here. How you gonna steer it? Where’s the pilot’s wheel? Who’s gonna navigate this thing?”

“I guess God will.”

“Oh, and I suppose you’ve seen Him too.”

“No, I’ve never seen God.”

The reason I emphasize that particular point is because Hebrews, chapter 11, verse 7, mentions that Noah believed “things not yet seen”. He had never seen an ark. He had never seen rain. He had never seen God. But a man, or woman, of integrity is more interested in obeying the voice of God than, at times, the voice of reason.

Ladies, just imagine with me for a moment, how you would like to be married to a man who is considered the most eccentric, foolish man in the community? Think of it. I can just imagine Mrs. Noah going to the marketplace and all the ladies coming up, “Now, you dear poor soul, I’m sure you’ll go with that basket case of a husband, you poor thing.”

Kids, how would you like it if your dad was known as the biggest loser in the community? Don’t answer that – you will be in trouble if you do! You would want to disown him, right? Unless, of course, you share his cause. And they did. Chapter 7, verse 1, says,

Then the Lord said to Noah, “Enter the ark, you and all your household, for you alone I have seen to be righteous before Me in this time.”

Well, the ark is finished, and I know you are familiar with the story, so I will move along a little quicker. They have finished perhaps, even bringing the animals, and have gone into the ark. I can imagine seeing Noah’s family go into that ark.

If I had been Noah, about this time I would get my digs in. “I’ve been preaching for one hundred twenty years and nobody has responded. I’ve been called a fool and every other name in the book for one hundred twenty years. My kids have been ridiculed; made fun of, and my wife also.”

Now would be the chance. And yet, I would imagine Noah responding somewhat differently. I would imagine Noah, before entering the ark, turning around. I am sure crowds have gathered; crowds have come to see this thing. Noah’s family has been hauling luggage and food from their home into the ark, and the crowds have come to watch. I would imagine that Noah would turn around. Now he is a suntanned man with deep lines in his face and calluses on his hands from hard labor. I would imagine one last time, he extends to them the invitation to enter the ark. He might say something like, “Don’t you understand? Judgment is coming. Haven’t you heard? Methuselah died. Won’t you enter the ark?”

We know from the estimations of scientists and mathematicians that the ark was only half full. Half full – there was room for hundreds, if not thousands of people. Do you know how many people responded to his preaching, to his invitations, to his life – the kind of life you are living? Zero. It was a colossal failure. Noah only had seven converts – his own family members. That is one convert every seventeen years – boy, that is exciting. And yet, God considered him a man of integrity, not because people responded to his voice, but because he had responded to God’s voice.

Integrity is patience in the midst of uncertainty

3. Let me give a third ingredient – integrity is patience in the midst of uncertainty.

Look at chapter 7 of Genesis, the first 10 verses.

Then the Lord said to Noah, “Enter the ark, you and all your household, for you alone I have seen to be righteous before Me in this time.

“You will take with you of every clean animal by sevens, a male and his female; and of the animals that are not clean two, a male and his female;”

Understand that all of the animals are not going in two by two. The clean animals are going in by sevens; the unclean by twos. The reason for that is there would need to be animals for sacrifices. Continue to verse 3.

“also the birds of the sky, by sevens, male and female, to keep offspring alive on the face of the earth.

(note the word “seven” in verse 4),

“For after seven more days, I will send rain on the earth forty days and forty nights; and I will blot out from the face of the land every living thing that I have made.”

Noah did according to all that the Lord had commanded him.

Noah was six hundred years old when the flood of water came upon the earth.

Then Noah and his sons and his wife and his sons’ wives with him entered the ark because of the water of the flood.

Of clean animals and animals that are not clean and birds and everything that creeps on the ground,

there went into the ark to Noah by twos, male and female, as God had commanded Noah.

(note verse 10),

It came about after the seven days, that the water of the flood came upon the earth.

That is why I call this patience in the midst of uncertainty. I cannot believe the obedience of Noah; the patience of Noah and his family. They have gotten everyone into the ark, they are in there surrounded by animals, and guess what happens? For seven days, absolutely nothing! The door is shut; they have all

their equipment; they are ready to float – but there is no rain.

I imagine after a day or two, the neighbors lose their uncertainty; they get a little more bold. They had been wondering, “Is judgment coming?” Now two days have passed and nothing is happening. Now they are out at the ark barbecuing. One man said they are playing badminton using the ark as the net. They are out there having a great time and hollering, “Hey, Noah, are you still in there?”

Noah is probably scratching his head, thinking, “Lord, is this some kind of sham? Where’s the rain?”

Yet, there is no record of that. Although Noah was probably confused and uncertain, there is no record that he ever questioned God.

My friends, integrity believes God even when it seems ridiculous. You and I want integrity as long as it makes us look respectable. Noah was willing to follow integrity, even when it made him look ridiculous.

Look at verse 10 again.

It came about after the seven days, that the water of the flood came upon the earth.

I think this was probably God’s way of saying, “Look, I’m going to give mankind seven more days to repent. Seven more days because, when all of the generations read of My judgment, they’re going to know that I was so patient with man. I gave him every opportunity, and he would not repent.”

Now look at chapter 7, verse 17 through the end of the chapter.

Then the flood came upon the earth for forty days, and the water increased and lifted up the ark, so that it rose above the earth.

The water prevailed and increased greatly upon the earth, and the ark floated on the surface of the water.

The water prevailed more and more upon the earth, so that all the high mountains everywhere under the heavens were covered.

(This is a universal flood, not a local flood.),

The water prevailed fifteen cubits higher, and the mountains were covered.

All flesh that moved on the earth perished, birds and cattle and beasts and

every swarming thing that swarms upon the earth, and all mankind;

of all that was on the dry land, all in whose nostrils was the breath of the spirit of life, died.

Thus He blotted out every living thing that was upon the face of the land, from man to animals to creeping things and to birds of the sky, and they were blotted out from the earth; and only Noah was left, together with those that were with him in the ark.

The water prevailed upon the earth one hundred and fifty days.

You need to understand that Noah and his family will float in this thing for over a year. This is not a weekend trip; this is a year plus. And when the ark finally grounds on top of one of the ridges in the mountain ranges of Ararat, God did not tell Noah, "All right, here are all the details of how you begin."

God never told Noah what life would be like after the flood. He never even told Noah how long he would float. Noah is sending out a dove to look for some kind of dry land. Noah is so patient that he sends out a dove and waits seven days. I would have been sending out doves every thirty minutes to look for some kind of dry land. What a patient man. In the midst of uncertainty, Noah was a man of integrity.

Integrity is worship in the midst of difficulty

4. Let me give a fourth ingredient – integrity is worship in the midst of difficulty.

Notice chapter 8, verses 14 through 19.

In the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, the earth was finally dry.

Then God spoke to Noah, saying,

"Go out of the ark, you and your wife and your sons and your sons' wives with you.

"Bring out with you every living thing of all flesh that is with you, birds and animals and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth, that they may breed abundantly on the earth, and be fruitful and multiply on the earth."

So Noah went out, and his sons and his wife and his sons' wives with him.

Every beast, every creeping thing, and every bird, everything that moves on the earth, went out by their families from the ark.

And Noah kind of threw his arms out and said, "Finally, this is over. Lord, *never* put me through that again."

No, we are told in verse 20,

Then Noah built an altar to the Lord, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird and offered burnt offerings on the altar.

The first thing Noah did was lead his family in worship. What a confusing year this had been for him. It was a year of silence from God; a year of uncertainty; a year of tremendous difficulty, and yet, he worships God.

What About Today?

God responds in chapter 9, by establishing the Noahic covenant, a covenant that will change some of the things on planet earth.

One of the covenant changes will be that animals now will be in terror and fear of mankind. Man and beast will now be carnivorous.

The beautiful thing about the Noahic covenant, as we know, is the establishment of the rainbow as the sign of the covenant. By that, God says, "Every time you look up into the heavens, the earth will never be covered again by water." And by the way, you and I see the evidence of the covenant as well.

The unbeliever says, "Well, that's great – Noah is a wonderful man and he lived in a wicked world, but there is no need for a Noah today. God's judgment is not coming today."

Turn with me to II Peter, chapter 3, and look at verses 3 through 7. Sinful man refuses talk of judgment, but note what the scriptures clearly state.

Know this first of all, that in the last days . . .

(that is our generation, our day, our age of grace),

. . . mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts,

and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation."

For when they maintain this, it escapes their notice that by the word of God the heavens existed long ago and the earth was formed out of water and by water,

through which the world at that time was destroyed, being flooded with water.

But by His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for . . .

(for what kind of judgment?),

. . . fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.

Skip to verse 12.

looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat!

Just as certainly as God kept His word and the flood came, and He gave mankind centuries to believe through the preaching of Enoch and Noah, so He has given us a day of grace to believe, but judgment is also coming. How is it coming this time? Fire.

Someone might say, “Ha, ha, ha! How’s that going to happen?”

Who knows? They asked the same thing about the water in Noah’s day, and yet it came. My friends, do you understand that one of the most popular, fastest growing theological errors in our day is the disbelief and rejection of judgment; a literal hell? Yet, God says it will come.

Two parallels between Noah’s ark and Jesus Christ

Let me give two obvious parallels between Noah’s ark and Jesus Christ, which is a sermon in itself. This is a wonderful illustration and picture of salvation.

God, not man, designed the ark simply, yet profoundly, as His plan of salvation to all who would enter in

1. The first parallel is that God, not man, designed the ark simply, yet profoundly – it was His plan of salvation to all who would enter in.

What is the ark of salvation today, for all who are in who? Christ Jesus. As Romans, chapter 8, verse 1, tells us,

. . . there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

The ark only had one door

2. The second obvious parallel is that the ark only had one door.

Jesus would say in John, chapter 10, verse 9,

I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved . . .

If you are a believer today, it is possible in this corrupt generation, to be a person of integrity. However, it will take a pursuit of Jesus Christ as Lord. That pursuit will develop in you:

- purity in the midst of immorality;
- obedience in the midst of ridicule;
- patience in the midst of uncertainty;
- worship in the midst of difficulty.

Oh, how we need men, women, and young people of integrity today.

Dudley Tyng was a well known speaker in the 1800’s. In 1858, he spoke to five thousand young men at the Young Men’s Christian Association. We know it today as the YMCA, but it is no longer Christian. Dudley preached to five thousand, and one thousand people responded to Christ. He was a young man.

Later that day, he went back to the farm and decided to go to the barn and watch the men shelling corn. As he was watching, he got a little too close to the machine. His jacket got caught and his arm was pulled into the grinding gears of the machine. It was lacerated beyond repair. In a few hours, he would die. Medicine, at that time, was too primitive and the loss of blood was too great.

As he lay in bed, the people surrounding him suggested that Dudley give a word to those who listened to his message; to those who were following Christ; to those thousands of people that he was influencing. They said, “Dudley, give us a message to take back to the people.”

They say that he strained and then said, “Tell the people to stand up for Jesus.”

That night, the hall was filled as they relayed the story of Dr. Tyng and his death, and gave the message that he had given them.

The poem was written that we sing, with the words,

*Stand up, stand up for Jesus, ye soldiers of
the cross;*

*Lift high His royal banner, it must not suffer
loss.*

*From victory unto victory His army shall He
lead,*

*Till every foe is vanquished and Christ is
Lord indeed.*

That is what it takes to have an attitude that
pursues integrity. That is the battle of integrity.

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Lessons From Sinning Saints

Genesis 9:20-11:25

Introduction

After our discussion today, the rest of the book of Genesis will only cover three hundred fifty years, yet it is the majority of the book. It deals primarily with Abraham and Joseph and I am looking forward to studying the lives of these patriarchs.

Today, we come, in chapter 9, to an unfortunate passage of scripture. While in our last study we discussed the ingredients of integrity, today we will have a lesson from a sinning saint. Unfortunately, both lessons revolve around the same individual. That gives us the point that anyone can sin. In fact, no one is above sin or temptation – not even one like Noah.

Exposition

Look at Genesis, chapter 9, verses 20 through 29. This is after the flood, when Noah's family had embarked from the ark.

Then Noah began farming and planted a vineyard.

He drank of the wine and became drunk, and uncovered himself inside his tent.

Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers outside.

But Shem and Japheth took a garment and laid it upon both their shoulders and walked backward and covered the nakedness of their father; and their faces were turned away, so that they did not see their father's nakedness.

When Noah awoke from his wine, he knew what his youngest son had done to him.

(so he prophetically declared),

So he said, "Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants he shall be to his brothers."

He also said, "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."

Noah lived three hundred and fifty years after the flood.

So all the days of Noah were nine hundred and fifty years, and he died.

Sin . . . in the life of Noah

The parallel between Noah and Adam is interesting. The first man to ever live, Adam, sinned by partaking of the literal fruit of the vine. Noah, the first man after the flood, would also sin by drinking the fruit of the vine. Both men would fall and, as a result, one would recognize his nakedness, the other would become naked. Both would receive a covering from someone else, and, as a result of that sin, both would receive a curse. And yet, in that curse, would also be the promise of blessing.

Now the sins of Noah were two-fold:

- First, Noah became drunk, and drunkenness was in violation of God's command,

especially as you read later in the Old Testament.

- Secondly, not only did he become drunk, Noah became naked; that is, he, in his lewdness that we dare not even imagine, perhaps in his tent, shed his clothing in drunkenness.

Noah, this man of God, the preacher of righteousness, was now drunk and naked. He was shamefully exposing himself.

I found, in fact, at least six different interpretations of this passage of scripture. The interpretation that I will follow is that which literally follows the meaning of the Hebrew words. I know there is safety in discovering what the literal text means.

The words in verse 21, “uncovered himself,” are the same Hebrew words used in scripture for “shameful exposure”. There is nothing particularly sensational in this – Noah became drunk and took off his clothing; perhaps lewdly dancing about.

The confusion is in what Ham did. Some would suggest at least six different interpretations of this. Perhaps he had an incestuous relationship with Noah; that is, he uncovered his nakedness being a Hebrew idiom of lying with his wife. The text, however, does not indicate that. Some have even suggested that there is a homosexual violation. Yet the text does not say that Ham uncovered the nakedness of Noah, but that Noah uncovered his own nakedness.

So, what did Ham do? Verse 24 says,

When Noah awoke from his wine, he knew what his youngest son [Ham] had done to him.

Let me give two things that Ham did. Notice verse 22 again.

Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers outside.

- First, Ham saw.

The Hebrew meaning of the word is that he gazed; he observed; he watched. He is perhaps behind some covering of the tent, and he is watching his father.

- Not only that, I think the real sin was in what follows. The Hebrew word “told” means literally, “with delight”. Ham was really enjoying this.

This was not only dishonoring the honor of his father, but perhaps, was even revealing that in his heart, he had repudiated the faith of his father. “Ha! This is the preacher of righteousness. Look at what he’s doing.” and he was delighted in his father’s fall.

The only thing that is worse than committing a specific sin perhaps, is the devilish delight in observing that sin in someone else and sharing it with others. Why do you think the tabloids make millions of dollars every year? Because they pander to the fallen nature of man that delights in the sorry side, the seedy side of humanity. So their stories are of the fights, the break ups, the divorces, the lawsuits, and all of the seedy things that happen, the tragic things that happen to mankind.

So, Noah awakens from his stupor and makes a prophetic curse. Look at verse 24 again.

When Noah awoke from his wine, he knew what his youngest son had done to him.

Noah knew Ham had mocked him and he makes a prophetic curse; that is, he is saying what will happen. He is not saying, “Okay, Canaan, or Ham, you are now going to do this,” he is saying, “I perceive by revelation that this will be your future.”

So, Noah gives the curse and in it, is also the promise. Look at verse 26a again.

He also said, “Blessed be the Lord, the God of Shem . . .

Shem would be the father of the Semites. You can see in the name “Shem” the word “Sem”. This is Semite nations from which Israel would come. So, this is the promise of the coming Messiah.

Japheth is the father of the Indo-European nations, from which the majority of Americans have come. Ham will become the father of the African, the Egyptian, and the Arabian nations. This is easily found in documented accounts – not only in biblical records, but in accounts by secular anthropologists.

By the way, nations, or the idea of nationality, are God’s idea. Turn in your Bible to the book of Acts. It has been interesting and has given me great comfort to discover this in chapter 17. Look at verses 24 through 27a. Paul is speaking in the Areopagus to the philosophers. He is referring to the “unknown god”.

The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands;

nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything; since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things;

(note verses 26 and 27a),

and He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times . . .

(that is, how long they will last as a nation),

. . . and the boundaries of their habitation,

(that is, how large they will grow; how much land or territory they will conquer before crumbling),

that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him . . .

What is the purpose of the nations today? They are visual lessons that you and I, as part of a nation, need to search for God; to follow God.

What did great Rome teach us? What did Babylon teach us? They teach us that when we reject God, He rejects us.

What will the historians write of America one day? That we, as a nation, began to reject God. And, that He would then reject us. He will allow us to bear the consequences of our own immorality, and like Rome, crumble from within.

Slavery . . . in the future of Canaan

Now look again at Genesis, chapter 9. There are some people who believe the Africans or the black peoples are consigned to slavery and that God even ordained it as such in this curse. I have even heard that from evangelical lips.

There is one very clear way of discovering whether that is true or not – read what the text says. I do not mean to be facetious or caustic, yet it is tragic that this view, among others, is the result of a simple misunderstanding, if not ignorance of what the text says.

Please note verse 25 again.

. . . Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants he shall be to his brothers.

Who is cursed – Ham and all of his descendants? No. Canaan is cursed – one branch of the descendants of Ham, not all of the descendants of Ham. Only one

branch is cursed, and that is Canaan. Canaan would be the forefather of all the Canaanites.

Do you remember the Canaanites? They were inhabiting the land which God had promised to Israel. When Joshua led the people into Canaan, what did they have to do? Subjugate; overthrow; bring under their authority who? The Canaanites.

From the Canaanites came the Hittites, Perizzites, the Amorites, the Jebusites, and all the other “ites”. All of these came from Canaan, and now in fact, they have ceased to exist as a nation. The curse has been fulfilled.

If anyone had a claim to this curse in this century, by the way, it would not be the African, it would be the Arab who lives in Palestine.

Now, I have mentioned the descendants of Ham and Shem, so what about Japheth? Let me give some interesting facts about his descendants.

In verse 27 of Genesis, chapter 9, we are told that God would “enlarge Japheth”. Enlarging means that he would conquer, he would enlarge his borders. That is exactly what happened. Let me share a few thoughts with you.

Japheth’s son Gomer, who is mentioned in chapter 10, verses 2 and 3, is the forefather of the Germans – that is where we get that nation. One of Gomer’s sons, Togarmah, established Turkey. They always named their nations after themselves, being modest as they were. In fact, the Armenians came to be called the House of Targam.

Especially interesting are three of Japheth’s sons mentioned in chapter 10. Look at verse 2.

The sons of Japheth were Gomer and Magog and Madai and Javan and Tubal and Meshech and Tiras.

Now Magog, Tubal, and Meshech have given us the northern people, or the Russians. In fact, Ezekiel mentions Magog, in chapter 38, as the prince of Rosh. The Hebrew word for “chief prince” is the word “rosh,” or “rush,” from which we get our English word “Russia”.

Now, by the way, we are not talking about millions of years ago, we are talking about four thousand years ago. This is clearly seen in the histories kept by man, and especially in this table of nations.

Now the two tribes of Tubal and Meshech are found in the writings of Herodotus. He indicated that

by his time, the names had developed into Mesken and Theobelian. These two tribes would push north and east of the Black Sea into what is now Russia. In fact, these two tribes are now used as the dividing marks of the modern state of Russia. Tubal is now Tobol on the Tobolsk River and Mesken is now Moscow on the Moskva River.

Fascinating to me, when I think of that, that this was the beginning of that which would one day rise up against Israel, are the writings of Paul that God made every nation and He appointed not only the their times; that is, how long they will exist, but also their boundaries. God is in total control. He is not only the creator of nations, He is the controller of nations. I do not mean to imply by that that America is safe from the Russians. I do not find America in our text, but what I do find is the sovereign God who has mapped out even the nations and their boundaries.

Separation . . . in the course of history

Now turn to chapter 11, which introduces the story of the tower of Babel. This is a story of great mystery. It is fairly well documented that astrology and even the zodiac and idolatry ultimately trace their roots back to Nimrod and his kingdom of Babylon.

Note where Babylon got its start. Turn back to chapter 10 and read verses 8 through 10a.

Now Cush became the father of Nimrod; he became a mighty one on the earth. He was a mighty hunter before the Lord; . . .

(“in the face of the Lord,” it should say),

. . . therefore it is said, “Like Nimrod a mighty hunter before the Lord.” The beginning of his kingdom was Babel . . .

This is a spite; this is hunting in spite of the face of the Lord. Nimrod is the first man to be called “mighty,” and these verses refer to his prowess in hunting – not animals, but the souls of men that he will use in building his kingdom of Babylon. In fact, his name “Nimrod” means, “let us rebel”.

Nimrod’s father Cush, had heard the curse and said, “I am not going to abide by that. My little boy will grow up one day to be the rebuilder; the rebuilder of a nation.” and thus, we have Nimrod.

Turn to chapter 11 and look at verses 1 through 3.

Now the whole earth used the same language and the same words. It came about as they journeyed east, that they found

a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. They said to one another, “Come, let us make bricks and burn them thoroughly.” And they used brick for stone, and they used tar for mortar.

The next verse is a violation of God’s command that we read in chapter 9, to replenish or fill the entire earth. Look at verse 4a.

They said, “Come, let us build for ourselves a city and a tower whose top will reach into heaven . . .”

This “into heaven” could be translated “atop”. This is their religious system; this is replacing God. This tower will reach the heavens – that was their declaration. Continue to verse 4b and notice what they said.

“. . . and let us make for ourselves a name, otherwise we will be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.”

This tower was a monument erected to symbolize their rebellion against the command of God. Archeologists have discovered these towers, like the ziggurats, and they have found that at the top of these towers were altars and rooms dedicated to the worship of the signs of the zodiac. In fact, they have found these symbols painted and drawn on the walls. So, what we have today in modern astrology is not modern, it is going back in its roots to the ultimate rebellion that God would one day, in this chapter, come to stop.

Let me read something rather interesting from a man who has studied this. He says the text speaks of the top of the tower as being that which was dedicated to the heavens as a place of worship. So, astrology, which focuses on the study of the zodiac, originated in Babylon. If you look at any book on astrology, you will find that it was the Chaldeans, which is another name for the inhabitants of Babylon, who first developed the zodiac by dividing the sky into sections and giving meanings to each on the basis of the stars that are found there. A person’s destiny is said to be determined by whatever section or sign he is under.

Do you know what your sign is, by the way? I think most of us have stumbled into that knowledge which points its finger back to rebellion against God.

Let me continue. From Babylon, astrology passed to the empire of ancient Egypt, where it mingled with animism and polytheism. The pyramids were constructed with certain mathematical relationships to

the stars. The sphinx – that huge monument that is still in Egypt today, and if you have ever toured there, you have seen that – has astrological significance. It has the head of a woman, symbolizing Virgo, the virgin, and the body of a lion, symbolizing Leo. Virgo is the first sign of the zodiac; Leo is the last. So the sphinx, which actually means “joining” in Greek, is the meeting point of the zodiac. The sphinx is symbolizing, in effect, that this is the beginning and the end. It is saying, “Our religious system is eternal. It is the alpha, the beginning, and the omega, the ending.”

False religion, even way back in the time of Nimrod, sought to obliterate the true beginning and end. It is interesting that when Jesus Christ comes to rule, He will state, as we are told in the latter chapters of Revelation, chapters 21 and 22, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.”

I would warn you with this, if you read the horoscopes – stop, it is a dangerous thing. It traces its roots back to the idolatry of Babylon.

Well, God confounds the language. Look at verses 5 through 9 of Genesis, chapter 11.

The Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built. The Lord said, “Behold, they are one people, and they all have the same language. And this is what they begin to do, and now nothing which they purpose to do . . .

(that is, evil),

“. . . will be impossible for them. Come, let Us . . .

(perhaps an indication of the Trinity),

“. . . go down and there confuse their language, so that they will not understand one another’s speech.” So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of the whole earth; and they stopped building the city.

That was the plan of God, “I don’t want you erecting a one world government. I don’t want you to have one city ruling all the world. I want you to scatter and develop into the nations that I have designed.”

So, He came down and took care of that which even today, would create a common barrier; that is, language. It is hard enough to understand each other

even when we speak English, much less when there is another language.

I read an illustration of this point by a pastor. A lady in his congregation was a kindergarten teacher. It snowed a lot where she taught, and snowsuits were required. One day she was, with a lot of difficulty, helping a little boy into his snowsuit. It was one of those with all the ties, snaps, and buttons. It took her about five minutes. Finally, when she got the boy in it, he looked up at her and said, “This isn’t my snowsuit.”

So, with the grace of kindergarten teachers, who deserve a medal of honor anyway, she pulls the snowsuit off this boy, after untying and unsnapping everything. She finally gets him out . . . and he continues his story, “This is my sister’s snowsuit, but my mother said I could wear it today.”

If I had been that teacher, there would be one less kid on the planet earth!

There is great difficulty in communicating. In fact, the coming kingdom is prophesied by Zephaniah, in chapter 3, verse 9 (KJV), where God says through him,

For then [in the kingdom] will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the Lord, to serve Him with one consent.

Isn’t it fascinating to know that in heaven, we will all once again have the same language. The Spanish, the Chinese, the Mexicans, the Americans will all be able to communicate with one language, and I think, communicate perfectly.

Application

Now I want to take a practical turn in this sermon. Let me give several things that will be helpful from this passage, unfortunate as it is.

One thing was perfectly clear to me, as I studied this passage – had we written the Bible, we would have left out the sins of the patriarchs. There would have been things that we would have ignored, but God does not. In fact, I think that is another proof that God determined the content of this Book.

Sometimes the Bible is so comprehensive that it is embarrassing. Sometimes it probes, and we wonder why. We wonder why the Lord gave us these last five verses of Noah’s life. Why not end on a good note? Because I think God wants us to learn not only from

the successes of the saints, but from their failures as well.

Seven lessons from the sins of Noah

Let me give seven lessons from the sins of Noah.

A believer is never immune to sin

1. The first lesson is that a believer is never immune to sin.

Noah was six hundred years old when the flood came, and he had lived his life righteously for six hundred years. Then, in his later years, he mars his perfect record.

Is this unique in the Bible? Absolutely not. Moses, in his later years, struck the rock declaring for himself glory due only to God. When David was in his fifties, he fell into immorality.

Past success does not guarantee future safety from sin

2. That leads me to the second lesson that past success does not guarantee future safety from sin.

You do not inoculate yourself by all of the successes of the past week. Satan does not say, “Well, you know, he’s been really good this past week. We won’t bother him this week.”

Nor does Satan say, “Well, that person is almost in heaven. Let’s leave him alone.”

No, the temptation to sin persists to the grave.

Small temptations are often the most dangerous

3. The third lesson is that small temptations are often the most dangerous.

Look at Noah – the preacher of righteousness. He was a man who for a hundred and twenty years, said “No” to all kinds of immorality. Then, with a cheap flask of homemade wine, he is brought to his knees.

It was a small temptation, and yet, it was the most dangerous. Perhaps that is what the writer of scripture means, in I Corinthians, chapter 10, verse 12, when he says,

. . . let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall.

Watch out for the little things.

Temptations are always changing faces

4. Lesson number four is that temptations are always changing faces.

By the time you master one temptation, another one comes along. I say “changing faces” because ultimately, all temptation asks the same question, “Whose voice are you going to listen to – the voice of God or the voice of the world system, your flesh, and Satan?”

Sin never affects the sinner alone

5. Fifthly, sin never affects the sinner alone.

This is probably one of the most tragic parts of sin. It never affects just the sinner. You might say, “Oh no, my sin isn’t affecting anyone but me. In fact, no one even knows.”

However, it is that sin in your life that keeps you from being the kind of husband, father, believer, testimony that you should be. Someone is robbed when you and I get away from what God would have us to be.

Someone wrote, “Sin is like a pebble thrown into a pond of water. Although the pebble strikes only one place, the ripples from its force stretch outward.”

Believers never have an excuse for sin

6. Lesson number six, and mark this one well, believers never have an excuse for sin.

I stress “believers” because I Corinthians, chapter 10, verse 13, says,

No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.

When we sin, we say “No” to God’s escape plan.

God never ignores sin

7. Lesson number seven is that God never ignores sin.

God never ignores sin, even in the life of a saint. God never plays favorites. Sin will always bring guilt, no matter who you may be. That guilt may

bring the loss of joy; the loss of fellowship – there are always consequences.

Two lessons from our own sin nature

There are two further lessons that we can learn from our own biography of sin that God has given us. We are like Noah. Although we are not in the scriptures, we can certainly see the similarities that reside in our sin nature. Let me give two very positive lessons that we can learn from our sin nature.

I know that sounds odd that there is something positive to be learned about our sin nature. There is, but notice, I did not say “sin”. There is nothing positive about sin. I do not want anyone to call me this week and say, “Pastor, I sinned. And man, you’re right, I learned that positive lesson.”

I said “sin nature”. God can use the awareness of our nature to sin to do two things.

It develops appreciation for our position in Christ

1. Lesson number one is that the awareness of our own sin nature can be used by God to develop our appreciation for our position in Christ.

Paul, the great apostle, cried to God in verses 19 and 24 of chapter 7 of Romans (paraphrased),

Lord, whatever I want to do, I can't do it. Whatever I don't want to do, it seems like that's what I'm always doing. Who will deliver me from this body of death? Who will excise from me the sinful nature?

The body of death is referring to a Roman custom. A man who had committed murder was taken to the cross, but before he was put on that cross, if the murdered victim was a slave or someone of ill repute or perhaps, not a Roman citizen, the dead body would be laid on top of the murderer and strapped to him neck to neck, wrist to wrist, waist to waist, leg to leg, and then, put on the cross. That is what is referred to as this body of death. The murderer would die a hideous death with his victim cheek to cheek.

So, Paul says, in verse 24b,

. . . Who will set me free from the body of this death?

In other words, “Who will set me free from this wicked old man; this old nature that is strapped to me?”

Paul’s awareness of his sin was so great, but then he concludes with, in chapter 7, verse 25a, and chapter 8, verse 1,

Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! . . . there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

It develops gratitude for Christ’s work in us

2. Lesson number two is that the awareness of our own sin nature can be used by God not only to develop our appreciation for our position in Christ, but to develop our gratitude for Christ’s work in us.

II Corinthians, chapter 5, verse 17, tells us,

Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things [continually] passed away; behold, new things have [continually] come.

We get the idea that when someone – scruffy, unshaven, dirty – becomes a believer and the next week, he is in church – three piece suit, Bible in hand – then, yes, he is a believer. No, no – it is a Christian life, and it takes a life. It is not the Christian moment. One of the things about our sin nature is that it develops in us the appreciation that Jesus Christ is at work in our lives. There is so much that needs to be changed. There is so much developing that can take place. Do not expect changes in everything in a moment – it takes a life.

However, be confident that, as we are told in Philippians, chapter 2, verse 13,

. . . it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.

I like what Paul says in Philippians, chapter 1, verse 6,

. . . I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Jesus Christ.

God is at work. Our sin nature is a lesson. The reason that you and I are miserable in our sin is simply because Jesus Christ gives us the sense of guilt. It is our relationship with Him that shows us our wickedness. Thank God for that. It is a dangerous situation when an individual has no sense of sin.

Do you fail? Yes. Do you sin? Yes. But you know your sins are forgiven, because you gave your

life to Jesus Christ. Isaiah, chapter 1, verse 18a, tells us,

. . . Though your sins are as scarlet, they will be as white as snow . . .

This is the story of Noah – a saint and a sinner. Did he fail? Yes. Did he sin? Yes. God gave the

story to us so that we might learn. Yet God would write Noah's epithet in Hebrews, chapter 11, verse 7,

By faith Noah . . . became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.

We too have the righteousness of God, if we have come to the cross of Jesus Christ.

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Saying Goodbye to Security

Genesis 12:1-3

Introduction

I want to begin today, before we start our study of the life of Abraham in the book of Genesis, with a note of caution. We are not going to study the life of Abraham for the purpose of glorification; we are not going to make a superstar of Abraham. We do not want to do that. In fact, the church, as one man wrote, already has way too many superstars and not enough servants. There are too many people with medals and not enough people with battle scars. So, we do not seek to glorify anyone, not even Abraham, by studying his life. In fact, I am convinced, after studying Abraham's life this week, that he would be very uncomfortable and extremely fidgety under the spotlight and on the pedestal.

We are also not going to study the life of Abraham for the purpose of imitation. We are not going to try to imitate Abraham. In fact, when you imitate a man, you often will imitate his weaknesses and failures, not his strengths. We are not pursuing Abraham today. We are pursuing the God of Abraham.

We are also not going to study the life of Abraham for the simple sake of information. We are studying the book of Genesis, and Abraham stands between us and the end of the book. So, let us jump in and learn all that we can about him.

Now I am convinced that there is a danger when someone preaches or studies through the books of the Bible; through verses expositively, that it may promote the idea that it is an end in itself or, as one man said, we are to become smarter sinners. That is not the purpose. In fact, I come to this portion in the

book of Genesis with a profound sense that God means for us, at this time, to study Genesis, chapter 12. We do not know all of the reasons, but I believe He has us in Genesis, chapter 12, at this very moment. It is not a coincidence – God intends it to be life changing.

The Setting of Abram

With that said, let me introduce you to the setting of Abraham, or Abram at this point. It is in the vicinity of the Persian Gulf and is a land called Ur. To say the name, you kind of grunt and just say, "Ur". When we speculate about this country with such a dramatic name as Ur, we can almost see the cavemen with clubs on their shoulders dragging their women about by the hair on their heads. However, that is not the case.

Life as it was in Ur

Ur was perhaps, the most civilized place in the world. Its fleets of merchant ships would float about the Indian Ocean, selling and bringing their wares to other distant places of the countryside. It was also the place that had developed an intricate legal system. The people were involved in gem engraving and metalworking, planting and harvesting, and weaving. This was no simple place that Abram was called to leave. This was the way Ur was four thousand years ago.

In Ur as well, it has been discovered that they were proficient in mathematics. In fact, mathematical formulas have been found that they were working on in that day that still to some degree, confound mathematicians today. They were also proficient in

astronomy in Ur. This was the height of its cultural civilization.

Life as it was in Abram's home

Now, in the land of Ur there lived a Semite family. This was a region dominated by the Hamites, or descendants of Ham, who were idolatrous and immoral. However, right in the middle of this country was a Semite family with a little boy. That little boy would grow up to one day, change the course of human history.

We know this little Semite boy as Abram, which before his name was changed, meant "the father of many". His name will be changed to Abraham, which means "the father of a multitude or many peoples". But in Ur, we know him as Abram.

The tragic thing about Abram's home is that the idolatry of Ur had reached with clammy fingers through the door into his home. It had finally gripped the soul of his father Terah. In fact, Joshua, chapter 24, verse 2, tells us that Joshua warned the people before they entered the promised land, "Don't forget the idolatry; namely don't forget Abraham's father, Terah."

Abram's father would be used as a warning. We tend to think that Abram was raised in a home with spiritual giants as parents, but that was not the case. We know that Abram's father was an idolater, and he may have been participating in all the immorality that went along with that idolatry.

Before we go any further, it is worth making the application that the call of God can come regardless of one's roots or past life. So often we get the idea that, if God is going to use someone, that person is going to be raised in the perfect home environment; that mom and dad are going to be examples of godliness. We think that is the kind of child that grows up to be used by God; that is the kind of person that will one day be called "the friend of God".

My friend, your use and your usability in the kingdom of God will come regardless of your family. I do not want to minimize religious upbringing, as God can use that, but perhaps I am speaking to someone today who has not had that. You, like Abram, did not have an example of faith. Abraham would become the father of the faithful, yet he never had an example of what faith was all about – that was his home setting. So, take great encouragement that your family will not disqualify you for the service of

God. It will not, by the way, qualify you for the service of God either.

God's Three-fold Command To Abram

Now, with that said, let us turn to Genesis, chapter 12, and begin with the first few verses. We will take a look at the command given in these verses. It is three-fold.

Leave your society

1. The first command is basically, "Leave your society."

Look at verse 1a of chapter 12.

Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go forth from your country . . ."

Abram's country was idolatrous, as I have mentioned, led by the descendants of Ham. There was a warning in this, and perhaps even to the New Testament believer. It is a warning that is alliterated by Solomon in the writings of Proverbs to be cautious and to be careful of the societal boundaries. It may mean leaving. I think even the New Testament believer is given the challenge that, although we are in this society, we are not part of it. Let me repeat what I have said before that the more like your society you become, the less you will impact it for the cause of Jesus Christ.

We do not know, but immorality and idolatry had encircled the home of Abram and perhaps was even knocking at the heart of Abram. God said, "If I can use you, you've got to leave."

Now, Christ is the supreme example. He was a friend of sinners, but His purpose in being their friend was to bring them to Himself.

Let me warn you, especially young people, of the nature of ungodly friendships for the sake of friendship. Solomon wrote in Proverbs, chapter 27, verse 17b (King James Version), that,

. . . a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend.

That is why he told his son to depart from evil. In Proverbs, chapter 4, verse 27b, he wrote,

. . . turn your foot from evil.

David wrote in Psalm, chapter 1, verse 1,

. . . blessed is the man who does not . . . stand in the path of sinners . . .

We are here to win the world to Christ, not be a friend to it. Perhaps that was implied in the first of this three-fold command to leave your society.

Leave your stability

2. The second command is, “Leave your stability.”

Look at the next phrase in verse 1 of Genesis, chapter 12.

Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go forth . . . from your relatives . . .”

Not only did God command Abram to go forth from his country, but to leave his relatives as well. This is the circle of friends. In fact, the archaic translation of this could be, “leave your tribe or leave your clan”. In other words, “Leave all that life has encircled you with; leave the stability of home and friends and that circle of people that you know; leave your pattern of life and break out of it. I’m going to send you to some place totally new and different. Break out of the norm.”

This command was probably one of the most difficult things for Abram. We as well, would say, “I’ve got my friends and I’ve got my church and I’ve got my life and I’ve got my pattern and I’ve got my way of living . . .” – and all of that. We are so predictable. That is seen in the way you and I drive home the very same way from work every day. When we get home, we sit in the same chair. When we sit down at the dining table, we sit at the same place. Have you ever tried sitting somewhere else? It is weird; it is like you are in someone else’s home. Try sitting in another chair tomorrow for breakfast. Let me tell you what will happen – your kids will come in, look at you, then will look again and say, “Dad, are you still awake? Are you sick?”

“Mom, Dad has lost his marbles.”

I know what they will say. They will say, “Dad’s sitting in my chair.”

We have taught them well, haven’t we?

I think God is telling Abram to leave all of the old patterns; leave the familiar; leave the stability; leave the clan or the tribe, and go.

Leave your security

3. God also commands Abram to, “Leave your security.”

Look at the next phrase in verse 1 of Genesis, chapter 12.

Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go forth . . . from your father’s house . . .”

Notice God tells Abram to leave not only his country, but his relatives, and his father’s house.

Now, in the Middle East, your father’s house gave you a special identity. This was the place of your inheritance. This was your birthright – your security. In fact, in that day, if you married a woman, you did not leave your dad, you simply built another addition to his place and moved in. The more sons, the more wives, the more additions. Finally, this home was spreading over several acres. That was how they lived.

It was totally foreign to think of leaving your father’s house. That is exactly what God had asked Abram to do – to leave his security. There is the implication, ladies and gentlemen, and I want you to notice this, that he will never be back.

A little boy was his grandfather’s constant companion. They would often go on short trips together – to the grocery store, sometimes to the lake to fish, or wherever the grandfather needed to go. The boy always tagged along with his grandfather and they were delightful companions.

One day, the grandfather said, “Let’s go for a ride.”

The boy asked, “Where are we going?”

The grandfather left without him. When he got back, the little boy looked crestfallen and asked, “Grandfather, why did you leave me behind?”

The grandfather looked at him and said, “Because you asked where we were going. If you really wanted to go with me, it wouldn’t have mattered where we were going.”

I think that is in the heart of the man or woman of faith. God says, “Go,” or “Do,” or “Be.”

We say “Okay, Lord, where’s the security package? What are the benefits? Where are You taking me? How long will I be there?”

So, God moves on to the next person.

Your wife says, “Hon, let’s take a walk.”

You ask, “Where are we going?”

You ask because you know the game is starting in ten minutes. The kick-off is about to happen. Your wife knows too. So does God.

So God commanded Abram, "Leave your society; leave your stability; leave your security. Leave it all behind."

One of the difficult things, ladies and gentlemen, that we can be warned of, as individuals and as a church, is that we can fall into a pattern that is so predictable. We know exactly what is going to happen in our little conformed lives, so we never dare risk anything for God. Never stepping out in faith, we want to see it all in front of us. As a result, our usability for the kingdom of God is greatly hindered.

Let me read what one man wrote that sparked my thinking. Bruce Arson, the pastor of University Presbyterian Church, wrote these perceptive words. And I warn *all* of us as a church with these words.

I've observed a number of Christian organizations that have gone through the metamorphosis from pioneer organism to rigid and predictable organization. The work is begun by one person with a dream who risks all on that dream. As the dream takes shape, other people attach themselves to the original dreamer. Before long, a movement starts. Before long, an organized machine develops with departments and charts and budgets and detailed job descriptions.

The next move, and the one that by God's grace our church will avoid, is what he calls "from machine to monument," where procedures are set in concrete, policies are unchangeable, direction is unchallenged. He continues with the following words.

The monument is a tomb. In the process, we have moved from high risk to safety and certainty. In the framework of machine or monument, nobody risks anything. In fact, we need all of our resources just to keep the machine moving.

That is the potential of a church, not just individuals.

It is illustrated well in Gilbert and Sullivan's operetta that I have seen several times. It is *The Pirates of Penzance*, and the hero's name is Frederick, if you have ever seen this. Frederick decides to capture those nasty little pirates. So he enlists the help of the police force. These policemen are typical "Keystone Cops." It is a fascinating thing to watch as the women

gather in the square as the policemen declare their desire to catch the pirates. The women begin to sing, "Go on to glory, go on to glory." In fact, they even say, "Go, ye heroes, go on to glory."

The Keystone Cops begin dancing around the stage with their arms folded singing, "We go, we go." and they never went. Finally, the General interrupts them and points out, "You're not going anywhere."

They respond to him, "We go, we go."

The women are singing, "Go, ye heroes, go on to glory."

I am convinced, ladies and gentlemen, that it is possible for a church to sing *Onward Christian Soldiers*, and never take a step forward. I think the reason is because we, as one man wrote, "are so busy feathering our nests, we have no desire to fly".

We have such predictable, comfortable lives. Who is interested in going to the Promised Land? Who wants uncertainty and risks? Who is willing to live by faith?

We must consistently ask ourselves, "Who am I serving? Who am I loving? Who am I telling about Jesus Christ? Who am I praying for? Who am I giving to? Are the sandals or the soles on our spiritual shoes showing signs of wear, or is there dust gathering there?"

We have become entombed in safety and certainty.

Let me tell a story that occurred at our house one night, just before our boys' bedtime. We have two boys who at the time of this story, were not quite three. They both had blankets – you know the kind that they carried around during the day and slept with during naptime and at night. Keaton had a white one and Seth had a green one (at least it was green at the time, although I am not sure the original color was green).

One night, my wife and I discovered that their blankets were still in the washing machine. You should have been there when I gave the boys that news. They were tucked into bed and asked, "Where's my blanket?"

I made the announcement, "Boys, your mother forgot your blankets – they are still in the washing machine."

You have never seen such a panic attack or heard such weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth. They said, “We can’t do without our blankets.”

My wife and I had to rush to the washing machine, throw those blankets in the dryer, and hope they would dry quickly. The boys would never go to sleep. Why? Those blankets were their symbol of security. They had to have them in order to go to sleep. They were their crutch.

I find God, in Genesis, chapter 12, commanding Abram to throw away the security blanket of society, stability, security, and become a wanderer, a vagrant, a pioneer, a pilgrim. Abram was to become, as Charles Spurgeon once wrote, “shipwrecked on the island of God’s sovereignty.”

That is where we want to live. Responding to God’s call means finding our security in God alone. Do we really want that?

God’s Three-fold Blessing To Abram

Now, notice that following this three-fold command is a seven-fold promise. I will give three basic categories to help you keep these in mind.

The blessing of prominence

1. The first is the blessing of prominence.

Look at verse 2 of Genesis, chapter 12.

And I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing;

Notice that He says, “I will make your name great.” That contrasts with verse 4 of chapter 11 that we previously studied. Look at that verse.

They [these idolaters] said, “Come, let us build for ourselves a city, and a tower whose top will reach into heaven, and let us make for ourselves a name . . .”

Notice, in these verses, that God is basically saying, “I will provide the prominence; I will exalt your name; I will make of you many peoples. I will do that, not you.”

Solomon wrote in Proverbs, chapter 27, verse 2,

Let another praise you, and not your own mouth; a stranger, and not your own lips.

God declared that He would make the name of Abram great. There is the blessing of prominence.

The blessing of protection

2. Secondly, there is the blessing of protection.

The first part of verse 3 says,

And I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. . . .

This gives the fundamental truth that those who rise up against Israel soon find their demise – whether it is Babylon or Rome or Germany or the Palestinian Liberation Organization.

I would agree with expositors like Donald Grey Barnhouse or James Montgomery Boice, that this could be interpreted as any nation who rises up against Israel. In fact, the reason for America’s blessing, they say, is that we have been a friend to Israel. I believe it is true. In fact, even today, I watch with close scrutiny the relationship between America and Israel.

The blessing of promise

3. There is also, thirdly, the blessing of a promise.

The last part of verse 3 says,

. . . and in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.

This includes all the families of the earth – not just the Jews; not just the Semites, but all the families.

This is the promise of a Redeemer. Turn to Galatians, chapter 3, and we will look at a couple of verses that make this so clear. We will begin in verses 8 and 9.

The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying “All the nations will be blessed in you.” So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer.

It is hard to see this in Genesis, but in these verses it is delineated. He preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, and the gospel was that all the nations would be blessed in Abraham, so that those of faith would be blessed with him.

Look at verses 28 and 29 of the same chapter.

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise.

If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.

There was the promise given to Abraham, the "euangelion," the gospel, the evangelistic thrust of this Abrahamic Covenant that, "By your obedience, Abraham, I will bring from your seed, the One that will bless the whole world," speaking of Jesus Christ Himself.

The Response of Abram Defines "Submission"

Now read the first part of verse 4 of Genesis, chapter 12. How did Abram respond?

So Abram went forth as the Lord had spoken to him . . .

As I studied this passage, a lot of different words came to my mind that characterize the life of Abraham – words such as: obedience, faith, willingness to risk and to change. However, one word that seemed to strike me the most was the word "submission". In fact, I think we can find from these few verses in Genesis, two principles related to submission. We will call this a definition. Let me give them to you.

Submission is believing without comprehending

1. First, submission is believing without comprehending.

God said, "Abraham, I want to make you a father of nations."

Did Abraham comprehend that promise? No.

"Abraham, I am going to take you west, southwest, to a new land."

Did he comprehend where it was? No.

However, he submitted to the call. Submission is believing without comprehending.

A letter has been discovered that was written during Abraham's time, by an exiled Egyptian to his Pharaoh. This man was sent away from Egypt in exile by the Pharaoh to the unknown land of Palestine. I quote from David Hocking, who read a copy of the letter. The man writes his Pharaoh this spiteful letter.

Here where you have exiled me, are figs and grapes, where there is more wine than water. Honey and oil are plentiful. All kinds of fruit hang upon the trees. Barley and wheat grow in the fields, and herds of cattle of all types graze here.

He kind of laughs, "Ha, ha! You've exiled me here, and this is an oasis."

I cannot help but think of Abraham leaving Ur, the place of fantastic civilization. It was by its own right, a fertile region. He is heading through the Arabian desert, probably scratching his head thinking, "God, where are You taking me?"

Abraham does not know that just beyond the desert is a place like this. He submitted without comprehending. The point is that God knew.

Submission is obeying without understanding

2. Secondly, submission is obeying without understanding.

Turn to Hebrews, chapter 11, verse 8. You must see this. Verse 8 reads,

By faith, Abraham, when he was called [in Genesis, chapter 12, verses 1-3], obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; . . .

(note the next words – you should underline them in your text),

. . . and he went out, not knowing where he was going.

Try taking a vacation with your family without a roadmap. I always have the trip completely mapped out. However, in this call of God, there was the element of submission without understanding.

God did not give Abraham a detailed road map saying, "Abraham, here's what's going to happen there. And this is what is going to happen to you here."

God just said, "Go."

And though he did not understand it, Abraham went.

God has not given any of us a detailed road map. We do not know what is around the bend. His will for us may mean the loss of a job or the loss of a loved one by death or divorce. His will may mean financial loss, sickness, or pain. It may mean wealth. It may mean standing alone. The key, as with Abraham, is

that we have the confidence in our soul that we are traveling with God, and that we know He is sovereign. And, more than anything else, rather than have an answer, we would rather have Him as our companion. And so we go with God.

Imagine the wonder of being considered, as is said of Abraham three times throughout the Bible, “the friend of God”. In fact, God will even refer to Himself as, “the God of Abraham”. What an honor.

I think of what Jesus Christ wrote in John, chapter 15, verse 13,

Greater love has no one than this, that one [Himself] lay down his life for his friends.

It is delightful knowing that when you come to the cross and give Jesus Christ your sin and trust Him with yourself and your life, He becomes your friend – you become a friend of God. Believer, when you live this kind of life – willing to risk, willing to change, willing to serve, willing to love, pray, and give – God says of you, “You are My friend.”

Submission is obeying what you believe God wants you to do to advance His cause.

I will close with a story that Sam Kamaleson, who is the vice president of a mission organization, told. It is a story of a seventy year old lady who came to Christ.

This lady, who lived in Melbourne, came to her new pastor one day and said, “I believe God has called me into the ministry. What should I do?”

He said exactly what I would have said, “Well, maybe you ought to pray about it.”

What classic advice. He did not have a clue, but at least he was not wrong. “Go home and pray.”

She did. The lady went home and began to pray. It seemed that God was impressing her heart to do one

particular thing. She went to the drugstore and bought a batch of 3 inch by 5 inch index cards. She wrote on the cards the words, “Are you homesick? Come to my home for tea at 4:00.”

She took that stack of 3 by 5 cards and went all around the University of Melbourne and put them on poster boards. She placed them in places where people would see them; such as the cafeteria. “Are you homesick? Come to my home for tea at 4:00.”

The lady prepared tea at 4:00. Days went by and no one came, but she continued to prepare tea. Finally, on the fifteenth day, an Indonesian student showed up at her door, homesick and as eager to talk as she was to listen. So, she served tea to him and listened.

The student went back to the campus and told all of his friends, “Hey, you won’t believe it! I met a lady that’s just like my grandmother.”

Soon many students were coming. God gave that lady a ministry for ten years. When she died, there were no less than seventy pallbearers – Indonesians, Malaysians, Indians, Pakistanis – international students who had come to her home and found Jesus Christ. She had served them tea and shared the gospel.

This was a lady who had heard and obeyed the call of God. You might say, “Boy, I wish God would give me a call. I wish He’d impress my heart.”

Are you praying? Are you wanting? Are you desiring? Are you asking, “Lord, I, by faith, want to make a difference in this world for Your kingdom. Make it clear where.”?

My friend, are you a friend of God? He is your friend, and will accept you. Believer, are you a man or a woman of faith, willing to leave it all behind for the sake of being the companion of God?

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Rewarding Faith With Famine

Genesis 12-13:4

Introduction

In our last discussion, we began the biography of Abraham, the first pioneer. We discovered in him, a man of rare faith; a man who was willing to leave everything behind that represented security and stability. He left his society; he left his family. He was instructed by God to leave everything that had been his for many years and to go to an unknown land that God had promised to give him.

I wonder if we would have obeyed such instructions from God? Abraham did. We will discover this fact, in Genesis, chapter 12, as we review the promise of God to Abraham, or Abram, as he is named at this point in time.

Abram's Courageous Response of Faith

Genesis, chapter 12, is where we find ourselves again today. Look at verses 1 through 4a.

Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father's house, to the land which I will show you; and I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing; and I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed. So Abram went forth as the Lord had spoken to him; and Lot went with him. . . ."

The fact that Lot went with him was a mistake, as we will discover later. Continue to verses 4b through 5a.

. . . Now Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his nephew, and all their possessions which they had accumulated, . . .

Perhaps you have moved to this town in recent days, and you know what it is like to move everything you have accumulated. You probably wondered how in the world your attic held all that stuff. Well, Abram cleaned it out and took it with him.

Continue to the next phrase in verse 5.

. . . and the persons which they had acquired in Haran, . . .

This is the servants. What an adventure this is. Continue to the last phrase in verse 5.

. . . and they set out for the land of Canaan; thus they came to the land of Canaan.

Abram will now build two different altars. They are highly significant.

The place of Abram's altar

Let me tell where Abram builds the altars.

The oak of Moreh

1. The first altar is at the oak of Moreh.

Look at verse 6.

Abram passed through the land as far as the site of Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. Now the Canaanite was then in the land.

Understand that the oak of Moreh is a literal tree. This is the location of the first altar. "Moreh" means

“teacher,” and in old times, during the days of Abram, there would be the guru, or the teacher, who sat at a tree, and this was the tree of Moreh. This was the “oak of the teacher”.

The idolatrous guru was supposed to be able to hear the voices of the gods as they rustled through the leaves of the tree. It was at this very spot, this idolatrous location, that Abram set up an altar. What a man of courage! It is as if he said, “I know that you have your idolatrous practice, but God has promised me the land. So, right here under the leaves of this oak tree, I will build an altar to my God.”

Between Bethel and Ai

2. The second place Abram builds an altar is between Bethel and Ai.

Look at verse 7.

The Lord appeared to Abram and said, “To your descendants I will give this land.” So he built an altar there to the Lord who had appeared to him.

This was the first time Abram understands that it is Canaan. He builds an altar there and then proceeds. Continue to verse 8.

Then he proceeded from there to the mountain 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.

Now, again these places are highly symbolic or significant. “Ai” literally means “pile of rubbish”. It was symbolic of the temporal world. In fact, it would become a terrible place for the Israelites in their history, as it would develop. We will discover this, as we go through the Old Testament.

“Bethel” literally means “the house of God”. This was symbolic of everything that represented the presence or the fellowship of God, including heaven or the kingdom.

Right in the middle, between the pile of rubbish, representing the world, and the place of God, or the coming kingdom, Abram builds an altar.

What a tremendous illustration this is of the New Testament pilgrim, or you and I, who have built an altar. We live our lives somewhere between the pile of rubbish, this world that we are passing through, and the coming kingdom of God. That is where Abram built his second altar. It is an illustration to

us, and I think a warning, of a great danger that comes when we forget this world is not permanent. We become distracted by the scenery, and we dig down deep. We put the tent pegs in way too far. We are pilgrims; we are not settlers.

So, Abram pitches his tent and builds an altar.

The importance of the altar

Now, before we go any further, understand the importance of the altar. Let me give two points.

The altar represents a place of worship

1. First, the altar represents a place of worship.

Note in verse 7, that a theophany has occurred. A theophany is the appearance of the form of God. No man has ever seen God and lived. So this is what we consider theologically, a theophany; that is, the visible glory of God came to Abram. It is as if God gave Abram an outline of His figure, but never showed His face. The altar represents then, the place where Abram would worship God.

The altar represents a place of fellowship

2. Secondly, the altar also represents a place of fellowship.

This is a great day. Abram has made it through the desert; he has arrived in the land. God says, “This is the land that I am going to give to you,” so Abram builds an altar and has wonderful fellowship with the glory of God.

I can hear Abram singing the hymn, *What A Fellowship*.

What a fellowship, what a joy divine, leaning on the everlasting arms;

What a blessedness, what a peace is mine, leaning on the everlasting arms.

Can you hear him singing?

O how to sweet to walk in this pilgrim way, leaning on the everlasting arms;

O how bright the path grows from day to day, leaning on the everlasting arms.

Understand that at this point in Abram’s life, he is excited; he is thrilled. Everything is wonderful.

Then, bang! In the next verse – he lives happily ever after. No! Look at verse 10a.

Now there was a famine in the land . . .

Right in the middle of this, God interrupts Abram's rejoicing with a famine.

How do you respond when God interrupts your rejoicing with a period of famine? How do you respond when a trial or a test knocks on your door, especially when it comes on the heels of close communion and fellowship? It leaves us scratching our heads. We cannot figure it out. You might say, "I thought I'd arrived, Lord. I'm in Canaan. Here's the altar. We've had great fellowship. Then, bang! – a trial."

Perhaps you feel like King Hezekiah. In II Chronicles, chapter 31, verses 20 and 21, we read these words,

Thus [King] Hezekiah did throughout all Judah; and he did what was good, right and true before the Lord his God. . . . seeking his God . . . with all his heart . . .

Then, note chapter 32, verse 1a.

After these acts of faithfulness [the] king of Assyria came and invaded Judah . . .

This is the time when you think it is not worth it. After all the acts of faithfulness, guess what God does? He brings an enemy king to invade the land.

I think of Jesus Christ Himself, who, as recorded in Luke, chapter 3, went under the waters of baptism. When He came out of the water, His Father's voice was heard from heaven saying, in verse 22b,

. . . You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased.

Then, in Luke, chapter 4, verses 1 and 2a, we read,

Jesus, . . . was led around by the Spirit in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by the devil. . . .

Let me give you something to remember. This is something that most Christians never get and as a result, they give up when famine comes into their lives. It is this:

Initial obedience is the starting point on the road to spiritual maturity.

Initial obedience is the starting point. We have the idea that it is the final destination. We say, "Lord, I surrender to You. I want to be like Christ."

Then we think, "Well, great, that takes care of my sanctification. I'm here; I've arrived."

However, all of a sudden, God brings a trial into our lives, and we say, "Hey, wait a second Lord. What are You doing?"

God replies, "I'm answering your prayer. I'm going to make you like Christ."

"But, wait a second. I said I wanted to be like Christ. I said I want to surrender."

God, in effect, says, "I don't necessarily care that you say that, I want you to experience it. I want it to be a reality in your life."

So, testing comes to do just that.

Abram's Cowardly Retreat of Fear

Now, what lay ahead for Abram in terms of spiritual growth? In the next ten verses, we will find out.

Before we get into that and before we are too hard on Abram for checking out and heading for Egypt, however, notice the question that he is probably asking. We have probably asked the same thing. "God, where are Your promises? Where are they?"

God's three promises to Abram

Abram had been given three promises from God. God promised:

1. The land – Abram gets to the land, looks around, and sees the Canaanites with their chariots of iron and their armies led by blood thirsty pagans.
2. The seed – Abram is promised a myriad of descendants, yet he still is without child.
3. The blessing – God promises to bless Abram, but here comes a famine.

So, Abram asks the question, "Where are the promises?"

He probably scratches his head and says, "Well, isn't there a verse in the Bible that says, 'God helps those who help themselves'?"

No! Abram thinks, "Where can I find bread?"

Egypt was known as, "the granary of the ancient world," so he heads for Egypt. Abram retreats in cowardly fear.

Look at verses 10 and 11 of Genesis, chapter 12.

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. It came about when he came near to Egypt, that he said to Sarai his wife, . . .

We will get to Abram's words to Sarai in just a moment. But first, understand that Abram is heading to the place that throughout the Old Testament, represents rebellion to God and bondage to the world. Help was not in Egypt, help was at the altar. Abram had just built it. I think the angels in heaven were probably saying, "Abram, stay there. We've got a recipe for manna and we'd like to use it."

The angels probably said, "Shucks, now we got to wait until Moses comes along."

The angels know that there are rocks there that are ready for gushing, if Abram (or you and I) would only go to God. But he cannot see the promises, so Abram begins leaning on his own understanding; his own reason, and he heads for Egypt.

Ladies and gentlemen, imagine that you had walked up to Abram right in between these two verses, and said, "Listen, Abram, I want you to understand that in about three months, you're going to be alone in Egypt sitting in a tent. Your wife will have just been added to the harem of the Pharaoh, and your herds will be increasing."

Abram would have said, "You're reading the wrong tea leaves or something. Not me!"

However, we will discover that that is exactly what happens.

Let us look at a few verses before we go further. The prophet Isaiah wrote these words. Do you see yourself in these words? Notice Isaiah, chapter 30, verses 1 through 3, very carefully.

