GLIMPSES OF GOD

VOLUME II

AN INDUCTIVE STUDY OF GENESIS 26 - 50

O. William Cooper

Logos Ministries Inc.
4742 Westbury Drive
Fort Collins, Colorado 80526

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GLIMPSES OF GOD

VOLUME II

An Inductive Study of Genesis 26 - 50

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4742 Westbury Drive

Fort Collins, Colorado 80526

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS I
IN MEMORIUM III
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS V
THE INTRODUCTION 1
QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 1 3
LESSON 1: OVERVIEW OF THE TEXT 5
QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 2 9
LESSON 2: GENESIS 26:1 - 35 13
QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 3 27
LESSON 3: GENESIS 27:1 - 45 31
QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 4 49
LESSON 4: GENESIS 27:46 - 28:22 53
QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 5 65
LESSON 5: GENESIS 29:1 - 35 69
QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 6 79
LESSON 6: GENESIS 30:1 - 43 85
QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 7 101
LESSON 7: GENESIS 31:1 - 32:2 107
QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 8 133
LESSON 8: GENESIS 32:3 - 32 137
QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 9 151
LESSON 9: GENESIS 33:1 - 20 155
QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 10 167
LESSON 10: GENESIS 34:1 - 31 171
QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 11 187
LESSON 11: GENESIS 35:1 - 29 190
QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 12 205
LESSON 12: GENESIS 36:1 - 43 209
QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 13 225
LESSON 13: GENESIS 37:1 - 36 229
QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 14 249
LESSON 14: GENESIS 38:1 - 30 253
QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 15 271
LESSON 15: GENESIS 39:1 - 23 274
QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 16 287
LESSON 16: GENESIS 40:1 - 23 291

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 17 303
LESSON 17: GENESIS 41:1 - 57 309
QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 18 337
LESSON 18: GENESIS 42:1 - 38 343
QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 19 363
LESSON 19: GENESIS 43:1 - 34 367
QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 20 383
LESSON 20: GENESIS 44:1 - 34 389
QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 21 407
LESSON 21: GENESIS 45:1 - 28 410
QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 22 429
LESSON 22: GENESIS 46:1 - 34 433
QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 23 445
LESSON 23: GENESIS 47:1 - 31 451
QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 24 467
LESSON 24: GENESIS 48:1 - 22 471
QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 25 485
LESSON 25: GENESIS 49:1 - 33 491
QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 26 509
LESSON 26: GENESIS 50:1 - 26 513
A REVIEW OF CHAPTERS 26 - 50 529
THE CONCLUSION OF THE BOOK OF GENESIS 533
OTHER BOOKS BY DR. COOPER 535

IN MEMORIUM

"Mr. Garrison," as I knew him in the role of professor and later as a colleague, made a great impact on my life both in education and spiritual understanding. Though his position on issues was humbly stated, it was always carefully thought out. He did not need to convince others to share his opinions. I have heard him suggest supporting information for positions he did not share.

He had a professor's eye. He could spot errors in a book that most of us overlooked. We always left his class with some thought that demanded more careful study. He knew things that we, as students, did not know. He was eager to share the things he had discovered.

There was an obvious educational philosophy in his classroom. It was his responsibility to know and to share. It was our responsibility to be interested and learn. His quiet excitement and desire to learn were contagious. He played a leading role in creating an insatiable desire in me to know Scripture.

It was very clear that though he was well read, much of his teaching material came from his own discovery. He was humble about his Biblical knowledge. His familiarity with the entire Bible made it possible for him to illustrate our current Biblical study from his knowledge of the rest of Scripture. We learned a lot about teaching Bible by the courses in Bible we studied with him.

We enjoyed doing term papers for his classes. We knew that the paper would be returned with many valuable comments and suggestions for further study. It was always clear that intellectual interests were only a part of his deep desire. We knew that many of the discoveries we heard in class were insights from his time on his knees before God.

Though it has been 42 years since I sat in his class, I still treasure my notes from the classes and his comments on my term papers.

Understand that not everyone liked his teaching style. It was not flashy. He did not ride the current theological and Biblical bandwagons. It was just careful research precisely presented. To a few, this seemed less interesting.

My first class with "Mr. Garrison," was a course in the History of Missions. It was immediately clear that he was well versed in his subject. It was also clear that though he was teaching in Nyack, New York, his heart was still in India. His heart yearned for the beleaguered people of that land.

At that time, much of India was anything but beautiful. A returning missionary told me, "you could tell any station where Kiel Garrison lived by the abundance of flowers which surrounded his humble dwelling."

He was an example in other ways. In India, women were poorly treated. His treatment of his own wife was a quiet example to the men of his adopted land. A treasured

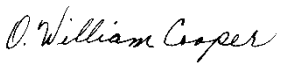
memory from my days at Nyack dealt with this. Each Friday evening, at the missionary meeting, he would walk down the aisle of the chapel, find a place for his wife and himself. He would glance toward the back of the chapel and she would join him. That was special to watch. They had been married many years, but still they hovered over each other like newlyweds. The way they looked at each other said it all.

His greatest example, however, was in the way he lived his life. I watched him with the careful eye of a learner. In reflection, a chorus he loved comes to mind:

Let the beauty of Jesus be seen in me -
All his wonderful passion and purity!
O thou Spirit divine, all my nature refine,
Till the beauty of Jesus be seen in me.

In the New Testament such a man was called "saint." To **Rev. Kiel D. Garrison** it is my humble privilege to dedicate this study.

O. William Cooper



Loveland Colorado
November 24, 1994

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The publication of a book is a large and complex task. It always involves the assistance of a number of people. These tasks take great care and enormous amounts of time. I am deeply indebted to Mrs. Betty Christensen, Rev. Mary Neil and Mrs. Ruth Cooper for their painstaking work in proofreading the document. Dr. Peter Stone again exercised his computer skills in putting the final copy in printable form.

The development of a teacher is an intricate undertaking. Everything you read; every class you take has the potential of making a positive impression upon your mind. One of the certitudes of teaching is that the student may remember what was taught, but remain incapable recalling who taught it. Much of the material in this volume is the result of my own research. Much of the rest is the product of the research and teaching of others. We can never totally acknowledge our indebtedness to others for what we know. It is information we do not have and can not discover.

I do know that what I have learned and discovered has been in large part due to the untiring efforts of the unsung heroes of the classroom and authors whose discoveries have enriched my life and mind. Though I am unable to identify them by name, I offer them my humble thanks and acknowledge my deep debt.

O. William Cooper

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Loveland, Colorado
November 24, 1994

THE INTRODUCTION

Volume II is an intense study of Genesis chapters 26 - 50. We designed this study so that you can approach it from one of two ways. You can read the white pages of this book and hopefully the portion of Scripture will take on new meaning and life for you as you study with us. We will attempt to help you see the message through the eyes of the author.

The second approach is that you can answer the questions, found on the colored pages of the text, for yourself **before** you read the text of this book. This will enable you to compare your observations with ours.

The book of Genesis does not tell us who wrote the message. Early Jewish writers have solidly stood for the Mosaic authorship of Genesis, as well as the rest of the Pentateuch - the first five books of the Bible. It appears that Jesus and other New Testament personalities believed that Moses wrote Genesis as well as the other four books of the Pentateuch. More recent writers have favored looking elsewhere for the authorship of Genesis. I cannot prove my position, but I believe Moses wrote the book of Genesis.

As we begin this study of the second half of the book of Genesis, we need to note that we will be using **Inductive Bible Study.** It is not pouring one's own interpretation into the text, but letting the text speak for itself. Very often, the way a message is written carries as much meaning as the message itself.

In this study, we will focus our attention on three parts of Inductive Bible Study:

1. Observation - Discovering what the book/passage **says.**

2. Interpretation - Discovering what the book/passage **means.**

3. Application - **Applying** what the book says to our lives.

Within this study, we will attempt to focus our attention on each of these parts.

As you may remember, from volume one, the author focused on the lives of outstanding men of Israel. This was a means by which to convey several very intense messages about God.

Genesis chapters six through ten focus on the life of Noah. In this story the author portrays the dual picture of both the indescribable mercy and irresistible justice of God. God displayed His mercy in His protection of Noah in the ark.

The other side of this picture is the justice of God. He sent the flood because of the exceeding sinfulness of the people. Despite what people might think about God, justice and judgment had to come because of their affront to the justice and holiness of God. It is in the telling of Noah's story that one discovers a deeper understanding of God.

In Genesis 12-25, the author tells the story of Abram/Abraham. In the telling of the experiences of Abraham's life, the author adds paint-stroke by paint-stroke until he records the death of the patriarch. By so doing, he draws back the curtain on the character of God. It was the God who told Abraham "I will take you to a land..." and He did it. God told Abraham he would give him a son in his very old age and He did it. In all of this we see the faithfulness of God more clearly than any factual statement could do.

This design is just as clearly portrayed in chapters 26 through 50. In this portion of the book, the author focuses our attention on the lives of two people: Jacob and Joseph. In

chapters 27 through 35, the author paints a picture of the life of Jacob or Israel as he was later called. He was cunning and willful. Nevertheless, God worked in his life and entered into covenant with him. The author gives us a beautiful glimpse of the character of God as he describes the events of Jacob's life.

Chapters 37 through 50 focus on the story of Joseph. There is a contrast between the goodness of Joseph and the evil ways of his brothers. From the beginning of the story, it appears that evil prospers and righteousness suffers. This is quite true to life. It certainly seems that way in day to day living. By the end of the story, however, it is clear that righteousness ultimately triumphs and unrighteousness is punished. In every experience of the story there is additional information about what God is like. We will talk more about this when we have completed the study.

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 1

OVERVIEW OF THE TEXT

1. Read Genesis 26 - 50 in approximately one hour. You are not reading for depth information, but to find the main themes in each chapter. On the chart below write a title of seven words or less for each chapter.

26	
27	
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LESSON 1: OVERVIEW OF THE TEXT

In the last half of the book of Genesis there are 25 chapters. The chart which follows is a summary of each chapter in that part of the text.

26	Isaac Deceives Abimelech
27	Jacob Deceives Isaac, Flees Esau
28	Jacob's Vision at Bethel
29	Laban Tricks Jacob into Marrying Leah
30	Struggles: Leah vs. Rachel; Laban vs. Jacob
31	Jacob Flees Laban
32	Jacob Wrestles With Angel at Peniel
33	Jacob Meets Esau
34	The Seduction of Dinah
35	The Death of Isaac
36	The Lineage of Esau
37	Joseph Sold Into Slavery
38	Tamar Exposes Judah
39	Joseph and Potiphar's Wife
40	Joseph Interprets Dreams of Butler and Baker
41	Joseph Interprets Pharoah's Dream
42	Brother's First Trip to Egypt for Grain
43	Dinner for Twelve Brothers
44	Joseph Plants Cup in Benjamin's Bag
45	Joseph Reveals Himself; Invites Family to Goshen
46	Joseph Welcomes His Family Into Goshen
47	Joseph Keeps Egypt Alive; Grain for Animals and Land
48	Israel Blesses Joseph's Sons
49	Israel Blesses His Sons and Died
50	Joseph dies - Covenant - Take Me To Canaan

The book of Genesis follows a general chronology, but the chronological presentation is not the purpose of the book.

A great symphony has a theme which occurs and reoccurs time and again throughout the work. In this same symphony there are also major and minor themes which blend and weave their way through the work. This also happens in the book of Genesis. There are two major themes which make up most of these 26 chapters. This is illustrated on the chart which follows.

	26	Isaac Deceives Abimelech
J	27	Jacob Deceives Isaac, Flees Esau
A	28	Jacob's Vision at Bethel
C	29	Laban Tricks Jacob into Marrying Leah
C	30	Struggles: Leah vs. Rachel; Laban vs. Jacob
O	31	Jacob Flees Laban
B	32	Jacob Wrestles with Angel at Peniel
	33	Jacob Meets Esau
	34	The Seduction of Dinah
	35	The Death of Isaac
	36	The Lineage of Esau
	37	Joseph Sold into Slavery
J	38	Tamar Exposes Judah
	39	Joseph and Potiphar's Wife
O	40	Joseph Interprets Dreams - Butler, Baker
	41	Joseph Interprets Pharoah's Dream
S	42	Brothers First Trip to Egypt for Grain
	43	Dinner for Twelve Brothers
E	44	Joseph Plants Cup in Benjamin's Bag
	45	Joseph Revealed Himself; Invites Family to Goshen
P	46	Joseph Welcomes His Family into Goshen
	47	Joseph Keeps Egypt Alive; Exchange Grain for Animals and Land
H	48	Israel Blesses Joseph's Sons
	49	Israel Blesses His Sons and Died
	50	Joseph Dies - Covenant - Take Me to Canaan

From the table above, it is clear that the author focuses his attention on Jacob and Joseph. As you study the text, you begin to wonder why the author chose these two men. The oldest son in the family was the most important person in the family next to the father. Both Jacob and Joseph were the youngest son in the family at the time of their childhood. As we study the text, we will be looking for reasons why the lives of these two men are lifted up in contrast to the thinking and actions of their culture.

Notice also that there are three different chapters sandwiched in between the two main themes in this part of the book. These three chapters appear to be disconnected from each other and from the main themes. It is almost as if they are an intrusion in the text; a parenthesis unrelated to the two dominant themes in this part of the book.

As you study, you will probably ask yourself some serious questions like these:

1. What does the seduction of Dinah have to do with the story of Jacob's life?
2. What does the seduction of Dinah, in chapter 34, have to do with the death of Isaac in chapter 35?
3. The author interrupted the story of Isaac with seven chapters which described the life of Jacob and the abuse of his grand-daughter, Dinah. Why would he do this?

4. Why was Esau, the eldest son and heir, dealt with in casual terms and summarily dismissed, (The text basically just mentions the names of his children and their children), while, on the other hand, the youngest son, Jacob, was described in at least seven complete chapters and in careful detail?

We do not want to venture a conclusion at this point in our investigation. We must, however, be aware of these questions and keep them in mind as we study.

Again, as we study we must be alert to see what the author is trying to tell us about God. It appears that this is the main purpose behind the writing. We must, therefore, do our very best to discover exactly what it is that God would have us discover about His greatness and our need.

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QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 2

ISAAC DECEIVES ABIMELECH

Genesis 26:1 - 35

1. There are five paragraphs in our best documents of Genesis chapter 26. Read each paragraph carefully looking for summary information for each paragraph. On the chart below, write a title of seven words or less for each paragraph in the chapter.

26:1-11	
26:12-17	
26:18-22	
26:23-33	
26:34, 35	

2. In chapter 26:1-11, the author describes the famine and what this has meant in the life of Isaac.
   a. God instructed Isaac not to go down to Egypt. Why was this so important?
   b. Read 26:3 again. What was God doing?
   c. What was God talking about when he said "all these lands"?
   d. Compare God's promise to Isaac with God's promise to Abraham in 22:15-19. What did you learn?
   e. Compare Isaac's deception of Abimelech, Genesis 26:7-11, with Abraham's deception of Abimelech, in Genesis 20:9-17. What did you learn?
   f. Both Isaac and Abimelech violated a covenant made between Abraham and Abimelech. What is the significance of this?

3. In 26:12-17, Abimelech challenged Isaac.
   a. There are some surprises in verse 12.
      (1). What were the surprises?
      (2). What do they mean?
   b. In verses 12-14 there is an emphasis on the wealth of Isaac. What does this emphasis accomplish?
   c. In Genesis 26:15, the author describes the struggle over wells and the destruction of these wells.
      (1). Why was this such an issue ?
      (2). What does this experience tell you about Isaac?
   d. In 26:16, 17, there is an encounter between Isaac and Abimelech.
      (1). What precipitated this encounter?
      (2). Read this paragraph again. Put yourself in Isaac's position. What would you feel?

(3). What did you learn?

4. In 26:18-22, Isaac's men were digging wells and the herdsmen of Gerar were filling them up.
   a. The author mentions that these wells were dug by Abraham. What is the significance of that fact?
   b. What does it mean that Isaac was digging wells?
   c. In 26:20, Isaac's men dug the well, but the Gerar herdsmen said, "the water is ours." Why would they say that?
   d. In 26:21, Isaac's men dug a well and the Gerar herdsmen claimed it. Isaac's men dug another well, but no one challenged them. Why the difference?
   e. Study the names that Isaac gave each of these wells. What did you discover?
   f. Notice the credit that Isaac gives concerning their uncontested well. What was he saying?

5. In Genesis 26:23-33, the tide has changed. Abimelech comes seeking a covenant with Isaac..
   a. In 26:24, God made a promise to Isaac.
      (1). What promises did God make?
      (2). Why did God make these promises?
   b. In verse 25, Isaac responded to God's promises.
      (1). How does Isaac respond?
      (2). What does each response mean?
   c. In 26:26, Abimelech came to see Isaac. Abimelech brought a personal advisor and a general with him. What is the significance of this?
   d. In 26:27, Isaac responded to the visit of the three men.
      (1). What was his response?
      (2). What was the emotional tone of this event?
      (3). What was the basis of Isaac's response?
   e. In 26:28, 29, the three men affirmed that God was with Isaac. Notice their emphasis, "There ought to be a sworn agreement between us - between us and you."
      (1). Study this affirmation.
      (2). What did you learn?
   f. In 26:31, the three men requested a covenant, but Isaac prepared a feast.
      (1). Why would he do this when he was preparing to enter into a covenant?
      (2). Compare and contrast the way Abimelech and the herdsmen sent Isaac away with the way Isaac sent the three men away.
   g. In 26:32, 33, the author indicates that **on the same day** that Isaac was kind to his adversaries, his servants discovered water in the well they were digging. What is the significance of that information?

6. In Genesis 26:34, 35, the spotlight shifts to Esau.
   a. Verse 34 indicates that this happened when Esau was 40 years old. What makes this information meaningful?
   b. The author tells us, in verse 35, that Esau married two Hittite wives. What is the significance of this information?

c. What does this tell you about Esau?
d. Why would the author include this little glimpse (verses 34, 35) of Esau immediately following the longer view of Jacob's actions (verses 1-33)?

7. There are serious contrasts in this chapter.
   a. Identify the contrasts.
   b. What do these contrasts teach you?

8. Review this chapter. What have you learned about God?

LESSON 2: GENESIS 26:1 - 35

ISAAC DECEIVES ABIMELECH

There are five paragraphs in our best documents for Genesis 26. A summary of the content is as follows:

26:1-11	Famine - Isaac Went to Egypt
26:12-17	Abimelech Instructed Isaac to Leave The Land
26:18-22	Isaac Dug Disputed Wells
26:23-33	Isaac Made A Covenant with Abimelech
26:34, 35	Esau Took Hittite Wives

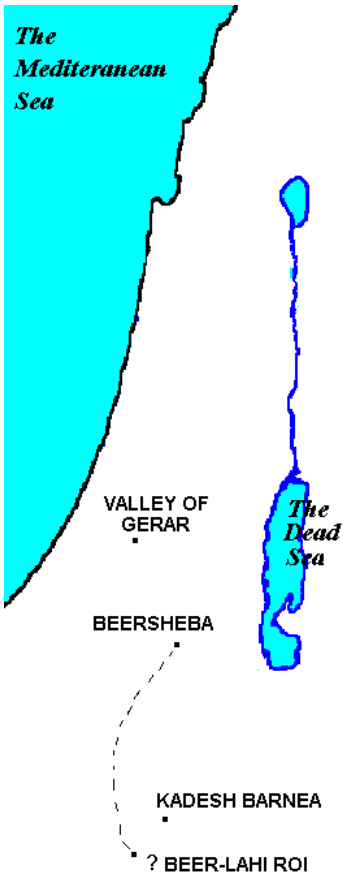
Genesis 26:1-11 - Famine - Isaac Went to Egypt

Isaac lived on the edge of the desert. Rainfall was infrequent. Any decline in the amount of rainfall would surely produce a degree of famine. Some believe that the curse of the ground, recorded in Genesis 3 and 5, was such a famine. Our text says, "besides the **earlier** famine...," but the Hebrew text is worded differently, "the **first** famine in the days of Abraham." This has led some students to believe that there had not been a famine in Canaan before the time of Abraham. This information is not sufficient to draw such a conclusion, but it is possible.

It is more reasonable to conclude that the famine, in Abraham's time, was so remarkable that it became an important historical reference point.

Whatever the true situation, Isaac went to Gerar, a city controlled by Abimelech. The name Abimelech was more a title of royalty rather than a personal name. It is like the title "Caesar" in the Roman Empire or "Pharaoh" in Egypt.

Notice that the ruler of the land of



Map 1: The Land of Gerar

Gerar, in the days of Abraham, was Abimelech (Genesis 20:1). Now in the time of Isaac, Abimelech also ruled Gerar. It is uncertain, but it is reasonable to believe that the Abimelech at the time of Abraham was the father of the Abimelech who ruled at the time of Isaac. The city of Gerar is located about ten miles north and about 18 miles west of Beersheba. Map 1 should be helpful.

Genesis 25:11 says that Isaac lived in Beer Lahai Roi. This is located about 50 miles south of Beersheba. The dotted line, on Map 1 points out a possible route for this 75-mile journey. We should keep in mind that Abimelech had been a close friend of Abraham. This would make a close tie between Abimelech and Abraham's son very natural.

Gerar, the capital of Philistia, was part of the land God promised Abraham. This was important, since Abraham went to unusual lengths to make sure that Isaac did not leave the land of promise. Isaac was now going to become an alien, but within the land of promise.

It was noted, in volume I, that historical books of the Bible did not make a strong effort to give a blow by blow account of events. I believe this passage is an illustration of this fact.

> *...And Isaac went to Abimelech king of the Philistines in Gerar. The Lord appeared to Isaac and said, "Do not go down to Egypt; live in the land where I tell you to live." Genesis 26:1b, 2*

Notice that the author told us what Isaac decided to do before telling us what God told him to do. Some students hold that, in the mind of Isaac, Gerar was just the first stop on his trip from Beer lahai roi to Egypt. shows that this would be a strange way to make such a trip. Another possible reason for this destination could be that the famine did not affect the western plains where Gerar was located. It is also possible that he went there because of the covenant that Abraham had made with Abimelech.

At the conclusion of this instruction, God reaffirms the covenant He made with Abraham. God told Abraham to go through the land. This was a way of identifying the fact that Abraham was claiming the gift God had promised. This did not need to be repeated. The land had already been claimed. God spoke to Isaac in these terms.

> *Stay in this land for a while, and I will be with you and will bless you. For to you and your descendants I will give all these lands and will confirm the oath I swore to your father Abraham. Genesis 26:3*

Staying in the land, as Abraham also understood, was a symbol of staying in covenant with God concerning the promise of the land. God was as interested in Isaac staying in Canaan as Isaac was. This is a general affirmation of the covenant.

Notice that God did not speak of a "land," but spoke of "all these lands." This suggests that God spoke of more than one nation's land that would be given to Israel.

God gave Abraham a twofold promise - lands and seed. This is the way God spoke to Isaac about his seed.

> *I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and will give them all these lands, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed. Genesis 26:4*

This was the unbelievable promise God made to the childless patriarch. God had kept this promise and now was reaffirming it to the son. It was a way of saying, this covenant will never cease.

God also showed the reason for continuing His promise to Abraham.

> *Because Abraham obeyed me and kept my requirements, my commands, my decrees and my laws. Genesis 26:5*

The obedience of Abraham was a motivating force for God to continue to honor the covenant. This was not new. God blessed Lot because of the righteousness of Abraham. It could not have been because of the righteousness of Lot. This fact tells us something important about the character of Abraham, but it also tells us something about the nature of God. God is a respecter of righteousness, not of persons. There is a generosity in the blessing of God. He could bless the righteous person and when that person dies, then the blessing would cease. God is so generous, however, that His blessing continues even after the death of those who mirror His righteousness.

Verse six contains only five words, but they tell you important information about the man.

> *So Isaac stayed in Gerar. Genesis 26:6*

The word "stayed" is "yashav" (יָשַׁב) which means "to sit." It was used to describe taking up residence in a given place. Isaac treated Gerar as home. God told him not to go to Egypt, so he did not go. This is a picture of his obedience.

It appears that there is a period of time between verses six and seven. Notice the way verse seven begins.

> *When the men of that place asked him about his wife, he said, "She is my sister," because he was afraid to say, "She is my wife." He thought, "the men of this place might kill me because of Rebekah, because she is beautiful." Genesis 26:7*

This seems far-fetched to people from a western culture. On Isaac's behalf, we should admit that it was not uncommon for people in that area to kill a man so that they could take his wife for themselves. This would protect them from facing the accusation of adultery. As pagans, it was not that they observed laws of purity, but it would be an affront to a man if someone had sexual relations with his wife. This being the case, the man who took another's wife as his own would always face the danger of revenge. If they killed the husband, there was no revenge to fear.

The other side of this is that Isaac followed the example of his father. He took the safe way out, though it placed his wife at risk. We do not understand this, but they did not perceive this to be unfair treatment of a wife.

There is a difference between Abraham's pretense and that of Isaac. When Abraham said, "she is my sister." It was a half truth because she was his half-sister. With Isaac the case was different. Rebekah was not his sister. This was an outright falsehood.

Notice that the author identifies some motives involved. Isaac told the lie because he was afraid. Fear, the lack of faith, the inability to expect God to be God, is often the door through which evil enters a life. Isaac also told the lie because of an unusual combination - His wife was beautiful and the people among whom he lived were evil. These men would not hesitate to kill a man in order to take his wife for themselves.

There is a sense in which Isaac was almost reliving his father's life.

When Isaac had been there a long time, Abimelech king of the Philistines looked down from a window and saw Isaac caressing his wife Rebekah. Genesis 26:8

Isaac did not just live in the land. He had moved into the city, into the exclusive part of the city where people of privilege lived - next to the king.

The author does not tell us why Abimelech "looked down from a window." The word "looked down" could be interpreted as a casual glimpse that was unintentional. That is not what the Hebrew text suggests. The word literally means to lean out of a window to get a better view. This is a very intentional action. Though neither the author nor Abimelech so indicate, it appears that Abimelech had some interest of his own concerning Rebekah.

Apparently, because he had lived in the area for some time and nothing had happened in relationship to his wife, Isaac grew more casual about the situation. He treated Rebekah as his wife, not realizing that they could be seen. The palace would be a taller structure than any of the other houses in the elite part of the city. Every house had a flat roof. People would sit there in the cool of the day because it was cooler than the rest of the house. Abimelech, standing on his roof, could see what was happening on the roof of Isaac's house. The author said that Isaac caressed his wife Rebekah. The word "caress" literally means to fondle or caress. It is a euphemism for intimate relations. These relations, of course, would be inappropriate for one to share with his sister.

Abimelech then confronted Isaac concerning his statement about Rebekah.

So Abimelech summoned Isaac and said, "She is really your wife! Why did you say, 'She is my sister'?" Genesis 26:9a

This was an official inquiry. The reason was clear and valid. Abimelech did not suggest the possibility that Isaac had dealt falsely with them. He was calling Isaac a liar. Abimelech had evidence that Isaac had dealt falsely with him. In so doing, Isaac had not only lied, he had broken a covenant. In the confrontation between Abraham and Abimelech, probably the father of this man Abimelech, a covenant had been made between the two men:

"...Now swear to me here before God that you will not deal falsely with me or my children or my descendants. Show to me and the country where you are living as an alien the same kindness I have shown to you." Abraham said, "I swear it." Genesis 21:23, 24

Isaac had done exactly what Abraham swore would not happen. The breaking of a covenant was not a casual error. It was considered a terrible crime.

Isaac answered Abimelech's accusation in carefully chosen words.

"Because I thought I might lose my life on account of her." Genesis 26:9b

This is not just a weak point in the life of Isaac. It is a terrible crime, a travesty against his wife, Rebekah and especially against God.

Abimelech's response gives us a little insight into the event.

Then Abimelech said, "What is this you have done to us? One of the men might well have slept with your wife, and you would have brought guilt upon us." Genesis 26:10

There would be no danger of a man of the city sleeping with Rebekah without the permission from Isaac to take her as his wife. The real danger would have been in relation to Abimelech himself. A king could take any single woman as his wife. It was customary, however, that he would go through the negotiations for the wife as anyone else would. This was usually observed, but there were times when the king just took the woman into his harem. Abimelech's statement about "one of the men" was probably a reference to himself.

We must ask ourselves, "Just how did they know that it was a sin to take another man's wife?" The law forbidding adultery had not yet been given. We do not know precisely. We do know that though the Law had not yet been given, Abraham observed the Law just the same. It is possible that people instinctively knew what was evil.

Notice that Abimelech did not say that such a person would bring guilt upon himself, but "upon us." This is the issue of corporate guilt. This issue is vividly described in the story of Achan. He sinned, but the entire nation suffered, but not as much as he and his family. There is both individual and corporate guilt. Corporate guilt is not unjust, as some say. The judgment is upon what we have allowed our culture to become. One of the problems with sin is that it never takes place in a vacuum. Sin, by its very nature, affects more than the one who does the overt evil. Drug addicts pay the price of their evil habit, but their families and the whole community also pay a heavy price for that persons tragic addiction.

Abimelech made a very generous gesture for the protection of Isaac and Rebekah. He gave this order:

> *So Abimelech gave orders to all the people: "Anyone who molests this man or his wife shall surely be put to death." Genesis 26:11*

The extreme nature of Abimelech's order gives you some idea of just how precarious it was for the husband of a beautiful woman. It was a godless country and tragic things could happen to a stranger in the area.

Genesis 26:12-17 - Abimelech Instructed Isaac to Leave Gerar

There is a surprise in this paragraph.

> *Isaac planted crops in that land and the same year reaped a hundredfold, because the Lord blessed him. Genesis 26:12*

This is the first mention of Isaac planting crops. This is significant for a couple of reasons:

1. The planting of crops is a significant time commitment. Isaac was going to do just as God commanded him.
2. Isaac was a herdsman. He now lived in an area not well suited for farming. This was also a time of drought. The growing of crops here would be a great witness for what God could do.

The author pointed out that during the first year of his farming, in an area not good for that, at a time when drought was in process, Isaac realized a hundredfold return on his crop. Such a return would be fantastic for someone who was an experienced farmer and in times of abundant rain. The author pointed out, however, that it was because the Lord had

blessed Isaac. This comes as a surprise to us because though we do not say it, we tend to think of God being bound by the limitations that surround us. God can make Isaac prosper in a place where farming should not be prosperous at all.

The author attempted to describe just how much God had blessed Isaac.

> *The man became rich, and his wealth continued to grow until he became very wealthy. He had so many flocks and herds and servants that the Philistines envied him. Genesis 26:13, 14*

People becoming envious of wealth is not news. That has always been the case. The message of the author is that Isaac was becoming wealthy at a time when the people of the area were not. They were the natives and he was the foreigner; they were the farmers and he was the herdsman, but he was becoming wealthy doing what they did best.

The reason behind their distress was more than wealth. The Philistines were pagan idolaters. Their grief over whose god was most powerful would carry over into the time of the kings of Israel and Judah. This was a religious consideration. Clearly God had blessed Isaac in a way that the idols of the Philistines had not blessed their people. This made the distress over the wealth issue just that much worse.

Distress turned to aggression. The Philistines were determined to make Isaac less wealthy than he had become.

> *So all the wells that his father's servants had dug in the time of his father Abraham, the Philistines stopped up, filling them with earth. Genesis 26:15*

There are at least two infractions identified in this verse:

1. They stopped up the wells that Isaac's father's servants had dug.
2. They violated a covenant which the previous Abimelech had made with Abraham. In Genesis 20:15, the previous Abimelech invited Abraham to live anywhere he liked in the land of the Philistines. This Abimelech had now violated that covenant. That was a serious violation of a covenant.

The people were forbidden, on pain of death, to molest either Isaac or Rebekah. The men of the area could do nothing to them personally. Filling in the wells was a way to attack Isaac without countering the order of the king. That is precisely what they did.

This having been done, Abimelech again violates the accord between his father and Abraham.

> *Then Abimelech said to Isaac, "Move away from us; you have become too powerful for us." Genesis 26:16*

It is not clear whether Abimelech's motive was a fear of Isaac's power or if it was envy over Isaac's wealth. It appears that no one in the area was as wealthy as Isaac. Whatever the cause, it was so important to Abimelech that he was willing to violate the covenant his father made with Abraham. This was unacceptable in that part of the world, even for an enemy.

There is a surprise in verse 17.

> *So Isaac moved away from there and encamped in the Valley of Gerar and settled there. Genesis 26:17*

The surprise in this verse is the fact that Isaac was willing to leave when asked to do so. He had an irreversible covenant that he could live anywhere he wished. He had possession of wells which provided all the water he could possibly need. This was a major consideration. Isaac also had a large retinue of servants on whom he could call to defend him against the Philistines if a struggle broke out. Still, when Abimelech told him to leave, Isaac left.

This could be, in part, that Isaac saw this as doing what God had told him to do. God told Isaac to stay in Gerar for a while. This means to be an alien, someone who has no rights. Isaac may have known where he was going when he left Gerar. He had been a herdsman in the area and had kept his flocks in the area while he lived in Gerar. We cannot be sure.

Genesis 26:18-22 - Isaac Dug Disputed Wells

Isaac moved from Grear and went to the "Valley of Gerar." We do not know exactly where the "Valley of Gerar" is located. It cannot be too far from the city because verse 19 tells of Isaac's encounter with herdsmen from Gerar in this valley. Wherever it was, Isaac "settled" there. The word "settled" means "to dwell." This was not a transient situation. Isaac made that very clear:

> *Isaac reopened the wells that had been dug in the time of his father Abraham. These were the wells which the Philistines had stopped up after Abraham died. Isaac gave these wells the same names his father had given them. Genesis 26:18*

If Isaac had planned to stay for a short time he would never have redug the wells that his father had dug a generation before. The redigging of the wells displayed his intentions. The author indicated that the Philistines had done to Isaac the same thing they had done to the wells as soon as Abraham died. This was to make sure that Abraham's heirs did not come to take over the wells that his servants had dug.

The wells Abraham had originally dug were not sufficient for Isaac. He needed still more water. This suggests that he had more herds than Abraham had.

> *Isaac's servants dug in the valley and discovered a well of fresh water there. Genesis 26:19*

It was dangerous to dig a well. The loss of life by the wall of a well caving in was common. It would only be done when Isaac decided that he was going to stay in the area. This is stated in very matter-of-fact style. The fact is that this was a tremendous find. It meant that Isaac could stay with all of his herds. This would otherwise have been impossible.

Verse 20 begins with the word "but." This suggests that a contrast is in progress.

> *But the herdsmen of Gerar quarreled with Isaac's herdsmen and said, "The water is ours!" So he named the well Esek, because they disputed with him. Genesis 26:20*

It seems unfair. This is not how the Gerar herdsmen would see it. Although Abraham and Abimelech had made an unbreakable covenant, this Abimelech broke it. This meant that in his mind, Isaac was a stranger, a foreigner. Such a person had no rights in the land and could not hold property. This being the case, the herdsmen of Gerar would conclude that the well could not be the property of Isaac even if his servants had done the digging.

Isaac called the name of the well "Esek." The word "Esek" means "to dispute." That is precisely what the herdsmen of Gerar had done with him. Notice, however, that there was no trace of retaliation by Isaac. This is a form of obedience. If Isaac was to be the foreigner, then he had to accept these kinds of things without opposition because he had no rights in the land.

Even with his weaknesses, Isaac had something of the character of his father Abraham. He just moved on when the dispute took place.

> *Then they dug another well, but they quarreled over that one also; so he named it Sitnah Genesis 26:21*

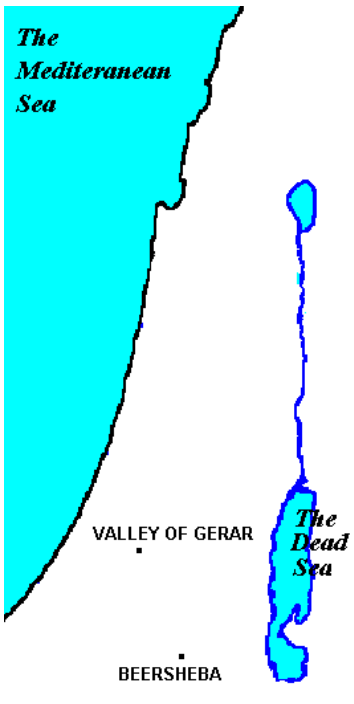
The name "Sitnah" means "opposition." Isaac named the well "Sitnah" because the herdsmen of Gerar had given him just that. They were determined to oppose him at every turn.

This verse tells us something about the men of Gerar. They were determined to be abusive to the man that they were forbidden to molest. Legally, they had a right to claim the well. Realistically, they did not need the water and they could not use it. This was a case of resorting to any possible means to get rid of a man they did not like.

Again, Isaac did not fight their unkindness.

> *He moved on from there and dug another well, and no one quarreled over it. He named it Rehoboth, saying, "Now the Lord has given us room and we will flourish in the land." Genesis 26:22*

The patience of Isaac, in this situation, is simply amazing. He named this well "Rehoboth" which means "room." Now they had enough room so that the other herdsmen would not bother them or take away their wells. Notice that Isaac gave the credit to God for providing space for them. Isaac expressed his faith in his statement. He affirmed that they would flourish in the land. We must remember that this was a time of drought and people would have been quite satisfied just to survive. He was certain they would flourish. That is just like God.



Map 2: Going "up" to Beersheba

Genesis 26:23-33 - Isaac Makes Covenant with Abimelech

Notice the directions given in the text.

> *From there he went up to Beersheba. Genesis 26:23*

The last mentioned location for Isaac was in verse 17, where he was in the Valley of Gerar. On Map 2 which

follows, you will note that Beersheba is located South and east of the Valley of Gerar. The question arises, why does the text say "up" when Isaac was traveling south and east? This is because the area of Beersheba was at a higher altitude than the valley of Gerar which was more in the plains along the Mediterranean Sea.

While Isaac was in Beersheba, God appeared to him.

> *That night the Lord appeared to him and said, "I am the God of your father Abraham. Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bless you and will increase the number of your descendants for the sake of my servant Abraham." Genesis 26:24*

Isaac needed that! He had been tormented by the Philistines for some time. He was a foreigner and his wealth was greater than theirs. He had more servants, but still the inhabitants were a source of tension and frustration for this stranger in the land.

The message he received from God was very important to Isaac. Notice how he responded to that message.

> *Isaac built an altar there and called on the name of the Lord. There he pitched his tent, and there his servants dug a well. Genesis 26:25*

This verse tells us something about Isaac's frame of mind. It mentions four specific things:

1. He built an altar.
2. He called on the name of the Lord.
3. He pitched his tent.
4. His servants dug a well.

Building an altar suggests that Isaac believed that it was God who had cared for him until this time. Isaac called on the name of God as a way of saying that God was the one who met the needs he could not meet for himself; that the blessing of God would continue to be with him while he remained in the land. Abraham also built an altar in a similar situation in Genesis 13:18. The author, also, mentions that Isaac pitched his tent. There is little doubt that Isaac had pitched at least some tents for sleeping the previous night. The situation here is a way of saying that Isaac pitched all of his tents. He was going to stay. He would not be moving on tomorrow morning. The verse also says that Isaac's servants dug a well. This is even clearer evidence that Isaac was preparing for a very long stay. When one is just passing through, he/she would look for existing sources of water. When one intends to stay for a long time, one will either locate near a good supply of water or attempt to dig a well close by. Isaac was settling in for a long stay.

Though Isaac had done exactly what his antagonists requested, they were still not comfortable with him being so near. Notice how the author describes Abimelech's visit.

> *Meanwhile, Abimelech had come to him from Gerar, with Ahuzzath his personal adviser and Phicol the commander of his forces. Genesis 26:26*

The information in this verse suggests that this was a very important visit. It shows just how troubled Abimelech was. Notice who came with him:

a. Ahuzzath - the personal advisor to the king.

b. Phicol - the commander of Abimelech's military forces.

Abimelech came with his two most trusted advisors. This was not a social visit. Apparently Abimelech had a serious agenda when he arrived. The presence of these two men was very significant. Ahuzzath, the personal advisor, was present to convey the idea that this mission was very important to the welfare of the Philistine people as a whole. On the other hand, Phicol, the commander of Abimelech's military forces, was present to give Isaac an impression of just how determined Abimelech was to have his way with the request that he was going to present to Isaac.

It appears that Isaac was quite aware of the gravity of their mission when he greeted them.

> *Isaac asked them, "Why have you come to me, since you were hostile to me and sent me away?" Genesis 26:27*

This was not the warmest greeting Isaac could have offered. He was clearly upset by their presence. He thought that he was free of them and did not have to concern himself with his relationship with them anymore. Such was not the case.

Obviously Isaac would be distressed at being invited to leave their land. There was more to it than that. The Philistines, through Abimelech, probably the father of this ruler, had made a pact that would extend peace between them for many generations to come. They were both bound to be protectors of each other. Abimelech broke that accord, however, when he sent Isaac away and when his herdsmen filled up the wells that Isaac's servants had dug. The greeting was a way by which Isaac acknowledged that though there had been a covenant between their families, it had been broken by the Philistines. Now they had no dealings with each other.

Many scholars believe that though there had been bounty in the land while Isaac had been there, when he left, the bounty ceased and everything dried up. They interpret this mission as a way for Abimelech to plead with Isaac to either return or ask his God to remove the curse from their people. Notice what they said to Isaac,

> *They answered, "We saw clearly the Lord was with you; so we said, 'There ought to be a sworn agreement between us' - between us and you. Let us make a treaty with you that you will do us no harm, just as we did not molest you but always treated you well and sent you away in peace and now you are blessed by the Lord." Genesis 26:28, 29*

They were asking that the covenant which had existed between them and Abraham now be confirmed between them and Isaac. The word "treaty" is more than it sounds. It is a covenant which carries with it an imprecation - a request that God destroy anyone who would break the oath. These men knew that they had violated the previous covenant and thus Isaac was released from it. They were concerned that he, or more importantly his children, would see the covenant as void and feel free to do violence to the Philistines. This proposed covenant would inhibit such thinking.

In their eagerness to cut a treaty with Isaac, they glossed over a few facts. Note how they described their treatment of Isaac:

1. We did not molest you.
2. We always treated you well.
3. We sent you away in peace.

4. Now you are blessed by the Lord.

It is as though they were responsible for the blessing of the Lord which now attended Isaac. One needs to interpret their description of their own conduct. They did not physically do anything to Isaac himself. It is a stretch of the truth, however, to say that they always treated him well. Asking him to leave their land was not treating him well. Taking the wells away from Isaac could not be considered as treating him well. Telling him to leave their land, in violation of their covenant with Abraham, could not be interpreted as "treating him well." You must interpret what they meant when they said they "sent him away in peace." They did not do him physical violence. On the other hand, they forcibly drove him out of their land. These men were on the spot. They had to put the best face on everything they had done. They knew that they had violated the unbreakable covenant and thus Isaac could do anything he wished to them. To add to this, they had not endeared themselves to him by their treatment.

The response of Isaac was shocking.