"Woe to the rebellious children," declares the Lord, "who execute a plan, but not Mine, and make an alliance, but not of My Spirit, in order to add sin to sin; who proceed down to Egypt without consulting Me, to take refuge in the safety of Pharaoh and to seek shelter in the shadow of Egypt! Therefore the safety of Pharaoh will be your shame and the shelter in the shadow of Egypt, your humiliation."

I think we could add a postscript to these words. "And when you go down to Egypt; when you trust in the world system; when you do not ask My counsel or My advice, don't blame Me when you get in a mess."

Recently, my family and I took a trip to Atlanta. We were all packed and ready to go. As we normally do, we were traveling through the night because the kids are controllable at that time, being asleep. Now, I knew the tires on the car were getting bald – I knew it. They were smooth and I had no business making an eight hour trip. In fact, before we left, I even checked to see if the spare was in the trunk. I was being foolish, but we left. I did not tell Marsha about the tires, of course. I figured, "God is sovereign, so we will get there."

Well, two o'clock in the morning, you guessed it – a flat tire on the side of Interstate 85. Two a.m.! Why don't these things ever happen in the driveway or just as you pull into the gas station – a full service gas station that has a sale on tires. It happens at two o'clock in the morning. So, I pulled over, and you know the way those semi's whipped by. I tried to convince Marsha to get out and change the tire, but she would not do it! I got out to change the tire.

Now, wouldn't it have been foolish for me to get out there and kind of kick the car and look up at the stars of heaven and say, "God, why did You do this to me? Why have You gotten me into this mess?"

That would have been absolutely foolish!

The last thing Abram could have said, when he got down to Egypt and all of this stuff started to happen that we are going to look at, was, "Lord, why in the world did You do this to me?"

Abram's problems were the result of his rebellion.

Many times we rebel against God; we get away from God. We do not ask advice or counsel and we get boxed into a corner. Then, guess who we give the credit to? God!

So, I went to the back of the car and pulled out the spare. Now the spare is barely more than a bicycle tire. They say you can go a hundred miles on those things. You can't! You can't! Those treads evaporated, and I had to stop every twenty five miles. By now the kids were up and uncontrollable. Finally, we pulled into a motel.

The next morning, I got up and went to a gas station. They happened to have a six dollar spare that fit the hub. It was worth every penny of it – six dollars, not a penny more, because when I got up to about forty five miles an hour, the car started to just shake. We shook into Atlanta – all the way there. It was my fault.

Abram is boxing himself in. I want you to notice what happens in verses 11 through 13 of Genesis, chapter 12.

It came about when he came near to Egypt, that he said to Sarai his wife, "See now, I know that you are a beautiful woman; and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife'; and they will kill me, but they will let you live. Please . . .

(I like the word "Please" in there – Abram is on his knees; he is begging, "Please, Sarai, . . ."),

. . . say that you are my sister so that it may go well with me because of you, and that I may live on account of you."

Now this was not really a lie. In Genesis, chapter 20, verse 12, we are told that Sarai is Abram's half sister. They had the same father, before God gave the penalties for marriage within the family, so she is his half sister.

Abram is clever. He says, "I'm not really lying, I'm just telling a half truth. Tell them you're my sister, and everything will be okay. We'll stay here; we'll get all the food we need; we'll survive. We'll slip back into Canaan and everything will be all right."

So, Sarai does what Abram asks.

Now, we know that it was a common practice in this day that if the Pharaoh wanted a woman, he respected marriage enough to kill the husband to get her! That was as far as his respect went. As a matter of fact, that is exactly the practice that David followed. You may remember that when he saw Bathsheba, he wanted her, so he took care of Uriah, her husband. David adopted the practice of a pagan Pharaoh. By the way, I think that is probably the reason why the people never said anything to David – they were pagans too. They said, "Our king is acting just like the Pharaohs of Egypt. He took care of the husband."

That was the way it was, until Nathan confronted David. That was the practice of the time, and that is exactly what would have happened to Abram and Sarai.

Well, let us continue. Look at verse 14.

And it came about when Abram came into Egypt, the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful.

Sarai was sixty-five years old. With the length of life they lived, she would probably be about thirty-five years of age in respect to how long we seem to live on planet earth. So she was really reaching the blossom of her womanhood. Abram knew she was beautiful. He was no dummy – he knew that as soon they laid eyes on her, they would knock him off.

Continue to verse 15 and note what happens. This was a shock to Abram.

Pharaoh's officials saw her and praised her to Pharaoh; and the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house.

Uh oh. Abram did not anticipate that. He did not think that it would go that far.

Now, the custom was for there to be a twelve month period of preparation before a woman was added to a harem. During that time, she was simply taken care of and Pharaoh did not touch her. She would be added to the harem officially, after the twelve month time. We do not know how far along this went, but I can just imagine Abram sitting alone in his tent realizing that he had really gone way too far.

I read a story by Gary Richmond that intrigued me. Gary used to work for the Los Angeles Zoo. He talked about the day when the curators of the reptile section of the zoo needed to perform surgery on a king cobra. Since Gary was on staff, they solicited his help. They said, "Look, Gary, you come with the four of us. We're going to go into the cage of the king cobra."

I think the king cobra was about ten feet long. You may know that king cobras have a cape that spreads as they stand almost erect.

So Gary comes along and they say, "Now, you need to help the surgeon. You grab the head and three of the other men will grab the body. Once you've got it, somebody else will take over. Then you help with the surgery."

They walked into the reptile cage and it was huge. Soon, the king cobra came around the corner. It was as if he recognized what they were up to and he immediately, as it were, stood and spread his cape. He then looked back and forth at each of the five men, as if he were selecting his prey. Gary was standing there with his knees knocking.

Soon, the snake darted at one of the men. He was an expert, so he leapt out of the path of the snake and

grabbed part of the body. All five men were then, quickly able to hold onto the snake.

So, Gary began helping the surgeon. The surgeon said, "Take some towels and wad them up. Then, stick them in the snake's mouth."

Gary tells that the snake was growling and hissing all during this. And, although they had de-fanged the snake, it still had the venom sacks with venom strong enough to kill an elephant.

So Gary wads up the towels and sticks them in the snake's mouth. The snake chomps down on those things and begins to grind. The venom dripped from those towels.

The surgeon said that the reason this was done was that although it was not really difficult to catch the snake, it was tough to let go and get out without getting bitten. So, they milk the snake; drain the venom. Then, if he per chance, gets a hold on one of the men, they will not die.

Gary continued and used this story to illustrate the story of Abram in Egypt. Abram, in effect, easily grabbed on to the snake. He tells a little lie; a little half truth, and thinks they will have it made. Now, however, he is embracing in his tent, a serpent that is venomous. He is probably looking over his shoulder and constantly wondering if his lie has been discovered and they are coming to take his head. And, just outside the tent, another deposit of cattle has arrived with a note from the Pharaoh saying, "Thank you, Abram, for coming to Egypt. Oh, that sister of yours, she's mine in three months."

It all started with a little lie. My friends, dishonesty is an epidemic, even in the church. I understand that in 1811, a conscience fund was started in Washington, D.C. when a man sent in five dollars that he had stolen from his taxes. The fund still exists today and, in fact, has had nearly four million dollars added to it.

Well, there is hope because of the first phrase of verse 17. Circle these words,

But the Lord . . .

If it had not been for the Lord's intervention, there would have been no hope. What is Abram going to do? Go up to the Pharaoh and say, "Pharaoh, I lied. I'd like my wife back."

No way. So, the Lord intervenes. Look at verses 17 through 19.

But the Lord struck Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife. Then 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."

Consequences of Abram's sin

Now, do not get the idea that everything is taken care of; that there are no problems now that God has intervened; that Abram is off the hook. No. Let me give several consequences of Abram's sin.

Lost blessing

1. First, there was lost blessing.

If Abram had stayed at the altar at Bethel; if he had called to God because his needs were not being met, God would have responded miraculously or in some way to provide for him. God did this for Moses, the children of Israel, Elijah, and many others. But, as a result of resting on his own reason, Abram lost the blessing of seeing God work; seeing God provide for his need.

So often you and I forfeit the blessing of God because instead of waiting on Him to provide, we figure it all out.

An increase in possessions

2. Secondly, there was an increase in possessions.

When Abram left Egypt, verse 2 of chapter 13 tells us that he was very rich. Why is this a consequence? Because these riches would cause the dispute among the herdsmen of Abram and the herdsmen of Lot that would finally cause a family split.

Do not ever think it is inevitable that if we grow rich, it is the blessing of God. In Canaan, in the will of God, Abram was living hand to mouth, while in Egypt, out of the will of God, he was getting rich. I do not mean to imply that when you stay in Canaan, poverty is the hand of God, nor that riches are the hand of Satan. But in Abram's case, this was in fact, true.

A maid servant named Hagar

3. Thirdly, when Sarai left Egypt, she brought along a maid servant to help, named Hagar.

This maid would bear a son, because Abram would once again listen to his reason. That son would grow up to be, even to this day, the arch enemy of the Israelite – the Arabian nation.

Lot was led astray

4. Fourthly, Lot evidently developed a taste for Egypt that persisted; he was led astray.

Abram took Lot back out of Egypt, but he could not get Egypt out of Lot. How tragic it is when a more mature believer, who should know better, leads a younger believer astray.

A lost testimony

5. Notice the fifth consequence, in verse 18, that you may not have caught; that is, a lost testimony.

Look again at verse 18.

Then Pharaoh called Abram and said, “What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife?”

Abram is confronted by a man who, at this particular point in his life, is more godly than he is – and the man is a pagan Pharaoh. The Pharaoh is straightening out Abram’s ethics; he is clearing up his morals.

How difficult it must be to be confronted by a pagan who knows even better than you. Perhaps you have received rebuke lately. Maybe it is a son who says, “Dad, you sure are gone a lot lately,” or a friend who confides in you and says, “Are you doing okay? You really, really seem impatient lately,” or a spouse who says, “Is everything right between you and the Lord? I don’t see the fruit.”

Abram was confronted by a pagan king that Abram should have won.

Abram’s Committed Return to Fellowship

Well, is there hope? Yes. Let me give a reason why. Because Abram returned to the altar.

In verse 20 of chapter 12, Abram and all with him, are escorted out of Egypt. I mean they took them

right to the border and said, “We never want to see you again.”

Then, look at chapter 13, verses 1 through 4a.

So Abram went up from Egypt to the Negev, he and his wife and all that belonged to him, and Lot with him. Now Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver and in gold. He went on his journeys from the Negev as far as Bethel, . . .

(note this),

. . . to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai, to the place of the altar which he had made there formerly . . .

Returning to the altar

What is Abram telling us? Let me give a couple of things.

Go back to the place of departure

1. First, go back to the place of departure; go back to where that fork came in the road and you went left, when God said to go right.

If you want to straighten it all out, go back to the place where you departed. I do not know about you, but your Egypt may be a bar. Your Egypt may be the principal’s office for cheating. Your Egypt may be in front of a cable television set where you secretly watch immorality. Your Egypt may be in the home of another man or another woman. Your Egypt may be much more subtle; such as, telephone conversations riddled with gossip or an unused Bible that is dusty and has marked on it the invisible words, “for Sunday’s only”. But wherever it is, you are in Egypt. Go back to the place of departure.

Go back to the place of dependence

2. Abram is also telling us to go back to the place of dependence.

Would you notice the last part of verse 4.

. . . and there Abram called on the name of the Lord.

In your life, just how essential is God? How often do you hear yourself say the words, “I can do it myself. Leave it to me.”

Go back to that place, like Abram, and once again call on the name of the Lord. Go back to that place of dependence.

Application – Lessons From a Backsliding Saint!

Let me apply this passage with four lessons that we can learn from a backsliding saint.

Do not be surprised when famine arrives in your life

1. First, do not be surprised when famine arrives in your life.

It is as if we are shocked when famine comes. But the path of faith is an ascending hill that is designed by God to develop the muscles of our faith. The journey is not a level plain where we can casually stroll nor is it a descending hill upon which we can coast. That is not faith. It is a climb. And that famine is designed by God to help you on your way.

Famine comes to test and strengthen our dependence on the Lord

2. Secondly, famine comes to test and strengthen our dependence on the Lord, even when He seems silent; even when He seems distant; even when He seems unfair.

As Proverbs, chapter 3, verses 5 and 6 tell us,

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge [trust, depend on] Him, and He will make your paths straight.

God never runs short of patience

3. Thirdly, God never runs short of patience.

This is an amazing thing. If I had been God, I would have said, “Abram, you are a loser. I’ll get another person to fulfill the covenant I’ve given to Israel. Forget it. You have caused the heathen to blaspheme My name. You have tested Me. You almost gave your wife away. I’ll find somebody else.”

However, God did not do that.

A story is told of Thomas Edison, when he was working on an improvement to his first light bulb. He finished it and handed the finished bulb to a young boy who was an assistant in the lab. That boy had to take it to the vacuum chamber up some stairs. He cautiously took each step one at a time, but then, at the last minute, he dropped the bulb and it shattered into a thousand pieces. The whole staff had to spend another twenty four hours making another bulb. When they finished, to the amazement of the staff, Edison handed the newly made bulb back to the same boy. That probably marked him for life. It changed that boy’s life, I would imagine. This time he accomplished the job.

Multiply that by ten million. That is how God is patient with His children. We drop the ball. There we are in the middle of Egypt, and God still cares.

Going to another source for help will never solve what faith in God can

4. Let me give one more application. Going to another source for help will never solve what faith in God can.

If we would only get this through our heads. Egypt will never help; it will never satisfy. There are no altars in Egypt; there is no fellowship in Egypt; there is no worship in Egypt. We have to return to Bethel, the place of fellowship; the place of worship; the place where God patiently waits for us to return.

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It All Began With a Bad Decision

Genesis 13-19

Introduction

A certain man was rather ill tempered. In fact, some would say he was occasionally brutal. According to a few reports, he was a weak leader in the home and was unable to hold a steady job. His wife was not well. In fact, she had been plagued for years by a disease that would soon take her life, that of tuberculosis. Of the seven children ultimately born to her, only three lived to adulthood. At this particular time in history, the death rate among children was tragically high – three out of every five children would die. This is what happened to her, of course. She had lost her first son when he was only six days old, and now, less than two years later, this diseased and depressed woman discovered that she was pregnant again. She was advised by everyone to abort, but she stubbornly refused and decided to carry and deliver the child. The civilized world is grateful for her decision, because the child would grow up as Ludwig van Beethoven.

Private Joseph Lockhard and Private George Elliott were on duty at the Opana Radar Station located on the northern tip of Oahu, Hawaii. They were about to go off duty when Lockhard noticed the characteristic blip of an airplane on his radar screen. He would watch as more than fifty blips appeared on the screen. He called Lieutenant Kermit Tyler with his findings, but Tyler assumed that the blips represented American bombers returning from maneuvers over California. He told Lockhard to forget it. Instead of calling Major Kenneth Berquist to confirm his assumption, which was standard procedure, he never called and the men went off duty. That decision, along with many other bad decisions,

enabled the Japanese bombers to attack Pearl Harbor without warning.

Decisions like these have had far reaching effects. Fortunately, the decisions that you and I make do not have such worldwide implications. I am very glad of that. However, the decisions that we make do affect our lives and the lives of those closest to us.

Decisions are all important. I think that is why Solomon urged his son, and us, over and over again, to ponder the path of his feet; that is, take careful note of decisions you are making because they are leading you somewhere, and they bring with them consequences.

Today, we are going to study the life of a man marked by foolish decisions – a man named Lot.

Robert Lewis Stevenson wrote prophetically that every man will one day be seated at a banquet table of consequences. We will soon discover Lot seated at this banquet table. He has spread it with the finest linen and china. You might observe from a distance and think, “Oh, I’d love to be seated where Lot is.”

However, if you come a little closer, you will notice that his plate contains very bitter food. And though he raises a rare and expensive goblet, you will notice that the inside is filled with regret and sorrow. He will also, eat alone. And it all began with a bad decision.

Turn to the first chapter in Lot’s biography – Genesis, chapter 13.

In our last discussion, we learned that Abram had compromised his position. He had gone to Egypt and had almost thrown the virtue of his wife away out of fear for his own life. But God sent a plague on the

Pharaoh and his household, so that it was learned that this woman was, in fact, the wife, not the sister of Abram, and Pharaoh released her. Abram had taken Lot along, and when they left Egypt, both were very wealthy.

It is interesting that when Abram returned to Canaan, he built an altar and once again called upon the name of the Lord. He repented and got back to where he ought to be.

However, we will notice what happens in chapter 13, when Lot goes back with him. We will begin with verses 5 and 6.

Now Lot, who went with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents. And the land could not sustain them while dwelling together, for their possessions were so great that they were not able to remain together.

Notice that the land is not too small to hold them. The land of Palestine, the Canaan land, is more than large enough to hold the herds of two wealthy men. The problem is that prosperity had brought about strife in this family, and it would soon split the family. Note, in verse 7, that the strife is between the herdsmen of Abram's livestock and the herdsmen of Lot's livestock.

And there was strife between the herdsmen of Abram's livestock and the herdsmen of Lot's livestock. Now the Canaanite and the Perizzite were dwelling then in the land.

Abram comes to Lot in verse 8 and note the use of the word "Please". It is used again in verse 9.

So Abram said to Lot, "Please let there be no strife between you and me, nor between my herdsmen and your herdsmen, for we are brothers. Is not the whole land before you? Please separate from me; if to the left, then I will go to the right; or if to the right, then I will go to the left."

Factors Behind Abram's Proposal

Now, I think Abram has changed since his time in Egypt. On occasion, before going to Egypt, if he needed something, he would take it into his own hands and make his decision based on factors that we will now discover Lot making his decision based upon. However, in these verses, we see Abram making a gracious proposal to Lot. Let me give three factors behind his gracious proposal.

Abram was prompted by God's original command

1. The first factor that I discover in this text that would cause Abraham to make this kind of gracious proposal is that he was prompted by God's original command. He, in effect, is going back to the original command of God.

Look back at chapter 12, verse 1a.

Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father's house . . ."

Note the phrase, "and from your relatives". Lot was Abram's nephew, the son of his brother Aaron.

God tells Abram to go away from his home, his relatives, and his father's house. Do you know what Abram does? He brings along his father and his nephew, Lot. Abram does not obey completely, until finally, God brings death into his family. Terah, Abram's father, dies. He moves on then, but he still has Lot tagging along. Lot will be a constant source of irritation. He will take up much of Abram's energy. The whole problem was that Abram never fully obeyed by separating from his relatives.

Now, Lot is back in Canaan with Abram. I think Abram probably thought, "Well, here's my chance to completely obey God. Here is the opportunity we need to separate."

Abram was confident of God's ability to provide

2. Secondly, Abram was confident of God's ability to provide.

I believe that because God had promised Abram the blessing; fertility; that his herds would multiply, and where better could that take place than in the fertile region of the Jordan Valley. And Abram actually gives the choice to Lot. He says, "Lot, if you choose that, I'll head west and north and dwell in the western region, which is less fertile."

How could Abram do that? He was confident in God's ability to provide.

Abram was unselfish in yielding his rights to God

3. Thirdly, Abram was unselfish in yielding his rights to God – not to Lot, but ultimately, to God.

Let us be realistic. Imagine that day with me. Abram says, "Look, Lot, let's have a talk. I want you to understand that there's strife. It's a poor testimony

to the Perizzites. What we want to do is split up. I'll give you the choice."

Realistically though, I think Abram has his fingers crossed, thinking, "Okay, Lord, now I've been gracious. Please give me the best slice of land."

I do not think for a moment that Abram walked into this whistling. He was probably very concerned that Lot would allow him to have the best, being the rightful heir; being the elder; being the one God had given the promise to. Lot would say, "Boy, Abram, you're a wonderful guy. Because of that, I want you to have the best."

Not a chance.

I was raised with three brothers in my home as a boy. My mom would often test our character. She would have a platter of some kind of pastry and she would select one of us boys to serve the other three. There was always one pastry on the platter that was bigger than the others. I can remember serving the dish, wondering if my brothers would respect my graciousness and leave the biggest for me. No way! The one left on that platter by the time my three brothers got through, was always the smallest, scrawniest piece of all.

It is a pipe dream to think that people are going to respond to your graciousness with a pat on the back and say, "Boy, I really respect you. You take the best."

Do you know what a pipe dream is? A pipe dream is hoping people will respond to you like you would like to be responded to. I clipped a list of pipe dreams out of a book that I read. The following were included:

Imagine, in your wildest dreams, your daughter saying, "Go sit down Mom. I'll clean up the kitchen tonight."

Imagine a mechanic looking under your hood and saying, "Oh, it's nothing. I'll just tighten up the fan belt."

Imagine a policeman stopping you and then saying, "You were only going 55? My radar must be on the blink again."

Imagine your little two year old running around saying, "Yes. Yes."

Imagine your husband saying, "Tuna casserole again. Wonderful!"

No, these are pipe dreams!

Well, I think to expect Lot to come along and say, "Abram, you take the best," was a pipe dream. Lot did not even flinch. He probably thought, "Abram's gone a little whacko giving me the choice. There's no decision here. This is fertile – I'll take this."

I happen to think that Abram was probably depressed.

Now, note what happened in the later part of chapter 13. Look at verses 14 and 15, which occur after the decision has been made.

The Lord said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, "Now lift up your eyes, and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward; for all the land which you see, I will give it to you and to your descendants forever."

In other words, "Take heart. The promise is still yours."

Abram had now had taken away from him everything that he had to support him. His dad had died, and their relationship had probably been so close that it had made it difficult for Abram to separate, even after God commanded him to leave his father's house. And his companion, his nephew Lot, though irritating at times, was now gone as well. And in addition, Abram is stuck in the west, which is the less fertile region. But God came along and said, "Abram, look up. The promise is still yours. I will give you all this land."

Continue to verse 17.

Arise, walk about the land through its length and breadth; for I will give it to you.

Notice what Abram does next. Does he complain to God? No! Look at verse 18.

Then Abram moved his tent and came and dwelt by the oaks of Mamre, which are in Hebron, and there he built an altar to the Lord.

By the way, when making decisions in your life, are these three characteristics evident?

- Obedience to God's command.
- Confidence in God's ability to provide.
- Unselfishness in yielding whatever you may think your rights are to God and saying, "God, You work. If it is through a guy like

Lot, I will still allow You to work, and I'll accept the decision."

Factors Behind Lot's Decision

Now, let us focus for the remainder of this discussion, on the decision that Lot made. Let us take a look at the factors behind his selfish, and I believe foolish, decision.

Lot was influenced by what he saw

1. The first factor is that Lot was influenced by what he saw.

Look at verse 10 of chapter 13.

Lot lifted up his eyes and saw all the valley of the Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere – this was before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah – like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt as you go to Zoar.

Note the last phrase, "like the land of Egypt". Lot had dwelt in Egypt and had become wealthy. Egypt never really left him, even though he left Egypt. This land reminded him of the fertile region of Egypt. Continue to verse 11.

So Lot chose for himself all the valley of the Jordan, and Lot journeyed eastward. Thus they separated from each other.

Now, we know historically that in this valley were five cities: Sodom, Gomorrah, Zoar, Zeboiim, and Admah. They were all prosperous, large cities. They had formed a confederacy and had developed a large, extensive agricultural system in the valley. Each city was located near a pocket of water and they formed a circle. To live there meant agricultural potential; fertile regions. You could have the best of the civilized world at your doorstep. We know there was a large population because tombs have been discovered in that region in which more than a million people are buried. So, Lot pitched his tent there.

The westward upland, where Abram would live, was not as productive. So, Lot chose the more fertile area. He was influenced by what he saw.

Lot was unconcerned by what he had heard

2. Secondly, Lot was unconcerned by what he had heard.

This is implied. Look at verse 13 of chapter 13. I do not think it is a coincidence that Moses inserts this as he writes the account.

Now the men of Sodom were wicked exceedingly and sinners against the Lord.

He is trying to find the words to describe the wickedness of this town. He says they were wicked exceedingly *and* they were sinners against the Lord.

Somehow Lot ignored what he had heard about this city. It had the reputation of being sin city. It was totally given over to the practice of homosexuality, as we will discover later. Perhaps Lot thought, "Well, I'm not exactly living in Sodom, I'm just living near enough to enjoy the benefits of its civilization."

We know that Lot was a gentleman farmer. That means that he did not actually do the labor. He, in fact, grazed his herds seventy miles from where he lived. His servants did the work. He lived kind of in the lap of luxury. So, he probably thought, "If I just move close enough, I can benefit from all that Sodom has, and I won't participate."

He foolishly ignored the reputation of Sodom and what he had heard.

Lot was irresponsible in leading his family

3. Thirdly, he was irresponsible in leading his family.

This is obviously so. Look back at verse 12 of chapter 13.

Abram settled in the land of Canaan, while Lot settled in the cities of the valley, and moved his tents as far as Sodom.

Sodom was the southernmost city of them all. You need to understand, ladies and gentlemen, that he is not moving his family into a home on a nice street in a nice city. Now, I am not implying that we are supposed to stay away, that we are not to be a light in a dark place, but he is moving close enough so that his family will feel the full effect of the lure of wickedness. This is like moving his family into the parlor of a brothel. It is like taking up residence in the backroom of a bar. He would expose his family to such temptation, and we will learn later that they will succumb; they will fall; he will lose his family. In terms of business, what a fantastic decision, but in terms of his family, what a tragic decision.

It is possible to make a similar decision today. A man may take a promotion that gives a bigger paycheck, but literally strips away the time that he has with his family. And he says, "Look how God is blessing me." Do not blame it on God. We need to constantly evaluate our priorities and our time.

Lot made a fantastic business decision, but it was a selfish decision. It is as if he said, "I'll lose my family; I'll potentially give them over to the temptation that they will be confronted with, but I want what I want."

This is like the little five year old little boy who loved motorcycles. Every time he would see one go by, he would just howl for joy.

We have that problem in our house now. We have two little boys. They have everything but the motorcycle. They have cowboy boots, jean jackets, and a guy in the church who is leading them astray because he has a motorcycle – and he is here today!

So, every time a motorcycle would go by, this little boy would let out a howl of joy, "Oh, soon I'm going to have me one of them!"

His mother would say the same thing that my boys' mother says, "Not as long as I'm alive you won't."

Finally, one day, the boy is standing by the street and is overheard talking to a friend as a shiny new motorcycle goes by. He points and says, "Look at that! Look at that! Just as soon as my mother dies, I'm going to get me one of them."

In effect, that is exactly what Lot seems to be thinking – "I want what I want, even though it means the potential loss of everything that is really dear."

The Downward Progression of Lot's Compromise

Would you note the downward progression of Lot's compromise?

Lot looked towards Sodom

1. The first step, in chapter 13, verse 10, Lot looked towards Sodom.

Lot pitched his tent towards Sodom

2. Secondly, in chapter 13, verse 12, Lot pitched his tent towards Sodom.

Lot is living in Sodom

3. Thirdly, in chapter 14, verses 11 and 12, Lot is living in Sodom.

Note chapter 14, verses 1 and 2a.

And it came about in the days of Amraphel king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, Chedorlaomer king of Elam, and Tidal king of Goiim, that they made war with Bera king of Sodom . . .

These wicked kings are at war with the king of Sodom and the entire confederacy. Now note verses 11 and 12.

Then they took [overcame] all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah and all their food supply, and departed. They also took Lot, Abram's nephew, and his possessions and departed, for he was living in Sodom.

First, it was a look.

Then, it was, "Well, Honey, let's put our tent nearby."

Then, the next step – they are living in Sodom.

Lot is a leader in Sodom

4. The final step, in chapter 19, verse 1, Lot is a leader in Sodom.

Turn to chapter 19 and look at verse 1a.

Now the two angels came to Sodom in the evening as Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom. . . .

Historically, we understand that the men who sat at the gates were the political leaders. They were the elders who decided matters of civil law. So, Lot is now a leader.

James Montgomery Boice wrote of this compromise. Let me quote his words:

He moved into Sodom. He made friends with the people. He rose in popularity. He put down deep roots. He built a business and a home. He raised a family, became a leading citizen, and destroyed his life. He destroyed his life by compromising God's way and accepting as right, those things which God said were wrong. He would betroth his daughters to men of Sodom. He allied his family with the sin of the city. Though he was

righteous, he did not present a heritage of righteousness.

The Consequences of Lot's Decision

Now, we need to cover the consequences of Lot's decision. I would really like to stay away from chapter 19, because it is so dark; it is so tragic. Yet, it is profitable in some way to us, as believers, so let us dive in.

Lot lost all sense of moral perspective and value

1. The first consequence is that Lot lost all sense of moral perspective and value.

The two angels that had just visited Abraham now come to Sodom. They know judgment is coming, and they come to warn them. Look at chapter 19, verse 1.

Now the two angels came to Sodom in the evening as Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom. When Lot saw them, he rose to meet them and bowed down with his face to the ground.

Lot does not know they are angels at this point. Continue to verse 2.

And he said, "Now behold, my lords, please turn aside into your servant's house, and spend the night, and wash your feet; then you may rise early and go on your way." They said however, "No, but we shall spend the night in the square."

Now, we will cover in a later discussion that Abram has been praying for Lot. He knows that God is going to destroy Sodom, so he says, "Lord, if You can find even ten righteous people there, would You not destroy it?"

Well, God sends two angels. It was the practice in the Old Testament that before you inflicted punishment, you sent two witnesses, so God sends two angels. And they are going to spend the night out in the square to observe the immorality and try to find ten righteous people. But Lot knows what it would be like to spend the night out in the square, so he says, "No, please spend the night in my home."

Look at verses 2 and 3.

Yet he urged them strongly, so they turned aside to him and entered his house; and he prepared a feast for them, and baked

unleavened bread, and they ate. Before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, surrounded the house, both young and old, all the people from every quarter;

This is an entire male population of Sodom given over to sodomy. Continue to verses 5 and 6.

and they called to Lot and said to him, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us that we may have relations with them." But Lot went out to them in the doorway, and shut the door behind him,

I cannot believe how far this man has stooped that he comes out to answer their invitation. Look at verse 7.

and said, "Please, my brothers, do not act wickedly."

Now note verse 8.

Now behold, I have two daughters who have not had relations with man; please let me bring them out to you, and do to them whatever you like; only do nothing to these men, inasmuch as they have come under the shelter of my roof.

He had tragically adopted the customary practice that a guest is to be protected, while women are mere cattle. But although that is the custom of society, I do not believe righteous men live that way. In fact, we will discover one of the patriarchs having a wonderful relationship with his wife. They knew better. It seems that Lot had been living in Sodom long enough for some of Sodom to take up residence in him. It is like he is an airplane pilot who is lost in the fog without instruments. He comes out on the porch and says, "Take my daughters. They are virgins. You can have them. But leave these two men that I hardly know alone."

Men and women, it is possible to live in rebellion and compromise to such a degree that you begin to adopt the pagan measures of your society. In fact, I think that is what Jesus Christ had in mind in Matthew, chapter 6, in the Sermon on the Mount, when he said, "Look, don't worry, don't pursue, don't grasp after that which you put on, that which you eat, the house you live in. Don't go after that stuff."

Why? "The pagans are searching after that."

Do you know what happens to us, as believers, living in this society? We begin to pursue the same things as our wicked society – what we wear, where we live, what we drive, what we eat. These things become our primary pursuit. Sodom lives in us.

Frankly, I would imagine that Lot's daughters never recovered from hearing their father suggest this horror.

Lot was subjected to harassment

2. The second consequence is that Lot was subjected to harassment.

Look at verse 9a of chapter 19.

But they said, "Stand aside." Furthermore, they said, "This one came in as an alien [foreigner]; and already he is acting like a judge; now we will treat you worse than them." . . .

This is implying that Lot had never said anything about their immoral practice. He had sat at the gate as an elder, and had judged matters, I am sure, that involved this sin, and yet, had never said a word – until now. And they look at him and scratch their heads – they are shocked. They respond, "What do you think you're saying? Are you our judge?" – meaning this is probably the first time he had ever spoken out against it.

They said, "Get out of our way, or we will treat you just as we will treat them. Stand aside."

Now note verses 10 and 11.

But the men reached out their hands and brought Lot into the house with them, and shut the door. They [the angels] struck the men who were at the doorway of the house with blindness, both small and great, so that they wearied themselves trying to find the doorway.

It is hardly imaginable that these men are so intent on their immorality that they are struck blind. And what do they do? Run to a doctor? No! They wearied themselves; they continually tried to find the door.

Lot lost his influence over those closest to him

3. This leads to the third consequence that Lot lost his influence over those closest to him.

Look at verses 12 and 13 of chapter 19.

Then the two men said to Lot, "Whom else have you here? A son-in-law, and your sons, and your daughters, and whomever you have in the city, bring them out of the place; for we are about to destroy this place, because their outcry has become so great before the Lord that the Lord has sent us to destroy it."

Note how Lot has lost his influence, in verse 14.

Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law, who were to marry his daughters, and said, "Up, get out of this place, for the Lord will destroy the city." But he appeared to his sons-in-law to be jesting.

They probably looked at him and laughed and said, "Since when did God speak to you? Since when have you heard the voice of the Lord? The Lord's going to destroy this city? Right! Sure He is, Lot!"

Lot's own future sons-in-law did not believe him.

Now the next few verses are not to be believed. Note carefully and even underline, in verses 15 and 16, "When morning dawned," and, "But he hesitated." Look at verse 15.

When morning dawned, the angels urged Lot, saying, "Up, take your wife and your two daughters who are here, or you will be swept away in the punishment of the city."

They have already told Lot that judgment is coming. So what does Lot do? He gets a good night's rest; he goes to sleep! And then they urge him even further when morning dawns and note his response in verse 16a.

But he hesitated. So the men seized his hand and the hand of his wife and the hands of his two daughters, . . .

Imagine, if someone came to your home and told you that there was a nuclear bomb in your living room. Would you go to the closet and think, "Let's see. What tie should I wear? What suit should I pack?"

No! You would be out of there! Destruction is coming, and you do not know when.

You may remember the fire drills when you were in elementary school. You never believed them, did you? You knew they were only drills. But the first graders believed them. They used to line up in a straight line, and they would walk out with eyes rolled big, "Oh, there's a fire in the school!"

Do you remember that? By then you were in fifth grade, and you knew the score! You just kind of casually strolled out. All of the first graders looked at you thinking, “What courage. Wow!”

You would even run back and get a pencil, because you knew it was just a drill.

Now I have tried to climb inside of Lot’s skin and think in the same way he must have thought. There is only one reason, and I could be wrong, but there is only one reason that I can think of that he would hesitate; that he would get a good night’s rest; that he would lag behind. That reason is unbelief! I do not think Lot really believed God would destroy the city. So, he hesitated; he delayed.

Lot was in disagreement with his wife

4. Fourthly, Lot was in disagreement with his wife.

You could rephrase this consequence a lot of ways. You could say that Lot lost his position of leadership. You could say that his wife lost respect for him. The truth was that Lot could not even convince his wife that God had spoken to him. Look at verses 23 and 24.

The sun had risen over the earth when Lot came to Zoar. Then the Lord rained on Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven,

The liberals think that this is just a small fire that somehow exploded some things in Sodom and became a big fire. But it is obvious that taking this literally, fire literally rained out of heaven. Brimstone could be translated, “burning sulfur”. It all came from the sky. Continue to verses 25 and 26.

And He overthrew those cities, and all the valley, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground. But his wife, from behind him, looked back, . . .

That phrase, “looked back,” could be translated a number of ways. It could be translated “lagged behind”. In other words, the party was fleeing and she lagged behind. It could also be translated, “returned”. The truth is, I do not believe Lot’s wife thought judgment would come, and she did not believe the testimony of her husband. She had learned to love Sodom.

Lot committed incest with his daughters

5. The fifth and, I think, the most tragic consequence is that Lot committed incest with his daughters.

Look at verses 30 through 32.

Lot went up from Zoar, and stayed in the mountains, and his two daughters with him, for he was afraid to stay in Zoar; and he stayed in a cave, he and his two daughters. Then the first-born 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 the earth. Come, let us make our father drink wine, and let us lie with him that we may preserve our family through our father.”

The story goes on to tell that both daughters did that. What a tragic consequence of living in Sodom. Lot’s daughters, instead of trusting God for their heritage, adopted the pagan practice they had probably seen a million times in Sodom.

Their children would be boys. Each would have a son. One daughter’s son would be named Moab. The other daughter’s son would be named Ben-ammi. Moab would be the father of the Moabite nation. Ben-ammi would be the father of the Ammonite nation. These two nations would constantly be a source of irritation and war with the sons of Abraham.

Lot’s story is a red flag that warns anyone who believes that sin will never be found out. His life is a tragic illustration that sin might be pleasurable for a season, but it brings with it the consequences.

Application – Lessons Learned From Lot

Let me apply this passage with two lessons that we can learn from Lot.

Constant exposure to sin ultimately wears down resistance to sin

1. First, constant exposure to sin ultimately wears down resistance to sin.

Do not fool yourself. If you pitch your tent toward Sodom, sooner or later you are going to be living in Sodom. That is why the apostle Paul, in I Corinthians, chapter 6, verse 18, said in regard to fornication or immorality, or “porneia” in the Greek, to what? Stroll away from it? No! To flee! To run! You and I cannot take the temptation.

The consequences of sin always outweigh the pleasures of sin

2. Secondly, the consequences always outweigh the pleasures of sin.

Sin can be pleasurable and even fun. But the penalty is severe.

When he began his incredible career, he was a seventeen year old refugee with a hundred bucks in his pocket. He and his family had been forced to leave a large fortune and flee, and he arrived half a world away in South America to start over. By the time he was twenty-two years old, he had not only earned his first million dollars, but he had earned the reputation of being a ruthless and selfish man.

This man lived a life surrounded by luxury and was devoted to pagan pleasure; to a hedonistic lifestyle. His extra-marital affairs were the talk of the press. And in 1968, he shocked the world with his marriage to the widow of an assassinated American president. At the pinnacle of his success in 1973, this man would be worth more than one billion dollars. The philosophy of Aristotle Onassis is best summed up by something he said to the press one day, "All that really matters is money. That's all that matters in life. The people with the money are the royalty now."

Then, his world began to crumble. His son, who was twenty-four years old in 1973, was involved in a plane crash. He died, and it was said, so did

Aristotle's desire to live. One magazine quoted an associate of Aristotle Onassis as saying that grief and guilt had dulled his sharp business sense, and in one year, he brought his fortune down eight hundred million dollars. Soon after, Onassis himself died.

In many ways, Lot is different from Aristotle Onassis. Lot is a believer. The similarity is that they both went from riches to rags. Think of Lot. He had reached the top. He was successful. He was a wealthy politician. He was influential. He had everything that he wanted – a wife, two daughters, perhaps a palatial home. And now, look at him in chapter 19 – penniless, living in a cave. His assets had been destroyed by the fire. He had lost his wife. And his daughters were now embarrassingly strange to him. What a tragic banquet of consequences.

I want you to take stock now. What kind of decisions are you making? What motivates you to make them? Where are they taking you?

Young person, what have you decided to live like when you walk out the front door of your house? Husbands and wives, where is God in your plans? Businessman or woman, what kind of ethics have you decided to live by in the working place? How close to Sodom do we live?

You may discover today, that Lot is sitting in your seat. If you discover that, then, like Abraham, go to the western highlands and build an altar and once again call upon the name of the Lord.

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Money Matters

Genesis 14

Introduction

We are going to address a subject today, in our study through the book of Genesis, that I discovered as I looked in my records of the thirty months of this church's existence, that I have spoken on one time – and that was on a Sunday evening. So today, I will speak on the subject of money.

However, understand that I am going to be approaching this subject from a different vantage point perhaps, than you have ever heard before. I may be teaching something that will cause you to think, “Yes, that’s exactly the way I’ve always believed, and it’s about time you taught it.” Or, you may think, “I have never heard that before, and in fact, I’m scratching my head because this is different from what I have heard.” Or, your thought might be, “I have never heard that before and I am convinced I don’t like it and never want to hear it again.” So for you, flexibility would be the key. For all of us, application is important.

We are studying Genesis, chapter 14, today, so please turn there in your Bible. We will begin with verse 17.

In our last discussion, we covered the fact that Lot rebelled against God. He compromised; he pitched his tent toward Sodom and ultimately, ended up in Sodom. Then, pagan kings took up war against the king of Sodom, as well as against the kings of the other four cities in the valley that made up that five-fold confederacy. And, as you may remember, Lot was taken captive, along with the king of Sodom and all of the goods. Then, Abraham sent his soldiers and rescued Lot.

The Story of Abraham and Jacob – Giving Before the Law

Now, after Abraham rescues Lot, he is returning and is approached by two men. He is approached, as we are told in verse 17 of Genesis, chapter 14, by the king of Sodom, who wants to give a gift to him. Abraham turns it down saying, basically, “I have sworn to the Lord God that I won’t take a penny from a pagan king, so that you can’t say you made me rich.”

Abraham

However, another man then approaches Abraham. That is where we will pick up our story today. Look at verses 18 through 20.

And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; now he was a priest of God Most High. He blessed him and said, “Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand.” . . .

(note how Abram responds to Melchizedek),

. . . He gave him a tenth of all.

Frequently people say that this giving by Abraham occurred before the law was given. So, because Abraham gave a tenth before the law, we, who live after the law, are required by God to give a tenth as well.

Turn to the New Testament passage of Hebrews, chapter 7, where verse 4 gives us an amplified account

of what happened. This verse relates again, the story of Melchizedek coming to Abram. Notice what happens in this amplified or enlarged version.

Now observe how great this man was to whom Abraham, the patriarch, gave a tenth .

..

Some expositors and commentators, in fact, think that Melchizedek was actually a pre-incarnate form of Jesus Christ. Melchizedek is really not a name, but a transliterated form of which the meaning would be “king of righteousness”. And, he was from Salem. Salem was the ancient city that is now Jerusalem – “Salem” coming from the Hebrew word, “shalom”. So this man was the king of righteousness; the king of peace. Because of this, many believe that perhaps, he was Jesus. I am not sure. In fact, Hebrews, chapter 7, seems to indicate otherwise. But Melchizedek comes to Abraham.

Note what Abraham does in verse 4b. He gave Melchizedek a tenth of what? Of all? No. He gave him,

... a tenth of the choicest spoils.

Now let me give two points about Abraham’s gift.

Abraham’s gift was spontaneous

1. Number one, Abraham’s gift was spontaneous.

There was nothing in the Old Testament account or in the New Testament account that would indicate God commanded Abraham to give a tithe – it was spontaneous. In fact, in his entire one hundred sixty years of life, we have no indication, before or after this occasion, that Abraham gave anything to the priests or to this priest. So, it was a spontaneous thing.

It would have been a good example, by the way, for the Jew. The Jew might have grumbled, and we are going to discover, as we go through this, why they could have grumbled. But Abraham gave a tenth of the choicest out of a spontaneous heart.

Abraham’s gift was generous

2. That leads us to point number two, which is, Abraham’s gift was generous.

It was a very generous gift, in fact. Even though it was not a tenth of all, it was a tenth of the choicest goods or spoils.

The Greek word for “spoils” is “akrothinion,” which could be translated “pinnacle”. This is the top. Abraham gave Melchizedek a tenth of the top of the pile. In value, this may have represented ninety percent of the entire cake. Abraham selected some choice goods and then, from those choice goods, he gave a tenth. This is a tenth of the choicest spoils.

Jacob

Now, we find another example in the Old Testament of tithing. These are, by the way, the first two occasions the word occurs in the Old Testament. It will occur approximately forty times. The second one is in relation to Jacob.

In Genesis, chapter 28, verses 20 through 22, Jacob says the following words to God. I think this is the attitude of most New Testament givers today.

... If God will be with me and will keep me on this journey that I take, and will give me food to eat and garments to wear, and I return to my father’s house in safety, then . . . I will surely give a tenth to You.

There are two things that are typical of Jacob’s attitude in giving. Let me give them to you.

Jacob’s gift was given with an attitude of manipulation

1. Number one, it was given with an attitude of manipulation.

Jacob’s gift was given with an attitude of fear

2. Secondly, Jacob’s gift was given with an attitude of fear.

In other words, you could conversely teach this that I give hoping that I will not break my leg.

Have you ever heard someone teach that if you do not give a particular percentage, then sooner or later you are going to end up in the hospital; your kid is going to break his leg; you are going to get sick . . . And do you know what God is going to do? He is going to exact the same amount from that doctor bill that you owed Him in the tithe.

Have you ever heard that taught? I have.

That is the attitude of Jacob – giving out of a sense of fear and manipulation. In other words, “Lord

I'm giving this to You, but please give me safety, give me food, give me clothing . . .”

What Does the Old Testament Teach About Tithing? – Giving During the Law

Now, what does the Old Testament teach about tithing? Let me give several points about tithing that will help us reach a conclusion as to what we are to do today.

Tithing - four categories

There are four categories of tithing.

Government or theocratic tithe

1. The first category is a government or theocratic tithe.

This, by the way, is a tenth. When you see the word “tithe,” you immediately equate in your mind, the meaning, “tenth”. You are going to learn as well, that every time you see the word “tithe” in the Old Testament, you will immediately think of the word “tax”. We could refer to these tithes as “taxed tithes”.

The first is the government tithe. We read in Leviticus, chapter 27, verses 30 and 32,

Thus all the tithe of the land, of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the tree, is the Lord's; it is holy to the Lord. . . . For every tenth part of herd or flock, whatever passes under the rod, the tenth one shall be holy to the Lord.

Now, Leviticus, chapter 27, is giving the principles by which the Jews supported the theocratic system; that is, the system whereby the priests were the under rulers or the under shepherds of God. So they were giving to the Lord, but in effect, they were giving to the priests.

This giving was done by a particular system. The priest would hold out a rod, just like one the shepherd would hold out to count his sheep. Then, all of the newborn cattle or sheep would be funneled underneath the rod. The first one that came under the rod belonged to the priest, or to the Lord.

So, do you know what the Jew did? He hoped, he prayed that the first one under the rod would be the scrawny one; the weak one; the sick one. Many times

he was even tempted, when the fattest cow of all was about to go under, to swap it with a sick one. Do you think a Jew would not think that way? Look at the next verse of Leviticus, chapter 27 – verse 33.

He is not to be concerned whether it is good or bad, nor shall he exchange it; or if he does exchange it, then both it and its substitute shall become holy. . . .

In other words, if you do that, guess what? The priest gets both of them – the fat one and the sick one. This was the way the people, in a sense, gave a tenth or a tax tithe, to support the priest.

Let me point out another passage. Look at Nehemiah, chapter 10, verse 39. The Jews not only supported the priests with this tax tithe, they supported others as well. The text reads,

For the sons of Israel . . . shall bring the contribution of the grain, the new wine and the oil to the chambers; . . . [for] the priests who are ministering, the gatekeepers and the singers. . . .

They had a paid choir in Jerusalem. These singers, the gatekeepers, and the priests lived in a similar way that I, or additional church staff, live. We live, they lived, on the basis of what people gave. So it was very important for the people to be taxed in this way.

Now, understand that this giving was not voluntary; was not something they did because they wanted to; was not done out of a free heart. This giving was commanded – commanded by God. It was demanded to support the priesthood and everything related to the priestly system. This is the first tenth.

Community or festival tithe

2. There is another tenth that is the community or the festival tithe. So, they gave ten percent for the first theocratic tithe and then, ten percent for, what I am going to call, the community tithe.

The text, in Deuteronomy, chapter 12, verses 10 through 11, and verses 17 through 18, says,

When you cross the Jordan and live in the land which the Lord your God is giving you to inherit, . . . then it shall come about that the place in which the Lord your God will choose for His name to dwell [Jerusalem], there you shall bring all that I command

you: your burnt offerings and your sacrifices, your tithes and the contribution of your hand, . . . You are not allowed to eat within your gates the tithe of your grain or new wine or oil, or the firstborn of your herd or flock . . . But you shall eat them before the Lord your God . . . you and your son and daughter, and your male and female servants, and the Levite who is within your gates; and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God . . .

So every year they had a national pot luck. Everyone went to Jerusalem and ate the tenth with all of their children and with the priests and, as a community, got together.

The first tithe supported the theocratic system. This tenth, or tithe, supported the sense of community and developed, among the Jewish nation, a sense of sharing and giving. This was a fantastic time of rejoicing. However, this was still commanded, not voluntary.

So, what are we up to now? Twenty percent. And we are not even finished yet – there is more.

Compassionate tithe

3. The third tithe is what we could call a compassionate tithe.

This was a welfare tithe. The people in the region where the Jews lived, by being taxed, supported a fantastic welfare system in Jerusalem. Notice how it works. The text in Deuteronomy, chapter 26, verse 12, reads,

. . . of your increase in the third year, the year of tithing, then you shall give it to the Levite, to the stranger, to the orphan and to the widow, that they may eat in your towns and be satisfied.

So, if you spread that tithe over three years, that tenth, you have three and a half percent.

You might say, “Wait a second. This is talking about the other tithe because it supported the Levite.”

This tithe supports the non-priestly Levite. That might include a retired priest or someone who is part of the tribe of Levi, but had no inheritance in the land.

This tithe is also a command. This was a taxed tithe that they gave annually. If you spread that ten percent out over three years, you are now giving how much? Twenty-three and a third percent.

How many of you want to hold to the Old Testament in terms of what you give to God? I do not see any volunteers. Of course not! We are now up to twenty-three and a third percent – and we are still not finished.

Miscellaneous tithes

4. Let me give two more tithes. We will call these miscellaneous.

Leviticus, chapter 19, verses 9 and 10, says,

Now when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very corners of your field, nor shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest. . . . nor shall you gather the fallen fruit . . . you shall leave them for the needy and for the stranger. . . .

This is a fascinating thought. Do you remember Ruth as she gleaned in the field? She was a foreigner until she married Boaz.

They were supposed to harvest, but leave the corners for the needy to come in and glean. If they had an apple tree and an apple fell off, they were not to run out and pick it up – that was for the needy person. They could hope that the wind would not come along in the night before they harvested the crop, because most of them would fall and they could not touch them.

There is another tithe in Nehemiah, chapter 10, verse 31. This verse says,

. . . we will forego the crops the seventh year, and the exaction of every debt.

So, every seven years, on top of the other tithes, they do not plant; they do not harvest. God has promised to give them enough to make it through the seventh year.

Notice the next phrase in the text. If someone owes you money, what are you supposed to do every seventh year? Forgive the debt.

You would be a little leery of someone borrowing in the sixth year, I would imagine. They would be lining up outside your door, but every seventh year, this was a test. Are you going to obey? Attitude has nothing to do with this. You could grumble all the way to Jerusalem. God was interested in your obedience.

This is how this system flourished in the Old Testament. It developed trust in God and obedience.

This was, in effect, the system of taxation. And it, by the way, will be upheld in the New Testament, as we are going to learn in this discussion today.

Free will offering – two categories

Now, there is another kind of giving in the Old Testament. There are the tithes, or taxes, that we just discussed, which were required. The second type of giving is what we will refer to as the free will offering. There are basically two kinds of these. I put them in categories as a result of my study, and I hope that will help you understand them better.

The gift of faith free will offering

1. The first kind of free will offering is one we will call the gift of faith. This is otherwise referred to in the scriptures as first fruits.

The text in Numbers, chapter 18, verse 12, says,

All the best of the fresh oil and all the best of the fresh wine and of the grain, the first fruits of those which they give to the Lord . .

Proverbs, chapter 3, verse 9, also indicates to give to the Lord the first fruits.

Giving the first fruits developed great faith. That is why I would like to refer to this as the gift of faith. This gift of first fruits came before the rest of the crops had been harvested. In other words, at harvest time you would harvest until you felt satisfied that you had enough to give to God, and then you would stop harvesting. You would give it to the priest, who would say you were, in effect, giving it to God.

Now, you would not know what the rest of the crop was going to yield. So, you give the priest a bushel of apples and then, the wind comes up that night and the rest of the apples fall to the ground. They are now for the needy.

Do you see how this would develop faith? God was asking them to determine in their hearts what they would give as the first fruits. They would just take a bushel basket and say, "Lord, this is the beginning, and I don't even know what You're going to give me to support my family, but this belongs to You."

The gift of love free will offering

2. The second category of free will offerings is the gift of love.

This is the free hearted gift that happened on occasion in the Old Testament. It is beautiful to study these passages. Exodus, chapter 25, verses 1 and 2, reads,

Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "Tell the sons of Israel to raise a contribution for Me; from every man whose heart moves him you shall raise My contribution."

Note the words, "whose heart moves him". In these verses, they are, in a sense, raising money to build a tabernacle. You might think, "No way! They are already giving twenty-three and a third percent, as well as leaving the corners of their field. God is not going to get a dime out of these people. They are already being taxed to the hilt."

However, if you study this passage, you will discover that Moses finally had to stand in front of the congregation and say, "Stop! Don't give any more. We've got more than we need."

The interesting thing is that this giving was motivated by their hearts.

The second text, Deuteronomy, chapter 16, verse 17, reads,

Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the Lord your God which He has given you.

There are no percentages given in this offering. In fact, this verse is very similar to a passage we are going to look at in the New Testament.

So, we have two categories of giving in the Old Testament. There are the taxes, or the tax tithes that supported the theocratic system, the welfare system, the community unity. Then, there are the free will offerings that were motivated by the heart. God never gave a percentage on these offerings, so this was as your heart moved you. They were given as expressions of faith and love. So, we have the tax tithe and the free will gift.

What Does the New Testament Teach About Tithing? – Giving After the Law

Now, what does the New Testament teach about tithing? We will move quickly as we have a lot to cover.

While many people will try to take the Old Testament and put it into the New, in terms of percentages, I think I have shown you why that is

fallacious. In order to do that and be consistent, you actually have to put twenty-three and a third percent into your free will giving.

The New Testament will uphold both kinds of giving – taxes and free will offerings – as we will see in the text. It is an interesting point too, that while the word “tithe” occurs nearly forty times in the Old Testament, it only occurs seven times in the New Testament. And guess where the references occur? In the gospels prior to the cross, when we are still in the Old Testament economy. The only time the word is referenced after the cross in the New Testament dispensation of grace, is in Hebrews, chapter 7, when it is merely retelling the story of Abraham giving to Melchizedek.

So, if we try to determine what we are to give on the basis of New Testament doctrine, we simply do not find the word “tithe”. However, we find something much more weighty. And I will warn you, we are going to find something that will give a greater weight of burden on you and on me.

Giving after the law – two categories

There are two kinds of giving after the law. Let me give them to you.

Required giving - taxes

1. First, there is required giving, or taxes.

We have the teaching of Christ in Matthew, chapter 17, verses 24 to 27. We will not take the time to read that, but make a note of the reference. This is the occasion where the men who collected the two drachma tax came to Peter and said, “Say, did your teacher pay the two drachma tax?”

This tax was one that the Roman government had levied on most men and most women. Peter answered, “Yes.”

The original word in the verse for “yes” means “tongue and cheek”. Peter says, “yes,” and he is anticipating, he is hoping that Jesus does pay the tax. He goes trotting off to where the Lord is and comes in the door of the house, and Jesus says, without Peter saying anything, “I know why you’ve come, and by the way, I will pay the two drachma tax. Peter, go down to the river, throw in a hook, and you’ll catch a fish. Open the mouth of that fish and you will find a gold coin. Take that gold coin and go pay the taxes.”

I wish that were in existence today – we would all go fishing in February! We would catch those fish with the tax money in their mouths. But by whatever method, Jesus is upholding the system of taxation.

There is another more specific illustration in Matthew, chapter 22, verses 15 through 22. This is when the scribes and the Pharisees come to trick Jesus. They come to Him and say, “Uh, Jesus, do you pay the poll tax?”

The poll tax was one of three levied by the Roman government. This was the smallest of the three taxes. They figured that Jesus would probably pay the big ones, but they are asking, “Lord, did you pay the little tiny poll tax that is imposed by the Roman government?”

Jesus replies, “Well, let me ask you this question, ‘Does anyone here have a penny?’”

One guy, probably the one who asked the question, said, “Yeah, sure, got it right here.”

And the Lord says, “Well, whose image is on that coin?”

He answers, “Why, it’s Caesar’s.”

So the Lord then says, “Well then, give to Caesar the things that belong to Caesar, and give to God the things that are God’s.”

In other words, if you are under the system of Rome and you have that money in your pocket, you are accountable to the authority God has placed over you.

So that guy probably thought, “Who came up with that stupid question? Boy, the Lord got around that perfectly.”

They knew if He said to pay taxes, He would be considered sort of a traitor to the Jewish nation. If He said not to pay them, then they would go to the Romans and say, “You’ve got an insurrectionist on your hands.”

Jesus, however, got around it by saying, “You are responsible to the government over you to pay the taxes that government levies on you.”

Now, understand, ladies and gentlemen, that paying our taxes is a God honoring thing. Jesus upheld it. They did it in the Old Testament to support the system that they were accountable to. We are under a system too. Paul will say that the rulers over us are what? Ordained by God. So by giving our taxes, we give glory to God.

Now, do not misunderstand me. Our taxes are due in a couple of months and I am not shouting, "Hallelujah!" I hate to pay it. I am not saying, "Honey, get the checkbook. It's time to write it out. Where's that 1040 form?" No, that is not my attitude at all. But understand that it is not necessarily attitude, it is obedience. It is coming to the point in our lives where we recognize that paying our taxes actually honors scripture; it glorifies God.

Free will giving or grace giving

2. So, the first kind of giving, and it is required, is taxes. The second kind, just as in the Old Testament, is the free will giving. We refer to that today, as grace giving, because grace is the word used synonymously with the act of giving.

New Testament principles concerning how we are to give

Let me give several principles that we can glean from the New Testament epistles, after the cross, as to how we are to give.

Our giving is to be based upon willingness

1. First, our giving is to be based upon willingness.

II Corinthians, chapter 9, verse 7, tells us,

Each one must do just as he purposed in his heart, . . .

(this is reminiscent of Deuteronomy),

. . . not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a . . .

(. . . big giver. No. God loves a . . .),

. . . cheerful giver.

It is not a matter of the amount, it is a matter of the heart; it is a matter of willingness. Why? Because God loves a cheerful giver.

So one of the first principles about giving is that it must come from the willingness of our hearts.

My younger brother Tim, even as a little boy, was very particular in his dress. We would take a family picture on a Sunday morning and my other brothers and I would have our shirttails hanging out and our shoes untied. But not Tim – Tim would look perfect.

He was always very concerned about the way he was dressed.

One Sunday, when Tim was probably about six years old, we were at church and it was time for our tithes and offerings. Our pastor had the habit of giving a fifteen minute warning that it was coming, so we would be ready. When the offering plate was passed to us, Tim pulled off the clip-on tie that he was wearing and put it in the plate. My mom leaned over and said, "What are doing? What did you do that for?"

Tim said, "Well, he said to give your ties and offerings."

That really did happen! I can just see the usher at the end of the line thinking, "What is this?!"

Well, Tim may have misunderstood what to give, but he certainly understood the willingness to give. I know that must have been a sacrifice for him because he was probably wearing his favorite tie. He gave it anyway though, based upon a willing heart; he gave it even when it meant giving up his favorite necktie.

Our giving is to be systematic and planned

2. Secondly, our giving is to be systematic and planned.

I Corinthians, chapter 16, verses 1 and 2, says,

Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, . . . On the first day of every week each one of you is to put aside and save, as he may prosper . . .

This gives us a very specific principle. We are to decide beforehand what we are going to give.

The worst time to decide what to give is Sunday morning. We should not decide by thinking, "Oh, here comes the usher with the offering plate. Let's see, what am I going to do?"

Decide beforehand what you are going to give. That will give you the opportunity to pray about it and to go to your spouse or your children and say, "What should we give God?" Also, if it is systematic and planned, we can hold ourselves accountable by checking to see how well our plan is working.

In 1976, a well known columnist was going to come up with a slogan for his artwork that he thought would best describe the American people. So, he sent out a form and had thousands of people respond with slogans that they thought represented the American

people. He then chose one slogan that he felt was the most descriptive. Do you know what the slogan was? It was, "The check is in the mail". That was the description that he felt best described the American people.

That attitude can carry over into our giving if we are without a systematic plan. We think, "Well, Lord, it's in the plate; it's in the mail."

So, take time to think, to plan, to systematize whatever you give, whether it is to the church, to missionaries, or to other causes.

Our giving is to be sacrificial and generous

3. Thirdly, our giving is to also have the characteristics of being sacrificial and generous.

II Corinthians, chapter 8, verses 1 and 2, says,

Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia, that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality. . . . beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord

Ladies and gentlemen, God in the New Testament; in the age of grace, is as interested in the amount we give as He is in the amount left over. In fact, I think He is more interested in what we have left over. This is the death knell of ten percent only teaching; of trying to impose one third of the Old Testament giving on the New Testament believer.

Let me illustrate this. Let us say that you and your next door neighbor live in the same kind of house, drive the same kind of car, and make the same salary of five hundred dollars per week. Now, you both give ten percent, right? You both give fifty dollars a week and have four hundred fifty dollars left over to spend. However, your next door neighbor, even though he does not deserve it, gets a promotion and a raise. He is now in middle management and makes a thousand dollars a week. Now, he gives a hundred dollars, while you are still giving fifty. And now, he has four hundred fifty dollars more leftover to spend than before. He thinks, "Lord, I'm giving my hundred," and he goes out on a shopping spree. In this case, who is really sacrificing more? You, giving fifty dollars, or your neighbor, giving a hundred dollars?

That is exactly the point of Jesus Christ as He was sitting and watching the treasury. There were thirteen golden shaped receptacles in the temple. Many expositors feel that when the people came and plunked in their bags of gold, that there was a vocal announcement. This was fun. You came into the temple, you dropped your bag into the receptacle, and you said, "A hundred dollars."

Then, someone else would come along and drop in a bag of gold and say, "Five hundred dollars."

There was a public announcement with this gift. That is why they were so caught up in pride.

Then, here comes this little widow. She walks in and drops her coin in and she says, "A mite," which is one-eighth of a penny. And Jesus, who is watching, comes out of His seat and says, "Hey, Peter, James, John, did you hear that? Did you see that? That lady gave more than everybody else!"

The disciples are scratching their heads. But, this is the attitude of giving. Jesus Christ is looking at the balance in the checkbook. He wants to know just what we are doing with what we have left.

Our giving is to be a result of growing in grace

4. There is a fourth principle that our giving is to be a result of growing in grace.

II Corinthians, chapter 8, verse 7, tells us,

. . . just as you abound in everything, in faith and utterance and knowledge and in all earnestness and in the love we inspired in you, see that you abound in this gracious work also.

Grace or "gracious work" is synonymous with giving. It is interesting that he uses the word "charis" for giving money. Is this grace? Yes it is! That is the way God considers it.

Giving money then, is one of the key signs of whether or not I am growing in grace. One of the most sensitive nerves in the human body is connected to the back pocket. One thing that occurs when we grow up in Christ is that the Holy Spirit begins to desensitize that nerve. We are freer to give; it does not hurt as much. Freer giving is a symbol of growing in maturity. As I grow in grace, I am able to give.

Our giving is to be considered as investing

5. Number five is that our giving is to be considered, or thought of, as investing.

II Corinthians, chapter 9, verses 10 and 11, tell us,

Now He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness; you will be enriched in everything for all liberality, which through us is producing thanksgiving to God.

Men and women, we do not give anything away when we give it to the cause of Jesus Christ. Nothing is lost.

Let me give a great illustration of this in the life of C. T. Studd. I have a picture of him on my wall, sitting in front of a little grass hut in Africa. C. T. Studd was the son of an incredibly wealthy man. When his father died, he was left with a fortune. That fortune, in the 1800's, equaled one hundred fifty thousand dollars. You can imagine what that would have been worth in today's economy.

C. T. Studd, being committed to God, proceeded to give five thousand pounds to Hudson Taylor, a missionary to China; five thousand pounds to William Booth, who would establish the Salvation Army, which used to be a very evangelical, evangelistic, organization; five thousand pounds to D. L. Moody, who was going to be a missionary to India, but God changed his mind to start Moody Bible Institute instead; plus other gifts, until he had three thousand four hundred pounds left. He gave that remaining amount to his bride on their wedding day. However, his wife said, "Honey, Jesus told the rich young ruler to give it all away." So, he sent that three thousand four hundred pounds anonymously to William Booth, as we would learn later from his journal. He then went to Africa.

Ladies and gentlemen, C. T. Studd did not give anything away. He is still reaping the dividends from that investment.

By the way, if you put money in the offering plate, but in your heart you would rather use it somewhere else, New Testament teaching says, "Don't give it. We'll survive without it."

A pastor once told me, "Look, if you teach grace giving, you won't be able to pay the light bill."

This church has never missed paying the light bill! Yet, as we are going to learn, there is a greater responsibility in grace giving.

Grace giving as a church protects from three attitudes

Giving is to be funneled through the New Testament church. We have many examples: the Macedonians, the Corinthians, the Galatians. Ladies and gentlemen, as a church, and let me speak to us now as a church body, not to you as an individual, we are a funnel. We are not a collection agency; we do not just want to store up funds, we are to be a funnel.

There are three very important reasons that we are to be a funnel. If we have the attitude of funneling instead of collecting, we will be protected from three attitudes.

Grace giving as a church will protect us from selfishness

1. First, grace giving as a church will protect us from selfishness.

This church does not have a church building at this time. That makes it is so easy for us to think of our many needs. We need to build a building; we need to purchase land, so let us spend it all on ourselves. Absolutely not!

Grace giving as a church will protect us from isolationism

2. Secondly, it will protect us from isolationism.

It is easy for a church to get the idea that all of the really important work of God is happening at that church and nowhere else. However, if a church funnels their funds to other ministries; if they give money away, it gives protection from that attitude of isolationism.

Grace giving as a church will protect us from unconcern

3. Thirdly, it will protect us from unconcern.

Turn to Revelation, chapter 3. There was a church that had this problem. It was a church that had become selfish, isolated, and unconcerned. I think often of the church of Laodicea, and my prayer is that our church will never become like it. If we do, I pray

that God will change us. Look at verses 14 through 16.

To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God, says this: "I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; . . .

(the word "hot" is the Greek word "zestos," from which we get our word, "zest," so there is no zest in this church),

". . . I wish that you were cold or hot. So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth."

In other words, "You became nauseating to Me."

Note why, in verse 17.

Because you say, "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing,"

I have written in the margin of my text, "and have need of no one."

In other words, the attitude was, "I have need of nothing and no one. We are independent. We are islands. We are wealthy. We pay all our bills. We have money set aside for nothing."

He says, in verse 18,

I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; . . .

(note the next statement),

. . . and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see.

What a powerful statement this was, because the "Tephra Phrygia" was produced in Laodicea. This was an eye powder that was exported all over the known civilized world. Physicians would take these tablets that were exported from Laodicea, and crush them into powder and make a salve to put on the disease inflicted eyes of people to help their eyesight. So, what does He say to this church? He says, "In the town where you make eye salve to give people sight, you are blind. *You* need eye salve."

What a challenge!

Application

Now, let us become very practical and apply these principles to our lives.

Ways in which a Christian can misuse money

The first question is, "How can I, as a Christian, misuse my money?"

The book of Proverbs offers answers to this question.

A Christian can misuse money through foolishness

1. The first way that a Christian can misuse money is through foolishness.

Look at Proverbs, chapter 21, verse 5.

The plans of the diligent lead surely to advantage, but everyone who is hasty comes surely to poverty.

The hasty person is one who spends money without putting thought into where it is going. They are hasty with their money; they are just spending it.

Turn to Proverbs, chapter 28, verse 19, which is along the same line.

He who tills his land will have plenty of food, but he who follows empty pursuits will have poverty in plenty.

I am aware, ladies and gentlemen, that you and I can be poverty stricken; we can lose our money and be wise in the doing. There are some things that are beyond our control. However, we can spend it foolishly and thereby, be reduced to poverty.

A Christian can misuse money through stubbornness

2. Secondly, stubbornness is a way Christians can misuse money.

Look at Proverbs, chapter 13, verse 18.

Poverty and shame will come to him who neglects discipline, but he who regards reproof will be honored.

In other words, if you cannot learn not only from mistakes, but from other people who counsel and advise, you may be headed for poverty. As Proverbs, chapter 11, verse 14, tells us,

Where there is no guidance the people fall, but in abundance of counselors there is victory.

Do not be stubborn when your parents, close friends, or your spouse advise you on how to spend money.

A Christian can misuse money through laziness

3. Number three, a Christian can misuse money through laziness.

Proverbs, chapter 20, verse 13, says,

Do not love sleep, or you will become poor; open your eyes [or work], and you will be satisfied with food.

A Christian can misuse money through stinginess

4. Number four, another way to misuse our money is through stinginess.

Proverbs, chapter 11, verse 24, tells us,

There is one who scatters, and yet increases all the more, . . .

(this is the principle of investing),

. . . and there is one who withholds what is justly due, . . .

(But guess what happens – is he wealthier because he keeps it? No! Look at the results.),

. . . and yet it results only in want.

A Christian can misuse money through indulgence

5. Fifthly, money can be misused through indulgence.

I think this is probably the area where we have most of our problems with money. Proverbs, chapter 23, verses 19 through 21a, says,

Listen, my son, and be wise, and direct your heart in the way. Do not be with heavy drinkers of wine, or gluttonous eaters of meat; for the heavy drinker and the glutton will come to poverty . . .

What he is saying in these verses is that these are people who are incapable of saying, “No”. You can translate that from gluttony and drunkenness into every area of life.

Can you and I say “No” to the lure of commercial society? It is very difficult. They are after us. They are, in a sense, after our pocketbooks. In fact, there is a certain amount of commercialism or materialism

that has crept into the church. We need to ask ourselves periodically, “Am I misusing money?”

Our parents and grandparents provided a good example in one area, and that is clothing. Do you know when our parents and grandparents bought new clothing? When the old clothing wore out. It was only then that they would buy new. Not us, however. We buy new clothing when the fashions change, just to keep up. And the funny thing is, the fashions cycle continually.

I am discovering that fashion fact with neckties. By the time I get a dozen or so neckties that are thin, they start to come back out with the fat ones! It is not because we want to wear more material – it is easier to get spaghetti sauce on those – they just keep changing them around. Fortunately I kept my college neckties and had them dry cleaned to get the spaghetti sauce off, so I will not have to buy too many neckties!

The question is, “Why do we buy what we buy?”

I have a brother, and I will not mention which one of my three brothers it is, who is funny about clothes. All of us used to get on to him about it. He has about seven or eight pairs of tennis shoes. In fact, the last time I went home, he had a brand new pair. He has tennis shoes to wear with jeans; tennis shoes to wear with khakis; tennis shoes to play basketball in, to play racquetball in, to jog in, to walk around the house in . . . I came home and he had a brand new pair. I said, “You are totally indulgent.”

Being my brother, he smiles and points out my indulgence. I will not tell you what that is either!

When my wife and I were first married, we made a mistake. I am holding myself up to poor light today by giving this illustration. A salesman came to our door selling the Encyclopedia Britannica. We were newly married and my wife goes to the door and the salesman comes in and tells her, “Lady, did you know that for thirty-nine cents a day, you can provide your children one day with a great set of encyclopedias that they can use?”

“Hey, really? Thirty-nine cents? Is that all?”

And I am just as dumb. I say, “Show me the whole thing.”

He lays out this glossy thing that covers the whole living room floor. Some of you are laughing, but he has been in your living room too! And this guy is aggressive. That whole thing was laid out and he is

giving us all the facts and he is telling us, “Look, provide now.”

And we tell him, “We don’t have any children.”

“Well, you’re going to have children.”

If only I had known that most likely, for my children to ever use those things, I would have to give them to the school where they go and let them do the reports there. They have not done anything with them yet, of course. We finally said, “Okay, we’ll buy them. That’s not bad; that’s not much money.”

He then said, to add injury upon injury, “Now look, since you are buying this, do you know that for only another hundred dollars, you can get the junior set of encyclopedias?”

That means that until our children are older, and I know doctoral students are unable to understand the Encyclopedia Britannica, they can use the junior set. We thought, “Well, what’s another hundred?”

We paid thirty bucks a month for three years. I hated to see that bill come in. Thirty dollars a month for three years, which totals to over a thousand dollars for a set of books that most often collect dust.

They are very clever. The problem is not just them; the problem is us. We are unable to say “No”. And as parents, especially those with teenagers, that is a crucial issue that you learn to teach not only yourself, but them.

Ways in which a Christian can use money in a godly manner

Now, how can I, as a Christian, use my money in a godly fashion? Let me give several ways.

A Christian can use money for the needs of their family

1. Number one, a Christian can use money for the needs of their family.

I Timothy, chapter 5, verse 8, tells us,

But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

Be careful on this one because it is so easy to desire to give your children the things that you never had. In so doing, you teach them a lack of discipline in giving. But it is a godly use of money to provide

for your family. In fact, if you do not, you are worse than an infidel. Note, however, that this is providing for their needs, not their “greeds”.

A Christian can use money to pay their debts promptly

2. Secondly, a Christian can use money to pay their debts promptly.

It is honoring to God to pay your debts on time.

Now people have different definitions of debt. My definition of a debt is something that you cannot afford to pay. A debt occurs when you purchase something that you do not have the resources to pay for.

Unfortunately I have come to understand from something I read this past week, that preachers are one of the highest credit risks in this country. That is sad because I think that same attitude then carries over into many churches.

A Christian should pay their debts.

A Christian can use money to support the ministry of the New Testament church

3. Number three, a Christian can use their money to support the ministry of the New Testament church.

This is giving that should reflect your gratitude of God’s grace. It not necessarily a set percentage – allow the Holy Spirit to work in your heart. It is also not a substitute for personal involvement in the church.

Examine your motivation for giving. Make sure it is not a subtle attempt to bribe God for His blessings in return. Also make sure your giving is not motivated by personal pride or a desire for personal recognition. As Matthew, chapter 6, verse 2, says,

So when you give . . . do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.

A Christian can use money to support other Christian ministries of like faith

4. Number four, a Christian can use their money to support other Christian ministries of like faith.

In I Corinthians, chapter 16, verses 1 and 3, Paul gave us an Christians giving to another Christian ministry of like faith. He wrote,

Now concerning the collection for the saints . . . I will send them with letters to carry your gift to Jerusalem.

A Christian can use money to help those in need

5. Number five, a Christian can use their money to help those in need.

In Ephesians, chapter 4, verse 28b, we are told,

. . . he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need.

Helping others in need may include very practical daily needs such as paying for: groceries, gasoline, a doctor bill. It may also include: counseling, praying, giving time. We are to be prepared to help those in need.

Two timeless principles of grace giving

Let me close by giving two timeless principles of grace giving.

1. First, the principle of priority. Does God have first priority in your life?
2. Secondly, the principle of submission. II Corinthians, chapter 8, verse 5, tells us of the Christians, “. . . they first gave of themselves to the Lord . . .”. Giving should begin with a heart that is submissive to the Lord.

In 248 A.D., Cyprian wrote of the Christians,

Their possessions hold them in chains; chains which shackle their courage and hamper their judgment and throttle their souls. They think of themselves as owners, whereas it is they rather who are owned; enslaved as they are to their property, they are not the master of their money, but its slaves.

Does this describe you? In order that this not be a description of us, our giving in this age of grace should be with God as the priority and in complete submission to Him.

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I Wish I Had More Faith

Genesis 15-18

Introduction

I frequently hear the words, “I wish I had more faith.” For instance, a woman will tell about her unsaved husband that she has been praying about for years and yet, his belief turns into hardened atheism. She wonders if the problem may be her faith, and thinks, “Perhaps I do not believe that God will ever save him. If I had more faith, maybe He would.”

A man mired in financial problems; in despair over thousands of dollars of debt, wonders, “If I only had enough faith, maybe God would take care of this problem.”

Another common “I wish I had more faith” situation occurs when illness strikes. Well meaning Christians assure the sick person, “If you will just believe, you will be healed.”

The ill person then tries their very best, and yet they are not healed.

Perhaps you have prayed for a sick person to get better and instead, they got worse. What do you think when that happens? You might think the problem is, “I just did not have enough faith.”

As a result, the Christian community is filled with shattered and confused believers thinking that somehow God would have been moved by a larger amount of faith. As a result of that improper theology, such believers leave themselves open for the Accuser.

Think of how often you have prayed over a car that would not start. Have you ever done that? I can remember a time in college when I left the dorm room, pulled the car door open, slid into that jalopy, turned

the key, and nothing happened. The weather was very cold and the battery had obviously frozen to death. So I got out, raised the hood, placed both hands on that battery, looked both ways to make sure no one was looking, and said, “Lord, bring this thing to life.”

I then got back in my car, turned the key, and it did not even sputter. I felt a little foolish! The thought went through my mind, however, “I wonder if I had more faith, if God would start this car.”

Abraham’s progression, as well as failure in faith

Today, we are returning to the story of Abraham in the book of Genesis. We will begin in chapter 14. We are going to discover his progression in faith, as well as his failure. In the process, we will discover principles that will help in understanding proper faith and how to walk by faith.

Between the last part of chapter 14, verse 24, and the first verse of chapter 15, you could write the word, “panic”. In fact, I have written in the word “fear,” because between the end of chapter 14 and the beginning of chapter 15, something has happened to Abraham. He is filled with fear and panic, as we will discover.

Reasons Abraham was fearful

I have tried to climb into the setting to discover why Abraham would be so fearful and I have come up with three reasons. Although I am not certain they are accurate, let me give them to you.

Possible retaliation

1. The first reason is perhaps that Abraham feared possible retaliation.

You may remember that Abraham has just rescued his nephew Lot from pagan kings. He has also rescued the king of Sodom. This is before God destroys Sodom. Abraham is now in a strange, foreign land and has created some bitter enemies. He does not have weapons of warfare, and after having beaten these kings in battle, perhaps he is afraid they will retaliate.

Potential poverty

2. There was also the threat of potential poverty that may have caused Abraham to be fearful.

You may remember as well, that a famine has recently hit the land and Abraham turned down the booty the king of Sodom. The king said, "Thank you, Abram, for saving my life. I want to give you great wealth to help you through the famine."

Abraham, however, turns it down. Perhaps he begins to have second thoughts.

Unpredictable promises of God

3. A third reason for Abraham's fear is perhaps the unpredictable promises of God.

I think this is probably the most accurate reason. The promises of God had said, "Abram, you will be given this land; you will be given seed; you will be given blessing."

None of these promises have yet come true, however. Abraham has been waiting and waiting and waiting.

One idea that we need to clear up in our "fuzzy" theology about faith is that great faith relinquishes the need for patience. We think that if we have enough faith, God will work immediately. That is simply not true. For Abraham, it will be a twenty-five year wait before God fulfills those promises.

The Arrangement of Faith

Notice verse 1a of chapter 15 of Genesis.

After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, . . .

Let me give two points about this arrangement of faith.

Initiated by God

1. First, faith is initiated by God.

God comes to Abram. Abram is shaky and fearful, and God takes the initiative.

Built on a relationship

2. Secondly, faith is built on a relationship.

God then says, in verse 1b,

. . . Do not fear, Abram, I am a shield to you; your reward shall be very great.

In other words, the only way for Abram to ever get over the fear of the future, the fear of retaliation, the fear that is perhaps brought on by famine, the fear of being unable to provide for his own is to develop a relationship with his Lord. The only way we, like Abram, can ever conquer fear is to develop a relationship with our Lord.

Did you notice the solution in verse 1? God says, "Do not fear, Abram, [because] I am a shield to you . . .".

Now ten years elapse and still, there is no child. I can only imagine the embarrassment of Abram. His name means "the father of many," as we previously discussed when studying Hebrews, chapter 11. Hebrew names were always indicative of what the person had. We can only imagine people coming to visit Abram and introducing themselves.

They would say, "What's your name?"

He would respond, "My name is Abram."

They would then say, "Oh, you must be filled with pride in having many sons."

Abram would probably hang his head and kick the dirt and say, "Well, no, I don't have any kids."

God will come along a little later and change his name from Abram to Abraham, which means "the father of multitudes". So then, it might seem as if he had triplets, but no, there were no kids yet.

The Alternatives to Faith

Abram spent twenty-five years waiting in that situation. I want to give several things that he did wrong during that wait. I am glad the scriptures include them for our account. He lapsed in faith; he went back on trust, and he did several things wrong. Let us look at Genesis, chapter 16.

Receive improper advice

1. The first thing Abram did that was wrong while waiting is to receive improper advice.

In chapter 16, verse 1, we are told,

Now Sarai, . . .

(this is before her name is changed to Sarah by God),

. . . Abram's wife had borne him no children, and she had an Egyptian maid whose name was Hagar.

Abram and Sarai probably acquired Hagar when they were in Egypt and were out of God's will. Continue to verse 2a.

So Sarai said to Abram, "Now behold, . . ."

(note her next statement),

". . . the Lord has prevented me from bearing children. . . ."

Sarai is involved in what we could call religious rationale. She is obviously blaming everything on the Lord. This makes spiritual sense. So, look at her solution in the next part of verse 2.

". . . Please go in to my maid; perhaps I will obtain children through her." . . .

Then, in last part of the verse, we read,

. . . And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai.

In other words, they are going to institute "Plan B". God has not come through and at this point, I believe, it has been thirteen years. So, Sarai says, "Let's help God out. He has given us the promise but He hasn't given us an explicit statement, so why don't we do this instead."

This is unbiblical advice; it is wrong.

Reject the laws of marriage

2. That leads us to the second thing Abram did that was wrong. He ignores the laws of marriage.

Look at verse 3 of chapter 16.

After Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Abram's wife Sarai took Hagar the Egyptian, her maid, and gave her to her husband Abram as his wife.

This clearly violates Genesis, chapter 2, verse 24, which says one woman and one man. God had never said polygamy was okay. Men of this time were

always away from God's ideal when they had many wives, and this was the practice or custom of Abram's time.

So, Sarai said, "Look, I can't have any children. It must be my fault. So you take the Egyptian maid and go into her and have a child."

Abram, by now, is such a weak leader that he not only accepts wrong advice, he ignores the revelation of God.

Refuse to wait on God

3. Thirdly, Abram refuses to wait on God.

This is obvious. Look at verse 4.

He went in to Hagar, and she conceived; and when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her sight.

The bottom line is that Abram did not wait.

Before we are too hard on him however, remember that it was twenty-five years in the waiting. I have difficulty waiting twenty-five minutes for something. He was waiting twenty-five years for the blessing; the promise; the seed. Finally, Abram scratches his head and says, "Sarai, there is no prospect in the promise of God. I don't see it, and I'm eighty-five years old."

Just before the Civil War, I was reading recently, a wealthy farmer by the name of Worthy Taylor, hired a young man named James, or Jim, as they called him. That summer, Jim cut kindling wood, milked the cows, and slept in the barn in the hayloft. During that summer, this young man fell in love with Taylor's daughter. She obviously loved him too. When the summer ended, as was the custom, Jim went to her father and asked for her hand in marriage. Worthy Taylor, however, looked at him, laughed, and said, "Son, you have no money and you have no prospects. There is no way in the world that you can provide for her."

Jim said, "I can provide. I promise I will make good."

Worthy, however, turned him down.

Thirty-five years went by, and Worthy Taylor prospered. He eventually tore down his barn and in the process of tearing it down, he noticed the rafter that had been above the hayloft where Jim had slept. Jim had carved his entire name in that rafter. James A. Garfield was by then, serving as the President of The United States of America.

In a sense, Abram viewed the promise of God like Worthy viewed James – no prospect. In other words, “There is no prospect, so we’ve got to come to terms with this. He’s promised us seed, but He isn’t coming through. Let’s institute this second plan, which is totally out of God’s will.”

So Abram has a child named Ishmael. That child will be the father of the Arabian nations, which are a constant thorn in the sight of Israel.

Results of violating God’s revelation

Let me give several results that the text gives us that occur as a result of violating God’s revelation.

Jealous rivalry

1. First, a jealous rivalry occurs.

Look at verse 4 again.

He went in to Hagar, and she conceived; and when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her sight.

This is typical; this is to be expected. Sarai cannot have children, but this servant girl can. Now there is a rivalry.

Marital friction

2. The second thing that happens is what we could call marital friction, to say the least.

I love what Sarai says to Abram. Look at verse 5a.

And Sarai said to Abram, “May the wrong done me be upon you. . . .”

This is classic. In other words, “Abram, this is all your fault.”

Abram is probably leaning against the wall saying, “Oh my goodness, this was your idea.”

Sarai continues in the last part of verse 5 to say,

. . . May the Lord judge between you and me.

Now we have real problems in the home.

Further weakness in Abram’s authority

3. The third thing, which I think is probably the worst, is further weakness in Abram’s authority.

Look at verse 6a.

But Abram said to Sarai, “Behold, your maid is in your power; do to her what is good in your sight.” . . .

In other words, Abram just backs off. He says, “I’m staying out of this. Sarai, you take care of her however you want. Leave me out of it.”

Abram should have corrected the problem. And, as we read in the last part of the verse, Sarai deals treacherously with Hagar in kicking her out of the tent.

The Absence of Faith

Well, we have a real problem on our hands, and it is basically because of a lapse in faith, but let us call the next section the absence of faith. Look at Genesis, chapter 17.

It is obvious that faith is missing in this situation, but it is never so clearly shown as in chapter 17 when Abram will explicitly state that he cannot believe God. Let us read the first few verses, beginning with verse 1.

Now 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 is the first time “El Shaddai” appears in the Hebrew text. It means God, the nourishing God; God, the most powerful God, who is capable of providing, which is specifically related to the promises. He says, in verses 2 through 4,

“I will establish My covenant between Me and you, and I will multiply you exceedingly.” Abram fell on his face, . . .

(probably shocked),

. . . and God talked with him, saying, “As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you will be the father of a multitude of nations.”

Remember it has been a twenty-four year wait at this point. This is the third time God has come to Abram saying, “Abram, you’re going to be the father of a multitude.”

Response to God’s promise

After waiting twenty-four years, Abram is probably saying, “Right, Lord.”

I think we could rephrase Abram and Sarai's response in two ways. These are, by the way, very prevalent in the church today.

"It hasn't happened yet, God."

1. The first phrase would be, "It hasn't happened yet, God."

Note verses 15 and 16a of Genesis, chapter 17.

Then 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 indeed I will give you a son by her. . ."

Sarah is ninety years old, by the way. Continue to verse 16b.

"... Then I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her."

Now in the next verse, verse 17, we see Abraham's absence of faith. He did exactly what we would have done.

Then Abram fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart, "Will a child be born to a man one hundred years old? And will Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?"

In other words, "Lord, it hasn't happened yet, and anything that is going to happen in relation to the promises, should have happened by now."

It is easy to have that attitude. We might think, "Whatever God is going to do for this country, He will have done it already. Whatever God is going to do in this church, He will have done it already. Let's coast into the kingdom."

I cannot help but think, although I am certainly not blaming him, that his attitude was "whatever will happen should have already happened".

It is interesting that I recently read in a magazine of man who had this attitude. The man's name was Charles Duell. In 1899, Duell was the director of the United States Patent Office. He wrote these words to President McKinley, "Let's abolish the patent office. Everything that has been invented has been invented. Everything that will be invented has been invented. Let's close down the office. We've reached it. This is it."

He lost his job. Someone else was placed in that position.

It is interesting that in the next year, the radio was invented. Three years later, the Wright brothers flew the first heavier than air object, which we know as an airplane.

We frequently have the same attitude. We think, "If God is really going to use my life, it really should have happened by now. If I'm going to impact this community, it really should have happened by now."

So, Abraham thought, "Lord, where are You? You've come to me with a promise and now, as a hundred year old man, I'm going to be the father of a multitude?"

I would laugh too!

"It can't happen now, God."

2. Now notice the response of Sarah in chapter 18. She laughs as well. God will have the last laugh, by the way. Her response could be phrased this way, "It can't happen now, God."

Abram says, "It hasn't happened yet, God." Sarah says, "It can't happen now, God."

Look at chapter 18, verses 9 through 14a.

Then they said to him, "Where is Sarah your wife?" And he said, "There, in the tent."

He said, "I will surely return to you at this time next year; and behold, Sarah your wife shall have a son." And Sarah was listening at the tent door, which was behind him.

Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; Sarah was past childbearing.

Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "After I have become old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?"

And the Lord said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Shall I indeed bear a child, when I am so old?'"

"Is anything too difficult for the Lord?"

...

The key to overcoming the pause or the patient waiting is in that last verse. God brought Abraham

and Sarah past the childbearing age so they could not take even a sliver of credit for the inception of the Jewish nation. It was as if God wanted to make it very clear that whatever was going to happen in that nation would be at His hand and by His power, not theirs. He wanted to bring them to the place where they recognized that with God, nothing is impossible.

This is a tremendous application spiritually. Perhaps you have been barren spiritually. Perhaps you have never produced fruit. Perhaps you have never had the opportunity to share Christ; to see someone come alive. Perhaps you feel that God is not at work in your life; that He is not using you. John, chapter 15, verse 5, says basically the same thing when Jesus Christ says,

I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.

Ladies and gentlemen, a solution to barrenness spiritually is not Christ *and* me, it is Christ *in* and *through* me, using me for His glory.

Perhaps you have thought, or maybe you have even been told, that you will never amount to anything for the cause of Christ. You may even think that it is too late in the game. Perhaps you think you do not have the training. You may be wondering, "What can God use me for?"

I recently watched a video tape of Howard Hendricks relating the story of an educator's conference that he participated in at Moody Bible Institute. There were hundreds of people in attendance at this conference.

One day, during the conference, he and another teacher went down the street for lunch. There was also an eighty year old lady who was attending the conference in line. They invited her to join them. Hendricks relates the story of their conversation as they sat down to eat.

They asked, "What are you doing at the conference?"

She replied, "Well, this is the first time you've been close enough that I could come. And I traveled all night on the Greyhound bus to get here."

They asked, "Why did you come?"

She said, "Well, I teach sixth grade boys, and I want to learn to be a better teacher."

Hendricks said they nearly fell off their chairs in awe of this woman. When you would expect her to be

reaching for the rocking chair, she is trying to develop skill in teaching.

It was fascinating, as they talked to her and she shared with them, they discovered that she had been teaching for years, and eighty-four men who had come through her class are serving the Lord full time.

One of the problems in churches today is that we are violating chapter 2, verse 4 of Titus. Do you remember what this verse tells older women to do? They are to teach younger women how to love their husbands and their children.

The word "love" in that Titus verse, interestingly, is the word that we get our "phileo" or "family affection" from. This is not the word "agape," but "phileo," which is the word that talks about being affectionate. You would think that wives would know how to be affectionate to husbands and children, but the apostle is telling the older women, "You've raised your children. Now that you're sixty, seventy, or eighty years of age, don't go for the rocking chair, get involved in the lives of younger women. Teach the young women, by your life, how to live; how to love."

A church today is terribly disabled if they do not have that ministry.

Go with me below the deck of a galley slave ship to see a man who is already in his mid-forties. He is chained to an oar with all of the other criminals. He is pulling and sweating at that oar. When you look inside that rank place, you might think, "Could anything good come out of here?"

Yet, God would work through one of those criminals, his name being John Knox, to literally turn Scotland upside down for the cause of God. And Knox did not even get started until he was in his forties.

What if Jesus Christ had gone to Jerusalem and put an announcement in the "Jerusalem Gazette": "Needed: Twelve men to introduce the kingdom of God on earth." Who do you think would have applied? All of the qualified people, all of the capable people, all of the learned or scholarly people, all of the religious and pious people would have applied, thinking, "I'm just what He needs to introduce the kingdom of God."

Yet, who did Jesus Christ choose to work through? Simon, the zealot, who would just as soon put a dagger in a Roman than to lead him to Christ. A greedy little tax collector named Matthew, who was so greedy that he would not even hire another person to

help him collect the taxes. Fishermen, who were unlearned. And these men, by the grace of God, learned that apart from Jesus, they could do nothing; that nothing was accomplished unless Jesus was at work in and through them. These men turned the world upside down.

Application – Misconceptions of Faith

Perhaps we have seen from Abraham and Sarah, at this point in time, that God could use anyone who is shaky in or lacking in faith. Sarah, at ninety years old, thought God's promise could not happen, and Abraham, at one hundred years old, thought of the fact that it had not happened yet. However, Genesis, chapter 15, verse 6, tells us,

***Then he [Abraham] believed in the Lord;
and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.***

This leads us to some of the popular misconceptions of faith that we have today. God uses Abraham; God uses Sarah, so we put them up on a high pedestal. We then think, "God could never use me."

The major problem is our misconceptions concerning faith. Let me give three of them.

Misconception #1 – Faith is evidenced by an amount

1. The first misconception of faith is that faith is evidenced by an amount.

We have the thought, "If only I had more faith, that car would have started." or, "If only I had more faith, my friend would have gotten better and lived, instead of gotten worse and died."

This is a misinterpretation of Jesus' words in Matthew, chapter 17, verse 20b, when He says,

. . . if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, "Move from here to there," and it will move . . .

People today, interpret that as saying that we have to drum up enough faith, even though it is small, and if we get that much, we can move mountains. However, that is not the issue. Jesus Christ is teaching that, "If you have your faith *in Me*, you only need a little grain of it to accomplish My work."

It is not the amount of faith, ladies and gentlemen, it is the object of that faith that is the issue. Even with

a little sliver of faith, if the object is Christ, He can work in and through you.

Misconception #2 – Faith is established by emotion

2. The second misconception is that faith is established by emotion.

This is a real problem today. It is the thought that faith is a feeling, an incredible feeling, and because you have it, God is going to do something great.

Have you ever felt that way and then, it did not happen? Talk about the air being let out of your sails! Because we feel that faith is somehow an emotion, when something does not happen, our expectations hit the dirt. We get some verse out of scripture and claim it, and we wait for the heavenly zap, but when it does not happen, we become confused.

I think of the martyr John Huss, who was in his prison cell awaiting his execution by being burned at the stake the following day. He was sitting in his cell, knowing he would be burned to death the following morning, peering into his candle and watching the flicker of the flame. His records reveal that he reached out his trembling hand and placed it over the flame and then, he pulled it back as he flinched in pain. He wrote, "If I cannot stand the pain of a little candle, how could I stand the flame at the stake?"

John Huss had no feeling that God would be able to pull him through that death experience, and yet he believed God and did not recant the following morning.

Would you accuse Paul of having a lack of faith because he prayed three times for the same thing?

Misconception #3 – Faith is exercised by self-confidence

3. That leads me to the third misconception that faith is exercised by self-confidence.

In other words, you have to believe God will do something or He will not do it; you have to be really sure that God is going to come through, because if you are not sure, He will not come through.

Faith then, becomes the sense of self-confidence, and we try to drum it up. We think, "Oh, there's a thought of doubt. I've got to get rid of it. I can't have any doubt. God, You will do it."

We drum up the faith and then what we ask may not happen, or worse yet, it happens and we think it was a result of our self-confidence.

My friend, your assurance that God is involved in your life and hearing your prayer is not related to how you feel or how self-confident you are. It is related to *who God is*. God is eternal; He is unchanging; He is involved in your life.

Hebrews, chapter 6, verse 12b, tells us,

. . . you . . . [be] imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

Did you note the combination there? We are told to imitate those who through “faith and patience” received the promises. Verse 15 tells us that,

And so, having patiently waited, he [Abraham] obtained the promise.

Even though we know he faltered, Abraham having patiently waited, obtained the promise.

Let me read something that I recently found. A man by the name of Mark Little, recalls a childhood event. He writes the following powerful words.

As a child, I loved to curl up in the back of our car as we drove through the night. I felt so safe cocked back there with dad in the driver's seat. But sometimes my grandmother would go with us, and she would sit on the edge of her seat barking instructions about every car that came our way. “Watch the side of the roads there. Be careful with that guy next to us. Don't go so fast.”

I don't think she ever enjoyed the ride. Why? Because she simply didn't trust my father. She couldn't rest in his care. Grandmother and I both reached our destination, but one got there with frazzled nerves, while the other one arrived happy and rested. I was learning to rest in my father's care.

Men and women, faith is not a feeling; faith is not an amount; faith is not a sense of self-confidence. Faith is assurance in who the person of God really is. Even though our prayer may seemingly to us, go

unanswered, He is sovereign; He can be trusted; He is worthy of our commitment.

Turn in your Bible to Genesis, chapter 21, and notice the glad day when the cry of a newborn boy pierced the ear. Look at verses 1 through 7.

Then the Lord took note of Sarah as He had said, and the Lord did for Sarah as He had promised.

So Sarah conceived and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, . . .

(note this),

. . . at the appointed time of which God had spoken to him.

Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore to him, Isaac.

(which means, by the way, “laughter”),

Then Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him.

Now Abraham was one hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him.

Sarah said, “God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me.”

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.”

Most of us are surprised when we get to chapter 21 and discover that God was right on time. Twenty-five years before, when He made the promise, He already knew, in His all-knowing mind, the due date of Isaac; He already had it mapped out. Abraham and Sarah only had to learn to rest.

Do you know what Abraham and Sarah learned about faith? They learned the same thing we need to learn today. Faith is like curling up in the back seat of a car and allowing God the Father to do the driving. The road He takes us on may be painful, but it will always be productive; it will always be perfect.

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A Sacrifice and a Sign

Genesis 22

Introduction - Review

Most of us can outline our lives on the basis of achievements. We seem to chapter our lives by graduating from high school or college; by getting married; by having the first child; by taking retirement. The life of Abraham, however, can be outlined on the basis of the tests that came into his life.

Major tests in Abraham's life

In our study of Genesis thus far, we have discovered three tests in Abraham's life. Let us review them briefly.

Abraham is told to leave home – Genesis 12

1. The first test is in chapter 12 of Genesis, when Abraham is told to leave his home of Ur of the Chaldeans.

This was a test because it meant he would leave all that represented security and stability. He would leave all of his family and friends. Yet, he took the test and passed it.

Abraham is told to separate from Lot – Genesis 13-14

2. The second test is in chapters 13 and 14 of Genesis, when Abraham is told to separate from his nephew Lot.

Abraham gave Lot his choice of the piece of land that he wanted. Lot selfishly chose the fertile region

of the valley, and Abraham separated from him by going to the rocky regions of northern Canaan.

Abraham is told to trust God for a son - Genesis 15-21

3. The third test is in chapters 15 through 21 of Genesis, when Abraham is told to trust God for a son.

Abraham would wait nearly twenty-five years for this son. That test came and Abraham proved that his faith in God, though small, was true.

We, in fact, suggested that the amount of faith is not the issue, but rather, the object of that faith. In other words, you could have little faith in thick ice and survive or you could place great faith in thin ice and drown. The essential ingredient is wherein you place your faith.

A Sacrifice – The Final Test

Abraham's fourth test is the one before us today. We will, in fact, conclude our series on the life of Abraham with this. The test, in Genesis, chapter 22, is God asking, "Abraham, will you now give your son back to Me?"

Turn to Genesis, chapter 22, and look at verse 1.

Now it came about after these things, that God tested Abraham, and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am."

The word "tested" is a correct translation. Your text might have the word "tempted". The Hebrew word is "nacah," which should be translated something other than "tempt". God does not tempt us,

He tests us to strengthen us. Satan will tempt us to weaken us. In this verse, it is indeed a test.

Continue to verse 2.

He said, "Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah; and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you."

God says essentially the same thing in four different ways, so there would be no confusion. In other words, "Abraham, take your son, your only son, the one whom you love and, in case you missed it, it happens to be Isaac."

I do not think Abraham was confused after God spoke to him. He will now encounter what is probably the greatest test of the four that have come into his life.

Practical lessons about testing

Before we go any further in the text, let me make some applications. We normally do this at the end of a discussion, but I want to make some applications at this point. Let me apply, from Genesis, chapter 22, what happens in our lives when we are confronted by testing. I will give several points that I think come from the text about testing.

A test may come after years of comfort

1. First, sometimes a test will come after years of comfort, or perhaps we could call it victory.

For thirty years, since the birth of Isaac, Abraham had been experiencing prosperity in the land. He had all of his prayers, in effect, answered. He had his son and he was prospering materially. He had thirty years of comfort and then, "bang," that is when God says, "Now, Abraham."

I can almost imagine that Abraham had probably thought, as you and I would have, "This is probably the last time I'll ever have to trust God."

Then, about the time we think we have that nailed down, God invades our lives with a test. It can come after years of comfort or victory.

A test may seem inconsistent with God's promise

2. Secondly, sometimes a test may seem inconsistent with God's promise.

Let me explain this. As you may remember, from Genesis, chapter 12, the promise was, "Abraham, I'm to give you a promise. It includes land; it includes blessing; it includes a seed; that is, a son."

In Genesis, chapter 17, verse 19, God says, "Your seed, your son, will bear a son."

That is the promise. Now, however, God comes along, in Genesis, chapter 22, and says, "Abraham, I want you to kill your son."

Abraham is scratching his head thinking, "Now how is this consistent with the promise of God? If my son is to have a son, how in the world is God going to accomplish that if I kill my son?"

Herein lies one of the mysteries of God's testing in your life and in mine. Sometimes it seems totally inconsistent with what we think God is supposed to do in our lives.

We have the promise. He says to you, "I want to conform you into the image of My Son."

That is a process. We, however, often mistake it as a product. So we say, "Okay Lord, wake me up when it happens. Let me know when you're finished."

Then, we become very confused because somewhere between point A and point B, a test comes, and it does not seem to make any sense. We might think, "Lord, how could this conform me to the image of Your Son? Why is this happening? What are You doing?"

We fail to realize that the nature of testing means that sometimes "backward" to us, means "forward" with God. It may seem inconsistent.

Let me give an illustration of this, a rather facetious one. While preparing for the ministry, I would never in my wildest imaginations have taken Hebrew grammar or Hebrew exegesis. For one thing, the class lasted an hour and a half, and there are not many things that I would like to do for an hour and a half on a hard bench. For another thing, the class began at seven o'clock in the morning on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday.

Well, three mornings a week I watched the sun rise through the window of my classroom. That was an exciting time in my life – as I am sure you can imagine. I would never have even suggested that this

was a class that I wanted to take. However, after it was finished, I was glad.

You may be in a class; you may be right in the middle of a course that God has designed in the curriculum to prepare you for your ministry. It may be a ministry in the life of another believer; in the lives of your family members; in the church, or whatever. You would never sign up for this course; there is nothing about it that is attractive. In fact, you may never learn to love it, but the course in which God has enrolled you is not an elective. You cannot get an exemption from it; you cannot even audit it – when you take it, but you do not have to do the homework! You have to go through it. That is the nature of testing.

A test may involve your most prized possession

3. Let me give one more point about testing that I have discovered from Genesis, chapter 22. Sometimes a test may involve your most prized possession.

That which you value the highest is that which God may suggest you make a change to or that you give up. He is saying, “Do you really trust Me for this?”

Imagine waiting twenty-five years for a son, and then, for thirty years, watching him grow into adulthood, only to hear God say, “I want you to kill him. Give your beloved son back to Me.”

How much easier it would have been for Abraham, although I do not find it in the text, to say, “Lord, I’ll tell you what I’ll do. I’ll give you Ishmael. Let me put him on the altar.”

Oh no. Ishmael represented the past. God wanted that which represented the future. You and I have little trouble giving God our past. We say, “Lord, all of the sins, all of my life that I’ve experienced up to this point, I have no problem trusting You with that. You take all of that. But my future; my tomorrow? Huh uh.”

How much harder it is to give God something precious; something in the near future.

Jay Herndon is a missionary to a poor mining village in Ireland. He wrote a story that I recently read, telling of something that happened in that village. One cold evening, the company bus, filled with the men of the village after a long day of work, was returning from the mine. The road was slick with

ice on that dark winter evening. To the left of the bus was a mountainous wall and to the right was a sheer cliff. It was a very narrow, dangerous road.

Suddenly, just a few feet ahead of the bus, the men could see the figure of a little boy. He was sitting in the middle of the road, with his back to the oncoming bus, playing in the snow. They knew, as an eerie hush fell over the bus, the driver would have to make a split second decision. To swerve or to stop would mean skidding and perhaps, destroying the lives of these men who were the fathers of the village. To continue forward meant the certain death of the boy, who was oblivious to the oncoming bus.

Jay Herndon wrote that after the bus stopped a few hundred feet beyond the crumpled form of the boy, the driver of the bus was the first one off. He ran back and picked up the lifeless form of his own son, and he buried his head in the boy’s coat and wept.

We have the dumb idea that Abraham is skipping up Mount Moriah, whistling songs, and acting as if this is a wonderful day in his life. Absolutely not! This is real. This is painful. He has been asked to take a knife and plunge it into the heart of his own son. And though he believed God would raise him from the dead, it did not obliterate the pain; the confusion.

Imagine this happening to you. Would you note Abraham’s incredible response? Notice verse 3a.

So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him and Isaac his son; and he split wood for the burnt offering, . . .

Did you notice that he rose early? If there was ever a day I would have wanted to sleep in, it would have been that one. He rose early. And he is an old man, yet he split wood for the offering. I imagined, as I read this, how nifty it would have been for Abraham to not split the wood for the sacrifice and then, get up to the rocky part of Mount Moriah and say, “Oh Lord, guess what I forgot? I forgot the wood. I guess we can’t have the offering.”

Abraham, however, is actually preparing every detail so that this sacrifice can take place. Continue to verses 3b through 5.

. . . and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. On the third day Abraham raised his eyes and saw the place from a distance. Abraham said to his young men, “Stay here with the donkey, and I and

the lad will go over there; and we will worship and return to you.”

Two points in Abraham’s response to this test

There are two points to note in Abraham’s response to this test:

1. First, his submission to the will of God.
2. Secondly, his surrender of his son.

A Sign – The Future Savior

Now we studied this passage as we were going through Hebrews, chapter 11, and I touched on something that I want to expand on for the remainder of our discussion today. The beauty of this passage is that it is an illustration of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

You might say, “Wait a second! Aren’t you reading a lot into this Old Testament passage? I don’t see it in here. Where are you getting that?”

My justification for that illustration comes from two New Testament passages. Turn to Hebrews, chapter 11, and look at verses 17 through 19.

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son; it was he to whom it was said, “In Isaac your descendants shall be called.” He considered that God is able to raise people even from the dead, from which he also received him back as a type.

The Greek word for “type” is “parabole,” from which we get our word “parable”. He is a type; he is an illustration of Jesus Christ being killed and then, resurrecting from the dead. That gives us a clue.

Now, turn to Romans, chapter 4, and note verses 19 through 25.

Without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah’s womb;

yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God,

and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform.

Therefore it was also credited to him as righteousness.

(note the next two verses),

Now not for his sake only was it written that it was credited to him,

but for our sake also, to whom it will be credited, as those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead,

He who was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification.

These verses make it even clearer that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead, just as in parabolic form, Isaac was raised from the dead. God considered that Abraham had literally put him to death, even though his hand never struck his son.

Isaac – a type of Christ

Now with this understood, let us go back to Genesis, chapter 22, and try to discover where Jesus Christ is to be found. I have come up with several major areas where we can see Jesus Christ.

Seen in the symbols of death

1. The first is in the symbols of death.

Note verse 6.

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 the two of them walked on together.

Abraham and Isaac are carrying the symbols of death; that is, wood, fire, and a knife. Do not overlook the fact that Isaac was to be a burnt offering. Do not forget that Abraham was not to just strike him with the knife; he was also to burn him as a burnt offering. The Old Testament teaches that burnt offerings were for sin, so Isaac was to be offered up as an offering for sin.

Wood

One of the symbols of death is the wood. Look at verse 9.

Then they came to the place of which God had told him; and Abraham built the altar there and arranged the wood, and bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood.

Wood is never mentioned in the Old Testament burnt offering passages, but it is emphasized in these verses. In fact, it is mentioned five times. It is interesting that Isaac carries the wood up the hill, just as Christ, until he stumbled, carried the wood up the hill. Then Isaac was laid on the altar on top of wood, just as Jesus Christ was laid on the wooden cross and nailed to it. I think we can see Christ in the references to the wood in this text.

Knife

Another symbol of death is the knife with which Abraham was to pierce Isaac. We know that the Old Testament prophet Zechariah would say, in chapter 12, verse 10, that one day,

. . . they [the Jews] will look on Me [Jesus] whom they have pierced . . .

Jesus was pierced through with spikes in His hands and in His feet.

Fire

There is also the symbol of the fire. This symbolizes, throughout the entire Old and New Testaments, tribulation or judgment.

The first time “fire” occurs is in Genesis, chapter 19, verse 24, where it talks about fire coming down from heaven to burn up Sodom and Gomorrah. The last time “fire” is mentioned is in Revelation, chapter 21, verse 8, where it talks about those who have rejected the Lamb; rejected the sacrifice, being cast into the lake of fire, which burns forever. So fire, in these references, is a symbol of the wrath of God. And we know Christ endured the wrath of God, as it was typified in fire.

Seen in the submission of Isaac

2. A second area where we see Christ is in the submission of Isaac.

Look at verses 7 and 8 of Genesis, chapter 22.

Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, “My father!” And he said, “Here I am, my son.” And he said, “Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?” Abraham said, “God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.” So the two of them walked on together.

That is a double positive in the Hebrew, which is used for emphasis. It shows unity. Abraham did not tie a rope around his son and say, “Come on, obey me!” No! Isaac went along in obedience and submission to his father.

Can you see Christ in that? It is like a neon sign. Christ was “. . . obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:8). Isaac portrays Christ in his submission.

Look at verse 9 of Genesis, chapter 22, again.

Then they came to the place of which God had told him; and Abraham built the altar there and arranged the wood, and bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood.

Notice that Abraham is a lot older than Isaac, but Isaac allows him to tie him up and put him on top of the altar. I think Isaac probably climbed up there on his own accord. I doubt Abraham, being old, was able to lift a thirty year old son. Note the submission.

Continue to verse 10.

Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son.

Then Isaac said, “Stop!”

No. He never did. He might have closed his eyes, and I would imagine that Abraham was weeping, but he submitted to his father.

Seen in the prophetic announcement of Abraham

3. A third area where we see Jesus Christ is in the prophetic announcement that is so beautiful from Abraham.

Note verses 11 through 13.

But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, “Abraham, Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” He said, “Do not stretch out your hand against the lad, and do nothing to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me.” Then Abraham raised his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him a ram caught in the thicket by his horns; and Abraham went and took the ram and offered him up for a burnt offering in the place of his son.

Now continue to verse 14 where we read the prophetic announcement.

And Abraham called the name of that place, The Lord Will Provide [Jehovah-jireh], as it is said to this day, "In the mount of the Lord it will be provided."

This is future tense. This is the prophetic announcement of Abraham. He is saying, "One day God will provide the lamb."

God did not provide the lamb in this, He provided a ram. He will one day provide a Lamb for the burnt offerings.

In John, chapter 1, verse 29, John the Baptist saw Jesus Christ coming toward him. Do you remember what he said? He said,

. . . Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!

He is here! God had provided.

Seen in the setting of the altar

4. One more area, from Genesis, chapter 22, that we see Jesus Christ is in the setting of the altar.

This is really a discovery from the development of history, rather than from the text, and it is perhaps, one of the most powerful. In our previous discussion of Hebrews, chapter 11, you may remember this point.

Mount Moriah is really nothing more than a ridge of hills. It was the place where Solomon would build his temple, which would later be destroyed. And just a stone's throw from the temple and from the place where Isaac was offered, a city would be built called Jerusalem.

By the time of Jesus Christ, that ridge of hills was no longer referred to as Moriah, but had been given a slang Aramaic expression because of the way that one of the ridges was shaped. It was now called Golgotha, or "the place of the skull".

It is powerful to recognize the fact that the place where Isaac was offered as a type of Christ; offered as a burnt offering for sin, would be the very place where Jesus Christ would hang from the cross. Jesus was the burnt offering being given up as a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world.

The prophetic statement of Abraham had indeed come true. God had provided the Lamb.

Conclusion

Philip Bliss was a well known hymn writer of yesteryear. In fact, our hymn books are filled with his hymns. One day, he was traveling to Pennsylvania to be with some friends. He traveled by train and spent most of the time on the trip writing lyrics for yet unpublished hymns.

As the train was approaching Ashtabula, Ohio, it began to cross a steel and wooden bridge that spanned a several hundred feet deep ravine. The winter weather had shaken the moorings of this bridge, and when the train was halfway across, it gave way. The train plunged into the ravine below. The passenger coaches immediately ignited with fire because of the pot bellied stoves inside that burst into flames upon impact. Philip Bliss and his wife were never identified.

Everyone thought that all the belongings, including the manuscripts for the yet unpublished songs, had also gone up in flames. However, weeks later, a trunk belonging to Bliss was discovered. It had been mistakenly placed on another train during an earlier stop in the journey. Inside the trunk, several manuscripts were found. One of them had the words to the song entitled, *My Redeemer*. The fact that the song was sung after Philip Bliss was in the presence of his Savior made these words more meaningful. He wrote,

I will sing of my Redeemer and His wondrous love to me;

On the cruel cross He suffered, from the curse to set me free.

I will tell the wondrous story, how my lost estate to save,

In His boundless love and mercy, He the ransom freely gave.

I will praise my dear Redeemer, His triumphant power I'll tell,

How the victory He giveth over sin, and death, and hell.

I will sing of my Redeemer and His heavenly love to me;

He from death to life hath brought me, the Son of God, with Him to be.

My friend, do you have that assurance? Have you been to Mount Moriah? Have you been to Golgotha? Have you been to the cross and accepted that burnt offering as your Savior? Has the death of Jesus Christ made a difference in your heart? Has the

resurrection of Jesus Christ made a difference in your | life?

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Examples of Godliness

Genesis 24

Introduction

The headline says, “Biblical Scholars Doubt Jesus Said He Would Return to Earth.” I love the “Biblical scholars” part. The article goes on to say, “A group of thirty Biblical scholars, accessing the most likely teachings of the historical Jesus, agreed overwhelmingly Saturday that He did not say He would return to earth and usher in a new age.”

One man from this committee said, “The findings on the second coming reflect what is really taught in most major universities and seminaries.”

Isn’t that exciting?! Let’s just turn the lights off and go home – there is no hope.

I cannot imagine claiming to be a Biblical scholar and coming to that conclusion. There are many reasons why, but I am glad we have the blessed hope and that comes basically from believing in the blessed book – the Bible.

In the Bible, as we study through it chapter by chapter, and sometimes verse by verse, we come to large narrative sections at times. We will study such a section today in Genesis, chapters 24 and 25. As a result, we will cover a lot of text to get to the main ideas of these chapters.

I am convinced that what the world needs, especially after reading articles like the one we just read, is the genuine item in the lives of believers. We need believers who are genuinely godly; who have a reality in their walk. Today, I want to introduce, by way of this text, the example of a godly father, and then, the example of a godly servant, and lastly, the example of a godly marriage.

An Example of a Godly Father

We will begin with the first verses of Genesis, chapter 24, and look at an example of a godly father.

Unwavering conviction before God

1. The first thing to note, as we read through Genesis, chapter 24, is that this godly father had an unwavering conviction before God.

Look at verses 1 and 2.

Now Abraham was old, advanced in age; and the Lord had blessed Abraham in every way. Abraham said to his servant, the oldest of his household, “Please place your hand under my thigh,”

The reference to the age of the servant is probably indicating priority; that is, this servant was the first in rank; he had been there the longest; he had priority. This servant, with his great authority, probably had charge of all that Abraham owned.

Placing a hand under the thigh was evidently a custom when a promise was to be made of a certain nature. The patriarch would see to it himself, and that individual servant would come and slide his hand under the thigh of the patriarch.

Continue to verses 3 and 4.

“and I will make you swear by the Lord, the God of heaven and the God of earth, that you shall not take a wife for my son [Isaac] from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I live, but you will go to my

country and to my relatives, and take a wife for my son Isaac.”

It is fascinating that Abraham’s faith is so strong that he would be intent on keeping his end of the covenant with God. God had promised that through Abraham’s seed; through the pure line of his tribe, the Messiah would come, as given in the Protoevangelium that we previously studied. So Abraham, believing that, is willing to risk his most loved servant. It will, in fact, endanger the servant’s life to take this long journey back to Abraham’s homeland to find a bride for Isaac.

This, by the way, is one of the most beautiful love stories in all of the Old Testament.

Unfaltering conviction before his son

2. Notice as well, not only Abraham’s unwavering conviction before God, but his unfaltering conviction before his son.

This is just as important because Abraham’s son, Isaac, is undoubtedly involved in this conversation between Abraham and his servant. He is hearing; he is watching this oath being taken by the servant, who would perform his proper duty in taking the dowry and locating the wife.

Notice how Isaac must have felt as he heard his father and the servant speak. Look at verse 5.

The servant said to him, “Suppose the woman is not willing to follow me to this land; should I take your son back to the land from where you came?”

Now, I can imagine Isaac saying, “Yeah, Dad, what if she won’t come back?”

Continue to verses 6 through 8 and notice the great conviction with which Abraham replies.

Then Abraham said to him, “Beware, that you do not take my son back there! The Lord, the God of heaven, who took me from my father’s house and from the land of my birth, and who spoke to me and who swore to me, saying, ‘To your descendants I will give this land,’ He will send His angels before you, and you will take a wife for my son from there. But if the woman is not willing to follow you, then you will be free from this my oath; only do not take my son back there.”

In other words, this was obviously not up for grabs. This was a conviction that Isaac would abide by, if he was to stay under the roof of his father’s tent. This was conviction. Abraham, as it were, had set a fence post deep in the soil there, and his son knew it was always there, and that was, Abraham would not violate the word of God.

Let me give a few words of encouragement to parents today. You are in the process of building fence posts and you are laying them deep in the soil of your family life. Do you know what your children are doing? Periodically, they are checking to see if they have moved. They will shake them to see if they are weak; they will kick them; they will nail protest signs to them. They are convinced that somehow they are going to make those things move, and they are asking you questions. It will give your children tremendous security to know that even though they put on the pressure, you will never say what is wrong can be right.

On the other hand, what happens when parents, under their children’s pressure, say, “Okay, what I’ve said for years is wrong, so this weekend, for this time only, it’s right.”? We give them over as prey to the philosophers on the campuses of our universities who say to them that there are no absolutes; that there is no such thing as absolute truth; that there is nothing that is right or wrong; that everything is relative. Then, the child thinks, “Ah, that makes sense because my mom and dad showed me that if I applied the right amount of pressure, I could get that absolute to change; that even that is not in cement.”

I have seen this with teens, as I have worked with young people as a youth pastor. I have seen it, but I never imagined it would happen with such young children – like mine!

I have twin three year old boys who, every morning, have one mission. They are going to find out if a fence post has moved overnight. I can hear them in their room, “Hey, Seth, you awake?”

“Yeah. Let’s go see if a fence post has moved.”

That is why, around our home, the early morning hours, between usually eight and ten o’clock, are the most difficult. It is as if one or the other runs around and says, “Hey, Dad, has this changed? Can you handle this?”

That is why I try to leave the house by 7:30 a.m. now!

It is the fence post that protects, guides, and gives children security. Now, children are fantastic lawyers. They have the appeal process down to a science. They are constantly looking for the loop hole. But that fence post; that guideline provides a foundation of tremendous security; it protects them.

I am reminded of a story that I read this past week. A little boy was riding his tricycle furiously back and forth; up and down the sidewalk in front of his house, with tremendous energy. Finally, a police officer stopped and asked, "Son, what are you doing?"

The little boy replied, "I'm running away from home."

He then, starts pedaling again.

The police officer says, "Wait a second. Why then, are you pedaling back and forth in front of your home?"

The little boy thought and answered, "Well, because my mom won't let me cross the street."

He is pedaling back and forth! He knew there was a fence post.

Isaac grew up in that kind of home; in that kind of setting. Do not think for a moment that Isaac never tested the fence posts. I can just see him as an eighteen year old, coming home and saying, "Hey Dad, I've met the cutest little Midianite. Oh those brown eyes have pieced my heart. . . . Now wait a second, Dad. I know she's not part of the tribe, but she's very interested in the covenant. She said she'd even come this Saturday to our family worship. She listened for hours as I talked to her about our family history. . . . What do you mean, 'No'? Oh Dad, I can't go out with anybody around here! They all think I'm strange."

Do not miss this. Isaac grew up in that kind of setting, and I am convinced that he constantly tried, but Abraham would never move.

Let me give you a New Testament commandment that is along this same line. God specifically stated, in II Corinthians, chapter 6, verse 14a,

Do not be bound together with unbelievers . .

.

The implication includes marriage. I have heard teenagers say, "I'm not marrying them, I'm just dating them."

Have you ever known a couple that married without at least one date? The point is not to try to

find an illustration of that one rare couple. The Bible has placed a period at the end of that verse, and we are not to change it to a question mark. You and I as parents, will have to make sure that fence post is firm.

What a steadfast example of godliness Abraham had before God and his son.

An Example of a Godly Servant

Now, let us look at Abraham's servant, who was an example of a godly servant.

Look at verses 9 and 10 of Genesis, chapter 24.

So the servant placed his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master, and swore to him concerning this matter. Then the servant took ten camels from the camels of his master, and set out with a variety of good things of his master's in his hand; and he arose and went to Mesopotamia, to the city of Nahor.

This is actually the dowry. Abraham, being a very wealthy man, needed ten camels to carry the dowry. Some lucky father is going to meet Abraham's servant in just a moment.

Continue to verse 11.

He made the camels kneel down outside the city by the well of water at evening time, the time when women go out to draw water.

Let me give a couple of things that I noticed from this servant that are an example of a godly servant.