> *Isaac then made a feast for them, and they ate and drank. Early the next morning the men swore an oath to each other. Then Isaac sent them on their way, and they left him in peace. Genesis 26:31*

This was not a celebration of Thanksgiving day for these people. The preparation of a great feast had strong symbolic meaning to the people of this area. When people entered into a covenant, it was sealed following a meal. The preparation of a feast where everyone ate and drank was a way of saying, we are going to enter into a very important, binding covenant. Eating together meant that there was to be no hard feelings between them. One would only eat with a person with whom they were at peace. This is shocking because these people had given Isaac every reason to be angry with them. Nevertheless, he was able to put it all away and be at peace with them. These people had broken a covenant with Isaac and now they wanted him to trust them again.

When Isaac's servants cleared out the wells, the Philistine herdsmen claimed that the water was theirs. Although Isaac had a covenant with these people, they drove him away. Now Isaac, in spite of the past conduct of these neighbors, ate the feast of covenant with them. He sent them away in peace and safety when they had done just the opposite to him. This is a side of Isaac with which most people are not aware.

There is an immediate response from God. Notice how the author writes in the following verse.

> *That day Isaac's servants came and told him about the well they had dug. They said, "We've found water!" He called it Shibah, and to this day the name of the town has been Beersheba. Genesis 26:32, 33*

It is as though God had seen how abusive the Philistines had been and how gracious Isaac was in response. That same day the servants found water in the well they were digging. Is that really a coincidence? Someone has said, "a coincidence is God's way of remaining anonymous." I believe, in this case, that was true.

The place was called "Beersheba" because of the meaning of the words. "Beer" means well. "Sheba" means oath or seven. It is the well of the oath. It was exactly that.

Genesis 26:34, 35 - Esau Took Hittite Wives

There is no way to identify the time sequence between verses 33 and 34. It is fair to assume that the timing of verse 34 does not immediately follow that of verse 33. This is because Isaac was 40 when he took Rebekah as his wife. The previous paragraphs have dealt with Abimelech scolding Isaac because he did not tell them that Rebekah was his wife.

Notice the time information that is given.

> *When Esau was forty years old, he married Judith daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and also Basemath daughter of Elon the Hittite. There were a source of grief to Isaac and Rebekah. Genesis 26:34, 35*

Genesis 25:26 tells us that Isaac was 60 years of age when the twins were born. If Esau married when he was forty, then Isaac was 100 years old at the time. It does not help us identify how close this situation was to the events of verse 33.

It seems fair to assume that verses 34 and 35 take place some years before the time of the encounter between Isaac and Abimelech in verse 32. We do not know how to account for this change in the chronology. We have said before that the author makes no effort to give us a blow by blow account in precise chronological order. He is much more interested in telling us something about God that helps us understand just who God is.

The Hittites were a people who adopted the deities of other nations. They worshipped Ishtar, from Ninevah, and Marduk, the patron deity from Babylon. They also assimilated the gods of Syria and Asia Minor. Their worship practices were a particular threat to the faithfulness of Israel to Jehovah.

The disdain with which the people of Israel held the Hittites was well known throughout the land of Israel. There is no way that Esau could have been uninformed about this danger. His marriage to a Hittite woman had to be a deliberate act to hurt his parents and degrade them in the Jewish community. Taking two Hittite wives only compounded the pain for Isaac and Rebekah. This had to be a particularly troublesome time for Isaac and Rebekah. Isaac tried so hard to please God. To think of his son disobeying God in such a way had to devastate him completely.

Conclusion

There is a contrast in the view of Isaac in this chapter. In the first paragraph, Isaac lied because he was afraid the men of Gerar would want his wife and kill him. This was a violation of the covenant between his father and Abimelech. At the end of the chapter, however, Isaac was being gracious and helpful when Abimelech had driven him out of the area and also violated the covenant made between Abraham and Abimelech. If God never changes and He blessed Isaac because of the righteousness of Abraham, then think of how our children would be blessed if we were committed to righteousness as Abraham was?

God blessed Isaac as a farmer in Gerar, although he had lied in his dealings about Rebekah. There is some thought that the blessing Isaac experienced in Gerar ended when Isaac was driven out of the city and the area. Does God always deal with us in this way when we do wrong? If that were the case, what would that tell you about God?

Isaac was most gracious to Abimelech when the king had driven him out of the city and area, but then had to come seeking a covenant because he was afraid of how prosperous Isaac had become. The very next verse tells us that Isaac's servants found water in the wells they were digging on the same day. Surely this is not a coincidence. What does it tell us about God? Why is it so difficult for us to accept this truth for our own times?

There is another contrast in this chapter. There is a contrast between Isaac on the one hand and Esau on the other. Notice that there are 33 verses dealing with Isaac and only two dealing with his son Esau. Isaac, though human and sinful, was gracious and God blessed him in an unusual way. Esau, on the other hand, made some intentional moves to bring pain to his parents. Esau made no gestures in the direction of righteousness. It is not surprising that his life was filled with tragedy and pain.

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 3

JACOB DECEIVES ISAAC, FLEES ESAU

GENESIS 27:1 - 45

1. In our best manuscripts, there are five paragraphs in Genesis 27:1-45. On the following chart, write a title of seven words or less for each paragraph.

27:1-4	
27:5-17	
27:18-29	
27:30-40	
27:41-45	

2. In verses 1 - 4, Isaac told Esau to prepare a meal for him.
   a. What was the purpose of this meal?
   b. What would have been different if they had forgotten about the food?
   c. In 27:1, the author speaks of Esau as his "older son." What is the significance of this piece of information?

3. In 27:5 - 17, Rebekah schemes to deceive her husband.
   a. Why would Rebekah what to deceive Isaac?
   b. What impact does the Lord's message to Rebekah, in Genesis 25:23, have upon the events in this chapter?
   c. Evaluate the parental example you see in Rebekah as described in this paragraph.
   d. In this paragraph, Jacob is afraid of being cursed by Isaac. Who is taking the risks here and how serious are these risks?
   e. Read Genesis 27:11, 12, again. What is the nature of Jacob's reluctance?
   f. Study 27:13 again. This statement could have far reaching effects on Rebekah's life. See if you can detect some hint of Rebekah's motive.
   g. In 27:15-17, the author described a tense, tragic event.
      (1). In 27:15, the author indicates that Rebekah took "the best clothes of Esau her older son." What difference could this make? Why would she choose the "best clothes"?
      (2). What reason can you find for the "best clothes" being kept in Rebekah's tent?

4. In 27:18 - 29, the author describes Jacob's deception of Esau.
   a. In this passage, Jacob did and said several things that deceived his blind father.
      (1). What were these deceptions?
      (2). What are the implications of these deceptions?

b. Put yourself in the place of Isaac in this experience. What feelings would you have?
c. It appears that Isaac did not recognize that he was touching the fur coat of a goat instead of the hairy arm of his son. What does this tell you?
d. In 27:24, Isaac asked an emotional question. What does this question tell you?
e. In 27:25, Isaac asked his son to bring the food to him.
   (1). What were the motives behind this request?
   (2). Did this exercise settle Isaac's mind?
f. In 27:26, Isaac instructed his son to come and kiss him.
   (1). What was the significance of this request?
   (2). What does this tell you about Isaac?
g. In 27:28, 29, Isaac blessed his son. Carefully study each statement in this fatherly blessing.
   (1).`In verse 28, Isaac blessed Jacob with four things:
      (a). What are they?
      (b). What is the importance of each blessing ?
   (2). In Genesis 27:29a. There are two parts to this statement.
      (a). What is the difference between the two?
      (b). What is Isaac really promising Jacob in this statement?
   (3). In the second part of verse 29 (29b), there are two more promises to Jacob.
      (a). What does each promise mean?
      (b). What is the difference between the two?

5. In Genesis 27:29c, Isaac blessed Jacob with two more statements.
   a. What were these blessings?
   b. What did each one mean?
   c. What effect do these final two blessings have on the overall paternal blessing Isaac gave Jacob?

6. In Genesis 27:30-40, the author describes Esau's discovery of Jacob's deception.
   a. In 27:30, Esau brought the food he prepared to his father.
      (1). What instructions did Esau give Isaac?
      (2). What is the emphasis of these instructions?
      (3). What right did Esau have to make these requests?
   b. In 27:32, the author describes Isaac's response to Esau's instructions.
      (1). How did Esau respond?
      (2). Why would he respond in this way?
      (3). What indication is there of Isaac's emotional state when this happened?
   c. In 27:33b, Isaac said, "I blessed him - and indeed he will be blessed."
      (1). What does this comment mean?
      (2). If Isaac was tricked, as he was, why then does he insist, "... and indeed he will be blessed"?
   d. In Genesis 27:34, Esau reacts to Isaac's shocking discovery. Put yourself in Esau's situation.
      (1). How would you feel?
      (2). How did Esau conduct himself?

e. In Genesis 27:35, Isaac reacted to Esau's shocking outburst.
   (1). How would Isaac know that Jacob had done this?
   (2). What does this tell you about their relationship?
f. In 27:36, Esau responded to Isaac's discovery.
   (1). In this verse, Esau did at least three things:
      (a). What three things did Esau do?
      (b). What does this tell you about Esau's personality and character?
   (2). What does this tell you about how Esau solved problems?
   (3). In this verse, Esau asked two questions?
      (a). In your own words, what is the answer to each question?
      (b). What do you learn from each answer?
g. In Genesis 27:37, Isaac answers Esau's questions in general terms.
   (1). What answer does he give?
   (2). Put yourself in Isaac's position.
      (a). How would you feel?
      (b). What would you say?
h. In 27:38, Esau responds to Isaac's disappointing response.
   (1). Put yourself in Esau's position.
      (a). How would you feel?
      (b). What would you say?
   (2). What was Esau's emotional response?
   (3). What is the answer to Esau's question in this verse?
i. In 27:39, 40, Isaac gives a weak blessing to Esau. Study these verses carefully.
   (1). Two parts of this blessing, in verse 39, deal with where Esau will live.
      (a). What are these two parts of the blessing?
      (b). What does each one mean?
   (2). Three parts of this blessing, in verse 40, deal with Esau's future relationships.
      (a). What are these three parts?
      (b). What does each one mean?
   (3). Compare the closing statement in Isaac's blessing of Jacob (27:29c) with the closing statement of Isaac's blessing of Jacob (27:40b.)
      (a). What did you learn?
      (b). In what position did Isaac put himself?
      (c). In what position did Isaac put Esau?

7. In 27:41-45, Rebekah instructed Jacob to flee from his brother.
   a. In 27:41a, the author gives a description of Esau's feelings toward Jacob at this point.
      (1). Describe his feelings in your own words.
      (2). What does this tell you about Esau?
   b. In 27:41b, Esau talked to himself.
      (1). What does this mean?
      (3). What does this tell you about Esau?
      (4). What would this information mean in a court today?
   c. In 27:42-44, again tries to control the situation.

(1). If Esau spoke to himself, in 27:41b, who could have told Rebekah about it in 27:42?
(2). Rebekah described, for Jacob, how Esau reacted to losing the blessing. In your own words, describe her evaluation.
(3). There is a basic flaw in Rebekah's plan. What is that flaw?
(4). What risks, if any, was Rebekah running by sending Jacob to stay with her brother?

d. In Genesis 27:45, Rebekah, described her plan for this cooling down period.
(1). What is the plan?
(2). What is wrong with it?

8. Look at the picture of Isaac as presented in this chapter.
   a. What actions of his can you find?
   b. What attitudes of his can you find?
   c. What does this tell you about the man?
   d. What observations can you make on the basis of these facts?

9. Look at the picture of Rebekah as presented in this chapter.
   a. What actions of hers can you find?
   b. What attitudes of hers can you find?
   c. What does this tell you about her?
   d. What observations can you make on the basis of these facts?

9. Look at the picture of Esau as presented in this chapter.
   a. What actions of his can you find?
   b. What attitudes of his can you find?
   c. What does this tell you about him?
   d. What observations can you make on the basis of these facts?

10. Look at the picture of Jacob in this chapter.
   a. What actions of his can you find?
   b. What attitudes of his can you find?
   c. What does t his tell you about him?
   d. What observations can you make on the basis of these facts?

11. Look carefully at Isaac's family.
   a. How would you describe the quality of that relationship?
   b. What reasons can you give for your conclusions?

LESSON 3: GENESIS 27:1 - 45

JACOB DECEIVES ISAAC, FLEES ESAU

In our best manuscripts, there are five paragraphs in Genesis chapter 27. A summary of the content of each paragraph is as follows:

27:1-4	Isaac Instructs Esau To Prepare Meal for Blessing
27:5-17	Rebekah Helps Jacob Deceive Isaac
27:18-29	Jacob Deceives Isaac
27:30-40	Esau Discovers Deception - Fury
27:41-45	Rebekah Instructs Jacob to Flee Esau

Genesis 27:1-4 - Isaac Instructs Esau to Prepare Meal for Blessing

Notice the way this paragraph begins.

> *When Isaac was old and his eyes were so weak that he could no longer see, he called for Esau his older son and said to him "My son." "Here I am," he answered. Genesis 27:1*

The Hebrew text is slightly different. It might read as follows:

> *And it came to pass, when Isaac had become old, and his eyesight weakened from seeing, that he summoned Esau, his older son, and said to him,...Genesis 27:1a*

Chapter 26 ends with an event that happened when Esau was forty years old. Genesis 25:26 indicates that Isaac was sixty years old at the birth of Jacob and Esau. This would make him 100 years old when Esau married the two Hittite wives. In Genesis 35:28, the author indicates that Isaac died at 180 years of age. We cannot be sure, but there appears to be between 70 and 80 years that pass between the end of Genesis 26 and the beginning of Genesis 27. Many Jewish scholars, however, believe that there were only 52 years between the two chapters. Whichever may be the case, several decades passed.

The Hebrew text, quoted above, suggests that Isaac was blind. This was not the result of an accident. It was the consequence of age.

Notice that the text speaks of Esau as Isaac's "older son." This is a hint that Isaac is about to make Esau his "heir." The heir was usually the eldest son, but it did not have to be that way. Joseph was initially identified as the heir (identified as "beloved son" in the New Testament) although he was the eleventh son in the family.

In verses two through four Isaac gave Esau instructions concerning the meal he was to prepare for his father.

> *Isaac said, "I am now an old man and don't know the day of my death. Now then, get your weapons - your quiver and bow - and go out to the open country to hunt some wild game for me. Prepare me the kind of tasty food I like and bring it to me to eat, so that I may give you my blessing before I die." Genesis 27:2-4*

There is serious debate about the purpose of the meal Isaac instructed Esau to prepare. The text is not helpful in this search. Some say it was a way to bring joy to Isaac when he was about to bless his older son. That is possible. I prefer another explanation. We know that when an oath or covenant was made, it was sealed by a covenant meal. Such a covenant could not be broken. We will note later that Isaac told Esau that the blessing given to Jacob, in Genesis 27:33, must stand. It cannot be broken. This blessing was consummated by a meal and could not be broken. It is interesting that Jesus announced "the new covenant in His blood" at a very significant meal - Passover.

The timing of the paternal blessing was a delicate decision. They believed that it must be given in the father's final five years if possible. They did not want to wait too long, lest the father die without giving his blessing.

The phrase "wild game" does not appear in the Hebrew text. It simply says "game." On the other hand, the instruction about going "out into the open country "definitely suggests wild game, but he does not specifically say so.

Notice also that Isaac instructed Esau to prepare "tasty food." The word here means things pleasant to the taste. We might translate it "dainties." Some scholars believe that Isaac meant food that was highly seasoned as the people of the area really enjoyed.

Genesis 27:5-17 - Rebekah Helps Jacob Deceive Isaac

Throughout this chapter, it is obvious that this is a dysfunctional family. Isaac loved Esau and Rebekah loved Jacob. Rebekah plotted against the wishes of her husband. One needs to ask just how this came to be in the family God had chosen to be the vessel through whom the Messiah was to come.

In verses six through ten, it is as though Rebekah has chosen to counteract a decision that clearly belonged to her husband. It is as though she was determined that he would not have his desire carried out. Notice what the text says.

> *Now Rebekah was listening as Isaac spoke to his son Esau. When Esau left for the open country to hunt some wild game and bring it back, Rebekah said to her son Jacob, "Look, I overheard your father say to your brother Esau, 'Bring me some game and prepare me some tasty food to eat, so that I may give you my blessing in the presence of the Lord before I die.'..." Genesis 27:5-7*

In these verses, it is as though Rebekah was eaves dropping on the conversation between Isaac and Esau. It is clear that Rebekah and Jacob know exactly what is about to happen. Whatever they did, it was intentional. It cannot be considered coincidental.

Aside from her special preference for Jacob, we must ask ourselves why Rebekah would give such unfortunate instructions to her son. We must remember that in Genesis 25, God made a prophetic statement to Rebekah concerning her sons.

> *The Lord said to her, "Two nations are in your womb, and two people from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger." Genesis 25:23*

God said this to Rebekah. The text does not say that Isaac heard it or that Rebekah told him of the announcement. It is possible that Isaac had been unaware of this divine announcement all these decades. It is possible that Rebekah was simply trying to make sure that God's prophetic announcement became reality. We can not be certain.

Rebekah felt strongly about the instructions she was giving Jacob.

Now, my son, listen carefully and do what I tell you: Genesis 27:8

Rebekah felt strongly enough that she was willing to be solely responsible for the outcome of the action. She took full responsibility for the design. Jacob was to do exactly what she told him to do.

Notice the instructions Rebekah gave Jacob.

Go out to the flock and bring me two choice young goats, so I can prepare some tasty food for your father, just the way he likes it. Then take it to your father to eat, so that he may give you his blessing before he dies." Genesis 27:9, 10

This is a terrible parental example. Notice that Rebekah commanded Jacob to deceive Isaac, his father, in at least two ways:

1. Make him think that this is venison and not goat meat.
2. Make Isaac think you are Esau and not Jacob.

This is just the opposite of what parents ought to be teaching their children, no matter what their ages.

Jacob had a reputation as a deceiver, a heel-grabber, but we should remember that this was his mother's design, not his. Notice how he responded to her commands.

Jacob said to Rebekah his mother, "But my brother Esau is a hairy man, and I'm a man with smooth skin. What if my father touches me? I would appear to be tricking him and would bring down a curse on myself rather than a blessing." Genesis 27:11, 12

Jacob is resisting his mother's plan to deceive his father. It was clear to him that this was a risky idea that probably would not work. Jacob, however, gives us a glimpse into his own mind when he said, "I would appear to be tricking him..." The Hebrew text is stronger than this. A fair translation of that text would read, "I will be like a deceiver in his eyes." Jacob could not be **like** a deceiver, he was one. Could he be so deeply involved in repeated deception that he no longer saw this flaw in his character?

Jacob was afraid of being found out and then receiving a curse rather than the blessing. We need to remember that these people believed that the blessing a father pronounced upon his sons would definitely come to pass. They held exactly the same view concerning the father's curse.

The tragedy of this family reaches new depths as Rebekah displays just how intent she was to have her own way.

His mother said to him, "My son, let the curse fall on me. Just do what I say; go and get them for me." Genesis 27:13

It is reasonable to say that she was desperately afraid of what Esau would do to her favorite son, Jacob. That is understandable. There is more involved than fear for Jacob's life. She was just as concerned that the thing she wanted to happen would indeed take place. Just as they believed that a dying father's blessing would definitely come to pass, so they also believed that the father's curse would also come to pass.

Whatever the full detail of her motives, Jacob obeyed her command. Notice how the author describes his actions.

So he went and got them and brought them to his mother, and she prepared some tasty food, just the way his father liked it. Genesis 27:14

Notice that it says that "he went and got them and brought them to his mother." It does not say that he was enthusiastic about the direction this was going.
Everything was to be just the way she thought it should be so that her husband would be deceived; so that Isaac would think that Jacob was Esau and give him the family blessing and control of the family and its fortunes.

Rebekah was determined to deceive Isaac in as many ways as she possibly could.

Then Rebekah took the best clothes of Esau her older son, which she had in the house and put them on her younger son Jacob. She also covered his hands and the smooth part of his neck with the goatskins. Then she handed to her son Jacob the tasty food and the bread she had made. Genesis 27:15-17

Rebekah tried to think of everything. She got out the clothes that Isaac would identify with Esau. Notice that the text says, "Rebekah took the **best** clothes ..." The Hebrew text uses the word "precious" or "costly clothes." There are several possibilities concerning the meaning of this word. It could mean that Esau had two sets of clothing, one for every day work in the field. The other clothes were more costly and were never worn in the field. It could mean that these were the clothes that Esau wore whenever he served his father. It could also mean that these were the clothes that identified Esau as the one who would be in charge of the family when father died. This would be like the coat of many colors that was given to Joseph later on in the book of Genesis.

Notice also that these "best clothes" were kept in Rebekah's tent, not in the tent occupied by Esau's two wives. Naturally, the question arises, Why would he keep his clothes in his mother's tent rather than in his own? It could be that he chose to keep them there so that they would be handy to put on whenever he served his father. It would save him time to have the clothing right where he was. Some scholars suggest that this was done because Esau did not trust his Hittite wives. We do not know for certain.

Whatever the reason for these situations, Rebekah got out the clothing that belonged to Esau and put them on Jacob in order to deceive her husband. Again, this says something tragic about the health of this family unit.

Because Esau was very hairy and his brother Jacob was very smooth skinned, Rebekah had to do something that would fool her husband. She covered Jacob's arms and neck with the skins of goats as a way of making Isaac think that this was Esau, and not Jacob. People wonder how she could fool her husband so easily in this manner. One possibility is that he was not fooled, but went along with it anyway. We must remember that he could see nothing. He was also quite old and his sense of touch was greatly diminished. It is reasonable to think that he could be fooled by such a scheme because he was unable to feel the difference between the skin of a goat and that of his son Esau.

The author makes it very clear that this is completely engineered by Rebekah.

Then she handed to her son Jacob the tasty food and the bread she had made. Genesis 27:17

It is clear that Rebekah made the decisions from the very beginning. There is no reason to believe otherwise. Jewish scholars go so far as to suggest that Jacob was an unwilling par-

ticipant. They suggest that only the need to be obedient to his parents forced him to cooperate with this scheme. That, of course, can not be verified.
We can be certain that the author of Genesis presents Rebekah as the one who took the lead in this whole deception.

She suggested the idea - 27:5

She told Jacob to go and get the two young goats - 27:9

She prepared the meal - 27:14

She got Esau's clothes out of her tent - 27:15

She covered Jacob's hands, arms and neck with goat skins - 27:16

She gave Jacob the food to take to his father - 27:17

She even told him to flee to her brother in Paddan Aram - 27:42

Her determination to get this blessing for Jacob allowed her to devise a plan that would stoop to deception and falsehood in order to achieve her goals.

Genesis 27:18-29 - Jacob Deceives Isaac

It is a tragic event when a man is deceived by his wife and his grown son. Nevertheless, that happened to Isaac. We must remember that Isaac is blind. This blindness is not long term. This means that his other faculties had not had time to compensate for the loss of sight. The deception was only possible because he could not see which son was before him.

In this paragraph, Jacob is either denying or ignoring everything that he had learned about family relationships. Notice how he spoke to Isaac.

> *He went to his father and said, "My father." "Yes, my son," he answered, "Who is it?" Genesis 27:18*

Jacob called Isaac "father." That was a tragic trick. A "father" was to be treated with ultimate respect and integrity. Jacob, however, denied Isaac that respect and integrity by the things he said and did.

Jacob was willing to sacrifice his character in order to achieve his goals. Notice what he said to his father.

> *Jacob said to his father, "I am Esau, your firstborn. I have done as you told me. Please sit up and eat some of my game so that you may give me your blessing." Genesis 27:19*

This verse contains two dishonest statements by Jacob: He was not Esau as he said. He did not do as his father had commanded him concerning the meal of wild game. Jacob called goat meat "game." This is a terrible deception. Notice, also, that Jacob's purpose is clear. He was not interested in his father's delight in wild game. He was preoccupied with the blessing that he would hopefully receive. That was a selfish, tragic motivation to say the least.

Isaac, though he could not see, was surprised by the speed with which his son was able to prepare the meal. Note what he said,

> *Isaac asked his son, "How did you find it so quickly, my son?" "The Lord **your** God gave me success," he replied. Genesis 27:20*

One lie is seldom enough to cover one's tracks. Jacob, having told one lie, must now tell another to cover his actions and motives. Dishonesty is a growing, cancerous malady. Having told one lie to cover his actions and motives, another was required to cover the confusion which the previous lie created.

Dishonesty creates confusion. Isaac was further confused by the second lie. God could enable Jacob to find wild game quickly, but He didn't and doesn't usually do so. Notice Isaac's apprehension.

> *Then Isaac said to Jacob, "Come near so I can touch you, my son, to know whether you really are my son Esau or not." Genesis 27:21*

Isaac, in his blindness, knew that something was wrong, but couldn't tell what it was. The way he spoke indicates that he had doubts if this was really Esau as the person claimed to be.

Jacob, in fact, told two lies about being Esau - one with his words, the other with his physical deception, pretending to be Esau. Think of the control it must have taken for Jacob to do as his father commanded him.

> *Jacob went close to his father Isaac, who touched him and said, "The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau." Genesis 27:22*

Notice Isaac's response. We can't say he knew it was Jacob. He did know something was wrong. This he stated emphatically when he said, "The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau."

The next verse is quite helpful in this search. Notice what the author said:

> *He did not recognize him, for his hands were hairy like those of his brother Esau; so he blessed him. Genesis 27:23*

That seems strange to us. Goat hair and human hair both smell and feel different from each other. The black silky hair of the desert goats was a lot like human hair. We know that the Romans used this hair to make wigs for those who had lost their hair.

Whatever the case, the author makes it clear that Isaac did not discover the deception because the goat's hair was a lot like human hair. The fact that Isaac was unable to tell the difference between the hair on a man's hand from the hair on a goat's pelt must be attributed to the fact that old age made his hands very insensitive to touch. Though this was his most reliable test to see if this was indeed Esau, still Isaac had questions. He blessed Jacob, but Isaac was not convinced.

> *"Are you really my son Esau?" he asked. "I am," he replied. Genesis 27:24*

He trusted, as he should in that culture, that his son would tell him the truth. That trust, however, was unfounded. The words of Jacob were not just deceptive, they were deliberate lies.

You can almost feel the tension and frustration of Isaac as he struggles with his son's identity. Isaac, still not quite convinced, had yet one more test to find out the identity of the one who claimed to be Esau.

> *Then he said, "My son, bring me some of your game to eat, so that I may give you my blessing." Jacob brought it to him and he ate; and he brought some wine and he drank. Genesis 27:25*

It was clear that asking questions would not set his mind at ease. He decided to seek answers by two other means:

1. He had the pretender, Jacob, come close to bring the food. This accomplished two things:

- When Jacob came close, it allowed Isaac to use his sense of smell again to see if he could detect whom it might be.
- The eating of food and the drinking of wine offered two possibilities:
- Isaac liked the food that Esau prepared. If he ate the food, he might be able to tell whether or not Esau prepared it.
- Covenants of any kind required a meal to finalize them. To this day, treaties are signed and then followed by a banquet. It was considered a terrible crime to default on a covenant or enter into one falsely. This gave the pretender one more opportunity to own his rightful identity. Jacob did not have the courage to do it. The covenant meal was eaten as Jacob continued to pretend that he was Esau.

2. Still, Isaac was not satisfied. He gave Esau's pretender one more opportunity to tell the truth.

> *Then his father Isaac said to him, "Come here, my son, and kiss me." So he went to him and kissed him. Genesis 27:26, 27a*

The kiss was not so much a sign of family affection as it was a sign of trust. When one person kissed another, it was a symbol of mutual trust and trustworthiness. It was a way of saying, "You can trust me without reservation of any kind." No symbol so thoroughly suggests dependability and trust as the kiss. In spite of this, Jacob maintained his deception by his silence. What a tragic blow to his integrity and his relationship with his father!

In this blessing, Isaac utters a prophetic message. They believed that the father's blessing was not just a collection of nice thoughts. Isaac was bestowing irrevocable power upon his son.

Did Isaac know the truth before he gave his blessing? The text here is inconclusive. In another chapter there is additional information that will aid our conclusion.

Isaac seems to take the scene at face value. This is how he introduced his blessing.

> *When Isaac caught the smell of his clothes, he blessed him and said,...Genesis 27:27a*

Notice that Jacob kissed Isaac, but Isaac did not kiss his son. We must question why that was true. It could be that Isaac was unable to fully participate in this symbol of trust because of the confusion over who was before him. The importance of the question is heightened by the fact that the elder would usually kiss the younger in such a situation. Now we must ask with greater intensity, "Why did Isaac change this custom?" All our information seems to lend credence to the idea that Isaac's uneasiness would not allow him to participate wholeheartedly.

Isaac begins his blessing on a high note:

> *"Ah, the smell of my son is like the smell of a field that the Lord has blessed." Genesis 27:27b*

Isaac focused his attention upon what God had done in nature. His words conjured up thoughts of a beautiful field whose scent was indescribable.

Isaac began the blessing with a seeming paradox. He commenced the blessing with the mild command, "look." Our version begins, "Ah, the smell of my son..." The Hebrew text begins with the mild command, "look." The interesting thing about this is the fact that having said, "l**ook**," he immediately directs attention to the **smell** of his son. This would not be unreasonable for a sightless person. It was, also, not uncommon for a person to substitute one sense for another. In Jeremiah 2:31, he said, "See the word of the Lord."

Isaac, in this verse, draws a picture of just how fragrant a field is that has been blessed by Jehovah. Using the name "Lord," which is really "Jehovah," Isaac focused attention on the fact that God is eternal and just. Could Isaac be hinting that this son might not be just in what he was doing? We do not know, but it is an interesting question. It is thought by some scholars that the "field" which Jehovah had blessed, is a reference to paradise, the Garden of Eden. This is possible. Isaac is at least speaking of a very special place which God, by His blessing, had made much more wonderful than any other land.

This blessing consists of a single sentence, though some translations have divided it up into at least four sentences. We will deal with this blessing one portion at a time.

> *May God give you of heaven's dew and of earth's richness - an abundance of grain and new wine. Genesis 27:28*

Though it is difficult to discern in the English text, there are two different names for God used in this blessing. In Genesis 27:27, Isaac spoke of the field which "Jehovah" has blessed." Notice however, that in 27:28, Isaac said, "May God (Elohim) give you the of the dew of heaven." Elohim is a very personal name for God. It draws attention to the Majesty of God and stresses His mercy.

We must wonder why Isaac blessed his son with **dew** from heaven, rather than **rain**. In that part of the world, rain is important, but sparse and sporadic. It is **dew** that sustains the crops and gives them their harvest. Palestine can survive a long time without rain, but they can not survive without dew. Isaac was asking that his son have the moisture necessary for survival and the provision of their necessary food.

> *"...And of the earth's richness." Genesis 27:28b*

The word "richness" or in some translations "fatness," diverts the understanding of some. Isaac is talking about fertility. He is imploring God to give his son a fertile land that grass may grow for his herd and crops may grow for his large family. The request for an "abundance of grain" is not too significant for people in our country. Most of us have never found food to be of short supply, much less face famine or starvation. That was not the case in that part of the world. There were many harvests that were scant and total crop failure was not unheard of. Isaac was pleading that his son would never again face that tragedy.

Isaac continued with his blessing:

> *"...an abundance of grain and new wine." Genesis 27:28c*

The request of Isaac in the first two sections of this blessing dealt with abundant provision of food for both animals and human beings. In this third segment, he brings that request to a conclusion. He turned to a word picture with which they were quite familiar. Isaac

pleaded for plenty of "new wine." The question immediately arises, "Why would he seek new wine when aged wine is so much better?" The answer is simple. When Isaac sought "an abundance of new wine," he was not only asking for an abundance, but also a continuing supply. He was saying, give my son such a supply of new wine that he can use the aged wine this year and know that next year he will have another abundant supply of mature wine to drink.

In verse 29, the focus of the blessing is changed. Up until now, Isaac has prophesied concerning the desire for abundance of food.

"May nations serve you and peoples bow down to you." Genesis 27:29a

This first section of verse 29 deals with the relationship of Isaac's son to other tribes and nations. Isaac prophesied that tribes and nations would serve his son, that other peoples would work on behalf of his son.

It is not clear in our translations, but there is a very intricate message in the words, "Peoples bow down to you." This is not a picture of the weak bowing down to the powerful. The way it is written in the Hebrew, it is the powerful bowing down to the powerful. It is a bowing of respect and honor, rather than one of fear and helplessness.

In the second section of verse 29, Isaac turns to yet another direction:

"Be Lord over your brothers, and may the sons of your mother bow down to you." Genesis 27:29b

In the Hebrew text, however, it has a slightly different emphasis. It begins, "Be ruler to your brothers." The root word for "ruler" means "to rise," "to restore." It carries the idea of being unusually strong. In its masculine form, it describes a man at the height of his power. This is the idea David expressed when he said,

Blessed is the man who makes the Lord his trust, who does not look to the proud, to those who turn aside to false gods. Psalm 40:4

Isaac is not suggesting that his son lord it over all his relatives. This son will be the one who governs his tribe. The emphasis, however, is on the fact that his son would be the spiritual leader of Isaac's heritage. This son, Jacob, is to lead his people in trusting God as well as being ruler over every facet of the lives of those in this extended family. At the least, this means that Esau would be under the control, socially and spiritually, of his younger brother.

Isaac continued,

May the sons of your mother bow down to you..." Genesis 27:29b

There is more than one message in these words. This is the crucial statement, for Jacob and Esau, in the entire blessing. No matter what the birth order or paternal preference, the son receiving this blessing is officially the first-born of the family, the one who rules when Isaac dies, the one who receives a double portion of the inheritance.

Another emphasis in this segment has to do with Isaac's intent in the word translated "bow down." The exact word is used twice in this verse. "Bow down" literally means to "wallow" or "descend." It was often used as a military term to describe how conquered soldiers would lie down so that conquerors might walk on their backs to show the depth of their servitude. Isaac used "bow down" to describe how nations would show deference to

his first-born. Again, he used the same word, "bow down," to describe the way the immediate family would accept the control of his "first-born" over every detail of their lives. The emphasis is not on cowering, but on governing.

The closing segment of Isaac's blessing should be seen as protection or a guarantee. Isaac has prophesied marvelous conditions for his "first-born." Inevitably, it will create envy among those who do not fare as well. It is almost like a guardian angel who attends the conclusion of the blessing. Such protection was not uncommon when a blessing had been given. In the book of Numbers, Balaam had been commanded to curse Israel. God forbade that and Balaam gave a blessing to Israel rather than a curse. He concluded the blessing with these words:

> *"...May those who bless you be blessed and those who curse you be cursed!" Numbers 24:9*

This is the same protection that Isaac pronounced on his "first-born." The use of such protection is not surprising. Many ancient blessings ended with such a protective device. This successfully terminates any idea of contesting father's will. As we will see later, the recipient of the blessing, within a family, would undoubtedly be the object of scorn on one hand and jealousy on the other.

Look at exactly what Jacob did to his father. Jacob lied to or deceived Isaac in several ways:

1. Jacob told Isaac that he was "Esau, your firstborn." Obviously, that was not true.
2. Jacob told his father that he had done exactly as he had told him to do. He had done nothing of the sort.
3. He urged Isaac to "eat of my game" - This was not wild game at all. It was goat meat.
4. He lied about God - "The Lord your God gave me success." God did no such thing. Jacob prepared goat meat. It could be done immediately.
5. He entered into a covenant, deceptively. That was immoral and unacceptable.
6. He kissed his father - this was the emphatic symbol of trust. It was a way of saying you can trust me without any reservation. Jacob, however, was not trustworthy.

It is hard to describe the extent of the moral decline of Jacob in this experience.

People tend to look at this experience and focus on Jacob. It is important to look at the encounter from the perspective of each participant. We must ask ourselves how Isaac conducted himself in this confrontation. There is no reason to believe that Isaac was uninformed of the fact that Esau had sold his birthright to his brother Jacob. Despite this sale, which was perfectly legal, Isaac was going to give the blessing to Esau, the son he favored. This was not appropriate and Isaac knew it. Further, God had said that the elder of these two would serve the younger. Isaac was going to give the blessing to Esau whether it was right or not; whether it was God's desire or not. He placed his own preference ahead of the will of God.

Genesis 27:30-40 - Esau Discovers the Deception - Fury

There is no way to estimate the time it took for Esau to kill the wild game he had caught. It probably took many hours just to find and kill the animals. It also took several

hours to dress-out and prepare the game Esau had caught. This certainly took at least a full day and could have taken much more than that.

The author, in verse 30, indicated just how close they came to an awkward confrontation between Esau and Jacob in Isaac's presence. It would have been most embarrassing and very threatening.

Esau was not only a good hunter, he was also a good cook. He knew how to prepare food to please his father Isaac.

> *He too prepared some tasty food and brought it to his father. Then he said to him, "My father, sit up and eat some of my game, so that you may give me your blessing." Genesis 27:31*

This verse is a single sentence. In the second part of the sentence, notice the exhortation of Esau - "Let my father arise and eat of his son's game." This is immediately followed by an indication of Esau's motive. The meal was prepared so that the blessing might be received. There are at least two ways to view this motive:

- It could be that it was just a necessary part of receiving his father's blessing. He was simply observing local customs in response to his father's instructions in 27:1-4
- It could also indicate a selfish motivation. Esau hunted and prepared the game so as to receive his father's blessing.

The response of Isaac had to shock Esau. How many fathers, blind or sighted, have to be told that the voice they hear is that of their son? The problem, as we know, was that Isaac had been through a most difficult experience about the identity of his son, and now another man is telling him that he is Isaac's first-born. Isaac's reply is frightening both for him and for Esau.

> *His father Isaac asked him, "Who are you?" Genesis 27:32a*

This was an emotionally packed moment. Isaac was confused, again, and Esau was confused and shocked that his father would say such a thing. Surely, Isaac would know who he was.

Esau's reply was as unusual as his father's.

> *"I am your son," he answered, "Your first-born, Esau." Genesis 27:32b*

No doubt, Esau was born first. "First-born," however, was not always reserved for the son who was born first. In this instance, Esau was born first, but he knew very well that he had given up the position of being the "first-born." Esau was claiming precisely the position that he had forfeited, viewed as unimportant when he wanted some food his brother had prepared. There is no way to justify his actions any more than one could justify the deception of Jacob.

Isaac responded with great shock, surprise and confusion.

> *Isaac trembled violently and said, "Who was it, then, that hunted game and brought it to me? I ate it just before you came and I blessed him - and indeed he will be blessed!" Genesis 27:33*

It is clear, from this statement, that Isaac believed that he had blessed Esau. Isaac was so shocked that he "trembled violently. The Hebrew word for "trembled violently" is

"charad" (חָרַד) is a root word and means to shudder with terror. It is to be so terrified that one is unable to stop shuddering. We are forced to ask the question, why would Isaac react so strongly? He had done nothing wrong. He had given the blessing to the younger son, but it was not intentional. He had been mislead. There are many possibilities, but I believe the most noteworthy are these: It may be that he was upset because he wanted Esau to have that blessing. It could be that he feared God would punish him for blessing the wrong son. The text does not speak to the issue.

Isaac's confusion is described in his own words:

> *"Who was it,. then, that hunted game and brought it to me? I ate it just before you came and I blessed him." Genesis 27:33*

In the Hebrew it is more dramatic. A reasonable translation might be, "Who, where is the one who hunted game?" Isaac was dumbfounded. He couldn't believe anyone could do that.

Isaac was also distressed by the timing. The pretender had hardly left the tent when the real Esau came in.

The reality of what he had done quickly flashed through Isaac's mind.

> *"...I blessed him - and indeed he will be blessed!" Genesis 27:33b*

The thought burned in Isaac's mind that he had given his "blessing of the first-born" and it was irrevocable. There was nothing that he could do to remove the blessing from the pretender and give it to Esau, who was his eldest son. You will remember that there was a meal involved in the giving of this blessing. This was a covenant, properly executed and it could not be changed as long as they lived.

The response of Esau could be easily understood if he had not bartered away that privilege. Nevertheless, he responded in rage.

> *When Esau heard his father's words, he burst out with a loud and bitter cry and said to his father, "Bless me - me too, my father!" Genesis 27:34*

Notice that neither Isaac nor Esau stopped to figure out who had stolen the blessing. Only later did that detail come as a question. In his bitter emotional state, Esau's intense desire for the blessing outstripped his reasoning. He knew that it was not possible for his father to bless one person, as his "first-born" and then give a second person that same blessing. His father could give both his sons a blessing. Jacob blessed both of Joseph's sons. Isaac, however, could not give both sons the "blessing of the first-born."

Only at this point did Isaac stop to try to figure out who had deceived him.

> *But he said, "Your brother came deceitfully and took your blessing." Genesis 27:35*

Isaac presents this as a statement of fact, but he had no firm knowledge that this was true. It gives us a glimpse into the family relationships. Esau did not say, "I can't believe that Jacob would do such a thing. It was simply a statement, Jacob deceived me. This suggests that Isaac believed that Jacob could and would do such a thing. In that culture, this was a horrible admission. It gives some indication of just how poor the family relationships were.

Esau did not need a second suggestion.

Esau said, "Isn't he rightly named Jacob? He has deceived me these two times: He took my birthright, and now he's taken my blessing!" Then he asked, "Haven't you reserved any blessing for me?" Genesis 27:36

Granted, Esau was upset, and that is understandable. It does not give him the freedom to lie to his father. Jacob neither deceived Esau nor took the birthright away from him. Esau knew exactly what he was doing. He may have thought that he could sell the birthright because his father certainly would not give the birthright or blessing to the son who was close to his wife, but not to him. Esau could say he had miscalculated, but it was false to say he was deceived or the victim of theft.

There is another insight here. If you look at the blessing, verses 28 through 29, you will get a glimpse of what Isaac had in mind to give to Jacob - nothing. It appears that having given the birthright/blessing to the one he thought was Esau, there was nothing left for Jacob. That is exactly the dilemma in which Esau finds himself. The division between brothers, between parents and their children is horrendous. The answer to Esau's disturbing question to his father was, "No, I did not reserve any blessing for your brother and that is what is left for you now that he received your blessing."

There is an impression of God in this drama. Here a father and son are working against a mother and son. God had made it clear, and they all knew it, that Jacob would be the ruler of the family. God would allow no attempt, no matter how carefully planned, to interfere with His announced plan for His servant. God would do whatever necessary to insure that His intent was carried out in every detail.

The awareness of the extent of this tragedy, for Esau at least, began to settle in. Apparently, Isaac worked so hard at planning to give Esau everything, and Jacob nothing, that when the tables were turned, Esau was left with nothing at all. Apparently, Isaac's dislike for Jacob had no bounds whatsoever. Isaac spoke of this shocking turn of events in these terms:

Isaac answered Esau, "I have made him lord over you and have made all his relatives his servants, and I have sustained him with grain and new wine. So what can I possibly do for you, my son?" Genesis 27:37

Isaac went beyond even the animosity within his immediate family. Thinking he was blessing Esau, Isaac made all of the relatives servants of his "first-born." This had major ramifications during the time of Mordecai, centuries later.

There is good reason to believe that Esau had always believed that he would be the "first-born," that he would be ruler over his mother and brother whom he had struggled with most of his life. Suddenly he found himself Jacob's servant for life. Imagine how he would feel thinking of that.

Esau could not believe that this would not be changed. He insisted that his father do what was impossible for him to accomplish - bless him when his father had given his entire blessing to Jacob.