Complete obedience to the word of his master

1. First, he was completely obedient to the word of his master.

This servant is going to fulfill every jot and tittle; he is going to carry it all out; he is going to make sure he obeys completely. He questions his master to find out what to do if there is a "what if" situation. He asks, "What if she won't follow me? What if she won't make the dangerous trip back? What if she won't leave her family. What if?"

Abraham says, "No, don't take Isaac there."

So now, the servant is going to obey.

Complete dependence on the help of God

2. Notice a second thing, and we need to dig a little for this one; that is, he was completely dependent on the help of God.

Look at verse 12.

He said, "O Lord, the God of my master Abraham, please grant me success today, and show lovingkindness to my master Abraham."

Would you note the humility shown by the servant in this verse? He says, "Grant to my master success."

If we compared this servant with us as servants of God, I expect that we would rarely have that attitude. So often our attitude is not, "God, allow me to minister for You so that You get the glory."

There is a tremendous sense of humility in this servant's voice as he goes to God.

I once read that there is no telling what good a man or woman could do for God if they do not care who gets the credit. That is a powerful thought! It takes this servant's attitude of humility.

Now look at verse 13, as the servant arrives and continues his prayer with the Lord. I love this.

"Behold, I am standing by the spring, and the daughters of the men of the city are coming out to draw water;"

There might have been fifty, or a hundred, or more young women. We do not know how many are approaching this well. The servant is supposed to pick one out. There is not a chance in the world. So, he is going to give God some specifics. Continue to verse 14.

"now may it be that the girl to whom I say, 'Please let down your jar so that I may drink,' and who answers, 'Drink, and I will water your camels also,' – may she be the one whom You have appointed for Your servant Isaac; and by this I will know that You have shown lovingkindness to my master."

In other words, he is saying, "Lord, we've got a hundred gals coming here. They are all eligible and I've got to pick one of them out. So what I'm going to do is just kind of put the fleece out, and I'll kind of let my gaze rest on one of them, and I'll go up and ask her for a drink. If she says, 'Why I'd be delighted to give you a drink, and not only that, I'll give water for your camels as well,' then I'll know, or at least I'll

have an inkling. She still has to be part of the family, but at least I'll know to carry it a little further."

An Example of a Godly Marriage

Now we are about to be introduced to Rebekah.

The Character of Rebekah

Let me give three things from this text that are striking about her character of godliness.

Refused temptation

1. The first is in the next few verses, and that is, she refused temptation.

Note verses 15 and 16 of Genesis, chapter 24, as the servant is still praying to God and is about to say, "Amen".

Before he had finished speaking, behold, Rebekah who was born to Bethuel the son of Milcah, the wife of Abraham's brother Nahor, came out with her jar on her shoulder. The girl was very beautiful, a virgin, and no man had had relations with her; and she went down to the spring and filled her jar and came up.

Rebekah's purity is mentioned twice in scripture. While our society considers this virtue not worth protecting, and in fact, our young people are given incredible amounts of pressure that this virtue is even an embarrassment, the word of God states differently. It is interesting that when something is repeated twice in the scriptures, it is not because God stutters, but rather because He is emphasizing the point.

I like the fact that it adds that she was beautiful. It is implied that she had turned down many suitors and had refused temptation.

God intends this bonding of a physical nature to be part of that total unity as one person, though it is taken out of context today. Beware. You will never be sorry for saying, "No"; you will never be sorry for initiating this policy.

If you have given that treasure away, I want you to know that God forgives that as He does anything else. I would then challenge you to immediately initiate a policy of abstinence until you are married. God will bless you for that discipline.

Respected an elder

2. Rebekah also, secondly, respected an elder.

This is what I gleaned from the next few verses. Note verses 17 through 19.

Then the servant ran to meet her, and said, "Please let me drink a little water from your jar." She said, "Drink my lord"; and she quickly lowered her jar to her hand, and gave him a drink. Now when she had finished giving him a drink, she said, "I will draw also for your camels until they have finished drinking."

The servant is probably thinking, "This is too good to be true."

Continue to verse 20.

So she quickly emptied her jar into the trough, and ran back to the well to draw, and she drew for all his camels.

Now understand, here is a man with ten camels. Ten camels drink about twenty gallons of water. This little girl has just volunteered two hundred trips to the spring.

Do you know what the servant's response is? It is classic. Notice the first phrase of the next verse, verse 21a.

Meanwhile, the man was gazing at her in silence . . .

The servant could not believe his eyes and ears. He is thinking, "This woman has actually done just what I've said to God. I thought I made it too tough. Maybe it's been too easy."

Here Rebekah comes with great respect for a man that she knew was a servant; a slave. She could tell by his appearance, by his garment, that he represented another. Yet she, in great respect for an older individual, I think, gave him a drink.

Let us read the next couple of verses, verses 21 through 22.

Meanwhile, the man was gazing at her in silence, to know whether the Lord had made his journey successful or not. When the camels had finished drinking, . . .

(that probably took two or three hours),

. . . the man took a gold ring weighing a half-shekel . . .

I hate to tell you this, but that was for her nose. All of a sudden, you have a different image of Rebekah, right? Beautiful? Oh man, not a chance!

That was for her nose. In fact, if you do not believe me, verse 47 says,

. . . I put the ring on her nose . . .

The ring weighed a half-shekel. I am not sure how much a half-shekel weighs, but I hope it was light.

Continue to verses 22b and 23.

. . . and two bracelets for her wrists weighing ten shekels in gold, and said, "Whose daughter are you? Please tell me, is there room for us to lodge in your father's house?"

This is all extra – over and above what he had asked God to do with this gal – but he had to find out was whether she was a relative of Abraham. God had promised the seed to Abraham's family, and this servant had to make sure she was related.

Rebekah answers, "Yes," in verse 25.

Again she said to him, "We have plenty of both straw and feed, and room to lodge in."

Look at the servant's response in verses 26 and 27.

Then the man bowed low and worshipped the Lord. He said, "Blessed be the Lord, the God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken His lovingkindness and His truth toward my master; as for me, the Lord has guided me in the way to the house of my master's brothers."

They were related. Mission accomplished. The first one he selected was, in fact, the one that he would give the proposal to.

Responded to God's will

3. Rebekah refused temptation and she respected an elder. Now notice a third thing, and that is, she responded to God's will.

We will not take the time to read verses 28 through 49. The servant is ushered into the presence of Laban. You may remember that character. We are going to study more of him a little later. Laban probably saw those ten camels with all of the good things and thought, "This is too good to pass up." He invites the man in, and the servant relays to him the whole story. He starts from the beginning, and that is what occurs between verses 28 and 49.

Now Laban will respond and I want you to notice what happens. We will begin with verse 50.

Then Laban and Bethuel replied, “The matter comes from the Lord; so we cannot speak to you bad or good.”

They had enough insight to notice and to believe that, in fact, this was the will of God; this was from God. Continue to verses 51 and 52.

“Here is Rebekah before you, take her and go, and let her be the wife of your master’s son, as the Lord has spoken.” When Abraham’s servant heard their words, he bowed himself to the ground before the Lord.

And said, “Thank you, Lord.” – that is in the Hebrew. Continue to verses 53 and 54.

The servant brought out articles of silver and articles of gold, and garments, and gave them to Rebekah; he also gave precious things to her brother and to her mother. Then he and the men who were with him ate and drank and spent the night. When they arose in the morning, he said, “Send me away to my master.”

The servant is ready to go back. Look at the response in verse 55.

But her brother and her mother said, “Let the girl stay with us a few days, say ten; afterward she may go.”

Now, they have decided that this is the will of God. We do not know if Rebekah has even been asked yet. Of course, in this culture, your spouse was normally chosen by your relatives. There was still submission on the part of the children in accepting that spouse. They want her to stay for ten days; they want to have a long good-bye. So they say, “Well, we’ll call Rebekah in.”

How will she respond to something that she knows is God’s will? She evidently believes it as well. Notice that she responds immediately to the will of God. Look at verses 56 through 58.

He [the servant] said to them, “Do not delay me, since the Lord has prospered my way. Send me away that I may go to my master.” And they said, “We will call the girl and consult her wishes.” Then they called Rebekah and said to her, “Will you go with this man?” And she said, “I will go.”

That is an amazing verse. This beautiful little lassie just said, “I believe it’s God’s will. You believe it’s God’s will. I am evidently part of this covenant promise. I’ve never met Isaac. I’ve never been away from home [probably], and you are asking me to go to the other side of the world. What is my response? I’ll go.”

This is the kind of wife Isaac would need to trust God with in fulfilling the covenant promise, as we will see in just a moment.

The character of Isaac

Before we get to the romantic conclusion, let us back up and take a look at what kind of man Rebekah is about to meet. We will not read the verses again, but let me give you three things about the godly character of Isaac.

A compliant son

1. First, he was a compliant son.

Look at verses 4 to 6 of Genesis, chapter 24. Isaac is in the conversation concerning his future wife, and obviously, as I have implicated, he has grown up testing this fence post, and probably not understanding. Now, dad has selected a bride that he will not see until she is introduced to him.

Do not mistake what is happening in this situation. Isaac is not an eighteen year old at this point. He is not a twenty-five year old. He is not a thirty year old. Isaac is a forty year old man. He could have said at any time, “Dad, the covenant is for you. You’ve got a wife. I’m going back to see if that Midianite girl is still available. I’m forty years old.”

However, Isaac patiently waited and complied. What a son!

A consistent believer

2. Secondly, he was a consistent believer.

Look at verse 62.

Now Isaac had come from going to Beer-lahai-roi; . . .

When there is a Hebrew name, such as “Beer-lahai-roi,” you need to find out what it means. Hebrew names were always significant, especially in relation to Isaac. This name means, “the place where

God lives and sees me.” All of his years, Isaac had lived with the sense of God’s presence.

How in the world could a man grow up and wait until he is forty, an eligible bachelor, and continually say “No,” to the temptation and the pressure of his pagan culture? How could he wait as a compliant and obedient son? I think the next verse gives us the clue. Look at verse 63.

Isaac went out to meditate in the field toward evening; . . .

(the original Hebrew indicates this is a habit; this is a continual process),

. . . and he lifted up his eyes, as he would, and looked . . .

I think this is why Isaac was the kind of man that he was, because it was his practice to meditate daily. Perhaps you have a time with the Lord in the morning, or perhaps in the afternoon; his time was in the evening, at dusk, when it was cool. Isaac would go out and have a time daily, with his God.

Ladies and gentlemen, let us go back to basics for a minute. Is it any wonder that God would use a man like Nehemiah to rebuild Jerusalem when we learned at the very beginning of his ministry that he had a pattern of praying and praying constantly throughout that entire effort? Is it any wonder that we talk about Nehemiah today? Is it surprising to us that God would use a man like Daniel to face the pagan pressures of a court given over to licentiousness, and to then, face the lions, when we learned that he prayed three times every day? Do we think all that Jesus Christ accomplished is a coincidence when we know that He was constantly in prayer with His Father? His prayer was, as recorded in Matthew, chapter 26, verse 39b,

. . . Father, . . . not as I will, but as You will.

As I meditated on this thought, it occurred to me that one of the few specific things that Jesus Christ taught His disciples to do was what? Pray. I thought of the fact that He did not give them a “play by play” on how to win Jerusalem, even though He could have. He did not, from what we are told, give them all the facts on how to go out as a pair, or on what they were going to encounter and what they were going to face. We do know the scriptures give us a specific lesson on how to pray.

Ladies and gentlemen, you may wonder today, why God’s hand is on someone else. Perhaps you have

wondered why your spiritual experience is shallow. You might be saying, “Wait twenty years? I can’t wait twenty minutes.”

I suggest that the problem may be that the hinges on the door of your prayer life are rusty. We would rather have some quick little formula.

Now let us go back to our existence with God when we are all alone. Do we pray? Evidently, Isaac had the habit of prayer, and he developed godliness over that forty year period of waiting for his wife.

A committed husband

3. Now notice the third thing in Isaac’s character, and that is, he was a committed husband.

Note verse 64.

Rebekah lifted up her eyes, and when she saw Isaac she dismounted from the camel.

The literal Hebrew for “dismounted” means that she “jumped,” as it were. Boy, this is a romantic conclusion! She jumps off that camel and, in verse 65,

She said to the servant, “Who is that man walking in the field to meet us?” . . .

(“I think I know!”),

. . . And the servant said, “He is my master.” Then she took her veil and covered herself.

I cannot figure that out. Why in the world would she cover her beautiful face? He had not even seen her before, but yet, that was the custom.

Continue to verses 66 and 67.

The servant told Isaac all the things that he had done. Then Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah’s tent, and he took Rebekah, and she became his wife, and he loved her . . .

This is one of the few times in the Old Testament that we specifically learn of a man’s love; this is one of the few times it is ever even mentioned. We obviously know that it is assumed with these couples, but Isaac and Rebekah’s was a special love story. The Bible emphasizes the fact that he took her to himself and he loved her.

The characteristics of Isaac and Rebekah’s marriage

There are at least three characteristics that mark the quality of Isaac and Rebekah's marriage that I want to give.

The characteristic of adjustment

1. The first is the characteristic of adjustment.

Here is a man who has been a bachelor for forty years. He is just like you and me. After forty years of living on planet earth, you have the system down. Isaac might have been the kind of man who would leave his shawl all over the floor of the tent. I do not know. He might have had the practice of eating at a particular time. He already had his taste buds developed and knew what he wanted to eat. Isaac's life was fairly well set, and isn't it interesting that he brings Rebekah to himself and there is the development of love.

I like what one man said, "Love is developed after marriage, not before."

That is a powerful thought!

The characteristic of empathy

2. The second thing that strikes me of Isaac and Rebekah's marriage is the characteristic of empathy.

We would learn this elsewhere, but let me tell that Isaac has been mourning his mother's death for three years. They were obviously very close.

Let me say this about mourning. The Bible never says that when you have a death in the family or go through a tragedy that you are supposed to "keep your chin up". There was a three year period of mourning with Isaac, and he was a godly man.

Evidently there was empathy from Rebekah, because she came, and we are told in the last part of verse 67,

. . . thus Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.

Do not assume that is naturally going to happen. It did in this case, which shows us a lot about their relationship and about Rebekah especially.

The characteristic of patience

3. Thirdly, the characteristic of patience is obvious.

As Isaac and Rebekah would now wait for the promise of God to come to them, guess what God does? God gives Isaac a barren wife. You would think that all of the struggles that Abraham went through to receive what God had said He would give would be enough, but God does the same thing with Isaac. Isaac and Rebekah will pray together and wait patiently, not for five years or for ten years, but for twenty years before God fulfills what He said He would do. Their relationship was marked by patience, and in the process of waiting patiently, they revealed their godliness.

Application – Truths About Godliness Today!

Let me give two characteristics of godliness.

1. The first is that godliness is not delivered upon conversion, it is developed. Isaac developed godliness through his daily habit of prayer.
2. The second characteristic is that godliness is not strengthened under stress, it is revealed whether or not you have it. Isaac and Rebekah revealed their godliness in their waiting with patience.

Well, godliness began with an obedient Abraham, and that was contagiously caught by the next generation. We will learn that it was also caught by the generation after that and the next and the next.

I heard from my father a couple of days ago that his Uncle Herald passed away and went home to be with the Lord. Uncle Herald was a godly man of eighty-seven years of age. He was the sixth generation preacher, which made my father the seventh, and made my older brother and me the eighth. We began tracking back on the phone, which it is unusual for my dad to do anything sentimental, and he related stories that I had heard slivers of, but he expounded. He told me about our family and some things that had occurred.

My father said, "You know, it all really began with a pioneer couple who came to Minnesota in a covered wagon and settled as farmers. They were my grandparents on my father's side. The man was an unbeliever; he did not believe in God. However, he had married a woman who was a stout believer in the principles of the word of God. She prayed for thirty-five years that her husband would come to Christ.

After thirty-five years, he bowed his knee and came to the cross.”

As a result of that relationship, they would have a son who would also follow God. He would have a son who would raise me. I feel very responsible to carry on that tradition, not necessarily that my sons would go into the ministry, but that they would carry on the tradition of godliness.

Ladies and gentlemen, one day we are going to look down history's lane and see lives that are

affected. Godliness has to be developed. As dads and moms, godliness must be evidenced. As servants who live for Him, completely obeying His word, completely dependent upon Him for strength, godliness must be evidenced. Godliness must be developed in the home and in the marriage if we ever hope to impact this world for Jesus Christ. The world is not looking for a sermon, it is looking for reality in the lives of the saints. Let us take stock.

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A Tale of Two Sons

Genesis 25:19-27

Introduction

I read a story recently about a little girl who had just heard the fairy tale *Snow White* for the first time. She was so excited about it that she could hardly contain herself. When she got home, she said to her mom, “Mommy, I just heard a wonderful fairy tale of Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs.”

The little girl retold the story to her mother. I had the facts verified by one of the children in our church, by the way, to make sure I had the story right. I always got *Snow White* confused with *Sleeping Beauty*, as they are a lot alike.

The seven dwarfs had protected Snow White from a wicked queen. One day, they were away at work in the mines and the wicked queen disguised herself and came to the cottage. She enticed Snow White to purchase a poisoned apple. Snow White, of course, bit into it and fell into the sleep of death.

The little girl, with her eyes glistening, told the story of the way Snow White was lying in the glass coffin and Prince Charming comes riding up on his white horse. He spots Snow White, dismounts, and walks over to her. He then, tenderly takes her hand and kisses her back to life.

What an emotion packed story. You know a Baptist did not write that one – it is too emotional!

Snow White comes back to life and the little girl said, “And you know what happened next, Mommy?”

Mommy said, “Sure, they lived happily ever after.”

With childlike innocence, the girl said, “No, Mommy, they got married.”

That little girl, without realizing it, had told a partial truth. That is, getting married and living happily ever after are not necessarily synonymous.

In our last discussion, we left two lovebirds. You may remember Isaac and Rebekah. They had never seen each other prior to becoming husband and wife, as Abraham had told his servant to go to their distant home country to find a bride for his son Isaac. The servant went, and after searching for what seemed to be a brief hour, spotted a beautiful girl who fit his prayer – she gave water to him and his camels to drink. He brought this beautiful young lady back to the home, where Isaac was out in the field meditating. Isaac looks up and sees the caravan coming with this young lady sitting on one of the camels. She sees him as well, and you can almost see them running through the field in slow motion, and embracing. Man!! When we left them, the text read, in Genesis, chapter 25, verse 67,

Then Isaac . . . took Rebekah, and she became his wife, and he loved her . . .

It is a little sad however, that what had begun as an ideal . . . would become an ordeal. As one man wrote, “Their marriage would become like a violin, the strings were still attached, but the music had stopped.”

Why was it that something so beautiful would end up so marred? Why was it that something that began like a fairy tale would end up as essentially, a disaster? The answers to those questions are found in a tale of two sons.

The Birth and The Divisions

The first chapter in this tale of two sons is found in Genesis, chapter 25. I have entitled this chapter, "The Birth and The Divisions". We will begin with verses 20 through 21a.

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. Isaac prayed to the Lord on behalf of his wife, because she was barren . . .

We touched on the fact that Isaac prayed in our last discussion. Now let us continue and skip to verse 26b.

. . . Isaac was sixty years old when she gave birth to them.

In verse 20, Isaac was forty years old, and now, according to verse 26, he is sixty. This lets us in on the fact that for twenty years, Rebekah was barren. For twenty years, she patiently waited and he persistently prayed to God to fulfill the promise of the seed.

Isaac was the patriarch in line; that is, the line from which the Messiah would come. So, he is praying and we have a beautiful picture of unity in the home between Rebekah and Isaac. For twenty years, she is patiently waiting and he is praying before God as the spiritual leader. So, we are given the implication that twenty years have produced a foundation that we would almost think to be unshakeable.

We are told the answer to prayer came, in verses 21 through 23.

. . . and the Lord answered him and Rebekah his wife conceived. But the children struggled together within her; and she said, "If it is so, . . .

(that is, if this is an answer to prayer),

. . . why then am I this way?" So she went to inquire of the Lord. The Lord said to her, "Two nations are in your womb; . . ."

(I imagine she probably fainted after hearing that, but, after reviving her, the Lord went on, probably quickly, to say),

" . . . and two peoples shall be separated from your body; and one people shall be stronger than the other; . . ."

(note the next phrase),

" . . . and the older shall serve the younger."

That last phrase is important. We will get back to that in just a moment.

Now let us continue to verse 24 to see what happens on delivery day.

When her days to deliver were fulfilled, behold, there were twins in her womb.

I love the word "behold" because this was probably a shock. Look at verse 25.

Now the first came forth red, all over like a hairy garment; and they named him Esau.

This was a little fuzz ball of a baby; all hairy like a little fuzzy ball, and completely red. I can just imagine everyone cuddling him immediately. They called him Esau, which means "red," or in Arabic, it literally means "hairy". Continue to verse 26.

Afterward his brother came forth with his hand holding onto Esau's heel, so his name was called Jacob . . .

Imagine that, the first baby comes and then, there is another one grabbing hold of his heel. How would you like to be a midwife during that one?

It tells us that because of that they named him Jacob. Jacob means "supplanter". I had to look that one up. Supplanter means, "to take the place of". Jacob could also be translated "one who takes the heel".

Supplanter means "one who takes the place of," so Jacob is the one who is going to take the place of the firstborn. This is out of the order of the patriarchal line; that is, the older usually has the blessing given to him. Jacob grabs hold of that heel as if to fight it and say, "No, I'm going to be first!" But he came out second.

Now, we have a break in the story while the boys grow up. The photograph album is not very extensive because we are actually skipping sixty years before the next verse. Look at verse 27a.

When the boys grew up, Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the field, . . .

The boys had grown up. Esau had become a skillful hunter, a man of the field. This fellow was robust. He was what might be called, "a man's man". He was an athlete. He loved to go out and hunt; he was a skillful man; he was always out in the field, never at home. You can almost hear Isaac, in pride, as we will learn later, tell the exploits of his brave son.

Esau is the one who captured two deer and did not lose an arrow. He is the one who carries three or four beams on his back at once to repair the fence. He is "Papa's boy". "That's my son."

Verse 27b goes on to tell us,

. . . but Jacob was a peaceful man, living in tents.

A division in the parents' affection

Now, probably the most tragic verse in relation to parenting, is verse 28 of Genesis chapter 25.

Now Isaac loved Esau, because he had a taste for game, but Rebekah loved Jacob.

Isaac proudly looked at this firstborn son and stubbornly, as we will note, refused to believe that Jacob would be given the blessing. You can almost see his chest puff out in pride, just as a dad's does today with a son. The tragic thing is, however, that this verse gives the implication of a division. It says that "Isaac loved Esau, . . . but Rebekah loved Jacob."

As far as Rebekah is concerned, Esau is the kind of guy that tracks mud into the tent. When anything is broken, she knows it is Esau who did it. But Jacob is a mother's delight. He loves to stay in the tent. He is probably sensitive, inquisitive, and helpful. So she loved him.

The division in the parents' affection that is implied in this early verse, and that we will see more of later, would reap very, very bitter fruit. It would bring disunity, not only in the marriage, but ultimately, in the entire home. They had decided that they would show partiality toward one instead of the other, rather than love them alike.

Let me say a word, at this point, to all of us who are parents. Whether your children are three, or thirteen, or thirty and gone from home, they are still hearing messages from what you have said in the past. I am sure you are aware that children pick up, with incredible skill, any kind of criticism that is based upon comparison. Perhaps you heard it growing up. "Your sister never got a C in science, she always made an A." Or, "Your brother always kept his room straight, so why don't you?" It is criticism based on comparison. What will happen is the child will learn not just to understand that, but he will also understand to manipulate you as a parent on the basis of the differences that you like.

I can imagine, if Esau ever wanted to get in good with his dad, it was very easy – just bag an extra pheasant, come home, and prepare it. Isaac would say, "Yeah, that's my boy." Then he might say something like, "Here are the keys."

If Jacob ever wanted to get in good with his mom, I can imagine him saying, "Mom, let me take care of dinner. I'll cook your specialty." He had her wrapped around his finger.

Esau and Jacob had learned how to take advantage of these differences. We are really going to see that come out in chapter 27. The division grows more apparent each day.

A division in the son's attitudes

Notice another insight in this chapter, and that is the division in the sons' attitude towards spiritual things. Look at verse 29 of chapter 25.

When Jacob had cooked stew, Esau came in from the field and he was famished.

Jacob is in the kitchen, while Esau had been out hunting. I can just imagine these brothers disdaining one another. To Jacob, Esau was a rugged, rough guy who would eat like a barbarian. And to Esau, Jacob was a sissy; a man who stayed at home cooking around his mother.

By the way, let me say I wish I knew how to cook better. If anything ever happens to my wife, I am in trouble. I can live off peanut butter and jelly, and if I really get rambunctious, I can make a grilled cheese. I do not know how many of you men can cook, but if you say you can, I am going to start making house calls and you can prove it to me.

Look at verse 30.

and Esau said to Jacob, "Please let me have a swallow of that red stuff there, for I am famished." Therefore his name was called Edom.

"Edom" is literally transliterated "red". Continue to verses 31 and 32.

But Jacob said, "First sell me your birthright." Esau said, "Behold, I'm about to die; so of what use then is the birthright to me?"

Now let me explain the birthright. We learn what the birthright is from several Old Testament passages; such as, Deuteronomy, chapter 21 and I Chronicles,

chapter 5. We learn that it involved both material and spiritual blessings. The firstborn, the one given the birthright, would be given a double portion of land when the dad died. More importantly, however, the one who received the birthright would be the spiritual head of the family; the spiritual leader. Esau was a man of the earth; a man of the flesh, and he could care less about being the spiritual leader. He is hungry, so he says, “Who wants to be a spiritual giant, I’m famished.”

Esau had a disdain for spiritual things, so we read in verse 33,

And Jacob said, “First, swear to me”; so he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob.

Now Jacob goes about this in the wrong way. I am not excusing him, but underlying his improper methodology and his impure motive is the desire to have that spiritual leadership. He would have had it, since God had ordained it, if he had just been willing to wait for it. Look at verse 34a.

Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew; and he ate and drank, and rose and went on his way. . . .

Note the crassness of these words, “he ate and drank, and rose and went on his way.” Esau sat down, scoffed it down, and then, gets up and leaves. He does not even think about what he has given up. In fact, it really will not hit him until later, when he sees how it has disadvantaged him in terms of material prosperity. The last part of verse 34 tells us,

. . . Thus Esau despised his birthright.

Perhaps you are thinking that I am being too hard on Esau. So, let me go a step further. Turn to the New Testament to the book of Hebrews. Let me prove to you the reality of his character being that of the flesh. Look at Hebrews, chapter 12, verses 15 and 16. Especially note verse 16.

See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled; that there be no immoral or godless person like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal.

Immoral, in this verse, means that Esau had no spiritual desire or discernment. He was a man totally given over to the desires of the flesh. It came down to the question, “Is it a little meal or is it the birthright; is it one meal or spiritual leadership and headship of the

family and being the one in the line of the Messiah who will soon come?” Esau said, “I’ll take the food.”

This was tragic. But understand, from Genesis, chapter 25, that Esau is not an Amalekite pagan. He is the son of Isaac and the grandson of Abraham, the man of faith. If anyone had been born into this world with spiritual advantages, it was Esau.

Principles of spiritual inheritance

Let me make a couple of observations before we go any further. I will give a couple of principles of spiritual inheritance.

A godly heritage does not make spirituality inevitable

1. First, a godly heritage never makes spirituality inevitable.

If it was in anyone’s DNA, it was in Esau’s, and he disdained it.

An ungodly example does not make spirituality impossible

2. Secondly, let us flip the coin and spend a little more time on this in our thinking. An ungodly example never makes spirituality impossible.

Let us look at chapter 26 of Genesis, and I want to briefly scan it. Chapter 26 is the story of Isaac when a famine hits the land. He goes to the land where Abimelech is the king and he repeats the same sin of his father. His wife is beautiful and he is afraid the people of the land will kill him to have his wife. So he tells them that his wife is his sister. This is exactly the same thing that Abraham did. Deception was evidently, learned at home.

Jacob and Esau were in their forties, or maybe in their fifties, and they saw their dad and their mom go along with this deception. It was an ungodly example, yet we find one of the boys to be spiritually discerning and spiritually sensitive.

I think we are living in an age of, what we will call, parental paranoia. There is supposed to be safety in a multitude of counselors, but now I think there is insanity. My bookshelves have been filled in the last year, with books on raising children. Some of you are beyond that, but perhaps in your day, there were no books. Now, believe me, if you go to the store, you will note that there are many. They are good books,

and you can buy as many as you like, but know that reading them is probably going to produce a lot of confusion. You will have to decide under God's leadership, where you land.

One illustration I can give comes from my own family; my own little children. We have just come through that stage that all parents dread – the potty training stage. Who comes up with these terms anyway? We had one who was determined not to comply. The other one had no problem. Finally, we decided that this was a matter of him making up his mind. This was to him, the *Alamo* or *Custer's Last Stand*. Marsha and I were the Indians and Custer would fall. Finally, there was a sliver of success; there was some submission there. However, it was as if the following day, his mind was made up, "Hey, the other way was a lot more convenient, so why discipline?"

It was less than fifteen minutes after that episode that I was walking through the bedroom and picked up a book my wife had just gotten. I was flipping through it, and "bang," it lands right on a page with that particular thought in mind. It said, "Never discipline when a child fails in this regard." It continued on to say, "It may warp their personality."

Ha, ha. Now when he does something strange, I wonder, "Did I warp the poor kid?"

Before we leave this, let me say that there is a solution to this kind of paranoia – and it is not in a book. It is the theological understanding that God is the giver of spiritual desire. We, as parents, live as if it depends on us, but ultimately, we need to understand that underneath it is the spirit of God drawing that child unto himself – whether they are young or old. You may do everything wrong, but that child may turn out to be a mighty saint of God. However, you want to do everything right to help alleviate most of the hurdles they will have to face when they decide to commit their lives to Christ.

The Betrayal and The Deception

Now, I have entitled the next section, "The Betrayal and The Deception". Look at chapter 27, verses 1 through 4.

Now it came about when Isaac was old and his eyes were too dim to see, that he called his older son Esau and said to him, "My son." And he said to him, "Here I am." Isaac said, "Behold now, I am old and I do not know the day of my death. Now then,

please take your gear, your quiver and your bow, and go out to the field and hunt game for me; and prepare a savory dish for me such as I love, and bring it to me that I may eat, so that my soul may bless you before I die."

Understand that a blessing is supposed to be a public event. This is a time of great celebration and all of the family, the servants, and those around that region are invited – this is a feast. Isaac's son is now being given this blessing, which is really the official enactment of the birthright, and what is Isaac planning to do? He is going to do it on the sly. It is only going to be between him and Esau. Why? Do you remember that phrase we read back in chapter 25? God told Rebekah, in verse 23b,

... the older shall serve the younger.

One of the problems with Isaac was that he had stubbornly refused to submit; to bend to the will of God. He thought that he could defy God successfully; that he could deny Him secretly in this area. So he was going to pull his son in, bless him before anyone found out, and then, it would be too late for Jacob.

Well, Rebekah is listening in. She is quite a character by now. She had the glass up to the wall of the tent and was listening. Perhaps she had expected Isaac to try something like this. Let us read the text and let the story tell itself. Look at verses 5 through 10 of Genesis, chapter 27.

Rebekah was listening while Isaac spoke to his son Esau. So when Esau went to the field to hunt for game to bring home, Rebekah said to her son Jacob, "Behold, I heard your father speak to your brother Esau, saying, 'Bring me some game and prepare a savory dish for me, that I may eat, and bless you in the presence of the Lord before my death.' Now therefore, my son, listen to me as I command you."

(she probably whispered this),

"Go now to the flock and bring me two choice young goats from there, that I may prepare them as a savory dish for your father, such as he loves. Then you shall bring it to your father, that he may eat, so that he may bless you before his death."

Jacob, like his mom, was really a deceiver because he thinks, "Well, Mom, there are some flaws in this plot. We forgot something."

Continue to verses 11 and 12.

Jacob answered his mother Rebekah, "Behold Esau my brother is a hairy man and I am a smooth man. Perhaps my father will feel me, then I will be a deceiver in his sight, and I will bring upon myself a curse and not a blessing."

The word "deceiver" is used, but I like the King James Version translation of "mock" better. He is saying, "Perhaps my dad who is blind, will be offended that I have taken advantage of his blindness."

Jacob did not want to mock or deceive Isaac in this way. He did not want to walk in and take advantage of his old dad's blind eyes that could not see. So he said, "I don't want to do this. So let's make sure that, if he ever asks, we've covered the bases. Let's make sure he doesn't catch me in the act."

Continue to verse 13a.

But his mother said to him, "Your curse be on me, my son; . . ."

In other words, "If he gets all over you, we'll just lay it right on me."

Continue to verses 13b through 16.

". . . only obey my voice, and go, get them for me." So he went and got them, and brought them to his mother; and his mother made savory food such as his father loved. Then Rebecca took the best garments of Esau her elder son, which were with her in the house, and put them on Jacob her younger son. And she put the skins of the young goats on his hands and on the smooth part of his neck.

This was just in case Isaac hugged him, which he probably would after giving a blessing. Continue to verse 17.

She also gave the savory food and the bread, which she had made, to her son Jacob."

This is really thickening. Look at verse 18.

Then he came to his father and said, "My father." And he said, "Here I am. Who are you, my son?"

In other words, "Which one are you?"

Continue to verses 19 through 20a.

Jacob said to his father, "I am Esau, your firstborn; I have done as you told me. Get

up, please, sit and eat of my game, that you may bless me." Isaac said to his son, "How is it that you have it so quickly, my son?" . . .

Uh, oh. They forgot there should have been more time involved. So he thinks, "What am I going to say? Oh, I've got it."

Look at verse 20b.

. . . And he said, "Because the Lord your God caused it to happen to me."

Wow, talk about blasphemy! "God blessed me out there. I caught it real quick." Now he is bringing God into it.

Continue to verse 21.

Then Isaac said to Jacob, "Please come close, that I may feel you, my son, whether you are really my son Esau or not."

Isaac is not such a dummy. Look at verses 22 through 24a.

So Jacob came close to Isaac his father, and he felt him and said, "The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau." He did not recognize him, because his hands were hairy like his brother Esau's hands; so he blessed him. And he said, "Are you really my son Esau?" . . .

This is a tragic, pitiful verse. Then Jacob looks his blind father in the face, verse 24b,

And he said, "I am."

Look at verses 25 through 27a.

So he said, "Bring it to me, and I will eat of my son's game, that I may bless you." And he brought it to him, and he ate; he also brought him wine and he drank. Then his father Isaac said to him, "Please come close and kiss me, my son." So he came close and kissed him; . . .

I would imagine this is probably hard for Jacob, as this may have been the first time his dad had ever kissed him, since his dad loved Esau. I would also imagine that this is very uncomfortable for Jacob and may have even made him cry. I do not know. This is a tragic story.

Continue to the next phrase in verse 27.

. . . and when he smelled the smell of his garments, he blessed him . . .

Now, Jacob gives the blessing. He says, in verses 28 and 29,

Now may God give you of the dew of heaven, and of the fatness of the earth, and an abundance of grain and new wine; may people serve you, and nations bow down to you; be master of your brothers, and may your mother's sons bow down to you. Cursed be those who curse you, and blessed be those who bless you.

The Blessing and The Departures

Well, the deception is complete. Tragically, it is about to be discovered. In fact, look at the very next verses, verses 30 through 33a of Genesis, chapter 27.

Now it came about, as soon as Isaac had finished blessing Jacob, and Jacob had hardly gone out from the presence of Isaac his father, that Esau his brother came in from his hunting. Then he also made savory food, and brought it to his father; and he said to his father, "Let my father arise and eat of his son's game, that you may bless me." Isaac his father said to him, "Who are you?" And he said, "I am your son, your firstborn, Esau." Then Isaac trembled violently, . . .

It is as if he recognized, in that brief moment, and it caused him to shake all over, that he had fought the will of God for a hundred and thirty-eight years. Now, even with his little plot to bless his son Esau, Jacob had come and received the blessing.

Now at this moment, something fantastic happens. Let us look at verse 33b.

. . . and [Isaac] said, "Who was he then that hunted game and brought it to me, so that I ate of all of it before you came, . . ."

(he knew who it was),

" . . . and blessed him? . . ."

(note the last part of the verse),

" . . . Yes, and he shall be blessed."

From the beginning of that terrible moment to the end of his speaking, it is as if Isaac finally resigned himself. Then he said, "Esau, I'm sorry, but Jacob will be the one who is blessed." It is as if he finally resigned himself to the will of God.

We read Esau's reaction in verses 34 through 38.

When Esau heard the words of his father, he cried out with an exceedingly great and bitter cry, . . .

(he began to literally scream),

. . . and said to his father, "Bless me, even me also, O my father!" And he said, "Your brother came deceitfully and has taken away your blessing." Then he said, "Is he not rightly named Jacob, for he has supplanted me these two times? He took away my birthright, . . ."

(that is a lie),

" . . . and behold, now he has taken away my blessing." And he said, "Have you not reserved a blessing for me?" But Isaac replied to Esau, "Behold, I have made him your master, and all his relatives I have given to him as servants; and with grain and new wine I have sustained him. Now as for you then, what can I do, my son?"

(think of the pitiful inflection in his voice, "What can I do?"),

Esau said to his father, "Do you have only one blessing, my father? Bless me, even me also, O my father." So Esau lifted up his voice and wept.

These are crocodile tears, as it were. These were no longer tears because Esau wanted the birthright, the blessing, these were tears because he now recognizes, as his father has just said, he will live off the fatness of the land. Jacob will have the grain; Jacob will be the master, and Esau says, "No! I want that."

It was too late, however. Isaac, his father, prophesied and this is literally a prophecy. This is not condemning Esau, this is just prophesying what would happen to Esau. Look at verses 39 through 40.

Then Isaac his father answered and said to him, "Behold, away from the fertility of the earth shall be your dwelling, and away from the dew of heaven from above. By your sword you shall live, and your brother you shall serve; but it shall come about when you become restless, that you will break his yoke from your neck."

Continue to verse 41.

So Esau bore a grudge against Jacob because of the blessing with which his father

had blessed him; and Esau said to himself, "The days of mourning for my father are near; then I will kill my brother Jacob."

There was no spiritual desire in Esau. He was still a man of the earth; a man of the flesh.

Two chief causes for marital discord

The tragedies of this home and a couple of the things that brought about most of the problems are the same things that exist in our marriages today. Let me give two key problems that cause marital discord.

Stubbornness in men

1. For men, we could call the problem stubbornness.

How many women are married to stubborn husbands? I know my wife married one, unfortunately.

Why is it that a man will ride around completely lost, but will not stop for directions? That example is fresh on my mind because I did it Friday night. The whole family was in the car, headed to the home of some church friends. I had been there once, a long time ago, and I thought, "Oh, I know how to get there. I don't need the directions."

I did not have a map in the car, so what did we do? We drove around town for thirty minutes before I finally stopped and got specific directions.

When we got to the home, the lady said, "I'm sorry you got lost."

My wife said, "Well, now I know my way around town."

That was marital discord.

Manipulation in women

2. For women, I think the problem is manipulation.

Now it is the women's turn. There is a tendency, before women tell their husbands what they want them to do on their day off, to cook their favorite meal.

Why is it that we tend, as men, to be stubborn, and, as women, to be manipulative? It goes all the way back to the garden, that we previously studied, when God told man that, because of the fall; because of sin, he would rule her. Implied in that is a domination; a stubbornness. To the woman, God said

their desire would be over him. The desire of women would be to manipulate men; to fashion them.

We find this in Isaac and Rebekah's home, and it literally wrecked it. It can wreck ours as well.

Application

The consequences of disharmony

Now I want to give the consequences, although painful, of disharmony in the home. Let me give three, before we close.

Grief

1. The first consequence is grief.

Turn back to Genesis, chapter 26 and look at verse 34.

When Esau was forty years old he married Judith the daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and Basemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite;

Then, look at verse 35.

and they brought grief to Isaac and Rebekah.

These wives were not women of the tribe; these were Canaanites; these were pagans. All of the spoiling that dad had done; all of the love that was there was soon disdained. Why? Because son had grown up to recognize the deceit; the partiality.

I think of the grief that perhaps Isaac felt when he recognized, after he had blessed Jacob, that he had had a chance; he had had years before he blessed his son to develop a relationship. He had had an opportunity to love his son Jacob, and he had turned his face away, shown partiality, and loved Esau instead.

Now it comes to Isaac that Jacob is the next patriarch. I cannot help but imagine that Isaac went back in his memory to his relationship with his dad, Abraham. It was a beautiful, close relationship. Perhaps Isaac retraced, in his imagination, that trip to Mount Moriah where he and his father had gone, arm in arm together, to do the will of God. Now Isaac had lost his own son. What grief he must have had.

Separation

2. The second consequence is separation.

The family is now broken apart. Both sons are gone. Isaac and Rebekah are a husband and wife who have been deceiving each other and lying to one another for decades. They had started out like Prince Charming and Snow White, but now they live in embarrassed silence.

Perhaps the saddest implication of this separation is in chapter 27. Note verse 42.

Now when the words of her elder son Esau were reported to Rebekah, she sent and called her younger son Jacob, and said to him, "Behold, your brother Esau is consoling himself concerning you by planning to kill you."

Now Rebekah will again manipulate, as she says, in verse 43,

Now, therefore, my son, obey my voice, and arise, flee to Haran, to my brother Laban! Stay with him a few days, until your brother's fury subsides, until your brother's anger against you subsides and he forgets what you did to him. Then I shall send and get you from there. . . ."

The tragedy is, ladies and gentlemen, that Jacob would be gone, not for a few days, but for twenty years. He would never see his mother again alive. She would never see her son again alive. In fact, the next time that Jacob returns to Canaan it will be when Jacob and Esau get back together again at the burial ceremony of their dad, Isaac.

This was the woman who was going to have it her way. She was going to manipulate; she was going to control. Instead of trusting God, Rebekah sent Jacob away not knowing that she would never see him again.

Silence

3. I think the third consequence is silence.

Perhaps the most tragic implication is that neither Isaac nor Rebekah are heard from again until chapter 35, when they are buried. Isaac had not been about to die, he was just trying to get this blessing slid under the carpet. He would, in fact, live for forty more years. I cannot help but believe that the final forty years of life for Isaac and Rebekah were years of great sadness.

The correction of disharmony

What are the solutions to disharmony? Let me give three.

Respect

1. The first is respect, especially from the wives – do not manipulate.

Perhaps you are married to a very stubborn man; perhaps you are married to an unbeliever. You may be separated from a husband who is an unbeliever, and you are praying that he will come to God. Perhaps you, like Rebekah, never learned. Can you learn to rely on the sovereign arms of a God who is in control?

Love

2. The second solution is more for the husbands, and that is, to love your wives.

Ephesians, chapter 5, verse 25a, says,

Husbands, love your wives . . .

Husbands, love your wives.

Instruction

3. The third solution is instruction.

Ephesians, chapter 6, verse 4, says,

Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

We need to recognize that God gives the spiritual increase in our children's lives and that even now, wherever they may be, God is in control. Yet, we still need to provide the best example possible, because they are watching.

Let me read the poem, *Little Eyes Upon You*, that I keep in a prominent place in my study. It is to a daddy, but it is a poem that I think, also applies to those who are not married and to those who do not have children. There are spiritual people who are younger in the Lord and are watching you. What do they see?

There are little eyes upon you and they're watching night and day.

There are little ears that quickly take in every word you say.

There are little hands all eager to do anything you do;

*And a little boy who's dreaming of the day
he'll be like you.*

*You're the little fellow's idol, you're the
wisest of the wise.*

*In his little mind about you no suspicions ever
rise.*

*He believes in you devoutly, holds all you say
and do;*

*He will say and do, in your way when he's
grown up just like you.*

*There's a wide-eyed little fellow who believes
you're always right;*

*And his eyes are always opened, and he
watches day and night.*

*You are setting an example every day in all
you do;*

*For the little boy who's waiting to grow up to
be like you.*

This has been the tale of two sons, but it has actually been about a family of four people. Perhaps I have spoken to:

- an Isaac who is resisting the will of God; who is stubbornly resisting God's desire because it does not fit his plan.
- a Rebekah who is fashioning her life, and the most important person in that life is herself.
- a Jacob who is living a lie; who is deceiving – that may be deceiving a spouse; deceiving a child; deceiving a teacher or a professor; deceiving a boss.
- an Esau, someone who never accepted the birthright and therefore, never had it; someone who had no spiritual insight or desire – for you, it is coming into the line of the Messiah and accepting Him as your Savior.

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Jacob's Ladder

Genesis 28

Introduction

In our last session we studied a tale of two sons. If you missed it, I would encourage you to request the tape, lest you think today, I am being too hard on poor Jacob.

We discovered, as we introduced the life of Jacob, that he had inherited his mother's ability to scheme. We saw him manipulate the birthright away from his twin brother Esau. We saw him, in one final sordid display of deceit, trick his elderly, blind father out of the blessing.

No sooner had Jacob stolen out of his father's tent, than Esau returned from the field expecting to receive the blessing himself. What would happen next was nothing less than an explosion in that family. I imagine the accusations flew about like poisoned arrows. Finally, Esau thought to himself, "My brother has tricked me for the very last time," and planned to kill him.

Rebekah, however, discovered Esau's intentions. She told Jacob, "Jacob, you need to leave because your brother's intending to kill you, perhaps in the night. We'll tell everybody that you're going to the old country to find a wife."

If you think television has great plots, you have not been reading Genesis. The plot begins to really thicken in chapter 28. In fact, let us pick up our story of Jacob in that chapter.

Jacob's Departure From Home

We will begin reading in Genesis, chapter 28, verses 5 through 9.

Then Isaac sent Jacob away, and he went to Paddan-aram to Laban, son of Bethuel the Aramean, the brother of Rebekah, the mother of Jacob and Esau.

Now Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob and sent him away to Paddan-aram to take to himself a wife from there, and that when he blessed him he charged him saying, "You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan,"

and that Jacob had obeyed his father and his mother and had gone to Paddan-aram.

So Esau saw that the daughters of Canaan displeased his father Isaac;

and Esau went to Ishmael, and married, besides the wives that he had, Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael, Abraham's son, the sister of Nebaioth.

Now, let me stop at this point just long enough to tell you how tragic this must of been. Here is Esau, who has discovered now that he is without the blessing. He who has been the favorite son of his father has now been, in a sense, replaced by Jacob, the supplanter; that is Jacob, who has taken the place of another. And Esau, not really having a heart for spiritual things, discovered in his brother, obedience to the patriarch father. Jacob would indeed, take a wife from among the relatives; from among the tribe of the family of Abraham. So Esau says, "Maybe if I go and get a wife, perhaps then I'll regain the favor from my father."

How sad that was. Isaac and Rebekah, as we discovered last session, were very partial parents.

One loved Esau and the other loved Jacob. Here is Esau vainly trying to win the approval of his father. We do not know that he ever did, and it is sad.

Let us leave Esau now. We will not hear from him again for nearly twenty years.

Jacob's conflict, loneliness, bankruptcy

Let us look at Jacob, beginning in verses 10 and 11 of chapter 28.

Then Jacob departed from Beersheba, and went toward Haran. He came to a certain place and spent the night there, because the sun had set; and he took one of the stones of the place and put it under his head, and lay down in that place.

Now even though Jacob is deserving of every bit of trouble that he is about to receive, let us, for a moment, try to be a little sympathetic by climbing into his sandals and looking out through his eyes. Jacob is anything but an outdoorsman. He has probably never toughed it out, under the stars, a single night of his life. In fact, chapter 25, verse 27b, tells us that,

. . . Jacob was a peaceful man, living in tents.

Jacob was a sensitive man who had learned to cook. He was his mother's favorite and had grown up tied to the apron strings of that possessive mother. He was pampered by all of the servants. His father was the wealthy patriarch. Yet, here he is now, totally alone, desolate, without anything, spending the night out in the open.

He has just embarked on a trip that will take him many days. It is a five hundred mile journey. The text indicates that when he stops to sleep, he did not choose that place as a campsite. Instead, he spent the night there because the sun had set.

Jacob is a man who had probably never camped in his life. He had probably never even hiked, yet here he is trekking five hundred miles. Finally, not wanting to stop, he has to because it is dark. We find no record of a campsite. We find no record of a campfire or a meal. All we see is Jacob coming to a point in the barren, rock filled region outside of Luz, thinking, "Oh, I can't go any further. I guess I'd better spend the night here."

Jacob probably takes his cloak off, wads it up, finds a little rock, puts it on the rock, puts his head down, and hopes the night will pass quickly. I would

imagine, as he lay there, thoughts were racing through his mind; such as, "Will I ever see my father and mother again? Will I ever return to my homeland? Will my brother Esau, catch up with me and kill me? Was it really worth stealing the birthright and deceiving my way into the blessing?"

Ladies and gentlemen, God was bringing Jacob to a point of teachability. To do that, God had to bring Jacob to a very lonely, desolate place where all of the props had been knocked out that had once muffled the voice of God. Now Jacob was all alone. There in that lonely place; there in that barren, rocky region of loneliness, God would speak.

Have you ever been there? Have you ever pillowed your head on some tragedy, some trial, a difficulty, a financial loss, some pain? Perhaps there has been a time in your life when all of the props were smashed and you discovered that they had been muffling God's voice. There in that barren region, God speaks to Jacob, and He will speak to you.

Jacob's Dream Near Haran

God approaches Jacob by way of a dream. Notice that with me in verse 12a.

He [Jacob] had a dream . . .

Three elements in Jacob's dream

There are three elements in this dream. Let us look at each one.

Ladder

1. The first element of Jacob's dream is a ladder. Look at the next phrase in verse 12,

. . . and behold, a ladder was set on the earth with its top reaching to heaven . . .

"Ladder" could be translated "ramp" or "stairway". This was literally a smooth, as it were, ramp, a "çullam" that reached from the gate of heaven right down to where Jacob was sleeping, or dreaming.

Angels

2. The second element is the angels of God. This is given in the last part of verse 12.

. . . and behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it.

The second element is the angels who are symbolizing the servants doing the bidding of God.

Voice of God

3. The third element is the voice of or the very presence of God.

Look at verses 13 and 14.

And behold, the Lord stood above it and said, "I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie, I will give it to you and to your descendants. Your descendants will also be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread out to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and in you and in your descendants shall all of the families of the earth be blessed."

It is interesting to understand that Jacob had deceived his father into giving him the covenant blessing. So, there is a good chance, in that lonely place, that Jacob would think, "Am I really God's choice?"

What God is doing is letting Jacob in on the fact that, had he just waited, God would have given him the blessing anyway. Jacob had always been God's elect; he had been the selected one to carry on the messianic line. So, in this wilderness place, God does nothing more than confirm, "Yes, you are the one. You are indeed, the next patriarch in line. You are the chosen one."

Four promises in God's blessing to Jacob

In this blessing, there are four promises from God to Jacob. Let me give them to you.

Presence – "I am with you"

1. First, in a compassionate way, God promises His presence.

Look at the first part of verse 15.

Behold, I am with you . . .

God is promising His presence or His companionship. God says, "Behold," or "Look, I am with you. You are not alone."

I would imagine that Jacob, never having been out on his own; never having been alone, was probably scared to death. This was a howling wasteland; a

place of snakes; a place of perhaps wild animals, and all we really know is that Jacob just took what he had on his back and took off from his home for Haran. So, God comes along and says, "Jacob, you can't see Me, but I want you to know that I am with you."

Protection – "I will keep you"

2. Secondly, God promises His protection.

Look at the next phrase in verse 15.

. . . and will keep you wherever you go, . . .

The word "keep" could be translated "guard". This is a promise of God's protection or guardianship.

Guidance – "I will bring you"

3. The third promise is of God's guidance.

Look at the next part of verse 15.

. . . and will bring you back to this land; . . .

Jacob was perhaps wondering, "Will I ever return? Will I come back home?."

God says, "You will."

Assurance – "I will not leave you"

4. Fourthly, God promises His assurance.

The last part of verse 15 gives us this fourth promise of assurance. God says,

. . . for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.

In other words, "I will accomplish what I've promised you."

Jacob's Response to God

Now the response of Jacob is twofold. Let us look at these.

Initial response – Discerning

1. Jacob's initial response to God's blessing is discerning.

Notice his first response in verse 16.

Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it."

This first response is one of discernment or insight. Jacob said, in effect, “I would have never believed that God was here, but in fact, He is.”

Jacob had localized God at Isaac’s altar. However, before we are too hard on him, we need to realize that we do the very same thing. We localize God in church. He is with me when I am in church. He is with me when I am praying. He is with me when I open and read the Bible. That is where God is. But is God with me at 6:30 on Monday morning when I am on my way to work? Is God with me in the shop or in the kitchen? Is God with me in the emergency room of the hospital or at the funeral home? *Yes*, God is there. Although we tend to localize God in, what we call, spiritual things, God is everywhere. Because we are believers, God is, in effect, in us.

Verse 17 is a great response, Jacob was filled with trusting fear. Note that verse.

He was afraid and said, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.”

In other words, “Out here, can you believe that? Here among the rocks and the loneliness, *this* is the place of God; *this* is in fact, the gate of heaven!

This is a wonderful place to stop because Jacob has been so discerning, and it is as if he worships God. But he goes back to sleep, evidently, and we have to continue, although I would rather not.

Verses 18 and 19 begin to give us a totally different response. It is as if Jacob went back to sleep, but then he gets up very early in the morning.

So Jacob rose early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on its top. He called the name of the place Bethel; however, previously the name of the city had been Luz.

The name “Luz” means, “the place of light,” and is perhaps, translated “separation”. In these verses, “Bethel” means, “the house of God”. He is, in effect, saying that this is the place of God.

Final response – Foolish

2. Now, in his final response, Jacob will do something foolish – he will make a vow. This is the first vow of the Old Testament, and I

want to give three things that were wrong with this vow.

Self-serving

- First, Jacob’s vow was totally self-serving or self-centered.

Get your pencil ready and I want you to underline every time he says, “I,” “me,” and “my.” You will find it nine times. Look at Jacob’s vow in verses 20 and 21.

Then Jacob made a vow, saying, “If God will be with me, and will keep me on this journey that I take, and will give me food to eat and garments to wear, and I return to my father’s house in safety, then the Lord will be my God.”

That is terrific. Jacob says, in effect, “God, if you really come through with what you have just promised me in this vision, then I will do some things.”

Note that Jacob is totally self-serving in this vow.

Doubting

- Secondly, this vow implied doubt in God.

Verse 21a says,

and I return to my father’s house in safety . .

.

In other words, Jacob is saying, “If You can really do what You’ve said You’ll do, and I’m not really sure You can, and I don’t know of anything I can do except trust You, then I guess I will trust You. And at the end of the journey, if I am safely back in the tents of my mother and father, then I’ll give You the benefit of the doubt.”

Bargaining with God

- The third element of this vow that I think is wrong, is that it attempts to bargain with God.

There are three things in this bargain. Note them carefully.

- First, Jacob promises to let God be his God.

Look again at the last part of verse 21.

. . . then the Lord will be my God.

Jacob promises to acknowledge God as his God.

Now, before we are too hard on him, I think we often do this as well. We say, “Lord, if You do so and so, I’ll *really* serve You. If You help me out with this, will I ever be loyal to You. I’ll even acknowledge You at the job; I might even witness for You. If You make my life fall right into place; if You smooth out the path; if You fill every need that I have; if You take care of all of my problems, *then*, God, I’ll give You the benefit of the doubt that You exist, and You will be my God.”

That is real faith? Jacob had to learn. God would put him in school to learn, over the next twenty years, that faith is living without scheming. Christianity is living without scheming; without manipulating; without controlling. Jacob seeks to control God.

- Secondly, Jacob offers to make a memorial to God.

Look at verse 22a.

This stone, which I have set up as a pillar, will be God’s house . . .

As if God’s going to be impressed. Can you see God in heaven calling the angels over, “Look Jacob’s made a memorial!”

“Oh, really? Out of gold?”

“No, it’s a pile of rocks.”

That is really impressive. Why, when God would set down the details to build His house, you may remember that the beautiful temple of Solomon was to be bedecked with jewelry and gold and silver. And here is Jacob with a little pile of rocks, saying, “God, this will be my memorial to You, if You pull all of this off.”

I would imagine that God was thrilled.

- Thirdly, Jacob offers a tenth of his substance.

In verse 22b, Jacob says,

. . . and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You.

This is classic Christianity of today. In other words, “God, if You bless me with wealth, I’ll give some of it back to You. If You give me all of this, Lord, guess what – the more You give me, the more I’ll give back to You, as if You need it.”

I think this is the attitude that most of us have when it comes to giving. We think, “Lord, now wait a second, my giving is dependent upon You giving to

me. You give me a lot, and I’ll give You a little more.”

The sad thing is that Jacob thought he could bribe God with a dime.

God’s Response to Jacob

By now, I am looking for a flash of lightning and a simmering little pile of ashes where Jacob once stood bargaining with an almighty God. However, God responds to Jacob in two ways. These are implied.

Silence

1. The first way God responds is by silence.

Now silence is good because there is no flash of lightning; there is no powder puff on the ground where Jacob once stood. That is good.

However, silence is bad because Jacob will go for twenty years without ever hearing the voice of God. Jacob will go without direction.

Patience

2. The second response is, I think, even more beautiful; that is, a response of patience.

God says, in effect, as He chuckles under His breath, “Oh you little bargainer; you little barterer, I’m going to send you to school. Your teacher is going to be Laban, and he’s a master at bargaining. He’ll change your wages ten times. He’ll trick you into marrying his older daughter when you thought you were getting the younger daughter. He’s going to take care of you, and there you will learn that faith in Me comes without the scheming; without the manipulating; without the bargaining. It is simply a matter of trust in My sovereignty.”

Would Jacob ever learn that God wanted to be part of his every day life! God wants to be the priority. God will not settle for anything less than commitment to Him apart from bargaining.

You might say, “Well, ah, it would be wonderful if God would give me a ladder. If God would give me something like that, I would never respond like Jacob. If I had seen God and the angels descending and ascending on that ladder, that ramp, that ‘cullam,’ I’d never be the same.”

I want to point out a beautiful picture in John, chapter 1. John has given you a ladder. Look at John,

chapter 1, verses 48 through 50. Nathanael is contemplating concerning the Messiah under a fig tree. He is then brought to Jesus.

Nathanael said to Him, "How do you know me?" Jesus answered and said to him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." Nathanael answered Him, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel!" Jesus answered and said to him, "Because I said to you that I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You shall see greater things than these."

Now, in verse 51, Jesus will quote from Genesis, chapter 28, verse 12.

And He said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you shall see the heavens opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on . . .

(what?),

. . . the Son of Man."

Jesus Christ, in effect, said, "I am the Ladder. I am the Revelation between God and man. I am the One that is giving you access to the very throne of God."

Now, you and I, living in this century, after the cross, have so much more than Jacob ever had. He had a passing dream. We have an indwelling Christ; we have the Ladder living with us day to day. Yet, we still bargain; we still scheme; we still barter; we still bribe; we still say, "God, my relationship with You is dependent upon what You do for me."

God wants us to live the kind of life that treats Christ as if He is living every day of the week.

Conclusion

Several American ministers were visiting a collective farm in Siberia. The local commissar, not knowing they were ministers, told them that the people

were very proud of their church and that he wanted to take them to see the church. The ministers followed him down a path through the village way. Soon, to their surprise, they noticed a beautiful white building with onion shaped turrets.

As these ministers drew closer to the building, they noticed that on the walls of the church, communistic slogans had been painted. They also noticed that the yard was fairly well kept. It appeared to be a place of worship. Perhaps people even went here, who knew?

As the ministers walked in through the front doors, they were surprised to find the vestibule much like an ordinary church. However, when they stepped through the doors leading into the auditorium, their mouths dropped open. It no longer had any semblance of a church sanctuary. It was covered, from floor to ceiling, with chicken coops filled with cackling hens. The commissar gestured proudly and said, "Our church is a chicken hatchery. It's the finest one in Siberia."

The commissar then announced to these ministers, "Chickens are real, God isn't."

I fear that we live with that attitude. We say that this pain, this sickness, this difficulty, this problem, this financial loss – these things are real – and we ask, "God where are You?"

There in the rocky region of Luz, God came to Jacob and said, "I am here. I designed the pillow that you laid your head upon. I planned for your path, though trembling and frightening as it was, to come by this way. And when you came, you discovered that I was here waiting for you."

Jesus Christ is there for you too. He said, in Hebrews, chapter 13, verse 5b,

. . . "I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you."

Whether it is in the sanctuary of a church or the barren region of loneliness and isolation, God is there.

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Discipline, Deception & Distrust

Genesis 29-31

A Panoramic View: Twenty Years In the Life of Jacob

We want to take a panoramic view of Jacob's life today. After studying three chapters that will cover twenty years of his life, I came up with the sum total of three words to describe that twenty year experience – "Discipline, Deception, and Distrust." It is a shady passage or revelation in the life of Jacob and yet, when we come to the end of it, I want to show you a sovereign God and the way in which He worked it all out for Jacob's good.

Please turn in your Bible to Genesis, chapter 29, where we will continue in our study of the life of Jacob.

Love At First Sight

We will call the first scene in Genesis, chapter 29, "Love At First Sight". This is probably the most attractive part of the entire passage we are going to look at today.

Let us read verses 1 through 3.

Then Jacob went on his journey, and came to the land of the sons of the east. He looked, and saw a well in the field, and behold, three flocks of sheep were lying there beside it, for from that well they watered the flocks. Now the stone on the mouth of the well was large. When all the flocks were gathered there, they would then roll the stone from the mouth of the well and water the sheep, and put the stone back in its place on the mouth of the well.

Let us pause at this point, and look at this picture. Jacob has just completed a five hundred mile journey. You may remember that he left his home after he had stolen the blessing. His mother overheard that Esau was going to kill him, so she said, "Go to the old country and find a wife."

That was really a disguise for getting out of the home. So, Jacob left on a five hundred mile journey, all alone, as we studied in our last discussion.

He has just finished that long, tedious journey when he comes upon this well in the middle of a field of grass with sheep lying around it. There were also a number of shepherds, probably teenagers, who were doing the job of tending the sheep, sitting perhaps, on a sloping, grassy hillside nearby. Jacob walks up to this group of young men and says, in verse 4,

*... "My brothers, where are you from?"
And they said, "We are from Haran."*

Jacob's heart begins to beat because that's where he wants to head. Continue to verses 5 and 6.

He said to them, "Do you know Laban the son of Nahor?" And they said, "We know him." And he said to them, "Is it well with him?" And they said, "It is well, and here is Rachel his daughter coming with the sheep."

Now, as you know, Jacob is looking for a wife, and she needs to be a relative from his family. He has just discovered that he has arrived at the destination to which he has been traveling for probably many months. The shepherds say to him, "You've just arrived at where you've been traveling, and I want you to know that the shepherdess, Rachel, is coming with her sheep."

If you will skip to verse 17, we will take a look at this Rachel, as well as her sister Leah. They are the two daughters of Laban.

And Leah's eyes were weak, but Rachel was beautiful of form and face.

When it says that Leah's eyes were weak, it is using an Old Testament idiom that does not mean she had a vision problem. Unfortunately, it means that she was very unattractive; it was the polite way of saying that this woman was . . . ugly.

It is interesting too, that in Old Testament times when they wanted to say a woman was beautiful, they would frequently use the expression that she was "cow eyed". I do not know how many women would really get a kick out of being called "cow eyed," but if you were attractive, you were referred to as "cow eyed". If you were unattractive, you were "tender eyed" or "weak eyed".

When we get further in the passage, you will understand a little better the reason that Moses inserted this interesting verse. It tells us that Leah was very unattractive, but Rachel was beautiful of form and face. Rachel's description is the Old Testament way of saying, "Wow! She's beautiful of form and face."

He is being polite, I guess. Evidently, Rachel is extremely attractive; she is very beautiful.

Jacob sees Rachel coming along with the sheep and he begins to act like a hot shot. Notice what he does in verse 7.

He said [to the shepherds], "Behold, it is still high day; it is not time for the livestock to be gathered. Water the sheep, and go, pasture them."

This is clever. Jacob is still the manipulator. He sees this beautiful young girl coming along and she is a potential candidate for marriage, so he tries to get rid of the shepherds. He says, "Hey, you know, it's really not time to gather the sheep for watering. So, I'll tell you what, give them a little to drink and head for the pasture. Get gone."

This is kind of like a boy getting rid of his kid brother so he can have time alone. They don't buy it. Look at verse 8.

But they said, "We cannot, until all the flocks are gathered, and they roll the stone from the mouth of the well; then we water the sheep."

Jacob probably growls under his breath at that response. Note what he does next, in verses 9 and 10.

While he was still speaking with them, Rachel came with her father's sheep, for she was a shepherdess. When Jacob saw Rachel the daughter of Laban his mother's brother, and the sheep of Laban his mother's brother, Jacob went up, and rolled the stone from the mouth of the well and watered the flock of Laban his mother's brother.

This stone at the mouth of the well is large. That is why they waited until several shepherds were around because it took several shepherds to move this rock off the well. But Jacob is going to be a real tough guy. Rachel comes along and he wants to impress her, so he goes and, by himself, rolls that rock off the top of the well. He probably flexes a little bit to get Rachel's attention. Then he waters her sheep.

This is a guy who has never worked a day in his life. He is the pampered son of the patriarch who had many servants. But in these verses, Jacob is really excited about watering Rachel's sheep.

Now what happens next is a shock. At some point, while Jacob is watering Rachel's sheep, they probably communicated. Then, he musters up all of the courage that he can and, the next verse says,

. . . Jacob kissed Rachel . . .

I would imagine he is awkward and she is shocked, but I do not see a slap anywhere in here – so, maybe there is hope. Jacob's next action, in the last part of this verse 11, is really impressive. He,

. . . lifted his voice and wept.

Imagine, he has just kissed a beautiful young girl and he starts crying. Ladies, what would you do if a fellow kissed you for the first time, and then, started to weep? That is exactly what happened with Jacob and Rachel. He kisses her and then he begins to cry. She is probably wondering, "What's wrong? What's going on?"

On his behalf, Jacob was probably overcome with emotion due to the fact that she was the daughter of his mother's brother. All of the recent events probably overcame him as well – the loneliness, the estrangement from his family. Then, here was a beautiful girl who may have even looked like Rebekah and reminded him of her. So, he begins to cry.

The next verse goes on to say,

Jacob told Rachel that he was a relative of her father and that he was Rebekah's son, and she ran and told her father.

Continue to verse 13.

So when Laban heard the news of Jacob his sister's son, he ran to meet him, and embraced him and kissed him and brought him to his house. Then he related to Laban all these things.

I imagine verse 13 probably covers several hours. Jacob related to Laban "all these things," which probably included: the fact that he had deceived his brother, the fact that he had tricked his old blind father, the fact that he had manipulated his mother to get his way, and the fact that he had slipped away in the night to keep from being killed by his brother, Esau. He probably told Laban the whole story.

Verse 14 tells us,

Laban said to him, "Surely you are my bone and my flesh." And he [Jacob] stayed with him a month.

Now notice the set up for the next scene when the deceiver will be deceived. Look at verse 15, which occurs after Jacob has stayed with Laban for a month.

Then Laban said to Jacob, "Because you are my relative, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me, what shall your wages be?"

Now understand that Jacob is not serving Laban. Jacob is not working for Laban, he is staying in Laban's home. Evidently, Jacob thought that he would be entertained at length. So Laban, instead of coming along and saying, "Get to work!" comes along and tactfully says, "How much would you like to be paid for your work?"

In other words, "Get moving."

I think Laban knows what Jacob is going to respond with. We are told in verses 16 and 18,

Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the older was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. Now Jacob loved Rachel, . . .

(for that month, it was probably obvious that he was courting Laban's daughter),

So he said, "I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel."

Laban probably laughed up his sleeve. Understand that it is legitimate for Jacob to serve Laban because Jacob is penniless and has no dowry, no money. He has left home without anything, so it is perfectly legitimate that he will work in place of a dowry for his wife. So in verse 19,

Laban said, "It is better that I give her to you than to give her to another man; . . ."

(in other words, "I could care less, but okay."),

" . . . stay with me."

Continue to verse 20.

So Jacob served seven years for Rachel and they seemed to him but a few days because of his love for her.

Can you imagine? Isn't that disgusting? It is hard to believe, but seven years seemed as only a few days.

The Deceiver Is Deceived

Now, verse 21 begins the passage of the next scene that we will call, "The Deceiver is Deceived".

Then Jacob said to Laban, "Give me my wife, for my time is completed . . ."

I do not know if it had been just a day in his mind, but he had been counting down the days – 2,555 days. I guarantee that on the 2,556th day, Jacob comes to Laban and says, "My days are completed."

In other words, it is the end of seven years. Jacob says to Laban, "Look at my calendar – I've marked down every day. Give her to me."

Continue to verses 22 through 24.

Laban gathered all the men of the place and made a feast. Now in the evening he took his daughter Leah, and brought her to him; and Jacob went in to her. Laban also gave his maid Zilpah to his daughter Leah as a maid.

You need to understand that it was the custom for the bride to be heavily veiled. I would imagine, clothed in this way, the only thing that could be seen of her were her fingertips. As a result, Jacob would not have a clue that this is Leah. It is dark as well, and he is overcome with love and emotion. He has worked seven years for this and he probably hardly took a second glance.

Now they are in the wedding tent and there is the wedding week to fulfill. Notice the next verse.

So it came about in the morning that, behold, . . .

(that could be translated, “Look!”),

. . . it was Leah! . . .

It is almost as if Jacob is doing the writing now. The next morning, the sun streams in through the slit of the canvas, perhaps creating some kind of glow in the tent. He wakes up realizing, “Oh, I’m a married man now.”

He rolls over, perhaps to give Rachel a kiss, and “*Look! It’s Leah!*” I can imagine he jumped five feet into the air, wrapped that blanket around him, and said, “What are you doing here?”

I wish that conversation had been included. She is probably cowering over at the edge of the bed, “Well, you know, my Dad and I were part of this.”

Jacob gets on his clothing, runs down to where Laban is staying, and says, in the last part of verse 25,

. . . “What is this you have done to me? Was it not for Rachel that I served with you? Why then have you deceived me?”

I love Laban’s response, in verse 26. Jacob has met his match. Laban casually responds, “Oh, didn’t I tell you about a clause in the contract? We have a custom in our town . . .”

. . . It is not the practice in our place to marry off the younger before the firstborn.

“Didn’t I tell you about that?”

Jacob is probably seething. So Laban says, in verse 27a,

Complete the week of this one, and we will give you the other also . . .”

There is a lot there that is implied that Moses left out. “Complete the week” means to complete the wedding week. In other words, fake it for a week.

Jacob knows he will be the laughing stock of the community if he ever lets on that he has been deceived like this. So, for a week, he is trying to smile. I can see Leah – she has got her arm around him, “got my husband.” I can see the wedding picture now – she is beaming; he is snarling. But completing the week was what he had to do if he wanted to get Rachel, so he did.

Finally, Rachel is given to him. Skip to verse 30.

So Jacob went in to Rachel also, and indeed he loved Rachel more than Leah, and he served with Laban for another seven years.

I cannot imagine.

Sir Walter Scott wrote, “Oh what a tangled web we weave, when first we practice to deceive.”

Jacob is beginning to reap what he sowed.

Norman Rockwell, who is one of my favorite artists, painted an interesting scene. Is this particular painting, a woman is at a butcher counter buying a Thanksgiving turkey. She is perhaps, in her sixties and is dressed very properly. She is standing at the counter with a smug smile on her face. On the other side of the counter, the butcher is standing behind the scales with a sly little grin on his face.

If you just look at the painting briefly, you will miss it. If you look closely, however, Rockwell has revealed their hands. The butcher’s thumb is pressing down on the scale behind the Thanksgiving turkey – and the lady has her finger pressing up on the scale. Deceiver meets deceiver!

That is a classic illustration of Jacob who has been, for his entire life, pressing up on the scale. He has been manipulating circumstances; making sure that he arranges the weight of his activities in his life. However, he meets a butcher by the name of Laban, who has a very heavy thumb. So the deceiver is deceived.

Let me point out several ironies in the way that Jacob was deceived:

- just as Jacob had deceived his father, he had been deceived by Rachel’s father;
- just as Jacob had pretended to be Esau, Leah had pretended to be Rachel;
- just as Jacob had dressed in his brother’s clothing, Leah had dressed in Rachel’s wedding clothing.

If there was ever a time in the history of humanity when a man took a dose of his own medicine, it was then.

The Battle For the Babies

The next scene could be entitled, “The Battle For the Babies”. Look at verse 31 through 32a.

Now the Lord saw that Leah was unloved, and He opened her womb, but Rachel was barren. Leah conceived and bore a son and named him Reuben . . .

Then, in the next several verses, we have a detailed account of all of the children that are born to Jacob. It is rather sad because there is a tremendous

amount of jealousy and fighting inside that home; it is now a place of discord and strife.

However, you cannot help but pity Leah. Verse 31 says that the Lord had pity on her because He saw that she was unloved. Even though she had manipulated her way into that wedding, it is interesting that God had pity that she was unloved.

Note also, the names of the sons. These names speak volumes of a very sad, lonely, frustrated woman. Leah named her first son Reuben. That literally means, "Look, a son!"

In that economy, a son was the greatest thing you could give your husband. Bearing a son would bring an immense amount of pride and appreciation. Leah has a son and says, "Look, it's a son!" But Jacob does not look.

Leah's next son is named Simeon, which means, "hearing". She is saying, "God has heard me. Now, Jacob, will you hear me? Will you love me?" Yet, he does not.

Leah's third son is Levi, which means, "joined". In other words, "Won't this son bring about the attachment that I so desire from my husband?" But that does not happen.

It is interesting that the final son's name is Judah, which means, "Praise the Lord!" It is as if Leah reached a point in her life of realizing that Jacob was not going to respond to her or show love or affection to her. So, when the fourth son comes along, she simply names him, "Praise God!" It is a sad story.

Notice what Rachel is doing in verse 1 of chapter 30.

. . . Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children . . .

She is barren, so her first act of desperation is done in verse 1. She goes to Jacob and blames him.

. . . "Give me children, or else I die." . . .

Continue to verse 2.

Then Jacob's anger burned against Rachel, and he said, "Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?"

Then, in Rachel's second act of desperation, she gives Jacob a concubine, or her maid. Look at verse 3.

She said, "Here is my maid Bilhah, go in to her that she may bear on my knees, that through her I too may have children."

What we have going on, ladies and gentlemen, is a real battle. Who can give Jacob the most children?

Now Leah will follow suit and give her handmaid to Jacob because she has discovered that after the fourth child, she is not having children anymore. So these two sisters are constantly fighting.

One commentator suggested that this battle is one huge poker game. Each side is raising the ante. I thought about this, and it is as if one woman says, "I bid one wife."

Then another one says, "Well, I bid one wife and four children."

The other one responds, "Well, I'll match your wife and raise you a concubine and her two children."

The other one replies, "Well, I'll raise you another concubine."

That makes one wife, one concubine, and six children, against one wife, one concubine, and two children. Not that I know how to play poker, you understand.

And what is Jacob doing all of this time? Is he complaining? Oh no. Is he providing a solution? Not on your life. As a result, this feud reaches a boiling point. Look at verse 14 of chapter 30.

Now in the days of wheat harvest Reuben went and found mandrakes in the field, and brought them to his mother Leah. Then Rachel said to Leah, "Please give me some of your son's mandrakes."

Mandrakes were considered aphrodisiacs; that is, fertility helps. Note Leah's response to Rachel, in verse 15a. This is classic.

But she said to her, "Is it a small matter for you to take my husband?" . . .

Here is the deceiver, here is Leah, who slipped into that wedding tent, accusing Rachel of taking her husband. What a fight. But Rachel says to her, in verse 15b,

. . . "Therefore he may lie with you tonight in return for your son's mandrakes."

Rachel says, "Okay, he's yours, just give me the fertility helps."

Continue to verse 16.

When Jacob came in from the field in the evening, then Leah went out to meet him and said, "You must come in to me, for I have surely hired you with my son's mandrakes." So he lay with her that night.

Jacob is really a spiritual giant, isn't he?

Look at verses 17 and 18.

God gave heed to Leah, and she conceived and bore Jacob a fifth son. Then Leah said, "God has given me my wages, because I gave my maid to my husband." So she named him Issachar.

The passage then goes on to tell about all of the other children that they have. Because of this, that home was in tremendous turmoil. Each woman was trying to manipulate a loving response.

There are principles in this that contain a message. There is a message to husbands that we are not to try to manipulate a loving response from our wives. There is a message to wives that you are not to try to manipulate and manage some kind of loving response from your husband. We are to love unconditionally, regardless of response. If we try to buy or bribe love and affection from our spouse, the only thing that will happen is that we will get frustrated.

Vindicated At Last

The next scene is one of vindication. We will call this, "Vindicated At Last". I will boil down the last part of chapter 30 to a couple of statements. Let me at least read verse 25a.

Now it came about when Rachel had borne Joseph . . .

Rachel finally had a son and, according to verse 24,

She named him Joseph, saying, "May the Lord give me another son."

It is interesting that when she finally has a son, she names him, "Lord give me another one." There is no contentment in that woman's life.

Well, let me boil it down because we do not have time to read all of the passage. Jacob finally goes to Laban and proposes to leave. He wants to take his wives and his children and go. When he makes this proposal, verse 27 reveals the selfishness of Laban.

But Laban said to him, "If now it pleases you, stay with me; I have divined that the Lord has blessed me on your account."

In other words, "You are my ticket to material wealth. You're the patriarch. Wherever you go, God's blessing goes. So please stay with me."

Jacob finally reaches an agreement with Laban. He says, "Look, let's divide the herd. You let me have the spotted, the speckled, the striped."

The predominant color of Bedouin sheep was white and the goats were dark brown. It was rare for there to be a speckled, a spotted, or a striped sheep. So Jacob is saying, "You know I am penniless. I've got wives and all these children and no way to support them. So, why don't you give me the measly part of your flock and from that, I'll develop a herd of my own."

Laban responds, "Okay, you deserve that."

So Jacob and Laban go through the herd and divide it. I want you to notice what happens after the flock is divided. Look at verse 36 – there is so much trust between these two men.

And he [Laban] put a distance of three days' journey between himself and Jacob, and Jacob fed the rest of Laban's flocks.

In other words, "I don't trust you Jacob. You might slip over here and inter-breed these sheep so that you'll come up with more spotted, speckled, and striped sheep. So, I'm going to leave and I'm going to be gone three days journey away so you can't get near me."

However, God intervened and turned that measly little flock into an incredible flock. Look at verse 43.

So the man became exceedingly prosperous, and had large flocks and female and male servants and camels and donkeys.

Vindication, at last.

Eloping, Twenty Years Late

Now, Laban's spirit is really going to become apparent in this next section that we could entitle, "Eloping, Twenty Years Late". Look at chapter 31, verse 1.

Now Jacob heard the words of Laban's sons, saying, "Jacob has taken away all that was our father's, and from what belonged to our father he has made all this wealth."

Isn't that interesting? Continue to verse 2.

Jacob saw the attitude of Laban, and behold, it was not friendly toward him as formerly.

Skip to verse 4.

So Jacob sent and called Rachel and Leah to his flock in the field,

This is for privacy sake. Continue to verses 5 through 7.

and said to them, “I see your father’s attitude, that it is not friendly toward me as formerly, but the God of my father has been with me. You know that I have served your father with all my strength. Yet your father has cheated me and changed my wages ten times; however, God did not allow him to hurt me.”

Skip to verses 11 and 13.

Then the angel of God said to me in the dream, “Jacob,” and I said, “Here I am.” . . . “I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar, where you made a vow to Me; now arise, leave this land, and return to the land of your birth.”

So God has given His approval that Jacob is to leave. The only thing is, He did not tell Jacob to do it during the night. Jacob waits until Laban has gone away to shear his sheep, and then he gets all of his wives and his children, the concubines, the servants, the donkeys, and the cattle and he heads back home.

Of course, when Laban finds out, he is very incensed. He catches up with Jacob and they finally confront one another. Jacob *erupts* and says, in a sense, “How dare you try to hold me back!” Look at verse 38 of chapter 31.

These twenty years I have been with you; your ewes and your female goats have not miscarried, nor have I eaten the rams of your flocks.

In other words, “I have taken careful care of your ewes and female goats. And I haven’t taken care of my own business expenses at your account. I haven’t fed myself and my men from your herd.”

Continue to verse 39.

That which was torn of beasts I did not bring to you; I bore the loss of it myself. You required it of my hand whether stolen by day or stolen by night.

There was no insurance policy to cover losses. So, in other words, “I served you. I took care of your

flock. I made sure there were no miscarriages. I made sure that I didn’t eat at your expense. Whenever one died or was stolen, I took care of it out of my own pocket. And I did this for twenty years!”

Look at verse 40.

Thus I was: by day the heat consumed me, and the frost by night, and my sleep fled from my eyes.

In other words, he is saying, “I didn’t have a vacation for twenty years.”

Continue to verse 41.

These twenty years I’ve been in your house; I served you fourteen years for your two daughters and six years for your flock, and you changed my wages ten times.

Look at verse 42. He is really getting on the stump now.

If the God of my father, the God of Abraham, and the fear of Isaac, had not been for me, surely now you would have sent me away empty-handed. God has seen my affliction and the toil of my hands, so He rendered judgment last night.

Vindication is fulfilled.

A Covenant Of Distrust

The next passage of scripture ends this twenty year period with Laban. We can call it, “A Covenant Of Distrust”.

This is a covenant that is often misinterpreted today. You will find this on Hallmark cards and scripture cards and there is a warm, fuzzy feeling. But notice the context as Laban says in verses 43 and 44 of chapter 31,

. . . The daughters are my daughters, and the children are my children, and the flocks are my flocks, and all that you see is mine. But what can I do this day to these my daughters or to their children whom they have borne? So now come, let us make a covenant, you and I, and let it be a witness between you and me.

Then Jacob responds in verses 45 and 46.

Then Jacob took a stone and set it up as a pillar. Jacob said to his kinsmen, “Gather stones.” So they took stones and made a heap, and they ate there by the heap.

Now look at verse 49. This is the covenant.

. . . May the Lord watch between you and me when we are absent one from the other.

Have you ever heard that or seen that? In other words, “May the Lord watch over us as I am absent from you.”

Note the next verse,

If you mistreat my daughters, or if you take wives besides my daughters, although no man is with us, see, God is witness between you and me.

Jacob and Laban are setting up this covenant, and Laban is saying, “While I can’t see you and while my back is turned to you, if you slip across my border and steal sheep, God is watching you. If you do anything to my daughters, God is watching you.”

Jacob is saying, “Yea, that sounds great. If while I’m away from you and I’m not watching you, if you slip over into my border and try anything funny, God is my witness.”

That was the covenant of distrust. And they bid one another good-bye forever.

Application: Twenty Years – What Should Jacob Have Learned?!

Imagine that we could have Jacob with us for a few minutes today; that we could have him all to ourselves at a time just before he died. Let us say we bring him out on the porch and sit him in a very comfortable chair. We take a blanket and put it around his stooped shoulders and over his knees to keep away the chill. Then, we draw up a chair real close, lean toward him, and begin to ask questions.

We say, “Jacob, you’ve lived a colorful life. In fact, the most colorful perhaps, is that twenty year period in the old country. Would you give us some lessons as to what you learned?”

After studying this man’s life for several weeks, I am convinced that Jacob would lean back in his chair, take a deep breath and let it out again, ponder his words – he was never much of a talker – and with his chin on his chest, he would probably say, “Twenty years in the old country, I sure met my match in that

old Laban. I guess I learned two lessons. Number one, I learned that you reap what you sow. I never really cared what I did or who I hurt, as long as I got my way. Manipulating my poor mother, tricking my old father, sneaking the blessing away from my brother – it didn’t matter to me, as long as I got my way. I sowed the seeds of deception, trickery, pride, and self-advancement. I sowed those seeds and as a result, reaped humiliation, insecurity, and pain.”

If we could interrupt Jacob for a moment, we could come real close to where we are today. We also reap precisely what we sow. If we sow a lifestyle that is in direct violation of God’s principles, then we will reap disaster. Believer or not, some of us may be balancing on the tightrope of that disaster right now – without a net; without a pole.

One man wrote that God may seem slow, but He never compromises with consequences. You will reap abandonment, fear, loss of joy, and ineffectiveness.

Now let us get back to Jacob because he said he had two lessons to teach us. As he begins to tell us the second lesson, I can almost see him in my mind. He probably has a little gleam coming to his eye and maybe a smile flickering across his face as he takes another deep breath. He says, “I’ve also learned, that God is in sovereign control. I would have never married Leah. But from her would come Levi.”

Now, if Jacob could see into the future, he would tell us that Levi, Leah’s son, would be the one who would father the tribe that would bring the nation of Israel to the mercy seat of God. They would be the priests unto God. If there had been no Leah, there would have been no Levi.

One of the great, great grandsons of Levi was Moses. So, if there had been no Leah, there would have been no Moses.

Leah’s fourth child was Judah. From Judah would come David, the King of Israel. From David would come the tribe or the line from which Jesus Christ would come. If there had been no Leah, there would have been no David.

Jacob might continue, “God even used my failure and my lack of understanding to advance His cause. *God is in sovereign control.*”

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Growing Old . . . Growing Up

Genesis 33ff

Introduction

In our last discussion, we discovered Jacob meeting with God and wrestling. Afterward, God revealed to Jacob a new name, “Israel,” meaning, “the prince of God”. Now Jacob is going to meet his brother Esau in the confrontation that he has been dreading, perhaps, for the twenty years that he has been away. So today, we will pick our story back up at Genesis, chapter 33, as we, in fact, conclude our study of the life of Jacob.

The Reconciliation of Two Brothers

We will begin with the reconciliation of the two brothers, Jacob and Esau. I will point out a couple of things related to this reconciliation that are right and wrong – especially wrong. It seems, as we will notice in chapter 33, that Jacob, though he has met with God and though he has been given a new name which means, “no longer schemer, but God’s prince,” still acts as a little bit of a schemer.

First, however, notice Jacob’s attitude as he meets Esau. Look at chapter 33, verse 1a.

Then Jacob lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, Esau was coming, and four hundred men with him. . . .

The four hundred men were soldiers that Esau had brought with him. Continue to verses 1b and 2.

. . . So he divided the children among Leah and Rachel and the two maids. He put the maids and their children in front, and Leah and her children next, and Rachel and Joseph last.

This was the way Jacob left it, and he was going to be the last person that Esau met. But evidently, he had a little bit of courage after meeting with God, because now he goes in front of his wives and children. Look at verse 3.

But he himself passed on ahead of them and bowed down to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother.

The word “bowed” or “bowed down” could be translated “fell prostrate”. This is not really the character of Israel the prince, this is more of Jacob the trembling schemer.

It was the oriental custom to fall down seven times when you met a king. Undoubtedly, Jacob knew that Esau was the King of Edom, but he himself was now the prince of God and this was his brother. Yet he met Esau by falling prostrate seven times, giving, in a sense, honor to a man who was not deserving of the honor of God’s man.

Now note verse 4.

Then Esau ran to meet him and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, . . .

Instead of plunging a knife into Jacob’s throat or chest, Esau embraced him. What a shock this must have been to Jacob! Then, he kissed him. The tense indicates that Esau repeatedly kissed him.

Jacob has not seen his brother for twenty years – he is expecting at least a fist fight. But Esau, that big burley man, runs up to Jacob and throws his arms around him and starts kissing him. Then, we will note in the last phrase of verse 4,

. . . and they wept.

Underline that word “they”. God had undoubtedly performed a miracle in the heart of Esau during the twenty years of Jacob’s absence. And He had brought these two brothers together in reconciliation.

Perhaps today, you are facing the difficulty of a feud or estrangement; some division. It is interesting that God is bigger than anything you and I might face. He is strong enough that it is possible to bring it all together.

I was reading, this past week, of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, whose parents disapproved so strongly of her marriage to Robert that when she married him, they ostracized her and they, in a sense, kicked her out of the family. For the next ten years, almost weekly, Elizabeth Browning wrote to her parents a love letter to try to pursue reconciliation. After ten years, she received a box in the mail. When she opened it, her heart was broken, because inside was the collection of all the letters that she had sent her parents, and not one had been opened.

Perhaps that is what motivated Ray Stedman to write, “The ministry of reconciliation originates with God, not man.”

Reconciliation is owned and accredited by God, and achieves what is otherwise impossible.

I do not know how impossible the feuding, fighting, disagreeing, divisive situations you are facing may seem. But God could put Esau and Jacob together in the dusty sands outside of Luz. These men, surrounded by sheep, by armed men, by curious children, by strapping soldiers, embraced one another. And we see them there, weeping.

Notice Jacob’s insistence on giving Esau gifts. Look at verses 8 through 9a.

And he [Esau] said, “What do you mean by all this company which I have met?” And he [Jacob] said, “To find favor in the sight of my lord.” But Esau said, “I have plenty . . .”

The words, “I have enough,” are interesting. In verse 11, Jacob says the same thing, “I have enough.” These two men, who never had enough, finally came to a point where they could say to each other, “We, in fact, are satisfied.”

Yet Jacob, I think, is conniving. Verse 10a tells us that,

Jacob said, “No, please, if now I have found favor in your sight, then take my present from my hand . . .”

You may remember from our last discussion, that Jacob put the rams in front, and then the ewes, and then the goats to try to butter Esau up, so that by the time Jacob met Esau, Esau would respond favorably. Esau did not even want them, but Jacob presses, “No, take them.”

“No,” Esau says, “I don’t want them.”

“No, take them.”

“Okay, I’ll take them.”

I think though, that there is an underlying motive in this. In that culture, it was improper for an enemy to receive a gift. If you had an enemy, he was not to receive anything from your hand. So Jacob is wanting legal assurance that the feud was over. He did not trust his brother, but he knew if Esau took the gifts, the division was settled. Esau, in fact, finally did take them.

The Rebellion and Revenge of Jacob’s Children

I observed another problem in the next few verses. In verses 11 through 14a, we see Jacob’s insensitivity to Esau’s request for companionship.

“Please take my gift which has been brought to you, because God has dealt graciously with me and because I have plenty.” Thus he urged him and he took it.

Then Esau said, “Let us take our journey [together] and go, and I will go before you.”

But he [Jacob] said to him, “My lord knows that the children are frail and that the flocks and herds which are nursing are a care to me. And if they are driven hard one day, all the flocks will die.

Please let my lord pass on before his servant, and I will proceed at my leisure, according to the pace of the cattle that are before me and according to the pace of the children . . .”

Esau, in the generosity of his heart, impulsively, emotionally, says, “Jacob, what do you say we get together and travel to Seir together? We can reestablish all that we’ve missed in the last twenty years.”

But Jacob says, “Uh-uh.”

Perhaps he is thinking, “This is too good to be true. I’m afraid that I might offend Esau and before this trip is over, he’ll be after my throat again. No way! I can’t trust God to continue what He did in bringing this reconciliation about.”

So Jacob makes a promise, but notice the insincerity of his promise. Look at the last part of verse 14. Jacob says, “You go ahead, . . .”

“. . . until I come to my lord at Seir.”

In other words, Jacob is saying, “Esau, you go ahead, and I’ll come along at a slower pace. Ultimately, we’ll meet together at Seir.”

However, the text will later reveal that as soon as the horsemen are out of sight; as soon as the soldiers of Esau are out of sight and the tips of their spears can no longer be seen, instead of traveling southeast to follow his brother, Jacob goes northwest. He lied to his brother.

I cannot help but imagine what Esau was thinking while waiting in Seir for his brother. Everything is patched up, and where is Jacob? He is settling in Shechem. So he lied to his brother.

I also cannot help but imagine what Jacob’s sons must have thought as they saw their father lying. I lean back in my chair and begin to imagine what it must have been like for the twelve sons of Jacob to see their patriarch father, the *Man of God*, give a boldface lie. They heard him say, “Esau, we’ll meet you later in Seir.” But as soon as Esau was gone, “(whew) Let’s go, we’re heading for Shechem.”

The seeds of dishonesty are often sewn in the home. Jacob will pay a bitter price, as the next chapter is nothing but a story of his son’s lies.

I can well remember, as a youth pastor, working with one teenager who continually lied. I discovered later, that his father was being investigated for lying to his company.

Now, do not misunderstand, I am not implying that every dishonest child has a dishonest parent. I know because I was a dishonest child and my parents were honest. So often, however, the seeds of honesty or dishonesty are sewn in the home, and are watered by what the child observes. The child hears us call in sick, knowing we are going golfing or fishing. The child is told to tell so-and-so on the phone that we are not home. The seeds of dishonesty are sewn.

I read recently, about a California homemaker who was observed going through a supermarket tapping various items. Behind her came her two little children, who would pocket the items she tapped.

I read, as well, of one woman who was apparently pregnant. As she walked out of the grocery store, the assistant manager was suspicious and stopped her. Later, in the security office, she gave birth to a chuck roast, two pounds of butter, and some syrup.

The events that will occur in Jacob’s family, I believe, are a result of the scheming and the dishonesty of Dad. This remains a stark lesson for those who are fathers and mothers. I will not elaborate on the incident as it would take too long, but I will at least tell what occurred.

Look at verse 1 of chapter 34.

Now Dinah the daughter of Leah, whom she had borne to Jacob, went out to visit the daughters of the land.

Dinah went out to see what Shechem was all about. It was a wicked city. It reminds me of Lot and the tragedy of pitching his tent near Sodom and Gomorra. Continue to verses 2 through 7.

When Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, the prince of the land, saw her, he took her and lay with her by force.

He was deeply attracted to Dinah the daughter of Jacob, and he loved the girl and spoke tenderly to her.

So Shechem spoke to his father Hamor, saying, “Get me this young girl for a wife.”

Now Jacob heard that he had defiled Dinah his daughter; but his sons were with his livestock in the field, so Jacob kept silent until they came in.

Then Hamor the father of Shechem went out to Jacob to speak with him.

Now the sons of Jacob came in from the field when they heard it; and the men were grieved, and they were very angry because he had done a disgraceful thing in Israel by lying with Jacob’s daughter, for such a thing ought not to be done.

Skip to verses 13 through 17. Notice that Jacob’s sons take the lead. Dad is silent, and will remain silent throughout this entire incident. Note that the sons will answer deceitfully – oh, they learned that well.

But Jacob's sons answered Shechem and his father Hamor with deceit, because he had defiled Dinah their sister.

They said to them, "We cannot do this thing [intermarry], to give our sister to one who is uncircumcised, for that would be a disgrace to us.

"Only on this condition will we consent to you: if you will become like us, in that every male of you be circumcised,

"then we will give our daughters to you, and we will take your daughters for ourselves, and we will live with you and become one people.

"But if you will not listen to us to be circumcised, then we will take our daughter and go."

Hamor and Shechem agree. Look verses 24 through 26.

All who went out of the gate of his city listened to Hamor and to his son Shechem, and every male was circumcised, all who went out of the gate of his city.

Now it came about on the third day, when they were in pain, that two of Jacob's sons, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, each took his sword and came upon the city unawares, and killed every male.

They killed Hamor and his son Shechem with the edge of the sword, and took Dinah from Shechem's house, and went forth.

Two tragic elements

Two things are really the tragic elements of this chapter. Obviously, what we have just read is sad. But, as we were observing the life of Jacob, let me give two tragic elements that have resulted.

Jacob's silence

1. The first tragedy is Jacob's silence. Jacob hears of the incident and remains silent. No comment!
2. Finally, when he speaks, the second tragedy is found in his rebuke.

Jacob finally speaks, after the conniving and the murdering, and what does he say? Look at verse 30.

Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, "You have brought trouble on me by making me odious among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and the Perizzites; and my men being few in number, they will gather together against me and attack me and I will be destroyed, I and my household."

In other words, "What really bothers me about this incident is the fact that you have caused grief to me."

He makes no comment about murder. He makes no comment about deceit. This is just a slap on the wrist. Why? I think it is because Jacob had lost all moral fortitude at this point with his sons. He could not say, "No"; he could not discipline.

The Return of Jacob to Bethel

At this time, God intervenes. Look at chapter 35, verse 1.

Then God said to Jacob, "Arise, go up to Bethel and live there, and make an altar there to God, who appeared to you when you fled from your brother Esau."

What was it about Bethel? If you look it up on a map or do a little research in an atlas, you discover that it is just a barren region with slabs of rock on a stretch of broken hills. The pasture land is not very fertile. What was it about Bethel that would cause God to invite Jacob back?

God told Jacob to go to Bethel because it was the place of intimacy with God. Bethel was the place where God had visited Jacob. Bethel was the location where the altar of Abraham stood. God was, in effect, inviting Jacob back to Himself; He was inviting him home.

Two marks of Jacob's trip

Notice, in the next few verses, that Jacob obeyed. This trip was marked by two things.

It began with repentance

1. First, it began with repentance.

Look at verse 2 through 4. It is interesting to note that Jacob's household even had foreign gods.

So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, "Put away the foreign

gods which are among you, and purify yourselves and change your garments;

“and let us arise and go up to Bethel; and I will make an altar there to God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and has been with me wherever I have gone.”

So they gave to Jacob all the foreign gods which they had and the rings which were in their ears, and Jacob hid [buried] them under the oak which was near Shechem.

It began with repentance. The idols had to be buried and left behind.

This reminds me of the time in Ephesus that we are told about in Acts, chapter 19, verse 19. A revival is taking place and the believers gather all their books of witchcraft, make a bonfire, and burn them.

Repentance begins with a change; it is an about-face. There is no possibility that God would ever accept idols in Bethel. So the path back to God and intimacy with God began with repentance.

It included sorrow

2. Secondly, the trip included great sorrow.

Several deaths occur during this trip. Look at verses 6 through 8. It is interesting that God would include this.

So Jacob came to Luz (that is, Bethel), which is in the land of Canaan, he and all the people who were with him.

He built an altar there, and called the place El-bethel [God of the house of God], because there God had revealed Himself to him when he fled from his brother.

Now Deborah, Rebekah’s nurse, died, and she was buried below Bethel under the oak; it was named Allon-bacuth [oak of tears].

You may remember that Jacob had a very close relationship with his mother, Rebekah. He would never see her again after he left to go to the old country to find a wife. But perhaps out of concern for her son when he left, she said, “Here, take my trusted servant Deborah with you. She’ll watch over you. She’ll care for you.”

We have every reason to believe that, for twenty years, Deborah served Jacob. This verse tells us that

one of the last remembrances of his dear mother dies. I think it is included to let us know that sorrow has begun. Jacob buries her under the oak and names it “oak of tears”.

That is not all of the sorrows on this journey. Look at verses 16 through 19 of chapter 35.

Then they journeyed from Bethel; and when there was still some distance to go to Ephrath, Rachel began to give birth and she suffered severe labor.

When she was in severe labor the midwife said to her, “Do not fear, for now you have another son.”

It came about as her soul was departing (for she died), that she named him Ben-oni; but his father called him Benjamin.

So Rachel died and was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem).

The story of Jacob and Rachel is one of the greatest little love stories in the Bible. Jacob worked for fourteen years for this woman. He loved her, obviously, from all that we have read. She now dies while giving birth to their second son. Once again, the procession halts and they have another funeral. And sorrow increases.

That is still not the end of the sorrows, however. Look at verses 27 through 29. Note that it has been twenty years since Jacob and Isaac were reunited.

Jacob came to his father Isaac at Mamre of Kiriath-arba (that is, Hebron), where Abraham and Isaac had sojourned.

Now the days of Isaac were one hundred and eighty years.

Isaac breathed his last and died and was gathered to his people, an old man of ripe age; and his sons Esau and Jacob buried him.

Jacob returns home after decades. He finds that his mother is already dead, and then, soon after his return, his father dies as well.

Jacob and Esau are reunited at the funeral. They are probably still eyeing one another, but yet sorrow has always had a way of bringing people back together. They are, in a sense, reunited at the grave and afterward, they part. They will never see each other again.

Jacob's sorrow continues to increase. Look ahead to chapter 37. We will study this in detail later, but will include a brief discussion of it at this point.

Joseph is Jacob's dear son. It is his memory of his wife, Rachel. But the brothers, deceiving their father, said that Joseph had died. You probably know the story. Look at verses 31 and 32.

So they took Joseph's tunic, and slaughtered a male goat and dipped the tunic in the blood;

and they sent the varicolored tunic and brought it to their father and said, "We found this; please examine it to see whether it is your son's tunic."

Notice, it is not "our brother's tunic," but "your son's tunic." Continue to verses 33 and 34.

Then he examined it and said, "It is my son's tunic. A wild beast has devoured him; Joseph has surely been torn to pieces!"

So Jacob tore his clothes, and put sackcloth on his loins and mourned for his son many days.

Joseph was his brightest hope. I would imagine that Jacob limped out to some secluded spot; some quiet, shady piece of land, and dug a hole. I would imagine that Jacob laid the tunic of his son in the hole, buried it, and wept. He mourned for many days.

Principles Learned From the School of Sorrow

Studying the sorrow of Jacob has revealed several insights. Let me give them to you.

Obedience to God does not exempt us from sorrow

1. Number one, obedience to God does not exempt us from sorrow.

I say this because Jacob was obeying God. God said, "Return to Bethel," and he did. He was following the voice of his God and it was during that time that he buried three of his dearest friends.

Sorrow is not always sent as God's punishment

2. Secondly, sorrow is not always sent as God's punishment.

You may remember the story of Job, and that others told him of his sorrow, "It must be a result of sin, Job." – but it was not.

Sorrow is never sent without God's permission

3. Thirdly, sorrow is never sent without God's permission.

Would you remember that? It is never sent without God's permission.

Even the words of Joseph, at the end of Genesis, ring true. Jacob has died and Joseph's brothers are afraid that he will retaliate for the wrong they have done to him. Joseph says, in chapter 50, verse 20,

... God meant it for good ...

Though you and I cannot see the good in sorrow, we, like Joseph, have to believe that God is involved; that God is in control; that God is behind the scenes.

Sorrow is God's choicest tool in developing maturity

4. Fourthly, and especially related to Jacob, sorrow is God's choicest tool in developing maturity.

I think of Hebrews, chapter 5, verse 8, that says, *Although He [Jesus Christ] was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered.*

Hebrews, chapter 12, verse 6, says,

For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, ...

The Greek word for "discipline" is "paideia," which literally means, "son making". Sorrow is included in the larger scope of that discipline, and literally makes us mature. Sorrow is a part of the process of "son making". He does it to those He loves.

Evidences of Maturity in the Aging Patriarch

Did Jacob grow up? Did he mature in the faith? Let me briefly tell why I believe he did. There are several marks of maturity in the aging patriarch.

Jacob's conviction regarding Egypt

1. The first mark of maturity is Jacob's conviction regarding Egypt.

You know that the famine has come and Joseph has been serving in Egypt. Jacob is at his wit's end and does not know what to do.

Now the old Jacob would have packed his bags and headed for Egypt, as Egypt was the granary of the world. However, in evidence of his spiritual maturity, he no longer wanted to compromise his position; he wanted to stay in the land of blessing, even though it meant hunger. So the old Jacob is no longer visible, but the new Jacob, Israel, hesitates.

God comes to Jacob in chapter 46. Look at verses 1 through 4.

So Israel set out with all that he had, and came to Beersheba, and offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac.

God spoke to Israel in visions of the night and said, "Jacob, Jacob." And he said, "Here I am."

He said, "I am God, the God of your father; do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you a great nation there."

"I will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also surely bring you up again; and Joseph will close your eyes."

I love that. There was the evidence of maturity, in that Jacob wanted to obey the word of God.

Jacob's contentment in meeting Joseph

2. The second mark is Jacob's contentment in meeting Joseph.

Look at chapter 46, verse 28.

Now he sent Judah before him to Joseph, to point out the way to Goshen . . .

This is where they are all getting together in Egypt. We will study this in more detail later.

Continue to verses 29 and 30. I cannot imagine this meeting!

Joseph prepared his chariot and went up to Goshen to meet his father Israel; as soon as he appeared before him, he fell on his neck and wept on his neck a long time. Then Israel said to Joseph, "Now let me die, since I have seen your face, that you are still alive."

The interesting thing is that, after weeping, Jacob did not bitterly complain, "God has robbed me of so many years with you."

There is no resentment! Instead, there is an element of peace and contentment, which has long been missing in Jacob's life. Contentment is one of maturity's greatest qualities.

Jacob's character in blessing the Pharaoh

3. I notice a third mark of maturity, and that is Jacob's character as he blesses the Pharaoh.

Look at chapter 47, verses 5 and 6.

Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Your father and your brothers have come to you. The land of Egypt is at your disposal; settle your father and your brothers in the best of the land, let them live in the land of Goshen; and if you know any capable men among them, then put them in charge of my livestock."

In other words, "Give them work and I'll pay them."

Continue to verse 7.

Then Joseph brought his father Jacob and presented him to Pharaoh; and Jacob blessed Pharaoh.

Note this and do not miss it, and you will have to use your imagination. Joseph leads his aged father into the splendid courtroom of the Pharaoh. Jacob is uneducated; he has been a wanderer; he has lived in tents; he is probably dressed in rough clothing. He limps into the courtroom. I can imagine that scene, as Jacob is surrounded by wits and wisdom and splendor, gold finery, and the majesty of the great Pharaoh, the ruler of the known world. Yet, it is interesting that Jacob does not cower; he does not grovel. The text implies that this old man holds out his shaking hands and blesses the Pharaoh.

There is a moral splendor in one who walks with God. There is an inherent majesty that cannot be intimidated. I love this old man walking into the courtroom and *he*, with Pharaoh bowing his head, blesses that man. What strength.

Evidences of Faith in the Dying Patriarch

One of the great delights in studying this man's life has been studying the last few days of his life. Not only is spiritual maturity evident; that is, he has grown up, but faith is evident as well. Let me give four evidences.

Jacob's burial request

1. The first evidence of faith is seen in Jacob's burial request.

Look at chapter 47, verses 29 through 31.

When the time for Israel to die drew near, he called his son Joseph and said to him, "Please, if I have found favor in your sight, place now your hand under my thigh [to make a vow or covenant] and deal with me in kindness and faithfulness. Please do not bury me in Egypt,

"but when I lie down with my fathers, you shall carry me out of Egypt and bury me in their burial place." And he said, "I will do as you have said."

He said, "Swear to me." So he swore to him. Then Israel bowed in worship at the head of the bed.

Here is this man, unable to get out of the bed, knowing he is about to die, and he requests that he is buried, not in some splendid mausoleum in Egypt, but in that humble cave of Machpelah. Why? Because that is the place of God's choosing.

Jacob's blessing of Joseph's sons

2. The second thing that reveals faith is Jacob's blessing of Joseph's sons.

Chapter 48 tells the story of Joseph bringing his two sons to Jacob. Jacob, who is now blind, holds out his trembling hands and then blesses them.

Now what is the interesting point in this blessing? Look at verse 19 of chapter 48, as Jacob speaks of one of the sons of Joseph.

. . . he also will become a people and he also shall be great. However, his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his descendants shall become a multitude of nations.

In other words, "I know that the promise of God is true. There will one day be a nation; there will be a seed. Although I am way over here in Egypt, I know one day, this land will be ours and it will be inhabited by our people." What faith.

Jacob's prophecy content

3. Jacob's faith is also seen in the content of his prophecy, as he calls his twelve sons to his bedside.

Jacob is now about to say his last words. So one son at a time, twelve in all, come up to the bed. He then, with a trembling voice, gives them a final blessing. He prophesies as to what will happen.

We will not look at all of it, but notice verse 10 of chapter 49. Jacob is talking to Judah. You may remember that Judah will be the one from whom David will come. That will be the messianic line. Notice verse 10 and make note of the second half of the verse.

The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until Shiloh comes, and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.

"Shiloh" means, "the 'Rest-Giver'". In other words, "The line of Judah will reign until the 'Rest-Giver' comes."

Who is Shiloh? We know it is Jesus Christ, who one day said to the teeming masses, as recorded in Matthew, chapter 11, verse 28,

Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.

In other words, "I am the 'Rest-Giver'."

The question is, how did Jacob learn that name? Where did he learn the name of Shiloh?

I would agree with one of the old commentators of yesteryear, F. B. Meyer. Meyer suggested that perhaps Jacob learned that name when he was wrestling with the Angel of the Lord, which is Jesus Christ.

You may remember that just before the angel left, Jacob said, "What is your name?" (Genesis 32:27)

The text does not tell us. All it says is that the Angel of the Lord turned and blessed him. Perhaps it was then that He whispered in Jacob's ear, "My name is Shiloh, the 'Rest-Giver'."

Perhaps that played on Jacob's mind and now, as he prophesied, he knew that one day that "Rest-Giver" would come back to rule! What faith.

Jacob's final words to his sons

4. Finally, faith is seen in Jacob's last words to his sons.

Look at chapter 49, verses 28 through 33.

All these are the twelve tribes of Israel, and this is what their father said to them when he blessed them. He blessed them, every one with the blessing appropriate to him.

Then he charged them and said to them, "I am about to be gathered to my people; bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite,

"in the cave that is in the field of Machpelah, which is before Mamre, in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought along with the field from Ephron the Hittite for a burial site.

"There they buried Abraham and his wife Sarah, there they buried Isaac and his wife Rebekah, and there I buried Leah –

"the field and the cave that is in it, purchased from the sons of Heth."

When Jacob finished charging his sons, he drew his feet into the bed and breathed his last, and was gathered to his people.

In other words, Jacob is saying, "Let me lie in the land of promise together with my fathers, holding, in a sense, this land in fee, surrounded by the emerging

nation. That's where I want to lie, because I look forward to the time when God will fulfill the promises to my father Abraham, and my father Isaac, and to me."

So what does God say of Jacob? Jacob is entered into the "hall of faith" in Hebrews, chapter 11, where God makes specific mention of his faith in his old age. In verse 21b, the text says,

By faith Jacob, as he was dying, . . . leaning on the top of his staff.

That was when Jacob evidenced faith.

God also chooses to mark the scriptures with a personal title that is used in relation to Jacob more than any other patriarch. God chooses for us to remember Him more often as "the God of Jacob" than as "the God of Abraham" or as "the God of Isaac". God would have us know Him as "the God of the stumbler," "the God of the failure," because the story of Jacob is really the story of God's grace – the God of the sinner who finally repented; who finally rested; who finally, in his old age, trusted in his God.

The question is, ladies and gentlemen, do you have a personal story of when God's grace invaded your life? He is "the God of Jacob". Is He your God as well?

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Teenage Dreamer

Genesis 37

Introduction

One of the great delights of preaching through the book of Genesis has been hearing people comment that they never realized how practical an Old Testament book could be. Genesis has been just a part of that dry, old, dead section that makes the Bible a little thicker and heavier than you would really like it to be. It is not quite slim enough to fit into your purse or into your pocket.

To be perfectly honest with you, I myself have been rather surprised at the richness that I have often overlooked or ignored. As a pastor, preaching through this book for the first time, I have often come to a passage in Genesis, read it, and then stopped and said, “Okay, Lord, nothing hit me that time.”

I will read a Genesis passage again and again and again. Yet, as you may have experienced, with the instruction of the Holy Spirit and being surrounded by books written by men who have come this way before me, Genesis has come alive. It has been a real thrill, up to this point, to feed you from the pasture land of this great book.

Why study the Old Testament

I have been asked the question, “Why is it that we study the Old Testament? If we are New Testament believers, is it really relevant?”

I appreciate that kind of question. In fact, let me answer it a bit more than I normally would.

Turn in your Bible to Romans, chapter 15. This is where the apostle Paul tells us why we, in fact, should study the Old Testament. It is not a dead

section of the Bible; it is not old; it should not be dusty. In verse 4, Paul says, in reference to the Old Testament,

For whatever was written in earlier times . . .

(You should write in the margin of your Bible, “O. T. or Old Testament,” because that is what Paul is referring to. In fact, let us read it that way, “For whatever was written in the Old Testament . . .”),

. . . was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

So, in studying the Old Testament, we have been given the promise of two things.

- First, the Old Testament gives us present instruction.

This is teaching that would edify the New Testament believer. I have found no one who could teach us any more than Joseph.

As one man wrote, “We will observe him and learn from him as he blazes a trail through the jungle of mistreatment, false accusations, undeserved punishment, and gross misunderstanding.”

We will observe how Joseph lives and how he acts.

- Secondly, what a future hope we are given!

We will learn from Joseph how to forgive others, how to be free from bitterness, and how to have rock-solid faith. And, by the way, Joseph had rock-solid faith in a God that he never saw. God never appeared to Joseph; God never spoke directly to Joseph, as He

did Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and yet, Joseph trusts Him. We will learn how to trust Him too.

It is interesting, before we begin the biography of Joseph, that there are only two people in the entire scripture that nothing negative is said about their character or their life. One is Joseph and the other is Daniel. It is fascinating to think that both of these men were sold into captivity. They were deposited into paganism, when they had once been so secure in their home lives as young men. We have a lot to learn from Joseph, as we study this individual, who will show us it is possible to live purely in an impure society; it is possible to have character in a morally chaotic society.

The Contrast Between the Record Books

Let us begin in Genesis, chapter 37. We will start by noticing the contrast between this chapter and chapter 36.

Esau

I think the contrast between these two chapters is subtle, because chapter 36 begins by listing the genealogy of Esau, Jacob's brother, and it is impressive. Count it and you will find that Esau had five sons and, from that, he had twenty-seven chiefs and eight kings. Verse 1 of chapter 36 says,

Now these are the records of the generations of Esau (that is, [the king of] Edom).

A very impressive genealogy unfolds.

Jacob

Then we come to chapter 37 and verses 2 through 3a says,

These are the records of the generations of Jacob. Joseph, when seventeen years of age, . . .

I think this is an implication of contrast. The world would consider twenty-seven chiefs and eight kings impressive, as contrasted to a seventeen year old boy named Joseph.

As I pondered this thought, it occurred to me that what the world would consider noteworthy may not even make the back page in heaven's news release. While the world would consider Esau impressive and his genealogy something to take note of, God will

spend chapter after chapter recording the life of one who starts out, in these verses, as a teenage boy.

I recently read a story that illustrated this point. If Dan Rather had been living in 1809, his evening news would have centered, not on Britain or America, but on Austria. In fact, all eyes would have been on Napoleon as he swept across the canvas of civilization bringing emperors to their knees and controlling vast empires. What could have been more important on the international scene than Napoleon? Who could have been more important; who more noteworthy than this little dictator?

Yet, in 1809, a teenager took a book from the shelf of his father's library. He went out behind the barn and began to read. The phrase that captured his thoughts, as he read it over and over again, was, "the finished work of Christ." That boy got on his knees and accepted Jesus Christ. Soon after, J. Hudson Taylor went to China and founded the China Inland Mission that would literally bring millions of Chinese to Jesus Christ.

I think it is interesting that we see a teenager compared to an impressive genealogy, yet God finds the teenager noteworthy. He takes note and wants us to as well.

The Favoritism of Joseph's Father

Now, look at chapter 37, verses 1 through 3a.

Now Jacob lived in the land where his father had sojourned, in the land of Canaan. These are the records of the generations of Jacob. Joseph, when seventeen years of age, was pasturing the flock with his brothers while he was still a youth, along with the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives. And Joseph brought back a bad report about them to their father. Now Israel [Jacob] loved Joseph more than all his sons, . . .

In this passage, two phrases will occur that reveal the first thing that strikes me about Joseph's biography; that is, the favoritism of his father toward him.

"Son of his old age" = "Son of discernment"

The first phrase, in verse 3b, is,

. . . because he was the son of his old age; . .

.

Now this is not Joseph's fault or Jacob's perhaps, for considering Joseph a favorite, because the phrase could be translated, "the son of the ages". It is a reference to a child who is very perceptive and discerning, as well as compliant and obedient.

Joseph, the son of the ages, though he is seventeen, has the maturity of a twenty, thirty, or forty year old. He has the perception of one who is far beyond his years. How easy it would be, as a father, to give more note to a son who would be called a "compliant child" in books today. Joseph is the dream of every parent. There is never a conflict with this son; he is always obedient.

Can you, who are parents, imagine this for just a moment? I expect conflict around our home. I expect it in daily portions. I cannot imagine a compliant child who would be considered a "son of the ages". Yet, Joseph was that kind of boy. So Jacob is endeared to him as a result of this compliancy.

In Joseph's home, eleven brothers were constant trouble. They would grow up to be rebellious and immoral. Yet, while they are growing up, Joseph is growing into a mature, obedient, godly young man.

"Varicolored tunic" = "Sleeved coat"

The second phrase that I think reveals an exaggerated favoritism is in the last part of verse 3, and tells us,

... and he made him a varicolored tunic.

Your translation may call this tunic a coat of many colors. The many color idea comes from that culture where nobility would wear robes that had been expensively dyed. The literal Hebrew translation comes from the word "pas," which is not "many colored," but means "extremities or wristed". In other words, this tunic reached to Joseph's wrists and to his ankles. It was a garment of the nobility.

It is interesting that a person who would wear that garment would be obviously recognized as someone exempt from hard labor. In that day, the men wore cut off tunics that came to their knees so that they could move easily and work and sweat. But here comes Joseph, dressed in a garment that reaches to his wrists and to his ankles; a garment of nobility. It literally meant, "Joseph, you don't have to work. You are exempt from hard labor." Perhaps this was an unwise move for his father.

So Joseph is given the honored position, obviously, as the heir to the blessing. He is also given the favored position of one who oversees the work. Everyone else is working, but Joseph, who is second to the youngest, is calling the shots.

To make matters worse, Joseph, according to the last part of verse 2, in case you missed it,

... brought back a bad report about them to their father.

Here Joseph is – the straw boss – on the scene, but not working. He is watching and notices the immorality of his brothers. So he goes back and tells his father.

Some commentators suggest that this is tattle-telling. I do not think so. In fact, the more you learn about Joseph, the more you realize that his conscience is easily pricked by immorality. He probably feels a sense of duty to his brothers, who are dragging the family name through the mud. So he goes back to his father, Jacob, and tells him what they are doing.

What is Jacob's response? It is characteristic – it is silence. Jacob is a classic example of a passive father who is unwilling to confront the sins of his sons. He thinks, "If I ignore it, maybe it will go away. If I excuse it, maybe it won't seem so bad. It would be easier to ignore and excuse, than to confront."

My friend, passivity in the home; silence in response to sin will literally make this home an illustration of Proverbs 29, verse 15b, which tells us,

... a child who gets his own way brings shame to his mother [and father].

Note, however, if you have been studying with us, that Jacob's passivity started years ago, as he silently watched Leah and Rachel fighting for preeminence in the home. Then, his daughter, Dinah, is raped, and he is uncharacteristically silent for a father who would seem to leap to her defense. Then, when his sons rise up and massacre an entire city, Jacob is silent. As his sons further develop their immorality and it has become known, where is Jacob? He is quiet.

The Envy of Joseph's Brothers

Now, Jacob's sons hate and openly disdain one of their own and he never says a word. Notice the inevitable response of Joseph's brothers to such passivity and partiality. Look at verse 4.

His brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers; and so they hated

him and could not speak to him on friendly terms.

These brothers literally could not speak to Joseph, “Shalom”; they could not say, “Peace,” to him. They hated the sight of him.

The Dreams of Joseph

Look at verse 5a.

Then Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him even more.

I think, perhaps in his naiveté, Joseph shares his dreams with his brothers. You probably know the story. Let us look briefly at it. Look at verses 6 and 7.

He said to them, “Please listen to this dream which I have had; for behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and lo, my sheaf rose up and also stood erect; and behold, your sheaves gathered around and bowed down to my sheaf.”

Joseph has had a legitimate dream and this seventeen year old is going up to his brothers and saying, “Hey brothers, I had a dream and I was a sheaf in the field and all of you bowed down at my feet. What do you think of that?”

- Dream number one is basically this: Joseph is saying, “I am heir to Jacob’s blessing.”
- Dream number two is basically this: Joseph is saying, “I am the future leader of the Jewish nation.”

Look at verse 9.

Now he had still another dream, and related it to his brothers, and said, “Lo, I have had still another dream; and behold, the sun and the moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me.”

Now this has gone beyond just an ordinary field. Now Joseph is saying that Mom and Dad, the sun and the moon and the eleven stars, “You are bowing down to me.”

In other words, “I will be the ruler of the future Jewish nation. Isn’t that exciting, guys?”

The Crimes of Joseph’s Brothers

It is tragic that, instead of responding to Joseph, the brothers reacted. I think part of the problem is that they were bitter against God, as I will reveal in just a moment.

Let us look at verses 12 and 13.

Then his brothers went to pasture their father’s flock in Shechem. Israel [Jacob] said to Joseph, “Are not your brothers pasturing the flock in Shechem? Come, and I will send you to them.” And he said to him, “I will go.”

Note that now, Joseph is not with his brothers in the pasture anymore. In fact, he is no longer even working – he is exempt; he has the coat. His father says, “Go and find out how they’re doing.”

Continue to verse 14.

Then he [Jacob] said to him, “Go now and see about the welfare of your brothers and the welfare of the flock, and bring word back to me.” . . .