Esau said to his father, "Do you have only one blessing, my father? Bless me too, my father!" Then Esau wept aloud. Genesis 27:38

The results of their terrible family-dividing feud had finally come home to devastate the ones who were responsible for their perpetuation. Most any father would give a special blessing to his "first-born," but he would reserve some blessing for his other sons. The

remaining sons were not his first-born, but he loved them dearly. Isaac's family was different. He planned to give blessing and all to Esau and leave the "mama's-boy" with nothing. It all back-fired on them.

Isaac made a stab at giving his favorite son a blessing. He did not do it well. Look at what he said:

> *"Your dwelling will be away from the earth's richness, away from the dew of heaven above." Genesis 27:39*

Think about that for a minute. You wonder, how could anyone wish a thing like that on his favorite son? Isaac was trapped by his own designs. Look at verses 28 and 29. Isaac had given both "heaven's dew" and "earth's richness" to Jacob. It was impossible to give the same blessing to Esau. He could not give away what was already given. Look at this so called blessing again. As we indicated earlier, the dew was their major source for moisture for the growing of food and the nurture of the grasses eaten by their large herds. If Esau is to dwell away from the dew, then he will be void of what is necessary to provide food for his people and grasses for his animals. Life was going to be very difficult. Isaac continued saying, "your dwelling will be away from the earth's richness." Here again, the richness of the earth is a description of the ability of the ground to provide food for his family. This was especially true concerning grain. Food for both his family and his herds was always going to be in short supply. What a blessing! Isaac ended up essentially cursing the one he wanted to give the total blessing. Isaac said that Esau's tent would be in all the places where there was no richness of the earth. That is the desert and that is where Esau's descendants have lived even until the present. This land is the least productive on earth except for the Arctic areas.

One wonders if Isaac was not just trying to show Esau how futile his request really was. Notice what Isaac said in this attempt at a blessing:

> *"You will live by the sword and you will serve your brother." Genesis 27:40a*

These two "blessings" are shocking to say the least. When Isaac said, "You will live by the sword," he was saying at least two things:

1. You will be a fighter; good at warfare.
2. You will never know real peace; fighters never do.

What a tragic indictment to place on your favorite son. There was little else he could do. He had not finished. The most important part of the blessing, which Jacob received, was that he would rule over all his relatives. Without totally destroying his place in the culture, Isaac could do nothing to reverse the promise he had given to Jacob. He could only reiterate what he had said. He did it. "You will serve your brother." Some have tried to soften this by saying that Esau's serving of his brother was an honorable service. There is no grounds in the text to support that position. Esau was going to be under the control of his brother. He would never get used to this idea, but he could not change it.

The closing of the blessing of Esau, is a glimpse into the heart of Isaac. Notice what he said,

> *"But when you grow restless, you will throw his yoke from off your neck." Genesis 27:40b*

We can not say this statement was intentionally misleading, although it would be difficult to understand why it is not. When Isaac blessed Jacob, he made his brothers and family Jacob's servants. There is no hint of an ending of that arrangement. When Isaac blessed Esau, however, he specifically identified a time when they would tire of being Jacob's servants and throw off his control over their lives. This is giving with one hand and taking it back with the other. It appears that Isaac allowed his own anger to show in this final statement. Did Isaac fail to consider the consequences of this promise? Return to the closing remarks in the blessing of Jacob:

> *"May those who curse you be cursed and those who bless you be blessed." Genesis 27:29c*

It is reasonable to think that the moment that Esau "grew restless" of Jacob's rule, He would immediately come under the curse of his father. It appears that in his strong desire to free Esau from Jacob's dominance, Isaac placed his favorite son in the position of being cursed without realizing it. That is what happened and it is still in effect.

Genesis 27:41-45 - Rebekah Instructs Jacob to Flee from Esau

The events of the chapter might be construed as following immediately upon one another. That is not the case. We can not give a time sequence, but this paragraph covers a considerable amount of time. Whatever the time span involved here, the tensions in that family had to be immense.

If you read chapter 27:39 and 40 and then read 27:41, you will find a cause and effect relationship. Isaac gave Esau a questionable blessing and therefore Esau had some strong feelings about Jacob. Notice what the author said:

> *Esau held a grudge against Jacob because of the blessing his father had given to him. Genesis 27:41a*

The Hebrew text is more direct. It simply says, "Esau hated Jacob...: The word "hate" is "satam" (שָׂטַם) in the Hebrew and means "to lurk," or "to persecute." It is to hate someone so much that you will stalk their actions until you have an opportunity to do them great bodily harm.

The author illustrated the extent of this hatred by citing the following situation:

> *He said to himself, "The days of mourning for my father are near; then I will kill my brother Jacob." Genesis 27:41b*

Esau was his father's favorite. There seems to be no reason to believe that his father would not understand if Esau did harm to his brother. Would his father disown him if he killed Jacob? That would be simply conjecture, but it seems doubtful. When Esau went against his parents wishes and married **two** pagan women, it did not hurt his chances of being the one to receive the blessing as the "first-born." One possible consideration is that though his father may have allowed such a terrible thing to pass, the people in the area definitely would not allow it. All of this is information that we simply do not possess. One thing is clear, this potential murder is really premeditated.

The next verse poses some complex problems for our understanding. In Genesis 27:41b, the author indicated that Esau said these things to himself. Now, in 27:42, the author tells us that Rebekah heard about the plan. We have to ask ourselves, just how could she hear about it when Esau was talking with himself? It is possible that having

talked with himself about it, Esau also shared the information with some trusted servants, or other members of the household. We can not be sure.

Rebekah was always looking out for the best interests of her favorite son, Jacob. She knew how to get things done, even if it was not always done in the best way.

> *When Rebekah was told what her older son Esau had said, she sent for her younger son Jacob and said to him, "Your brother Esau is consoling himself with the thought of killing you. Now then, my son, do what I say: Flee at once to my brother Laban in Haran. Stay with him for a while until your brother's fury subsides." Genesis 27:42-44*

Notice how Rebekah described Esau's situation. She said he was "consoling himself with the thought of killing you." The word "consoling" is "nacham" (נָחַם) in Hebrew and means "to sigh," "to breathe strongly," "to feel deep sorrow, "to console oneself by seeking revenge."

Rebekah was willing to manipulate circumstances in order to accomplish her own goals. The root of this whole controversy is the selfish goals of Rebekah and Isaac. They have spent a whole lifetime looking after their personal agenda rather than trying to bring harmony into their household.

One might wonder what could be wrong with sending Jacob away until his brother calms down. At least the lives of both boys would be spared. You may remember that when Abraham was going to get a wife for Isaac, it was very important that the boy never leave the land of Canaan. Abraham was willing to forego the marriage rather than for his son to leave the promised land. The issues were just the same now. The idea of remaining in Canaan was crucial to Israel's retention of the land. Rebekah gave these instructions with the full knowledge that this was contrary to the will of God. That never seemed to get in the way of her selfish decisions. Rebekah was sending Jacob into a family where pagan worship was required of all who lived there. Achieving her goals - protecting Jacob and undercutting the wishes of Isaac - were much more important than protecting Jacob from exposure to pagan worship.

Rebekah had it all worked out, but there was a flaw in her plan.

> *"...When your brother is no longer angry with you and forgets what you did to him, I'll send word for you to come back from there. Why should I lose both of you in one day?" Genesis 27:45*

Think about this statement for a minute. I find it hard to believe that there would ever come a time when Esau would stop being angry with Jacob. This was a culture where people never forget a wrong that was done to them, but were to remember the wrong as long as they lived and to take an oath with their children to carry on the grudge as long as necessary. Granted, this was a dangerous situation, but her hope that this would all blow over in time was totally unrealistic. These were extreme times and hard decisions had to be made. She did not trust Jacob to make the proper decision for himself, in spite of the fact that he was a grown man.

Conclusion

Out of the everyday experiences of life, one's values begin to show through. This was true for Isaac and his family. The source of the problems can not be traced to a single event or person. When you read this passage, it is like eavesdropping on a family fight.

You feel dirty; it is like wallowing in the mud of human misuse and abuse. Imagine what this must have been like as a holy, all-knowing God was pummeled with these powerful symbols of self-righteousness, greed and sin.

The message of grace is that God loved and sought each member of the family to love and follow Him. That message of grace extends to each of us. God also observes intently the weakness of our lives and families. Moment by moment He loves us and seeks to draw us to Himself.

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 4

JACOB'S VISION AT BETHEL

GENESIS 27:46 - 28:22

1. In our best manuscripts, there are three paragraphs in Genesis 27:46 - 28:22. On the chart which follows, write a title of seven words or less for each paragraph:

27:46-28:9	
28:10-17	
28:18-22	

2. In Genesis 27:46-28:8, the author describes Isaac's sending Jacob to Haran.
   a. Look at the experience of Rebekah, both in this paragraph and in chapter 27. How would you describe her spiritual condition?
   b. Study 27:46 carefully. What information can you glean from Rebekah's statement? What did Rebekah fail to mention?
   c. Think carefully about the meeting of Jacob and Isaac, apparently the first since Jacob's deception of his father, Isaac.
      (1). Put yourself in Isaac's position.
      (a). How would you feel?
      (b). How would you feel about Jacob?
      (c). How would you feel about Rebekah?
      (d). What would be going through your mind?
      (2). Put yourself in the place of Jacob.
      (a). What would you be thinking?
      (b). What would you think about Isaac?
      (c). What would you think about Rebekah?
      (d). What would be going through your mind?
      (3). Put yourself in Rebekah's position.
      (a). What would you be thinking?
      (b). What would you think about your husband, Isaac?
      (c). What would you think about Esau?
      (d). What would worry you the most?
   d. In Genesis 28:3, 4, Isaac used a different name for God - "God Almighty" when he blessed Jacob. What is the significance of this change?
      (1). What is the content of Isaac's blessing upon Jacob?
      (2). Compare this blessing, Genesis 28:3, 4, with the blessing given to Jacob in 27:27 - 29.
      (a). In what ways are the blessings similar?
      (b). In what ways are the blessings dissimilar?
      (3). In 28:4, Isaac speaks to Jacob about living in the land as an alien. What is the significance of this statement?

e. In Genesis 28:6-9, there is a telling contrast between Esau and Jacob. Study these verses carefully.
   (1). What contrasts, between Jacob and Esau, does the author draw?
   (2). What does this information tell you?
   (3). In Genesis 28:9, the author gives some information about the identity of Esau's third wife.
      (a). What is the importance of the author's emphasis upon the fact that this is the **third** wife?
      (b). The author carefully describes the genealogy of the third wife. Why is this important?
   (4). What impact does the origin of the wives of Jacob and Esau have upon their position in terms of God's covenant with Abraham and Isaac?

3. In Genesis 28:10 - 17, the author describes Jacob's dream at Bethel.
   a. In 28:13, the author quoted God's message to Jacob in the dream.
      (1). God identifies Himself by two different names - "LORD" and "God." Why would this be necessary?
      (2). Why was it necessary to preface God's message to Jacob by calling Him, "the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac?
   b. In Genesis 28:13b-15, God makes some very specific promises to Jacob.
      (1). What did God promise?
      (2). What was the significance of these promises?
   c. In 28:16, 17, the author described Jacob's response to God's promises.
      (1). How did Jacob respond?
      (2). What emotions can you identify in the text?
      (3). Put yourself in the place of Jacob.
         (a). How would you feel?
         (b). How would you respond?
         (c). Why would you respond that way?

4. In 28:18 - 22, the author describes Jacob's covenant with God.
   a. In 28:18, Jacob took his stone pillow and stood it up as a pillar.
      (1). What is a pillar? (check in a Bible dictionary)
      (2). Why did Jacob have to stand it up?
      (3). Why did he pour oil on the pillar?
      (4). What did this pouring of oil mean?
   b. In 28:19, Jacob changed the name of the place from "Luz" to "Bethel".
      (1). Why would he change the name?
      (2). What is the difference between "Luz" and Bethel? (hint - check the meaning of both names in a Bible Dictionary.)
   c. In Genesis 28:20-22. Jacob continued his response to God's generous promises.
      (1). In these three verses, Jacob identifies a covenant between God and himself.
         (a). What is God's part in this covenant?
         (b). What is Jacob's part in this covenant?
      (2). What is the significance of the "tenth" as described in verse 22?
         (a). What was Jacob saying?

(b). What did he mean by these words?

5. Review this whole passage again.
   a. What does God's offer to Jacob say about your life?
   b. What does God's offer say About our relationship with God?
   c. What does Jacob's response say about our relationship with God?
   d. What changes in your life does this passage suggest to you?

LESSON 4: GENESIS 27:46 - 28:22

JACOB'S VISION AT BETHEL

Introduction

There are three paragraphs in our best documents of this passage. They are as follows:

27:46-28:9	Isaac Sent Jacob to Paddan Aram
28:10-17	Jacob's Vision at Bethel
28:18-22	Jacob Covenants with God

Genesis 27:46-28:9 - Isaac Sent Jacob to Paddan Aram

Rebekah was not only controlling her son and the situation, she also thought that the idea of falsifying and manipulating the truth was acceptable if it met her needs. She could have been stoned for all the things that she did that were unsupportive of her husband. One wonders why Isaac did not realize that she was distorting the truth before this time.

> *Then Rebekah said to Isaac, "I'm disgusted with living because of these Hittite women. If Jacob takes a wife from among the women of this land, from Hittite like these, my life will not be worth living." Genesis 27:46*

Rebekah is mentioned only 30 times in the entire book of Genesis, and only in Romans 9:10 in the New Testament. In none of these passages is there any direct indication that she had become a worshipper of God. It is reasonable to assume that she did take part because it was what her husband believed and practiced, but there is no reason to believe that it meant anything more than that. This causes me to wonder what her problem was with the Hittite women. We know that there had been bad blood between Jews and Hittites for decades. It is highly possible that these two Hittite wives were unwilling to take a subservient place to their mother-in-law as Jewish wives would be required to do. Beyond this, the Scriptures give us no further information.

Rebecca's previous actions and motives cause us to wonder if this, though true, was merely a guise to get Isaac to go along with one more of her schemes. One must question her motives simply because she did not mention the fact that Jacob's life was in danger to Isaac. That would be highly unlikely if she were properly motivated. Notice what Rebekah said in Genesis 27:46, as previously quoted. This is an interesting statement. If you look carefully, you will see that she included four specific statements in the sentence:

1. Her fear, ostensibly, was that Jacob would take a Hittite wife.
2. By saying," from Hittite women like these," she was making a disparaging remark about Esau's wives.
3. She said Jacob's marriage to such a woman would remove meaning/value from her life. That is strange. Though we do not approve of it, women in that day felt that being a good wife and bearing children were all the meaning a woman could find

in life. In view of this, one must wonder if this was not additional information to support the idea that she was looking for reasons to get Isaac to send Jacob safely away.

4. It is clear that she bitterly despised the Hittite women, the two wives of Esau. The Hittites were considered crude, people with very low moral standards and brutish. It is easy to assume that these women did not gracefully give deference to Rebekah because Hittites looked down on Jews.

One might wonder why Rebekah didn't just tell Jacob to run and forget about trying to justify it to Isaac and the family. She wanted Jacob to return. This would not be possible if he just ran away. Again, if Jacob fled, it would give Esau freedom to chase him. Esau was a man of the outdoors. He could easily catch Jacob. If, however, Jacob was sent by Isaac, then there was no valid reason for Esau to give chase.

Think about Isaac's reaction to Rebekah's demand:

So Isaac called for Jacob and blessed him and commanded him: "Do not marry a Canaanite woman." Genesis 28:1

Notice that the text tells us nothing about a confrontation between Isaac and Jacob concerning the deception which he worked against his father. It is reasonable to assume that there was a noisy, unfortunate confrontation, over this episode, in which both father and son said some things that they later regretted having voiced.

Imagine how charged the air must have been when Jacob came to receive his father's second blessing and be sent off to Paddan Aram. Think of the feelings Isaac must have had as he placed his hands on Jacob's head again. I can imagine that a burst of sarcasm must have raced through his mind wishing to ask if this was really Jacob or not. This was the son who destroyed Isaac's intention to give the blessing to Esau in spite of what Jehovah had said to Rebekah.

Look at the charge Isaac gave to Jacob:

"Do not marry a Canaanite woman. Go at once to Paddan Aram, to the house of your mother's father Bethuel. Take a wife for yourself there, from among the daughters of Laban, your mother's brother." Genesis 28:1b, 2

We cannot imagine a father instructing his son to marry his first cousin. It would be illegal in our culture and would result in children with tragic physical and mental handicaps. That was not true in that day. Indeed, they really preferred that their children marry a relative because they knew that they could trust them.

Today, many Arab fathers arrange weddings for their daughters with a first or second cousin. These unions, however, produce children who have debilitating foot and eye problems. The same would be true in our culture under similar circumstances.

Isaac must have exercised monumental self-control as he pronounced a blessing upon Jacob.

"May God Almighty (El Shaddai) bless you and make you fruitful and increase your numbers until you become a community of peoples. May he give you and your descendants the blessing of Abraham, so that you may take possession of the land where you now live as an alien, the land God gave to Abraham." Genesis 28:3, 4

Observe that Isaac began his blessing with the use of the name El-shaddai. This is a compound name for God.

"El" is (אֵל) in the Hebrew language. It means "Almighty." It places a serious emphasis on the power of God.

"shaddai" is (שַׁדַּי) in the Hebrew. It means "burly," "powerful," "impregnable," "a spoiler."

We should probably translate this compound name as "the Almighty Powerful God." As happened so often, the Hebrew language achieved emphasis by simple repetition.

It appears that Isaac was convinced that Jacob was going to need all the help he could get on this journey.

If you look closely, this was really a very generous blessing that Isaac bestowed upon this son with whom he was hardly on speaking terms. This was true, in part, because a man's heritage was of ultimate importance to him. God had promised that through Isaac and his heritage there would be several nations of people. God would be with them and give them the land of Canaan where they now lived as aliens.

Isaac began his blessing of Jacob with these words:

"May God Almighty (El Shaddai) bless you and make you fruitful." Genesis 28:3a

The word "bless" is "barak" or (בָּרַךְ) in Hebrew. It literally means "to kneel." It can be used to describe a person blessing God or God blessing people. It is an act of adoration of God when applied to people. It is an act of loving generosity when applied to God. Isaac was urging God to show great love and generosity to this son who was not only his heir, but also the vessel through whom God's blessing of Abraham was to be fulfilled.

Isaac continued:

"... and make you fruitful..." Genesis 28:3b

The word "fruitful" is "parah" or (פָּרָה) in Hebrew. This word literally means to "bear figs." A fig tree has an abundant harvest on its branches. It is to grow or bring forth a large harvest. It is not surprising that this was a part of Isaac's blessing. His parents had great difficulty in conceiving a child. Indeed it was not until Abraham was 100 and Sarah was 90 that Isaac was born. Rebekah had the same difficulty bearing children. Isaac was saying that he wanted his son to be able to avoid the problems experienced by his parents and grandparents.

Isaac again continued:

"... and increase your numbers until you become a community of peoples." Genesis 28:3c

The Hebrew text is a bit more graphic. It says, "may you be an army of nations." The gift of a large family was considered a very great blessing. Isaac was blessing Jacob with something that he himself never had. Again, this might be surprising given that Isaac was angry with Jacob. We can maintain perspective by remembering that God was going to keep the covenant with Abraham though this son. This made it possible for Isaac to control his anger and bless his son.

In verse four, Isaac specifically identifies the blessing of Abraham with Jacob.

"May he give you and your descendants the blessing of Abraham, so that you may take possession of the land where you now live as an alien, the land God gave to Abraham." Genesis 28:4

It was a great honor for Jacob to be the son of Isaac and grandson of Abraham. It was an even greater honor to be the one through whom God fulfilled His promise to give Abraham's seed the land of Canaan.

Notice the irony in this verse. Isaac speaks of the Promised land in two different ways:

- The land where you now live as an alien. - The word translated "alien" is "maguwr", (מָגוּר) in Hebrew. It literally means "to turn aside," "to be a sojourner," "one who lives in fear," "to be a pilgrim," "a temporary abode."
- The land God gave to Abraham. Isaac expresses great faith as he deals with the "now and the not yet." He knew Jacob lived as a sojourner in the land and would for some time. He was just as convinced that God would one day keep His promise to Abraham through Jacob. Then the land of sojourner would become his land. What a statement of faith!

There is a custom in the text that could easily escape our notice. This is how the author describes it:

*Then Isaac **sent Jacob on his way** , and he went to Paddan Aram, to Laban son of Bethuel the Aramean, the brother of Rebekah, who was the mother of Jacob and Esau. 28:5*

The fact that Isaac "sent Jacob on his way" literally saved Jacob's life. If Jacob had fled, Esau could have chased after him and killed him. Because Isaac "sent Jacob on his way," Esau could do Jacob no harm.

In the passage just quoted, notice how Laban is identified:

- "Laban son of Bethuel the Aramean"
- "Laban, the brother of Rebekah"

This was necessary so that there would be no doubt about the fact that Laban and Rebekah were brother and sister. This makes it clear that Jacob was going to be with family.

The spotlight now shifts to Esau. Throughout this whole experience, Esau has been reacting, not acting.

Now Esau learned that Isaac had blessed Jacob and had sent him to Paddan Aram to take a wife from there, and that when he blessed him he commanded him, "Do not marry a Canaanite woman," and that Jacob had obeyed his father and mother and had gone to Paddan Aram. Genesis 28:6, 7

Jacob and Esau differed in a variety of ways. This passage shows that Esau was as angry at his father Isaac as he was at Jacob. Isaac told Jacob what to do and Jacob did it. That was not always the way Esau responded to his parents desires.

The author gave us an insight into Esau's thinking.

Esau then realized how displeasing the Canaanite women were to his father Isaac; so he went to Ishmael and married Mahalath, the sister of Nebaioth and daughter of Ishmael son of Abraham, in addition to the wives he already had. Genesis 28:8, 9

At first glance, this seems to be simply disobedience or a difference of views between a grown man and his parents. Read the verse again. It is much more than that.

There was a serious division in the family of Abraham, between the descendants of Isaac and those of Ishmael. The family of Abraham was forbidden to intermarry with the pagan peoples, Hittites, etc., that inhabited the land of promise. To avoid inter-family feuds, Abraham gave Ishmael and the other children, who were not born of Sarah, presents and sent them off to the east toward the desert. The very worst thing a child of Abraham could do would be to have any dealings with the pagan peoples who resided in the land. Esau had married two of these pagan women. Such marriages inhibited him from the worship of God. This was disobedience both to his parents and to God.

Esau already had two wives. The men of that time were not forbidden to have more than one wife, but it was not usually done unless there was no child born of the first wife.

The text tells us that Esau's third wife was named Mahalath and that she was the daughter of Ishmael. Genesis 36:3 speaks of this third wife in this way:

> *Also Basemath (which is Mahalath) daughter of Ishmael and sister of Nebaioth. Genesis 36:3*

We know that these people were shepherds in the northwestern part of the desert which is to the east of the Dead Sea. It is highly possible that they were related to the later Nebataens who worshipped the sun and moon and a whole pantheon of other deities.

This highlights the fact that Esau married a wife from Ishmael's family. The promises of God could not be kept if the member of Isaac's family were married to a descendent of Ishmael. God had said that the promises would not be realized through Ishmael or his descendants. Whatever else it involves, this is disobedience to God's command.

These verses identify more than disobedience. The author was pointing out that when Esau discovered just how much the foreign wives hurt his father and mother, he deliberately went and married a third pagan wife who was a descendant of his father's worst enemy. It is reasonable to assume that he was looking for a way to hurt his father as deeply as possible. This is far worse than disobedience.

Genesis 28:6-9 form a very brief, but important parenthesis in the story of Jacob. One must ask why the author interjects this divergent material at this point. There are at least two reasons:

- Jacob is the youngest son and yet he is the one who received Isaac's blessing, the one through whom God would fulfill His promise to Abraham. This brief parenthesis points out that part of the reason can be found in the difference between the two men. Neither of them were saints, but Jacob started out to take a wife as he was instructed. Esau, on the other hand, discovered how much his actions hurt his father and deliberately did it again knowing how painful it was for Isaac.
- The reception of God's promise to give the descendants the land of Canaan, was the most important priority in Isaac's family. By obeying Isaac's command, Jacob placed himself in the position where God's promise could be fulfilled in his life. Esau, on the other hand, deliberately took a third wife knowing that it would make it impossible for the promise of God to be fulfilled through him. It was more important for Esau to spite his father than to be in a position where God could work through him to bless his family.

It is not accidental that this parenthesis on the disobedience and abuse of Esau is placed between the obedience of wayward Jacob to the command to his father and his covenant with God on the other .

Genesis 28:10 - 17 - Jacob Had a Dream at Bethel

Observe that in 28:5, it says that Jacob went to Paddan Aram. In 28:10, however, it says "Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Haran." It sounds as though Jacob set out twice. We must remember that the author was not trying to give a chronological blow by blow account of the events. The author said Jacob started out, then gave a brief contrast between Jacob and Esau, and then picked up the story of Jacob again.

One might wonder why Jacob started out for Paddan Aram in verse five, while he left for Haran in verse ten. This is not a picture of two different places. Paddan Aram is in the area of Haran.

Jacob set out on his trip to Haran but did not get far by sundown.

> *When he reached a certain place, he stopped for the night because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones there, he put it under his head and lay down to sleep. Genesis 28:11*

This seems strange to us. When traveling, we would seldom stop for the night just because the sun had set. Nights were cold, dark and dangerous. He also had to deal with the fact that desert travel was physically draining. To travel from daylight until dark was almost too much for one day.

When Jacob fell asleep, he had a dream.

> *He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, the angels of God were descending on it. Genesis 28:12*

The author gave this information as a setting for what happened in the dream. We must remember that God often spoke to the prophets and the patriarchs of Israel through their dreams.

> *There above it stood the Lord (Jehovah) and he said, "I am the Lord (Jehovah) the God (Elohim) of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac." Genesis 28:13a*

These words do more than identify deity. It also describes some important information about God. Notice the four statements about Himself that God makes at this time:

- I am the Lord. The word "Lord" is (יהוה) or "Jehovah" in the Hebrew language. This name for God stresses the fact that He is eternal. If you look at how the name is used throughout the Old Testament, you will see that it is used in situations where legal matters and judgment is involved.
- "The God" - The word "God" is "Elohim" or (אֱלֹהִים) in Hebrew. It is the name for deity that emphasizes His majesty. This name is used particularly in situations which stress the mercy of God. This was important to Jacob. He knew about the God who judges; Jacob had disobeyed before. In the turmoil of this recent experience he had to be reminded that God would show mercy even in the midst of judgment. He needed to know that this merciful God could be depended upon.

- The God of Abraham - This was God's way of identifying Himself as the majestic God of mercy who was faithful to Abraham. He was saying to Jacob, "you can count on me because I am characterized by mercy and have shown myself faithful to Abraham."
- Jacob knew God had brought Abraham safely out of Ur and watched over him through the dangerous thousand mile trip around the Fertile Crescent to the land of Canaan. God promised to bring Abraham to the land and He did. God promised to give Abraham a son, and He did.
- The God of Isaac - Jacob was even more familiar with the life of his father, Isaac. He certainly knew the circumstances surrounding Isaac's birth. He would surely have been told about Abraham's preparation to sacrifice his only son. The God of mercy who had been faithful to his father, Isaac, was now speaking to Jacob.

These descriptions of God cause one to wonder just why God could not have identified Himself as deity and left it at that. The message to Jacob which followed, explains the lengthy, intricate description. God said,

> *I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you. Genesis 28:13b-15*

In these words, God promised Jacob seven specific things:

1. **"I will give you the land."** This was an amazing promise. Jacob was running for his life. He had no property and no one to help protect him in travel. The amazing thing was that with the way he had treated others, it is a wonder God would give him anything. The fact that God would give the land to him and his descendants means that the land will continue to belong to the family.
2. **"Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south."** Genesis 28:14a
   This is quite a promise to Jacob. He didn't even have a wife. He came from a family where one generation after another had difficulty conceiving children. Spreading out suggests a large expansion of the family. This was a favorite way to describe a large family. It takes a God who fits the previous description to keep such a promise.
3. **"All people on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring."** This had to seem strange to Jacob. His brother wanted to kill him. If neighboring families heard about it, they might join Esau. Now, God said all people on earth would be blessed through Jacob and this would be continued through his offspring, which he does not have. This too takes real faith. It was through one of his offspring, Jesus Christ, that people of every age and place were offered forgiveness of their sins and eternal life.
4. **"I am with you"** - People face hardships in life. God's presence makes all the difference. When God said, "I am with you," to His people, it meant more than a

physical presence. God sent the pillar of cloud and fire to remind Israel that He was their guide and He would protect them from every danger. The Shekinah Glory in the tabernacle, was a reminder that God was their God. He would hear their prayer and forgive their evil ways.

5. **"I will watch over you"** - These words would raise many images in the Hebrew mind. "Watching over" is the task of the shepherd. It is what the eagle does as she teaches her young to fly. "Watching over" is the constant of a mother as she cares for her first-born. It suggests intense personal care. It also suggests the teaching of those who are dependent upon us.
6. **"I will bring you back to the land"** - Jacob was getting ready to leave the Promised Land. This is something he would do everything possible to avoid. He was fleeing because his life was in danger. Now, in the midst of Jacob's awkward, dangerous situation, God promised to bring him back to the land. There is a subtle hint here of another promise. If Jacob is going to return to this land, then God is also saying that Jacob would escape Esau.
7. **"I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."** - This talks about the way God views His promises. Jesus did not make a promise and then forget about us until He is reminded of the promise He made. When God covenants to do something for us, He will not leave us; will not rest until the promise has been fulfilled.

Put yourself in Jacob's shoes. You are running away because your brother has decided to kill you. Now without any pleading; without even deserving it, God volunteers to bless you in these magnificent ways. What a generous God Jacob discovered!

Though these things took place in his sleep, Jacob apparently remembered what happened.

> *When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it." Genesis 28:16*

It was a shock to Jacob to realize that God was there. It looked like a place where he could lie down and sleep. He discovered, however, that along with sleep and rest, he had come into God's very presence. This was an awesome thought and Jacob took full cognizance of it. One might wonder how a dream would convince Jacob that God was present. Jacob does not answer that question. Jacob had not been a model of obedience to God. For God to bless him as He did, in spite of Jacob's wandering ways, would certainly convince him of God's mercy. The author recorded the response of Jacob in these words:

> *He was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God (Elohim); this is the gate of heaven." Genesis 28:17*

Jacob thought of this place as "awesome." The Hebrew word for "awesome" is (יָרֵא) and means "to fear." From this concept, they developed the idea of reverence and worship. It is "to hold in dread," "awe." This place was not awesome, reverential or worshipful because it was a designated place. It was awesome because God was there. It was clear to Jacob that only God, Elohim, the God of Mercy, could have made the promises that were made to him.

Notice that Jacob used poetic parallelism in this verse. "Poetic parallelism" is a tool of writing in which the author writes two phrases that are similar, but not identical. The second always adds a slightly different piece of information and at the same time emphasizes the point by repetition.

We must now ask ourselves the question, What is the difference between "the house of God" and "the gate of heaven." The phrase "house of God" is literally "the abode (dwelling place) of God." It is a place set aside for the prayer of God's people in their time of need. Note that Jacob used the name "Elohim" to identify God. This is appropriate because it is the name for God that stresses His mercy. The dwelling place of God is the place where human beings can fulfill one of their divine purposes - the worship of God (standing in awe of the majesty of God). It is a place where the holiness of God may be celebrated.

On the other hand, the phrase "the gate of heaven" is to some extent a different entity, but not greatly so. There is great debate as to whether the Jewish rabbi's believed in heaven in the way that Christians do. There is probably some difference, but there is also probably more kinship between the two ideas than some Christians allow. First, it is important to realize that the Jewish mind does not think of heaven as a physical place so much as it is a spiritual reality. Indeed, some Jewish theologians believe that the heavenly temple was placed directly in front of the physical temple on the temple mount in Jerusalem. This is not a universal belief among Jewish theologians.

It is interesting that some Jewish teachers believe that these two phrases were antiphonal. They believe that Jacob made the first statement - "This is the house of God" and that God made the second statement, "This is the gate of heaven." Such a position would suggest some information concerning the intent of the passage. If this is true, then Jacob was talking about a place where God could be approached in worship and awe. The statement of God, on the other hand, would suggest that the location in which this dream took place was a place where God's people could share intimately in the presence of God. They would be thinking that the place of this dream, whether Bethel or Jerusalem, would be the gate through which our prayers would come to God seeking help. The earthly temple would be the divine place of residence while the "gate of heaven" would be the means whereby God expresses awareness of the needs we express in prayer.

Genesis 28:18 - 22 - Jacob Covenants with God at Bethel

There is no doubt that Jacob was deeply impressed by the events of that morning. This had to be a bit frightening for him.

> *Early the next morning Jacob took the stone he had placed under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on top of it. Genesis 28:18*

There is a difference between a pillar and an altar. A pillar is composed of one stone, while an altar is composed of many. An altar was made for the purpose of sacrifice, but a pillar was set up for an oblation. The pouring of oil on top of this stone suggests that Jacob was setting this stone, this place apart as holy unto the Lord. How could Jacob set a place apart as holy to God when he did not own the land? Jacob did not own the land, but God had promised that it would one day be his. Jacob acted in faith upon that promise and set this place apart as a uniquely holy place to God.

Names, for Israel, were a way of associating the significance of places and persons. This is the reason that Abram's name was changed to Abraham and Jacob's name was later changed to Israel. Notice how Jacob dealt with that issue in this instance.

He called that place Bethel, though the city used to be called Luz. Genesis 28:19

The name "Luz" literally means "almond tree." That was a nice enough name for a city. It would not do, however, when such momentous events had taken place in that locality. To mark the place, and honor the event, Jacob renamed the place "Bethel", "House of God."

Jacob did a second thing to celebrate the event which had taken place here. It came in the form of a response to the promise of God.

*Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "**If** God (Elohim) will be with me and will watch over me on this journey I am taking and will give me food to eat and clothes to wear so that I return safely to my father's house, **then** the Lord (Jehovah) will be my God (Elohim)." Genesis 28:20, 21*

This covenant/promise, which Jacob made, is an "If... then" clause. Jacob was setting out the boundaries of an agreement. The "if" part related to God. The "then" part related to Jacob. Notice that the "if" part deals only with promises that God had already made. Jacob did not make any additional conditions to the agreement. Jacob identified five conditions that God had promised to him:

1. If God will be with me
2. If God will watch over me
3. If God will give me food
4. If God will give me clothing
5. If God will return me to my father's house

It is clear that Jacob was not bargaining with God. He was simply responding to an offer that God had already proposed. Jacob was simply formalizing the offer that God made and then responding to it. In effect, Jacob was saying, if God will do all these things for me, then this is what I am prepared to do in response. Jacob began with a promise and followed the promise with two evidences of his sincerity. This was Jacob's response:

1. **The promise** - The Lord will be my God. He was saying that the Lord, (Jehovah, the eternal God of Justice) will be my God, (Elohim, the majestic God of Mercy.) Jacob promised that he would view Jehovah as the deity to be worshipped. There could be nothing less.
2. **The evidence** - Jacob followed this vow with two evidences of his sincerity.

This stone that I have set up as a pillar will be God's house, and of all that you give me I will give you a tenth." Genesis 28:22

If Jehovah was to be Jacob's God, then there had to be a place of worship. Jacob identified this place as the place of worship. The stone pillar was a symbol both of the covenant that was made here and the place of worship that it also identified. The promise of "the tenth" was a symbol of gratitude. When Abraham returned from recapturing Lot, he gave a tenth of the bounty to Melchizadek. It was not a requirement. It was Abraham's way of expressing gratitude for what God had done. It is exactly the same in this instance.

Because Jacob said that this pillar shall be the house of God, many scholars believe that the place where this happened was Jerusalem and not Bethel. It is possible, but not probable.

Conclusion

The focal point of this chapter centers in the vision as recorded in 28:10 - 17. The vision was a picture of God as merciful and just. This picture of God stresses just how faithful He had been to those who put their trust in Him. Observe that when Jacob discovered this picture of God, he responded in deep commitment and reverence. That is the way God is. It is the way God's people respond.

As we have repeated often in this study, this is not just history, it is a spiritual history in which historical facts and stories are given in order to convey deep spiritual truth. God, in this encounter, was gracious to forgive and restore. In view of God's changelessness, it is important for us to ask some serious questions:

- How will I express my gratitude?
- How will I maintain that forgiven, restored relationship?

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 5

LABAN TRICKS JACOB TO MARRY LEAH

GENESIS 29:1 - 35

1. In our best manuscripts there are four paragraphs in Genesis chapter 29. Read each paragraph carefully. On the table below, give each paragraph a title of seven words or less.

29:1-12	
29:13-20	
29:21-30	
29:31-35	

2. In Genesis 29:1-12, the author told of Jacob's arrival in the area of Haran.
   a. In Genesis 29:2, 3, the author described the use of a large stone used to cover the mouth of the well. What might be the purpose of this stone?
   b. Put yourself in the place of Jacob. How would you feel when you saw the daughter of your uncle Laban?
   c. In Genesis 29:7, Jacob argued with the shepherds, who were at the well. What was this argument about? What does Jacob want them to do? Why?
   d. In Genesis 29:8, the shepherds claim that they can't water their sheep until all the flocks have arrived. What difference could that make?
   e. In Genesis 29:9, 10, the author stresses the fact that Jacob rolled the stone aside. What does this tell you?
   f. In 29:11, Jacob kissed Rachel and began to weep. If you were Rachel, what would you think? If you were one of the shepherds at the well, what would you think?

3. In Genesis 29:13-20, Jacob began his long stay with Laban.
   a. In Genesis 29:13, the author tells us that Laban "hurried" to the well to meet Jacob. Why would he do this?
   b. In Genesis 29:13, Laban embraced Jacob and kissed him. What would cause him to do this?
   c. In Genesis 29:14, 15, Laban asked Jacob what his wages should be. That would never happen here. Why would Laban do such an outrageous thing?
   d. Why did Laban wait a month before making this offer?
   e. In Genesis 29:16, 17, the author described Laban's daughters. In view of this statement, how would you describe these two women?
   f. In Genesis 29:18, Jacob loved Rachel and volunteered to work seven years to win her hand in marriage. Evaluate how generous an offer Jacob made.
   g. Read 29:19 very carefully. Why would Laban make such a statement?
   h. Read Genesis 29:20 again. Put yourself in Jacob's position. How would you feel?

4. In Genesis 29:21-30, the author describes Jacob's weddings with Leah and Rachel.
   a. In Genesis 29:21, 22, Jacob asked Laban to set up the wedding. Why would Jacob do this?
      (1). Why would Laban bring all the people together?
      (2). Why was it important for them to have a feast?
   b. In Genesis 29:23, it appears that Laban is the one who did wrong in this experience.
      (1). Is this an accurate perception?
      (2). In Genesis 29:23, it appears that Laban totally deceived Jacob. Is there any possibility that Jacob was not deceived? Please explain.
   c. Read Genesis 29:24 again carefully. What does this verse tell you?
   d. In Genesis 29:25, Jacob complained bitterly that he had been deceived. Was Jacob as shocked as he appeared to be? Explain.
   e. In view of Genesis 29:26, was Laban totally honest with Jacob during the negotiations? Explain.
   f. Study the exchange between Jacob and Laban as recorded in Genesis 29:27, 28. If you were Jacob, how would you feel?
   g. Read Genesis 29:30 again. Record each piece of information you discover there. What did you learn?

5. In Genesis 29:31-35, the author described the birth of Leah's four sons.
   a. In Genesis 29:31, the author described the family situation. Look carefully at this verse. Write down everything that you discover.
   b. In Genesis 29:32, Leah identified the reason she had a boy and why she named him "Reuben."
      (1). Study this explanation carefully. What did you learn?
      (2). If you were Rachel, how would you feel at this point?
   c. In Genesis 29:33, a second baby was born to Leah.
      (1). Who named the baby? Why?
      (2). Why was this baby given this name?
      (3). If you were Rachel, how would you feel now?
   d. In Genesis 29:34, a third son was born to Leah.
      (1). Who named this baby? Why?
      (2). Why was the baby given this name?
      (3). From this verse, what did Leah know about God?
      (4). If you were Rachel, how would you feel now?
   e. In Genesis 29:35, a fourth son was born to Leah.
      (1). Who named this baby? What does this tell you?
      (2). Why was this baby called "Judah?"
      (3). If you were Rachel, how would you feel now?
   f. Study again the names given these four boys and why these names were given.
      (1). How did the reasons change between the first and fourth baby?
      (2). What does this tell you?

6. Study the names of God that are used in this chapter.
   a. What names were used?

b. Where in the chapter are these names found?
c. What does this tell you?

7. In view of your study of chapter 29, what did you learn which will strengthen your spiritual walk?

LESSON 5: GENESIS 29:1 - 35

LABAN TRICKS JACOB INTO MARRYING LEAH

Introduction

In our best manuscripts there are four paragraphs in Genesis chapter 29. A summary of their content is as follows:

29:1-12	Jacob Meets Rachel at the Well
29:13-20	Jacob Serves Laban Seven Years for Rachel
29:21-30	Laban Deceives Jacob
29:31-35	Leah Bears Four Sons

Genesis 29:1-12 - Jacob Meets Rachel at the Well

There is a bit of a paradox in chapters 28 and 29. Chapter 28 represents the high point, so far, in Jacob's spiritual life. Notice that Jacob left the land of Canaan immediately following this astonishing spiritual experience. He had to know, as his father knew, that God had made a covenant to give the entire land of Canaan to the seed of Abraham. Isaac knew he was not to leave the land for any reason. Jacob had to know this. Nevertheless, at the peak of his spiritual relationship with God, Jacob had to leave the land to go to his mother's brother, Laban. This was a land of idol worship.

This was not an isolated choice for Jacob. He was going to stay with Laban because his parents told him to; because he had deceived his father and took away his brother's blessing. His life was in jeopardy. It is not surprising that God would minister to a man like Jacob, even in the midst of his scheming and selfish manipulating actions. In one verse, the author covered the events of a 500 mile journey. It would take about two months to make such a journey.

There is a picture of local inventiveness in this paragraph.

> *There he saw a well in the field, with three flocks of sheep lying near it because the flocks were watered from that well. The stone over the mouth of the well was large. When all the flocks were gathered there, the shepherds would roll the stone away from the well's mouth and water the sheep. They would return the stone to its place over the mouth of the well. Genesis 29:2, 3*

Mutual dependence was a key to their survival. Water was a precious commodity for the people in this culture. A huge stone accomplished two things:

- It kept dirt and other things from blowing into the well.
- It kept strangers from taking water from their meager supply.

The hospitality of the east is evident in verse four.

> *Jacob asked the shepherds, "My brothers, where are you from?" "We're from Haran," they replied. He said to them. "Do you know Laban, Nahor's grandson?"*

"Yes, we know him," they answered. Jacob asked them, "Is he well?" "Yes he is," they said, "and here comes his daughter Rachel with the sheep." Genesis 29:4-6

It was proper for people to inquire as to the well-being of a person they met along the way. Only then could they proceed with the inquiry they wished to make. Note that Jacob called these shepherds "brothers." They were men, but not necessarily members of Jacob's family. There was an additional piece of information at the end of the shepherds' response - his daughter Rachel is coming.

Jacob now knows that he has accomplished his goal, he has found his mother's family. The fact that Laban's daughter was tending the flock gives us a **possible** clue about the family. This could suggest that Laban had no sons, but it is not conclusive. We will say more about this later.

There is no explanation for the apparent situation in verse seven:

"Look," he said, "the sun is still high; it is not time for the flocks to be gathered. Water the sheep and take them back to the pasture." Genesis 29:7

Though Jacob was not from this area, he seems to have taken over and issued directions as though these were his shepherds. The question arises, Why would he do that? We do not know. The following verse is helpful, however:

"We can't," they replied, " until all the flocks are gathered and the stone has been rolled away from the mouth of the well. Then we will water the sheep." Genesis 29:8

Whatever it was that caused Jacob to instruct the shepherds, they did not follow his instructions. If Jacob had any authority over them, the shepherds would have been taking great risks to refuse his instructions.

Verse nine seems to interrupt the story:

While he was still talking with them, Rachel came with her father's sheep, for she was a shepherdess. When Jacob saw Rachel daughter of Laban, his mother's brother, and Laban's sheep, he went over and rolled the stone away from the mouth of the well and watered his uncle's sheep. Genesis 29:9, 10

Was Jacob traveling all alone? We usually think of it in these terms. In Genesis 29:2, the author says that the stone was "great." If Jacob was alone, then he possessed unusual strength to move the stone by himself. Because of the contrast between Jacob and Esau, we think of Jacob as weak. This picture presents a different view. It appears that Jacob did move the stone all by himself.

Verse eleven startles some people.

Then Jacob kissed Rachel and began to weep aloud. Genesis 29:11

The kiss which Jacob gave Rachel, had an entirely different meaning for them than it does for us. A kiss was a way to show that there were harmony and forgiveness between these two people. Jacob was not being forward or inappropriate with Rachel. Despite the symbolic meaning of the kiss, Jacob had to quickly identify himself as family. If he did not, he would be considered forward and inappropriate in his treatment of his cousin, Rachel.

Though the text does not explain the reason for this emotion, there may have been several reasons for Jacob's weeping. He may have wondered if he could reach the safety of

his family in Haran before Esau caught him. He may have been overjoyed that he had found the family in this desert area. These seem to be the most plausible possibilities.

Verse twelve adds some information in this regard:

> *He had told Rachel that he was a relative of her father and a son of Rebekah. So she ran and told her father. Genesis 29:12*

Had Jacob not done this, he would have upset Rachel and the nearby shepherds would probably have done him harm. We must remember that his dress would have told them that he was from a different area than their own. The prohibitions against touching a woman were strictly observed.

The discovery of a relative from far-off Canaan was great news for Rachel. We must remember that travel and communication were much rarer and primitive than it is today. The visit of a family member was a very rare and wonderful experience. This was particularly true when the relative was a woman. When a woman married, she became a part of her husband's family. Her contacts with her parents and siblings were rare at best.

Genesis 29:13-20 - Jacob Served Laban Seven Years for Rachel

When Rachel discovered that Jacob was her cousin, she changed the way she dealt with this stranger. Notice what the author wrote:

> *When Laban heard the news about Jacob, his sister's son, he hurried to meet him. He embraced him and kissed him and brought him to his home. In Laban's home, Jacob told him all these things. Then Laban said to him, "You are my own flesh and blood." Genesis 29:13, 14a*

Notice that the emphasis in the response of Laban and his family was upon immediacy. Rachel **ran** to tell her father. When Laban learned of Jacob's coming, he **hurried** to meet him. This was part of their code of hospitality. A guest must not be kept waiting. This might suggest that they were not pleased with his visit. A quick response would suggest that they were quite happy that the guest had come.

Laban hurried to meet Jacob, but Jacob did not know whether his uncle would be happy to greet him. There had been some unfortunate feelings within the family over their differing forms of worship. Laban made the situation clear when he met Jacob. The text says that Laban "embraced Jacob and kissed him." Both things were symbolic. The embrace was a way of saying to Jacob, and to all who observed, that this man was trusted and accepted by the family. The kiss was a way of saying that there was harmony between the two men. Former differences, whatever they might have been, no longer put any distance between the two.

The text also says that Laban took Jacob into his house. This meant that there were harmony and forgiveness between the two. If there had been discord previously, it no longer prevailed. There was now perfect harmony. Laban had taken Jacob into his house and everyone understood what that meant. Jacob was to be a guest in his uncle's home. No harm could come to him there.

Observe that the author took great care in identifying the relationship between Jacob and Laban's family. In verse 12, Jacob was identified as "A relative of her father and a son of Rebekah." Again, in verse thirteen, Jacob was identified as "his sister's son." In verse fourteen, Laban identifies Jacob saying, "You are my own flesh and blood." This

clear identification as family changes the whole nature of Jacob's visit. Notice the immediate change in the relationship.

> *After Jacob had stayed with him for a whole month, Laban said to him, "Just because you are a relative of mine, should you work for me for nothing? Tell me what your wages should be." Genesis 29:14, 15*

The first hint of the change in the nature of this visit is in the duration of it. The law of hospitality required that a man provide food, shelter, comfort and protection for a guest for three days. If a guest wanted to stay longer, they held him in suspicion because of his alleged motives. In the text, Jacob had stayed for a whole month. They had probably never had a guest who stayed a month.

The second hint of the change in this visit is in verse 15. The author quoted Laban, "Just because you are a relative of mine, should you work for me for nothing?" A desert host could not prevail upon his guest to do any work for him. This would be an act of disrespect and dishonor. Relatives, however, were treated like Laban's children and expected to help in the work of the family.

The final sentence in verse 15 appears to express Laban's generosity. That is not necessarily the case. This sentence signals the beginning of negotiations. In effect, Laban was asking Jacob to identify the amount where they would begin to negotiate Jacob's compensation. This could lead to some very hard bargaining and usually did. These people were particularly sensitive to one's reputation. It was highly possible that if Laban let Jacob set the limits for their bargaining, it would work out in his own favor. If Jacob's offer was unreasonable, Laban could say so without embarrassment. If Jacob's offer were acceptable, Laban could agree and appear congenial. If Jacob's offer were really favorable to Laban, then he could graciously accept it and benefit greatly. He could then suggest that he was simply giving Jacob what he wanted.

The next two verses are a parenthesis in the text. These verses explain Jacob's offer.

> *Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the older was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. Leah had weak eyes, but Rachel was lovely in form, and beautiful. Genesis 29:16, 17*

It appears that Jacob's offer is most generous and open. As we shall see, that may not be the case. Each statement in this parenthesis is very important. The author begins by comparing the ages of Laban's daughters. Leah was older than Rachel. The second piece of information is that Rachel is more beautiful than Leah. So far Jacob's choice is very understandable. It is not surprising that a man would want a beautiful wife. Also, a man would want a younger wife. She could do more work over a longer period.
Potentially, at least, she could have a larger number of children. Usually, they believed a younger woman was more apt to have male babies than female.

The difference in appearance, between Leah and Rachel, may have many considerations, but the difference in their eyes was singled out for attention. The text says that "Leah had weak eyes, but Rachel was lovely in form, and beautiful." There are several pieces of information stated or implied in this quotation.

Leah had weak eyes. Scholars differ about the meaning of "weak eyes." Some say that it means that she cried a lot. Still others contend that it means her eyes were slightly crossed. We cannot be certain, but I favor the second possibility.

Rachel was lovely in form. We assume this means Rachel had a more appealing figure than Leah. The people of that day knew a woman would have many physical tasks to perform. She would need to be large and strong to accomplish these things. The author was probably saying she was strong enough to do the work expected of her. It is not accidental that the author follows this appearance of strength with a description of her beauty. The author added a third piece of information in these words:

> *Jacob was in love with Rachel and said, "I'll work for you seven years in return for your younger daughter Rachel." Genesis 29:18*

The most important piece of information, concerning Jacob's response, was that he loved Rachel. The fact that a man loves a woman and desires to marry her is quite normal for us. It was not common in Jacob's time. Few, if any young men, married for love in that day. In almost every instance, the father arranged the marriages of his sons and daughters. The issue was decided by whether the dowry would be sufficient from the groom's parents or in the case of sons, if the required dowry was not too high. Jacob's father was not present and he had to make a choice.

The terms Jacob imposed upon himself seem stringent. They are! Viewed from another perspective, however, they are not. The dowry might well be an equal amount if Isaac had been present to complete the negotiations. We must also remember that we have no evidence that Jacob had anything with him to enable him to bargain in any other way.

Laban's response to Jacob's offer was carefully worded.

> *Laban said, "It's better to give her to you than to some other man. Stay here with me." Genesis 29:19*

Notice that Laban accepted Jacob's offer, but he did not say that Jacob could have Rachel as his wife. Laban's statement evokes a question: Why is it better for Laban to give his daughter to Jacob than to give her to some other man? Isn't it possible that Laban could have received a better offer from someone outside the family?

The answer makes perfect sense to these people, but not to us. It would be better to give his daughter to Jacob than to another man because Jacob belonged to the family. He could be trusted because he was family. That culture required family to treat one another well while others would not be expected to do so. By the same token, family members were expected not to bargain so strongly as others might do.

We have serious concerns, even laws, about first cousins marrying because of the almost certainty that this would lead to deformed and handicapped children. This apparently did not happen in that time. In the city of Bethlehem today, however, you can see a multitude of children who have deformed feet and suffer severe eye problems. This is because their parents are first cousins.

Jacob's joy shows through the words of the text. Look carefully at what the author said,

> *So Jacob served seven years to get Rachel, but they seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her. Genesis 29:20*

Jacob's joy had an effect upon his awareness of time. Seven years is a long time. The text does not suggest that the wait was very short. It rather suggests that in Jacob's mind the prize was so worthwhile that it was well worth the wait. We must also remember that Ja-

cob was under the instructions of his father to take a wife from his mother's family. This was really the best he could do under the restrictions placed upon him.

There was probably no young groom in that culture as excited about his pending marriage as Jacob was. Typically a groom would not know who his bride would be until the time of the wedding. Jacob had chosen his bride and he was excited about it.

Genesis 29:21-30 - Laban Deceives Jacob

It is interesting that it was Jacob who asked that the wedding take place. People might mistakenly think that Laban was intentionally slow about fulfilling his part of the agreement. This is possible, but not probable. Notice what the author wrote.

> *Then Jacob said to Laban, "Give me my wife. My time is completed and I want to lie with her." So Laban brought together all the people of the place and gave a feast. Genesis 29:21, 22*

Under normal circumstances, it was the responsibility of the groom's father to set the date for the wedding. When the announcement was made, it was the bride's father's task to set up the wedding. It is possible that Laban was taking his time about setting up the wedding. It is more probable that in the absence of Isaac, the father of the groom, Jacob carried out that responsibility.

Our best translation of verse 22 does not read" Laban brought together all the **people** of the place." These documents read" Laban gathered all the **men** of the place." There is a good cultural reason for the second version of this text. We will discuss this shortly.

Some questions come to mind as we read verses 21 and 22:

- Why did Laban call the men of the area together?
- Why was it necessary to have a feast?

The men of the village or area were the ones who made legal, binding decisions. Laban wanted this contract to be legally binding upon both Jacob and himself. This is the kind of thing that Abraham did in Genesis 23:1-16 when he wanted to buy land in which to bury Sarah.

All covenants were sealed with a meal. This was one more way that Laban, and all other fathers in that culture sealed the marriage vows of their sons and daughters. A covenant sealed with a meal could not be broken under any circumstances. Now, in two ways the marriage covenant, between Jacob and Laban, could not be broken. Laban's interests were totally secure.

In the eyes of many, Laban is the deceiver in this experience. To some extent, they are right. Laban is not alone in his deception, though his deception is obvious.

> *But when evening came, he took his daughter Leah and gave her to Jacob, and Jacob lay with her. Genesis 29:23*

Many people wonder why Jacob didn't complain about the deception before the marriage was consummated. There are at least two major possibilities:

It is possible that Jacob knew about the deception and expected it. In this scenario, Jacob knew this was necessary if eventually he wanted to have Rachel as his wife. We know that a bride was covered. This usually made it impossible for the groom to know for sure whether he had been deceived until the marriage was consummated. The problem with this position is that though the bride could not be seen, Jacob might recognize the voice as

she spoke her vow to her husband. Jacob would certainly talk with his wife once they were inside the marriage tent. The text does not speak to the issue, but the first possibility seems to have some credence.

There is evidence in this paragraph that Laban was a man of exceptional means.

> *And Laban gave his servant Zilpah to his daughter as her maid-servant. Genesis 29:24*

This verse is a small parenthesis in the flow of the story. When a man was gathering his wealth, the first servants he purchased were men to help care for his flocks. Only later did he purchase female slaves to help with the work around the tent. The fact that Laban gave his daughter a servant girl means he had substantial wealth.

There are many questions which surround the next verse of the text.

> *When morning came, there was Leah! So Jacob said to Laban, "What is this you have done to me? I served you for Rachel, didn't I? Why have you deceived me?" Genesis 29:25*

We are forced to wonder, Did Jacob know about the deception and then pretend to be shocked by the ruse? Was Jacob's distress an act or was he serious? We do not know. Upon careful reading of the text, it certainly appears that Jacob was shocked.

Laban's response to Jacob's irate questions creates as many questions as the previous verse.

> *Laban replied, "It is not our custom here to give the younger daughter in marriage before the older one." Genesis 29:26*

Laban's response is direct. He simply said that such a thing was not done in that culture. This unwritten rule was used to prevent the embarrassment of an older daughter whose younger sister was given in marriage before she was. It should be remembered that this was a rule all over that part of the world. This was not a new idea to Jacob. Granted, Laban did not tell Jacob of the rule, but it was practiced in Canaan and Jacob certainly knew about the rule without being told by Laban. Jacob certainly would be convincing in his complaint, but there was no doubt that Jacob was aware of the custom at this very time.

Laban continued with an idea designed to give Jacob what he wanted without violating the marriage code of the land. This idea also relieved Laban of the problem of finding a husband for his younger daughter.

Notice that Jacob set the boundaries of the first agreement, but Laban set them for the second term. Laban said,

> *"Finish out this daughter's bridal week; then we will give you the younger one also, in return for another seven years of work." Genesis 29:27*

It appears that Laban's second offer immediately follows Jacob's complaint over the previous deception. That was certainly not so. We do not know how long the span of time was between the two, but there had to be some time elapse before Laban's offer was a reality.

It was Laban who suggested that Jacob have both daughters as his wives. Multiple wives were common practice among the pagan families. This was not nearly as common

in Israel as it was in Haran. An exception to this existed when the wife was barren. Between verse 27 and 30 there is a time span of at least seven years, if not more.

In verse 28, Jacob responded to Laban's suggestion.

> *And Jacob did so. He finished out the week with Leah, and then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel to be his wife. Genesis 29:28*

Reading this verse, it appears that Jacob accepted Laban's suggestion almost casually. That shocks us. In the first place, this is contrary to our faith and law. It is economically impossible for people in our culture to sustain a family with multiple wives in our time. The people of Jacob's time would frankly do better financially with the help of an additional wife and her servant. We may be distressed by Laban's actions, but we must observe that Laban kept the bargain he drove with Jacob. Laban was simply abiding by his agreements.

As we suggested in Genesis 29:24, the financial situation of Laban's family is illustrated in Genesis 29:29 again.

> *Laban gave his servant girl Bilhah to his daughter Rachel as her maidservant. Genesis 29:29*

Laban had sufficient resources to enable him to not only give his daughter Rachel to Jacob as a wife, but also give Bilhah as a servant for Rachel. This wedding immediately increased the workforce of Jacob by two, not just one.

One of the most obvious problems of a household, with more than one wife, is the issue of preference. Notice the way the author described it.

> *Jacob lay with Rachel also, and he loved Rachel more than Leah. And he worked for Laban another seven years. Genesis 29:30*

The husband would naturally appreciate one wife more than the other. The wives, on the other hand, have a natural inclination toward dominance. This inevitably leads to intense conflict.

Tucked away at the end of verse 30 is an additional piece of information. The final sentence indicates that Jacob stayed with Laban and worked for him for an additional seven years. This brought the total time to 21 years. This means that Jacob was at least 61 years of age at the end of these 21 years of service with Laban.

One wonders why Jacob would stay on with Laban when he had deceived Jacob so badly. There may be several reasons Jacob stayed. One among them was the fact that he needed more sheep and goats to sustain his growing family.

Genesis 29:31-35 - Leah Bears Four Sons

The presence of more than one wife in a family creates many strained relationships within it. Put yourself in Leah's place. Your husband is married to you only because your father insisted on your marriage before your younger sister could get married. Your husband is willing to work an additional seven years to have the wife he really wanted. You are forced to work to help him get a second wife to compete with you for his affections.

Along with the picture of pain, this paragraph has a beautiful picture of the mercy of God.

When the Lord saw that Leah was not loved, he opened her womb, but Rachel was barren. Genesis 29:31

This is the first mention of God in this chapter. The author refers to Jehovah, the eternal God of Justice, as he describes this situation. God could not have been pleased with the arrangement between Jacob and Laban. Leah had a problem. Jehovah, the God of Justice, recognized that Leah was hated for something she could not control. Observe that the text says that God opened Leah's womb as an act of mercy. The text does not say that God closed Rachel's womb. It does say that she was barren. This statement is in contrast to Jehovah's opening of Leah's womb. Is it possible that just as He opened Leah's womb, so He may have closed the womb of Rachel? The import of this is that the mercy of God takes many forms.

Leah came from a culture that was intensely idolatrous. This is significant in view of her statement in verse 32.

Leah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Reuben, for she said, "It is because the Lord has seen my misery. Surely my husband will love me now." Genesis 29:32

Leah called her firstborn son "Reuben." This name means, " see, a son." It was a great joy that a son was born. It was an even greater joy that it was their first child. Observe that Leah named the child. In Canaan, this task was usually done by the father. It was usually that way in Haran as well. This may suggest just how completely Jacob was committed to Rachel, the wife he loved. It is not hard to believe that Jacob could leave Leah to even name her own baby. Leah was tolerated, not loved.

One must wonder, coming from an intensely idolatrous culture, as Leah did, why would she attribute the birth of her son to the fact that God looked upon her affliction? She used the name "Jehovah" for God. This suggests that she saw the birth of Reuben as an act of justice. It also suggests that the family was aware of the fact that Rachel, though beautiful and favored, was also barren. Did Leah come to believe in Jehovah as Jacob did? It appears that she did.

The closing sentence, in verse 32, is a devastating statement. Leah said, "For now my husband will love me." This suggests that up to this point Jacob had not loved her. It is impossible to put into words the intense pain which is evident in Leah's remark. She was convinced that her only hope of being important in her husband's eyes was in her ability to bear children. Degraded is a very mild expression for what she had to feel.

The mercy of God continued in Leah's life.

She conceived again, and when she gave birth to a son she said, "Because the Lord heard that I am not loved, he gave me this one too." So she named him Simeon. Genesis 29:33

Leah bore a second son and called his name Simeon. This name means "hearing" or "heard." The text indicates the reason she gave the child this name. She ascribed the birth of her second son to the fact that God had heard that she was hated and in mercy gave her another son. This does not mean that God was listening to the local gossip. It means that God heard the bitter prayers of a wife abandoned within the family.

The story of Leah was one of the most devastating pictures of sorrow and rejection to be found in Scripture. Her cry of pain is even clearer in verse 34.

Again she conceived, and when she gave birth to a son she said, "Now at last my husband become attached to me, because I have borne him three sons." So he was named Levi. Genesis 29:34

Leah's third son was named "Levi" which means "to join." As in the meaning of her two older sons, Leah used the name to describe her pain and hopes. Leah hoped that her bearing three sons while the favored wife, Rachel, was barren would cause her husband to shift his affections to her. It is interesting that though she ascribed the two previous sons to the mercy of God, there is no mention of God at the birth of Levi. There could be several reasons for this fact. It could be that her hopes with the birth of her first two sons were not realized and she gave up on Jehovah. This possibility is dimmed by her praise of Jehovah at the birth of her fourth son. It could also be that she was happy with her ability to conceive, when Rachel could not. She could consider it an expression of her ability and not an act of divine mercy. No single reason seems sufficient to explain this change.

Leah gave birth to a fourth son while her rival, her sister Rachel, remained barren. We do not know if these four boys were only children born during this time. They probably were not, but we do not know.

She conceived again, and when she gave birth to a son she said, "This time I will praise the Lord." So she named him Judah. Then she stopped having children. Genesis 29:35

Again, Leah named this child. She called him "Judah" which means " May God be praised." Observe that this is the only name of the four that does not focus on her sorrow or need. She simply named him for the praise of God. This does not suggest that her pain was ended. It does shift the focus, however, from her pain to God's praise.

Leah gives us reason to believe that she understood some deep things about the character of God and His relationships to the people who call upon His name. Given her pain and abandonment, one wonders how she learned so much about Jehovah.

Conclusion

It is not accidental that throughout the pain, disappointment and deception of Genesis 29:1-30, the name of God is not mentioned once. On the other hand, in a time of similar pain and disappointment, Genesis 29:31-35, Jehovah is praised as the cause of merciful experiences by one who had grown up in paganism and idolatry.

Look at the times of stress, pain and disappointment in your life. What occupied your words and thinking during those times? Where do you turn for comfort and support in times of disappointment and rejection?

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 6

STRUGGLES: LEAH VS. RACHEL; LABAN VS. JACOB

GENESIS 30:1 - 43

1. In our best manuscripts there are five paragraphs in Genesis chapter 30. Read each paragraph carefully. On the chart below, record a title of seven words or less for each paragraph.

30:1-8	
30:9-13	
30:14-24	
30:25-36	
30:37-43	

2. In Genesis 30:1-8, the author talks about Rachel's handmaid, Bilhah, bearing children.
   a. Why would Rachel give her handmaid to Jacob to bear children?
   b. What emotion, in Rachel, does the author identify? Why would she have this emotion?
   c. In Genesis 30:1, Rachel made a seemingly rash statement.
      (1). What did she say?
      (2). What did she mean?
      (3). Why did she make this statement?
   d. In Genesis 30:2, Jacob responded to Rachel's outcry.
      (1). What did Jacob say?
      (2). What did Jacob mean?
      (3). What emotion of Jacob's does the author identify?
      (4). Why would Jacob speak this way?
   e. Read Genesis 30:3 carefully.
      (1). What was Rachel saying?
      (2) What emotion do you detect in this verse?
   f. Read Genesis 30:4, 5 again.
      (1). What do you feel as you read these verses?
      (2). If you were Rachel, when this occurred, how would you feel?
   g. Read Genesis 30:6 again.
      (1). What does this verse tell you?
      (2). What two statements does Rachel make?
      (3). What does Rachel mean by these statements?
      (4). What do these two statements tell you?
      (5). In view of Rachel's religious background, what does this verse tell you about her?

h. In Genesis 30:7, 8, the author described the naming of Naphtali.
(1). Why did Bilhah's second son receive his name?
(2). What does this tell you about Jacob's family relationships?
(3). What was the nature of this struggle?

3. In Genesis 30:9-13, the author dealt with the children Zilpah bore.
a. Genesis 30:9 describes a particularly painful situation.
(1). Put yourself in Leah's place. Why would you give your servant Zilpah to Jacob?
(2). Why was Leah so determined to have yet another child, even if it meant giving her maidservant to her husband?
b. In Genesis 30:10, 11, the author described Leah's response to the birth of Zilpah's son.
(1). Why would Leah feel it was good fortune that her hand maid gave birth to a baby fathered by Jacob?
(2). What benefit would anyone gain by having one more son when you already had four?
c. Genesis 30:12, 13, describe the response of Leah to the birth of Zilpah's second son.
(1). The text says nothing about Zilpah's response. Why do you think the author did that?
(2). Why was Leah's joy so great that she named the child Asher, when it was Zilpah's baby?

4. In Genesis 30:14-24, the struggle continued between Leah and Rachel.
a. In Genesis 30:14, the author tells the story of Reuben's mandrakes.
(1). The author carefully identifies that this takes place at the time of the wheat harvest. Why would he do this?
(2). What was a mandrake? (A Bible dictionary or encyclopedia may be helpful here)
(3). Why would Reuben bring these to his mother, Leah?
(4). Why would Rachel want some of the mandrakes?
b. In Genesis 30:15, Leah and Rachel had a confrontation relating to the mandrakes.
(1). In Genesis 30:15, Leah accused Rachel of taking away her husband.
(a). Is this true?
(b). If so, how could Rachel do that?
(2). Leah sarcastically challenged Rachel saying, "Will you take my son's mandrakes too?"
(a). Was Rachel trying to **take** Reuben's mandrakes?
(b). If not, then why would Leah make such a charge?
(3). Read Genesis 30:15 again.
(a). How would you describe Leah's emotional state as portrayed here?
(b). How would you describe Rachel's emotional state as indicated here?
c. In Genesis 30:16, the author described the way Leah dealt with Rachel's request.
(1). Put yourself in Jacob's position. How would you feel when Leah said these words to you?

(2). What does Leah mean by the word "hired"?
(3). Is it true that Leah had "hired" Jacob?

d. In Genesis 30:17, the author asserts that "God listened to Leah."
(1). What does the author mean when he said, "God listened to Leah"?
(2). What observations can you make on the basis of this verse?
(3). In view of Leah's background, what can we say about what she did?
(4). In what way is there a link between God hearing Leah's prayer and her pregnancy?

e. In Genesis 30:18, Leah identified her attitude toward what God had done.
1). In view of the Christian understanding of persons having sexual relationships only with their spouse, how do you understand Leah's statement?
(2). How do you understand the fact that Leah called her fifth son "Issachar."

f. In Genesis 30:19, 20, Leah spoke about the birth of her sixth son.
(1). Leah, coming from an idolatrous background, spoke of her sixth son as a gift from God. What observations can you make about this ?
(2). Read these verses again. What do these verses say about the relationship between Jacob and Leah?
(3). Put yourself in Leah's place. What kind of conditions would be required to cause you to make such a statement?

g. In Genesis 30:21, the author tells us that Leah gave birth to a baby girl.
(1). Throughout the book of Genesis, there is little reference to the birth of daughters or of daughters at all. Why would the author change the policy at this point?
(2). Having mentioned the birth of Dinah, there is no further mention of Leah giving birth to children and almost no mention of Leah at all in the rest of the book. What, if anything, does this suggest?

h. The author pointed out, in Genesis 30:22, that Rachel prayed and God heard her.
(1). The author begins verse 22 saying "God remembered Rachel." Does this suggest that God had forgotten her? If not, what does it suggest?
(2). Read Genesis 30:22 again. What observations can you make about the author's statement, "He listened to her and opened her womb"?

i. In Genesis 30:23, the author described Rachel's response to the birth of her son.
(1). How did Rachel feel?
(2). What disgrace was she talking about?

j. In Genesis 30:24, Rachel said, "May the Lord add to me another son."
(1). If you were Rachel, what would you have meant by that statement?
(2). In view of Rachel's idolatrous background, how does this statement relate to her faith?
(3). Why would she call her first son "Joseph"?

5. Genesis 30:25-36 focuses upon the wage negotiations between Laban and Jacob.
a. In Genesis 30:25, the author described Jacob's request that Laban send him on his way back to Canaan.
(1). The author specifically stipulates that this took place after Rachel gave birth to her first son, Joseph. Why would this be important?

(2). Jacob requested that he be sent on his way. He was a married man with children. What did he mean by this request?

b. In the last sentence of Genesis 30:26, Jacob said, "You know how much work I've done for you."
   (1). If you were Jacob, what would have meant by these words?
   (2). If you were Laban, how would this statement make you feel?

c. In Genesis 30:27, Laban responded to Jacob's request.
   (1). What was the atmosphere, the characteristic feeling of Laban's response?
   (2). Laban said he "learned by divination that the Lord has blessed me because of you."
      (a). What evidence of this blessing could Laban point to in his life?
      (b). What does this statement say about the Lord?
      (c). What does this statement say about Laban's spiritual life?

d. Laban made an offer in Genesis 30:28.
   (1). How generous does that offer appear to be?
   (2). Was Laban offering Jacob a blank check?
   (3). In view of their previous relationships, is there any reason to believe that Laban is quite generous?

e. In Genesis 30:29, 30, Jacob responds to Laban's question.
   (1). In these verses, Jacob reminded Laban of two things:
      (a). What were the two things?
      (b). Why are they important in these negotiations?
   (2). Jacob concludes his response, in verse 30, with a different concern:
      (a). What is that concern?
      (b). What does this tell us about their previous arrangements?
      (c). What was Jacob saying to his father-in-law?

f. In Genesis 30:31, 32, the author described the next step in the these wage negotiations.
   (1). Why does Laban continue to press Jacob to make a specific request?
   (2). In verse 31, Jacob answered on two levels.
      (a). How would you describe the emotional tone of Jacob's response when he said, "don't give me anything.?"
      (b). Why did Jacob include this sentence?
      (c). In the last part of verse 31 and all of verse 32, Jacob made his request:
         [1]. Why would Jacob request this kind of animal rather than another?
         [2]. Why would Jacob request this kind of animal rather than a specific number of animals?
         [3]. Who was to make the selection?
         [4]. Why would the identify of the one making the selection be an issue?
         [5]. Why would Jacob select the "speckled," "spotted," "dark colored lambs," "speckled and spotted goats"?

g. In Genesis 30:33, the author describes the way Laban will know if Jacob has been faithful to their agreement.
   (1). Why would this be important?
   (2). What does this say about the relationship between Jacob and Laban?

h. In Genesis 30:34, 35, the author described Laban's response to Jacob's request.

(1). In verse 34, Laban did something out of character for him - he did not negotiate at all. Why would he do this?
(2). Compare the request (Genesis 30:32) with the action (Genesis 30:35).
(a) What comparison or contrast can you find here?
(b). What does this tell you about Laban?

i. In Genesis 30:36, Laban put a distance between his sheep and those of Jacob.
(1). What is the reason for this?
(2). What kind of message would this send to Jacob?

6. In Genesis 30:37-43, Jacob devised a plan to get even with Laban, his father-in-law.
   a. In Genesis 30:37,38, the author described Jacob's plan to insure that the flocks produced as many streaked animals as possible.
      (1). What effect would the peeled branches have upon whether or not the offspring of the animals were streaked or not?
      (2). What facts does this plan suggest about Jacob?
      (3). If you believe the striped branches had no effect on the coloring of the lambs, how do you account for the results Jacob achieved?
   b. In Genesis 30:39, the author records that the ewes produced streaked lambs as Jacob designed. Looking at this apparent success through manipulation, can you see any positive quality in Jacob?
   c. In Genesis 30:40-42, the author described a second scheme that Jacob employed.
      (1). What was the scheme?
      (2). What two results does the author list for us?
      (3). What was wrong with the scheme?
      (4). Put yourself in Laban's position. How would you feel when you saw these results materialize?
   d. In Genesis 30:43, the author describes just how wealthy Jacob had become.
      (1). Why did the author find it necessary to mention the servants, camels and donkeys in this description of wealth?
      (2). What does that tell you about Jacob? About Laban?

7. Read this paragraph again. There is a strong contrast that covers the entire paragraph. Record each contrast that the author mentions, between Jacob and Laban.
   a. What does this tell you about Jacob?
   b. What does this tell you about Laban?
   c. What do you observe about God?

8. Reread the entire chapter. There is a series of contrasts in the chapter.
   a. List the details of each contrast.
   b. What does this tell you about conflict?
   c. Where is God in the midst of the struggles?

9. Think about your life in terms of such conflicts.
   a. Whom have you tried to surpass?
   b. What does this chapter suggest concerning our own tendencies to be like Jacob?

LESSON 6: GENESIS 30:1 - 43

STRUGGLES: LEAH VS. RACHEL; LABAN VS. JACOB

In our best manuscripts there are five paragraphs in Genesis chapter 30. A summary of the content of these paragraphs is as follows:

30:1-8	Rachel's Handmaid, Bilhah, Bears Two Sons
30:9-13	Leah's Handmaid, Zilpah, Bears Two Sons
30:14-24	Leah Bears Three; Rachel Bears Joseph
30:25-36	Laban and Jacob Agree on New Wages
30:37-43	Jacob Designs Way to Undercut Laban

Genesis 30:1-8 - Rachel's Handmaid, Bilhah, Bears Two Sons

Chapter 29 ends with the dilemma of Leah and the birth of her four sons. Chapter 30 begins with the dilemma of Rachel because she was barren. These two sisters were locked in a bitter struggle for the affection of their husband, Jacob.

In the first verse of the chapter, the author described Rachel's reaction to the fact that Leah had four sons and she had none. The author quotes the exchange between Rachel and Jacob.

> *When Rachel saw that she was not bearing Jacob any children, she became jealous of her sister. So she said to Jacob, "Give me children, or I'll die!" Jacob became angry with her and said, "Am I in the place of God, who has kept you from having children?" Genesis 30:1, 2*

This is a picture of indescribable pain. One by one, Leah continued to give birth to sons, but though Rachel was favored, she had no sons. Note that the text says, "When Rachel saw that she was not bearing Jacob any children, she became jealous of her sister." The pain was produced by Rachel's comparison of what happened for Leah and for herself. It was a contest, not a life.

The author said that Rachel was "jealous" of Leah. The word translated "jealous" is "qana" (קָנָא) and means "to be zealous in a negative sense." It came to stand for jealousy or envy, to provoke to envy.

The pain was so intense that she lashed out at Jacob, "Give me children or else I die!" We must remember that in that culture barrenness was considered to be a problem in the wife, not the husband. Obviously, we now know just how unfair such an attitude is.

In view of the cultural understanding, we must ask the question, Why would Rachel lash out at Jacob when they thought the problem was with her? We do not know for certain, but this problem was not new in the family. Sarah could not conceive. Isaac and Rebekah had the same problem. Now Jacob and Rebekah are trapped in the same situation. No one can say for certain, but you may remember that when Isaac and Rebekah

faced this problem, Isaac entreated the Lord on behalf of his wife. This is what the author said,

> *Isaac prayed to the LORD on behalf of his wife, because she was barren. The LORD answered his prayer, and his wife Rebekah became pregnant. Genesis 25:21*

Is it possible that Rachel knew this and was desperately upset with Jacob because he had not done what Isaac, his father, had done? Her lashing out was a plea for help.

A second question arises, What did Rachel mean when she said, "Give me children or else I die!" There are several possibilities:

- She may have been threatening Jacob about dying either from tensions or from suicide.
- Women who did not bear children were considered dead. She could have been referring to this understanding.
- A wife could be put away if she did not bear children. She could have been referring to this as a form of death for her.

We have no way to be certain, but the second possibility seems more reasonable than the others.

In view of their cultural views on this subject, it is not difficult to comprehend why Jacob responded in anger.

> *Jacob became angry with her and said, "Am I in the place of God, who has kept you from having children?" Genesis 30:2*

Jacob's anger was about as fierce as it could get. This is a difficult experience for us to grasp. If ever Rachel needed Jacob's understanding, it was now. Nevertheless, Jacob was steaming with anger at her.

Remember, however, the people of that culture believed that childlessness was a punishment from God. If we put ourselves in Jacob's position, it is easier to understand. The fact that Rachel had no children after several years of married life was clear indication to them that God was punishing her. With that in his mind, Jacob heard the impossible - somehow her barrenness was his responsibility. With that mental framework, his fury was as understandable as her cry for help.

In verse three, the spotlight shifts back to Rachel. If a wife argued heatedly with her husband,. she was seriously risking being divorced. When Jacob showed no willingness to intercede on her behalf, Rachel did the only thing she could do:

> *Then she said, "Here is Bilhah, my maidservant. Sleep with her so that she can bear children for me and that through her I too can build a family. Genesis 30:3*

If a woman was married and childless for ten years, people expected one of three things to happen:

- She must now have a baby
- Her husband should divorce her
- The childless wife could give her maidservant to her husband to have a child on her behalf. The child of this union was considered to be a child of the wife.

The later possibility is exactly what Rachel did. Again, this is shocking to us. It is, nevertheless, what they accepted and did. Notice the way the author described the events:

So she gave him her servant Bilhah as a wife. Jacob slept with her, and she became pregnant and bore him a son. Genesis 30:4, 5

It is presented in a very matter-of-fact way. We have no reason to believe Rachel felt as casual and matter-of-fact as it sounds. It had to tear her to shreds.

You get a glimpse into Rachel's inner being in the next verse.

Then Rachel said, "God has vindicated me; he has listened to my plea and given me a son." Because of this she named him Dan. Genesis 30:6

Some translations use the word "vindicated" rather than "judged." The word literally means "judged." True or false, Rachel was convinced God had punished her. Others believed the same thing. Rachel was so sure of this that she named her surrogate son "Dan" or (דָּן) in Hebrew. The name "Dan" means "Judged." Observe the statements that Rachel made:

- God has judged me.
- God has listened to my plea and given me a son.

In spite of the fact that they believed that childlessness was divine judgment, notice that having spoken of judgment, she immediately speaks of the mercy of God. God listened to her prayer and gave her a son through Bilhah.

Rachel grew up in an adulterous, pagan culture. They did not know or worship Jehovah. The question naturally arises, How did she know of the judgment of God, His willingness to show mercy and hear prayer, his gracious gifts even to those who fail? We do not know. It appears that it had to be through Jacob.

Some would think Rachel's giving her maidservant to Jacob so as to have children on her behalf was a solitary act. It was not. It was an ongoing arrangement so that Bilhah could continue to bear children on Rachel's behalf.

Rachel's servant Bilhah conceived again and bore Jacob a second son. Then Rachel said, "I have had a great struggle with my sister and I have won." So she named him Naphtali. Genesis 30:7, 8

Observe, in verse eight, that the name of the second child reflects family conditions and relationships. She first gives the reason for the name. Our best Hebrew texts could be translated "With the struggles of God (Elohim) I have struggled with my sister. The word "struggle is "Naphtali" (נַפְתָּלִי) which means "to wrestle vigorously." It comes from the root word "pathal" (פָּתַל) which means "to twine," "to struggle." Rachel intensifies the image by saying she wrestled with her sister as one would wrestle with God. I suspect that this recalls Jacob's struggle with the angel at Bethel. Rachel said her struggle with Leah totally consumed her energies. Because of this, Rachel named the second son "Naphtali" which means, "he wrestled."

Genesis 30:9-13 - Leah's Handmaid Zilpah, Bears Two Sons

This paragraph is as tragic and painful as it is short. The intense competition for Jacob's attention is painfully obvious in the opening sentence of the paragraph.

When Leah saw that she had stopped having children, she took her maidservant Zilpah and gave her to Jacob as a wife. Genesis 30:9

The great urgency for Leah to bear children was not the love of children or an expression of the love of husband and wife. She simply wanted more children to compete successfully with her sister Rachel for the affection of their husband. Though Leah had borne four sons previously, during the time Rachel's maidservant bore two sons, Leah had borne none. Now she was in the same situation Rachel had experienced earlier. Rachel solved her dilemma by offering her maidservant to produce children on her behalf. Leah could see that this was acceptable. She gave her maidservant Zilpah to Jacob for the purpose of giving birth to a baby on her own behalf.

> *Leah's servant Zilpah bore Jacob a son. Then Leah said, " What good fortune!" So she named him Gad. Genesis 30:10, 11*

This whole idea of giving your servant girl to your husband to have a baby for you baffles us. We would think of it as strange and tragic, but it was quite commonplace to them. We must remember that childbearing was different for them than it is for us. If a couple had no children, they would have no one to care for them in their old age. Their name would end and that was considered shameful. It was a matter of life or death for them in later years. The bearing of children meant that they could then have larger herds and move themselves away from the danger of starvation. It is nice if people can have children in our time, but for them the more children they had the safer they were from theft and murder.

When Zilpah gave birth to her first son, Leah was exuberant. She gave the child the name "Gad" (גָּד) which means "fortunate" and comes from the root "guud" (גּוּד) which means to "overcome." Leah felt as much competition as Rachel did, if not more.

As with Bilhah, the use of Zilpah to provide children was an ongoing arrangement. Notice how it is described.

> *Leah's servant Zilpah bore Jacob a second son. Then Leah said, "How happy I am! The women will call me happy." So she named him Asher. Genesis 30:12, 13*

As with Rachel, Leah was the one who named the baby, not Zilpah. This was considered Leah's baby in every way except inheritance.

Notice what Leah said about the women. Peer pressure among the women was extremely high. The thing that came to Leah's mind when the baby boy was borne was that the women would call her happy. This is tragic, but it is a true account of the way in which that culture thought and acted.

Lean named Zilpah's second son "Asher" (אָשֵׁר). In Hebrew this name means "happy." It comes from the root word "ashaar" (אָשַׁר) which means "to be straight," "to be level," "to prosper," "to be blessed." Leah measured her blessing from God by the number of children she had. Aside from her children, she had no joy or blessing. This is a bleak outlook, but quite realistic for them.

Genesis 30:14-24 - Leah Bears Three; Rachel Bears Joseph

Again, the spotlight shifts. The author now describes a different facet of the struggle between Leah and Rachel. The author began this paragraph viewing the activities of Reuben, Leah's oldest son.

During wheat harvest, Reuben went out into the fields and found some mandrake plants, which he brought to his mother Leah. Rachel said to Leah, "Please give me some of your son's mandrakes." Genesis 30:14

This event took place during wheat harvest. Harvest season began, in this part of Palestine, with the barley harvest in the early to middle part of April and ended three or four weeks later with the wheat harvest. Many of us have an image of this event in our minds. We visualize a little boy six or seven years of age who picked some wild flowers for his mother. That is not an accurate understanding. For a more accurate view, think of Reuben as a young man who has already been accepted in the family as a man. He is not yet married, but many boys his age, thirteen or more, were getting married. He had probably been working in the wheat harvest and saw the mandrakes in the field. The mandrake had a purple blossom, but it was not a flower as such. It was closely allied with the tomato or potato. The root of this plant was worshipped in antiquity. This root, which was like a potato, contained a poisonous drug from which love potions were made. It was thought to excite sexual desire. Reuben was well aware of the competition between Leah and Rachel and saw this as a way of aiding his mother's cause.

Many people think of Rachel's request for some of the mandrakes as a desire for some pretty flowers to beautify her tent. It is more appropriate to think of Rachel as requesting the root of this plant so that she, too, could make a love potion. It would be her hope that this potion would improve her chances of becoming pregnant. They were willing to try most anything that would enhance their possibilities of bearing a child. This verse gives us an impression of just how desperate these two sisters were.

Leah's response was understandably cold. Look carefully at what she said:

But she said to her, "Wasn't it enough that you took away my husband? Will you take my son's mandrakes too?" "Very well," Rachel said, "He can sleep with you tonight in return for your son's mandrakes." Genesis 30:15

Can you feel the sarcasm in Leah's words? There is a depth of pain here that she had not unleashed before. Read the words once more,

"Wasn't it enough that you took away my husband? Will you take my son's mandrakes too?" Genesis 30:15b

These words also contain the thrust of exasperation. Leah's words contain a feeling of disbelief. It is as though she said, "Haven't you hurt me enough? I can't believe you are brazen enough to want to take away my love potion, my only hope of winning back my husband."

Notice that along with the sarcasm and exasperation, there is also blame. Leah saw Jacob's preference of Rachel as something that Rachel did. Rachel may have been kind to Jacob, before his marriage to Leah, but it was hardly Rachel's fault that he preferred her beauty.

Leah said, "You took away my husband." In effect, Leah said that she was married, but because of her sister, she had no husband. There is a burning accusative tone in Leah's words. It is as though she accused Rachel of stripping away everything of value from Leah's life.