Skip to verse 18.

When they [the eleven brothers] saw him from a distance and before he came close to them, they plotted against him to put him to death.

Can you imagine the immorality that has so seeped into their hearts that now they will kill their half-brother. Look at verse 20a.

Now then, come and let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits . . .

The brothers are, by the way, in Dothan, and “Dothan” is literally translated, “two cisterns”. This is the place of two wells, and they said, “Let’s throw Joseph into one of the two wells.”

Note what they say in verse 20b.

. . . and we will say, “A wild beast devoured him.” Then let us see what will become of his dreams!

Look at verses 21 through 23, as Reuben, the oldest brother, speaks.

But Reuben heard this and rescued him out of their hands and said, “Let us not take his life.” Reuben further said to them, “Shed no blood. Throw him into this pit that is in the wilderness, but do not lay hands on him” – that he might rescue him out of their hands [come back later], to restore him to his father. So it came about, when Joseph reached his brothers, that they stripped Joseph of his tunic, . . .

You can almost see it, “Get that coat off! That has incensed us because of what it stands for.”

The first thing they did was rip the coat off of Joseph’s back. Continue to verse 24.

and they took him and threw him into the pit. Now the pit was empty . . .

Evidently one of the cisterns did not have any water in it.

Note the crassness of their character, according to verse 25.

Then they sat down to eat a meal. . . .

They sat down to eat a meal! A later passage of scripture tells us that while they are eating, they can hear the pleading of Joseph. They hear his entreating as he calls out, “My brothers, please! Reuben! Judah! Can you hear me? Save my life!”

They were sitting there, within earshot, eating a meal. How hard they had become. Continue to verses 25b and 27.

. . . And as they raised their eyes and looked, behold, a caravan of Ishmaelites was coming from Gilead, . . . Judah said to his brothers, “What profit is it for us to kill our brother and cover up his blood? Come and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him, for he is our brother, our own flesh.” And his brothers listened to him.

Look at what they do in verse 28.

Then some Midianite traders passed by, so they pulled him up and lifted Joseph out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver. Thus they brought Joseph into Egypt.

Twenty shekels is the price of a crippled slave.

Continue to verse 31. The brothers take care of that long sleeved thing they so despised.

So they took Joseph’s tunic, and slaughtered a male goat and dipped the tunic in the blood;

Having studied Jacob, it was fascinating that while Jacob had one time deceived his father by slaughtering a goat and pretending to be Esau, now he is about to be deceived by the blood of a goat.

Continue to verse 32.

and they sent the varicolored tunic and brought it to their father and said, “We

found this; please examine it to see whether it is your son’s tunic or not.”

In other words, “We’re not going to actually lie to you, Dad, you make up your mind what you think happened.”

Look at verses 33 through 35.

Then he examined it and said, “It is my son’s tunic. A wild beast has devoured him; Joseph has surely been torn to pieces!” So Jacob tore his clothes, and put sackcloth on his loins and mourned for his son many days. Then all his sons and all his daughters arose to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. And he said, “Surely I will go down to Sheol in mourning for my son.” So his father wept for him.

Jacob’s sons and daughters thought, “Man, this mourning has gone on long enough!” and tried to comfort him, but he would not be comforted. Continue to verse 36.

Meanwhile, the Midianites sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, Pharaoh’s officer, the captain of the bodyguard.

The consequences of Joseph’s brother’s scheme

The crimes of Joseph’s brothers yield three consequences. Let me give them to you.

- For Jacob, it meant incredible sorrow that would last until he sees Joseph again face to face. It will take years.
- For the eleven brothers, it meant living in guilt. We know they will live in guilt because one day, they see Joseph and their hearts are terrified by the recalling of that incident that played over and over in their minds. One day, when Jacob will die, they will live in fear that Joseph will now retaliate. Their guilty consciences have robbed them of joy. Envy has been rottenness to their bones.
- For Joseph, it resulted in slavery.

Application – Lessons Learned From Joseph’s Home Life

Let me give three principles of application from this passage from the lives of Jacob, Joseph, and Joseph’s brothers.

While parents may not be perfect, they must not be passive

1. First, from Jacob we can learn that while parents may not be perfect, they *must* not be passive.

We are living in a day and an age when, more than ever, the voice of instruction, of correction, of discipline, and of purity *must* be heard. By whom must it be heard – the preacher? Absolutely. But I would agree with the old proverb that says, “An ounce of motherhood is worth a pound of clergy.” It is time that they hear your voice no longer refusing to ignore or excuse their sinful bent and their wayward path.

Will your children howl in protest? Will they rise up; will they threaten to retaliate? Will they threaten to reject you and say, “Mom, I don’t love you anymore.” Absolutely!

I think that is what motivated Mark Twain, though not a believer, when he said something rather true about this. He said, “When I was fifteen, I thought my father was a fool. And then I turned twenty, and it amazed me how much he had learned in five short years.”

I think the howling and the protesting is what motivated God, through his writer Solomon in the Proverbs, to write into scripture, in chapter 23, verse 13,

Do not hold back discipline from the child, although you [discipline him], . . . he will not die.

I cannot help but chuckle because I can well remember giving my parents the idea that I was about to die. Children will do that, as they manipulate and as they try to have their way. They will say, “Mom, Dad, if I can’t do that . . . if I can’t go there . . . if I can’t say this, I’ll die! I can’t live. I can’t go on.”

Solomon says, “They won’t die.”

But, as I read this passage again, it struck me that not only did Jacob not discipline, he also did not express love for his eleven sons. It is interesting that you never see him doing anything for his other sons. That led me to think and in fact, convinced me in my mind, that a parent who is unwilling to instruct; a parent who is unwilling to discipline and to correct is a parent who in reality, is not expressing biblical, genuine love for the child.

That is what Solomon meant when he wrote these words, in Proverbs, chapter 13, verse 24,

He who [refuses to discipline] . . . hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him diligently.

A passive parent, like Jacob, is one who refuses to discipline and to express his love. Ultimately, like Jacob, they are a parent who refuses or somehow ignores his children so that he is never involved in their lives. I do not really think Jacob was that involved in Joseph’s life. He certainly was not involved in the lives of his other eleven sons.

I do not think there is a parent alive who, though not disciplining or showing expressions of love, would say, “Hey, at least I’m involved.” When was the last time you took your children to a park? When was the last time you called your child in college just to say, “I love you.”? When was the last time you sat on the edge of their bed and expressed your love for them?

David Jeremiah records in one of his books, “The average father has less than three meaningful encounters with his children every day, and each encounter lasts no more than fifteen seconds.”

Mom and Dad, it is time to put the newspaper away, to store the golf clubs, to put the vacuum away, and to get involved in the lives of your children.

Envy is actually a symptom of bitterness against God

2. Secondly, from Joseph’s brothers we can learn that envy is actually a symptom of bitterness against God.

This is clearly seen in the brothers’ response to Joseph’s dreams. Look again at chapter 37, verse 20, the last part,

. . . we will say, “A wild beast devoured him.” Then let us see what will become of his dreams!

This strikes home. What if your little brother, if you have one, had come up to you one day and said, “Hey, one day I’m going to be the president of the United States, and you’re going to be the janitor that will clean the bathrooms outside the oval office – and they had better be clean.”

Do you know what you would do? You would fall on the ground in laughter. You would hold your sides, “President of the United States, that’s great, keep it up! Sure, I’ll clean.”

Why? Because you really do not think it will come true.

Joseph's dreams, however, incensed his brothers and angered them enough to make them want to kill him. Why? Because they knew Joseph's dreams would come true. Their envy and bitterness was really against, not Joseph, but God, because God did not deal that hand to them. Would they submit to that plan? No way! "We will not serve."

While God's blessings seem to stop, His plan never hesitates

3. Thirdly, from Joseph's circumstances, let me give you this thought – while God's blessings seem to stop, His plan never hesitates.

Imagine the first seventeen years of Joseph's life – surrounded by loving attention; wearing the tunic declaring that he was the heir apparent. He had complete respect from his father and from the adults who knew that he was the next patriarch.

However, now we see him bound and fettered in a long line of slaves who are headed for Egypt. Joseph will be sold to a man he has never met. He will be introduced to a country he has never been to. He will hear a language he does not understand. He will be abandoned.

Yet one day, Joseph will be God's man in a foreign country who will insure the survival of the nation of Israel. That would not have been of much help to him, however, had you told him at this point.

Be careful, men and women, how you measure the plan of God. We tend to equate His plan with long sleeved tunics surrounded by loving people. But His plan may mean the opposite.

Jesus Christ, by the way, is illustrated by Joseph more than any other character in the Old Testament. I have read commentator after commentator, and in fact, one, by the name of Arthur Payne, came up with more than one hundred illustrations. It is a study in itself and it is fascinating. Jesus Christ also was the beloved son. He also was sent to His brethren. He also was rejected by them. He also was sold for a handful of silver. It is interesting that Joseph went through that so his brethren would find food when famine came. Jesus Christ went through that for who? For you and I! He went through it so that you and I could be fed; so that our souls that are parched and needy would find refreshment.

As you yield to Jesus, the One who has tasted it all, you will come to recognize that His plan is right on schedule. Everything is going according to His purpose, according to *His* plan.

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Saying No . . . When Others Say Yes

Genesis 38, 39

Introduction

Today, we are going to talk about a subject that everyone faces sooner or later in life – usually sooner than later. It is a subject that is no respecter of persons. It comes to the wealthy and it knocks on the door of the poverty stricken. It makes itself available to the young and to the old; to the spiritually immature and to the spiritually mature.

It is the subject of temptation. And no one more than Joseph gives us principles on how to say, “No,” when everyone else is saying, “Yes.” We discover the story in Genesis, chapter 39.

Joseph Arrives In Egypt

Turn to Genesis, chapter 39, and let us begin with verse 1a.

Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt; . . .

You may remember this was also basically the last phrase of verse 28 of chapter 37. Joseph’s brothers sold him to the Midianites for a price that would have a contemporary value of about fifty dollars. Each of the brothers got about \$4.50 out of the sale. That was fine with them because they were rid of this “dreamer” that they hated.

The brothers were incensed by Joseph’s dreams for one reason – they knew his dreams were going to come true. They were not about to bow at Joseph’s feet, and they were incensed that God had, in effect, chosen him rather than them.

Verse 1 of chapter 39, says,

Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt; and Potiphar, an Egyptian officer of

Pharaoh, the captain of the bodyguard, bought him from the Ishmaelites, who had taken him down there.

Egypt in the 15th dynasty is a 1,000 year old world power

I think it would help our understanding to take a brief look at Egypt. We are talking about a far away country that we know little about.

Historians tell us that Joseph went to Egypt during the 15th dynasty (there were thirty-one dynasties in all). This was the Hyksos dynasty, which means that Egypt is a one thousand year old world power at the time of Joseph’s story.

Egypt, at this time, is the dominating force; it is the wealthiest nation in the known world. Egypt was astounding its contemporaries with its architecture as the pyramids of Giza had already been built. It was astounding everyone with its creativity because the sphinx had already been carved. By the time Joseph arrives in Egypt, it was astounding architecturally, mathematically, and in the field of medicine. Egypt was the marvel.

I cannot help but imagine what it must have been like for Joseph. He was a wanderer, the son of a nomad, living his life in a tent. Now he was being introduced to this magnificent civilization, this developed culture of Egypt.

The colorful words of one expositor concerning Joseph being taken by Potiphar are helpful. F. B. Meyer writes these words,

Potiphar was an Egyptian grandee, a member of a proud aristocracy, high in office and in

court favor. Joseph would, no doubt, live in a splendid palace covered with hieroglyphs and filled with slaves. The young captive must have trembled as he passed up the pillared avenue through sphinx guarded gates into the recesses of that vast Egyptian palace where they spoke a language of which he could not understand a word and where all was so new and so strange.

While I cannot imagine it, I have certainly tried.

Joseph Begins Service For Potiphar

It would be helpful as well, to better understand who Potiphar is. The text says that he was, “the captain of the bodyguard.” That means Potiphar was perhaps, the most trusted man to Pharaoh. He was the individual responsible for the Pharaoh’s livelihood. The fact that he was the captain meant that he had somehow reached the top of the heap. He was also a very wealthy man; a man whom Pharaoh had entrusted with great wealth. He had many slaves, undoubtedly, and this man had purchased Joseph.

I can see Joseph trembling on the auction block as this man of rank and distinction comes to purchase him. The captain of the guard would have been something like the head of the CIA. He probably would also have been representative of the head of the KGB because this man was also, historians record, the chief executioner. Potiphar was responsible to take care of the heinous criminals who would come into this civilized kingdom.

So here was Potiphar, a man with incredible power and authority; who perhaps ranked among the very top, and Joseph is selected by him. In all of this, I believe, the hand of God can be seen.

Joseph Encounters Persistent Temptation

Now let me lead you to the temptation that Joseph is facing. Let us look at verse 2 of chapter 39.

The Lord was with Joseph . . .

You should underline that phrase in your text because it occurs seven times. It is a theme that runs throughout this chapter. Verse 2a says,

The Lord was with Joseph, so he became a successful man. . . .

Did you catch that? Joseph was successful with God before the scriptures would record he was a successful man. Verse 2b says,

And he was in the house of his master, the Egyptian.

This is a little confusing because we miss the chronology. We are told “he became a successful man.” Until this point, Joseph was probably sleeping and quartering with all of the rest of the slaves. But he became successful; he distinguished himself as a slave of great promise, so Potiphar, according to the text, moves him into his house.

Then look at verse 3 to learn what happened next.

Now his master saw that the Lord was with him . . .

It is interesting that the master “saw that the Lord was with him”. Underline that because Joseph did not tell him that the Lord was with him. I do not think Joseph knocked on his door and said, “I want you to know that I am the servant of the living God.”

No, Joseph, lived such a distinguishing life that sooner or later, Potiphar took note that this man was led by his God. Perhaps at some point, Joseph was able to explain to Potiphar what had happened. Look at the last part of verse 3 and the first part of verse 4.

. . . and how the Lord caused all that he did to prosper in his hand. So Joseph found favor in his sight and became his personal servant;

This is another promotion. Joseph moves out of the slave quarters into the home of Potiphar. Now among all the servants in that home, he is the personal slave, the personal attendant to Potiphar himself.

That is not all, however. Potiphar, according to verse 4b,

. . . made him overseer over his house, and all that he owned he put in his charge.

“Overseer” could be translated, as in the Septuagint, “steward”.

Now I want to stop at this point, because the same thing happened when we studied the life of Daniel. You may remember that Daniel and Joseph are the only two individuals recorded in the Bible who have nothing negative written about their lives. They had similar lifestyles as both were taken from their homes and deposited in a very pagan, immoral society. Yet they both lived their lives in such a way that God prospered them. This is fascinating in light of the fact

that both Joseph and Daniel had every reason in the world to chuck their jobs; they had every reason in the world to do all kinds of sabotage to try to bring down the pagan kingdoms in which they were forced to live.

If I had been Joseph, I would probably be tunneling out; I would be creating some way to escape. However, at some point in all of this, Joseph resigned himself to the fact that this was God's plan. Rather than be the slave who goofed off; rather than being the servant who worked at getting out of work (have you ever worked around someone like that?), Joseph was determined to be diligent.

As a result of Joseph's diligence, his master promoted him. Note verse 5.

It came about that from the time he made him overseer in his house and over all that he owned, the Lord blessed the Egyptian's house on account of Joseph; thus the Lord's blessing was upon all that he owned, in the house and in the field.

We know that behind the scenes, God is responsible.

As soon as Potiphar gives Joseph the promotion, his cattle reproduce more rapidly and the crops are bumper crops. "This is great," he thinks, so Potiphar, who is no dummy, in verse 6,

. . . left everything he owned in Joseph's charge; and with him he did not concern himself with anything except the food which he ate. . . .

In other words, Joseph is no menial slave; Joseph is responsible for every activity of this bustling palace. If anyone needed anything, Potiphar would say, "Go see Joseph." If anyone needed time off, "Go see Joseph." If anyone wanted a raise, "Go see Joseph." If there was a skirmish, "Go see Joseph." Joseph handled all of the details of this wealthy, powerful, influential man.

Now the text is about to set us up. Look at the next phrase in verse 6,

. . . Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance.

That is the biblical way of saying, "Joseph was handsome and well built." He was handsome in form; that is, this man was good looking and well built. There is nothing wrong with being good looking and well built – it is just not fair! This was Joseph; this guy had it made! However, the text inserts this so that

we begin to cringe at the thought of what will happen next.

Three kinds of temptation

Now, let us stop for just a moment. Let me give some very helpful words that one commentator wrote concerning the temptations that Joseph will face. There are three kinds of temptations that we face and they can be categorized. I doubt this is comprehensive, but most of the temptations we face in our daily lives come from one of these three categories.

Material

1. The first kind of temptation is material; that is, a lust for things.

This can be a lust for something as small as a ring to something as large as a new home. It can be a lust for something as shiny as a brand new car or something as dusty as an old antique. But there is a flame that burns; there is a lust; there is a desire to have more things. We all feel it and all face it.

Personal

2. The second kind of temptation is what we could call personal temptation.

This is a lust for fame, for prestige, for honor, for position. This kind of individual will make sure that he shakes the right hands and is seen with the right people. He does everything possible to somehow claw and scratch his way to the top of the heap because, "That's where I want to be." This is a lust for preeminence. We battle with that too, don't we? To have our way!

Sensual

3. There is a third kind of temptation and that is the sensual temptation.

This is the gratification of one's physical desires; lusting after someone else.

As I tried to apply this to Joseph, I found that these types of temptations matched in all three counts.

Joseph is a man who is facing the material temptation. You may remember what it was like back with his family tending the sheep – there was nothing nice; there was rarely anything fancy. That lifestyle

was just plain old living – comfortable, but not affluent. Now, Joseph is taken from that and deposited in this wealthy, civilized world that offers all kinds of luxuries. Perhaps he faced the temptation of wanting, of desiring to have what these Egyptians had.

I am sure that Joseph was facing personal temptation as well. He was probably a bit heady at times when Potiphar calls him in and says, “Joseph, I want to promote you. You won’t live with the rest of the slaves anymore; you will live in my home now.” And then, Potiphar gives him the elevated position of steward. I can imagine Joseph looking in the mirror and saying, “You are really something! You’re coming up fast. You’re quite a guy!” He is human.

Then the sensual temptation, the gratification of physical desires, is about to knock at Joseph’s door. Let us see how he handles it. Look at verse 7 of chapter 39.

It came about after these events . . .

Pause here for just a moment. It has now been seventeen years. Joseph is, I believe, thirty-two years of age when this happens. He is no longer a teenager; he is a grown man. So after these events, meaning after all of these promotions, we read,

. . . that his master’s wife looked with desire at Joseph, and she said, “Lie with me.”

Now this attack makes me blush to even preach this text. We are not even given her name, but we know she has no scruples. Notice at the end of her comment, there is just a period. Note further, however, in verse 12, there is an exclamation point. I think that is significant because the first is more like a suggestion, but the latter is an imperative; it is a command.

Joseph Remains Steadfast In Resisting Advances

The first time Potiphar’s wife approaches Joseph, she probably, although the text does not tell us, gave him the standard operation of the temptress, according to Solomon. I imagine that she buttered him up and used flattery, perhaps. She may have approached him and said, “Joseph, I have noticed you. You’re quite a young man. You have risen through the ranks. And on top of that, you’re very handsome. You’re quite a young man.”

As history records, Egyptian women were probably more liberated than women of any other

nation at that time. This woman goes on to tell Joseph what she really wants, as she says in verse 7b,

. . . “Lie with me.”

Verse 8a tells us,

But he refused . . .

Three reasons for saying “No”

Verse 8 will give us the nature of his refusal. Note that this time, Joseph stands and talks with Potiphar’s wife, perhaps because she approaches him without the demanding that will come later. He basically gives her three reasons why he will not sin, and I love this.

“I would break the trust of my master”

1. The first reason Joseph gives for not sinning with Potiphar’s wife is basically, “I would violate or break the trust of my master.”

Look at verse 8 again.

But he refused and said to his master’s wife, “Behold, with me here, my master does not concern himself with anything in the house, and he has put all that he owns in my charge.”

In other words, “He’s left everything up to me. He’s given me great responsibility. I can’t violate the trust of this man in my life.”

Joseph had professional integrity. That is incredibly rare.

“I would violate my character”

2. He does not stop at that, however. Joseph says, “Not only would I violate my master’s trust, I would also violate my character.”

Look at verse 9.

“There is no one greater in this house than I, . . .

(I think that could be translated, “There is no one with greater responsibility than I, . . .”),

“. . . and he has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do this great evil and sin . . .?”

One man wrote that he is about to lose his coat, but he will keep his character. I like that.

Joseph would not violate his character and do this great – compromise? – fudge a little bit? – alternate lifestyle – romantic affair? No. While our society today gives all kinds of clever little phrases about things that go on, Joseph nails it down. He says, “this great evil” is “sin”. He says, “I cannot violate my character. It is worth more to me than you.”

By the way, that is a good grid, especially for young people, as we are tempted with things. Perhaps it is stealing something small and just slipping it into your pocket or maybe it is cheating a little on an exam. Growing up, my father would often say to me, “I hope your character is worth more than that.”

That grid is helpful even now, because I ask myself the question, “Is my character worth less than stealing something small? Is my character worth less than a hundred dollars on my income tax? Is that all my character is worth?”

What is the price tag on your character?

“I would forfeit my fellowship with God”

3. Joseph goes on to say a third reason, and I think the most powerful element in this refusal; that is, “I would forfeit my fellowship with God.”

Look at verse 9 again.

“There is no one greater in this house than I, and he has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do this great evil and sin against God?”

So, in other words, Joseph says, “I would violate the trust of my master. I would violate the nature of my character. And I would violate or forfeit the fellowship with my God.”

I think it is interesting that seven times, you hear the phrase, “His God was with him,” - somehow, some way. Joseph lived with the sense that God was involved in his life. I think that strikes at the very core of personal purity, of saying, “No,” to temptation. That is having a relationship with God that we fear, more than anything else, we would violate.

Plato used to tell a story to his students of a shepherd boy who discovered a ring out in the field. When he would slip the ring on, it would make him unknown or unrecognizable to anyone in his village. As a result, he was given anonymity. The shepherd, prior to this discovery, was a very moral young man;

an upstanding, hard worker. But he began slipping that ring on and soon, Plato says, he became a terrible, wicked sinner.

With that thought in mind, I have thought of Joseph, who has been given anonymity. Nobody knows him in Egypt. Nobody! If there is a perfect time to sin, it is now. No one recognizes him. All of his family is back home – way over there, somewhere. He does not think he will ever go back. And, “Listen, I can come up with some good reasons why I should do this. I’m young; single. God has, it seems, abandoned me. This is the lifestyle; this is accepted. And no one will know.”

Yet, even in the light of anonymity, Joseph says, “No.”

Joseph Is Rewarded By Imprisonment

Well, you come to the last part of that verse, verse 9, and you kind of think, “Whew! Wow! I’m glad that’s over.”

However, look at the next verse, verse 10.

As she spoke to Joseph day after day, he did not listen to her to lie beside her, or be with her.

What a woman! But, Joseph makes it clear now that not only will he not say, “Yes,” but he is going to try to steer clear of this woman because every time he sees her, there is another proposition.

So Joseph tries to stay away; he tries to steer clear. But it does not work very well because it says that she spoke to him every day. So somewhere along the line, she corners him.

In terms of a woman who does not know God, Joseph had every reason to be attractive to her. Handsome, young, moral, upright, hard working, Joseph was “a catch”. It is interesting, if you study Proverbs, chapters 6 and 7, who does the temptress or the tempter seek after? It is the what? The precious life. It is people like you. It is the one who is seeking to glorify God. It is the individual who is seeking to live an upright life. That is the kind of person who is attractive to a needy and lost world that has no moral bearing. You are a very attractive person to the world system.

Finally, in verse 11, Potiphar’s wife sets the stage – and I think she planned this, the little rascal.

Now it happened one day that he went into the house to do his work, and none of the men of the household was there inside.

In other words, she had gotten rid of all of the servants; no one else was inside the house. Continue to verse 12a.

She caught him by his garment, saying, “Lie with me!” . . .

This time there is an exclamation point; this was a demand. I have tried to understand why she felt she had the right to demand. I think, if you go back into that culture, you have to remember that he is still a slave. She feels like she owns him; as if, “He belongs to my household.”

Undoubtedly this woman was involved with other slaves. She felt like she had rights. I imagine that Satan could also whisper in Joseph’s ear, “She does have rights! She owns you.”

Joseph may have been a slave, but she did not own his soul. Look at verse 12b.

. . . And he left his garment in her hand and fled, and went outside.

The Hebrew indicates literally, “to the street.” Joseph left his garment in her hand and ran out into the street. I have often wondered what he did out there. He probably just stood there, waiting for who knows what to happen because of what she would do next. I like the King James version of this,

. . . he . . . fled, and got him [self] out.

It is as if he was thinking, “Nobody else will get me out of here, so I’ll get myself out of here!” and he ran out into the street.

Potiphar’s wife is not finished though. Continue to verse 13.

When she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and had fled outside,

She begins to literally, scream.

Was Joseph, by the way, a coward in this situation? Should he have stayed there and claimed a verse? It is interesting that for this particular kind of temptation, we have a very clear command in the New Testament. It is to do what? To “flee” – run, take off, get out. That is what Joseph did.

Note what Potiphar’s wife does. Look at verse 14.

she called to the men of her household and said to them, “See, he has brought in a

Hebrew to us to make sport of us; he came in to me to lie with me, and I screamed.”

She says, “This Jew boy . . .” – she is bitter. Continue to verse 15.

“When he heard that I raised my voice and screamed, he left his garment beside me and fled and went outside.”

In other words, “He’s out there in the street.”

Continue to verse 16.

So she left his garment beside her until his master came home.

She is waiting for her husband to come home. Look at verses 17 and 18.

Then she spoke to him with these words, “The Hebrew slave, whom you brought to us, came in to me to make sport of me; and as I raised my voice and screamed, he left his garment beside me and fled outside.”

Look at Potiphar’s reaction in verse 19.

When his master heard the words of his wife, which she spoke to him, saying, “This is what your slave did to me,” his anger burned.

Do you know what is missing? Who was Potiphar’s anger burning against? Let me conjecture with you for just a moment, that his anger is not against Joseph. Potiphar is the chief executioner, so if this young slave had attempted rape, he would be dead.

However, do you know what Potiphar does? Look at verse 20.

So Joseph’s master took him and put him into the jail, the place where the king’s prisoners were confined; and he was there in the jail.

Whose jail did he put Joseph in? Potiphar puts him into the prison that he is responsible for. He puts him in with those in bonds that he oversees. He allows him to live.

I think if we could pull back the pages of history and observe that occasion, I think we would see that Potiphar was very angry with himself. I have no doubt that he knew his wife well. In fact, she indicates her disrespect of him, in verse 14, when she says, “‘See, he has brought in a Hebrew . . .’ slave, this husband of mine.”

This is an indication that there were problems. I think Potiphar is very angry that he has allowed something that he knew might very well happen. I think he is also angry at her. He allows Joseph to live.

Note what happens, in verses 21 through 23a.

But the Lord was with Joseph and extended kindness to him, and gave him favor in the sight of the chief jailer. The chief jailer committed to Joseph's charge all the prisoners who were in jail; so that whatever was done there, he was responsible for it. The chief jailer did not supervise anything under Joseph's charge because the Lord was with him; . . .

It is as if the chief jailer gave Joseph a key ring and said, "Joseph, you look over everything and make sure everything is in order."

So God promotes Joseph, even in jail. Look at the last part of verse 23.

. . . and whatever he did, the Lord made to prosper.

Application – An Honest Look At Temptation

What a story! Familiar and yet so applicable. In fact, let me give two applications today.

Let us take an honest look at temptation. Any kind of temptation, whether it is material – you are struggling with something you want to purchase or to have, or personal – you perhaps feel God is not dealing the right deck to you, so you are going to scrape your way to get just a notch higher, or sensual – you are struggling with the gratification of physical desires. Let us take an honest look and I will give two applications.

Temptation, once resisted, may not disappear

1. First, from this story we learned that temptation, once resisted, may not immediately disappear.

This is the reason I said we would take an honest look – I do not really like this. We would like to think that if we resist once, God goes, "Poof," and the temptation is gone. Then we can say, "Whew, took care of that one! I'll never face that again in my life."

No, that temptation does not immediately disappear. In fact, with Joseph, it was a recurring theme for perhaps fifteen years.

Temptation, successfully resisted, may not bring expected results

2. Secondly, temptation, successfully resisted, may not bring expected results.

This is obvious. We want to say, "Okay, Lord, bless this guy!"

Seventeen years of turning down this woman. Seventeen years of uprightness and character. Now is the time to let Joseph step into his role as prime minister. But, not yet. In fact, as a result of successfully resisting temptation, Joseph is thrown in prison. I can imagine him sitting there in a heap, saying, "Lord, thanks a lot!"

We are built that way. We like to think that if we find a thousand dollars in a wallet and we return the wallet that the owner is going to split the money with us as a reward. We like to think we are going to get a thank you.

I recently read of a young fellow who was riding on his paper route and discovered a sack that had somehow been separated from, I have no idea how, a Brinks armored truck. The sack contained sixty thousand dollars! The guy returned it – what a guy! Brinks gave him five hundred dollars. The newspaper quoted him saying, "I wish I had kept it all."

There is something in my heart that says, "Yea, I think I would have too."

I might have called them on the telephone and said, "Look, I'll return this if you . . ." and then, given them a figure.

We would like to think that when we resist, God will reward us. It is time for thanks. But Joseph feels the dampness of a prison cell and is surrounded by legitimate criminals.

One phrase makes it worth it all, however. Joseph does not know this right now, by the way, but you and I can read it. Look at verse 21 again.

But the Lord was with Joseph . . .

He will discover it very soon.

Look back at verse 2 also.

The Lord was with Joseph . . .

In other words, as a successful servant rising in the ranks; as a steward with responsibility for all that his master has, God was with him. We might say, "It's obvious that God was with him."

However, verse 21 tells us that God was with him in the prison cell.

What character this individual had, and we have just scratched the surface. I think only God can produce that character. That kind of character is a result of the supernatural.

You and I cannot resist the constant bombardment of temptation apart from the phrase, “The Lord was with him.” That is the cultivation of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. It is found in a person; that is, the Lord. And I trust that, even today, you can say, “The Lord is with me. He is in control of my life. He is giving me the strength, when others say, ‘Yes,’ to say, ‘No.’”

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Nobody Loves Me, This I Know . . .

Genesis 40

Introduction

In our last discussion, we left Joseph in Egypt. He was in a strange land and yet, as we discovered, had an incredible work ethic. He decided, even though he was in a foreign land; even though he was where he did not want to be as a result of being betrayed by, abducted, and sold into Egypt by his brothers, that instead of throwing his job; instead of, in a sense, sabotaging the effort in Egypt, he was going to do his best. Joseph would serve God in the house of Potiphar.

I am sure you remember the next part of the story that Joseph was approached by Potiphar's wife, and he refused. We studied the principles of saying, "No," to temptation. Then, as a result of saying, "No"; as a result of doing what was right; as a result of being Godly, God rewarded him. Well, we would not look at it that way. If we could look thirty years into his future, we would say that that was God's design in the way He responded to Joseph's obedience. However, when Joseph responded to something sinful in a right way, he was, in effect, rewarded with imprisonment. That is where we left him.

Falsely Accused & Permanently Imprisoned

Let us begin our discussion today in Genesis, chapter 39, verses 19 through 21a.

Now when his master heard the words of his wife, which she spoke to him, saying, "This is what your slave did to me," his anger burned. So Joseph's master took him and put him into the jail, the place where the king's prisoners were confined; and he was

there in the jail. But the Lord was with Joseph . . .

This is the seventh time the phrase "the Lord was with Joseph" appears and you should underline it in your text. The Lord was with Joseph at the beginning of the chapter when he was prospering and being promoted. The Lord was with Joseph in the prison.

Continue to verses 21 through 23.

But the Lord was with Joseph and extended kindness to him, and gave him favor in the sight of the chief jailer. The chief jailer committed to Joseph's charge all the prisoners who were in the jail; so that whatever was done there, he was responsible for it. The chief jailer did not supervise anything under Joseph's charge because the Lord was with him; and whatever he did, the Lord made to prosper.

This is an incredible story, as Joseph is falsely accused and permanently imprisoned. Make no mistake – Joseph is in that prison for life; he is there until he dies.

The literal translation of the Hebrew word "prison" is, "the hole". It was a pit; it was a dark, dank, stench-filled room with perhaps two or three other key political prisoners. That is where Joseph is shackled.

Archeologists have discovered similar prisons in the deserts of Egypt, among many discoveries. Holes or pits where they would place prisoners have been uncovered. The prisoner would have a brace that would go around their neck, imprisoning or shackling

them to a pillar, and their ankles would be shackled as well.

That is referred to in Psalm, chapter 105, verse 18, when it talks about Joseph. It says,

They afflicted his feet with fetters, he himself was laid in irons;

So Joseph begins, not with a responsible position in prison, but by being shackled to a stone pillar by his neck and ankles, standing for a length of time that he does not know.

The key phrase, as you well know and I have already mentioned, is “the Lord was with him.” The Lord had another design for Joseph. The Lord was not about to let Joseph rot in the prison. Although for some, that has been the case; for Joseph, it was not.

Something unusual happens, the Lord gives Joseph favor in the eyes of the captain of the guard’s servant so that he is promoted. That promotion is not taking him out of the hole, but rather, he is released from the fetters and now serves the other prisoners. That is not much of an improvement, but I am sure, to him it was a great improvement. He no longer has his neck in an iron brace, but will now serve.

Common forms of mistreatment

As I was thinking of this, there is an obvious application in the mistreatment Joseph has faced – it is unjustified; he is betrayed; he is accused of doing something he has never done. We also, although to no degree such as this, face mistreatment. Let me give three ways that we face mistreatment.

From people

- The first way that we face mistreatment is, of course, from people.

There are a number of biblical illustrations of mistreatment by people. Look at Nehemiah, who is a classic illustration of someone who continues to do the will of God, even when mistreated and accused.

One day, the people look at Nehemiah’s work of rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem and say, “Oh Nehemiah, what you are doing is insignificant. In fact, if a little fox jumps on the wall, it will crumble. You’re nobody.” Others say, “What you’re really doing is trying to pad the pew; trying to stack the deck. You are trying to make it so that you will one day have a city to govern.”

This was mistreatment by people. It is interesting that Nehemiah faces it with very little rebuttal.

From family

- We would also face mistreatment, accusation, trouble, criticism from family. The logical extension, or the extreme of that would be abuse.

Perhaps you have come from an abusive home. Perhaps you, as a little child, were abused. That is the extreme of being mistreated by family. Sometimes we can be mistreated by people we love. If we consider Joseph’s story, he also faced mistreatment by his brothers.

From friends

- The third way we face mistreatment would be from friends.

I think this hurts as much as from family, especially if the mistreatment is at the hands of close friends.

The rejection that Paul faced and felt from Demas is brought to my mind. You may remember in II Timothy, chapter 4, verse 10, Paul writes, and you can almost hear the agony in his voice,

Demas . . . has deserted me . . .

The word “deserted,” or “forsaken” as your translation may say, could be translated, “left in a lurch, abandoned”. With that, comes the idea of Paul being in a state where the battle really gets hot; where he really begins to need help and support, like we all do. The implication of what Paul is saying at that point in time is, “Demas left me in a lurch. Demas abandoned me.”

I also think of the disagreeable disagreement that Daniel had in his life. Turn ahead to the book of Daniel. We have studied this in detail in the past, but we will briefly look at it again. We are, in a sense, arguing from implication, but I think there is benefit to that in this case. We will look at Daniel, chapter 1.

You may remember that Daniel, like Joseph, was taken to a pagan country. He is told, “You need to eat certain foods and you will be tested by the king.”

Daniel says, in verses 12 through 13a,

“Please test your servants for ten days, and let us be given some vegetables to eat and

water to drink. Then let our appearance be observed in your presence . . .”

In other words, “Then put us to the test; give us the final examination.”

Continue in verse 13.

“. . . and the appearance of the youths who are eating the king’s choice food . . .”

“Youths,” would imply all of the Hebrew slaves that had been taken to Babylon to be trained for leadership. What they had intended to do was take these youths, train them for leadership in Babylon, and then, ultimately, transplant them back to Jerusalem so that they would, in a sense, be puppets of the Babylonian kingdom.

So Daniel says, “Test us against the youths that are eating the king’s choice food.”

Look at the last part of verse 13 and verse 14.

“. . . and deal with your servants according to what you see.” So he listened to them in this matter and tested them for ten days.

Now the next verse, verse 15, is the one we want to notice.

At the end of ten days their appearance seemed better and they were fatter [in better health] than all the youths who had been eating the king’s choice food.

The implication is that Daniel and his three friends were the only of the Hebrew captives to say, “No.” They were quartered, undoubtedly, with the other political prisoners. In my imagination, I can almost hear the debate. I can hear Daniel on one side saying, “No, it’s wrong! We can’t eat that food – it would violate the Levitical standard. We cannot eat that.”

I can see all the other youths on the other side saying, “No, Daniel, you’re taking this to an extreme. We disagree.”

Finally, the test came, and Daniel and his three friends passed. I see, interwoven into the context, a very bitter disagreement. Daniel is forced to stand alone. These are his friends; these are the Hebrew youth that have been taken captive with him.

Mistreatment by people, family, and friends are common forms of mistreatment.

Temporarily Befriended & Divinely Inspired

Now notice that Joseph is temporarily befriended and divinely inspired. Let us dive into chapter 40. Begin with verse 1.

Then it came about after these things, the cupbearer and the baker for the king of Egypt offended their lord, the king of Egypt.

There have been volumes, that I have had the privilege of reading, on just this first verse. Let me share with you the top of what I have learned.

“The cupbearer” could be translated, because of the definite article “the,” as “the chief of the cupbearers”. This is also not just “a” baker, this is “the” baker; this is “the chief of the bakers”. There were perhaps dozens, if not hundreds of bakers preparing the foods, as well as others who kept that palace thriving.

It is interesting, and many have implied, that the cupbearer, who was responsible to hand the king his cup, would be the one responsible for taking a sip of what the Pharaoh would drink and then give it to him. If the cupbearer keeled over after thirty seconds, then of course, the Pharaoh would not drink. If the cupbearer survived, then the Pharaoh would drink. So the cupbearer was in a very responsible position, because if anyone wanted to assassinate the Pharaoh, slip a little cache of poison in his cup, if the cupbearer faked taking a sip and then gave it to the king, it would be, “Goodbye King”. This cupbearer was perhaps one of the most trusted men in the kingdom.

Do you remember another individual who was the cupbearer? In the Old Testament, he was the cupbearer to Artaxerxes. It was Nehemiah. Nehemiah was perhaps the most trusted person to Artaxerxes – his very life depended on that man.

It is interesting as well, that the cupbearer was, in a sense, in agreement with the priests. They have now discovered much conclusive information that the Pharaoh was not allowed intoxicating drink. In fact, the priests prescribed what the Pharaoh could drink. The cupbearer would make sure that the Pharaoh got only what had been prescribed.

There have been findings uncovered that have depicted a king or a Pharaoh with a cup in his hand and the cupbearer is shown taking a grape off of a vine. The inscription says, “They press grapes into their water and the king drinks.” The implication is that this is right off the vine; this is fresh.

Knowing that (we will get off this topic in a minute), explained to me Proverbs, chapter 31, verse 4, in which Solomon said,

. . . It is not for kings to drink wine, or for rulers to desire strong drink,

The implication is they are not to have intoxicating drink. The New International Version translates, “. . . nor for rulers to drink beer”. This is an interesting verse of scripture. I think it is because, as the next verse says,

For they will drink and forget what they decreed, . . .

In other words the cupbearer would make sure that the Pharaoh's mind was not befuddled by intoxicating drink. He would carefully make sure it was not poisoned and also make sure it fit the regulation. The cupbearer was a very responsible individual.

Well, because the cupbearer and the baker are both thrown into prison at the same time, what does that make you think? There is the implication that these guys had something going. Perhaps they had been hired by assassins. Perhaps someone had slipped poison into the food and the Pharaoh did not know whether it was the cupbearer or the baker; he did not know who was responsible. So he throws both of them into prison until the evidence has been weighed. Perhaps that is what they are waiting for.

Let us go to the next verses in Genesis, chapter 40. Look at verses 2 through 4.

Pharaoh was furious with his two officials, the chief cupbearer and the chief baker. So he put them in confinement in the house of the captain of the bodyguard, in the jail, the same place where Joseph was imprisoned. The captain of the bodyguard put Joseph in charge of them, and he took care of them; and they were in confinement for some time.

So, in that dank little cell, Joseph will now serve them. It is humiliating enough to be a slave, but now, although he is loosened, he is, in effect, a slave to criminals. He will take care of them.

Now note verses 5 through 7.

Then the cupbearer and the baker for the king of Egypt, who were confined in jail, both had a dream the same night, each man with his own dream and each dream with its own interpretation. When Joseph came to them in the morning and observed them,

behold, they were dejected. He asked Pharaoh's officials who were with him in confinement in his master's house, "Why are your faces so sad today?"

Volumes have been written on this as well. Obviously Joseph is a very caring, sensitive individual. Even though he is imprisoned, he is still concerned enough to ask these two men, who are also prisoners, "What's bothering you? Share it with me, and maybe I can help."

Joseph is an unusual character. Continue to verse 8.

Then they said to him, "We have had a dream and there is no one to interpret it." Then Joseph said to them, "Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell it to me, please."

These were startling words. Ladies and gentlemen, this reveals two very important things about Joseph in prison.

- First, it reveals that Joseph still believed in his dreams.

Do you remember the dreams that Joseph had? If he did not believe in his dreams, he would have told these guys, "Listen, the last thing you want to do is dream. I had two dreams one time, and let me tell you what happened to me. Are the sheaves bowing down to me? Are the moon and the stars worshipping me? Forget the dreams, guys. They don't mean anything. Nothing will come to play."

This reveals that Joseph still, in his heart, believed that God had given him those dreams and that they would come true.

- Secondly, obviously this reveals that he had not abandoned God – which is incredible.

Joseph said, "Do not interpretations belong to God?"

In other words, "I want you to know that even though I was obeying Him, even though I was doing what was right, even though I was a trusting follower of His law, He has thrown me into prison. Yet, I still trust Him; I still obey; I still follow."

Joseph had not abandoned God.

Let us read further and see what happens. Look at verses 9 through 11.

So the chief cupbearer told his dream to Joseph, and said to him, "In my dream, behold, there was a vine in front of me; and

on the vine were three branches. And as it was budding, its blossoms came out, and its clusters produced ripe grapes. Now Pharaoh's cup was in my hand; so I took the grapes and squeezed them into Pharaoh's cup, and I put the cup into Pharaoh's hand."

This again would be evidence to the topic I was on a few minutes ago. Continue to verses 12 and 13.

Then Joseph said to him, "This is the interpretation of it: the three branches are three days; within three more days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your office; and you will put Pharaoh's cup into his hand according to your former custom when you were his cupbearer."

Now verses 14 and 15 are interesting. Note them well, because Joseph is absolutely human. He says,

"Only keep me in mind when it goes well with you, and please do me a kindness by mentioning me to Pharaoh and get me out of this house [this prison, this hole]. For I was in fact kidnapped from the land of the Hebrews, and even here I have done nothing that they should have put me into the dungeon."

In other words, Joseph is saying, "Listen to my story now, and when you get out, please (note that word) put a good word in Pharaoh's ear for me."

I am going to mention this again when we get to applications, concerning the way in which God is developing a very important principle in Joseph's life that needs to be in our lives as well.

Let us go on to verses 16 through 19.

When the chief baker saw that he had interpreted favorably, he said to Joseph, "I also saw in my dream, and behold, there were three baskets of white bread on my head; and in the top basket there were some of all sorts of baked food for Pharaoh, and the birds were eating them out of the basket on my head." Then Joseph answered and said, "This is its interpretation: the three baskets are three days; within three more days Pharaoh will lift up your head from you and will hang you on a tree, and the birds will eat your flesh off you."

There is a big difference in the interpretation of the baker's dream. He is going to be beheaded.

Note the character of Joseph. I wondered if he made sure he was far enough away from the leash of this guy before he gave him the interpretation; if he measured how far he would have to run. Yet seemingly, Joseph, without even blinking an eye, simply says, "This is the interpretation."

What a powerful statement that is to everyone today, who teaches God's Word. We have not only the message of the cupbearer; that is great news – there is heaven, there is forgiveness, there is rejoicing; we also have the message of the baker; that is bad news – there may be judgment, there may be death. Joseph, interpreting the Word of God, gave them both.

Now this interpretation is incredibly important because in that day in Egypt, bodies were embalmed. Why did they do that? In their religious system, the preservation of the body was essential for life after death. So they made sure they took good care of their bodies because they would come back and inhabit them in the next life. That is why they developed the tremendous process of embalming bodies.

Notice that the judgment in verse 19 is really severe for the Egyptian culture. The verse basically said, "They'll not only behead you, but they will take your body, what's left of it, and they'll impale it on a tree and birds will come and eat the flesh off of your body."

Birds were sacred in Egypt, so they were never destroyed. As a result, they were probably in an overabundance and even carnivorous. They would come and pick the flesh from his body. The baker therefore knew there was no chance for life after death, being a pagan. He faced severe judgment.

Potentially Rescued, Yet Tragically Forgotten

Now Joseph is potentially rescued and yet, he is tragically forgotten. Look at verse 20.

Thus it came about on the third day, which was Pharaoh's birthday, that he made a feast for all his servants, and he lifted up the head of the chief cupbearer and the head of the chief baker among his servants.

This is interesting, Pharaoh designed his own birthday party. He pulls the cupbearer and the baker into the banquet room. He is going to have fun; this is sport. This for him, is, "my little birthday party to myself."

Continue to verse 21.

***He restored the chief cupbearer to his office,
and he put the cup into Pharaoh's hand;***

Pharaoh probably said, "I'm a wonderful Pharaoh, aren't I?"

Perhaps, however, he discovered the evidence he was looking for. Maybe it was proved that the cupbearer was innocent and the baker was guilty. Look at verse 22.

but he hanged the chief baker, just as Joseph had interpreted to them.

He beheaded him, obviously, and then hanged his body on a tree.

Now verse 23 is very important.

Yet the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph, but forgot him.

You should underline those three words, "but forgot him." Sometime, at another time, ponder the implications of the way that must have affected Joseph.

F. B. Meyer, a colorful expositor, uses his imagination in this situation. He writes that the next day, when the prison door opens, Joseph jumps with a start. He looks toward the door, perhaps even running over to it, thinking, "Here they are! I'm free!"

He had probably told all of the other prisoners, "They're coming to get me, I guarantee."

Then, after a few days, the door opens and he probably, with a start and with a hopeful look, looks over at the door – but it is another prisoner or a guard entering or exiting. Finally, someone comes to the door and Joseph does not even look.

It must have been unbelievably difficult for Joseph to go through that experience of knowing that the cupbearer had chosen to forget him.

The cupbearer has been restored. He may have thought, "Would I dare threaten the position I have now with the Pharaoh by bringing up a story about this Hebrew captive; this slave? No way! I'm not going to endanger my position."

The cupbearer is walking on eggs. But perhaps, over a period of time, he forgets the entire story.

Common responses to mistreatment

Let me give you some common responses to mistreatment. I am sure these are in a book somewhere, but I did not read them. In fact, the way I got these was by leaning back in my chair and asking

myself the question, "Stephen, how do you respond to mistreatment?"

There are at least three responses to mistreatment. Let me give them to you.

Self-pity

- The first common response to mistreatment is self-pity.

I can imagine that Joseph, in that prison, had every potential to throw the biggest pity party in history. "Look at me. Woe is me. It all started with jealous brothers. And then I do my best and Potiphar doesn't defend me. His wife falsely accuses me. Now I'm in prison. I interpret dreams for God and it doesn't get me anywhere. Poor, poor me."

The next chapter reveals, by its silence, that Joseph never threw that pity party. Because he is human, however, I have every reason to believe he was sorely tempted to.

Bitterness

- The second common response is bitterness.

Bitterness is initially directed toward the person who has mistreated us – the person who has accused us; the person who has criticized us. We do not want to see that person; we do not want to be near that person; we do not want to drive our car by that person's house; we do not want them to drive their car by our house. And the bitterness begins to grow.

However, ultimately, bitterness is directed not toward that person, but toward who? It is directed toward God. A person who is filled with bitterness has ultimately forfeited his fellowship with God. He is, in effect, saying, "God did not deal kindly with me in allowing this to happen to me."

Bitterness is a very, very common threat when we are mistreated.

Revenge

- The third common response to mistreatment is revenge.

That response is the one where you can really spend some time. You envision that person's face on the wall of your kitchen or your study or office, or on the driveway when you pull up into your garage.

Joseph had every reason in the world to seek revenge. I can imagine that, in a sense, Joseph's "hit list" is growing. As soon as he gets out of prison, he has got a list. The first on the list is: eleven brothers. "Once I am the most powerful man, when they bow their knee to me, I'm going to slice their heads from their bodies. And I've got every reason to."

The next entry on Joseph's list would be, "Wait until I have more power than Potiphar. He'll be accountable then. And Potiphar's wife! . . .". I think if I were Joseph, I would imagine putting Potiphar's wife in prison, in that very cell, for the rest of her life, with only water.

Yet we never read, in the record of Joseph's life, after he was elevated to prime minister, that he ever has a meeting with Potiphar. He probably never saw Potiphar's wife. But I guarantee, they were thinking, "Uh-oh."

You may remember, of course, as we will study in detail later, when he meets his brothers that he forgives them. Somewhere in that prison cell, in the next two years – two years of being forgotten and abandoned – he was able, by the grace of God, to gain victory over mistreatment.

Application

Let me tie this together by suggesting a couple of applications.

Ways we open ourselves up for letdowns

I think there are ways that we open ourselves up for mistreatment or to the ill effect of mistreatment. We call these perhaps, "letdowns." Let me give you two.

Misplacing trust

1. The first way we open ourselves up is by misplacing our trust.

Joseph really opened himself up because in verses 14 and 15, he tells the cupbearer, in a sense, "You be my savior; you give the word; you get me out of this prison."

God would teach Joseph, over the next two years, "If you get out of here, it will be by Me."

It will, in fact, be a miracle that gets Joseph out of prison.

We open ourselves up for this kind of letdown when our fulfillment, our happiness depends on someone other than God; when we put our trust in flesh. When you put your ultimate trust in me, you will be let down. If I ever put my complete trust in you, I will be let down. We all fail each other.

I think, when we face the potential bitterness, or self pity, or revenge as a result of mistreatment, we are, in a sense, saying, "I placed my trust in that person rather than in *God* working through them."

Making unrealistic expectations

2. Secondly, we open ourselves up by making unrealistic expectations.

I was talking with another pastor and he was sharing some things that have happened. He, being human, of course, told me about a pastor who called him on a Saturday night and said, "Where are you?" He was supposed to be there the next day for an all day seminar. He kind of laughed and said, "You know, I had completely misjudged or miscalculated or put something else in the place of that on the calendar, and had forgotten." He got a late night special flight and somehow made it.

If you know me, or I know you, or you know anyone long enough, they will drop the ball; they will let you down; they will disappoint you; they will be late. Let us move on, that is too convicting!

What to do when left in a lurch

Let me mention the next part of these applications. What should we do when we are left in a lurch? What should we do when we are faced with handling a response to mistreatment. Let me give three things.

Re-evaluate

1. First, re-evaluate.

Re-evaluate; ask yourself some questions. What is my attitude supposed to be? What are my motives supposed to be? What are my priorities? Is this person revealing to me that my priorities are way out of line; that my motive for doing something is out of kilter?

Refuse – to retaliate

2. Secondly, refuse – simply refuse to retaliate.

That is as much of a commitment as anything else. Make up your mind that you will not allow your mind to retaliate; to imagine revenge. If you do not imagine it, you will never perform it. It begins in the heart.

Refocus

3. Thirdly, refocus.

Let me give two points about refocusing.

- First, refocus on God's desire.

This is an interesting thought because God's desire is for harmony, for unity, for forgiveness. In fact, that is why Matthew, chapter 5, verses 23 and 24, tells *you* to go to the person who has something against you. It is not the other way around, even though you might expect it to be. Jesus says,

Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.

I think the reason for this is because that person who has something against you is so caught up and has, in fact, transgressed the line and is involved in bitterness, and perhaps revenge and self-pity. When they are in that position, it is our responsibility to go and help them out of that by saying, "Tell me what I did," and apologizing if necessary.

It is interesting that Jesus Christ tells us to strive for harmony, unity, and forgiveness. Obviously we should strive for this in our family, but also in the church.

- Secondly, refocus on God's design.

Let me give two thoughts on this.

- Every disappointment in life is another illustration of the faithfulness of God. When someone disappoints you, that is an illustration of the way Jesus Christ *never* disappoints.
- Secondly, every disappointment is another step toward maturing in the image of Christ. Hebrews, chapter 5, verse 8, tells us of Jesus Christ that,

Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered.

Can you imagine taking several hours, and still not even finishing the task, to write down every incidence of mistreatment that Jesus Christ suffered? Try writing down every time Jesus Christ was mistreated, accused, abandoned, rejected, and so forth. We fellowship with Him in His glory, but also in His sufferings (I Peter 4:13).

Let me read a poem that was written perhaps a hundred years ago, by Julius Sturm.

*Pain's furnace heat within me quivers;
God's breath upon the flame doth blow.
And all my heart in anguish shivers,
And trembles at the fiery glow.
And yet I whisper, "As God will,"
And in His hottest fire hold still.*

*He comes and lays my heart all heated
On the hard anvil, minded so.
Into His own fair shape to beat it
With His great hammer, blow on blow.
And yet I whisper, "As God will,"
And at His heaviest blows hold still.*

*He takes my softened heart and beats it,
The sparks fly off at every blow.
He turns it o'er and o'er and heats it,
And lets it cool and makes it glow.
And yet I whisper, "As God will,"
And in His mighty hand hold still.*

*Why should I murmur? For the sorrow
Thus only longer lived would be.
Its end may come and will tomorrow,
When God has done His work in me.
So I say, trusting, "As God will,"
And trusting to the end hold still.*

He kindles for my profit purely

*Affliction's glowing, fiery brand.
And all His heaviest blows are surely
Inflicted by a master hand.
So I say, "As God will,"
And hope in Him and suffer still.*

Men and women, there is something far greater
than vindication before men, recognition before men,

acceptance before men. There is something far
greater than all of that. It is the consciousness, like
that of Joseph, that *God* is with me – and God is going
in a particular direction and I am going with God.

I have a small plaque in my study that says, "The
greatest knowledge is the will of God. The greatest
joy is doing it."

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The Test Of Prosperity

Genesis 41

Introduction

If you have been studying the life of Joseph with us, you have noticed that his life thus far, has been a whirlwind of reversals. Joseph was the favored son of his father. He was adorned by him, with a coat that reached to his ankles and to his wrists, which denoted nobility and exempted him from the hard labor that his brothers would have to perform.

However, Joseph then ends up in a pit because his jealous brothers are determined to wipe out this dreamer. But when all seems to be at a loss, he is, instead of being killed, sold to Midianites. That would perhaps be the low point in his life, as he is standing, stripped naked, on the auction block to be sold to the highest bidder. That bidder happens to be Potiphar.

God gives Joseph favor in Potiphar's eyes and he is soon elevated and promoted and given a great responsibility. But then, as you probably remember, Potiphar's wife decides to sink her talons into his character. Because he refused, Joseph ends up in prison. That is another low point in his life.

Then, the cupbearer and baker of the Pharaoh, who were placed in prison with Joseph, have dreams. It seems that there is hope because he is able to interpret their dreams and knows one of them will be taken out of prison. He says, "When you get out, please remember me. Tell the Pharaoh that I have been falsely accused. Do everything that you can because I have given you a favorable interpretation. Get me out of this prison."

The last part of chapter 40 ends with the words, "... but [the cupbearer] forgot him."

Let us go back, in fact, to Genesis, chapter 40, verse 20a, to set the stage.

Thus it came about on the third day, which was Pharaoh's birthday . . .

Three days after Joseph interpreted the cupbearer's and the baker's dreams in prison, Pharaoh has a birthday. I want to give an interesting side light on this because, if you have been reading the newspaper lately, you have noted that scoffers, and critics, and those of more liberal beliefs are once again attacking the reliability of the scriptures.

You may have noticed the front page of our local newspaper recently, which told that they are determined to tone down the sexist point of view of the scriptures. The implication being that the Word of God is sexist. They are going to change the references of "he" in verses, to "it". I do not know what they are going to do with the masculine references to God, but perhaps they will find a way around that as well.

I think it interesting that critics have often said, "This is proof that the Bible was written by someone long after the time of the Pharaoh because they didn't know anything about birthday parties during the time of Pharaoh."

Yet, it says in verse 20 that Pharaoh is having a birthday party. This is proof that someone living far beyond that time wrote.

It seems as if God, every once in awhile, allows the archeologist's spade to uncover some evidence. Perhaps you have heard of the Rosetta stone that was uncovered which gave the ability to read hieroglyphics. On that Rosetta stone is an entire decree given at the birthday party of a Pharaoh!

Well, it was Pharaoh's birthday party and, according to verses 20b through 23,

. . . he made a feast for all his servants; and he lifted up the head of the chief cupbearer and the head of the chief baker among his servants. He restored the chief cupbearer to his office, and he put the cup into Pharaoh's hand; but he hanged the chief baker, just as Joseph had interpreted to them. Yet the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph, but forgot him.

It had only been three days. When I read this, the first thought that came to my mind was that the cupbearer's memory reminded me of me. Three days! I have a hard time remembering when my wife tells me to pick up a loaf of bread on my way home from work – after only eight hours. So now, when I leave home in the morning, she pins notes to my lapels! But after three days, you would think that he would remember. I looked up each word in the original text, thinking that one of the words would imply he chose to forget, and I could not find it. He did not make up his mind to choose to forget, he simply forgot.

But is that really what was going on behind the scenes? There was a sovereign God who knew that the timing was not right. Joseph still had two more years of preparation before he would step from the prison cell into the office of prime minister. God was not through preparing him. He was making gold out of Joseph.

You may be familiar with Job, chapter 23, verse 10b, when Job wrote that,

. . . when He [God] has tried me, I shall come forth as gold.

That is an internal development. He is not saying that when God is finished, he will get his job back. He is not saying that when God is finished trying him, his spouse might return; he will get promoted; his children will begin to obey. No.

. . . when He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold.

That is an internal development of character that is sterling; that is valuable.

God was, in a sense, in that prison cell for two more years while Joseph had been forgotten. About Joseph's ankles were the fetters, and periodically perhaps, his neck was fettered to a stone column so that he had to stand at attention. What was God doing? Making gold.

I have heard several illustrations recently, that illustrated this point so well. A young soprano was singing in a concert hall to a vast audience. Her range was exquisite and she was obviously trained. The composer of the song she was singing was in the audience. One of his friends leaned over, after she had finished, and asked, "What do you think of that?"

The composer replied, "She will be great one day, after her heart has been broken."

A. W. Tozer wrote the following words. Listen carefully because you might disagree.

It is doubtful that God can use anyone greatly until God has hurt him deeply. There in the prison cell for this two year period, God is, in a sense, hurting, developing, maturing, so that he will come out of that cell ready for the office of prime minister.

The Dreams of Pharaoh

Let us now note, as we head into chapter 41 of Genesis, all that occurs. Look at verses 1 through 8a.

Now it happened at the end of two full years that Pharaoh had a dream, and behold, he was standing by the Nile.

And lo, from the Nile there came up seven cows, sleek and fat; and they grazed in the marsh grass.

Then behold, seven other cows came up after them from the Nile, ugly and gaunt, and they stood by the other cows on the bank of the Nile.

The ugly and gaunt cows ate up the seven sleek and fat cows. Then Pharaoh awoke.

He fell asleep and dreamed a second time; and behold, seven ears of grain came up on a single stalk, plump and good.

Then behold, seven ears, thin and scorched by the east wind, sprouted up after them.

The thin ears swallowed up the seven plump and full ears. Then Pharaoh awoke, and behold, it was a dream.

Now in the morning his spirit was troubled, so he sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt, and all its wise men. And Pharaoh told them his dreams, . . .

Note that these magicians are a collection of the wisest of the wise in Egypt. They are, by the way, the same crowd that Moses will do combat with in the book of Exodus. The title “wise men” could be translated, “well-versed in the writings”. In other words, these men knew all of the writings of Egypt.