Rachel's response was couched in much softer tones, but it could have been marked with an equal amount of tension. On the basis of Rachel's reply, is it fair to assume that

Leah and Rachel took turns sleeping with Jacob? We don't know. It is clear that they had some regular understanding about sleeping arrangements. Whatever the motive, Rachel sought to calm her irate sister by suggesting that in exchange for the potion, Leah could have Jacob sleep with her that night.

It is interesting that Jacob was not present and knew nothing of their plans for his evening. This is especially interesting in view of the fact that this was a culture in which males totally dominated every aspect of life.

> *So when Jacob came in from the fields that evening, Leah went out to meet him. "You must sleep with me," she said. "I have hired you with my son's mandrakes." So he slept with her that night. Genesis 30:16*

There are several important pieces of information in this verse:

Leah went out to meet Jacob. This can be understood in more than one light:

- It is understood by some as an expression of her compassion for Rachel. Leah did not want this to have to be announced to Jacob in Rachel's tent where he would normally go. There are some serious questions with this position. This event takes place against a backdrop of Leah's sarcasm, blaming others and exasperation. These two positions do not fit each other.
- Another possibility is that Leah, who has been so sarcastic and calculating, had decided to go and meet him just to make sure that the bargain was kept. I frankly prefer this possibility.

Leah went out to meet him to tell him he must stay with her that night. Leah had "hired" Jacob. The word "hired" means "temporary purchase," "to hire for wages." This word comes from the root word "karaw" (כָּרָה) which means "to purchase) or "to buy." Some scholars claim that Leah earned the right to have Jacob sleep with her. It could be difficult to explain the difference between this and a fee for prostitution.

Whatever may have been the case, Jacob spent that night with Leah.

As we said of Rachel, Leah grew up in an adulterous, idolatrous culture. We wonder, therefore, how she came to believe in God.

> *God listened to Leah, and she became pregnant and bore Jacob a fifth son. Genesis 30:17*

The surprising information in this verse is, "God listened to Leah." This means that she had prayed. We are left with some questions:

- Why did she pray to God rather than the idol from her homeland?
- How did she know God answered prayer, especially for one who had disobeyed by worshipping idols as she had?
- On what basis did she expect God to hear and answer her prayer?

We do not have the answers to these questions, but they are interesting to ponder. One thing is certain, there is a definite link between Leah's prayer and her pregnancy. The author states that God hearkened to Leah and she conceived and bare Jacob a fifth son.

One would think that Leah would gain confidence from the fact she had borne five sons and Rachel had borne none. It did not. Her attitude was much like a modern athlete - yesterday's achievements are history. Only what I achieve today really matters.

In verse 18, Leah identified her attitude toward what God had done.

Then Leah said, "God has rewarded me for giving my maidservant to my husband." So she named him Issachar. Genesis 30:18

This is the second time Leah has used the word "shachar" (שָׂכָר). She said God had given the reward to her. She expected God to act and He did. Notice, however, there is more. Speaking of her "hire," she immediately identifies the meaning of her "hire" - the fact that she gave her maid servant to Jacob. We must inquire, What is the difference between Rachel giving Bilhah to Jacob and Leah giving Zilpah to Jacob? The difference is that Rachel was required, by the mores or customs of the culture, to give her maidservant to Jacob because she had been married for ten years and had not given Jacob a single child.; Leah, on the other hand, had borne four children, all boys, but when she ceased to bear children she gave her handmaid to Jacob in order to produce children, even though local customs did not require it. Leah was saying, God was now rewarding her for that action.

Leah, therefore, named the child, "Issachar." Here again, the naming of the child reflected the conditions of her life rather than her hopes for his future. The name "Issachar" is "yishchar" (יִשָּׂכָר) which is a form of the Hebrew word "shachar" (שָׂכָר). The word means to reward, or hire.

Verses 19 and 20 give us a glimpse into the family life of Jacob and his two wives.

Leah conceived again and bore Jacob a sixth son. Then Leah said, "God has presented me with a precious gift. This time my husband will treat me with honor, because I have borne him six sons." So she named him Zebulun. Genesis 30:19, 20

Again, Leah bore a son. There is no mention of her bearing any daughters up to this time. This does not mean she had no daughters. A daughter is mentioned later, but only because she is focal in the story that is being told.

Notice that following the birth of Leah's sixth son, Leah said, "God has presented me with a precious gift." She said that it was God who had given her this sixth son. Leah then explained the gift. She said, "This time my husband will treat me with honor." A better translation of that statement might be," Now my husband will **live with me** because I have borne him six sons." We can only assume that the text means what it says - Jacob was not living with her. It appears that Jacob lived with Rachel, but had sexual relations with Leah also in the hope of having children by one of them.

Put yourself in Leah's place. You are your husband's first wife, not by desire, but by default of local customs. Your sister is the wife he loves and the one with whom he lives. That would be enough to destroy a woman.

The word translated "lives" is "Zabal" (זָבַל) and means "to reside," "dwell with," "**to enclose**." Leah was saying now her husband would make her tent his dwelling place as it had never been. She named this sixth son Zebulun which is a form of Zabal. This name also reflected Leah's life conditions rather than her hopes for his future.

Verse 21 comes almost as an afterthought.

Some time later she gave birth to a daughter and named her Dinah. Genesis 30:21

This is a parenthesis between the birth of Zebulun, in verse 20, and Rachel's pregnancy in verse 22. Having mentioned the birth of this daughter, nothing more is said about her at this point in the story.

Go back to review Genesis 29:32 - 30:21 - the birth of Leah's seven children. Observe that after the birth of all six sons, Leah attributed their birth to the action of God. Following the birth of the daughter, however, Leah said nothing at all, not even about God. Indeed, we will see nothing more about Leah bearing children in the rest of the book. **A hint!** Later on in the book we may discover the reason Leah's daughter's birth is recorded here.

At the end of this paragraph, which focused on the birth of three of Leah's children, the spotlight shifts again to Rachel.

> *Then God remembered Rachel; he listened to her and opened her womb. Genesis 30:22*

This statement indicates that Rachel prayed to God (Elohim). We wonder, How did Rachel come to pray to God? How did she come to believe in God? How did she come to believe that God answers prayer? The most credible answer to these questions appears to be that Jacob was the primary influence in bringing Rachel out of a life of idolatry to a relationship with Elohim, the God of Jacob.

In our culture, we have great skill and experience in identifying problems. We seem to have almost no skills in solving the problems we so carefully identify. In this verse God heard Rachel's prayer and then did what was necessary to solve the dilemma. Rachel's problem was that she lived in shame because she was childless. God removed the shame by opening her womb to enable her to conceive.

Verses 23 and 24 give us a glimpse of Rachel's inner feelings.

> *She became pregnant and gave birth to a son and said, "God has taken away my disgrace." She named him Joseph, and said, "May the Lord (Jehovah) add to me another son." Genesis 30:23, 24*

Rachel took no credit for her pregnancy and the birth of her son. It was clear to her, that God did this. Notice, however, what she said about the effects of this great miracle, " God has taken away my disgrace." We are aware of no sin of hers that immediately precedes this statement. As a childless wife, however, she lived in disgrace. People looked upon her as a secret sinner. This picture of disgrace meant total isolation from those who should have been most supportive of her. God had taken away her disgrace. God is like that!

Rachel named her first-born son "Joseph" (יֹסֵף) which means "adding," or "let him add." She was saying that she believed in God and her first son was born. Now she is saying she believed God would perform another miracle in her life. She believed this so strongly she was willing to give her son this name and be reminded every time she saw him or spoke his name, that she expected God to perform another miracle giving her another son. This was a great risk of faith, but it was not too great for her.

Genesis 30:25-36 - Laban and Jacob Agree on New Wages

The author of Genesis uses a specific time designation to begin this paragraph. There is good reason for this precise time.

After Rachel gave birth to Joseph, Jacob said to Laban, "Send me on my way so I can go back to my own homeland. Genesis 30:25

Jacob did not mention his desire to be sent away until after Rachel had given birth to Joseph. Why would Jacob wait so long? There could be several reasons: If Jacob came to Laban, originally, with nothing, he would not have survived if he left to go back to Canaan when he got Rachel as his wife. We know that if a man married a wife and she did not, for ten years, bear children, the husband was expected to divorce her. The bride's father was expected to return the dowry. In this instance that dowry was seven years of hard work. If Jacob went back to the land of promise before Rachel had a baby, he had no hope of ever getting this dowry returned. It was in his best interests to stay as long as necessary to make sure he did not lose out altogether. We do not know this to be his motive, but it is a serious possibility.

In verse 26, Jacob asserts that he has completed his agreement with Laban and wants to be sent on his way.

"Give me my wives and children, for whom I have served you, and I will be on my way. You know how much work I've done for you." Genesis 30:26

The question arises, Why must Jacob ask to be sent away when he is part of Laban's family? There are several pieces to the answer:

- To leave without permission/without being sent on your way can humiliate the host within the family as much or more than a stranger leaving without proper farewells.
- To leave desert hospitality without being sent on your way humiliates the host in the eyes of his neighbors.
- When Jacob arrived, he was received with the understandings of desert hospitality. If one is received with desert hospitality, he may not leave without being sent away.

These considerations could be of life or death importance in that culture.

Laban was not as excited as Jacob was at the prospect of his departure for Canaan. Observe Laban's response:

But Laban said to him, "If I have found favor in your eyes, please stay. I have learned by divination that the LORD has blessed me because of you." Genesis 30:27

Remember, these two men are relatives. That should not be misconstrued, however, as friendship. Despite the tensions between them, there are some interesting information in this reply:

- Notice that Laban made no offer to pay Jacob wages until he talked about going away. This suggests that Laban would use Jacob as long as possible despite his very effective service to Laban.
- Laban put Jacob in an awkward position. He said, "If I have found favor in your eyes, please stay." In effect, if Jacob wants to leave, then he must tell Laban that he does not like him. This is not a healthy thing to do.

- "I have learned by divination that the LORD has blessed me because of you." The word "divination" is "nachash" (נָחַשׁ) and means "to hiss "or "whisper a magic spell," and "enchantment," "a diligent observation." This word was also used to describe certain powers of the Occult. Our translation speaks of "divination." That is probably an appropriate understanding. Laban said he had "divined" that God (Elohim - the God of mercy) had blessed him because of Jacob. Certainly Laban could not miss the fact that God had blessed him during the time Jacob was with him. When Jacob arrived, Laban had no sons. Now he had sons. When Jacob arrived, Laban's herds were small enough for one girl (Rachel) to shepherd. Now he has so many herds that it took several shepherds to watch over them. Imagine how this affected Laban. When Jacob's grandfather left Ur, he also stopped worshipping the idols that were used by these people. The people of the Chaldees had steadily lost their flocks and their wealth, while Isaac's family , who worshipped Jehovah, grew wealthy and powerful. There was no way they could deny the power and generosity of Jehovah. Laban had observed this generous act of God in contrast to the demanding, demeaning ways of Laban's idols.

Bargaining needed to be well planned. Laban's plan was contingent upon Jacob making the initial request. Observe how Laban started:

He added, "Name your wages and I will pay them." Genesis 30:28

This offer sounds far more generous than it really was. The beginning offer always sounds too good to be true, because it is. Laban wants Jacob to think of him as a generous man. The truth is that he was nothing of the sort. This was, however, a place to start the negotiations.

Jacob was expected to pick up the negotiations by responding to this generous, but not very specific offer. Jacob did just as he was expected to do.

Jacob said to him, "You know how I have worked for you and how your livestock has fared under my care. The little you had before I came has increased greatly, and the LORD has blessed you wherever I have been. But now, when may I do something for my own household?" Genesis 30:29, 30

Jacob was as able a negotiator as Laban. This was Jacob's opportunity to negotiate a good agreement if he was patient and not too greedy. Observe Jacob's negotiative expertise.

- He began by describing the excellence of his work.
- He touched on the fact that he was a hard worker.
- He moved on to stress that Laban's flocks fared very well because of Jacob's hard work and care.
- He mentioned that Laban's flocks had increased greatly. All this was demonstrable.
- The Lord (Jehovah) had blessed Laban because of Jacob.
- Jacob carefully did not suggest a financial consideration which he thought he should receive
- Jacob only asked when he could do something for his own house.

When Jacob came to Paddan-Aram, Laban had no sons and treated Jacob as a son. This, of course, was now changed. Whereas Jacob had once been considered Laban's heir, this was no longer the case. Now, Jacob had to plan his inheritance on his own. This increased the need for a much larger holding of flocks and possessions. Jacob had said some nice things about himself, but he had made no specific request. Had he made the request, it would have been used against him.

It was now Laban's turn to reply, but he had no request from Jacob which he could attack or make light of. This pressured Laban to ask again what he should give him. These negotiations were difficult and delicate. Jacob had conducted himself very well.

Notice how Laban had to reply:

"What shall I give you?" he asked. Genesis 30:31

Laban said all the things that sounded generous, friendly and concerned for his relative's welfare. None of this was real. These negotiations were strictly business.

It was in the best interest of both Jacob and Laban to force the other person to suggest the beginning figure for wage negotiations. Had Laban been as generous as he wanted to appear, he would have named a figure even if it would have been more than he could have arranged by strictly hard negotiations. Laban, now, had to find a way to keep the negotiations going without naming a specific offer. He did this by asking a direct question. Notice that it sounds as if any suggestion Jacob made would be acceptable.

Laban's direct question put Jacob on the spot. The wording of Laban's question further complicated the issue by making it sound like a gift rather than a wage Jacob deserved.

Jacob avoided Laban's insinuation by flatly announcing that Laban was not giving him anything. By claiming that Laban was not giving him anything, Jacob evened the negotiations.

The fact that Jacob was to be the beneficiary of this negotiation placed a burden on him to make the first offer. Jacob made a wise move by not mentioning a specific amount and instead suggested a pattern of payment. He did this by identifying the kind of animals that would be his rather than announcing a specific number.

Jacob's reply was strong, but calculated:

"Don't give me anything," Jacob replied. "But if you will do this one thing for me, I will go on tending your flocks and watching over them. Let me go through all your flocks today and remove from them every speckled or spotted sheep, every dark colored lamb and every spotted or speckled goat. They shall be my wages." Genesis 30:31b, 32

Jacob's opening statement may seem too strong, but it was not. Laban made a deliberate miscalculation by using the word "give." It portrayed Jacob as the recipient of a gift for which he had done nothing. It made Jacob look as though he was a beggar. Jacob was simply clarifying the situation. He had worked hard and did not want to be thought of as a beggar.

Jacob's request was carefully stated. He was asking for animals that were the least desirable - that meant that it would be easy for Laban to agree to his request. If Jacob asked for a specific number of animals, like 100 sheep, then Laban would try to negotiate the number down to 50. By asking for a kind of animal rather than a number, Jacob re-

moved the whole area of negotiation from this agreement. It also meant that Laban would not know how many animals he was agreeing to let Jacob have until he already had them. This entire procedure demonstrated Jacob's unusual skill in bargaining.

The statement in verse 33 gives an indication of the nature of their previous relationship.

> *"And my honesty will testify for me in the future, whenever you check on the wages you have paid me. Any goat in my possession that is not speckled or spotted, or any lamb that is not dark-colored will be considered stolen." Genesis 30:33*

Because this was a formal agreement, a covenant, it was not necessary to include a protective clause in it. The relationship was sufficiently strained that Jacob felt compelled to add an additional layer of protection to prevent his relative from violating their unbreakable agreement without incurring the wrath of his neighbor.

This protective device was easy to verify. Jacob's suggestion was carefully worded. It offered him an additional layer of protection against a violation of the agreement by Laban, and at the same time, the ease with which his compliance could be checked gave good reason for others to trust his faithfulness of intent.

A question needs to be addressed. Out of all the possible suggestions, why would Jacob choose this one? He could have suggested that every fifth or sixth lamb be his, but there would be no way to prove that he had been faithful to the agreement.

A second reason for Jacob's offer had to do with Laban's willingness to accept the offer. If extensive negotiations follow the first offer, this would suggest that Jacob was being unfair in his offer - a reputation everyone involved wanted to avoid. Everyone knew that the spotted and ringstreaked were the least desirable animals in the flock. An offer to remove such animals from the flock would help to rid the flock of further incidence of such animals and would help greatly in getting Laban to accept the offer. When Jacob volunteered to take these animals as his pay, Laban jumped at the chance.

Jacob made a very wise offer. It appeared that both Jacob and Laban had won the negotiations. It was not immediately clear just how well Jacob would fare from this agreement.

The author indicated that Laban was pleased with Jacob's offer.

> *"Agreed," said Laban. "Let it be as you have said." That same day he removed all the male goats that were streaked or spotted, and all the speckled or spotted female goats (all that had white on them) and all the dark-colored lambs, and he placed them in the care of his sons. Genesis 30:34, 35*

Laban's response indicates the level of his pleasure. He did not suggest any counter-offer just to see if this was the lowest possible offer. He wanted to accept the offer before Jacob had an opportunity to rethink his suggestion.

Laban's actions corroborated his words. The emphasis in this action was upon immediacy. Laban put the agreement into action on the same day it was made. There was now no time for a less profitable offer.

You will notice, in verses 34 and 35, that Laban did not trust Jacob to separate the sheep. The agreement, from Genesis 30:32, which was accepted by both Jacob and Laban, called for Jacob to go through the flock. Without changing the agreement, Laban did the separating. This would not be permissible and Laban knew it.

By the separating of the rams, it became virtually impossible for Jacob to realize an increase of even one animal. This was a desperate miscarriage of justice on the part of Laban. He has nearly assured the financial ruin of Jacob and his family.

There is a problem with the text in verses 34 and 35. At first glance, it appears that Laban sorted out all the spotted animals and placed them in the care of his sons. They promptly put three days distance between their flocks and those under the care of Jacob. It further appears that Laban entrusted the care of all the unspotted and healthy animals to the care of Jacob. I doubt if this is the case. Though the text is not clear at this point, it appears that Laban separated out all the spotted and sickly animals and placed them in the care of Jacob. Laban then gave the unspotted animals into the care of his own sons.

The text does not specifically state, but it appears that Jacob would have to care for his own animals and also provide a major portion of the care of Laban's flock. Otherwise, it would not be in Laban's interest to enter into the agreement.

There was a strange item also included that was not in the agreement.

> *Then he put a three day journey between himself and Jacob, while Jacob continued to tend the rest of Laban's flocks. Genesis 30:36*

This was unnecessary in view of the way these people cared for their animals. Shepherds tried to keep their flocks separate as much as possible, but it was not necessary. If two flocks got mixed, one shepherd would simply give a call and all of the sheep he tended would gather around him. The other sheep would not respond. This move, to put three days distance between the two flocks, could serve only two purposes:

- It could send the message that Laban did not trust Jacob and so he removed his sheep as far away as possible.
- It could be a way to make sure that no lambs or at least no good lambs were born.

In either situation, it could only further strain already very poor relationships between the two men. That did not appear to bother Laban. He separated the two flocks. He apparently felt that he had a foolproof plan to outdo Jacob.

Genesis 30:37-43 - Jacob Designs a Way to Undercut Laban

This paragraph seems to suggest a false assumption about animal husbandry. At first reading, it sounds as though the text suggests that the peeled white streaks in the bark of the Poplar and Almond polls were responsible for the occurrence of ringstreaked pelts on the animals that were conceived in that area. We know that this is not the cause of ringstreaked pelts. We wonder, why would the Biblical text suggest such a false idea? The fact is that the text does not teach this as a formula to cause such markings on the animals coats. The text tells us that Jacob did this. The assumption is that Jacob believed it would have such an effect.

Notice specifically what the text does say...

> *Jacob, however, took fresh-cut branches from poplar, almond and plane trees and made white stripes on them by peeling the bark and exposing the white inner wood of the branches. Then he placed the peeled branches in all the watering troughs so that they would be directly in front of the flocks when they came to drink Genesis 30:37, 38a*

Jacob was still up to his scheming ways. He was searching for ways to take natural events (conception and birth) and cause them to work in his favor. The result of this was that he would realize unequal benefit over Laban, but could not be held accountable for these events.

Jacob knew that the conception often took place when the animals were gathered at the watering trough. He probably observed that an animal conceived in front of a light colored tree or one with the bark removed and the white of the wood exposed and the resulting animal had a streaked coat. These verses emphasize two things about Jacob:

- Jacob was alert and opportunistic. He was always alert to find a better way to do his work .
- Jacob was still Jacob - the "heel-grabber." He never stopped looking for a way to take advantage of another individual for his own profit.

Jacob had a keen mind. Notice the author's report of the effectiveness of Jacob's efforts to undercut his uncle, Laban.

> *When the flocks were in heat and came to drink, They mated in front of the branches. And they bore young that were streaked or speckled or spotted. Genesis 30:38b, 39*

Jacob became wealthy, but he was also alert and hardworking. He always looked for ways to improve his conditions.

Having manipulated the situation in his own favor, Jacob looked for ways to capitalize on his gains.

> *Jacob set apart the young of the flock by themselves, but made the rest face the streaked and dark-colored animals that belonged to Laban. Thus he made separate flocks for himself and did not put them with Laban's animals. Genesis 30:40*

Jacob searched for ways to insure that as many animals as possible produced ringstreaked offspring. One way to accomplish this was to make sure that as few as possible produced offspring with clear coats. His manner of separating the animals also contributed to the attainment of this goal.

Jacob was not satisfied. He had also been very observant. Jacob noticed that strong animals produced strong offspring. He realized that if he was careful to allow the ringstreaked ewes to mate with only the strongest rams, he would produce not only more ringstreaked offspring, but these would also be very strong and healthy. The author described just how Jacob accomplished this feat.

> *Whenever the stronger females were in heat, Jacob would place the branches in the troughs in front of animals so that they would mate near the branches, but if the animals were weak, he would not place them there, so the weak animals went to Laban and the strong ones to Jacob. Genesis 30:41, 42*

This seems cruel. It is one thing to try to guarantee that his own flock would be strong and numerous. It is quite another to plan so that Laban's flock would be small and feeble. Why would he do that? This is simply a matter of power. The more animals and the stronger the flock Jacob had, the greater was his power. He could buy slaves to care for his flock and this increased his safety from attack. On the other hand, the smaller and weaker Laban's flock, the fewer servants he would have and the more defenseless he

would become. The result was that both the strength and large size of Jacob's flock and the small size and weak flock of Laban contributed to Jacob's wealth and power.

This was not the way it was supposed to be. Laban hired Jacob. The greater benefits should have been for Laban. In reality, Jacob prospered the most.

Notice there are contrasts in this passage. There is a contrast between Jacob and Laban. Though the text does not say so, it assumes that Laban allowed nature to take its course concerning the breeding of the animals. Whatever the color of the coat of the ram and ewe was not a concern so long as the young were born. He allowed the animals to mate as they would. Jacob was careful to make sure the ringstreaked mated with the strong rams and that the weakest rams mated with the ewes with a clear coat. Jacob engineered the outcome of the animals borne in his favor and against his uncle.

There was also a contrast in the results. Jacob's herd became larger and stronger. Laban's herd became smaller and weaker even though Laban was the owner of the operation.

Put yourself in Laban's place. How would you feel if you hired Jacob and he ended up prospering more than you did? Certainly, you would be angry, upset and even suspicious. That is exactly what Laban experienced.

In the closing verse of the chapter, the author summarized the situation in Jacob's home.

> *In this way the man (Jacob) grew exceedingly prosperous and came to own large flocks, and maidservants and menservants, and camels and donkeys. Genesis 30:43*

It is clear that Jacob did well. We must ask, "why did it not suffice the author to say this rather than tell that he not only had large flocks, but also had man-servants and maid-servants and camels and donkeys?" This additional information gives a more accurate impression of just how prosperous Jacob became. If he had a small increase in his flock, the existing herdsmen could care for them with ease. If the size of the herd increased substantially, however, then it would require a larger number of shepherds to care for the flocks. This would also require a larger number of maid-servants to prepare food and shelter and move the tents as new grazing areas were required.

The camels and donkeys served a different function. There are symbols of wealth and prestige in every era. In that culture, the possession of servants, camels and donkeys were all symbols of great wealth. Both the camel and the donkey were also beasts of burden. As Jacob's holdings increased, it was necessary to have these animals to move their tents and belongings from one site to another. There was also a second function for these animals. A man could accumulate an unlimited number of sheep and goats. The number of animals a given area could support, however, was definitely limited. When a man's accumulation of animals was greater than the grazing area could sustain, he had to either sell some of his animals or move to a larger, more prolific grazing area. If he sold his animals, there were several avenues in which he could invest his gains. He could invest in gold or gems. These required no grazing area. He could also purchase servants. These servants would have children and produce other servants to use or sell. He could also purchase beasts of burden. These camels and donkeys would bear others and he would retain his wealth and increase it thereby.

The text makes no mention of the fact, but there was a constant competition between Jacob and Laban in terms of their religions. There had been a similar problem during the early life of Abraham, and it had not gone away. Laban and his family participated in idolatry. They believed that their idols were powerful and concerned about them. Jacob and his family, however, did not worship idols, but worshipped Jehovah. He was convinced that God prospered him and watched over him.

The competition between Jacob and Laban had many side issues which surrounded it. It was devastating enough for either of them to be bested by the other. Add to this the embarrassment that they would both feel when the other succeeded or surpassed them. It was a personal failure. It was also a failure for their deity. The people of the desert did not take this kindly. The closing statement in the paragraph is fraught with emotion. Jacob became exceedingly prosperous and this meant defeat for Laban and defeat for his idols as well. That was not easy for him to handle.

This chapter is a study in wasted struggles. Bilhah and Zilpah were only given to Jacob to bear children because of the struggle for supremacy between Rachel and Leah. What good came of that effort? Not one of the children of Bilhah or Zilpah turned out well. The four sons, that Leah used to humiliate Rachel, all became a liability to the family. Their lives created strife, but nothing worthwhile.

The struggle between Jacob and Laban was a conflict between two "heel-grabbers." Ultimately all their underhandedness accomplished nothing. What a colossal waste of effort!

There were ego defenses and confrontations separating these two men. Greater than this, however, was the confrontation between the God of Jacob and the gods that Laban and his people served. Behind all the rest, this was the issue that was central in the conflict.

The trappings have changed, but life has changed little from that time to ours. People still struggle to protect their ego or something unimportant. We still waste our time and energy trying to be better than someone else, rather than seeking to be the best that we can be. In such a world, God speaks again. He will be with us even when our motives do not bear close scrutiny. God will still care for us when we have not expressed care for each other. Look carefully at your relationships with others. What do these say about what you value most? What do these things tell you about what is important in God's eyes?

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 7

JACOB FLEES LABAN

GENESIS 31:1 - 32:2

1. In our best manuscripts there are six paragraphs in Genesis chapter 31. Read the chapter carefully. On the following table, write a title of seven words or less for each paragraph.

31:1-16	
31:17-21	
31:22-32	
31:33-35	
31:36-42	
31:43-32:2	

2. In Genesis 31:1-16, the author describes Jacob's plan to flee from Laban.
   a. Read the closing paragraph of chapter 30 and the opening paragraph of chapter 31. What observations can you make? How are these two related to each other?
   b. When Jacob explained to Rachel and Leah the reasons he wanted to leave Paddan-Aram, what three reasons did he give them?
   c. Is there any significance to the fact that there are **three** reasons?
   d. In Genesis 31:6-8, Jacob draws a serious contrast between Laban and himself. Describe that contrast.
   e. In Genesis 31:6-8, Jacob also draws a strong contrast between God and Laban. Describe that contrast.
   f. In Genesis 31:8, 9, Jacob attributes the type of lambs born in the flock to divine action. We also know that Jacob made serious efforts to affect this outcome. On the basis of the text, how can you explain Jacob's position that God was responsible for these results.
   g. In Genesis 31:10-12, Jacob had a dream about the marking of the new-born lambs in the flock. What does this dream have to do with Jacob's attempts to control the kind of lambs the ewes bore?
   h. In Genesis 31:13, God identified Himself as the God of Bethel:
      1. What does this mean?
      2. What difference does it make?
   i. In Genesis 31:14, 15, the author said, "Then Rachel and Leah replied..." This was the first time the two women were mentioned in this order. What significance, if any, can you attach to this fact?
   j. In Genesis 31:14, 15, Jacob's wives talked about being regarded as "foreigners." What does this mean?

k. In Genesis 31:16, there is a serious misunderstanding of the culture in which these people lived.
   1. What is the misunderstanding?
   2. How could Jacob's wives describe this situation correctly?

3. In Genesis 31:17-21, the author describes Jacob's escape from Laban.
   a. In 31:17, 18, the author mentioned that Jacob put his wives and children on camels and drove them ahead of him. Why is this significant?
   b. In Genesis 31:19, the author highlights the fact that Rachel stole Laban's household gods while he was away sheering sheep. Why would it be necessary to do this while Laban was away from camp?
   c. What reason could you suggest for the fact that Rachel stole the household gods rather than something far more valuable in which her father had invested?

4. In Genesis 31:22-32, Laban caught up with Jacob.
   a. In verse 22, the author indicated that Laban learned of Jacob's surprise flight and immediately took his family, friends, and hired servants and pursued Jacob as quickly as possible. What does this tell you about Laban's purpose in this pursuit?
   b. In 31:23, the author indicates that Laban caught up with Jacob in seven days.
      1. What does this tell you about the intensity of the pursuit?
      2. What do you learn from these pieces of information?
   c. In Genesis 31:24, God appeared to Laban in a dream.
      1. Put yourself in Laban's position. How would you, as a worshipper of idols made of wood and stone, feel if Jacob's God spoke to you in a dream?
      2. Now look at what God said to Laban in the dream. What would these instructions mean to you?
   d. In Genesis 31:25, the author indicates that Jacob had pitched his tent in the hill country of Gilead when Laban caught up with him.
      1. What does this information tell you?
      2. How does it assist in understanding the message of the text?
   e. In 31:26-28, Laban verbally attacked Jacob for leaving Paddan-Aram secretly.
      1. Put yourself in Jacob's position. How would you feel if this was said to you?
      2. Read each attack and question again.
         (a). Is each one honest?
         (b). Is each one fair?
         (c). If Laban had been present when Jacob was about to leave, do you believe he would have thrown a party to celebrate their departure?
   f. In Genesis 31:29, Laban told Jacob that God had spoken to him.
      1. He bragged, "I have the power to harm you..." Is that really true?
      2. Laban called God, "The God of your father."
         (a). What did he mean by that name?
         (b). How would this name affect Laban?
         (c). Compare this verse with what you know of the idols Laban served. What did you learn?
      3. What instructions did God give Laban?
      4. What is the significance of this instruction?

g. In Genesis 31:30, Laban made a statement about Jacob's motive for leaving Paddan-Aram. Just how accurate was Laban's assessment?
h. In Genesis 31:30, Laban made a serious accusation against Jacob concerning the household gods.
    1. Jacob did not worship the household gods which Laban worshipped. Explain the reasoning that would cause Laban to accuse Jacob.
    2. Put yourself in Jacob's place. How would you feel when Laban made such a serious accusation?
i. In Genesis 31:31, 32, Jacob responded to Laban's fierce attack.
    1. Jacob claimed that he feared Laban would take Leah, Rachel and their children away from him. In view of the context, just how realistic was this fear?
    2. Jacob made two bold assertions about the theft. "The thief shall not live." "In the presence of our relatives see for yourself whether there is anything of yours here with me; and if so take it." What would be the effect of these assertions be upon Laban? Upon the relatives of both men?
    3. In Genesis 31:32, the author indicates that Rachel had stolen Laban's household gods. List all the possible reasons she might have for committing such a terrible crime? Which reasons seems most reasonable?

5. In Genesis 31:33-35, Rachel deceived her father.
    a. Notice that this paragraph begins with the word "so." What information does this fact provide for us?
    b. In Genesis 31:33, the author described Laban's search.
        1. Record the order in which Laban searched the tents?
        2. What does this tell you?
    c. In Genesis 31:34, 35, Rachel carried out her deception.
        1. Study what Rachel said and did. What does this study tell you about Rachel?
        2. Read verse 35 again. Rachel explained why she could not rise to let her father search the place where she sat. Explain why she would make this false comment to her father?

6. In Genesis 31:36-42, Jacob made a scathing attack on Laban.
    a. Remember, Jacob did not know what Rachel had done. Read 31:36 again.
        1. Put yourself in Jacob's position. What would your feelings be?
        2. Now put yourself in Laban's position. How would you feel listening to this attack?
    b. In 31:37, Jacob made at least three attacks on Laban. Write these down and study the list.
        1. In both 31:36 and 31:37, Jacob attacked Laban because of his accusations and the humiliation. What did Jacob say in 31:37 that he had not already said in 31:36?
        2. What hint of motive can you find for Jacob's continued attack in 31:37?
    c. In Genesis 31:38, 39, Jacob continued his attack on Laban, but in a different direction. Read these two verses several times.
        1. What do these verses tell you about Jacob?
        2. What do these verses tell you about Laban?

3. What hint can you find concerning the reason Jacob felt he needed to say these things?

d. In Genesis 31:40, Jacob again continued his attack.
   1. Jacob described what life had been like, for him, as a shepherd for Laban. In what way was Jacob's experience different from that of other shepherds?
   2. In view of your answer, what was Jacob seeking to accomplish by this part of the attack?

e. In Genesis 31:41, Jacob continued his description of his life as a shepherd for Laban. Read this verse carefully.
   1. There are three statements in the two sentences of this verse. List these three statements.
   2. Study these three statements:
      (a). What are the statements?
      (b). How many of these events could Jacob control?
      (c), How many of these three statements benefited Jacob in one way or another?
      (d). In view of these facts, why did Jacob include this verse in his tirade?

f. In Genesis 31:42, Jacob talked about God and identified Him in four different ways.
   1. What are they?
   2. What does each reference add to the thing Jacob said?
   3. Put yourself in Laban's situation. The gods he served were not known for their mercy, but for their frightening actions. How would you feel when Jacob said this?

7. In Genesis 31:43-32:2, the scene changed. Now Jacob and Laban entered into a covenant.
   a. Read 31:43 and think carefully about the first sentence.
      1. List the statements that Laban made.
      2. Are all of these statements true?
   b. In the closing question in Genesis 31:43, what was Laban saying? What was the expected answer to Laban's question?
   c. In Genesis 31:44, there is an invitation to enter into a covenant.
      1. How would you describe the emotional tone of this invitation?
      2. In view of the context of this invitation, why would either Laban or Jacob want to enter into a covenant?
   d. In Genesis 31:45, Jacob responds to Laban's request for a covenant.
      1. What was Jacob doing?
      2. What did this mean?
   e. In Genesis 31:46, the author reported two things:
      1, What were the two things?
      2. What did these things mean?
   f. In Genesis 31:45, 46, something is missing and this is a surprise.
      1. What is the surprising omission?
      2. How do you explain this fact?
   g. In Genesis 31:47, both Jacob and Laban give this place a name.

1. What do these names mean? (If the margin of your Bible does not give this information, consult a Bible Dictionary)
2. What is the significance of these names?

h. Laban made a strong statement in 31:48. What did Laban mean by this statement?

i. Across the country, many youth groups use the words of Genesis 31:49 as a closing benediction for their regular meetings.
1. What emotion describes how Laban felt as he spoke these words?
2. Explain why it is or is not appropriate to use this verse as a benediction.

j. In simple terms, Genesis 31:50 is a threat.
1. Was it appropriate for Laban to threaten Jacob in this manner over these issues?
2. What did Laban mean when he said, "Even though no one is with us"?
3. What did Laban say about God in this verse?
4. What would this say to Laban about the household gods he served?

k. There is a problem with what Laban said in 31:51.
1. What is the problem?
2. How do you explain this situation?

l. In Genesis 31:52, Laban spells out the whole idea behind their covenant.
1. What is the issue behind Laban's announcement?
2. On the basis of the text and context, for whose benefit - Jacob's or Laban's - was this announcement made?

m. In Genesis 31:53, Laban made a surprising appeal.
1. Laban really made three appeals. What are they?
2. Why would Laban appeal to the "God of Abraham" when he did not believe in Abraham's God?
3. Why would Laban insult Jacob by appealing to the "God of Nahor" when Jacob did not believe in these household deities?
4. What was added to the appeal to the gods when Laban said, "the God of their father?"
5. What was Laban's motive in adding "the God of their father" to his appeal?
6. What does Laban mean when he appeals to the gods to "judge between us"?
7. The final sentence in 31:53, was Jacob's response to Laban's invitation.
(a). Why does the author mention that Jacob took an oath , but says nothing about Laban doing the same thing?
(b). What did the author mean when he said that "Jacob took an oath in the name of the fear of his father Isaac?"
(c). What is "the fear of his father Isaac."?
(d). Why didn't Jacob use the name for God that Laban suggested?

n. Genesis 31:54 contains four symbolic statements:
1. What are the four symbolic statements?
2. What does each one mean?
3. What does this verse add to our understanding of this entire story?

o. The final picture of Laban in Scripture is found in Genesis 31:55.
1. What does this picture describe?
2. What does it mean?

3. There is a symbol which, shockingly, is missing in this verse.
   (a). What is the symbol?
   (b). What has the author told us by this omission?

p. In Genesis 32:1, the author tells us Jacob was met by the angels of God.
   1. In view of what Jacob had been through and the frightening encounter he was about to experience with Esau, if you were Jacob, what would this encounter mean to you?
   2. How would you feel?

q. Jacob expressed astonishment in Genesis 32:2
   1. What astonished him?
   2. What did this mean?
   3. What is the significance of the name he gave this place?

8. Look carefully at your life during the past year. Most of us have encountered a Laban somewhere along the way. The message for these encounters in life is this:

   If the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the fear of Isaac, had not been with me, you would surely have sent me away empty-handed. ***But God*** *has seen my hardship and the toil of my hands, and last night he rebuked you. Genesis 31:42*

   The question is, What is your hope on the basis of your knowledge of God? What do you honestly expect God to do in the crucial times in life?

LESSON 7: GENESIS 31:1 - 32:2

JACOB FLEES LABAN

Introduction

There are six paragraphs in our best manuscripts of Genesis chapter 31. A brief summary of their content is as follows:

31:1-16	Jacob Plans to Flee Laban
31:17-21	Jacob and Family Flee Laban
31:22-32	Laban Catches Jacob - Accuses Jacob of Stealing Idols
31:33-35	Rachel Deceives Laban
31:36-42	Jacob Scathes Laban
31:43-32:2	Jacob and Laban Enter into Covenant

You will note, from the table above, that this study includes all of chapter 31 and two verses in chapter 32. This is due to the fact that the paragraph does not end with 31:55, but continues to 32:2. Unfortunately, most recent translations do not identify this fact by the way they format their chapters.

Genesis 31:1-16 - Jacob Plans to Flee Laban

This paragraph and chapter 31 as a whole begin with the word "and." This ties the content of chapter 31 to the content of the end of chapter 30. That is very significant. Chapter 30 ends with a description of Jacob's accumulated wealth. Chapter 31, on the other hand, begins with the author's statement about the way Laban's sons talked about Jacob. This is a way of saying that Jacob's great accumulation of wealth was the cause of the things Laban's sons said about Jacob. Notice how the author described the situation.

> *Jacob heard that Laban's sons were saying, "Jacob has taken everything our father owned and has gained all his wealth from what belonged to our father. Genesis 31:1*

Jacob had gone from great poverty to exceptional wealth. It is also true that Laban did everything within his power to try to keep Jacob from accumulating anything at all.

Laban's sons were now young men. We presume that they were approximately 17 or 18 years of age. Many young men of this age had already taken control of their families. In the above quotation you can see that their concern had to do with wealth, not with justice. The boys had focused their attention on two things:

- Jacob has taken away (diminished) their father's holdings. This decreased their inheritance.

- Jacob **used** their father's holdings to build his own wealth. This suggests that they feel that he does not deserve to have it.

Jacob also observed something about Laban.

And Jacob noticed that Laban's attitude toward him was not what it had been. Genesis 31:2

This suggests that though Laban had violated the agreement almost immediately, he was not happy with the way it was working out. The fact that Laban's attitude toward Jacob had changed suggests that Laban held Jacob responsible for this undesirable turn of events. This may not seem like much to us, but it was an ominous sign to Jacob. Laban was the leader of a clan. In the desert economy, a clan leader had life and death power over any member of his clan. The complaints of Laban's sons raised concern; the visible disfavor of Laban was traumatic.

Is there a cause, effect relationship between verses one and two? The text does not indicate so, but our suspicion is that this had been a family fear and the cause of both expressions of discomfort in Laban's family. It is clear, in the text, that Jacob was sharp and alert. Many people could go through the same kind of experience Jacob did and never realize that there was a problem. Jacob was observant enough to notice that his success was a source of tension for the sons of Laban. Jacob was also alert enough to notice that though nothing was said, Laban's attitude toward him had changed. Jacob was sharp enough to realize that this meant trouble for him if he did not act immediately concerning this situation.

Jacob's observation of Laban and his sons was frightening to say the least. The author, however, presents the other side of the contrast in verse three.

Then the Lord said to Jacob, "Go back to the land of your fathers and to your relatives, and I will be with you." Genesis 31:3

Laban and his sons stood against Jacob. At the same time, however, God was with Jacob and guided him. The question comes to mind, "Why would God tell Jacob to go back to his relatives when he was already with relatives?" Technically, that is true. Practically, that was not true. Because it was his mother's family, they felt no compulsion to look after him. Jacob could be dealt with like any other foreigner, and he was. It was seen as a victory for their god if they could manipulate someone who worshipped another god. That is exactly how they treated Jacob.

There is another concern. Children were and are very important in an eastern culture. Jacob feared that Laban would want to send him away and keep his wives and children. That would be devastating for us, but even worse for them.

Another question comes to mind. Three pieces of information helped Jacob to make up his mind to leave Laban:

- The conversation of Laban's sons
- Laban's attitude
- The message from God.

Is it possible that these are the three witnesses that are later required to establish truth in Deuteronomy 17:6? Granted, that law had not yet been delivered and would not be for more than 100 years. Still, we know that all of the ten commandments were known and

practiced probably a hundred years or so before Israel went to Sinai. My best understanding of this is that it was a practice of the law long before the law was given.

Notice that again God gives a promise to accompany His instructions. He told Jacob to go back to his own family. This could have been a very dangerous decision. His father-in-law could have detained his wives and children, done Jacob physical harm, and taken away his flocks, his wealth.

In view of these facts, God gave Jacob a promise - "I will be with you." The presence of God was equal to whatever danger he might encounter. On the basis of the problems he faced and the promise God had given, Jacob made a decision.

This is a turning point in the story of Jacob, but it is more than that. It is a picture of how God deals with His people. When everyone was against Jacob; even when Jacob did not do very well at following God: still, God was with him.

In verse three there is another emphasis on being **in** the land. God told Jacob to return to the land He had covenanted to give to him and his heritage after him.
For all Jacob's underhandedness, still there was a real concern for God in his life.

> *So Jacob sent word to Rachel and Leah to come out to the fields where his flocks were. Her said to them, "I see that your father's attitude toward me is not what it was before, but the God of my father has been with me." Genesis 31:4, 5*

In the text, it appears that Jacob's action was immediate. That is probably not the case. Notice how Jacob pursued his decision. Jacob set about doing what God had counseled him to do. Was it simply because God told him to go? Was it because he saw the displeasure in Laban's face? Was it that he had heard about the conversations of Laban's sons? The text is not clear on this point, but the response was immediate.

Notice that when Jacob called his wives to come to the field, he told them just what had happened to him:

- He heard of the conversations of Laban's sons
- He saw the change in Laban's attitude
- He heard God tell him to go to Canaan

Jacob apparently thought his two wives would need to be convinced. Notice the explanation he gave for his intentions:

> *"You know that I've worked for your father with all my strength, yet your father has cheated me by changing my wages ten times. However, God has not allowed him to harm me. If he said, 'The speckled ones will be your wages,' then all the flocks gave birth to speckled young; and if he said, 'The streaked ones will be your wages,' then all the flocks bore streaked young." Genesis 31:6-8*

Observe that Jacob draws a strong contrast between his conduct and that of Laban:

JACOB	LABAN
Served Laban with all his power	Deceived Jacob
	Changed Jacob's wages 10 times

As Jacob presented his view of the situation to his wives, it is clear that he felt that he was the abused person in the covenant. He was taken advantage of, but he did a little of his own undermining.

There is another contrast in these verses that is equally strong.

LABAN	GOD
Deceived Jacob	God did not allow Laban to hurt Jacob
Laban changed Jacob's wages 10 times	

It is clear from the chart that there is a fundamental difference between Laban and God. Laban is doing everything possible to make sure that Jacob does not survive. God is guaranteeing that Jacob not only survives, but prospers. Laban fails; God succeeds.

A question naturally arises. If God would not allow Laban to hurt Jacob, and Jacob believed that, then why did Jacob work so hard to undercut Laban?

The text does not address this question. My own feeling is that if Jacob had trusted God to watch over him, God would have done it. I also remember that there were many times in my own Christian walk when what I knew was not allowed to have an effect upon what I did because of my own weak faith. We must also remember that Jacob had been a "heel-grabber" all his life. Old patterns are not easily broken. God worked to protect Jacob even though His faltering servant was not able to trust Him completely.

There is another facet of this whole experience. Laban and Jacob served different gods. In the understanding of that day, if a man won, it was considered a victory for his god. If Laban was able to undercut Jacob, it was considered that his idols were stronger than Jehovah. Not only did Jacob win the struggle for the flocks, it was also a resounding defeat for the idols that Laban worshipped.

To break a contract was a terrible thing. To break a contract ten consecutive times was unheard of and totally unacceptable. No one in that culture would ever trust such a person again.

In the next sentence, Jacob gave specific detail about how Laban made changes in their contract:

> *If he said, "The speckled ones will be your wages," then all the flocks gave birth to speckled young; and if he said, 'The streaked ones will be your wages' then all the flocks bore streaked young. So God has taken away your father's livestock and has given them to me." Genesis 31:8, 9*

Jacob attributed this phenomenal situation to the action of God. Again, a related question requires an answer. If Jacob did so many things to manipulate the outcome of the flock, then how can he say that God did it?

If Jacob believed that whatever he did, God was at work in it, he would not be the only one in history to think that way. We must, again, acknowledge that the text does not speak clearly to the issue. Some scholars believe that when Laban saw the color of the rams that impregnated the ewes, he would change the wages so that Jacob would not receive any lambs of that particular color. These scholars continue their explanation saying that God changed the markings of the unborn lambs to whatever coloration of the lambs Jacob was

to receive. This, of course, can not be corroborated. Whatever happened, God took the responsibility for causing it to happen and Jacob affirmed this divine action.

Jacob spoke quite clearly about the results of the wage manipulations. It was not that Jacob received some newborn animals when Laban tried to insure against it. Jacob did receive lambs which Laban tried to prohibit, but there was more. Each time Laban tried to cheat Jacob out of what was rightfully his, the number of Laban's flock declined just as Jacob's flock increased. As the attempts to defraud Jacob continued, the difference between the growing size of Jacob's flock and the declining size of Laban's flock multiplied.

Jacob, speaking with his wives, shares some information not previously known to us.

> *"In breeding season I once had a dream in which I looked up and saw that the male goats mating with the flock were streaked, speckled or spotted. The angel of God said to me in the dream, 'Jacob,' I answered, 'Here I am.' And he said, 'Look up and see that all the male goats mating with the flock are streaked, speckled or spotted, for I have seen all that Laban has been doing to you.'" Genesis 31:10-12*

Jacob told Leah and Rachel that he had seen a dream concerning the coloring of the flock. Whatever God may do currently, dreams were one way He communicated with those who served on His behalf at that time.

In this dream, Jacob saw that the rams, by which the ewes conceived, were of three varieties: ring streaked, speckled and spotted. Two questions come to mind:

- Why would the same information concerning the coloration of the rams, be presented twice - in the dream and in the angel's announcement?

  This would be shocking information. That would help account for the double presentation. Later on, when the law was presented, it was decreed that truth was established by two or three witnesses. Could this be a divine criteria to help people discern truth? We can not be sure. We do know it is good educational procedure to show the learner what you want them to discover and then tell them what you have already shown them.

- What do "ring streaked", "speckled" and "spotted" mean?

  Ring streaked - The Hebrew word "aqod" (עָקֹד) means striped in a winding crooked manner

  Speckled -"Naqod" (נָקֹד) to mark by branding, spotted, speckled

  Spotted - "Barod" (בָּרֹד) spotted as if a dark animal coat were sprinkled with hail

Notice how the angel describes Laban's actions - "I have seen all that Laban **has been doing** to you." This was not an isolated event or even a series of events. This was an ongoing way of life with Laban and God was making sure that Laban did not succeed in taking advantage of Jacob.

Having established what the angel of God was doing on Jacob's behalf, the divine emissary continued by identifying these events with the character of God.

> *"I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar and where you made a vow to me. Now leave this land at once and go back to your native land." Genesis 31:13*

God identified himself as "the God of Bethel." The name for God that He used was "el" (אֵל). This name places an emphasis on the fact that God is almighty,; it stresses the idea of divine strength. The name "Bethel" is a compound name which means house of El or

house of the Almighty God. A careful translation of the sentence might read like this: "I am the Almighty God of the house of Almighty God." When God said He was the God of Bethel, He was reminding Jacob of the experience in Bethel recorded in Genesis 28.

In part at least, Jacob had manipulated people because he had never learned to trust God to do what needed to be done. It was this "heel-grabbing" outlook; this "Jacob" attitude that got him into the problems he had when he fled from his father's home and came to Bethel in Genesis 28. There God appeared to Jacob in a dream. He reaffirmed the promise to give the whole land to Jacob rather than for him to try to manipulate his way into inheriting it. God was saying, "I will give you the whole land." This was important because one of the promises God made to Jacob at Bethel was that He would protect him. Protection was a very important consideration at this point in Jacob's life.

Now God identified Himself as the God who appeared to Jacob in that place of covenant called Bethel. The angel of God went on to identify Bethel as the place where Jacob anointed a pillar. Anointing was a symbolic act whereby a person set apart a person or thing for the purposes of God. Kings were anointed as a way of saying that they had been sanctified, separated for the service of God in leading His people. The priests were anointed for the service of the temple. God reminded Jacob that he had anointed a pillar of stone with oil. This was a symbol of sanctifying this place; of setting this place apart from all others as a place where sacrifices were to be made to God. If you remember, Jacob did not make sacrifices at Bethel in Genesis 28. God now identified Himself as the God of the place Jacob set aside for worship and sacrifice. God was calling Jacob to return to the place he had promised would be a place of sacrifice and use it for that deep experience of worship for which it was intended.

The angel of God continued to speak in Jacob's dream. On behalf of Jehovah, the angel of God said, "I am the God of Bethel, where you made a vow to me." In Genesis 28:20-22, Jacob made three promises to Jehovah:

- Jehovah will be my God
- This stone shall be God's (Elohim) house
- I will tithe all that you give me - the tithe of gratitude, not necessity.

God reminded Jacob that he had made promises to God and it was time to make good on those promises. The important thing about these promises was that they established a covenant relationship. God always wanted a covenant relationship, not the burning of an animal.

In verses 14 through 16, Leah and Rachel respond to Jacob's presentation of what they should do. It appears that they have talked this matter over at considerable length.

> *Then Rachel and Leah replied, "Do we still have any share in the inheritance of our father's estate? Does he not regard us as foreigners? Not only has he sold us, but he has used up what was paid for us." Genesis 31:14, 15*

Notice that verse 14 contains a dramatic change. This is the first time that the two wives of Jacob are mentioned in this order - "Rachel and Leah." There are two reasons for the previous word order:

- Leah was the older of the two wives. Age was always treated with respect.
- Because Leah was the older of the two, she was married to Jacob before Rachel was.

Verse 14 is a most unusual statement. It has caused some scholars to believe that Laban may have had a drinking or gambling problem. At the least, this was an unusual statement to be made about a herdsman. When they sold animals or gained wealth in some other way, they would buy more servants or more animals so that they could again increase their holdings. This sounds like he used up what he had received as their dowry. This is probably not the case.

Verse 14 would have a strange sound coming from the lips of a daughter in that culture. The family inheritance was normally divided among the sons in the family. The daughters were not included in this. Their rationale, of that culture, for this was that the daughters would benefit from the inheritance from her husband's inheritance in his family. The daughters, however, were guaranteed a dowry from the liquid assets the family possessed at the time of the death of the father.

In this instance, however, Rachel and Leah had apparently figured in the inheritance of their father for a number of years. This was due to the fact that when Jacob married Leah, it appears Laban had no sons. Jacob would then become his heir. With the birth of Laban's sons, this was all changed. The daughters, now married, would receive no part of the family inheritance. One can see why they would speak as forcefully as they did in verse 14.

It would be easy to get a wrong impression from verse 15. When Rachel and Leah said, "Does he not regard us as foreigners?" This requires our understanding. They were not speaking of the mistrust and disrespect that Jews and Samaritans extended to each other. Their words dealt with something more specific than that. A foreigner or "nakriy" (נָכְרִי) was something so strange it commands intense observation. People of a different color will be closely watched by persons who had never seen someone like that before. Differing customs can also arouse suspicion. People from other nations had no legal standing and could not own property. It is to this that Rachel and Leah refer when speaking of themselves as "strangers."

Verses 14 and 15 were not such unusual statements for that era, but they are totally beyond our comprehension. These verses give us a glimpse into the mindset and attitude of that desert culture. They could speak casually of being sold like cattle. We are horrified by that thought. It is possible to understand this statement in a different light. Usually a groom paid a specific price for his bride. An understanding father might allow the bride to have part or all of that price for her headpiece. It was a way of showing how well she married. In this case, Laban received 14 years labor for his two daughters and kept the benefits of it all. This strong statement remains a question in our minds.

The strong statements from Jacob's wives were not completed as yet. Their anger was not yet satisfied.

> *"Surely all the wealth that God took away from our father belongs to us and our children. So do whatever God has told you." Genesis 31:16*

Rachel was apparently the one who spoke. It could be that she spoke for the two of them because she was the one that Jacob loved the most and probably had the greatest impact on his thinking. Her words betray her attitude. She apparently thought that her father had lost the animals because God took them away from him. She also felt that God had given these animals to Leah and herself because Laban had given them nothing, but kept the benefits of Jacob's work, which was substantial, for himself.

Notice that Rachel told Jacob to do what God told him to do. Leah was the older sister. She had also been married to Jacob longer than Rachel. On the basis of these facts, we need to ask, Why did Rachel answer Jacob rather than her older sister? The text does not address this question. Our best guess is that Rachel answered because she was much closer to Jacob than Leah was. Leah had a technical position, but Rachel had a real position. Rachel's answer was not completely factual. In reality, everything that God took away from Laban was not destined to belong to these two daughters and their children. By desert custom, none of it would have belonged to them. It appears that her motivation was not spiritual, but reactionary. It is almost as though she was saying, "If Laban is going to be like that, then do what God told you to do." This smacks of spite. We need to be generous, at this point. These women grew up in a pagan environment. They had known nothing of how God deals with His people.

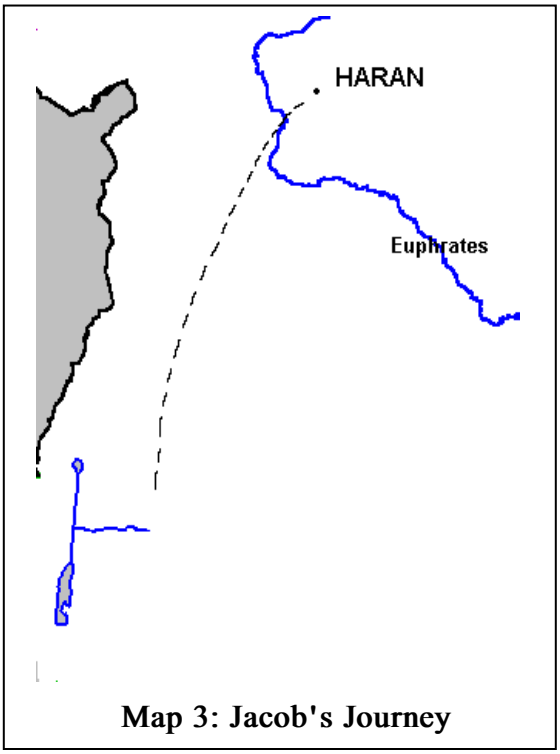
It should also be observed that Rachel told Jacob to do what God told him. She was acknowledging that God speaks to His people. This was quite an assertion coming from a person out of a pagan background where the gods did not speak at all.

Genesis 31:17-21 - Jacob and Family Flee Laban

This paragraph begins with the word "then." This suggests that this is the next step in the telling of a story. Having made the decision to escape this uncomfortable situation, Jacob prepared to leave his father-in-law, Laban.

> *Then Jacob put his children and his wives on camels, and he drove all his livestock ahead of him, along with all the goods he had accumulated in Paddan Aram, to go to his father Isaac in the land of Canaan. Genesis 31: 17, 18*

The fact that Jacob put his wives and sons on camels is more than a report of his action. If a person was wealthy enough to have a camel, it would be used to transport his tents and supplies. For the author to say that Jacob put his wives and sons on camels was to say that he was wealthy enough to have animals to transport his tents, goods and then have 10 or 15 more to transport his wives and children. This is a description of one of the wealthiest people in that part of the world.



Map 3: Jacob's Journey

On Map 3 you can see what kind of trip they were beginning.

Though it does not appear so in our text, verse 19 begins with the word "and" in the Hebrew text.

> *When Laban had gone to shear his sheep, Rachel stole her father's household gods. Genesis 31:19*

The word "and" suggests that there is a fur-

ther step in the story which is about to be revealed. This step involves two parts:

- Laban was away shearing his sheep
- Rachel, Laban's daughter, stole the teraphim, the family idols

It appears that the author has described a picture of theft within the family. It is this, but it is more. The teraphim were carved images that were worshipped within the family. These idols were kept in the tent of the father of the household. In the event he was deceased, these idols were kept by his heir, the one who would then assume control of the family and the family fortune. This would normally be the oldest son. When Jacob started his relationship with his father-in-law, Laban had no sons. In such a situation it was acceptable for the son-in-law to be the heir. It appears this was the situation in Laban's household. By the time Jacob was preparing to leave, Laban had more than one son. It was now assumed that the natural son would be the heir. What most of them thought of as a simple instance of theft was really Rachel's way of saying, "my husband deserves to be the heir in this family." Rachel was taking something that belonged to her father, but she felt it really belonged to her husband. This puts the whole experience in a completely different light.

The author turns the spotlight back to Jacob again.

> *Moreover, Jacob deceived Laban the Aramean by not telling him he was running away. Genesis 31:20*

The author emphasized a point in this verse. He began by saying that what Jacob did was deceptive. The Hebrew word is "ganab" (גָּנַב) which means to steal, to gain by stealth, to secretly steal away. It was not a matter of poor timing or uncritical decision-making. This was a deliberate plan to sneak away while Laban was out of camp. This was a way to surprise Laban and allow Jacob to get several days away from the camp before Laban knew he had gone. Jacob certainly hoped that he would be gone for a week or so before Laban knew he was gone. Though the text does not say so, apparently a servant or family member went and told Laban immediately. This way, Jacob had only a three day start on Laban and his men.

Again, the picture was more than it appeared to be. Jacob left his father-in-law's home without saying good-bye to the family. In that culture, it was a serious insult to the host. In almost every instance it meant that the guest had no respect for the hospitality he had received from the host. The text does not say so, but it appears to be a reasonable assumption that this represented Jacob's feelings on that occasion.

In verse 21, the author identifies the direction Jacob was taking on his way home.

> *So he fled with all he had, and crossing the River, he headed for the hill country of Gilead. Genesis 31:21*

On Map 3 you can see the direction Jacob was taking in his effort to return home.

As you look at this map, Jacob was heading in the right direction to go to Canaan. Though the map does not reveal it, this was rugged terrain and Jacob had approximately 500 miles to travel. This was going to be a long and dangerous trip.

Genesis 31:22-32 - Laban Catches Jacob - Accuses Jacob of Stealing Idols

This paragraph, in the Hebrew text, begins with the word "and." We learned in our grammar studies that there is only one major thought in a paragraph. Beginning a new paragraph suggests that this will be a new major idea. Beginning such a paragraph with the word "and" suggests that this new major idea is tied to the major idea of the previous paragraph. The connection between the flight of Jacob and the theft of the idol had to appear as a cause and effect relationship to Laban.

In this paragraph the spotlight shifts back to Laban.

> *On the third day, Laban was told that Jacob had fled. Taking his relatives with him, he pursued Jacob for seven days and caught up with him in the hill country of Gilead. Genesis 31:22, 23*

Some might wonder why they waited three days to tell Laban that this impossible thing had happened. You will remember that in Genesis 30:36, Laban removed his flock a distance of three days journey from the flock of Jacob. It took someone, probably a servant or family member of Laban, three days to travel to the place where Laban and his sons were watching the flock.

Notice that the author reports that Laban "took his relatives with him." This statement can describe blood brothers. It can also be used to describe servants, hired laborers and neighbors.

The question comes to mind, if both Laban and Jacob were traveling, then how was Laban able to overtake Jacob as he fled? You will remember that Jacob was traveling with all his possessions and his slow moving flock. Laban, on the other hand, did not have his flocks with him. He also did not have the slow moving animals that carried the tents and possessions of Jacob.

In verse 24, there is a different facet of the major idea in this paragraph.

> *Then God came to Laban the Aramean in a dream at night and said to him, "Be careful not to say anything to Jacob, either good or bad." Genesis 31:24*

It is interesting that the author used the name "Elohim" in his description of God's intervention in Laban's pursuit. The name "Elohim" identifies the majestic God of mercy. This experience tells us something about Laban, but it also tells us something important about God. The verse indicates that God protects us, no matter how threatening the opposition may be.

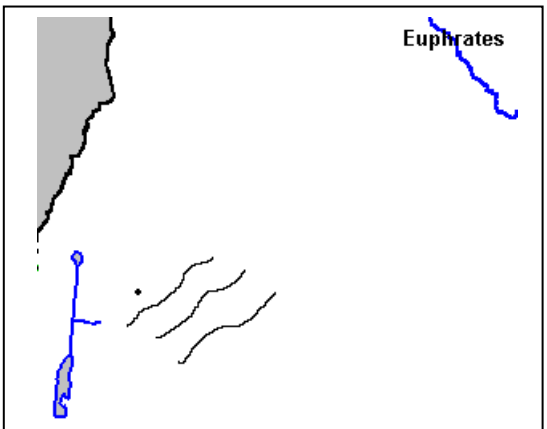
Notice also what God said to Laban. The Hebrew text reads a bit differently, "Be careful for yourself." God identified the source of the problem - Laban. God did not say," Look out for Jacob." Notice also that God specifically told Laban not to speak to Jacob either good things or bad. This was even more stringent than telling Laban not to hurt Jacob. God was in control. In that situation, Jacob was safe.

With these instructions, Laban came to meet Jacob.

> *Jacob had pitched his tent in the hill country of Gilead when Laban overtook him, and Laban and his relatives camped there too. Genesis 31:25*

This verse describes the meeting of Jacob and Laban. The author tells us that Jacob pitched his tent in the mountains of Gilead.

Both Jacob and Laban were camped in the mountain. It may describe more than one situation. At least one of these is the fact that people lived in the valleys and plains when everything was safe. When Israel was under the threat of attack, people fled to the mountains and the caves they found there. This may well be why Jacob was camped in the mountains.



Map 4: The Mountains of Gilead

When Laban met Jacob, he asked him a series of questions.

> *Then Laban said to Jacob, "What have you done? You've deceived me, and you've carried off my daughters like captives in war. Why did you run off secretly and deceive me? Why didn't you tell me so I could send you away with joy and singing to the music of tambourines and harps? You didn't even let me kiss my grandchildren and my daughters good-by. You have done a foolish thing." Genesis 31:26-28*

These questions are in two parts:

- You stole away without my knowledge. You carried away my daughters as captives at sword point. The question is, Why did you do these things? We should note that these accusations are half true. Jacob did sneak away without telling Laban he was going. Jacob, however, did not take Leah and Rachel away at sword point. Laban painted the picture in the darkest possible terms. This was, in fact, dishonest.
- The second question has a message that may tend to mislead one. Laban accused Jacob of secretly stealing away without telling him. This deprived Laban of the opportunity of sending his family members away with a feast; Jacob deprived Laban the opportunity to kiss his daughters and their children. Among other things, this means he lost the opportunity to express and receive forgiveness with family members who are leaving. It was important that parting family members receive forgiveness from each other.

Laban concluded this second question with an evaluation of Jacob's conduct - " You have done a foolish thing." The word "foolish" comes from the root word "sacal" (סָכַל) which literally means "to be fat," "silly," "to be foolish." In Laban's mind, Jacob had done something not only unwise, but also dangerous. Such a personal attack could produce violent reactions from either party. To this extent, Laban did not obey the command of the Lord.

In verse 29, Laban continued to express his anger.

> *"I have the power to harm you; but last night the God of your father said to me, 'Be careful not to say anything to Jacob, either good or bad.'" Genesis 31:29*

Laban bitterly reminded Jacob of what usually happened when a guest embarrassed his host by leaving without being sent away. The mores of that culture would give Laban permission to deal violently with Jacob. In the middle of this sentence, Laban used the word "but." This always suggests a contrast is in process. Laban is contrasting what the culture would allow him to do as opposed to what God would allow him to do. God intervened in Laban's plan and he related the experience to Jacob.

Notice how Laban described this encounter: "The God of your father said to me." Laban's god could not speak. God spoke to Laban though he did not serve Jacob's God. God spoke in words which were a command - "Be careful not to say anything to Jacob, either good or bad." It was sufficiently strong that Laban obeyed the command.

Laban continued his attack on Jacob with a third question:

> *"Now you have gone off because you longed to return to your father's house. But why did you steal my gods?" Genesis 31:30*

Laban began the question with the word "now." This word often suggests that there is a change in the direction of his talk with Jacob. In typical negotiation style, Laban begins his attack with ideas they have in common - both Laban and Jacob are clear that Jacob wants to go home.

Look at the verse again. Notice that Laban identifies Jacob's reason for wanting to return to the area where his father lived. Laban's stated purpose for Jacob's move was that he was lonely for home. There is frankly no statement, prior to 31:30, which suggested that Jacob was homesick. If you review the report of Jacob's experience in Paddan-Aram, Genesis 29:1 - 31:30, you will not find a report of Jacob's loneliness. This review of 29:1 - 31:30 will reveal Jacob's tremendous sense of frustration because of the way Laban changed the covenant and wages time after time.

Having established what he thought was or wanted Jacob's motives to be, Laban quickly focused in on one of the primary issues that bothered him - "Why did you steal my gods?" The embarrassment of Jacob leaving without being sent away was important, but the primary issue was that Laban believed that Jacob had stolen his idols. Theft, in the desert, was and is a very serious crime. The punishment for theft is still the amputation of the right thumb so that a person can not pick up something that does not belong to him. In some cases, the crime was so terrible that the punishment was death. This gives us some indication of just how serious Laban's accusation was.

We must ask ourselves, When there were no witnesses to the crime, why did Laban accuse Jacob? There are two major possibilities:

- Laban and Jacob had been enemies for a long time. Each had many reasons to be suspicious of the other.
- A man would never suspect his own daughters of stealing from him. This would be most unusual in that culture.

In the remaining verses of this paragraph, Jacob answered Laban's abrasive attack.

> *Jacob answered Laban, "I was afraid, because I thought you would take your daughters away from me by force. But if you find anyone who has your gods, he shall not live. In the presence of our relatives, see for yourself whether there is anything of yours here with me; and if so, take it." Now Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen the gods. Genesis 31:31, 32*

In the first of these two verses, Jacob responded to the harsh accusation of Laban. Jacob was very honest - he was afraid Laban would take away his wives and children.

This was surprising. Laban had a large number of men with him. On the other hand, it appears that Jacob had as many men if not more servants than Laban had. If this is true, then why would Jacob be afraid? The text does not say, but it is possible that Jacob had a large number of servants, but a greater number of Laban's men were family. This would mean that these men could be trusted more and be expected to give more of themselves on Laban's behalf than Jacob's servants would.

In the final verse of this paragraph, Jacob addresses Laban's most devastating accusation. - the theft of his gods. We must remember that Jacob was not aware of what Rachel had done.

Jacob was giving his pledge to integrity, a dramatic public announcement that he could not rescind no matter what transpired.

Notice also that Jacob announced the death penalty for the thief. This is an unusually harsh punishment. Most often, the punishment for this level theft required the return of the stolen property and a penalty of 10 to 20 % of the value of the stolen goods. In the desert, as it is in some Near Eastern countries, the penalty for theft is the cutting off of the right thumb. Jacob's announcement of the death penalty seems a bit harsh. It would be understandable if he were trying to assure Laban of his innocence and desire to discover the responsible party. We must ask, just why would Jacob be so harsh? As we said earlier, Jacob did not know that Rachel took her father's idols. It could be sarcasm on Jacob's part seeking to put Laban in a very embarrassing situation. This would be an eye for an eye approach. It seems clear that Jacob was counting on Laban's inability to find anything. This would subject Laban to verbal and perhaps physical abuse from Jacob and his family along with the humiliation before his own family. Jacob's statement is a challenge, not an attempt to discover truth. In Jacob's defense, we must say that though he may have indulged in sarcasm, he was also able to take a strong stand for the right.

In this same sentence, Jacob said, "In the presence of our relatives, see for yourself whether there is anything of yours here with me; and if so take it." Jacob made it clear that he was not trying to take anything that belonged to Laban, on the other hand, he was making it clear that he was not going to give up something that belonged to him.

The closing sentence in the paragraph is a brief parenthesis. It is a way of stressing the fact that Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen the idols. Jacob had no idea just how dangerous his challenge really was.

Genesis 31:33-35 - Rachel Deceives Laban

In the Hebrew, this paragraph also begins with the word "and." As we indicated before, this ties the following paragraph to the material which preceded.

> *So Laban went into Jacob's tent and into Leah's tent and into the tent of the two maid-servants, but he found nothing. After he came out of Leah's tent, he entered Rachel's tent. Genesis 31:33*

The word "so," in the New International Version, and the word "and" in the Hebrew text indicate that the content of 31:33-35 is connected to the content of 31:22-32. In that para-

graph, Jacob challenged Laban to find what had been stolen and show it to him and all the people of both families.

Notice the order in which Laban went into the tents.

- Jacob's tent
- Leah's tent
- Two maid-servants tent
- Rachel's tent

It may be that Laban was convinced that Jacob could steal his idols. After all, Jacob and Laban did not trust each other. Laban may have believed that his daughters could take the family idols because Jacob was their husband. Certainly the maid-servants could be expected to do that because they had nothing and no identity.

Laban then went to Rachel's tent.

> *Now Rachel had taken the household gods and put them inside her camel's saddle and was sitting on them. Laban searched through everything in the tent but found nothing. Rachel said to her father, "Don't be angry, my lord, that I cannot stand up in your presence; I'm having my period." So he searched but could not find the household gods. Genesis 31:34, 35*

Verse 34 is a parenthesis giving us insight into the events we had not known. These verses contain several pictures of what Rachel was like, as well as telling what she had done.

- She hid the idols from her father - this is inappropriate behavior.
- She lied about her own condition
- Her actions and her words did not match

In these verses, the author describes the next step in her actions. Having stolen her father's idols, Rachel is now forced to admit her theft or else hide her actions. She chose to hide. Laban looked all through Rachel's tent, but to no avail. The only place Laban did not look was in the saddlebags where Rachel sat.

Rachel was confronted with another decision - Would she allow her father to discover her theft or seek to deceive him by diverting his attention away from the saddle bags where she had hidden the idols? She chose deception. She deceived Laban by lying to him.

Rachel told her father that she was having her period and could not move. This was false. The reason she said this was very clear. During the time of a woman's period, it was not permissible for a man to touch her or anything she has touched. If a man touched a woman in this situation, he would be unclean. Anyone who touched him or things he had touched would be unclean. He could not take part in any religious activities. Rachel knew that her announcement would keep her father from discovering her theft, deception and lie. This experience tells us something about the nature of evil. One evil leads to another which leads to another. Evil tends to multiply.

Genesis 31:36-42 - Jacob Scathes Laban

In the Hebrew text, the paragraph again begins with the word "and." This suggests that 31:33-35, the report of Rachel's lie to her father about her condition, is tied to this para-

graph. This paragraph deals with Jacob's response to this whole experience. We must assume that Jacob still does not know what happened.

> *Jacob was angry and took Laban to task. "What is my crime?" he asked Laban. "What sin have I committed that you hunt me down?" Genesis 31: 36*

The text says that Jacob "took Laban to task." The word is (רוּב) "ruub" which means "to grapple," "to wrangle," "to engage in intense, abrupt controversy." It is to plead on behalf of one's understanding of a controversy. The author was saying that Jacob aggressively attacked Laban. Jacob believed he had every reason to confront Laban with what appeared to be libelous insinuations and threatening words and actions. Jacob was angry because Laban had publicly humiliated him. Now Jacob wanted revenge. He challenged Laban to show what wrong he had done. He was trying to humiliate Laban.

In spite of all this, Jacob was not satisfied. He continued his attack on Laban:

> *"Now that you have searched through all my goods, what have you found that belongs to your household? Put it here in front of your relatives and mine, and let them judge between the two of us." Genesis 31:37*

Jacob continued to try to make Laban look foolish because he accused Jacob of something he could not prove. Knowing Laban found nothing, Jacob challenged Laban to set the stolen goods before their families and let them pass judgment. This was a brutal attack. It is probably a good barometer of how the two of them had been feuding for several years.

Jacob wanted to embarrass Laban. He did three things to accomplish this questionable goal:

- He reported what Laban had done - you have searched everything I own. No one would go through another person's belongings unless he was absolutely certain that the stolen goods were present. Just the fact that Laban inspected everything gives us two pieces of information:
  1. Laban was absolutely certain he would find the stolen gods.
  2. Jacob stood accused of theft. This was a very serious humiliation to which Jacob was subjected by Laban. Failure to prove the accusation would bring the wrath of the accused.
- He confronted Laban - "What did you find in my stuff that was one of your belongings?"
- He made Laban look ridiculous - Jacob knew that Laban had found nothing. Nevertheless, Jacob demanded that Laban place his findings before the members of both families. Jacob was confident that there was no way Laban could produce anything that had been stolen. He relished just how embarrassed Laban would be in front of everyone who knew him.

One of our discoveries in life is that attacking those who hurt us is never enough - it always requires one more attack. Jacob experienced the same thing.

> *"I have been with you for twenty years now. Your sheep and goats have not miscarried, nor have I eaten rams from your flocks. I did not bring you animals torn by wild beasts; I bore the loss myself. And you demanded payment from me for whatever was stolen by day or night." Genesis 31:38, 39*

Jacob simply recited what had been happening.

- When the ewes and female goats did not give birth, it was not a loss to Laban. Jacob absorbed that loss.
- It was not unusual for hired shepherds to eat a ram from the flock. Jacob never did that. He provided his own food.
- When a wild animal killed one of the flock, the hired shepherd must demonstrate that he had tried to rescue the animal by at least bringing back an ear, a foot or leg bone. If he did not do that, he must replace the animal at his own expense. Jacob absorbed that loss when he could have been released from it.

As you look at these three factors, it becomes clear that Jacob had been a good shepherd. Jacob's statement, however, has two sides. On one hand, it demonstrates just how good a shepherd Jacob had been. On the other hand, with each successive statement about how well Jacob performed, there was an equally damaging impression/insinuation against Laban.

Jacob wanted to focus even more on how sacrificially he had served.

> *"This was my situation: the heat consumed me in the daytime and the cold at night, and sleep fled from my eyes." Genesis 31:40*

If you look closely at this verse, you will note an important change. In previous statements, Jacob was honest and open. Jacob here spoke about drought. It is true, the heat and drought are devastating. It is also true that though it is extremely hot in the desert during the day, it can be freezing cold for a shepherd at night. Honesty, is not the issue here. The real issue is that though the heat was debilitating and the cold was devastating, this was true for every shepherd. Jacob presented it as unusual sacrifice, when in fact it was just a normal, everyday experience for every shepherd. We wonder, therefore, why he mentions this at all. It appears that this was designed to gain sympathy for Jacob.

Having pointed out his sacrifice as a shepherd, he now points to his struggles in other areas.

> *"It was like this for the twenty years I was in your household. I worked for you fourteen years for your two daughters and six years for your flocks, and you changed my wages ten times." Genesis 31:41*

In this verse, Jacob gave three pieces of information:

- He served fourteen years for Laban's two daughters
- He served six years for his flocks
- Laban changed Jacob's wages ten times in six years.

Remember, this whole paragraph is a tirade by Jacob against Laban. The first two of these complaints were made with Jacob's consent and for his benefit as well. He was in a spot with no money or property with which to pay a dowry.

The last piece of information is really the one Jacob wanted to emphasize. We can appreciate why he might want the two families to know this. The agreement about wages was a covenant that was not to be broken. Laban made such an agreement with Jacob. Both men had good reason to believe that this covenant would not be changed. As Laban and Jacob pursued their lives in this covenant, it became clear that this covenant was not

as beneficial to Laban as he expected it to be. In that culture, this fact would make no difference. The covenant was to be kept. Laban, then unilaterally changed the agreement and a new covenant was made. This too, did not meet Laban's expectations and it was changed again. The covenant was a means by which two things were guaranteed:

- It guaranteed Laban the more favorable/lucrative terms in this agreement.
- It guaranteed that Jacob could not get out of this covenant that favored Laban.

In spite of this lopsided agreement, Laban still found it necessary to make a more favorable covenant approximately every seven months during the next six years.

Jacob then identified his understanding of what happened while Laban was taking advantage of him.

> *"If the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the fear of Isaac, had not been with me, you would surely have sent me away empty-handed. But God has seen my hardship and the toil of my hands, and last night he rebuked you." Genesis 31:42*

Notice, Jacob said, "Except God had been with me, you would have sent me away empty." Jacob said that God made the difference in his impossible relationship with Laban. Jacob knew that this problem relationship was beyond his ability. He admitted that God had been doing for him what he had not been able to do for himself.

If you look closely at verse 42, Jacob said two things:

- He said something very beautiful about the care that God gives to the oppressed.
- He said God had protected him by rebuking Laban.

He was also attacking Laban once more. Jacob said that if God had not intervened, Laban, though he had made a covenant with Jacob, would have broken that covenant completely and taken away everything Jacob had earned including his wives and children. This was a devastating attack.

Observe that Jacob referred to God, in verse 42, in three ways:

- **The God of my father** - this name for God is "Elohim" the majestic God of mercy. This stress on the mercy of God supports Jacob's accusations against Laban. For Jacob to refer to God as "God of my father," suggests that this was the God his family worshipped in an ongoing fashion.
- **The God of Abraham** - Again, Jacob used the name "Elohim" - the majestic God mercy. The use of this name is like saying, "The God who was faithful to Abraham..."
- **The Fear of Isaac** - This name does not mean that Jacob was afraid of his father. This is a third way to identify the God of Israel. It is the God before whom Isaac stood in awe. This is a royal scene, a worship experience. God is so great that Isaac was filled with awe/reverence and could only stand in His presence.

Jacob contended that **if** God had not been with him, **then** Laban would surely have sent Jacob home with nothing. This statement affirms two things:

- The faithfulness and power of God.
- The terrible way in which Laban treated Jacob.

Jacob was praising God and slamming Laban in the same breath. This was officially frowned upon and considered in bad taste. Nevertheless, it expressed Jacob's honest feelings.

Jacob begins the last sentence speaking of the one he worshipped as "God." This is the name "Elohim" (אֱלֹהִים) which refers to the majesty of God. This name is repeatedly used in situations where the mercy of God is being emphasized.

The last sentence in verse 42, begins with the word "but." This indicates that there is a contrast between the description of how Laban would have acted and the way God treated Jacob. This sentence contains a cause and effect relationship:

CAUSE	EFFECT
God saw hardship and toil	God rebuked Laban

In the Hebrew, the word "rebuked" is really "yakach" (יָכַח) and means “to judge,” “to determine the truth,” “to decide,” “to justify or convict,” “to plead one's case.” This is a way of saying that God condemned what Laban had planned and done.

Genesis 31:43-32:2 - Jacob and Laban Enter into a Covenant

This paragraph represents a definite shift in the dialogue. Up until now, Laban has been on the offensive. He was accusative in his words and somewhat condescending in his manner. He did not find the idols he was confident he would find. He must now take a much more conciliatory approach to his enemy, Jacob.

> *Laban answered Jacob, “The women are my daughters, the children are my children, and the flocks are my flocks. All you see is mine. Yet what can I do today about these daughters of mine, or about the children they have borne?” Genesis 31:43*

Having been abusive and accusative, Laban now turns abruptly and attempts to be magnanimous. Observe that Laban has some definite feelings himself and his possessions that may not express the total picture. There is a series of half truths in his statement.

"The women are my daughters." Truthfully, Laban was the father of Rachel and Leah, but for the price of fourteen years labor, Laban had sold them to Jacob. These women belonged to Jacob, not Laban.

"The children are my children." Again, Laban was the grandfather of Jacob's children, but these children were not the property of Laban. Laban has taken advantage of an old legal concept that suggests that the father is the titular owner of everything in his house. That would not apply in this case because Jacob was technically the father of this household. Indeed, the final position of control - the giving of these children in marriage - belonged to Jacob, not to Laban.

"The flocks are my flocks." There is no doubt these animals came from stock that had formerly belonged to Laban. Despite Laban's numerous changes of his unchangeable agreement with Jacob, God still worked it out that increasingly the flocks that had belonged to Laban became the property of Jacob. Laban was in fact renouncing all of the many unchangeable covenants he had made with Jacob and claiming all the flocks again for himself.

"All that you see is mine." This is intended as an all-inclusive statement. Because it is so inclusive, it represents a greater misunderstanding than all the other claims. Despite Laban's claim, none of the things that they could see were really his.

Laban based his actions on a series of misunderstandings we have just cited. Laban's question is a prelude to his attempt to appear generous and magnanimous. Notice how he phrased the question:

> *"Yet what can I do today about these daughters of mine, or about the children they have borne?" Genesis 31:43c*

The anticipated answer to Laban's question was that his generosity would not allow him to do anything that would hurt his daughters or his grandchildren.

A very honest answer to his question would be that he could do nothing because they did not belong to him. He had no possession or control over them anymore.

Thinking he had established his generosity, Laban proposed yet another covenant which could not be changed:

> *"Come now, let's make a covenant, you and I, and let it serve as a witness between us." Genesis 31:44*

The words "Let us make a covenant" are not a literal translation. The Hebrew text states, "Let us **cut** a covenant." This is due to the fact that when the wording of a covenant was agreed upon, the principals involved would sacrifice an animal, thus the word, "cut."

A question arises. Who or what does Laban suggest will serve as a witness between Jacob and himself? To what does "it" refer? Scholars argue at great length about this matter. The fact that they spoke of cutting a covenant suggests that this agreement involved God in the transaction. This leads me to believe that Laban was suggesting that God was the one who would serve as the witness between them. Indeed, some scholars translate the word "it" as "he." There are other possibilities. Some believe that the covenant itself will serve as the witness between the two men. Others believe Jacob set up a pillar and it was to this that Laban was referring. We can not speak with certainty on the issue.

The author's report indicates that Jacob gave no verbal response, but acted.

> *So Jacob took a stone and set it up as a pillar. Genesis 31:45*

This response is the reason some believe that it was the covenant that Laban intended as witness between the two men. The pillar was a symbol of a significant encounter with God. You will remember that in Genesis 28:22, Jacob set up a pillar at Bethel following his vision there. It was a visual reminder of his encounter with God. When Jacob stood the stone pillar on end, he was saying, This is a three way agreement - God, Jacob and Laban. It gives us a glimpse into his intent. People of the Near East are very symbolic persons. Having set up the pillar, Jacob wished to present yet another symbol of his intentions.

> *He said to his relatives, "Gather some stones." So they took stones and piled them in a heap, and they ate there by the heap. Genesis 31:46*

Observe that Jacob told his relatives to gather stones and make a mound. Now, observe, further, that Laban did not instruct his relatives to gather stones. In this action, Jacob was declaring his intentions:

- He entered into the covenant without reservation.
- He instructed his relatives to each place a stone on the heap commemorating this unchangeable agreement. Jacob used this to say, "I can not break this covenant and my relatives are joined in this covenant with me. They can not violate this covenant with God either."

Laban, on the other hand, did not participate in the erection of the pillar and he did not instruct his relatives to place stones on the mound. Laban, in effect, left himself a way out of the covenant. He need only allow his relatives to violate the covenant and he could do harm to Jacob without technically violating his personal promise. Such thought patterns would not be beyond his thinking.

This gives us an additional glimpse at both men. Jacob was anxious to give assurances that would make it impossible for him to violate his oath. Laban, on the other hand, handled the situation differently. He had the opportunity to make the same kind of commitment Jacob made, but chose not to do so. We are forced to conclude that this was intentional. It means that Jacob had every intention of keeping his word while Laban left the door open a crack to find a way out of the agreement if circumstances so indicated.

The author also indicated that they all ate beside the heap of stones. This symbolized a double message:

- It was the symbol of acceptance and friendship. This is what happened when Jesus ate with Zacchaeus; when Joseph ate with his brothers. All present should know that they were safe from the others who participated in the meal.
- It also symbolized the sealing of an unchangeable covenant. This, of course, is what happened when Jesus and the disciples ate the bread at their Passover when the Master announced a new covenant.

As the relatives and servants of Jacob placed their stones on the heap and then ate the bread of friendship, they became participants in the covenant. The relatives of Laban apparently did not participate.

Having established a covenant of friendship, Laban decided to give the place a name.

Laban called it Jegar Sahadutha, and Jacob called it Galeed. Genesis 31:47

This verse makes it clear that Jacob and Laban represented two different language backgrounds. Jacob spoke Hebrew and Laban spoke Aramaic, a Semitic dialect from the northwest. It was used for hundreds of years before Christ in the area we now call Iraq. The name that Laban gave the place - Sahadutha - means "heap of witness." Jacob, however, did not use the Aramaic although he had to understand it quite well. The use of the Hebrew was a way of asserting his identity with his fathers' rather than with Laban. Jacob called the name of this important place "Galeed." This name also means "the heap of witness." Both men gave the spot the same name, but in different languages.