These magicians were well versed in the occult. They had powers that are evidenced, especially when Moses fights against them, as they give revelation of Satan’s power in them. These men were very wise in terms of the underworld. They were well trained in interpreting hard sayings and dreams. If anyone could do it, these men could.

When we read these dreams, you and I could probably make an educated guess as to their meaning. It seems that there are good things happening for seven years and then, there are going to be bad things happening for seven years. It makes simple sense to us.

Yet, I think God closed the minds of these wise men. They were not able to tell Pharaoh the meaning. Look at the last part of verse 8.

... but there was no one who could interpret them to Pharaoh.

Now look at verse 9. You may remember this character.

Then the chief cupbearer spoke to Pharaoh, saying, “I would make mention today of my own offenses.”

The cupbearer is saying, in a sense, “Uh-oh, I forgot something, Pharaoh, that may be helpful.”

Continue to verses 10 through 13.

“Pharaoh was furious with his servants, and he put me in confinement in the house of the captain of the bodyguard, both me and the chief baker.

“We had a dream on the same night, he and I; each of us dreamed according to the interpretation of his own dream.

“Now a Hebrew youth was with us there, a servant of the captain of the bodyguard, and we related them to him, and he interpreted our dreams for us. To each one he interpreted according to his own dream.

“And just as he interpreted for us, so it happened; he restored me in my office, but he hanged him.”

The Interpretations of Joseph

Now, two years later, God brings to the cupbearer’s mind a remembrance of this Hebrew captive, Joseph. So, we are told in verse 14a,

Then Pharaoh sent and called for Joseph, and they hurriedly brought him out of the dungeon; . . .

They literally forced him to run. He stops, however, and probably understanding whose presence he will be in, decides to dress the part.

And when he had shaved himself and changed his clothes, he came to Pharaoh.

Now look at verse 15.

Pharaoh said to Joseph, “I have had a dream, but no one can interpret it; and I have heard it said about you, that when you hear a dream you can interpret it.”

Stop! Imagine you are Joseph at this moment. You have spent years in prison because you were falsely accused. This is your grand opportunity! This is, in a sense, your day in court. This is your opportunity to vindicate yourself. I think my first words would have been, “If you’ll get me out of prison, I’ll do this.”

Or perhaps if Joseph had been spending that two year period in bitterness, determining that once he was released, there would be revenge, then that would have been the first thing out of his mouth. But look at verse 16. He says these words,

... “It is not in me . . .”

In other words, “Pharaoh, it’s not me.”

I want to rush into the courtroom and say, “Joseph, just a minute! Sure it is! God is in you! Take some credit here.”

There was no credit taken by Joseph. He says in verse 16,

“It is not in me; God [Elohim] will give Pharaoh a favorable answer.”

I love this because I can just imagine all of the magicians and all of the wise men filling that court of Egypt. And there that grand Pharaoh sits, and this little Hebrew captive, Joseph, says, “Elohim will tell you.”

As you know, Egypt was a very idolatrous nation. They had myriads of idols; myriads of gods. And

Joseph says, “Elohim, the God of heaven, will reveal it to you.”

Look at verse 17. I think Pharaoh probably ignored Joseph’s statement.

So Pharaoh spoke to Joseph, “In my dream, behold, I was standing on the bank of the Nile;”

Pharaoh tells the story. Let us get to the end of the story and note what happens. Look at verses 25 through 31.

Now Joseph said to Pharaoh, “Pharaoh’s dreams are one and the same; God [Elohim] has told to Pharaoh what He is about to do.

“The seven good cows are seven years; and the seven good ears are seven years; the dreams are one and the same.

“The seven lean and ugly cows that came up after them are seven years, and the seven thin ears scorched by the east wind will be seven years of famine.

“It is as I have spoken to Pharaoh: God has shown to Pharaoh what He is about to do.

“Behold, seven years of great abundance are coming in all the land of Egypt;

“and after them seven years of famine will come, and all the abundance will be forgotten in the land of Egypt; and the famine will ravage the land.

“So the abundance will be unknown in the land because of that subsequent famine; for it will be very severe.”

Joseph’s interpretation is to the point and it is truthful. Perhaps if you had been abducted; perhaps if you had been sold into slavery and falsely accused, you would have added a little “P.S.” to this, “And Pharaoh, I hope Egypt rots. It wouldn’t bother me a bit. Seven good years are coming. Seven bad years are coming too, and you deserve every bit of it.”

Joseph’s advice

However, what will happen next is nothing less than startling. Let us take a look. Joseph says in verse 33,

“Now let Pharaoh look for a man discerning and wise, and set him over the land of Egypt.”

I like the way he adds the word “discerning”. Pharaoh had his “wise” men, but a discerning person is one who can see a problem *and* a solution. Pharaoh had all kinds of people who could say, “Pharaoh, here’s the problem . . . this is the problem,” just as there are those in your life who see the problems, and perhaps you can see problems. A discerning person, however, can provide a solution.

Look at Joseph’s recommended solution in verses 34 through 36.

“Let Pharaoh take action to appoint overseers in charge of the land, and let him exact a fifth of the produce of the land of Egypt in the seven years of abundance.

“Then let them gather all the food of these good years that are coming, and store up the grain for food in the cities under Pharaoh’s authority, and let them guard it.

“Let the food become as a reserve for the land for the seven years of famine which will occur in the land of Egypt, so that the land will not perish during the famine.”

“This is how you can survive, Pharaoh, during the famine.”

Now, I sat back and asked myself, first of all, “Where in the world did Joseph come up with this plan?”

The last time we saw Joseph in freedom, he was overseeing the tending of sheep, as the son of a wandering immigrant in the land. Now, as a thirty year old, he is standing in the court of the Pharaoh and he is saying, “Pharaoh, this is the problem. Now let me give you a three-fold solution.”

Bang! Bang! Bang! He says, “We need:

- a central administration;
- a security system;
- a distribution plan.”

It is fantastic!

The Promotion of Joseph

Pharaoh is probably on his throne thinking, “Wow! I’m going to believe this because he interpreted the dream. But now, where in the world

am I going to find some man who can not only share the problem, but provide the solution.”

Notice what he does in verse 38. He is speaking to the wise men; the magicians.

Then Pharaoh said to his servants, “Can we find a man like this, in whom is a divine spirit?”

He is asking, “. . . in whom dwells the spirit of the gods.” He is not a believer, but he senses something in Joseph that is distinctive. He senses that Joseph’s God is really part of his life. It is more than an idol, it is a reality to him. And his God has given him discernment and wisdom. Oh, that the world could see that in you and in me.

Continue to verses 39 and 40.

So Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Since God has informed you of all this, there is no one so discerning and wise as you are. You shall be over my house, and according to your command all my people shall do homage; only in the throne I will be greater than you.”

Now before we enjoy the promotion, let us broaden our imagination a bit and try to imagine what the rest of the country would think about this. Here is a young upstart, and all of the news will spread as fast as fire, that this servant is now going to become prime minister. You would probably think, as one man that I heard suggested, that he knew someone or bought someone off. No one would know that God was behind the scene. And although Joseph’s plan sounds wonderful to Pharaoh, it would not sound wonderful to you and me. Joseph has suggested that he tax the people one-fifth of their produce for seven years. This is a tax increase. The people are going to ask, “Upon what basis, Pharaoh, have you done this?”

Can you imagine asking our President, as he gets on his plane and heads to Europe to heal a rift in NATO, “Do you have a plan?”

The President would reply, “Yes, I do.”

Then imagine asking him, “Well, upon what basis do you have a plan?”

What would our response be if the President then answered, “Well, I had this dream . . .”

The people of Egypt might say, “Pharaoh, you’re going to raise our taxes. For seven years you’re going to take a fifth. Upon what basis?”

The Pharaoh would respond, “Well, I had a dream and this Hebrew slave told me what it meant.”

We need to understand the tremendous risk in this promotion. Yes, Joseph is prime minister, but I guarantee, he was hated.

Now, let us dive into this from rags to riches story. I love it.

Pharaoh says to his servants, “Let’s find a man.”

Then Pharaoh says to Joseph in verse 39, “There’s nobody like you. Let’s put you over the house.”

Note what Pharaoh does in verses 41 and 42a.

Pharaoh said to Joseph, “See I have set you over all the land of Egypt.” Then Pharaoh took off his signet ring from his hand and put it on Joseph’s hand, . . .

A signet ring was a symbol of power. It was with this ring that he would stamp into the wax of invoices. It was with this ring that he had the power to buy and sell. It was with this ring that he stood as Pharaoh’s man. He was accountable to no one. Continue to the last part of verse 42.

. . . and clothed him in garments of fine linen and put the gold necklace around his neck.

This was a symbol of his position; this was royalty. Joseph was *the* second in command over all of Egypt!

Application – Joseph’s Greatest Test!

I cannot help but wonder what Joseph thought because just a few hours before, he was scraping food from a tin plate and his feet were shackled. Now, his feet are perhaps being looked after by the best physicians. His prison garb has been taken off and he is dressed in fine clothing. His hands, callused from prison yard work, are now adorned with the signet ring of the Pharaoh. This is his day. Joseph will now ride in a chariot – a gift of the Pharaoh. In front of him will be the slaves who run before the chariot saying, “Iskay, iskay,” or “Bow down, here comes Joseph.”

Every one of us would enjoy being prime minister of Egypt. We would love, in our flesh, to be unaccountable to anyone – never having to ask for time off, for vacation pay, for a raise; never being told to do another job for the rest of our lives. We would

answer to no one – everyone would answer to us. We would be on top.

Yet, ladies and gentlemen, how do you believe Joseph would answer if we were able to ask him, “Joseph, what was the greatest test that you faced?”

“I’ll bet I know – it was when your eleven brothers threw you in the pit and you had to fight the feelings of revenge and bitterness. That was it, wasn’t it?”

He would probably say, “No.”

“Oh, I know, it was Potiphar’s wife and the way she was after you day after day, and you had to ward off her advances. That was the greatest test, wasn’t it?”

I doubt it. I believe, the greatest test Joseph faced was prosperity. The position that he now has. The authority that was now in his office.

Why is it that prosperity is a tremendous test? It is a test that you and I face living in our culture today. We live in a “give me” type of culture that is always after more. And we have more; we have so much. I think we are not aware that the test is laid at our feet. Why is it so dangerous that we prosper? Why is it that one man would write, “While a hundred men can stand adversity, only one can stand prosperity.”?

What is it about our natures that cannot handle the pampering, and yet we want it? What is it about our flesh, our relationship with Christ, that cannot handle when we are really on top and are unaccountable? Why does God not want that?

Two reasons prosperity is such a great test

Let me give you two reasons why prosperity is such a great test. You may want to write these down.

Prosperity tends to eliminate faith

1. First, prosperity tends to eliminate faith.

Turn to the book of Deuteronomy, chapter 8. This was the warning to the children of Israel. It is a warning that you and I must remind ourselves of constantly. He says, in verse 11a of chapter 8,

“Beware that you do not forget the Lord your God by not keeping His commandments and His ordinances . . .”

The children of Israel at this point, are on the edge of the land. If they had not disobeyed they would have

entered. He gives this warning, in verses 12 through 18.

“otherwise, when you have eaten and are satisfied, and have built good houses and lived in them,

“and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and gold multiply, and all that you have multiplies,

“then your heart becomes proud and you will forget the Lord your God . . .

“He led you through the great and terrible wilderness, with its fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground where there was no water; He brought water for you out of the rock of flint.

“In the wilderness He fed you manna which your fathers did not know, that He might humble you and that He might test you, to do good for you in the end.

“Otherwise, you may say in your heart, ‘My power and the strength of my hand made me this wealth.’

“But you shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He who is giving you power to make wealth . . .”

These are powerful words.

It seems that when you and I are in need, we remember God. We go to Him more in prayer at such times. We pray, “Lord, how are we going to make this payment? Give us wisdom.”

There is something precious about adversity. Why? Because it engenders faith in God; it does not allow us to forget Him.

Do you know one of the most exciting things, men and women, about being a part of this church right now? It is that we do not have much in terms of material wealth. It would be hard to forget God because for each step, we must pray, “God give us wisdom.”

We are looking for the miracles. We are watching His hand. It is primitive. We are at the beginning. But beware of the prosperity; beware of the advancement. I would imply to beware when we no longer put out folding chairs or meet in a dirty room in the back for Sunday school. Beware when we have so much.

As a church, I challenge us, as we look forward to prosperity, to take stock now. Also in our individual lives, when you and I prosper, we tend to forget God.

The elimination of faith weakens character

2. The second reason that prosperity is such a great test is that not only does prosperity eliminate faith, but the elimination of faith weakens character.

When faith is eliminated, character is weakened. It is the hard time that develops the iron in the blood, the toughness of moral character.

Look at another passage. Go all the way to the other end of the Bible, to Revelation, chapter 3. Take note of a church where this happened and let it be a warning to us, not only individually, but corporately. Look at verses 14 through 17a.

To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God, says this:

“I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot.

“So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth.

“Because you say, ‘I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing,’ . . .”

What is the result of an attitude that says, “I don’t need anything; I have everything. God has prospered me.”

We have forgotten God. Then what happens? Our characters become tepid and we lose our effectiveness. We are lukewarm.

The elimination of faith, ultimately, produces a weakened character that, ultimately, denies the potential of an effective ministry.

How do we know that Joseph did not forget God?

How do we know, men and women, from Genesis, chapter 41, that Joseph did not forget God during the prosperous years? How do we know? I am going to give you a very clear reason.

Notice the names that Joseph gives to his sons. To make Joseph more palatable to the Egyptian

culture, Pharaoh wisely gives him an Egyptian name and gives him an Egyptian wife – both of which, he accepts. Joseph, however, has two sons that he is determined to raise according to his “old country” values. We are told in verse 51,

Joseph named the firstborn Manasseh, “For,” he said, “God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father’s household.”

Joseph has a second son and, according to verse 52,

He named the second Ephraim, “For,” he said, “God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction.”

How do we know that Joseph did not forget God? When he had two boys, he named them in honor of his God, Elohim – “God has done this . . .”. In fact, that runs through the entire chapter of Joseph’s life. As he prospers, “God . . . God . . . God . . .!” is on the tip of his tongue.

“Joseph, you’re really something!”

“God did it.”

“What a plan you came up with, Joseph!”

“God did it.”

I think if someone in our day, perhaps us, went back and lived in that kind of situation and became the prime minister, they would probably write a book and entitle it, *From Prisoner to Prime Minister, And How I Did It In Two Short Years*. Joseph took absolutely no credit.

What was the key to passing the prosperity test?

Let me ask another question, by way of application. What was the key to Joseph passing this test?

It was this: Joseph was careful to respect the glory of God, the place of God, and the authority of God.

Between the two extremes of adversity and prosperity, there is one little word – integrity. It is that character that acknowledges God. It takes no credit for itself; it yields it all to God. It never looks in the mirror and admires itself; it gives all of the honor to God. Joseph had integrity.

Conclusion

What happened to Joseph's interpretation of Pharaoh's dream? It came true. Look at verses 53 and 54.

When the seven years of plenty which had been in the land of Egypt came to an end, and the seven years of famine began to come, just as Joseph had said, then there was famine in all the lands; but in all the land of Egypt there was bread.

Let me add a footnote to this. As I have mentioned in previous discussions, Joseph is a type of Jesus Christ. There are perhaps, more than a hundred illustrations of this. Joseph's Egyptian name, many believe, means, "Savior of the world". It is interesting, as famine comes to the land, note what happens, according to verse 55,

So when all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried out to Pharaoh for bread; and Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians, "Go to Joseph . . ."

I love that! There is a famine in the land today. What is our answer? "Go to Jesus Christ. *He* can feed you; *He* can provide nourishment."

Perhaps you are listening today and there is a famine in your soul. You have never come to the Savior of the world. Go to Him.

I would imagine, at this point in Joseph's life, he could have sat back, stuck his thumbs in his lapels, and said, "See, I told you so. It happened, just like I said."

However, Joseph is beyond that now – because God had hurt him deeply, God had broken him, God had formed him. So now, as prime minister, he has the same character that he had when he was a prisoner. He is not putting on airs; he is not sticking up his nose at the peons out there. He is still compassionate; he is still caring.

Something wonderful has happened in Joseph's life. God has created gold. Gold is a quality of character so pure. Gold is a quality of character that, in Joseph's day and today, is in great demand. And it is so rare.

Do you have it? Do you acknowledge the glory of God? Do you give Him the honor and the praise for everything that transpires – even when you prosper? The world will be quick to notice, just as they noticed in Joseph's day. And, ultimately, they will come for an answer. Then, you can point them to the Savior of the world and say, "Go to Jesus."

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The Prosecutor Within

Genesis 42

Introduction – The Gift of a Sensitive Conscience

The government receives sums of money from people who have imposed fines upon themselves for stealing from the government. In one case, the person stole government blankets. Another knowingly did not put the correct postage on a letter. One lady, whose husband had died, realized he had cheated on his income tax the year before. She sent a check for five hundred dollars. The government, in 1811, created what they call, the Federal Conscience Fund. It now totals more than three million dollars – all from people who have made restitution.

I read a rather funny story of one man who decided that he would make restitution because he had cheated on his income tax. He wrote the government this letter, “I have stolen from the government by cheating on my income tax and I can’t sleep. I have enclosed a check for \$75. If I still can’t sleep, I’ll send you the rest of what I owe.”

What is it that sometimes points a finger at us?
What is it that sometimes robs us of sleep at night?

George Washington called it, “The sparkle of celestial fire.”

Lord Byron referred to this inner struggle as, “The oracle of God.”

We are referring to it today as, “The prosecutor within.”

The purpose of this sermon today, is much more than just getting through another chapter in the book of Genesis. I trust that, as a result of this sermon, we will be more sensitive to our conscience as God

speaks to us. Then, if there are things that need to be made right, today will be the time when that is done.

Three functions of our conscience

Let me give three things, before we dive into Genesis, chapter 42, about this gift that God has given us; that is, our conscience. Our conscience has a threefold function. There are probably more, but let me give three.

Distinguishes between right and wrong

1. First, the conscience – this gift from God; this inner oracle – distinguishes between right and wrong.

Now, the conscience is not always accurate. In fact, if you train it, it is like a circus dog. You can train it to roll over; you can train it to come when you whistle; you can train it to play dead. It is not completely accurate because it is dependent on how you condition it.

God, however, has given us the gift of conscience to distinguish between right and wrong. As a result, a little four-year-old boy, whether he is born in America, or in Africa, or in Australia, knows that when he lies to Mommy and Daddy, he has done something wrong.

We do not have to teach children how to lie, we have to discipline the liar out of them. Why is that? Because God has given them, and us, this distinguishing ability between what is right and what is wrong.

That is why it is so important, ladies and gentlemen, that we condition our conscience by the scriptures; that we allow the Bible to tell us what is right and what is wrong. Then, our consciences are not tuned to our culture, whose values change, our consciences are tuned to the scriptures, which never change.

Encourages doing what it right and discourages doing what is wrong

2. Secondly, another facet or function of the conscience is that it encourages doing what is right and discourages doing what is wrong.

That is why, young people, you might experience a struggle during mid-term examinations. If you are in Spanish class and you are like me, you are barely making it. Let us say that during the mid-term exam, you happen to sit next to the guy who is the smartest guy in the class. He is as good as bilingual and you know that every answer he gives is going to be right. So, all of the sudden, you are facing a battle.

“Look! Look over there.”

You say, “No.”

“Yes!”

“No.”

“Yes!”

You are carrying on this conversation in your head. What is happening? You are, in a sense, carrying on an argument with your conscience. Your conscience is encouraging you to do what is right and to not look at someone’s answers. It is discouraging you from doing what is wrong, which your flesh is encouraging you to do. That inner struggle that you feel when you are tempted to do something that is wrong is a God-given struggle called, “conscience”.

Produces guilt when wrong is done

3. The third function is that the conscience produces guilt when wrong is done.

Again, men and women, it is very important that the Bible determine what is right and wrong. Our consciences can become so seared that we can do wrong and experience very little guilt. I am convinced that no matter how hardened an individual may be, he will always experience some sense of guilt, but he, and we, can play it down.

The first time you want to do something wrong in a particular area, your conscience shouts, “No!!”

The second time you want to do that wrong thing, a few days later, you say, “Now look, conscience, I understand why you shouted, “No,” but I didn’t tell you a reason or two of why I should.” And your conscience, after hearing the reasons, says, “No!”

So you come back the following week, and you say, “Now, I realize why you said, “No,” because of these particular reasons, but I’ve come up with a few more. Here are additional reasons and rational as to why I should do this (or say this or go there or whatever).” And your conscience says, “No.”

Then, at a later point in time, you give your conscience additional rational and you so justify it that now your conscience says in a whisper, “No.” But it is much easier to ignore a whisper than a shout. That is why it is so important that we allow our consciences to be transformed by the renewing of our minds through God’s Word.

Ways God Awakens a Sleeping Conscience

Now, the third function of the conscience, or the producing of guilt when wrong is done, is going to be seen in Genesis, chapter 42. So turn there in your Bible and we will see the awakening consciences of Joseph’s ten brothers.

For twenty-five years, Joseph’s brothers had battled their consciences. His brothers battled and fought to silence and to suppress the guilt that they had because of what they had done to Joseph. For twenty-five years, they had ignored what their consciences were shouting. They had not said anything to their father, Jacob. They had perhaps, never breathed it again to each other. They were living under tremendous, severe guilt.

Now prophecy tells us that these brothers will come to Egypt and establish a great nation. So in the valley of Goshen, this little, bitty nomadic tribe will turn into a fantastically huge nation – the nation of Israel. That cannot be done in Canaan, they need Goshen to support that kind of existence. God has planned that they do that in Egypt.

However, for the ten brothers, as well as Benjamin, the eleventh brother, and their father, Jacob, to come to Egypt, there must be a reconciliation with Joseph. For a reconciliation to take place, these brothers must admit their guilt. And

for them to admit their guilt, their sleeping consciences must be awakened.

Three principles to awaken a guilty conscience

Now some have suggested that Joseph is incredibly hard on his brothers. But I think I will be able to show that he is doing nothing more than wisely awakening their suppressed guilty consciences. There are several principles that will do this.

The principle of association

1. The first is the principle of association.

Let me explain what I mean by this through looking at the first five verses of Genesis, chapter 42. Begin with verses 1 and 2.

Now Jacob saw that there was grain in Egypt, and Jacob said to his sons, "Why are you staring at one another?" He said, "Behold, I have heard that there is grain in Egypt; go down there and buy some for us from that place, so that we may live and not die."

This is very interesting because it proves that there has been guilt by association. They are starving. There is a famine in the land. And where can they get bread? Everyone knows – in Egypt.

There is an old proverb that says, "Never speak of rope in a hangman's house."

You never want to speak of Egypt to Joseph's ten brothers. In fact, Egypt was something they never wanted to be confronted with. I would imagine, over the twenty-five year period, when anyone from Egypt was coming through needing lodging, the brothers probably just scuttled them right on past. They do not want anything to slip. Perhaps by some coincidence, the person knew Joseph.

So their father Jacob says, "We're starving! Go to Egypt!"

The brothers probably cast furtive looks at each other – suspicious looks, as Reuben looks at Simeon. Egypt! I am sure terror gripped their souls. Go to Egypt! That is the last place on earth they want to go. All of the guilt begins to rise to the surface as they hear the dreaded name of the country where they sold their brother. Egypt.

Jacob says, "Quit staring at each other. What are you just looking at one another for? Go to Egypt."

So, in verse 3,

Then ten brothers of Joseph went down to buy grain from Egypt.

I cannot help but allow my imagination to join that caravan as they head to Egypt. I imagine, as they get closer, they see slave gangs working in the fields, and wonder, "Is Joseph there?"

As they get closer to Egypt, perhaps they see some slaves working at some menial task. They take a closer look, afraid they might discover that it is Joseph. They are petrified, as you will see later in the chapter.

Continue to the first part of verse 4, which is interesting.

But Jacob did not send Joseph's brother Benjamin with his brothers . . .

Benjamin, you may remember, is the blood brother of Joseph. The other brothers are half brothers. Benjamin is a true son and he, evidently, received all of the love of Jacob that had once been given to Joseph. So he was, obviously, pampered. He was, like Joseph, the son that Jacob was partial to.

Perhaps, by this time, Jacob has begun to mistrust his other sons. Perhaps, by now, he senses that there was mischief done, so he will not send Benjamin with them. He says, in the last part of verse 4,

. . . I am afraid that harm may befall him.

In verse 5, we then read,

So the sons of Israel came to buy grain among those who were coming, for the famine was in the land of Canaan also.

It is interesting, ladies and gentlemen, the way that God will use guilt by association in your life and in mine. There may be some holiday that brings to your mind terrible feelings of guilt because you have unconfessed sin. I am not talking about sin that you have confessed to Jesus Christ. That should no longer produce guilt. We are to forgive and we are to allow Christ to forgive us, and then forget it. But those things that we have held back, those things that we have harbored in our souls in rebellion – maybe some event, some vacation spot, some person's name – when we hear it, our blood runs thick – we are guilty. That is why it is interesting to notice the way we can hear of certain things and feel so guilty.

I recently read a biographical sketch of Al Capone that was quite fascinating. Al Capone, as you may know, gunned down perhaps more than five

hundred men in his days as a mob leader in this country. He was a vicious man who attached machine guns to the inside of his trunk. When he was being pursued by other gangsters or by the police, he could mechanically operate the guns from the inside of his car as he drove. He would push a button, the lid would fly open, and he would spray the car behind him with bullets. He and his gangsters often would “blow people away” as they were driving along the road. In his later years, this man became so obsessed; so paranoid, and one fascinating thing is that he was terrified of cars filled with men. Why? It was guilt by association.

Ladies and gentlemen, when we read in God’s Word of Peter denying Jesus Christ, what is God doing? God is, perhaps, confronting us with guilt by association. In other words, He is bringing to our minds that yesterday, in the hallway of that downtown business, someone asked us something about religion and we refused to say anything. We denied Him and then, felt guilty. Perhaps, there by the locker in school, someone made some caustic remark about the Lord and you clamed up. So when you read of Peter, God is able to convict you by association.

The principle of circumstances

2. The second principle that Joseph will begin to use, wisely I think, to awaken his brother’s guilty consciences, is what we will call the principle of similar circumstances.

I agree with the great expositor F. B. Meyer, as he talks of the way in which Joseph lays down, literally step-by-step, everything that his brothers had done to him. Joseph will parrot words that they once hurled at him; he will put them in the same situation that they had put him in. Why? Because he wants to sense and to see whether or not they have dealt with their guilt.

Let us look at this together. It is fascinating. Look at verse 6 of chapter 42.

Now Joseph was the ruler over the land; he was the one who sold to all the people of the land. And Joseph’s brothers came and bowed down to him with their faces to the ground.

It is interesting that in Genesis, chapter 37, verse 7, Joseph’s dreams foretold that his brothers would bow down to him. The same Hebrew word is used in these two verses. Continue to verse 7a of chapter 42.

When Joseph saw his brothers he recognized them, but he disguised himself to them . . .

Remember that Joseph is the prime minister now. He is wearing the Egyptian headband. He is clean shaven now, according to Egyptian custom, instead of wearing a full beard, as was the custom of the Hebrews. He looked anything other than a Hebrew. And we are told in the next phrase of verse 7 that he continued this acting by,

. . . and spoke to them harshly. . .

This is a similar circumstance. Notice in verse 4 of chapter 37, that the brothers could not speak peace to Joseph. The Hebrew word was “Shalom” – they could not say, “Shalom,” to Joseph because they hated him so much. Every time he was around, they spoke harshly to him. Now Joseph is the one speaking harshly to them. He says, in the last part of verse 7,

. . . “Where have you come from?” And they said, “From the land of Canaan, to buy food.”

Perhaps Joseph is in charge of all of the large purchases of food and that is why his brothers are before him. Continue to verses 8 and 9.

But Joseph had recognized his brothers, although they did not recognize him. Joseph remembered the dreams which he had about them, and said to them, “You are spies; you have come to look at the undefended parts of our land.”

Joseph will give his brothers exactly what they gave him – a false accusation. As we previously studied, they said, in a sense, “You’re a dreamer. You’ve come to spy on us. Our father sent you along so you can spy.”

You may remember that Joseph brought back a bad report of his brother’s character to their father and they accused him of being a spy. I imagine he probably said, “No, no, guys, I’m not a spy! I’m your brother. I love you.”

“No! You’re a spy, sent by our father.”

Now Joseph, interestingly, accuses them of the same thing. Look at verses 10 through 14.

Then they said to him, “No, my lord, but your servants have come to buy food. We are all sons of one man; we are honest men, your servants are not spies.” Yet he said to them, “No, but you have come to look at the

undefended parts of our land!” But they said, “Your servants are twelve brothers in all, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan; and behold, the youngest is with our father today, and one is no longer alive.” Joseph said to them, “It is as I said to you, you are spies; . . .”

In other words, not only does he falsely accuse them, but he refuses to listen to their pleas. That is exactly what they had done to him. Continue to verses 15 and 16.

“By this you will be tested: by the life of Pharaoh, you shall not go from this place unless your youngest brother comes here! Send one of you that he may get your brother, while you remain confined, that your words may be tested, whether there is truth in you. But if not, by the life of Pharaoh, surely you are spies.”

He is giving them several tests that we will study in our next discussion. This is one of them, it is a test of honor. He is going to discover whether they really care about their brother, as they will soon put Simeon in prison.

This is the principle of similar circumstances. God often works in our hearts in the same way. We are guilty of something and, for some reason, we suppress that guilt and ignore it until we see someone else in a very similar situation. We may have been guilty, perhaps of gossip, and we have ignored it or overlooked it until someone gossips to us or we are gossiped about. It is that similar circumstance that brings to our mind, by the grace of God, “I’m guilty of that.”

George W. Truitt, a preacher of yesteryear, used to tell the story of a man who was accused of killing his employer. To hide the facts, the man burned his employer’s home to the ground. He was on trial and the prosecutor and his defense attorney were doing their best. The trial went on for several weeks, with the judge presiding in that courtroom scene. Finally, the last remarks were made and then, it was the judge’s turn to address the jury. The judge began to speak to the jury of this heinous crime that the man had been accused of. Then, to the shock of all in that packed courtroom, the judge buried his head in his hands and began to weep. He said, as he confessed to that entire courtroom, “I have been guilty, since thirty years ago, of killing my employer. To hide the

evidence, I burned his home to the ground. I, for the last few weeks, have been judging my own crime.”

Sometimes God can work in our lives to bring about an awakened conscience through similar circumstances.

The principle of isolation

3. There is a third principle to awaken a sleeping conscience that we will call the principle of isolation.

Note verse 17,

So he put them all together in prison for three days.

Bang! Bang! Bang! Joseph gives his brothers similar circumstances by speaking to them just as they had spoken to him. He gives them the same treatment and then, he throws them in prison – just as he was thrown in.

However, I think Joseph has something more in mind. By the wisdom that God had given him, he now puts his brothers into a place where all they have to do, for three days, is think. All they can do is just mull over in their minds, as their guilty consciences are coming awake due to returning to Egypt – the land of their brother that they had desperately tried to forget.

Now, Joseph’s brothers are in a prison. I imagine they are casting furtive glances about the walls of the prison, seeing the names and messages that previous prisoners have etched into the wall, and wondering, “I wonder if Joseph’s name is here. I wonder if this is where he was incarcerated.”

These brothers are tormented, I think, as they have time to think for three days.

Ladies and gentlemen, one of the reasons why God cannot get to us, in terms of awakening our slumbering consciences of guilt, is we never allow Him the time; we never get alone. We get into a room and we have to flip the TV on, or turn the radio on, or get some noise going in there because we cannot stand to be by ourselves.

Shakespeare wrote, “To be alone with my conscience is hell enough for me.”

When was the last time you were alone before God? Are you afraid to be, knowing that as soon as it is quiet, the Spirit of God will begin rumbling in your

soul and bringing to mind things that you have never dealt with?

I am reading a book that someone gave me, entitled, *Restoring Your Mind in a Secular World*. It is impacting me. The first chapter begins with a quote by Chuck Colson. He says, "Although in America, religion is becoming popular, it is becoming faddish. Although today, religion is up, morality is down. Why?"

The book goes on to declare that believers who are very religious, who know the game, who know the language, are no longer spending time alone with God. As a result, God does not speak. Christians are living with the guilt of unconfessed sin.

Application – The Response of a Guilty Conscience

Now, as Joseph deals with his brothers, I want to move to the application, which is, the response of a guilty conscience. This is tremendous. Let us take time to pull this apart.

Just the law of proportion would tell us that there is a lot in these few chapters. This is probably the story with the most specifics given to us in all the Bible. There is a reason for that. It is not just to be read and forgotten; it is not just an interesting story, it is to be applied.

There are several responses as we see these slumbering consciences come awake and bring with that, of course, pain.

An admission of guilt

1. The first response of a guilty conscience is an admission of guilt.

Look at verses 18 through 19a.

Now Joseph said to them on the third day, "Do this and live, for I fear God: if you are honest men, let one of your brothers be confined in your prison; . . ."

In other words, this is the test, "I'm not going to keep ten of you and send one of you back; I'm just going to keep one of you."

We will look at why I think Joseph did this in our next discussion. Continue to verses 19b through 20a.

". . . but as for the rest of you, go, carry grain for the famine of your households,

and bring your youngest brother to me, so your words may be verified, . . ."

Joseph is working toward a family reunion. Continue to the last part of verse 20.

". . . and you will not die." And they did so.

Note this scene. Joseph is standing in front with his ten brothers lined up before him, and in the middle is an interpreter. Joseph has been speaking in Egyptian – that has been part of his acting. He knows Hebrew fluently, but if he spoke Hebrew, they would perhaps, wonder. So he has been conversing to them through the interpreter in Egyptian. The brothers are beginning to speak now in Hebrew, not knowing he understands. Notice what they say, in verse 21.

Then they said to one another, "Truly we are guilty concerning our brother, because we saw the distress of his soul . . ."

That prison has certainly done the job. Now they speak of all these other factors.

". . . when he pleaded with us, yet we would not listen; therefore this distress has come upon us."

Circle the word "we" in your text, it is very emphatic in the original. In using this word, it is as if they smite their breasts and say, "*We*, only *we*, are guilty. *We* have done this terrible crime."

It is interesting that when their backs are against the wall, they admit guilt. Judah does not say, "God has done this because I committed incest," as he had done. Simeon does not say, "God has done this because I massacred those helpless men years ago," as he had done. Reuben does not say, "God has done this to me because I have slept with my father's wife," as he had done. No. The thing in all of their minds that brought tremendous guilt was, "God is doing this because of what we did to our brother, Joseph. We saw the distress of his soul when he pleaded with us."

Can you imagine the scene as Joseph is being chained in that chain gang along with the other slaves headed for Egypt? His hands are cuffed and he turns back to his brothers and says, "Reuben, Simeon, don't do this. Don't let them take me!" And he cries until his cry is no longer heard.

Verse 21b says,

". . . we saw the distress of his soul when he pleaded with us, yet we would not listen; therefore this distress has come upon us.

It is so true that when you do something to someone else, you bear the distress. There is something about the way God has made us that we actually become the victim when we mistreat; when we sin against others. There is a transfer of guilt.

An escape by self-defense

2. The second response of a guilty conscience is an escape by self-defense.

Look at verse 22.

Reuben answered them, saying, . . .

In other words, Reuben kind of pulls away from the crowd and says, “Hey, wait a second, brothers.”

“Did I not tell you, ‘Do not sin against the boy’;” . . .

What a lousy thing to say. He is as guilty as they are, and he says, “Didn’t I tell you so? Didn’t I tell you this would happen. I told you not to do anything against this boy and you did it.”

“. . . and you would not listen? Now comes the reckoning for his blood.”

Reuben was as guilty as sin. He was right in there with the rest of them for twenty-five years. He had never gone to his father; had never taken a trip to Egypt to try to rescue Joseph. And now, he is self-righteous? “Huh, me? Guilty? No way!”

When God brings to our mind things by way of an awakened conscience, we can admit guilt and say, “Lord, it is because I have sinned,” or we can say, “Wait a second, you don’t know who you’re talking to. I’m religious. I’m a Christian.”

An understanding of God’s involvement

3. The third response of a guilty conscience, and this is beautiful, is an understanding of God’s involvement.

Note verses 23 through 24a.

They did not know, however, that Joseph understood . . . He turned away from them and wept. . . .

I cannot imagine being Joseph, hearing these nine brothers weep that this was being done because of what they had done to him. It brought back to him all of the emotion of that day twenty-five years before when he saw his brothers desert and abandon him. He

has to turn away and just weep. Perhaps he rushes from the room. Finally, in verse 24b,

. . . he returned to them and spoke to them, he took Simeon from them and bound him before their eyes.

That is another similar circumstance.

Continue to verse 25.

Then Joseph gave orders to fill their bags with grain and to restore every man’s money in his sack, and to give them provisions for the journey. . . .

We will study this further in our next discussion. Skip to verse 28, as one of the brothers discovers the contents of his sack.

Then he said to his brothers, “My money has been returned, and behold, it is even in my sack.” And their hearts sank, and they turned trembling to one another, saying, “What is this that God has done to us?”

Note that last statement. One of the responses that God, I think, wants to bring us to, as He brings to our minds that guilty conscience that we have been suppressing, is that *He* is involved in our lives. He wants us to realize that He is even bringing about these events to bring us to Himself for cleansing and forgiveness. These brothers finally say, “God is doing something. There are too many coincidences here. Something is happening. It must be God.”

One of the responses of a guilty conscience is an understanding that we are accountable to God. Ultimately, the brothers understood that it was God who was behind the scenes.

Perhaps something has come to your mind that has been brought to your remembrance by the Spirit of God. You might be thinking, “I am guilty of certain things that I have been struggling with and rebelling against and hanging on to. What should I do? I don’t want to go through another chapter and a half until this thing is figured out.”

The Bible is very clear. We are to specifically confess, immediately forsake, and whole-heartedly claim the forgiveness of Jesus Christ. Some of you may need to make restitution as well. Some of you may need to request forgiveness from another.

My parents have been missionaries for more than thirty years with servicemen. My brothers and I grew up in downtown Norfolk, Virginia, where there was servicemen’s center. Running down the streets, we

would go down there after school and all summer long. Back then, the streets were fairly safe, so we could do that. There was also a wharf and we would play on the rocks and go in and out of every store. We would ransack the hallways of the MacArthur Memorial that was there, nearly every week, and the library as well.

The servicemen's center eventually moved out of its one room shop into a three-story building that was a block long. It was a very large servicemen's center, which they now no longer use. We would play for hours on end, all of the missionary kids, because that is where our parents spent most of their time. We had a ball! We had three stories all to ourselves. We would climb out on the roof and do all sorts of things. On the third floor there was a washing machine and a dryer for the servicemen. The sailors at that time, wore the whites and the darks and that funny little hat that they wore.

Now, I will tell you why I am remembering this. It is because of something I had forgotten. One of the missionary kids, named Bobby Walker, and I were the closest buddies until we graduated from high school. We then went our separate ways. He went to a local university and I went off to college. Bobby was a rascal and was responsible for anything wrong that I did! We used to hang around together.

My father recently got a letter from Bobby Walker, now referred to as Bob. Bobby wrote in his

letter, "You know, God has been working in my heart."

Bob is a thirty-two year old man. He now directs the largest Christian ranch in Virginia. I did not know that until a few weeks ago.

Bobby said, "When I was a kid and we were running around Missions to Military, I'd go up to the third floor and I'd take a piece of bubble gum and stick it on the end of a popsicle stick. I'd slip that stick down in the money box and I'd pull money out."

I cannot remember doing that with Bobby. Maybe that is a suppressed conscience, I don't know. But God had brought that to his mind.

He said, "I can remember doing that on several occasions. I have no idea how much I took, but here's twenty dollars. I think that will cover it."

Bob is, of course, working with teenagers and young people, as well as couples. He is evidently seeing, week after week, the importance, the necessity of a clean, clear conscience.

One of the greatest gifts God has given us is a conscience. We can turn it off; we can shout it down; we can ignore it. Or, we can, by God's Word, allow God to speak through it so that it is, in fact, the oracle of God.

Do not go another day with a guilty conscience. Experience the joy and the cleansing of a conscience that is clear and clean before God.

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The Jacob Temperament

Genesis 42:29 - 43:34

Introduction

Please turn in your Bible to Genesis, chapter 42. Today, the spotlight of this story swings away from Joseph and focuses primarily on Jacob and his ten sons. We studied the life of Jacob in a five-part series and this would be the sixth. Jacob has so much to teach us and once again, he is going to teach us many valuable lessons about God.

Let us pick up our story in verse 29 of Genesis, chapter 42. At this point, Joseph let nine of his brothers go, but kept Simeon. Look at verses 29 through 35.

When they came to their father in the land of Canaan, they told him all that had happened to them, saying,

“The man, the lord of the land, spoke harshly with us, and took us for spies of the country.

“But we said to him, ‘We are honest men; we are not spies.

“‘We are twelve brothers, sons of our father; one is no longer alive, and the youngest is with our father today in the land of Canaan.’

“The man, the lord of the land, said to us, ‘By this I shall know that you are honest men: leave one of your brothers with me and take grain for the famine of your households, and go.

“‘But bring your youngest brother to me that I may know that you are not spies, but honest men. I will give your brother to you, and you may trade in the land.’”

Now it came about as they were emptying their sacks, that behold, every man’s bundle of money was in his sack; and when they and their father saw their bundles of money, they were dismayed.

Jacob’s Response to the Report From Egypt

The first thing that I want to relate to you, in this study that I am calling, “The Jacob Temperament,” is Jacob’s four-fold, wrong conclusions in response his son’s report from Egypt.

Look at verse 36.

Their father Jacob said to them, “You have bereaved me of my children: Joseph is no more, and Simeon is no more, and you would take Benjamin; all these things are against me.”

Jacob is jumping to four wrong conclusions. They include:

- Joseph is dead;
- Simeon is dead;
- Benjamin will die;
- All these things are against me.

As I studied this passage of scripture and re-read this chapter, it was interesting to me just how much we can see in the response of Jacob. It is interesting how much we are like this man, in the flesh, when the Spirit of God does not control us. We so often, like Jacob, jump to wrong conclusions based on circumstances. We come to conclusions that are so often wrong, based on the facts that we think we have.

Jacob says, “Joseph is no more,” or “Joseph is dead.” He does not know he is not, of course, and he has not read chapter 43, as we will. However, Jacob is also stating that Simeon is dead, and he is not. He is jumping to the conclusion that the Pharaoh has put him to death. He also says, “Benjamin will die if you take him back there.” Then, he sums it up by saying, “all these things are against me,” or we could rephrase that, “everything’s going wrong.” In other words, “Poor me. Woe is me.”

Understand that by now, Jacob is an old and, I think, bitter man. He has had flashes of faith; he has had moments of true trust in Elohim. But we see him in this chapter, finally exercising, in his flesh, the statement that could characterize his entire life: “God has dealt me a bad hand. He’s fed me sour grapes.”

This kind of attitude crops up, perhaps in your life or in mine, when we make statements like, “Why does God always bless that other person? Why is it that in that other family, it just seems that their kids obey better than mine? Why is it that they make better grades? Why is it that he got promoted and I did not?”

We go on and on and on. Ultimately, we are saying, “God has really messed my life up.”

F. B. Meyer, a tremendous expositor of scripture whom I often quote, wrote, “Why is it that God’s hand is always on the other man?”

I have read that it is clinically proven, and have seen that it is true, not that clinics are that impressive, but it is interesting that secularists now agree that one of the chief causes of depression is self-pity. That is the attitude that Jacob expresses at this point, “Life is terrible. Look at all these things that are happening to me. Woe is me.”

These individuals put a banner out that reads, “Pity party here. Anybody want to join me?” And you will find that they collect together, which only feeds their misery.

Ladies and gentlemen, I really believe that one of the most often repeated mistakes that we see in Jacob, we see in our own lives. It is the mistake of misinterpreting the events in our life apart from the grace of God.

Jacob’s Reluctance to Cooperate With Egypt’s Demands

Now notice what happens in chapter 43 and you will see Jacob’s response.

At the end of chapter 42, after verse 38, you should write in parentheses, “A period of time.” Between that time and the time of verse 1 of chapter 43, their food runs out. Look at verses 1 and 2.

Now the famine was severe in the land. So it came about when they had finished eating the grain which they had brought from Egypt, that their father said to them, “Go back, buy us a little food.”

Initial denial

1. Now the first response of Jacob is initial denial.

Jacob has been told, “Dad, we cannot go back to Egypt unless we bring Benjamin with us.”

Jacob refuses to respond. He clams up; he goes into hiding. Finally, the food is gone and they get hungry.

Jacob comes back to his sons, denying what he knows to be true, and says,

... Go back [to Egypt], buy us a little food.

His sons will now counsel him. Look at verses 3 through 5.

Judah spoke to him, however, saying, “The man solemnly warned us, ‘You shall not see my face unless your brother is with you.’ If you send our brother with us, we will go down and buy you food. But if you do not send him, we will not go down; for the man said to us, ‘You shall not see my face unless your brother is with you.’”

Isn’t this interesting that the son is counseling Dad. The son is pulling the patriarch aside and saying, “Dad, did you forget that we can’t go back until we have Benjamin with us? Open your ears. Listen to me.”

Suggestive deceit

2. The second phase of Jacob’s response we could call, suggestive deceit.

Look at verse 6.

Then Israel said, “Why did you treat me so badly by telling the man whether you still had another brother?”

In other words, here is the great man of God, the patriarch, the man of faith, saying to his boy, “It

would have been better to have lied. Why didn't you lie? Why'd you tell him you had a brother?"

They answer that question in verses 7 through 9a.

But they said, "The man questioned particularly about us and our relatives, saying, 'Is your father still alive? Have you another brother?' So we answered his question [truthfully]. Could we possibly know that he would say, 'Bring your brother down'?" Judah said to his father Israel, "Send the lad with me and we will arise and go, that we may live and not die, we as well as you and our little ones. I myself will be surety for him [Benjamin]; . . ."

In other words, "If Joseph does something to Benjamin, it'll be guilt on my life. I'll take the responsibility."

We are really not going to focus too much on this, but do not overlook, as we go through this chapter, the development in the lives of the brothers. They have already admitted guilt, and confession is most of the cure. Now, we see Judah taking this responsibility, where earlier, twenty-five years before, he, and the other nine brothers, would have thrown their brother away. Now, it is a different story.

Continue to verse 10.

For if we had not delayed, surely by now we could have returned twice.

Attempted manipulation

3. Jacob still, is not broken. The next thing that Jacob says we could call, attempted manipulation.

Notice verse 11. This is classic Jacob stuff.

Then their father Israel said to them, "If it must be so, then do this: take some of the best products of the land in your bags, and carry down to the man as a present, a little balm and a little honey, aromatic gum and myrrh, pistachio nuts and almonds."

"You know, just like I did to Egypt. Let's butter him up. Let's manipulate him. Let's get on his good side. Let's take some things that they don't have much of in Egypt."

Jacob continues with the plan in verse 12.

Take double the money in your hand, and take back in your hand the money that was

returned in the mouth of your sacks; perhaps it was a mistake.

In other words, "Let's not trust God yet. Let's come up with our own plan. I've got a good one because, as far as I can remember, half a century ago, I think it worked on my brother Esau."

You may remember that Jacob took ewes, rams, and camels, and sent them ahead to Esau before Esau could come to him. Jacob was hoping to butter him up and get him mellowed down. So here is old Jacob; old, manipulative, deceptive Jacob, greasing the skids; trying to take the place of God.

Final trust

4. Imagine Jacob's sons at this moment, and what they see in him. There still does not appear to be much of a change, but I think there is. I really believe that in the process of these verses, there is time involved because of the great change. I think the change occurs in verse 14, which we could call, final trust.

Note verse 14a.

and may God Almighty [El Shaddai, the great Provider] grant you compassion in the sight of the man, that he may release to you your other brother and Benjamin. . . .

In other words, it is ultimately up to God.

Continue to verse 14b and note this last phrase.

. . . And as for me, if I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved.

Trust. In other words, when all of the smoke settled and, I think, Jacob was reminded of the sovereign God that had, in fact, been part of his life, he finally came to the conclusion that allowed him to say, "If my children die, then they die."

In other words, Jacob finally said, "El Shaddai is the One I will trust."

Most of us cannot understand Jacob's heart because we have never been in that situation. Some of you have perhaps, faced great trial. Some of you have lost loved ones to death, and you can better understand the anguish of Jacob's heart. Jacob thought that when he said, "Goodbye," to his sons, he was saying, "Goodbye," forever. What a difficult place in which to trust God.

A man that I respect highly, who used to pastor a hundred or so years ago, is George Matheson. His

hymns are rather antiquated and we do not sing them much anymore. George Matheson was a blind man and he lived with his two sisters. His two sisters learned Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, and would study for him. They would give him the results, they would look up words, and they would read the text. Then, George would, in his blind state, formulate all of the facts and would come up with the sermon and preach. He was known as “the beloved pastor,” and pastored, interestingly enough for that day, a rather large church of two thousand people.

One by one, George Matheson’s two sisters eventually married. With their marriages came great loss because they moved away. George was finally, completely alone. He was able to care for himself, but now struggled with all that he had learned. He was older; in fact, his sisters had married at an older age. In his struggle to trust a God who seemingly no longer would provide, George Matheson wrote a hymn. It is not even in our hymnal, I had to search to find it.

He wrote the following words after his second sister left. Note that he refers to his eyesight in references to light.

*O love that wilt not let me go,
I rest my weary soul in thee;
I give thee back the life I owe,
That in thine ocean depths its flow
May richer, fuller be.*

*O light that followest all my way,
I yield my flickering torch to thee;
My heart restores its borrowed ray,
That in thy sunshine’s blaze its day
May brighter, fairer be.*

*O joy that seekest me through pain,
I cannot close my heart to thee;
I trace the rainbow through the rain,
And feel the promise is not vain,
That morn shall tearless be.*

That is tremendous! I cannot understand what George Matheson went through, but I stand in awe. I stand in awe of you for what God is doing in your life through difficulty. He is making you, and through this situation with Jacob, He is making him.

So, in verse 15, the brothers return to Egypt.

So the men took this present, and they took double the money in their hand, and Benjamin; then they arose and went down to Egypt and stood before Joseph.

Joseph’s Brothers Return to Egypt

Now our story swings back to Egypt. Joseph will finally bring his brothers to the end of their test. I think he gives them a three-fold test.

A test of honor

1. The first test is a test of honor.

We studied this in our previous discussion. This is the test in which Joseph is wondering in his mind, “Do my brothers really care about one another? Will they let Simeon rot in this prison and never come back?”

I would imagine that Joseph had his doubts. I wonder, if they had not gotten hungry, if they would have come back. But, they did.

I would imagine that Joseph is watching and wondering, “How do they treat one another? How do they speak?”

He is constantly asking about their father, “How is your father?”

He is wondering if they would respond, “Oh, that old man? Why, we leave him alone. He’s so wrapped up in Benjamin, we never see him.”

That would have been the response of these brothers twenty-five years before. But now, every time they respond, they respond with politeness and respect. I think that was the test of honor, and they passed. It was a test of family identity.

A test of honesty

2. The second test that Joseph gives his brothers is the test of honesty.

I think this had to do with the money. These men were very dishonest, at least when Joseph remembered living with them.

Look at verse 16.

When Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he said to his house steward, “Bring the men into the house, and slay an animal and make

ready; for the men are to dine with me at noon."

Now Hebrew people did not dine with Egyptians. Later that almost comical statement is even made. It has never changed – Egyptians still do not eat meals of peace with the Jews. Even back then, it was a loathsome thing. So this steward probably scratched his head and thought, "Uh, wonder why the prime minister is having dinner with ten Jews?" But, he obeyed.

The brothers were not overjoyed when they received the invitation. Look at verses 18 through 19a.

Now the men were afraid, because they were brought to Joseph's house; and they said, "It is because of the money that was returned in our sacks the first time that we are being brought in, that he may seek occasion against us and fall upon us, and take us for slaves with our donkeys." So they came near to Joseph's house steward,

This is hilarious. They are not talking to Joseph, they are talking to his servant, who knows very little. Look at verses 20 through 21a and note the title they use for this servant.

. . . Oh, my lord, we indeed came down the first time to buy food, and it came about when we came to the lodging place, that we opened our sacks, and behold, each man's money was in the mouth of his sack, our money in full. So we have brought it back . .

.

Notice that they are walking into Joseph's house and are giving the money to this poor slave. They say, "We, indeed, intended to buy food."

Look at the last part of verse 21 through verse 22.

. . . So we have brought it back in our hand. We have also brought down other money in our hand to buy food; we do not know who put our money in our sacks.

They are really nervous. They are thinking that Joseph has called them into the house to call them into account. So they are explaining the situation to the steward, who has nothing to do with the solution or the problem.

The steward, however, had evidently been instructed by Joseph. I love his response. He is an unbelieving Egyptian who has been trained how to

respond. Joseph said, "By the way, if they say this, you say this." In verse 23a, we are told,

He said, "Be at ease, do not be afraid. . . ."

In other words, he says, in modern day vernacular, something like, "Take it easy, guys. And get off my arm. It's okay. I know what happened and it wasn't your money, it was our money."

Then, notice what he says in verse 23b,

Your God and the God of your father has given you treasure in your sacks . . .

In other words, "I've been told that your God is Elohim."

Elohim is the name used in this verse.

So he says, "Elohim has done this for you."

I cannot help but put myself in the place of these brothers. Have you ever been taken into account by an unbeliever? Have you ever been pulled in on the carpet? Someone says something about trusting God, "Well, we'll just have to trust God." – and you have been biting your nails.

You are on an airplane and it is going down. You are hanging on and the guy next to you says, "It's no problem here. You know, I trust God."

Well, the steward does not even know God. Yet he says, "But you've got a God don't you? Elohim. He's doing this all for you."

I don't want to belabor the point but it brought to my mind an illustration of a time in my own life when an unbeliever made an impact on me. I was working between college years – I think it was between my freshman and sophomore years. I worked on a construction site. I worked in a group and our small group was called "gophers". If you have worked on a construction site, you know what a gopher is. A gopher just does anything someone tells them to. They go and get windows, clean out a house, help the carpenters, or whatever.

There were four of us gophers, and we had a dump truck that we would drive around this huge site and pick up trash and do all kinds of interesting work. I had great, great motivation to continue college because I knew what would happen if I ever quit.

The three guys that I worked with worked hard at not working. They really were clever. One of the guys had been doing this for at least two years. I came in and was going to be there three months, and they knew it. I was ready to work. Many times I

would be loading that dump truck all by myself. I determined, if this was a testimony to them, it would be a testimony to them, and continued to do the work.

On the site, there was a refreshment van that would pull in. I am sure you have seen the type – they open the sides and sell all kinds of stuff. We were allowed a lunch hour, but that was all we got. One morning, I can still remember, the van pulled in at 10 o'clock. The other three guys made a bee-line for that thing. We were on a cul-de-sac cleaning out some homes that morning. They got all these refreshments and I was left out there picking up cinder blocks. It was hot, so I decided, "Hey, why not," and I got something to drink too. I took my drink and found the others in a house that had been finished and was waiting for the carpet. I came in with my coke and they kind of looked at me. I ignored it, sat down, popped the lid, and started to have my refreshment.

Now I probably saw our boss two times that whole summer. Well, no sooner had I sat down than the boss walked in the back door and saw the four of us. He had no idea that I did not do that every day like the other guys. I will never forget the look in his eye as he swept the room. He said, "Hey guys, I pay you for eight hours. Get out and go to work."

Oh! I was in that group! And the thing that hurt was, I knew God! I knew better.

Have you ever had an unbeliever confront you? And before those three guys – my testimony? Forget it! Down the tubes!

That is what is happening with Joseph's brothers. They come before a slave who does not care about their God, and they are frantic. They are explaining, "Look, we're not dishonest. And here's the plan; this is what we did."

The steward says, "Relax, you've got a God. He must be in control."

So what happens next? Verses 24 through 27a.

Then the man brought the men into Joseph's house and gave them water, and they washed their feet; and he gave their donkeys fodder. So they prepared the present for Joseph's coming at noon; for they had heard that they were to eat a meal there. When Joseph came home, they brought into the house to him the present which was in their hand and bowed to the ground before him. Then he asked them about their welfare, . . .

This is really interesting because they know he is the prime minister, yet he says, "How was your trip, men? How are you feeling?"

They probably wondered, "Is he setting us up for the ax?"

He asked them how they were doing and they said, "Well, we're fine."

Then Joseph, in verse 27b,

. . . said, "Is your old father well, of whom you spoke? Is he still alive?"

They said, "Yes, he is. We'd love to see him again."

They are probably so confused at what he is doing. Look at verse 28.

They said, "Your servant our father is well; he is still alive." They bowed down in homage.

These guys just keep bowing down – bowing down to the carpet.

Continue to verse 29a, as Joseph sees his little brother for the first time in twenty-five years.

As he lifted his eyes and saw his brother Benjamin, . . . he said, "Is this your youngest brother, of whom you spoke to me?" . . .

He still has to act ignorant.

They probably said, "Yes."

What a sight this was to Joseph. I can just imagine him going over to him and saying what's written, in the last part of verse 29.

. . . May God [Elohim] be gracious to you, my son.

About that time, I think I would have "lost it" if I had been a bug on the wall watching this whole thing. Joseph did exactly that. In the next phrase, he literally ran out of the room. He said, "Oh, God bless you, my son. Elohim bless you." And his brothers are really looking at him now. Then, he takes off and runs out. What is he looking for? Look at verse 30.

Joseph hurried out . . . to weep; and he entered his chamber and wept there.

He was looking for a place to weep. He threw himself across the bed and wept there.

I think a great point to bring out of this is the way this man, who was a great leader, could share and show emotion. We get the idea that if you are prime

minister, you have got it together all the time and you never have emotions. Yet Joseph had to leave, grab a towel, lay across his bed, and just weep.

Why was Joseph weeping? We are not told why, but I would assume that when he saw his brother, he was overwhelmed with twenty-five years of loss.

Joseph had not chosen Egypt. He had stayed there because somewhere between the prison cell and the office of prime minister, God had made it very clear, “Joseph, I brought you here. Eventually, you will bring this little nomadic tribe into the land of Goshen and you will help them become a great nation.”

Joseph did not choose Egypt. As soon as he was promoted, he could have asked leave and gone back to his home. He had stayed because God had wanted him to.

Twenty-five years of loss, however, overwhelmed him. This is his little brother, his real brother, who he had not seen for so many years. Now Benjamin is a grown man, and Joseph just had to weep.

Continue to verse 31.

Then he washed his face and came out; and he controlled himself and said, “Serve the meal.”

Verse 32 is kind of funny. Joseph has a little table over here and his brothers have a little table over there.

So they served him by himself, and them by themselves, and the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves, because the Egyptians could not eat bread with the Hebrews, for that is loathsome to the Egyptians.

Note verse 33.

Now they were seated before him, the first-born according to his birthright and the youngest according to his youth, and the men looked at one another in astonishment.

In other words, they did not say anything, but Joseph comes along and says, “Okay, you sit right here. And Simeon, you sit right here. And Judah, you sit right here.” He seats them all according to their age. “And Benjamin, you’re right here, at the head.”

These brothers, now, have “lost it”. I am sure they are nudging each other thinking, “How’d he figure this out?”

A test of humility

3. Joseph is not finished, and I think this is the third test. It is the test of humility.

Look at verse 34.

He took portions to them from his own table, but Benjamin’s portion was five times as much as any of theirs. . . .

Now if you had come to my house last night, and you were Benjamin, you would have gotten five portions of a great meal. My wife is a great cook. Do you want to know what I had for supper? Sure you do. You would have had five plates of tuna casserole. You would have had five rolls. You would have had five glasses of sweetened iced tea. If you come to our house, the tea is sweet. We do not put sweetener in it because it is already sweetened. You would have gotten, literally, five portions, but it would not have been for you to eat. Five portions is what they would give the Pharaoh, every time he sat down to eat. It was a symbol of honor; it was a symbol of great respect.

Now catch this, before Joseph was the favored son, he was the one who wore the tunic to his wrists and to his ankles. And what did the brothers do? They hated him. Now he puts before Benjamin, his only blood brother, five portions. Then, he probably watched. How do the other brothers respond? “Hey, did you see what Benjamin got? I knew it! He’s not only favored back home but he’s going to get the best deal here.”

I think that there was not even a sliver of jealousy. I think this because we are told in the last part of verse 34,

. . . So they feasted and drank freely with him.

Application

Let me try to tie this up by giving a couple of applications. We are really dealing with two different people, so let me give a couple of thoughts.

Recognize “the Jacob temperament” in you!