There is a tense, suspicious atmosphere about this name. Laban insisted on a covenant because he was afraid that Jacob would get his relatives from Canaan and return to destroy him and his family. The naming of this place was a symbolic reminder that God was watching to be sure that Jacob did not violate the covenant as Laban had done repeatedly. This place and its name were a witness against Jacob should he decide to return to destroy Laban. Jacob must have shocked Laban by giving the place the same name Laban had given it.

Laban was still not satisfied. Notice how he pursued the meaning of the name.

Laban said, "This heap is a witness between you and me today." That is why it was called Galeed. Genesis 31:48

Laban literally said, "This heap is witness (recorded testimony, legally binding.)" It binds us both, keeping us from doing violence to each other. It is the picture of an intermediary who forced the warring factions to observe a truce.

In verse 49, Laban demonstrates his knowledge of the Hebrew language.

It was also called Mizpeh , because he said, "May the LORD keep watch between you and me when we are away from each other." Genesis 31:49

He called the name of this place "Mizpeh" (מִצְפָּה) which describes a military watchtower, observation post used to prevent sneak attacks by an enemy army. This was a not too subtle slap at Jacob. Most people who grew up in a church youth group have used verse 49 as a pleasant benediction just before the meeting ended each week. Its use, in this instance, was stinging and abusive, anything but pleasant. Laban said to Jacob, "When I can't see what you are doing, the Lord, the eternal Judge of Israel is watching your every move."

Still Laban was uncomfortable. His fear and concern forced him to press for more protection, even after the covenant had been confirmed.

"If you mistreat my daughters or if you take any wives besides my daughters, even though no one is with us, remember that God is a witness between you and me." Genesis 31:50

This addition to the agreement dealt not with Laban's safety, but with his daughters. It should be pointed out that Laban had now far exceeded his rights and normal expectations. Once the dowry was paid and the marriage was consummated, the father had no more involvement with his daughter. She became the sole property and responsibility of her husband and his family. It was frankly none of Laban's business whether or not Jacob had any other wives. Jacob could have as many wives as he could support and Laban had nothing to say about it. It should be noted, however, that Jacob kept the promise he made to Laban on this occasion. The fact that Jacob would even enter into this discussion is evidence of his patience and fairness with Laban. This also gives a rather unwholesome picture of Laban.

Laban had two concerns:

- He feared Jacob would mistreat his daughters. This fear could be well founded, but was not. Jacob could take out his feelings against Laban on his daughters. Living in Canaan, there was nothing these gentile wives could do to protect themselves against abuse.
- Laban was afraid that Jacob would take other wives along with Rachel and Leah. If Jacob took a Jewish wife, then Laban feared this wife would receive preferential treatment and the natural and family hatred of Laban and his countrymen would create a dangerous life for Rachel and Leah. Were that to happen, the two women would be helpless to escape this painful situation.

Laban was not only adding to an unchangeable covenant, he was threatening Jacob. Laban's threat was presented in an "if...then" format - "**IF** you mistreat my daughters, and

IF you take any other wives besides them, **THEN** you will be punished. It is interesting that the threat Laban used involved the participation of the Jewish God. Laban used "Elohim" as the name for God. This name stresses the Majesty and Mercy of God. We can not account for the fact that Laban threatened Jacob saying the God of Mercy would witness between them when Laban could not be present. Certainly, Laban knew the meaning of the name.

Having already added to an unchangeable covenant, still Laban was not satisfied.

Laban also said to Jacob, "Here is a heap, and here is this pillar I have set up between you and me." Genesis 31:51

Observe Laban's claim. In this verse, Laban claimed that he set up the heap of stone and the pillar. Notice, however, that Genesis 31:45, 46, tells a different story. Verse 45 states that it was Jacob who set up the pillar as a symbol of this covenant. Verse 46 identifies the fact that Jacob told his relatives and servants to make the pile of stones and in so doing symbolize their participation in the covenant.

There is no way Laban can claim to have erected either the pillar or the heap of stone. It appears that Laban was as arrogant as he was deceptive. He made the claim, but he did not do the work. He took the credit, but did not make the symbolic commitment. We have known people like that in our time as well.

Look at verse 51 again. Read it out loud. There is an adversarial relationship here. They had just made a covenant of friendship, but one would never know it by the way Laban acted. He continued to try to protect himself from Jacob, who had taken the oath of friendship. Notice also that Laban continued to speak in divisive terms - "**between** you and me."

Again, Laban was not satisfied. He continued to redefine an already completed unchangeable covenant.

"This heap is a witness and this pillar is a witness, that I will not go past this heap to your side to harm you and that you will not go past this heap and pillar to my side to harm me." Genesis 31:52

Note that this agreement did not prohibit either of them from traveling to the others territory, but did prevent them from doing harm to each other. In this verse, Laban restates what had already been agreed upon in making the covenant. Laban sounds like a frightened man. There is no danger of Laban crossing this line to attack Jacob. It appears that he is more than a little concerned that Jacob might get more relatives and come back to attack him. If Jacob dealt with Laban according to their previous experience, such fears might be well founded.

Laban made a very surprising appeal.

"May the God of Abraham and the God of Nahor, the God of their father, judge between us." Genesis 31:53

Observe what Laban did in this statement:

- He appealed to the Gods to oversee the covenant he could not trust.
- He brought their deities into the standoff between two strong-willed men. Laban identified the deities in this manner:

The God (Elohim) of Abraham

The god's (elohim) of Nahor - Here the name "elohim" plural is used to describe the many gods of wood and stone worshipped by Nahor.

It could be easily overlooked, but Laban inserted a little barb into his attack. He identified Jehovah as the God of Abraham. He also identified the idols which Nahor worshipped. He then said of them, "the God (elohim – this name stresses the power of God and is usually used in situations where mercy is obvious) of their father." It is an underhanded way of indicating that Abraham had abandoned the worship of his ancestors, but the rest of the family had not done so. This was true, but it was not a failure as Laban hints.

Laban called upon the gods to judge between the two of them. The word "judge" is "shaphat" (שָׁפַט) which means “to pass sentence,” “to condemn the guilty party.”

Laban's treatment of Jacob was most unfair. Notice, however, that Jacob did not respond in kind. The author states that Jacob took an oath, but he does not say the same thing about Laban. I believe that Laban did what the custom required of him, but I have serious doubts if he really took an oath in the same way Jacob did.

Jacob responded by taking an oath. Jacob did not protest the appeal to Laban's idols, which Laban was certain Jacob had stolen, but he did not compromise his own faith either. Jacob took an oath by "the Fear of his father Isaac."

`We must now ask, What is "the fear of his father Isaac?" The word "fear" literally means “terror,” or “dread.” It comes from the root "packad" (פָּחַד) which means “to startle,” “to stand in awe” or “cause to tremble.” Jacob took an oath in the name of God, the one whose greatness caused his father, Isaac, to be startled and tremble with awe of His great power.

Again, there is no mention of the fact that Laban also made an oath. We can only assume that he did. An oath, to Laban, however, was not the same as an oath for Jacob. Jacob's God was truthful and faithful. He demanded nothing less of His followers. The idols of Laban, however, were thought to be capricious and deceptive. Their followers could not be expected to behave differently.

Whatever may have been Laban's intent, Jacob was dealing with integrity. He gave yet another symbol of his dependable word.

He offered a sacrifice there in the hill country and invited his relatives to a meal. After they had eaten, they spent the night there. Genesis 31:54

The word "sacrifice" comes from the root word "zabach" (זָבַח) which means “to slaughter” or “sacrifice.” It is the word used to describe the sacrifices to God. It was Jacob's way of involving His God in his oath. It was Jacob's pledge to God that he would abide by the terms of the oath he had sworn with Laban. This sacrifice was also Jacob's way of affirming his worship of God when Laban had made the unfortunate reference to the God of Nahor, the God of their father."

Jacob also invited his relatives and servants to join in the meal with him. On this occasion, the meal was more than a way to deal with hunger. This meal involved Jacob's relatives and servants in his second oath. None of Jacob's people were free from being bound by this oath and the worship of Jacob's God.

The author closes the verse with a simple sentence, but it is packed with meaning. "After they had eaten, they spent the night there." In view of the tensions surrounding

Laban's arrival and his unfortunate conduct during the negotiations for the treaty, one would expect Jacob to be very uneasy and wanting to get away from Laban immediately. Jacob spent the night in the same location as Laban. It symbolized that each could trust the other, no matter how tenuous the agreement might be.

At this point, the scene changed. The negotiating was done and the farewells were in order.

> *Early the next morning, Laban kissed his grandchildren and his daughters and blessed them. Then he left and returned home. Genesis 31:55*

Observe that Laban kissed his daughters and grandchildren, but there is no mention of him giving the kiss of friendship to Jacob. The question arises, Was this an oversight? Was it the selectivity of the author? Does it represent the attitude of Laban toward Jacob? We do not know. It appears that Laban was not anxious to give Jacob the symbol of friendship and forgiveness. The fact that the author did not record that Laban took part in the covenant symbols, though he reports with great precision how Jacob took part in these experiences, causes one to wonder if the omission of this information was not intentional because Laban did not extend the blessing to Jacob and did not offer him the kiss of forgiveness and friendship.

It is possible that the opportunity for Laban to kiss his daughters and grandchildren and to offer them his blessing was the whole purpose of Laban's chasing after Jacob in the first place. Obviously, the desire to secure the return of the family idols, which Laban thought were stolen, was very important. In the same vain, the covenant of friendship and forgiveness was important for everyone. When Jacob left without the blessing and being sent on his way, he insulted Laban before his family and his neighbors. Laban had to deal with this awkward situation or lose face in his community. Having made the covenant, Laban sent Jacob on his way and gave his grandchildren and daughters his blessing, the embarrassment was removed.

Laban went home. Laban is mentioned three more times in the balance of Scripture, but he is never again an active participant in the story. At this point, he passed from the scene of history.

Jacob also left the hill country on his way to meet his brother Esau. On the way, he received a great surprise.

> *Jacob also went on his way, and the angels of God met him. Genesis 32:1*

Jacob was met by at least two angels of God. Jacob was startled to say the least. He was convinced that this was a place where God (Elohim) camps. This is the picture of an army encamped enroute to battle. This would be encouraging to Jacob, in view of what he had just been through. It would also be encouraging in view of what Jacob knew was ahead as he came face to face with his brother Esau.

Jacob responded to this surprising encounter with the angels.

> *When Jacob saw them, he said, "This is the camp of God!" So he named the place Mahanaim. Genesis 32:2*

Notice that the text says, "When Jacob saw them." It does not say that anyone else saw these angels. Some scholars are convinced by the wording of this quotation that Jacob was the only one who saw the angels.

Jacob named this place "Mahanaim" which means two camps. We can not be certain of the meaning of "two camps." Some scholars believe it means two groups of angels - one camp that guarded Jacob in the land of Israel. The other camp of angels guarded Jacob while he was outside the land of Canaan.

Conclusion

This passage forms a fitting conclusion to the whole relationship between Jacob and Laban - two men who deserved each other. In the din of the activity of men trying to undercut each other, God was at work. People avoid the gutter situations in life because it is hard to work with them without becoming one of them. In the midst of human abuse, God is busy seeking to show mercy and love to the misused while revealing something of His greatness. Though it is hard to believe, it is in the midst of pain people cause each other that the self-revelation of God is clearest. Sometimes our pain seems so intense that our tears distort our vision.

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 8

JACOB WRESTLES WITH AN ANGEL AT PENIEL

GENESIS 32:3 - 32

1. There are three paragraphs in our best manuscripts of Genesis chapter 32. Read each paragraph carefully. On the table below, write a title of seven words or less for each paragraph.

32:3-12	
32:13-21	
32:22-32	

2. In Genesis 32:3-12, Jacob was preparing himself for his meeting with Esau.
   a. In Genesis 32:3, 4, Jacob sent messengers to Esau. Compare the message Jacob sent to Esau with his actions on Genesis 25:31 and Genesis 27:19. What did you observe?
   b. In Genesis 32:4, Jacob told his messengers what to say. He told them to speak of himself as "your servant." What difference would that make?
   c. In Genesis 32:5, Jacob told the messengers to tell Esau about the herds he possessed. Why would that be important?
   d. In Genesis 32:5, Jacob told the messengers to refer to Esau as "my lord." What difference would that make?
   e. In 32:6, the messengers returned and told Jacob that Esau was coming with 400 men.
      (1). What possible reasons could Esau have to bring 400 men?
      (2). Put yourself in Jacob's position:
         (a). What would you think?
         (b). What would you do?
   f. In Genesis 32:7, 8, Jacob explained his reasons for dividing his possessions into two groups.
      (1). What kind of thinking would cause him to do that?
      (2). What did he hope to accomplish?
   g. In Genesis 32:9, Jacob prayed. In this prayer he referred to God in three different ways.
      (1). What did this accomplish?
      (2). What did Jacob MEAN by using these names?
   h. In 32:10, Jacob continued his prayer.
      (1). In this part of the prayer, what did Jacob say about himself?
      (2). Why did he say it?
   i. In 32:11, Jacob did something which was **not** characteristic of his usual way of life. What was it?
   j. In 32:12, Jacob continued his prayer by reminding God of His previous promise.

(1). Why would he do that?
(2). To what extent, if any, was this a lack of faith?

3. In Genesis 32:13-21, Jacob gave his servants instructions concerning the way they were to go to meet Esau.
   a. In 32:13, the author gives two pieces of information:
      (1). What are those pieces of information?
      (2). What do they mean?
      (3). If you were Jacob, in this verse, what would this verse say about you?
   b. In 32:14, 15, the author described the gift Jacob sent to Esau.
      (1). Study the list. What did you observe about the nature of the gift?
      (2). We are haunted by Jacob's motive in sending this gift. List all the evidence you can which suggests Jacob's motive in sending the gift.
   c. In 32:16, Jacob was very precise about the way the procession of animals was to be taken to Esau. What difference would this make to Esau?
   d. In 32:17, Jacob gave specific instructions to the shepherds who would take the gift to Esau. Jacob gave them precise words to say to Esau.
      (1). What did Jacob tell the shepherds to say?
      (2). Why was it so important to say these precise words?
   e. In 32:19, Jacob told the shepherd of the second flock, and each succeeding flock, to say exactly the same thing the first shepherd said.
      (1). Wouldn't Esau tire of hearing the same words time after time?
      (2). Why would Jacob instruct them to do this?
   f. In 32:20, Jacob gave one final instruction. Study this verse very carefully.
      (1). Jacob stressed something they were to be sure to say. This had already been said. What difference would this message make?
      (2). In this verse, the author gives us a glimpse into the mind of Jacob.
         (a). What was he thinking?
         (b). What was his primary motive?
         (c). How do you know this?
   g. The author's statement, in 32:21, is puzzling.
      (1). What is the puzzle?
      (2). How can you explain it?

4. In Genesis 32:22-32, the author records the encounter between Jacob and the angel.
   a. In 32:22, there is another puzzling scenario. Read the verse carefully.
      (1). What is the puzzle?
      (2). How can you make sense out of Jacob's actions?
   b. In 32:23, Jacob put his family and possessions on the other side of the river. This left him all alone. What possible reason could he have for doing all this and doing it during the night?
   c. In 32:24, Jacob wrestled with a man all night.
      (1). Who was this man?
      (2). What is the nature of this struggle?
   d. In 32:25, the man could not overpower Jacob. Explain how the man could put Jacob's hip out of joint when he could not overpower him.

e. In 32:26, there is an exchange of words between the Jacob and the angel.
   (1). The man who wrestled with Jacob insisted that Jacob let him go because it was daybreak. What difference would that make?
   (2). What is the significance of the fact that the man had to ask Jacob to let him go.
   (3). Jacob refused to let the man go unless he blessed him. What does the blessing have to do with Jacob letting the man go?
f. In 32:27, the man who wrestled with Jacob asked him his name. In view of this whole experience, what does Jacob's name have to do with the wrestling?
g. In 32:28, The man who wrestled with Jacob changed his name from Jacob to Israel.
   (1). What difference does this change make?
   (2). Explain the reason the man gave for this name change?
h. In 32:29, Jacob tried to find out the name of the one with whom he wrestled.
   (1). Why was the man's name important to Jacob?
   (2). What was the man's reply?
   (3). What does the scene over the name have to do with the blessing the man gave Jacob/Israel?
i. In 32:30, Jacob named the place where this experience took place.
   (1). What did he name the place?
   (2). If you have access to a Bible Dictionary or Bible helps, what does this name mean?
j. In 32:31, the author indicated that Jacob limped when this experience was over. Record your thoughts about the fact that God made Jacob permanently vulnerable before He blessed him.
k. In 32:32, there is a parenthesis in the text about the Jews not eating the tendons attached to the hip socket. What does this information add to our understanding of the whole story?

5. In this chapter, we see the picture of a self-reliant man who had to become vulnerable before God could bless him. We see a man with grave concerns, determined to trust God rather than his own wiles. He discovered that he could trust God when it seemed impossible.
   Our modern technology has caused us to think that we can solve our problems when like Jacob, we really cannot. What is the message of this chapter to our self-sufficient situation?

LESSON 8: GENESIS 32:3 - 32

JACOB WRESTLES WITH AN ANGEL AT PENIEL

Introduction

In our best manuscripts there are three paragraphs in Genesis chapter 32. A summary of their content is as follows:

32:3-12	Jacob Plans Meeting with Esau
32:13-21	Jacob Instructs Servants About Meeting Esau
32:22-32	Jacob Wrestles with the Angel at Peniel

The story of Jacob's meeting with Esau is recorded in chapter 33. Notice in the above table that each paragraph of chapter 32 deals with a different portion of Jacob's preparation to meet his brother, Esau.

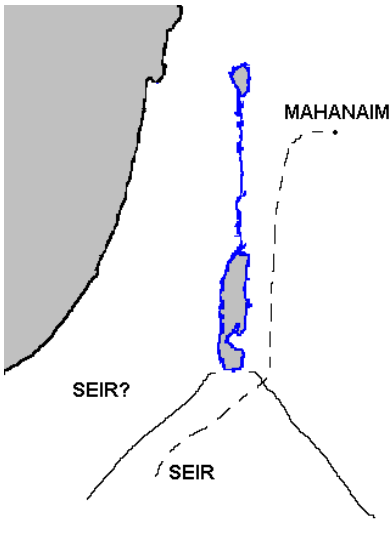
Genesis 32:3-12 - Jacob Plans Meeting With Esau

This paragraph marks a turning point in Jacob's conduct. Prior to this time, Jacob always found a way to manipulate other people for his own benefit. He did it with Esau concerning the birthright. He deceived his father, Isaac, pretending to be Esau. In so doing, he received the blessing Isaac intended for Esau. Though Laban could not be trusted to keep his word when a covenant was "cut," still Jacob tried to manipulate the marking of the newborn lambs so that the strongest would be his. This was his way of life.

Jacob returned to Canaan, at the command of God, and he decided to trust God rather than his own manipulations. He did not sneak back into the land. He sent word to his brother to tell him that he was returning.

> *And Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother, unto the land of Seir, the field of Edom. Genesis 32:3*

The previous paragraph took place at Mahanaim. Jacob sent messengers to Esau who lived in the land of Seir. As Map 5 indicates, there are two places which could be called "the land of Seir." Though I can not prove my assumptions, I prefer the location in the desert area south of the Dead Sea. To an extent, my choice was guided by the words in the text, "the land of Seir, the field of Edom." The word "field" is "Sadeh" (שָׂדֶה) which literally means to spread out, it is an area of the country, a land. The area of Edom was South and a bit East of the Dead Sea. This was a distance of at least 150 miles that must be covered



Map 5: The Land of Seir

by the messengers and then by Esau and Jacob. There is a problem with this situation:

> *An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of the LORD; even to their tenth generation shall they not enter into the congregation of the LORD for ever: Deuteronomy 23:3*

We know that Esau had intermarried with these people and was had some of them in his family. Technically, he should not have brought these people into the land of Canaan.

If Esau was in the area south of the Dead Sea, the messengers would need at least eight days to reach Esau and another eight days to return. This afforded Jacob about 17 days or more days to think through what he was doing.

Jacob was very precise about the way these messengers were to present his cause to his brother, Esau.

> *And he instructed them: "This is what you are to say to my master Esau: 'Your servant Jacob says, I have been staying with Laban and have remained there till now.'" Genesis 32:4*

Jacob had instructed the messengers concerning the way they were to speak of Esau and of himself. They were to refer to Esau as "master" "Adon," (אָדוֹן), which means powerful one. It has a particular reference to one whose power enables him to rule, to be master. On the other hand, he spoke of himself as "**your servant,**" "abad" (עָבַד), which means to work, to enslave, one who is compelled to work by another, a bond servant. What a change from their former relationship! In former days, Jacob manipulated Esau to get what he wanted and to control him. Just the reverse is now true. Jacob described Esau as the master and himself as the servant. You will remember that Jacob and Esau abruptly parted company (Genesis 27:41) over Jacob's attempts to usurp the privileges of the eldest son in the family. Jacob was deceitful and dishonest in getting Isaac to bestow the blessing on him. Nevertheless the blessing could not be taken away from him. It made Esau so angry he promised to kill Jacob. Identifying Esau as the master and himself as bond-servant was very significant. Jacob was saying that despite the blessing he possessed, he wanted Esau to know that he was prepared to place himself under the control and care of Esau as the head of the family. This was a tremendous change in Jacob, the heel-grabber.

Jacob was hiding nothing.

> *'I have cattle and donkeys, sheep and goats, men servants and maid servants. Now I am sending this message to my lord, that I may find favor in your eyes.' Genesis 32:5*

He left Canaan empty-handed; he returned a very wealthy man. At a time when it could hurt him, he told Esau all about his wealth. Jacob made no secret of the fact that he was seeking the favor of Esau. This is serious evidence of the change that had taken place in his life.

You may remember, from our study of Genesis 25:31, that Jacob was dealing harshly with his brother Esau over the birthright. Jacob was determined to control the family. In our current study, you see just the opposite. He spoke of Esau as his "lord," the one who had control over his life.

You can see the same contrast in chapter 27. When it seemed certain that the blessing of the first born was to be given to Esau, Jacob lied and deceived his father in order to receive that blessing.

When there was only minutes difference in the time of the birth of Jacob and Esau, one can understand why it might be a sore point with him, but it should not have been that important to him. It was!

In our current study, Jacob was not going to lie or deceive his brother. He sent word to Esau that he was coming. He told his brother just how large his flocks were when that could have been detrimental to him. The contrast between the three situations is amazing.

The messenger returned with a surprising message:

> *When the messengers returned to Jacob, they said, "We went to your brother Esau, and now he is coming to meet you, and four hundred men are with him." Genesis 32:6*

This was a time for waiting. There were from eight to ten days after the messengers returned before Jacob and Esau would meet. What did Jacob do during that time. He continued his travel toward his brother, but what went through his mind? Esau was coming with 400 men. Jacob had to wonder why the 400 men were coming I would be most surprised if at several times during those days he was not tempted to revert to his old subversive ways. A hundred perfect schemes must have flooded his mind as foolproof ways to escape the fury of his brother. At other times he had to struggle with his new direction in life - to trust God and refuse to use the deceptive ways of which he was such a master. I suspect he struggled with his new direction in life-to trust God and refuse to use deceptive ways of which he was by which life could be lived.

Put yourself in Jacob's shoes. You decide to trust God rather than your deceptive ways. Your brother has every reason to hate you and get even for the wrong you did him 20 years before. You send a message seeking to reestablish family relationships. The messenger returns to tell you Esau is coming to meet you with 400 men. Now there were several possible motives that could have caused Esau to come as he did. He could have come out of sheer joy to see his brother. It is amazing, however, what a guilty conscience can do to a man like Jacob. He certainly thought that Esau was coming to do him harm.

The text does not identify the 400 men who came with Esau. It is possible that they were all his servants or members of his family. If this is true, Esau had become exceedingly wealthy in the intervening 20 years. It is just as possible that some of these were neighbors with whom he had made a mutual defense agreement. If this is true, it also attests to his great power and prestige in the area. Neighbors usually tried to stay aloof from family confrontations. This was not always possible.

Whatever the scenario, Esau had become very rich and powerful in a foreign land during these 20 years. This gives us a hint of just how capable Esau really was.

Things are not always as they appear to be. This was the case with Jacob.

> *In great fear and distress Jacob divided the people who were with him into two groups, and the flocks and herds, and camels as well. He thought, "If Esau comes and attacks one group, the group that is left may escape." Genesis 32:7, 8*

This message was a shock to Jacob. His new approach was about to be tested. He had many difficult and dangerous experiences. In each instance his cunning and deceptive

ways got him through. Now that he faced his greatest test, he wondered if his new decision to be above board and trust God would be sufficient.

Jacob had several alternatives. He could continue his journey to meet Esau and trust God to work out the details. He could change his mind and go to a different location and thus avoid the confrontation. He could deceive his brother into thinking they would meet and go somewhere else. Jacob's response was not perfect, but it was far superior to what Esau had seen before.

We must ask, why would Jacob divide the group into two parts? Who would benefit from this maneuver? If Esau could destroy one group, couldn't he also take the second group? Notice Jacob's explanation: "If Esau comes and attacks one group, the group that is left may **escape**." Jacob knew that this was not a secure plan. He was looking for a way to preserve some of his people from destruction. Though this plan left much to be desired, still Jacob was thinking of the welfare of those who were with him and not himself.

We tend to show our true colors, in the times of danger and uncertainty. This was true for Jacob as well. In Genesis 33:9-12, Jacob talked with God. In this prayer, Jacob referred to God in three different ways:

- "**O God of my father Abraham**" - The name "God" is "Elohim" (אֱלֹהִים) means the majestic, royal God. This name is repeatedly used in situations where God is showing His mercy to the undeserving.
- "The God of **my father** Abraham" - Jacob knew his family had worshipped God for many generations. It represents the fact that God had been merciful to this family for decades. On the other hand, this family had served God also.
- The God of my father **Abraham** - This is an image of faithfulness. God told Abraham he would take him to a land, and he did. God promised to give this patriarch a son in his old age, and at age 100 He did. Jacob focused on God's mercy and faithfulness.
- **God of my father Isaac** - Again, Jacob used the name "Elohim" which focused on the mercy and majesty of God. Jacob identified God with his father, Isaac. The text does not say, but it is possible that Jacob remembered a time (Genesis 28:1) when he had deceived his father, Isaac, and tricked him into giving him the blessing of the first born. Knowing this, Isaac still blessed Jacob and sought what was best for him by sending him to Paddan Aram. He also wished God's blessing on him. The use of this name directs attention to the holy quality of God and the people who serve Him.
- **O Lord** - Jacob changed the name of God that he used. The name "Lord" is "Jehovah" (יהוה). This name stresses His eternal power. The name is used repeatedly in situations where it was necessary for God to bring judgment on people in order to bring them back to Himself.

Observe the emphasis which pervades each verse of this prayer.

"O God of my father Abraham, God of my father Isaac, O LORD, who said to me, 'Go back to your country and your relatives, and I will make you prosper.' Genesis 32:9

Jacob reminded God that He told him to go back to his land and his family. Jacob further reminded God that He had promised to make Jacob prosper. Jacob was not reminding God of this promise because he thought God had forgotten. Jacob repeated the promise as a way of saying, You are the God who in mercy and justice dealt with my family. Now you will continue to show this faithfulness and power on my behalf. Jacob was announcing the basis of his faith, not the substance of his fear. Jacob was acting on faith, not deception. This verse clarifies how this change took place in his life.

The second verse of this prayer directs our attention in a totally different direction.

> *"I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness you have shown your servant. I had only my staff when I crossed this Jordan, but now I have become two groups." Genesis 32:10*

In the past, Jacob never lacked for a very proud expression of his own importance. Things have changed. Here Jacob did just the opposite. No one had to point out his weaknesses. The word "unworthy is "qaton" (קָטֹן). It is a root word which means to diminish. It is to hold oneself as being of no account. It is to make small, to be unworthy. Jacob was saying that he did not deserve the kindness and faithfulness of God. Jacob also refers to himself as the servant of God. This was more than a saying. Servants existed to do the will of their master and no one else. He was expected to live or die for the opportunity to do his master's will. His life was not his own. This was Jacob's view of himself in relation to God and Esau.

Jacob then illustrates what he had said by referring to his economic history. This is a before and after picture. He began by describing his situation when he fled from Esau. When he left, he had only his staff. A staff was considered part of his attire. To mention this as a possession focuses attention on it as something special. This has led some scholars to believe that this was a very special staff which was later carried by Moses, David and every king who reigned until the temple was destroyed. This can not be corroborated. The statement stresses at least two things:

- Jacob left with his clothing and nothing more. He was impoverished.
- The staff he carried was, for some undisclosed reason, very important.

Having stressed the depths of his impoverishment upon leaving the land of Canaan, Jacob now turns to a description of his economic condition as he returned to the land. The intense contrast of these two situations was heightened by the use of the word "but."

Jacob returned to the land with so many possessions that it was appropriate to divide them into two companies for security reasons.

Jacob continued his prayer with a plea to God.

> *"Save me, I pray, from the hand of my brother Esau, for I am afraid he will come and attack me, and also the mothers with their children..." Genesis 32:11*

Jacob displays intense honesty in the midst of his fear. Again, this was not the way we remember Jacob. Jacob prayed, "Save me." The word "save" is "natsal" (נָצַל) which means to snatch away from, to protect, to rescue or recover from intense danger. Jacob pleaded with God to rescue him out of the hands of his brother, Esau. Nowhere in this prayer does Jacob claim to be worthy. Just the opposite, he claimed no position of worth at all.

Jacob was very direct about the two things he feared most:

- He feared Esau would attack him and destroy what God had given him in Paddan Aram. Granted he was concerned with things, but his concern was that he would lose what God had given him. This was more a concern for God's gift than a concern for possessions.
- He also feared Esau would attack his wives and children. This appears to be a new level of concern in Jacob's life. He may have been concerned about them before, but this is the first mention of it.

In verse 12, there is a change in Jacob's prayer.

> *But you have said, "I will surely make you prosper and will make your descendants like the sand of the sea, which cannot be counted.'" Genesis 32:12*

This is the second time in this prayer that Jacob reminded God that he had promised to make him prosper. Jacob believed God would keep His word. In order to do that, He would have to defend Jacob against Esau's **apparent** desire to destroy Jacob and all he possessed. This is more an affirmation of Jacob's confidence in the faithfulness of God than an expression of Jacob's lack of faith.

Jacob then reviewed the balance of the promise God made to him. In verse 12, Jacob reminded God of His promise to "make your descendants like the sand of the sea, which can not be counted." Jacob had several sons, but if this promise was to come true, he and his sons were going to have to survive this threatening encounter.

Jacob was a man who had lived in the sand desert. He knew what it was like to look in all four directions and as far as the eye could see there was only sand. Jacob was reminding God that he expected his sons to live and for his family to grow so much that it would not be possible to count them.

What a transformation in Jacob! The heel-grabber became the believer, the one who would be shocked if God did not do as He had promised.

Genesis 32:13-21 - Jacob Instructs Servants About Meeting Esau

This paragraph begins with the word "and" which suggests that it is the continuation of the story being told in 32:3-12. That is exactly what happened.

Think about Jacob for a moment. He knew that Esau was coming with 400 men. He needed to either plan a strong defense or flee, putting as much distance between himself and Esau as possible. He did neither. He stayed in that place all night. We are forced to inquire, why would he do this?

If you look back over the story of Jacob's life, you will notice that repeatedly, God spoke to him in a dream at critical points in his life. It is quite possible that Jacob was hoping that this would happen again. It did not.

In this paragraph, Jacob gives further illustration of his new outlook on life - dealing with life head-on rather than trying to manipulate people who get into his way.

> *He spent the night there, and from what he had with him he selected a gift for his brother Esau: Genesis 32:13*

There are two pieces of evidence in this paragraph which reveal Jacob's attitude toward difficulty.

- He stayed the night - He did not look for an easy way out. The fact that he stayed is evidence that he was not going to run again, as he did when he went to Paddan-Aram.
- He prepared a present to give to Esau - If you are going to run, you don't need to prepare a present. The fact that he prepared the gift makes it clear that as unusual as this was for him in the past, Jacob was going to meet his problem head-on.

Verses 14 and 15 make up a list of the things included in Jacob's gift to Esau.

> *Two hundred female goats and twenty male goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams, thirty female camels with their young, forty cows and ten bulls, and twenty female donkeys and ten male donkeys. Genesis 32:14, 15*

There are two problems with this list. Both problems have to do with the camels.

- The text simply says "thirty female camels with their young." Does this mean 30 animals in all? I think not. Does it mean that each female camel had a young offspring? If that is true then the total number of animals is 580 rather than 550.
- Some scholars interpret "with their young" to mean the appropriate number of male camels to provide propagation. We should note that there is an appropriate number of males included with the females of all the animals except the camels. There is no way to determine what the text really means. We only know that the present was large - nearly 600 animals. The nature of this gift was such that Jacob was providing was such, that this will not be a one time gift, but one that would year after year increase the holdings of its recipient, Esau. Jacob carefully provided sufficient males to insure that there would be lambs born each year. This gift would nearly double itself each year.

As we begin this discussion of Jacob's gift to Esau, there is a haunting question: Is Jacob's motivation, in giving this gift, a moral act or is it just one more instance of his manipulation? This is an important question to answer.

The text does not deal with this question directly. We are forced to search for clues in Jacob's words, decisions and experiences. As we proceed through this study, we will point out significant pieces of possible evidence. When we complete the study of the story, we hope you will have sufficient information to make up your own mind concerning this issue. We will mark such data with the *.

Whatever Jacob's motive, this kind of gift is one that is usually understood to be given to secure the good will of one who has superior status.*

There is another symbol in this gift that Jacob wants to bring to Esau's attention.

> *He put them in the care of his servants, each herd by itself, and said to his servants, "Go ahead of me, and keep some space between the herds." Genesis 32:16*

He did not just send the animals in one big herd, but arranged the herds with great precision. He put all the goats together under the care of a knowledgeable shepherd and put some distance between this herd and that which was to follow. Jacob took the sheep and separated them by some distance from all the other herds. Again, he put these under the care of a shepherd who had experience in shepherding sheep and put some distance between the sheep and the herd which was to follow them. Jacob took this special care with each herd that made up his gift to Esau. It appears that in his careful arranging of the

herds, Jacob hoped that Esau would realize the great care with which he prepared the gift. *

Jacob made even more precise plans for this gift.

He instructed the one in the lead: "When my brother Esau meets you and asks, 'To whom do you belong, and where are you going, and who owns all these animals in front of you?' Then you are to say, 'They belong to your servant Jacob. They are a gift sent to my lord Esau, and he is coming behind us.'" Genesis 32:17, 18

One might wonder how Jacob could anticipate the questions Esau would ask when he met the servants who accompanied his gift. These are the questions any shepherd would ask if he saw such a parade of animals.

Jacob's instructions contained four important pieces of information that he wanted to impress on Esau:

- **These animals belong to Jacob** - He was not coming home because he was destitute. He had sufficient possessions to care for his own needs for a long time to come.
- **Your <u>servant</u> Jacob** - Jacob did not tell the servants to say, "your **brother** Jacob." He took special care to present himself under the care of Esau as the eldest son in the family. The word "servant" comes from the root word "abad" (עָבַד) which means to enslave, to compel to do a master's bidding. It was a way of letting Esau know that he still held the eldest son's position in the family despite what had happened twenty years before.
- "**My lord Esau**" - Jacob did not tell his shepherds to say " these are a gift for my master's **brother**, Esau." It was very important to use the word "lord" "Adonai" (אֲדֹנַי) which means sovereign ruler, one who controls. It was used of God and gods as well as people of great, unrestricted power. The message in this instruction was to inform Esau that not only did Jacob recognize his subservient position, but also that he acknowledged the superior, masterly position Esau held in the family because he was the eldest son, the heir, in spite of the blessing Jacob received by deceiving his father.
- "**He is coming behind us**" - Esau had plenty of memories of Jacob deceiving, manipulating and undercutting him. When the servants told Esau that Jacob was giving something away, he had to be quite surprised. When Esau heard that Jacob was coming to face him, he had to be shocked and dazed with unbelief. Everyone involved knew that Esau had threatened to kill Jacob. This would tell Esau that he was going to meet a new man in his brother.

This instruction, also, was not new. He had given the lead shepherds the same instruction in 32:18. Jacob was placing special emphasis on the words they were to be sure to say, "**Your servant** Jacob is coming behind us." The emphasis is twofold:

- He is stressing the fact that Jacob was coming to meet Esau, not running from him.
- He was stressing the he was coming as Esau's servant, not as the master he was once determined to be.

Jacob displayed an openness which had not characterized his dealings in the past. He was quite direct about the fact that he was hoping that Esau would accept him. *

This gift was a form of ransom, a way to appease one's anger. It was an atonement for Jacob's sins of the past, for they were many. It was a way to declare that he was prepared to serve a master without reservation. It should be noted that Jacob said, " I will face him." I will personally say these things myself when he has gotten over the shock of the whole experience. It is interesting that he followed this by saying, "Perhaps he will forgive me." The word for "pacify" is "nasa" (נָשָׂא) which means to lift up my face, or pardon. A guilty person seeking pardon would appear before the abused party with his face toward the ground. If the abused person would forgive him, he would lift up the face of the wrong-doer, giving him the right to see his face again. Jacob could only do this if he was really prepared to place himself under the control of Esau as the master of the clan.

Verse 21 could give us mixed information. Notice how the author presents it:

> *So Jacob's gifts went on ahead of him, but he himself spent the night in the camp. Genesis 32:21*

One could get the idea that Jacob sent the gift on ahead to soften up his brother, Esau. He admits that he wants to be accepted, but this does not require that his motives were suspicious as they had often been.

There is another risk that Jacob took in this verse. The gift he gave Esau was immense. Given the desperate feelings which had festered between the two brothers for 20 years, no one would be surprised if Esau just took the great gift and went away. It was worth it for Jacob to take this risk. Imagine just how difficult it was for Jacob to sleep that night in the camp.

Genesis 32:22-32 - Jacob Wrestles with the Angel at Peniel

The text does not say so, but apparently Jacob could not sleep. Who could fault him for that? In his apparent restlessness, Jacob acted:

> *That night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two maidservants and his eleven sons and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. Genesis 32:22*

Again, the author writes in a very matter of fact style. Much more is involved here than what we see. This decision had to be very important to Jacob for him to act as he did. It was night. Everyone else would be asleep. He would have to wake up two wives, two concubines and eleven sons. The author mentioned eleven sons, but what about daughters? We do not know how many daughters Jacob had, but we know that Dinah had been born, so there was at least one daughter present along with the eleven boys. In the dark, with no street lights, they would have to strike their tents, pack all their goods and cross the river in the dark. If you grant a bright moonlit night, it would still be a very difficult thing to do. Reaching the other side of the river, they would have to set up their tents again, or at least break out enough covering to sleep the rest of the night.

The text says that they "crossed the ford of the Jabbok." A ford is a shallow place in the river where people can cross without wading deep through water.

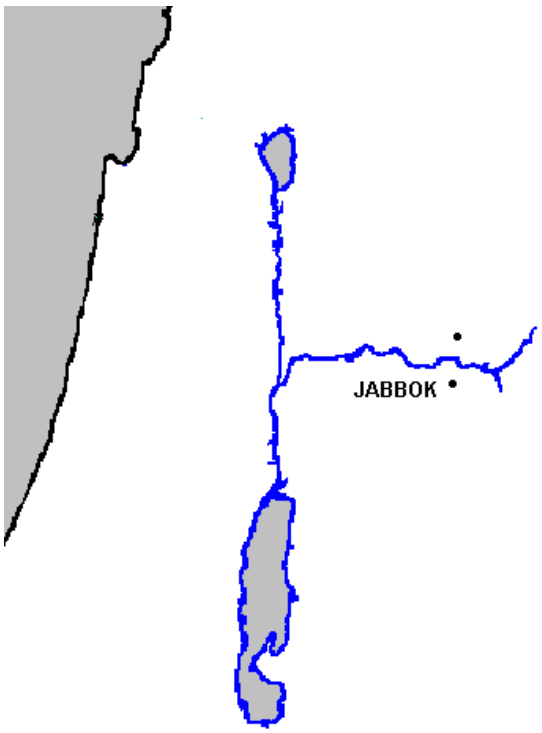
The question arises, why would Jacob feel the need to do this at night? The text does not say. There will be some hints concerning this question a little later in the text.

Map 6 gives us an impression of what Jacob did that night. He moved his family from the north side of the river to the south side. This offered them no strategic advantage at all. It

may be a number of things, but it is not a concern for his family's safety. They would have been safer on the north side of the river.

The next verse gives us a hint concerning the reason Jacob sent his family across the Jabbok.

> *After he sent them across the stream, he sent over all his possessions. Genesis 32:23*



Map 6: Jacob Moves His Family

Though the reason is not totally presented as yet, one thing is clear, Jacob does not want his family and possessions to be in the same place with him. One might conjecture, at this point, that he is thinking - if I am attacked, I do not want my family and possessions to be destroyed along with me. This would be a new way of thinking for Jacob, but it matches the changes that seem to be taking place. If you check Map 6 again, however, Jacob moved his family and possessions closer to Esau, not farther from him. If moving them was an act of concern for their welfare, then he should have placed himself between Esau and his family. He did just the opposite.

There is another possibility. All his life Jacob was preoccupied with possessions and their accumulation. It is possible that he wanted to place everything that he had, family and belongings - apart from him and meet with God without any of the things that had taken God's place in his life. We will check this again a little later.

Jacob is now all alone. The story continues in these terms:

> *So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. Genesis 32:24*

There is nothing in the verse that identifies who this man was. It is important to note that throughout the book of Genesis, angels are identified as "man" or "men." This is the understanding most scholars accept. The author tells us that this man/angel wrestled with Jacob until dawn. The word "wrestle" is "abaq" (אָבַק) which literally means "to float away." It is commonly used to mean grapple, to dust in a way that particles fly in all directions. We need to understand the nature of this struggle. Was it a spiritual struggle? Was it a physical struggle?

> *When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. Genesis 32:25*

The text says that "his hip was wrenched as he wrestled." In the Hebrew text, the word "wrenched" is "yaqa" (יָקַע) and means to severe oneself, to be out of joint, to abandon. This word was used to describe what took place when a body was impaled on a wall. When the flesh rotted and the bones came apart from each other, it was called "yaqa."

There is a side issue that should be dealt with at this point. Angels are stronger than men, but not all powerful. This being the case, the question arises, why was the angel unable to overpower Jacob when angels are stronger than men? The fact that the angel touched Jacob's hip and put it out of joint suggests that there was at least some physical struggle. This does not, however, mean that the purpose of the struggle was physical. My own conviction is that this was a spiritual more than a physical struggle. All his life, Jacob had tried to get ahead; tried to get power by his own efforts and accumulations. It seems to me that by placing his family and possessions on the other side of the river, Jacob had symbolically divested himself of everything he accumulated by his own efforts. He had tried to get the blessing by his cunning and power. Now he was determined that the blessing he received would not be because of his cunning, but because of the blessing of God. He would let nothing stand in the way of receiving that blessing. He was as determined to receive God's favor as he was his brother's pardon.

Jacob was wounded, but he did not cease the struggle. Notice how the author records the event.