The first application deals with Jacob and involves what we are calling, “the Jacob temperament”. Let me characterize that for you with two thoughts. And we all need to look in the mirror of scripture today.

Seen in a person who constantly re-iterates life's disappointments

1. First, "the Jacob temperament" is seen in a person who constantly reiterates life's disappointments.

Now do not misunderstand this. It is not wrong to share your pain and trial with your brothers and sisters in Christ. That is what we are here for.

I am talking about an individual who is like a broken record. You bump them and they spill it all. They constantly do it. They are not looking for a solution. They are not asking for prayer. They are not even seeking encouragement. They just want to dump.

I think we all do that from time to time, don't we? The next time your spouse or child does that, call them Jacob. That little exercise will be convicting.

Seen in a person who stubbornly refuses divine perspective

2. Secondly, the Jacob temperament is seen in a person who stubbornly refuses divine perspective.

Chuck Swindoll preaches a message from this text and he basically preaches it around that thought. He talks about an individual who refuses until the last moment, to finally look up. That is what Jacob did. He tried everything possible and never caught on until the very end.

This is like times that you and I struggle and do not think God is involved; that God is putting this together. Jacob says, in chapter 42, verse 36,

... all these things are against me.

If he had only had chapter 43, he would know that God was designing all along. It had to be this way to get them all back to Egypt. Just hang on!

Recognize the hand of God upon you!

I also think of the brothers and the way in which God worked in their lives. Let me give two ways to recognize the hand of God upon you.

Repentance is often brought about by God's goodness

1. First, repentance is often brought about by God's goodness.

The goodness of God leads to repentance. We have the idea that the only way He will ever get us to repent is to hit us over the head. We think He needs to send Gabriel or someone to just whack us good. That is not necessarily the case all of the time.

There are times when God just overloads us with goodness. In fact, in chapter 43, the last part, these brothers have been brought to repentance, as we will discover even more specifically in the next chapter. This did not occur by Joseph throwing them in prison, and not just for three days, but for the rest of their lives, and then sending a note to them saying, "By the way, I happen to be Joseph, your brother. As soon as you repent, I'll let you out." It happened because like Christ, he sets a table and offers fellowship. God does the same in our lives.

Behind the harshness of discipline is God's heart of love

2. Secondly, behind the harshness of discipline is God's heart of love.

The brothers did not know that Joseph was running to his bedroom to weep. They did not know that earlier, he could not control himself and had to turn away and weep. Everything that he was doing was literally tearing him up. I believe, as one man suggested, that Joseph was on the verge of breaking down the moment he saw his brothers. It was the wisdom of God through him that kept him from breaking until they had repented. In his heart, he was weeping. I think he wanted to embrace them.

That is the way that God so often deals with us. In fact, I think it is obvious that He always does. Even though discipline may be harsh, behind it is a heart of incredible love.

The question is, "Will we throw in the towel?" Will we say, "I'm starving in Canaan and I'll starve and die?" Or, do we persist and ultimately trust?

I heard a great story of an older couple. For decades, they ran a small store located in the inner city on the East coast. Finally, urban renewal came. All the old, dilapidated buildings were torn down and were replaced by beautiful new buildings to revitalize the city. Somehow, however, this older couple's general store was overlooked.

So after awhile, after all the building had stopped, their store was between two new buildings. To their left, with the wall just touching their little store, was a two-story department store. To their right was a huge

grocery store. It covered half of a block, with an additional half block for parking. So now, this little general store was surrounded by and literally in the shadows of, two huge stores that were selling what they had sold for years.

What would you and I have done? Well, needless to say, this couple had some spitfire. They, determined not to quit, took all the money they had and went to a sign painter. Using every penny they could spare, they bought the biggest sign they could. It stretched across the roof of their little store from one end to the other. It contained three words, "Main Entrance Here."

When I look at Jacob, I see him in the shadow of tremendous difficulty. But what I learn from him is that ultimately, he writes a sign in his life that

basically says, "God, You can still work here. I am still available."

George Matheson, who I referred to earlier, wrote these words, and with these, I will close,

My God, I have never thanked Thee for my thorns. I have thanked Thee a thousand time for my roses, but not once for my thorns. I have been looking forward to a world where I shall get compensation for my cross, but I've never thought of my cross as itself, a present glory. Teach me the glory of my cross. Teach me the value of my thorn. Show me that I have climbed to Thee by the path of pain. Show me that my tears have made a rainbow.

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What An Attitude!

Genesis 44 - 45:15

Introduction

I read a story that especially attracted my attention. It was the story of a tough young Marine who was twenty-four years of age. This Marine had already survived two years of cruel POW treatment, but had remained a model prisoner. The reason for that was the camp commander had told him that he would release him if he cooperated – so he did. In fact, this young Marine became a leader in camp reform thought groups. He did everything that he was told to do, until finally, it dawned on this young man that his captors had lied to him. They had no intention of letting him go. With that new knowledge dawning upon him, he went to his cot, curled up, refused any encouragement, any food, any offers of help, and simply lay there sucking his thumb. Three weeks later, he was dead.

When I read that story, I thought of a young twenty-eight year old who was imprisoned, betrayed, and forgotten. He was imprisoned due to false accusations. His own family had turned their back on him. If anyone had a right to curl up on a cot and say, “No,” to the world and, “Let me die,” it would have been this young man.

Yet, you may remember the story of the way this boy was finally let out of prison. As a thirty year old, he finally stood before the Pharaoh. He then became second in command of the entire kingdom.

At that point, we almost held our breath, didn’t we? We wondered, “Now that he is in command, what will his first acts be? Will he make Potiphar swing from the gallows? Will he take that woman who made a miserable mess of his life, and put her up there too? Will he immediately send for his brothers

in Canaan, bring them to Egypt, and torture them to death?”

If he had done these things, we would have said, “Well, they got what they deserved; they got everything they had coming to them.”

Yet, as you may remember, he came out of prison, after two years of almost solitary confinement, and had somehow, by the grace of God, forgiven. Now he stood in the court of Pharaoh as a man who was committed more to God than ever before.

Now we do not know, from the text, that his path ever crossed the paths of Potiphar and his wife, or the cupbearer, who had forgotten him in prison. We would assume, however, that they did. We do know, from several chapters in the text in fact, that his path crossed with his brothers, the men who caused it all to happen. Today we will look more closely at the way this man, Joseph, handles his brothers.

Let me tell you, as you may already know, Joseph is not out to kill his brothers or to reap vengeance on their lives. In fact, I think, he is trying to see whether they have an attitude of repentance; an attitude of acknowledging of God. That is the reason, I believe, that he brings about this final test that we will study today.

He has given them the test of honor. He has given them the test of honesty. He has given them the test of humility. Now, this last test involves silver in the sack. He, in fact, intends to bring his youngest brother, Benjamin, to the same place that he was twenty-five years earlier.

A Test of Character From Joseph

Let us look at Genesis, chapter 44, verse 1. Joseph is giving instructions.

Then he commanded his house steward, saying, “Fill the men’s sacks with food, as much as they can carry, and put each man’s money in the mouth of his sack. Put my cup, the silver cup, in the mouth of the sack of the youngest, . . .”

All of the rulers in Egypt had silver cups. These superstitious rulers believed that by watching the movement of the water, by dipping certain things in it, they could somehow divine the future. Although we know that Joseph did not do this, it seems that everyone assumed he did.

This was a very special cup. Joseph says, “Take that cup and put it in Benjamin’s sack.”

Then, he told his steward to follow the brothers and have them search their sacks. The steward catches up with the men and, of course, they claim their innocence. In verse 9, they even go so far as to say,

With whomever of your servants it is found, let him die, and we also will be my lord’s slaves.

Let us stop at this point for a moment. Imagine what these brothers could have done if they had not changed. Joseph is trying to discern whether his brothers are really different; whether somehow, in all of the events that have occurred over the last two years, they have begun to acknowledge God in their lives.

You may remember that for prophecy to be fulfilled, the family of Jacob must move back to Egypt. Prophecy declared that they would turn from a small tribe into a mighty nation in the land of Goshen. For that to happen, there needs to be reconciliation among all of these brothers. And, for that to happen, these brothers have to come to a point where they admit their guilt before God. So Joseph, in all wisdom, and I think, being directed by God’s Spirit, is providing the arena; setting the stage to discover whether or not they will, in fact, admit their guilt before God.

Possible responses

Now, when Benjamin’s sack is opened, the silver cup is discovered. If these brothers had not changed, I think they could have responded in two ways. Let me give them to you.

Repeat

1. First, they could have repeated what they had done with Joseph.

In other words, they could have said to each other, “We potentially could be slaves of Pharaoh, but we’re not guilty. Let Benjamin take the due penalty of what he probably did. I’m sure he must have slipped it in his sack. Let him go back to Egypt. Let him be a slave.”

Remember, twenty-five years earlier they had sent their brother Joseph into Egypt as a slave because they were so jealous. Now their lives are on the line. Will it make a difference?

Rationalize

2. They could have repeated their error or secondly, they could have rationalized.

Before, they were sending Joseph into Egypt just to get rid of the pesky dreamer. Now, however, they could have said, “We’ve got hungry families back in Canaan. We have a helpless father. We have wives and children who are waiting for our return. We’ve got five good reasons to let Benjamin go into slavery.”

I think these brothers could have rationalized their way out of this, but they did not. Verse 13 tells us that after they found the cup in Benjamin’s sack,

Then they tore their clothes, and when each man loaded his donkey, they returned to the city.

Tearing their clothes was unusual; it was a sign of grief. In other words, they have changed. Now, they are acting like brothers; they are sticking together; there is family identity; they are all Jacob’s sons. They are going to bear this together, so they head back to Egypt.

A Plea of Exchange From Judah

Now when the brothers get back to Egypt, it is interesting that Judah steps forward as the spokesman. Twenty-five years earlier, it was Judah who had said to his brothers, “Hey, I’ve got a great idea! Let’s sell this little dreamer. Let’s get rid of this beloved son of

our partial father. Let's send him to Egypt by selling him to the Midianites."

It was Judah's idea to sell Joseph. Now, twenty-five years later, he steps forward as the spokesman. Note verse 16a.

So Judah said, "What can we say to my lord? What can we speak? And how can we justify ourselves? . . ."

He is saying, "There is circumstantial evidence that we can't deny. But we are innocent!"

Then note the next phrase in verse 16.

". . . God has found out the iniquity of your servants . . ."

That's it! That is exactly what Joseph has been waiting for. His brothers finally reach the point where they admit their guilt. There was a vertical awakening; there was a realization that they had sinned against God.

It is interesting that they said, "We're innocent, but God has discovered our guilt."

What were they referring to? In their minds, they were plagued by their guilty consciences, as we have studied in a previous discussion. Joseph, through certain circumstances, brought that awake. Now, it is fully open; it is now bared; it is admitting itself. I think, therein lies part of the cure.

Chuck Colson, who is one of my favorite writers, wrote a story of a time when he served as a Marine lieutenant. He was brand new to the job and was filled with the pride of that position. He was leading a platoon of forty grimy, sweaty men on a training mission on an island that was part of a satellite of Puerto Rico. The men had been told that when they were on this island among the impoverished, poverty stricken people, they were not to buy or trade. They were to leave the people alone – but this command was expected to be ignored.

On the second day of maneuvers, they happened across an old man leading a scrawny donkey. On the back of that donkey were two ice filled sacks of cold drinks. All of the men headed toward this old fellow, pulling money from their pockets, ready to buy. Colson thought, "Here is a chance to really show off."

He said, "Sergeant, arrest that man."

The sergeant looked at him in disbelief, but began to carry out the order.

Colson then, trying to further impress the men, said, "Confiscate the contraband."

The men applauded as they took the sacks of ice and cold drinks and drank them all.

When they were finished drinking the drinks, Colson said, "Release our prisoner."

The old man, ignorantly and naively figuring his life had been spared, slunk away with his scrawny donkey. Although he had lost perhaps his life savings and his livelihood for many months, he was thankful his life had been spared.

When Chuck Colson writes of his former life before he found Jesus Christ, he says, "The thing that marks my mind is not the spectacular crimes of Watergate, it is there on that island, in cruelty, taking from that man what we did not deserve."

If you line these ten brothers up, you would see: a man who is involved in an incestuous relationship; a man who is a fornicator; a man who is guilty of murder. These brothers were guilty of every heinous crime that you and I are guilty of. Yet, when they acknowledge their guilt before God, what are they thinking? They are thinking, "Oh, God has finally uncovered our guilt of selling our brother; our father's favorite son."

Three obvious developments

Let me give three obvious developments in these brothers.

Admission of their guilt

1. The first is the admission of their guilt.

In other words, the admission of their guilt before God. This is a vertical awakening.

Respect for their father's feelings

2. Secondly, there is a respect for their father's feelings.

This is a horizontal awareness. Judah begins to say things that cause Joseph to tremble with excitement and emotion. Look at verses 18 through 20.

Then Judah approached him, and said, "Oh my lord, may your servant please speak a word . . . My lord asked his servants, saying, 'Have you a father or a brother?' We said

to my lord, ‘We have an old father and a little child of his old age. Now his brother is dead, so he alone is left of his mother, and his father loves him.’”

Notice how tenderly Judah refers to Benjamin. Before, it was, “Joseph, the favored son, how we hate him.”

Now, with compassion, he says, “Oh that young lad, how his father loves him so.”

Continue to verse 27.

Your servant my father said to us, “You know that my wife bore me two sons;”

For the first time, Joseph is going to hear the alibi. Note that he has not known for twenty-five years, what his brothers told his father. He has never known what his father thought happened to him, and I am sure he must have wondered what was going on in Canaan. For the first time, he hears. Look at verse 28.

. . . I said, “Surely he is torn in pieces,” and I have not seen him since.

Imagine being Joseph, hearing the account of your own demise – knowing that you are still alive. I think it is at this point that Joseph begins to tremble with emotion. His emotions are rising to the surface. All along, he has kept a stony face. When he has had to weep, he has run out of the room. Now, however, it boils to the surface.

There is respect for their father’s feelings.

Compassion for their younger brother

3. Thirdly, there is compassion for their younger brother.

Oh what a difference this is in their lives. Look at verse 32.

For your servant became surety for the lad to my father, saying, “If I do not bring him back to you, then let me bear the blame before my father forever.”

Judah continues in verse 33.

“Now, therefore, . . .”

“I’ve got a better idea. I’m not going home to bear the blame before my father. This is the plan . . .”

“. . . please let your servant remain instead of the lad a slave to my lord, and let the lad go up with his brothers.”

What a change! What an awakening on the horizontal level! Now, ten stubborn, selfish brothers are concerned about their father’s feelings. And Judah, who was the mastermind behind selling Joseph, now says, “Let me take Benjamin’s place. I’ll live as a slave for the rest of my life.”

An Announcement of Identity From Joseph

Judah’s words are exactly what Joseph has been hoping to hear. Now, he cannot stand it any longer.

In the first verses of chapter 45, we are told that he says, “Send everyone away. Get all of the Egyptians out of the room.”

Then he weeps so loudly that the Egyptians hear it. He breaks down right in front of these bewildered men.

Look at verse 3a.

Then Joseph said to his brothers, “I am Joseph! . . .”

“Ana Yowceph,” he cries out in Hebrew, “Ana Yowceph!”

These brothers probably stepped back, “Where did this man learn Hebrew? And he says he’s Joseph!”

Joseph, through his tears, says, “Ana Yowceph.”

I happen to believe that these men were so terrified, from what the text says, that they probably came near to fainting. It says in verse 3b,

. . . they were dismayed at his presence.

They were dismayed – or terrified – at his presence. I think, there was some skepticism also. With their rough beards and Hebrew clothing, these brothers were looking at a clean shaven Egyptian man with the headdress of a Egyptian prime minister. Joseph was decked with jewels and fine raiment. He was also soft, while they were rough. They probably thought, “This couldn’t be our brother. This can’t be Joseph. It’s another trick. He has found out somehow.”

I want to suggest to you that something happens at this point, as others have suggested before me. Look at verse 4a.

Joseph said to his brothers, “Please come closer to me.” . . .

“Come closer” is the Hebrew word “nagash,” which is not just to come closer geographically, but to

come closer in the sense of intimacy; in the sense of kissing. He says, “come closer,” and in saying that, I think Joseph revealed to his brothers the sign of the covenant. I think he pulled back his garment and revealed to his brothers that he was circumcised. That was the proof! No Egyptian would go through that right; only the Jew. This was the symbol that they were sons of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Joseph says, in verse 4,

... “Please come closer to me.” ... “I am your brother Joseph ...”

He is telling them, “I’m a son of Jacob.”

I think now, they turned white because they recognized the truth.

Many references to God

Joseph will go on to relieve their minds. He will give repeated references to God. Let me read them.

- Verse 5, “... *God sent me* ...”;
- Verse 7, “*God sent me* ...”;
- Verse 8, “*it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me* ...”;
- Verse 9, “... *God has made me lord of all Egypt* ...”.

Joseph gives all of the obvious references to the fact that God was involved.

Ladies and gentlemen, Joseph is giving us tremendous practical theology. It is in believing, “I am who I am because of God”; in believing, “I am where I am because of God,” that we gain a tremendous sense of security.

He says, “It wasn’t you who sent me here – it was God. God put me in Egypt. Although it looked as if you were the ones behind it, if you took a step back now and looked over all of the events, you’d see the hand of Elohim.”

That is great security to believe, “I am where I am because of God.”

It not only produces great security, ladies and gentlemen, it produces tremendous humility. In the next two phrases Joseph goes on to say, “God made me.”

Nowhere in the text do you get the idea that Joseph steps back and says, “Hey guys, let me tell you how I did it. You thought you sold me here as a slave,

but I’m the prime minister! Let me tell you all of the steps that I took.”

No. Believing, “I am what I am because of God,” will not only produce security when things are rough, but humility when things are going well.

So Joseph gives the news to his brothers that he is, in fact, Joseph. He then tells them the plan in verses 10 through 13a.

You shall live in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children’s children and your flocks and your herds and all that you have. There I will also provide for you, for there are still five years of famine to come, and you and your household and all that you have would be impoverished. Behold, your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see, that it is my mouth which is speaking to you. Now you must tell my father ...

“Go back and tell our father that I’m alive.”

An Expression of Forgiveness From Joseph

What happens next is beautiful. It is an expression of forgiveness from Joseph. Look at verses 14 and 15.

Then he fell on his brother Benjamin’s neck and wept, and Benjamin wept on his neck. He kissed all his brothers and wept on them, and afterward his brothers talked with him.

The Egyptians, with their ears to the wall outside wondering what in the world is going on in there, hear weeping, laughing, the shuffling of feet as Joseph goes from one brother to the next, weeping on them and embracing them.

You do not hug an enemy; you do not get close to someone you despise; you do not embrace someone you hate. Joseph starts with Benjamin, takes him in his arms, and they weep on each other’s shoulders. It had been so long since they had seen each other. Then he moves to Judah. Imagine that! He probably says, “Judah, I know that you sold me and it was your idea, but I forgive you.”

He embraces Judah and then, moves to Simeon. He goes down the line to Zebulun and Levi and all of the brothers. He hugs them and weeps and says, “You are forgiven.”

I cannot imagine.

Joseph kisses them, as verse 15 tells us, and afterward, after all of that is over, they sit down and talk with each other. It is a sign that they are together again. “Boy, we’ve got twenty-five years to catch up on. This is all that’s happened back in Canaan.”

Joseph is intensely concerned about his father, “Is he still alive? Is he well?”

He tells them of all of the things that have happened to him, perhaps. Maybe, at that time, he calls his wife and says, “Honey, come on in here. Here are my two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh. God has been good to me.”

Then, he sends them out to go get Dad.

Application – Adopting Joseph’s Attitude!

Let us ask why Joseph was a great man. Was it because he was prime minister? No. Was it because Joseph somehow accomplished an incredible administrative feat that would save a nation from starvation? No. Joseph was great because his attitude revealed two very special things. Let me give these, by way of application.

Forgiving of those who deeply hurt

1. First, Joseph was very forgiving of those who had deeply hurt him. This attitude of forgiveness is an ability directly related to seeing God at work through people.

In other words, if we live and adopt Joseph’s attitude, we throw that “black list” away. However, it always wants to creep back into our lives; we keep coming up with names. We think of some individual and imagine their face on the wall. We speak to them, we preach to them, we tell them what we would like them to do and how they wronged us. Joseph threw the black list away.

My boss, who overlooked me – his name is erased. My spouse, who has done me so wrong – their name is erased. That child, who didn’t turn out as I wished – their name is erased.

The ability to forgive those who have hurt us is directly related to seeing God at work in and through people. They are the tool that God is using in our lives.

Loving God regardless of circumstances

2. Secondly, Joseph was capable of loving God regardless of circumstances. This attitude is a direct result of seeing God at work through events.

Turn to Genesis, chapter 50. Jacob dies and the brothers start to get squeamish again, thinking, “Now that he’s dead, perhaps Joseph is not sincere.”

They send a messenger to Joseph saying, “Joseph, remember that Dad said, ‘Don’t hurt them when I die.’”

Joseph sends a message back to them. In fact, he weeps before them and actually speaks to them personally.

Look at verses 18 through 20a.

Then his brothers also came and fell down before him and said, “Behold, we are your servants.” But Joseph said to them, “Do not be afraid, for am I in God’s place? As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good . . .”

What a position to live in! What an attitude to have! All that has happened, you meant it for evil. You meant it to happen for my detriment, but now, as I step back, I can see God meant all of this for my spiritual good.

Harold Kushner wrote a book that was an instant best seller, entitled, *When Bad Things Happen To Good People*. It was on the New York best seller list for fifty-two straight weeks. It sold a half million copies in hardback before going into a paperback edition.

Kushner, who was a rabbi, had lost a son in death. The basic premise of his book is that God is all-loving, but He is not all-powerful; God is good, but He is not sovereign; this is a big universe and sometimes things get out of control. His solution is that we need to love God anyway and forgive Him for His limitations.

We might say, “I’d never think that way.”

Yet, don’t we live like that at times? We think, “God, where’d You go? How could this have happened if You had been involved in my life?”

Our real estate dealings have led me across the path of a man who has lost three children. Yet, when you speak to him, he, as a believer, never refers to God in anything less than terms of sovereignty and love. That is a great man.

I wonder how much like Joseph we really are –
able to forgive those who hurt us deeply; able to
translate, in the events of our lives and through the

people in our lives, that God is at work. How much
like Joseph are you?

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Together . . . At Last!

Genesis 45:16-47:12

Introduction

Captain Howard Rutledge was a POW for thirteen years during the Vietnam war. The *LA Times*, on February 19, 1973, carried the story of his return home after being away for so many years.

I have a book in my study that tells this man's story. I have read it several times and it is in fact, rather dog-eared by now. Rutledge became a believer while in, what they called, the Hanoi Hilton. He trusted Christ there and God kept him over thirteen years.

The story of Howard Rutledge, in much detail in the book, tells that he sent word that he was coming home. His wife and children were ready. He did not know that by that time, he was a grandfather. One of his three daughters had married and had a son. He also did not know that his son had had an accident and was confined to a wheelchair.

His family and friends were expecting Rutledge's return and soon, he left for Los Angeles. All of the media was there, as well as thousands of people. You may have heard or read of this reunion. It showed the men disembarking from the plane and an announcer would tell the name of the man who was finally home.

Finally, the announcer said, "Captain Howard E. Rutledge." The camera scanned the audience and a lady broke free and ran into the arms of Rutledge. They embraced and you can only imagine the scene as he was reunited with his family. His son was undoubtedly anticipating his father's response, wondering, "How will he handle the fact that now I am confined to a wheelchair?" His father, as he was reunited with his son, knelt beside the wheelchair, and

they gathered each other in their arms and hugged and wept.

There is something in our hearts that loves a story about a reunion; there is something in our hearts that loves going home. There is something about roots, about going back to where it all started that we love.

Perhaps it is because I have been studying this passage in Genesis that when I was in Virginia to preach at a missionary conference this past week, I decided to go back to the home where I was raised. I had not been there to see the house in thirteen years. My brother wanted to come along too. He was available at the time, so we drove back home to 4713 Regal Court.

Everything had changed at the house, of course. Trees were gone and different things had occurred. We knocked on the door and a gal with a baby on her hip answered. I said, "My name is Stephen Davey. I was raised in this house."

She said, "For real."

I said, "Yea, for real."

She probably thought I was out on a limb somewhere. I asked, "Would you mind if we just came through and looked at the house?"

She said, "No. That would be great. Come on in."

She went upstairs and got her dad. He came down and we began going through the home. This family had purchased it from my parents, who had moved when I was a college student. We went all through that house looking at all the little nooks and corners, and nicks too – we put them there. We saw everything from the laundry shoot that we stuffed our

little brother in, to the little basement, where we would hide. We went all through the downstairs and finally, upstairs to the little cubby-hole that was my bedroom after my brother went away to college. It was there that, as an eighteen year old, I remember kneeling and giving my life to Jesus Christ. After thirteen years, it was quite an interesting experience going back there.

There is something about going back. The moment we began studying Joseph's life, we were all waiting to get to this chapter. If we had not had so much to learn in the process, we would have gone directly to this part, as, finally, he is reunited with his father. Let us take a closer look.

Joseph Sends His Brothers Home For Jacob

You may remember, if you have been studying with us, that the brothers have come to Egypt and Joseph has finally announced in the Hebrew dialect, "Ana Yowceph!" or "I am Joseph!"

The brothers were terrified. Their legs trembled and they were afraid that now, they would get the ax.

Joseph, however, was very compassionate. He told his brothers to go home to Dad and, "Tell Jacob that I'm alive. And I have an open invitation for you to come back and to live with me."

That is where we pick up the story today, as he is saying goodbye to his brothers and sending them home to get Jacob.

The favor of Pharaoh – his promise and provision

Note, in verses 17 and 18 of chapter 45, the favor that Pharaoh has given these brothers.

Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Say to your brothers, 'Do this: load your beasts and go to the land of Canaan, and take your father and your households and come to me, and I will give you the best of the land of Egypt and you will eat the fat of the land.'"

We do not know why, but perhaps the Hyksos dynasty, as we think, was a shepherding dynasty. They were a little more sympathetic to this shepherd family.

Then Pharaoh says, in verse 19,

"Do this: take wagons from the land of Egypt for your little ones and for your wives, and bring your father and come."

Now, when we read a verse like that, we immediately think that he is talking about some wooden, rickety old carts with wheels that are about to fall off. In other words, "Take these old, rickety carts, with some donkeys pulling them, and go get your family."

However, if we were to go back to that time culturally, carts were an unheard of thing. Everyone at that time, walked or rode a beast. But the Pharaoh had, in a sense, the automobiles; the transportation – he had carts. These carts were covered with gold, bedecked with jewels, pulled by handsome animals, and attended by the finest of Pharaoh's court. You just did not ride in a cart unless you were somebody.

Imagine this entourage of gold-covered carts pulling into a famished area like Canaan, where they had never seen anything like that. The Pharaoh said, in effect, "Go in style. Go back and get all of your family and bring them back in wagons."

Today, this would be equivalent to a limousine service. This was probably the talk of Canaan for decades.

So the sons of Israel did just that.

An interesting command from Joseph, "Do not quarrel"

Verse 22 tells us that Joseph then,

To each of them he gave changes of garments, but to Benjamin he gave three hundred pieces of silver and five changes of garments.

Joseph sent them to his father, but with an interesting command. Note verse 24.

So he sent his brothers away, and as they departed, he said to them, "Do not quarrel on the journey."

Two reasons the brothers might quarrel

Now, I have to stop and ask the question, "Why would these brothers quarrel? I thought everything was patched up now."

Let me give two reasons why I think it is possible that they would break into quarreling.

Sudden wealth

1. The first reason is because of sudden wealth.

Where they came from, you did not have silver; you did not have hard, cold cash. In their culture, you traded in goats milk and wool; you lived close to the earth.

Now, however, these men had been given an incredible amount of money. And wealth, as you and I know, does not tend to unify; wealth tends to separate; to cause problems. So perhaps it is the sudden wealth of these brothers that would bring about the problem.

I think, as well, there is a hidden, subtle temptation in that Benjamin is given more. Benjamin is given five times more garments.

As I studied and re-studied this passage, I thought we could learn the following principle in this:

Repentance does not alleviate future temptation.

Just because the brothers had repented of their sin of dishonesty; of living a lie, they were, in a sense, still having to handle the temptation of dishonesty. They could, as they had done to Joseph, bump Benjamin off, take what he had, go back to Canaan with another story, and live wealthy lives.

Serious confrontation

2. I think, the second reason the brothers might quarrel is perhaps more significant and closer to the truth, and that is, there was the knowledge of serious confrontation.

Now they were going back to Canaan and were going to have to tell their father that they had lied. They were going to have to tell the story of what had happened. They could not just walk up, and just say, “Your son is alive. Joseph is alive.” – which is all the text relates that they say. No. Dad would say, “Now wait a second! Twenty-five years ago, you brought me a blood-stained tunic. What happened? What really happened?”

They knew there would be confrontation involved. They would have to confess; they would have to admit everything to Jacob.

Let me give this principle:

Repentance does not erase future consequences.

They had to go and tell Dad that they had lied.

Perhaps you have brothers and sisters. Having three brothers myself, I can well remember many

times of doing something wrong – led astray by one of my brothers – and having to admit it to our dad.

I can still remember my brother and I getting into trouble at school one day. In the two blocks from the school bus stop to our house, we argued the whole way as to what the story would be.

“Well, let’s say this.”

“No, let’s not say that, let’s say this.”

We bickered, “You let me take care of it.”

“No, you let me handle it.”

Well, what do we have here? We have eleven brothers who are having to go back to their father and tell him what happened. I can just hear it now.

I can hear Reuben, “Now look, you need to make sure, when we tell him the story, that you leave me out of it because I wasn’t there. You remember that.”

I can hear Judah saying, “Well, don’t forget that it was my idea to sell him to the Midianites and not kill him.”

Benjamin is saying, “Now wait a second guys! I’m not part of this. I wasn’t even there.”

“Oh? Who do you think you are, you goody, goody? We’re going to tell him whatever we want to tell him.”

I can see eleven brothers, by the time they end their three week journey, at each others throats. I think that is the reason why Joseph says, in verse 24, “Listen, don’t quarrel on the journey.”

Joseph knows his brothers. When they are heading back with money and garments that they have never had before, he says to these rough men; these men of the earth, “Don’t bicker. Don’t start trading your outfits. Don’t quarrel about what you have. Don’t look at Benjamin and get upset because he’s been given so much more. And whatever you do, don’t begin to argue about the story you’ll tell Jacob, our dad. Just go back and tell him I’m alive.”

I wish we had been in the cart to listen to the stories of these brothers as they returned home. They did return and went to Jacob and said, “You won’t believe this,” and, according to verse 26,

They told him, saying, “Joseph is still alive, and indeed he is ruler over all the land of Egypt.” But he [Jacob] was stunned, for he did not believe them.”

Jacob’s heart went numb. Continue to verse 27.

When they told him all the words of Joseph that he had spoken to them, and when he saw the wagons that Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of their father Jacob revived.

When Jacob saw the gold-covered carts; when he saw the jewelry; when he saw their garments, he knew that Joseph must, indeed, be alive, and his spirit revived.

Jacob Reveals Evidence of His Faith in God

Now we have studied the life of Jacob, but we need to pause and focus on him for a moment. If this is the old Jacob, he will pack the suitcases, load up the baggage, and without further ado, head for Egypt.

Jacob prays before entering Egypt

However, Egypt, as you may remember, is warned of by the prophets. Egypt, Jacob remembers, was the place where Abraham, his grandfather, lied and got away from the Lord. Egypt was also where Isaac, Jacob's father, was warned not to follow in his father's footsteps in going to Egypt. So Jacob thinks, "I can't go to Egypt if I am to be obedient to God."

All of a sudden, Jacob is faced with a tremendous struggle. He decides to do something that is uncharacteristic of Jacob – he decides to stop and pray. Look at verse 1 of chapter 46.

So Israel set out with all that he had, and came to Beersheba, and offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac.

Beersheba is the southern-most tip of Canaan; it is just before you cross the border. When Jacob gets to that southern-most tip, before he takes a step into the desert that will lead him to Egypt, he stops and offers sacrifices, probably at the same place where Abraham and Isaac had in Beersheba.

Now I do not know what Jacob said in his prayer was, but he must have said something like, "God, You know that my son is there. You know that food is there. You know that the promise is that we will multiply, so it makes sense that I should go to Egypt."

Why should he even pray? I cannot help but apply this directly to you and me. If we were given the same conditions – more money, closeness to family members, a better situation, the ability to provide so much more by leaving, by pulling up roots

– would we even think that God was not in it? Yet Jacob stops and says, in effect, "Lord, what should I do?"

Look at verses 2 and 3 and note the use of the name "Israel" for Jacob, which means, "Prince of God".

God spoke to Israel in visions . . . and said, "Jacob, Jacob." And he said, "Here I am." He said, "I am God, the God of your father; do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you a great nation there."

Solid evidence of inspiration – prophecy of an expansion

In the margin of your text, let me give two words to write. The first can be written at the end of verse 3, and is the word, "expansion".

These are self-contained prophecies in the book of Genesis; that is, we will see them prophesied and, in a later book, we will see them fulfilled. That is one of the greatest proofs of inspiration – expansion.

God says, in verse 3, "You go to Egypt,"

. . . for I will make you a great nation there.

Now verses 26 and 27 of chapter 46 tell us that sixty-six people in Jacob's family were heading to Egypt, making seventy in all, when Joseph's family is counted.

Prior to this, Abraham had been given the promise of a great nation – yet there were only seventy people. Isaac had been given the promise of a great nation – yet there were only seventy people. To Jacob, God had reiterated that same covenant promise, saying, "I will make you a great nation," but still, three generations later, all he could count was seventy people.

Yet we will learn in Exodus, chapter 15, that when they make their exodus from Egypt, after staying there for many years, nearly four million people will leave. Seventy people are multiplied into four million – that is a self-fulfilled prophecy.

Solid evidence of inspiration – prophecy of an exodus

The beginning of verse 4 contains the second word, which is, "exodus". Note that He promises an exodus to Jacob, saying,

I will go down with you to Egypt . . .

He continues in that verse to say,

... and I will also surely bring you up again
...

He is saying, “Don’t worry, I’m with you, but I will also bring you back.”

In other words, “Although you’re going to Egypt, which is not part of the promise, I will bring you back to Canaan; to the promised land. Don’t be afraid. This is My way of multiplying this tribe into a nation in the region of Goshen, which is very fertile – the best that Egypt has to offer.”

So Jacob stops to pray and God gives him the confidence and encouragement that he should go.

Joseph and His Father are Reunited at Last

Now, at last, the reunion occurs. Look at verses 27b through 28 of chapter 46.

... All the persons of the house of Jacob, who came to Egypt, were seventy. Now he sent Judah before him to Joseph, to point out the way before him to Goshen; and they came into the land of Goshen.

Joseph got the news from a messenger and as soon as he did, I have the idea that he went by himself, unattended. Look at verse 29.

Joseph prepared his chariot and went up to Goshen to meet his father Israel; as soon as he appeared before him, he fell on his neck and wept on his neck a long time.

It is hard for us to identify with this kind of reunion. We have probably never experienced anything like this, even in our own personal lives. All we can do is go back twenty-five years when this dad and son were torn apart by the jealousy of brothers. They had not seen each other in almost twenty-five years.

Now Jacob, finally, sees Joseph’s chariot coming. In the dimness of his eyesight, he looks and sees this Egyptian monarch riding toward him in a chariot of gold, pulled by prancing steeds. I would imagine he thought, “That can’t be Joseph.”

Yet Joseph, wearing the headdress worn by Egyptian royalty, dressed with all the Egyptian garb, and clean-shaven, unlike a Hebrew, finally reigns in his horses. He steps down off the chariot and walks over to his dad. Perhaps it is then that his father looked closely and recognized, “Yes, this is Joseph.”

We do not know of any words that were said. All they did was embrace and weep for a long time. Finally, through his sobs, Jacob lifts his voice and says, in verse 30,

... Now let me die, since I have seen your face, that you are still alive.

In other words, “This is the fulfillment of my life. My son that I thought was taken from me, is back. If I’m going to die happy, let me die now.”

It is all Jacob could utter. What a reunion that must have been!

Joseph reveals two important elements of family life

What happens next is a further indication of Joseph’s character. Let me give two important elements about Joseph’s life that should be characterized in our lives as well.

A sense of family responsibility, regardless of how painful the past

1. First, Joseph had a sense of family responsibility, regardless of how painful the past.

Joseph had every right to stick his brothers in some corner and forget them, while elevating his beloved father, Jacob. Yet, he continues to evidence forgiveness. Look at chapter 47, verse 11a.

So Joseph settled his father and his brothers and gave them a possession in the land of Egypt, in the best of the land . . .

Regardless of how painful the abandonment was; regardless of how cruel they had been, refusing to listen, as he pleaded that they not send him away with the Midianites, now, twenty-five years later, Joseph gives his brothers the best of the land. I wonder if we can have that sense of forgiveness in our hearts for those in our past.

A sense of family pride, regardless of how humble the origin

2. Joseph also had a sense of family pride, regardless of how humble the origin.

This is beautiful. His dad is a humble shepherd. He is dressed roughly and is perhaps even a little uncouth. He is used to living out in a tent close to the earth. His fingernails are dirty and his face is

unshaven. I can imagine, once they are reunited, Joseph talking with his dad, and his dad saying, “Joseph, tell me about your work. I’d like to go see it some time.”

“No, Dad, you don’t want to get around the court of Egypt. That’s really not the place for you.”

Joseph could have had an attitude of cover-up; of embarrassment; of keeping his father away. Just think of how humble his origin was, but now, he is prime minister of Egypt. However, do you know what Joseph does? He arranges for a personal introduction. Look at verse 7.

Then Joseph brought his father Jacob and presented him to Pharaoh; and Jacob blessed Pharaoh.

Joseph presented his father as he would a dignitary; as he would someone of great prestige; someone of diplomatic relationship. He treats his one hundred thirty year old, stoop-shouldered father in this manner. Joseph proudly says, “Pharaoh, I want you to meet my father.”

I would imagine the courtroom buzzed with people saying, “That’s Joseph’s father? Why certainly he was groomed for years for this position! He must have come from wealth. This shepherd is his father?!”

We know that shepherds were loathsome to the Egyptians. Yet Joseph, probably sticking his chest out, says to all that court, “This is my dad.”

How often a young man or woman will rise to prominence and, in the process, forget their origin.

I think of Marian Anderson, a famous black contralto, who had won a number of awards and had been, among other things, a United States delegate to the United Nations. She had given private concerts for President’s families, as well as for the King and Queen of England. She had been presented with the Presidential Medal of Freedom. She had written an autobiography that was an instant best seller. On one occasion the press cornered her and said, “Marian, what is the greatest moment of your life?”

She said, without even blinking, “The greatest moment was when I went back to the tenement house to my mamma and told her she wouldn’t have to take in washing anymore.”

Of all the times in Joseph’s life to be embarrassed; to be ashamed of where he had come from, this was it.

Instead, he introduces his father with great respect and pride to the Pharaoh.

Jacob’s appearance before Pharaoh

I love the words that Jacob said to Pharaoh. Look at verses 9 and 10, as he said,

. . . “The years of my sojourning are one hundred and thirty; few and unpleasant have been the years of my life, nor have they attained the years that my fathers lived during the days of their sojourning.” And Jacob blessed Pharaoh, and went out from his presence.

A declaration of life’s brevity

This is really a testimony that we miss in our translations; in our cultural distances. What Jacob was really doing, as he stood before the Pharaoh, was mustering up his faith in God, and twice he references sojourning or a pilgrimage. To the man who, to that culture, was the embodiment of the sun god Ray, who would live forever, Jacob, in effect, was saying, “We will die.”

Jacob said, “I have lived one hundred thirty years in my pilgrimage,” and, in effect, was saying, “You are on a pilgrimage too, oh great Pharaoh, and you will die.”

A testimonial of God’s sovereignty

It was a tremendous declaration of life’s brevity to a man who was worshipped as god. However, it was also a testimonial of God’s sovereignty. He briefly, in just a few words, refers to his fathers and their pilgrimage, and then says, “And I, in line now, am a pilgrim with them.”

Jacob could have stumbled all over his feet trying to say something that would impress the Pharaoh. He could have immediately started bragging on his son and all he had done to make Joseph what he ended up being. Yet, for just a few brief moments, he stands before Pharaoh and acknowledges the sovereignty of God. He says, in effect, “God has led me in this pilgrimage. And I am following in the line of those who follow God.”

Note that twice, Jacob does something to Pharaoh. What does he do? He blesses him! We cannot

understand that, but he is in the court of a pagan, idolatrous king, and he blesses him.

In America, we think “Well, what did he do? Say, ‘Good morning,’ and then, ‘Have a good afternoon.’?”

No. This was a bestowing of an acknowledgment of the God who blesses. We do not know what he said. All we know is that Jacob held out his trembling, old hand and blessed Pharaoh. Then, he left.

Application

I cannot help but think, as I view this reunion, of what it signifies to us. Joseph is a type of Jesus Christ, with many illustrations of things that are foreshadowed that would be fulfilled in the life of Christ.

One thing that strikes me is included in the message Joseph gave to his brothers. That is the message I want to leave with you. Joseph basically told his brothers to do three things. He said, “I want you to go back – go back to your family, go back to your friends, go back to the relatives, go back to the tribe – and tell them that:

- I am alive;

- I am exalted; I am the lord of all of Egypt;
- there is an open invitation for them to come and live with me.”

Do you see it? Jesus Christ, the anti-type, has come and given us, His brethren, a message. He says, “Go back to where you have had roots – go back to your family, go back to your tribe, go into the neighborhood where you are – and tell them that:

- Jesus Christ is alive;
- Jesus Christ is exalted;
- there is an open invitation to come and live with Me.”

What a reunion that will be! As the song says,
What a day that will be when my Jesus I shall see

And I look upon His face, the One who saved me by His grace.

When He takes me by the hand and leads me through the Promised Land.

What a day, glorious day that will be.

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Marks of True Greatness

Genesis 46-50

Introduction

History has recorded several individuals who have adopted the name “Great”.

If you have been a follower of history or have simply studied history courses in high school or college, you have learned of Peter the Great. He adopted that name with the ambitious thought that he was great. Yet, if you study his life closely, you discover that Peter the Great had a maniacal temper and was given to fits of rage, which one day, resulted in the killing of his own son.

Another individual we know of is Alexander the Great. He adopted that name as well, and we know that he indeed, conquered empires and ruled the known world of his time. Yet Alexander the Great, who conquered worlds, could not conquer his own flesh. He was given to drunken brawls, which, in one instance, resulted in the killing of his favorite general and friend, Clitus.

Herod also called himself “Great”. You know him from New Testament times. He was the man who built the temple and organized the nation. Yet Herod was given to fits of jealousy that would take the lives of his wife and his children, lest they dare take his throne.

What the world may consider great is something other than what the Bible considers great. What man marks as greatness may be completely different than what God marks as greatness.

Joseph’s Greatness is Seen in His .

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As we bid farewell today to Joseph, a man who has been a delight for us to study in our last few discussions, I want to look back at some of the passages we have already looked at, and then, look to the end of this book. Let us take a look at the greatness that is true in the life and character of Joseph. From that, I will give seven marks of true greatness. I suggest that you write these down to study further in the future. Ask God, as you look into the mirror of Joseph’s life, to make these marks of your own character as well.

Commitment to using authority wisely

1. Joseph’s greatness is seen, first of all, in his commitment to using authority wisely.

Look at chapter 46, verse 31 of Genesis.

Joseph said to his brothers and to his father’s household, “I will go up and tell Pharaoh, and will say to him, ‘My brothers and my father’s household, who were in the land of Canaan, have come to me;’”

We have previously discussed the story of the way Joseph and his family were reunited. Continue in verses 32 through 34, as Joseph says to his brothers,

“and the men are shepherds, for they have been keepers of livestock; and they have brought their flocks and their herds and all that they have.’ When Pharaoh calls you and says, ‘What is your occupation?’ you shall say, ‘Your servants have been keepers of livestock from our youth even until now, both we and our fathers,’ that you may live

in the land of Goshen; for every shepherd is loathsome to the Egyptians.”

You should underline “that you may live in the land of Goshen,” as that is the purpose of this interview.

It is interesting that Joseph, in greatness, never abuses his authority – not now, not before, and not after. He will rule as premier in this land for nearly a hundred years.

In these verses, we find Joseph introducing his brothers and his father to Pharaoh. They have come into the land, and Joseph, obviously, wants to take good care of his family. They, being shepherds, must settle in the only place that can capacitate sheep, and that is the valley land; the delta region, known as Goshen.

Now Joseph, being the greatest authority other than Pharaoh in the land, has every right; has every potential of telling his brothers, “Hey, settle in Goshen and don’t worry about a thing – I’ll handle the rest. I’m the premier; I’m the prime minister, what I say, goes. We won’t worry about Pharaoh, he’s my trusted friend. Who cares what the people might say? They know you are being given the most fertile region in Egypt and that there is a famine in the land, but don’t worry about them, you just go live in Goshen.”

Joseph had every opportunity to abuse his authority, yet he says to his brothers, “Go to Pharaoh. Let’s let it be Pharaoh’s decision.”

Later, in chapter 47, we discover that Pharaoh, in fact, says, “Go live in the land of Goshen.”

We can kind of chuckle because Pharaoh probably takes credit for the thought. Joseph had given him the thought, yet allowed Pharaoh to make the decision.

One of the most discouraging things in the work force is working for an employer – a boss, a foreman, a straw boss, the president of a company, an unsympathetic vice president – who constantly and continually abuses authority. And tragically, the individual, who may call themselves a Christian, finds himself in authority and we cannot help but stand back and think, “Man, did he ever change once he was given that position. I knew him before and he never talked like that; he never did things like that. But now, you can’t come within an arms reach of him.”

It has been said that the greatest test of a man or woman’s character is authority. Give an individual

some authority and see how they respond. You will note whether they have true greatness or not.

Willingness to live humbly

2. The second thing that strikes me and impresses me about Joseph is that he has a willingness to live humbly.

Look at verse 1 of chapter 47.

Then Joseph went in and told Pharaoh, and said, “My father and my brothers and their flocks and their herds and all that they have, have come out of the land of Canaan; and behold, they are in the land of Goshen.”

In other words, “They are awaiting your final approval.”

Continue to verse 2.

He took five . . . brothers and presented them to Pharaoh.

Now remember, they are loathsome to Pharaoh; to the Egyptians. Look at verse 3.

Then Pharaoh said to his brothers, “What is your occupation?” So they said to Pharaoh, “Your servants are shepherds, both we and our fathers.”

I cannot help but wonder what Joseph is doing about this time. As he is standing next to his brothers, he is perhaps, thinking, “Don’t mention that. Say something like, ‘We deal in large tracts of real estate.’ Don’t mention that you’re shepherds because they are loathsome.”

Archaeologists have discovered Egyptian art dating back to the time of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob. The art, depicts shepherds, on occasion, and they are always pictured as emaciated, evil, wicked kinds of people. For some reason, and we do not know all of the reasons, shepherds were considered loathsome; they were hated; they were despised. Shepherds were the lowest cast of society.

Some of that attitude toward shepherds carried through, even into New Testament times with the Jew. It is interesting that God would give the message that His Son was born to shepherds.

In these verses, however, we see an interesting characteristic and mark of Joseph’s character. He is willing to live with the knowledge that he is from the line of shepherds being rampantly spread in that kingdom. His father is a shepherd. His brothers are

shepherds. I can imagine him hearing or thinking that the people will say, “Will we follow a shepherd? Will we obey this premier, who we now know is a mere shepherd; a keeper of sheep?”

I think Joseph, in fact, risks his credibility with the people by being honest; by being humble.

Someone wrote well, “One who knows God well will be humble. One who knows himself well will never be proud.”

Ability to administrate honestly

3. A third mark that strikes me of Joseph’s character is that he had the ability to administrate honestly.

Look at verses 13 through 16 of chapter 47 and note Joseph’s honesty in administration.

Now there was no food in all the land, because the famine was very severe, so that the land of Egypt and the land of Canaan languished because of the famine. Joseph gathered all the money that was found in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan for the grain which they bought, and Joseph brought the money into Pharaoh’s house. When the money was all spent in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan, all the Egyptians came to Joseph and said, “Give us food, for why should we die in your presence? For our money is gone.” Then Joseph said, “Give up your livestock, and I will give you food for your livestock, since your money is gone.”

In other words, this welfare system was not a handout. If they had something in exchange for the food, they were going to give it. Finally, their money was gone and their livestock was gone as well.

The striking thing about that passage, that we often overlook, is the simple fact that Joseph was virtually handling the gross national product. He was handling all of the money in his hands. He had the key to the pantry; he was the one who had the meal ticket for the entire nation and they brought all of their money to him. I would imagine that literally, millions of dollars in gold and silver trickled through Joseph’s hands. What did he do with it all? He did what he was supposed to do – he brought it into his superior’s house.

If there was ever a time in Joseph’s life when he could have padded his account; when he could have

thought of retiring early, this was it. This was a gold mine! He could have thought, “I am unaccountable. I am having people come to me and say, ‘Joseph, we’ll do anything for you. We’ll give you all of our money just for food. Here, take our livestock.’”

Joseph, however, allows himself to be a funnel. That is a mark of character. He was administrating honestly.

George Mueller, who has been mentioned often from this pulpit, was a man who took care, in his lifetime, of ten thousand orphans. It has been said that more than eight million dollars came to George Mueller as a result of prayer. Yet, when he died and his accounts were tallied, he owned less than a thousand dollars in his own name.

Another Old Testament character that strikes me is Nehemiah, who was building the walls of Jerusalem. The world cannot figure out why anyone would build a wall and restore a city without some kind of financial manipulation in mind. Why would you build a kingdom if you were not going to become wealthy from that kingdom?

Nehemiah is there, building the wall, and finally, the enemies say to him, “Oh, we know why you’re building that wall – because you want to be governor; you want to receive the salary of a governor.”

Nehemiah responded, in effect, “I have not and I will not receive all of the benefits of being a governor.”

They could not figure it out. Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem were scratching their heads, outside the wall, and thinking, “Now what makes Nehemiah tick?”

The Egyptians must have been thinking, “What in the world makes Joseph tick? We can’t figure this guy out.”

Ladies and gentlemen, when you are unaccountable; when you have every opportunity; when you are alone with yourself, are you honest?

Desire to serve others unselfishly

4. The fourth thing that strikes me is Joseph’s desire to serve others unselfishly.

Look at chapter 47, verse 23a.

Then Joseph said to the people, “Behold, I have today bought you and your land for Pharaoh; . . .”

The people have become, in effect, tenement farmers. This was something like a feudal system of the middle ages. Note what Joseph does in the last part of verse 23.

“. . . now, here is seed for you, and you may sow the land.”

It is interesting that when this country comes to the end of their famine, the people still have their dignity and their self-respect because Joseph was serving the people with them in mind. He says, in verse 24,

At the harvest you shall give a fifth to Pharaoh, and four-fifths shall be your own for seed of the field and for your food and for those of your households and as food for your little ones.

This is a twenty percent tax. It is interesting that many liberal commentators will poke at Joseph concerning this account. In fact, many literatures, given to scriptural exposition, will begin chapter 47 at verse 27. They will skip this whole passage because they are just convinced that Joseph is now out for himself. Yet archaeology, once again, has helped us in discovering that neighboring countries excised more than fifty percent tax. It was often demanded of people to give half of their produce, half of their money to the kings. Joseph is, in a sense, saying, “I’ll take just twenty percent. That is enough to handle the administrative affairs; to keep this system going. We’ll take care of your cattle; we’ll provide the seed, you give us one-fifth.”

In light of what was taking place, Joseph was amazingly compassionate and unselfish. He served the people with them in mind. In fact, verse 25, says, in case there is any doubt,

So they said, “You have saved our lives! . . .”

They did not say, “You have been uncompassionate.”

They did not say, “You have been desirous of taking all that we have.”

No. The people say to Joseph,

“You have saved our lives! Let us find favor in the sight of my lord, and we will be Pharaoh’s slaves.”

In other words, “We will serve you faithfully.”

One of the greatest marks seen in the character of Jesus Christ was shown that day in John, chapter 13, when He was in the upper room and the big thought

on the disciples’ minds was the question, “Lord, who is going to be the greatest in the kingdom?”

What they were really wondering was, “What does God consider great? What is the mark of character that He really takes note of? Who will be among us, then, the greatest?”

In that room as they had already reclined to eat, the slaves were not there and no one wanted to wash the feet of the other, and they did not even wash their own feet, which strikes me. As you may know, Jesus Christ takes a towel and takes His gown and girds it up around Him. He then goes to Peter, takes his feet and puts them in the basin, and says, “Peter, I want to wash your feet.”

Peter, in the text, literally draws his feet up and says, “No, You can’t wash my feet.”

The Lord gives him a theological lesson in being “in Christ”.

Finally, Peter acknowledges His sovereignty and allows Him to wash his feet. Then, Jesus Christ goes around the room and washes twenty-four dirty feet.

I would imagine, in that room, you could have heard a pin drop. I would imagine you could only hear the splashing of water in that basin – and the dropping of tears as they ran off the ends of the noses and cheeks of the disciples as they sat there and watched true greatness.

The world measures greatness by how many people serve you. God measures greatness by how many people you serve.

Transparency to grieve openly

5. Another mark that strikes me is that Joseph had the transparency to grieve openly.

Look at chapter 49, verses 29 through 33. Jacob is now on his deathbed.

Then he [Jacob] charged them and said to them, “I am about to be gathered to my people; bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite, in the cave that is in the field of Machpelah, which is before Mamre, in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought along with the field from Ephron the Hittite for a burial site. There they buried Abraham and his wife Sarah, there they buried Isaac and his wife Rebekah, and there I buried Leah – the field and the cave that is in it, purchased

from the sons of Heth.” When Jacob finished charging his sons, he drew his feet into the bed and breathed his last, and was gathered to his people.

What will Joseph do now? Great man that he is – a man who has trusted God in His sovereignty in unwavering faith – how will he respond? Will he smile and say, “Wonderful, he’s with his fathers now. Glory, I’m going to see him one day in heaven.”?

No. He has the transparency to grieve. Look at chapter 50, verse 1 and 2a.

Then Joseph fell on his father’s face, and wept over him and kissed him. Joseph commanded his servants the physicians to embalm his father. . . .

Joseph wanted to give his father the greatest burial Egypt had ever seen. Continue to verse 3.

Now forty days were required for it, for such is the period required for embalming. And the Egyptians wept for him seventy days.

Forty days were required for the embalming period, but note that the Egyptians mourned and grieved for Jacob an additional thirty days.

Continue to verses 7 through 8a.

So Joseph went up to bury his father, and with him went up all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his household and all the elders of the land of Egypt, and all the household of Joseph and his brothers and his father’s household . . .

Skip to verses 10 through 11.

When they came to the threshing floor of Atad, which is beyond the Jordan, they lamented there with a very great and sorrowful lamentation; and he observed seven days mourning for his father. Now when the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, saw the mourning at the threshing floor of Atad, they said, “This is a grievous mourning for the Egyptians.” Therefore it was named Abel-mizraim [weeping], which is beyond the Jordan.

The world would say to something like this spectacle, “That is weakness.”

Christianity would say, “That’s unspiritual.”

I tend to believe there are people within the body of Jesus Christ who need a good cry. They are bottling things up – difficulties, resentments, deaths –

and have been told by the spiritual side, “Oh, chin up.”

I remember being at my father-in-law’s funeral and my mother-in-law was sitting in a chair holding a tissue. A relative come in, who supposedly knew the Lord, and said, “Now look, there’s no need to cry. Get a hold of yourself.”

I wanted to punch the guy.

We have missed what Joseph had. He was secure enough in his faith in God that he was able to grieve and weep.

You may remember that Jesus Christ wept at the tomb of Lazarus. He also looked over the city of Jerusalem and said, weeping,

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem . . . (Luke 13:34a)

It is strength to reveal those emotions, not weakness.

Capacity to forgive graciously

6. Sixth, Joseph also had the capacity to forgive graciously.

One of the most beautiful texts in the book of Genesis is found after Jacob dies. Joseph’s brothers are afraid that now, Joseph will have a vindictive attitude and put them to death. They come to Joseph, in verse 17a, saying,

“Please forgive, I beg you, the transgression of your brothers and their sin, for they did you wrong.” . . .

Continue to verse 18.

Then his brothers also came and fell down before him and said, “Behold, we are your servants.”

Now note Joseph’s response, in verses 19 through 21a.

But Joseph said to them, “Do not be afraid, for am I in God’s place? As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive. So therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones.” . . .

Remember, ladies and gentlemen, the capacity to forgive like this is dependent upon our ability to see God at work in the lives of other people. When someone impacts us in a certain way; when someone criticizes us; when someone says something to tear us

down; when someone attacks us; when someone is less than gracious, they are tools in God's hands to develop us.

Joseph viewed his brothers as tools in the hands of God to bring about a great result.

Confidence to die as a visionary

7. Finally, Joseph is great and it is seen in his confidence to die as a visionary.

I love this. Look at verses 22 and 23.

Now Joseph stayed in Egypt, he and his father's household, and Joseph lived one hundred and ten years. Joseph saw the third generation of Ephraim's sons; also the sons of Machir, the son of Manasseh were born on Joseph's knees.

In other words, Joseph saw his great grandsons. He was there. Continue to verse 24.

Joseph said to his brothers, "I am about to die, but God will surely take care of you and bring you up from this land to the land which He promised on oath to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob."

I would stop at this point and say, "Come on, Joseph. God gave a covenant promise to Abraham that he would be a great nation and Abraham had one son. He repeated that covenant promise to Isaac, 'I will make you a great nation,' and he had two sons. Then to Jacob, He repeated it again, and he had twelve sons. In three generations, there was a tribe of seventy, and you are holding to this?"

Joseph died a visionary. I know two things about his vision.

- First, Joseph had a vision of God's faithfulness.

He made his brothers swear, in verse 25a.

Then Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, "God will surely take care of you . . ."

- He also was confident of Israel's future.

Note the last part of verse 25. Joseph says,

". . . and you shall carry my bones up from here."

I love that! He said, "Look, when God finally fulfills the promise of the land, don't leave me in

Egypt, bring my body. I want to be there. God will fulfill His promise."

How could Joseph die with such vision? Because Joseph lived with such vision.

Application

Would we like to die like Joseph? The actual question is, do we live like Joseph?

As one person said, "Or are we chained to the status quo – afraid to try, to risk, to change, to go, to do something that we feel God may want us to do?"

Where is our vision? Living a life with vision will determine the way we die.

I have a book in my study that I read periodically. It reminds me of the brevity of my own life. Let me read the last words that several men spoke on their deathbed.

The first man was an unbeliever named Berlioz. He was a dramatist and a composer who spoke and wrote like Shakespeare. Before he died, Berlioz wrote,

Life is but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage and then is heard no more. It is a tale told by an idiot full of sound and fury. Life signifies nothing.

A man who lived fifty years prior to Berlioz, was Isaac Watts. He wrote the hymns, *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross* and *Oh God, Our Help in Ages Past*. Let me read Watts' dying testimony,

It is a great mercy that I have no manner of fear or dread of death. I can lay my head back and die without terror this afternoon.

He then, did just that.

Martin Luther was a monk who shook the world and conceived Protestantism. You and I benefit from that today. As Luther was lying on his deathbed with his closest friends about him, he repeated three times,

Into Thy hands I commend my spirit; Thou hast redeemed me, O God of truth. Into Thy hands I commend my spirit; Thou hast redeemed me, O God of truth.

Then as he breathed his last, he repeated John, chapter 3, verse 16, and his favorite verse, Psalm, chapter 68, verse 20,

Our God is the God of whom cometh salvation; God is the Lord by whom we escape death.

I want to die like that. Do you know what it takes? It takes:

- living like that – allowing the Holy Spirit to stamp upon our character the marks of true greatness;
- using authority, for those who have it, wisely as a parent or as an employer;
- administering honestly;
- serving others;
- grieving openly;
- forgiving graciously.

Greatness, men and women, is not developing great empires, but developing great and godly character. Greatness is not in leading men, but in leading our lives in such a way that God is pleased. Greatness is not, as measured by our world's standards, in receiving the applause of men; but is in receiving the approval of God.

The last verse of chapter 50 says,

So Joseph died at the age of one hundred and ten years; and he was embalmed and placed [temporarily] in a coffin in Egypt.

End of chapter; end of a book that I have come to love, but not the end of the story – because the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and Joseph is alive. He is just as available to stamp upon your character and mine, the marks of true greatness.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 5/7/1989 by Stephen Davey.

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