> *Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak." But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." Genesis 32:26*

That this is a physical encounter is unquestionable, but Jacob clarifies the purpose - He was determined to receive a blessing. He was not trying to show that his strength was greater than that of the angel. We can not be sure why the coming of the day caused the angel to request that Jacob let him go. It may be that he felt that his first responsibility, as an angel, was to praise God. On the other hand it may have been because Esau's arrival was imminent. We can not be sure. One thing is certain. Jacob was not going to let the angel go without a blessing.

The text does not say that the angel agreed to bless Jacob, but the actions say he did.

> *The man asked him, "What is your name?" "Jacob," he answered. Genesis 32:27*

The question could be asked, why did the angel need to ask Jacob for his name? Certainly the angel would know Jacob's name. It could be a more formal way of proceeding with the blessing.

In this instance we are again dealing with the meaning of names.

> *Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome." Genesis 32:28*

The name "Jacob," as you know, means "supplanter," "heel-grabber." The angel was saying that he would no longer be known as a heel-grabber. From this point forward, Jacob was going to be known as "Israel," which means "he struggles with God" or "he struggles for God."

Jacob might well be called the digger. He was never satisfied. Having been asked his name, as a part of the angel's blessing, Jacob wondered what the angel's name was.

Jacob said, "Please tell me your name." But he replied, "Why do you ask my name?" Then he blessed him there. Genesis 32:29

Two things stand out in this verse: Jacob was most gracious when he asked the name of the angel. This was significant because it had never been one of Jacob's more obvious qualities in the past. This was just one more piece of evidence that Jacob was really changed. He was as different from the past as his new name - Israel - was different from his former name - Jacob.

Secondly, the angel's response was not an evasive one as it may appear. Supernatural beings derived their names from their mission. The angels had different missions at different times. This means that their name would be different each time a task was assigned to them. The angels intent boils down to one of two possibilities:

- This mission was completed, so it made no difference what his name had been.
- His name had no ongoing meaning because it would be changed each time an assignment was made.

The important thing about the exchange, in verse 29, was that the angel blessed Jacob as he had demanded.

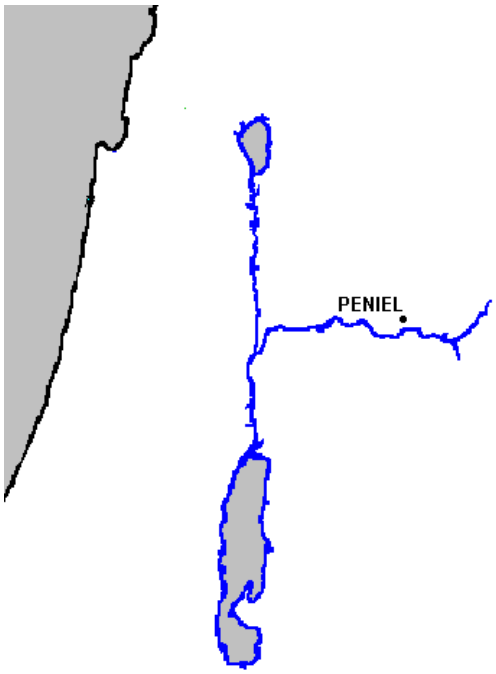
Jacob had experienced something that was awesome and sought some way to celebrate it.

So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying "It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared. Genesis 32:30

The name Jacob used for God was "Elohim" - the Majestic God of Mercy. Jacob could have used the name "Jehovah," but he wanted to emphasize the **mercy** of God, not His **justice**.

Our text calls the place where this took place "Peniel." It is sometimes spoken of as "Penuel. Peniel literally means "face of God." Because of interchangeable letters, the name "Penuel" literally means the same thing.

What does Jacob mean when he called the place Peniel? First, it does not mean that when Jacob called the place Peniel that he had in fact seen the face of God. No one has seen the face of God and lived. Jacob had seen an angel. "To see the face" is a way of saying a person has secured favor or approval of the person he saw. In Revelation 22, John was describing a heavenly scene. He said:



Map 7: Jacob Meets God at Peniel

No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb

will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. ***They will see his face*** *and his name will be on their foreheads. Revelation 22:3-5*

This is a picture of God's acceptance of His people.

Again, when we come to Genesis 43:3, Judah told Jacob what the Egyptian master, Joseph, had said:

*But Judah said to him, "The man warned us solemnly, '****You will not see my face again*** *unless your brother is with you.'" Genesis 43:3*

Judah was saying that Joseph would not accept them unless they kept his command. In our present study, Jacob called this place Peniel because he had seen God face to face; he had been affirmed and accepted by God and it had not cost him his life. This was a fantastic shock for Jacob. He could hardly understand the mercy of God, in view of the way he had previously lived.

The story continued in verse 31:

The sun rose above him as he passed Peniel, and he was limping because of his hip. Therefore to this day the Israelites do not eat the tendon attached to the socket of the hip, because the socket of Jacob's hip was touched near the tendon. Genesis 32:31, 32

This passage indicates that the displacement of the hip socket was permanent, not just out of joint and then replacing itself. Some scholars believe that it was immediately healed, but there is no textual warrant for this understanding.

If we think about the quotation from Genesis 32:31, 32, we realize that God had to make Jacob vulnerable before he blessed him. This was not necessary because of the nature of the blessing, but rather because of the nature of the man. Jacob had become self sufficient because of his cunning and deception. He depended upon his cunning rather than upon God. Only vulnerability can ultimately remove our dependency upon ourselves. That is what it took so that Jacob could benefit from the blessing God was giving to him.

Many Jewish people today do not eat the meat of the hind quarter of an animal. It is sold to Gentile butchers to be eaten by others. There is nothing wrong with this meat. In Israel, where prices are much higher, Jewish butchers strip out the several nerves which may not be eaten and then the Jewish customers may eat of that meat. It is an issue of respect, a way of remembering a very meaningful event in the life of a patriarch. It is not fear of harm.

Conclusion

In Christian circles, there is much conversation about how God changes lives. Unfortunately, however, there is sometimes more conversation than change. The difference between the life of Jacob, when he tricked his father into bestowing the blessing of the firstborn on him, and the life of Israel as he was about to meet his brother Esau, was real and obvious. The Old and New Testaments are replete with instances where such obvious changes took place: the change of David from adulterer and murderer to obedient king, the change of Peter from one who denied knowing Jesus to one who proclaimed the Good News of Jesus to the whole city, of Mark who went home when persecution came, to the

one who stood by Paul when he was in prison, of Saul whose life was so changed, they called him Paul. The list is long.

God is changeless. The God who transformed Jacob into Israel still transforms lives. It is never appropriate for me to say I can't help my weaknesses, it is just the way I am. There is no flaw in my makeup which is beyond His ability and my willingness to be changed. That being true, how do we account for the lack of change in our lives?

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 9

JACOB MEETS ESAU

GENESIS 33:1 - 20

1. In our best documents, there are two paragraphs in Genesis chapter 33. On the table below, write a title of seven words or less for each paragraph.

33:1-17	
33:18-20	

2. Genesis 33:1-17 describes the meeting between Jacob and Esau.
   a. Verse one describes the time when Jacob and Esau met.
      (1). Put yourself in Jacob's position.
         (a). How would you feel?
         (b). Why would you feel that way?
         (c). What would you want to do?
      (2). Why was it important to place each child with his/her mother as they moved toward Esau?
   b. Read verses two and three again.
      (1). The author carefully details the position of each wife and handmaid in this procession. What does this tell us?
      (2). What difference does it make that the handmaids and their children were at the front of the line, just behind Jacob?
      (3). What do we learn from the fact that Leah precedes Rachel in the procession?
      (4). What difference does it make that Rachel and Joseph were at the back of the procession?
      (5). If your name were Joseph, what would all this positioning say to you?
      (6). Review verse three again.
         (a) What shocking discovery did you make about Jacob?
         (b). What does this discovery tell you about Jacob?
      (7). What is the significance, if any, of the fact that Jacob bowed down seven times as he approached his brother Esau?
         (a). Would it have had a lesser meaning if he bowed down six times?
         (b). Would it have had greater significance if he had bowed down eight times?
   c. Genesis 33:2-4 gives contrasting information about Jacob and Esau. On the table below record the contrasting information you discover.

JACOB	ESAU

d. Genesis 33:4 describes Esau's actions when he met Jacob.
   (1). Identify each thing Esau did in this verse.
   (2). Explain what each of these actions meant to Jacob.
   (3). The author concludes the verse saying, "and they wept." What additional information does this sentence give us?
e. In Genesis 33:5, Esau asked a question about the people who followed Jacob in the procession.
   (1). What was Esau asking?
   (2). Why did Jacob find it important to line up his family in the procession as he did?
   (3). Study Jacob's response to Esau in this verse.
      (a). What is the significance of the fact that Jacob sees God as responsible for his having these children?
      (b). Observe the way Jacob identifies himself in this verse. What is the significance of this fact?
f. In Genesis 33:6, Jacob's handmaids and their children met Esau. Why was it important for Jacob's wives and children to also bow down before Esau as Jacob did?
g. In Genesis 33:7, both Leah and Rachel and their children met Esau.
   (1). It was Jacob who wronged Esau. Why was it necessary for his wives and their children to bow down before Esau?
   (2). Compare the meeting of the maidservants with Esau, 33:6, and the meeting of the two wives with Esau, 33:7.
      (a). What did you learn?
      (b). What does this mean?
h. In Genesis 33:8, a question and answer pass between Jacob and Esau.
   (1). State Esau's question in your own words.
   (2). What did you learn from the question Esau asked?
   (3). Study Jacob's response and restate it in your own words.
   (4). What did Jacob mean by this answer?
   (5). What significance can we attach to the title Jacob used here for Esau?
i. Esau, responded to Jacob's gigantic gift in Genesis 33:9
   (1). Esau's response appears to be extremely generous. In view of this fact, make a comparison between the actions and words of Esau in Genesis 27:41 with his response to Jacob here in 33:9. What did you learn?
   (2). Compare the way Esau addressed Jacob, in Genesis 33:9, with the way Jacob addressed Esau in 33:8. What does this tell you?
j. In Genesis 33:10, Jacob, willingly or unknowingly, applied a degree of pressure to Esau.

(1). What was Jacob's pressure?
(2). What was the consequence of this pressure?
(3). Study Jacob's reasons for insisting that Esau accept this monumental gift.
(a). What reasons does Jacob give?
(b). What did Jacob say it was like to see Esau and be received by him?
(c). What did Jacob mean by this statement?

k. In Genesis 33:11, Jacob urged Esau to accept the gift he brought to him.
(1). Why was it so important that Esau accept the gift?
(2). What reasons did Jacob give for insisting that Esau receive the gift which he did not really want to accept?
(3). What, if anything, does this tell you?

l. In Genesis 33:12, Esau interjects a surprise element into the story.
(1). What is the element of surprise?
(2). What possible reasons could Esau have for trying to get Jacob to do this?
(3). Which of these possibilities do you favor? Why?

m. Genesis 33:13 reports Jacob's response to Esau's surprising offer.
(1). Both Jacob and Esau were herdsmen. In view of this, what did Jacob tell Esau that he would not have known and considered in making his invitation?
(2). What light does this shed on Jacob's response in verse thirteen?
(3). What hint do you have, at this time, concerning what is really happening between Jacob and Esau?

n. In 33:14, Jacob made a counter-suggestion to Esau's invitation which he rejected.
(1). Read this verse very carefully. What specific pieces of information does it contain?
(2). Here, as in each conversation Jacob had with Esau in this chapter, Jacob refers to his brother as "my lord." What is accomplished by this repetition?
(3). Read the verse again. How much more slowly is Jacob suggesting that he travel than the pace at which Esau would move?
(4). Jacob specifically mentions his proposed arrival in Seir.
(a). What does this tell you?
(b). What problem might this create?

o. In Genesis 33:15, Esau and Jacob exchanged suggestions again.
(1). In 33:15a, Esau suggested that he leave men with Jacob.
(a). What would these men be left to do?
(b). Why would Jacob need these men now, in Canaan, when he traveled hundreds of miles without them or anyone else?
(2). In 33:15b, Jacob responded to Esau's offer.
(a). What did he say?
(b). What emotional tone do you detect in his response?
(c). Compare this refusal, in 33:15, with the previous one, in 33:13. What differences, if any, do you observe?

p. Study Genesis 33:16 for clues concerning the relationship between Jacob and Esau. What did you find?

q. In Genesis 33:17, the author identified the place to which Jacob went. On a map identify the location of both Jacob and Esau. What, if anything, did you learn?

3. In Genesis 33:18-20, Jacob bought land in Shechem.
   a. In Genesis 33:18, Jacob stopped near Shechem. Can you remember any reason why Jacob would want to stop here?
   b. In Genesis 33:19, Jacob purchased a tract of land from "the sons of Hamor." Why would he purchase the land, when he could dwell there without paying for it?
   c. In Genesis 33:20, Jacob set up an altar and called it, "El Elohe Israel."
      (1). Why would he give the altar a name?
      (2). Why would he give the altar this name?

4. Review chapter 33 very carefully. What have you learned that will impact the way you live your life for God?

LESSON 9: GENESIS 33:1 - 20

JACOB MEETS ESAU

Introduction

In the best Hebrew manuscripts of Genesis chapter 33, there are only two paragraphs. A summary of their content is listed on the following table:

33:1-17	Jacob Meets Esau
33:18-20	Jacob Buys Land at Shechem for an Altar

Genesis 33:1-17 - Jacob and Esau Meet

Despite the wording of our text, in the Hebrew, this paragraph begins with the word "and." This suggests that the author has continued to tell the story he was telling in chapter 32. That is an important observation in this situation. Verse 31 tells us that as Jacob passed Peniel/Penuel he was limping. This was a totally new experience for Jacob to be physically limited and at the mercy of others. In that condition, Jacob begins chapter 33.

> *Jacob looked up and there was Esau, coming with his four hundred men: so he divided the children among Leah Rachel and the two maid-servants. Genesis 33:1*

Jacob limped. He was unable to run and incapable of self-defense. In this condition, Jacob looked up and saw Esau with 400 men coming toward him.

The fact that Jacob put the children with their mothers gives an indication of the kind of danger Jacob anticipated. In greatest danger, people want children to be by their mother.

Put yourself in Jacob's position. How would you feel? Just to see your brother, who had a catalogue of reasons to hate you; who had vowed to kill you; to see him coming with 400 men would be enough to frighten you all by itself. Now add to it the fact that you are lame - incapable of flight or self-defense. In this situation, Jacob had to be beside himself with fear and foreboding, anticipating the worst. Jacob had had several days to decide what he would do. Now it was time for action.

> *He put the maid servants and their children in front, Leah and her children next, and Rachel and Joseph in the rear. He himself went on ahead and bowed down to the ground seven times as he approached his brother. Genesis 33:2, 3*

Jacob, the perfectionist, had made careful plans about the precise way they would approach Esau. There is a hint which helps us to understand why he divided up his family the way he did. Observe the order in which Jacob placed his family as they approached Esau:

The maid-servants - Bilhah and Zilpah and their children

Leah and her children were next

Rachel and Joseph came last.

All of Jacob's family was precious to him, but some more than others. The maid-servants and their sons held the least important places in the family. They were first in the procession. If any must die, then it should be those who held the least important position in the family.

Leah was Jacob's wife, not his concubine. She, therefore, held a place of higher importance in the family and was placed, with her sons, behind the servant girls and their sons.

Rachel was the woman Jacob cherished most. She was more important to Jacob than Leah or either of the servant girls. Rachel's son, Joseph, will discover shortly that he was more precious in his father's eyes than any of his other ten sons. Thus Joseph and Rachel were placed last in the procession. Though none of the family members were totally secure, Rachel and Joseph were more secure than any other family member. Jacob's thinking was obvious - Let the most dispensable members of the family be the first to meet Esau. Let the most valuable/important members of the family be farthest from Esau. They would thus be safer, longer. The shocking thing about verse three is that Jacob placed himself at the very front of this procession. He dealt with himself as the most vulnerable, least important member of the family. This is certainly a change in his thinking. In the past, others were dispensable in order to achieve his goals and protect his interests.

There is another glimpse into the life of Jacob in this verse. The author said, "He himself went on ahead and bowed down to the ground seven times as he approached his brother." There is no doubt in my mind, that Jacob bowed down to the ground at least seven times as he came nearer to Esau. That however, is not the main issue. The number "seven" serves two functions in this sentence:

- **It serves a literal function** - It tells exactly how many times Jacob bowed down before Esau.
- **It serves a symbolic function** - Seven is the symbol of completeness and perfection. Bowing down is a symbol of submission and servitude. This sentence symbolizes Jacob's total submission to the control of his brother. "Bowed down to the ground," in verse three, does not mean prostration. This is an expression of deep reverence and respect and everyone understood what it meant.

There is a strong contrast in this paragraph between Jacob and Esau:

But Esau ran to meet Jacob and embraced him; he threw his arms around his neck and kissed him. And they wept. Genesis 33:4

JACOB	ESAU
Planned meeting with Esau with great care	He just ran to meet Jacob
He thought of Esau as his **master**	He thought of Jacob as his **brother**
He bowed himself seven times on his way to meet Esau	He just ran to meet Jacob

This information is very important because it gives us a glimpse of what each man thought and did. Earlier in the study of the life of Jacob, we questioned the reason Esau brought 400 men with him. There are some scholars who believe that he brought all these men to destroy Jacob, but that God spoke to him in a dream and after that he was afraid to harm

his brother. There is no way to prove or disprove this theory, but we can say that there is no evidence of such a plan when Esau met Jacob.

Observe Esau's actions when he met Jacob:

Esau ran to meet him - There is no hint of caution or deliberation in Esau's actions. He showed eagerness to meet Jacob. Some scholars believe that Esau was so moved at seeing his brother bowing to the ground that he could not refrain from running.

Esau... embraced him - The embrace served two functions:

- It showed Jacob that there was no separation in their relationship, or animosity between them.
- It showed Jacob his brother's affection for him

He fell on his neck - This is also a symbolic act. It is a way of saying that Esau had complete trust in his long separated brother.

He kissed him - Among the several cultures in the Near East, the kiss is a universal symbol of forgiveness and restoration. This was the significance, in the New Testament, when the father kissed the Prodigal son. Esau used this to show Jacob that he was forgiven. In our best texts, there are markings over each letter of this word. The markings suggest the need for very careful translation of the word. Some believe that Esau's kiss was insincere and he tried to bite Jacob. The opposite is an equally possible understanding. Esau was very sincere in this kiss and intended to show honest forgiveness. I prefer the latter understanding.

They wept - The weeping was an honest expression of deep emotion. It was a deep sorrow over their intense alienation and long separation.

These symbolic greetings assured the two brothers that there was no danger for either of them. This being shared, they were free to discover other information about the welfare of the each other.

> *Then Esau looked up and saw the women and children. "Who are these with you?" he asked. Jacob answered, "They are the children God has graciously given your servant." Genesis 33:5*

The family procession, which Jacob ordered, was not the way people usually traveled. This caused Esau to ask some serious questions about their identity and the meaning of the makeup of the procession. The fact that each member of the family bowed down before Esau had to also cause him to ask questions. Jacob bowed down "seven times" before his brother to symbolize his submission to the family control of Esau. When Jacob's family did the same thing, they were also indicating that they too were submissive to the family control of Esau.

Jacob's response to Esau's questions is a telling one. The response portrays a sharp contrast between the former image of Jacob and the way he thought now. Previously, Jacob was in command and able to do for himself. Now Jacob immediately attributed the gift of children to the action of God. Jacob spoke of his children saying, "They are the children God has graciously given your servant." Jacob saw his eleven sons as evidence of just how gracious God had been to him. The experiences with Laban were not less painful. In review of the things God had done, Jacob discovered a deeper appreciation of how blessed he really was. That is a drastic change. There is more. Having been assured of

Esau's forgiveness and acceptance, Jacob still continued to refer to himself as Esau's servant. This suggests a high level of integrity on Jacob's part. The use of words which suggested his subservience to Esau were true, not ploys used to keep Esau from knowing his true feelings.

The symbolism was not complete when Jacob was received by Esau:

> *Then the maidservants and their children approached and bowed down. Genesis 33:6*

You will remember that the handmaids, Bilhah and Zilpah, with their children, led the procession. There had to be a great distance between Jacob and handmaids with their children. Jacob had enough time to be restored to his brother before the handmaids and their children arrived.

When the handmaids and their children arrived they also bowed before Esau. This was a way of assuring Esau that they too were placed under his guidance and control. This was important, but expected. Bilhah and Zilpah were servants and as such owed obedience and respect to their master and whomever he offered obedience.

The next to arrive in the presence of Esau were Jacob's wives and their sons.

> *Next Leah and her children came and bowed down. Last of all came Joseph and Rachel, and they too bowed down. Genesis 33:7*

Though Leah and Rachel were dealt with differently in the procession, they were mentioned together here. Again, a substantial amount of time passed between the arrival of the two handmaids with their sons and the wives with their sons. This would have been an imposing spectacle.

Think about this scenario for a moment. Look at the procession. If your name were Leah, this caravan would remind you that you were more important to Jacob than the two servants, but not as important as Rachel - his favorite wife and your younger sister. It is easy to understand the tensions that this would foster.

Again, if you were Rachel, this would be a most exhilarating experience. It would be a vivid reminder that you and your son Joseph were the two most important individuals in the world in Jacob's mind.

The alignment of the procession would tell Joseph, as young as he was, that he was more important, to his father, then all ten older brothers. In view of this, it would not be hard to understand why his brothers were as easily offended by him as they were.

Now put yourself in Esau's position. You eagerly hasten to meet your estranged brother and suddenly you are met by this seemingly endless column of animals and people. Imagine what Esau felt! He knew that this was not the way people travel. Verse eight gives us an insight into the mind of Esau. Notice what he said:

> *Esau said, "What do you mean by all these droves I met?" "To find favor in your eyes, my lord," he said. Genesis 33:8*

Esau was obviously confused by what he encountered. Two things are clear from his statement:

- He knew that there was some design to the way this procession was set up.
- He did not understand what the design of the procession was supposed to tell him.

Observe that Jacob gave an immediate response. The design had a specific purpose - Jacob's response to Eau's question gives us an insight into his thinking:

- **Jacob wanted to find "favor" in Esau's sight**. This word "favor" (chen) (חֵן) means "to be precious," and comes from the word (chanah) (חָנָה) which describes how the rays of the sun slant toward us at evening. It is to be inclined toward us as the sunset is.
- **Jacob spoke of Esau as "my lord."** Esau was supposed to be the heir of the family, the head of the clan when their father died, but Jacob did him out of that honor. Calling Esau "lord" was Jacob's announcement that he was restoring Esau to that position. "Lord" is what the whole family called the father or the one he designated as his heir.

As you reflect over this paragraph, notice that two things happen with each portion of the procession:

- Each group moved in procession like a marching army.
- When each group met Esau, they all bowed down. This was emphasized, in verse three, concerning Jacob himself.

When a defeated army presented itself to the conquering general, they passed in parade before him. When the army approached the raised spot where the general sat, every soldier bowed to the ground before him to show their submission to his control. Is it coincidental that Jacob so carefully orchestrated this meeting with his brother in the same way? I believe not! It was Jacob's way of placing himself and all that he had under the control of his older brother.

Esau was used to being in control. He had at least 400 men under his command. Jacob's wayward brother was unprepared, however, for this presentation. Notice his response:

> *But Esau said, "I already have plenty, my brother. Keep what you have for yourself." Genesis 33:9*

We are frankly at a loss to understand Esau's response here and in the rest of chapter 33. We have no reason to believe that the symbolism of their meeting had escaped Esau. This man who once took an oath to kill his brother now looks for an acceptable way to tell his brother that such symbols of contrition were unnecessary. Add to this the fact that it was considered rude, in that culture, to refuse a gift, no matter what the conditions. Did God work a miracle in Esau's heart which enabled him to forgive? The text is silent on the issue. We know it is true; we do not yet know why. We may discover that later.

Esau urged Jacob to keep these many gifts, pleading, "I have enough, my brother." It is doubtful if "I have enough" was really the reason for Esau's response. Invariably, a wealthy man never has quite enough.

There is a contrast in verses eight and nine which can easily escape our attention. In verse eight, Jacob referred to Esau as "my lord." In verse nine, however, Esau referred to Jacob as "my brother." A cursory reflection on the prodigal son parable reminds us that you do not refer to a person as "my brother" if you are not at peace with that individual. I submit that both Jacob and Esau were correct: Jacob needed to see Esau as the ruler of the clan; Esau needed to see Jacob as forgiven and restored - a brother.

In Genesis 33:9, Esau continued by saying, " Let that which thou hast be thine." In these words, Esau renounced all claim to any penalty which Jacob might owe him. Esau identified Jacob's family and all his possessions as the exclusive property of his brother. No penalty was necessary.

This was an unusual position for Jacob. He was accustomed to taking, not giving. Now he changed his ways and he couldn't give his retribution away. Observe how he spoke.

> *"No, please!" said Jacob. "If I have found favor in your eyes, accept this gift from me. For to see your face is like seeing the face of God, now that you have received me favorably..." Genesis 33:10*

This was Jacob's opportunity. If he saw this as a necessary obligation, a punishment, then Esau's disclaimer entitled Jacob to keep the gifts and say no more. That was not Jacob's desire. His response was in the form of a petition. Jacob's statement is a conditional one. "**IF** I have found favor in your eyes, **THEN** accept this gift from me." Jacob has shown just how much he wants his brother to take the gift. Observe that Jacob called this a "gift." It is a voluntary offering. The import of this is that it indicates that this is a gift of desire, not necessity. There is pressure in Jacob's words, however. In effect, Jacob said, "If you don't accept my gift, THEN I will understand that you reject me." I personally doubt if Jacob meant it that way, but that was the way it was.

Jacob continued by describing what this experience was like for him. He compared it to what a person would experience if he, per chance, had seen the face of God. They believed, as Abraham did, that if a person saw the face of God, he would die. In effect, Jacob said, "Esau, seeing you and not being destroyed is like seeing the face of God and living. This was a graphic picture that Jacob described.

Jacob continued his entreaty in the next verse.

> *Please accept the present that was brought to you, for God has been gracious to me and I have all I need." Genesis 33:11*

The word "present" (barak) (בָּרַךְ) which is the root word which means "to kneel." From this it gained an intention of blessing God. In effect, Jacob was saying, "Esau, I bring this gift to you, not as a penalty, but in the way I give a thank offering to God." This expresses deep gratitude.

Notice the reasons Jacob gives Esau for insisting that he accept the gift.
He pressed Esau to receive the gift because "God has been gracious (give favor) to me." The word "gracious" is exactly the same word, (chanan) (חָנַן) that was used in verse five. He said, in effect, "God has inclined Himself toward me in spite of my errors. I want to have the same relationship with you though I have mistreated you as well."

"Because I have all I need." - Jacob was not coming back because he had nowhere else to turn. Jacob returned with more than enough to care for his own needs. This statement was intended to make sure that Esau did not think Jacob had ulterior motives. Under former circumstances, such a thought would have been justified.

The verse ends with the author's statement that Jacob "insisted ..." The word "insisted" is (patsar) (פָּצַר) and means "to peck" "to pressure," "to urge stubbornly." It was clear to Jacob that Esau simply would not take "no" for an answer.

The author continued by relating Esau's response to Jacob's pressure.

Then Esau said, "Let us be on our way; I'll accompany you." Genesis 33:12

The invitation, by Esau, was a clear symbol that there were no barriers between the two of them. We are repeatedly amazed at the apparent transformation in Esau. We can not explain it, at least not yet. Esau was simply suggesting that they travel together. This was as congenial as Esau could possibly be. This is an awkward position. Jacob had done wrong; Esau offered a kindness Jacob refused the hospitality. It was not always safe to refuse hospitality. Jacob did this as gracefully as possibly, but it was still awkward and potentially dangerous.

Jacob's reply could be understood in a number of ways:

But Jacob said to him, "My lord knows that the children are tender and that I must care for the ewes and cows that are nursing their young. If they are driven hard just one day, all the animals will die." Genesis 33:13

Observe that Jacob continued to refer to Esau as "my lord." It indicates that he continued to think of Esau as the ruler of the clan. He also viewed himself as a family member under Esau's control.

Notice that Jacob does not come out and refuse to travel with Esau, though that is what he wants to accomplish. Instead, Jacob identified a plausible reason why traveling together was not practical. It is possible that Jacob was simply sharing the facts with his brother. The statements are probably true. The apparent motive is probably not the real one, however. One is forced to ask, why would Jacob make such a refusal of his brother's desire to help? There are a number of possibilities:

- It could be Jacob's "go it alone" personality.
- It could be that having made a deep commitment to serve and worship God alone, he did not want to place himself in an idolatrous context.
- It could also be that he was not altogether certain of Esau's reasons for wanting to travel together.

Ultimately, we do not know. It seems to be counter-productive to what Jacob has been attempting to accomplish. We must withhold our decision, for the present, to see of additional information is presented later in the study.

Jacob gave two reasons why it would not be a good idea to travel together:

- His children were "tender." This is a form of the word (rawkah) (רָכַךְ) which really means "to soften." It was used to describe something that was too tender/soft for the task - hands unaccustomed to working all day with a hoe. The normal pace was too much for children learning to walk.
- The lambs of Jacob's flock were not strong enough to endure a long trip at the normal traveling speed. We must also remember that Jacob now walks with a limp and regular travel would be most painful for him if not impossible. It strikes one strangely that Jacob told Esau these things that Esau knew as well as Jacob did, or better. The question immediately arises, why would Jacob do that? There are several possibilities. He certainly knew that he was not telling Esau something new, something he did not know. It may be that Jacob was stretching, trying to find a

reason not to go with Esau. This seems to fit the scenario better than some other possibilities.

Jacob, having explained why he couldn't travel with his brother, made an alternative suggestion:

So let my lord go on ahead of his servant, while I move along slowly at the pace of the droves before me and that of the children, until I come to my lord in Seir." Genesis 33:14

Observe that Jacob continued to speak of Esau as "my lord" and verifies it by making suggestions rather than giving directives as he would formerly have done.

The words of verse fourteen can be misleading. It sounds as though he suggested that Esau travel at a usual traveling pace and Jacob would travel a bit more slowly. Jacob actually suggested that Esau travel at the normal pace and he would travel in that direction as the flocks eat their way. At this pace, Jacob might only move a mile in a week. This is the way herdsmen and their flocks normally migrated.

Jacob further indicated that he would rejoin Esau in Seir when they had migrated that far. We are talking about a trip of many weeks if not months. There are two places named Seir in Palestine. One is a short distance north of Jerusalem. The other is a mountain area fifty or more miles south of the Dead Sea. This is the area where Esau lived and we assume this is the place alluded to in verse fourteen. Jacob, at this point, was a man in the middle. He felt great pressure , from Esau, to go with him to Seir. On the other hand, he also felt great pressure to get back into the land of promise and to be with his father Isaac.

The text does not indicate if Esau believed the things Jacob said or not. At least, Esau did not challenge the response that Jacob gave. Esau responded by making a second offer.

Esau said, "Then let me leave some of my men with you." Genesis 33:15

The text gives no hint of Esau's motives. We understand that Esau not only disobeyed his parents (marrying not one, but two pagan wives), but left Canaan and went to become a part of the pagan desert culture. It is possible that he wanted to absorb Jacob into the same disobedience with him. After all, his father Isaac was still living and if Esau wanted to further humiliate his father, nothing would accomplish that so completely as to see his only other son become a part of the pagan community with Esau. For whatever reason, Esau wanted to bring Jacob with him into Seir.

Esau suggested that he leave some of his 400 men to accompany Jacob to Seir. We know that it could be dangerous traveling. Aside from this, the text gives no indication of a need for protection in this area. We can only assume that Esau wanted to be very sure that Jacob came to Seir.

If you read and reread verse fifteen, you can sense some of the urgency in Jacob's instant response:

"But why do that?" Jacob asked, "Just let me find favor in the eyes of my lord." Genesis 32:15b

If you read this verse carefully, you will notice two changes. There is a change in the emotional tone of Jacob's response. There is an abruptness in Jacob's words that belies a coolness in the atmosphere of their relationship. It was nice while it lasted, but things are different now and both men can see it. The second change is that up until now both Jacob

and Esau had talked about going to Seir. Now, Jacob made a calculated change. He indicated that all he wanted was not to go to Seir, but to find favor in the eyes of his brother.

Esau could have understood the first rejection as simply a polite refusal for purposes of saving face. The second refusal made it clear to him that Jacob saw himself as subservient to his slightly older brother, but he was not going to become a part of Esau's pagan culture. Jacob wanted, and said so, only to be at peace with Esau.

There is an air of tension in Esau's response to Jacob's second refusal.

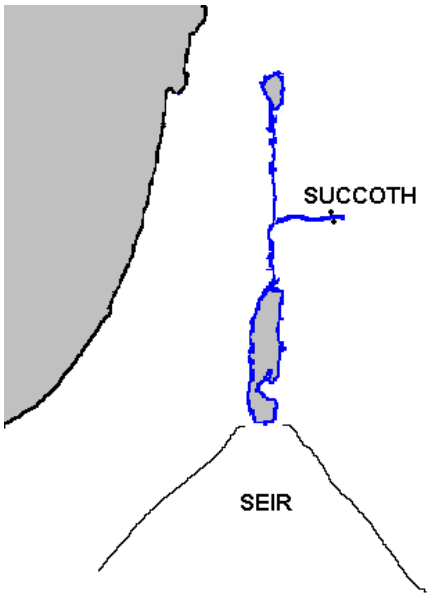
So that day Esau started on his way back to Seir. Genesis 33:16

The tension was so great that Esau said nothing at all. If the parting relationship, between Jacob and Esau, had been as cordial as their meeting, then they would have waited until the next morning to leave. They would have kissed each other to indicate their mutual trust and acceptance. Jacob would have gathered all his people together to send away Esau and his 400 men. The text indicates they left that same day and no mention is made of a cordial parting. There is no mention of Jacob and Esau meeting again until the burial of their father, Isaac.

Verse 17 marks a turning point in the story of Jacob's return.

Jacob, however, went to Succoth, where he built a place for himself and made shelters for his livestock. That is why the place is called Succoth." Genesis 33:17

Jacob made a deliberate choice to go West when his brother went South.



Map 8: Esau in Seir and Jacob in Succoth

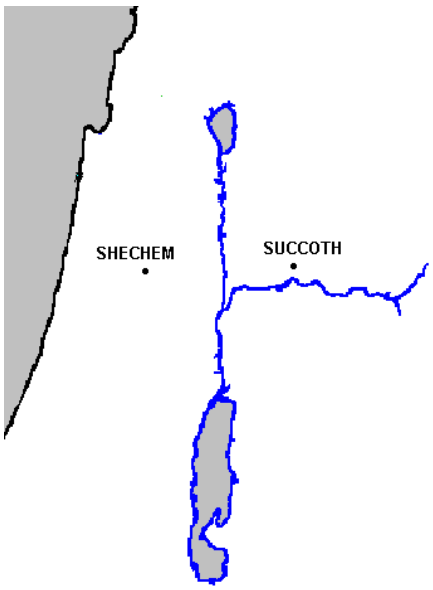
It gives the impression that this was a permanent parting of the ways for these two brothers. The journey from Penuel to Succoth was probably not more than ten or fifteen miles. Following the grazing patterns of his flocks, this trip probably took a few days.

The text indicates that when Jacob reached Succoth, he built a house for himself and booths or sheds for his animals. We can't be sure, but this may have been the first time he ever built or lived in a house. The question immediately arises, if Jacob was a wandering herdsman, why did he build a house for himself and sheds for his animals? The building of the sheds is evidence that he didn't intend to become a farmer instead of a herdsman. It is possible that his holdings were such that he could live in a house and have shepherd servants care for his herds in the areas surrounding Succoth. This is precisely what he did later when Joseph was sent to check on his brothers care of the flocks.

Genesis 33:18-20 - Jacob Buys Land in Shechem for an Altar

This paragraph is very brief, but it is crucial to an understanding of what Jacob intended to do.

After Jacob came from Paddan Aram, he arrived safely at the city of Shechem in Canaan and camped within sight of the city. Genesis 33:18



Map 9: Jacob Camped Near Shechem

This seems strange since Jacob had just built a home at Succoth. We cannot account for this unusual move on Jacob's part. One possibility is that he was determined to be inside the land of Canaan.

This verse makes it clear that Jacob was not ready to settle down and stay in one place. The question arises, Out of all the places in Canaan that Jacob could have gone, why did he choose Shechem? If you look back at the story of Abram, you will remember that this place held great significance for him.

Abram traveled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh at Shechem. The Canaanites were then in the land, but the Lord appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built an altar there to the Lord, who had appeared to him. Genesis 12:6, 7

Jacob's journey from Paddan Aram ended not in Succoth, but in Shechem. Jacob was now reclaiming the covenant God made with Abram that the land would belong to Abram's seed. It now appears that Jacob's refusal to accompany Esau was a spiritual, not simply a social decision. Apparently Esau wanted Jacob to forsake Jehovah, the land and the covenant and come to the desert and to the pagan surroundings with him. Jacob was determined to follow God as he had promised.

When the text says, "(he) camped within sight of the city", it is possible that he had gone to the same oak (terebinth) of Moreh where Abram had camped. If that is true, and I believe it is, then this gives us a glimpse into Jacob's motives and helps account for his cool responses to Esau's invitations. He has come to the place where the covenant was made to lay claim to it again.

In Genesis 33:19, some interesting questions are raised:

For a hundred pieces of silver, he bought from the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem, the plot of ground where he pitched his tent. Genesis 33:19

We must ask why the author said that Jacob purchased the land from "the sons of Hamor," rather than from Shechem after whom it was named? Indeed, Jacob may have dealt with

Shechem, as the leader of the family. This, however, was a clan. No matter what person negotiated with him, Jacob was still dealing with the whole clan.

Two facts make us wonder why Jacob bought this parcel of land:

- God had promised to give this land to Abraham's seed. Why would he then buy it?
- He could dwell there without payment, so long as he had allowed enough room for Hamor's family and flocks. Why would he insist on purchasing the land?

This area was under the control of a Hivite community, probably once governed by Hamor, but now under the control of his son, after whom the city was named.

There are at least two possible reasons why Jacob wanted to buy the land on which his tent was set up:

- He was from this area and did not want to be considered a stranger. The purchase of land would settle that issue forever.
- In the next verse, Jacob erected an altar. He did not want to build an altar on pagan soil. It should be built on land belonging to the people with whom God had entered into covenant.

The text indicates that Jacob paid "a hundred pieces of silver" for the property. The word "silver" was also used to identify sheep. Whether sheep or coins, Jacob paid an exorbitant price for the land.

Jacob came to Shechem for more than a place to pitch his tent.

There he set up an altar and called it El Elohe Israel. Genesis 33:20

This statement gives further credence to the understanding about the spiritual nature of Jacob's rejection of Esau's offer in 33:25. Jacob built an altar at the place where God promised Abram that He would give the land to his lineage.

The name Jacob gave the place is highly significant. The name is **El-Elohe-Israel**. This is a compound name for God. The meaning of the names is as follows:

- **El** - This name means "mighty one."
- **Elohe-Israel** - identifies God as the Majestic God of mercy. Adding Israel to this name suggests that this majestic, merciful God of Israel has a personal relationship with His chosen people - Israel.

This compound name for the altar might well be translated "Mighty is His merciful Majesty who claims Israel as His own." Remember that this took place in an area which was otherwise exclusively pagan and idolatrous.

Conclusion

At the end of chapter 32, Jacob made a strong commitment to God. The results could be anticipated: He was honored by God - his name was changed - and the depth of his commitment was tested.

Chapter 33, in its entirety, describes the experience of the deeply committed. There are a number of lessons to be learned through this description.

This story demonstrates it is one thing to make a commitment in the prayer chamber, but quite another to carry it out in our day to day relationships with people.

The story of Jacob and Esau makes it clear there are no exceptions when it comes to putting your commitment into practice in everyday problems.

If we designed the scenario, commitment would always lead to joy and rejoicing. In the real world, however, commitment will ultimately lead to risk and confrontation.

In the business world, success leads to rewards and attention. In the divine economy, however, commitment leads directly to more intense servanthood.

We have all seen it many times, in Scripture and our own experience - deep commitment always leads to increased, more subtle attacks from the enemy and his people.

Commitment can never be a solitary experience. The joy will exhilarate those closest to us and the pain will reach into their lives as well.

Goals are illusive things. They are usually easier when we are choosing between the good and the bad. The deeper the commitment, the more often we are forced to choose between the good and the best or between what appears to be good and the best.

It is possible for the apparently good things - the generosity of others - to keep the deeply committed from God's best if they are not very alert and determined to follow God.

We are well aware of the fact that the deeply committed are not flawless. Jacob agreed to go to Seir, but apparently had no intentions of going there.

The deeply committed have a keen sense of who really won the spiritual battles. Like Jacob, they turn to worship just as he built an altar.

The committed have a working knowledge of the power of God. Jacob named the altar - Mighty is the majestic, merciful God of Israel. The deeper one's commitment, the more personally aware he/she becomes of the greatness of God's power.

Our commitment to God is not a once-in-a-lifetime event, but a daily choice. We face the same kinds of situations that Jacob experienced. Every day we must choose - will I make the difficult choice to be committed to God no matter what the consequences or will I take an easier way?

Certainly, we can see the parallels between Jacob's experience and our own. Ultimately, each of us must decide, each day, just how deep a commitment are we willing to make to God right now?

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 10

THE SEDUCTION OF DINAH

GENESIS 34:-1- 31

1. In our best documents of the book of Genesis, there are two paragraphs in chapter 34. On the table which follows, write a title of seven words or less for each paragraph.

34:1-17	
34:18-31	

2. Chapter 34 seems out of place following chapter 33.
   a. What possible reasons can you find for inserting this picture into the midst of the story of Jacob's life?
   b. Read the chapter carefully.
      (1). What does it tell you about Jacob?
      (2). Make a chart comparing Jacob and his sons on the one hand and Hamor and his son on the other.

3. In Genesis 34:1-17, the author deals with the humiliation of Dinah by Shechem.
   a. In verse one, the author reported that Dinah went to visit the women of the land.
      (1). Think carefully about this information. Why is it important for our consideration? What issues are involved in this information?
      (2). Why does the author emphasize the fact that Dinah was the daughter of Leah?
      (3). What information can we gather from verse one?
   b. Verse two is a report of Shechem's crime.
      (1). If you were Shechem, how would describe this event?
      (2). If you were Jacob, how would you describe this event?
   c. Make a comparison/contrast between 34:2 and 34:3.
      (1). What did you learn from this exercise?
      (2). How do you account for the problem that exists in these verses?
   d. In Genesis 34:4, Shechem pressed his father to get Dinah as a wife for him.
      (1). Why would he do this?
      (2). Why did he need his father's help?
   e. In 34:5, the author described Jacob's reaction when he received word of this tragedy.
      (1). The author reported that Jacob's sons were in the fields with the livestock when he learned of the violation of Dinah. What does this have to do with Jacob's response?
      (2). Silence was quite unlike Jacob. Why did he respond with silence?
      (3). What does this silence say about Jacob's later response?
      (4). What does the text suggest concerning what Jacob did later?
   f. In 34:6, Hamor went to talk with Jacob about their children.
      (1). Why was this information important?

(2). What difference does it make?

g. Genesis 34:7 describes the reaction of Jacob's sons to the news about Dinah.
   (1). What do we learn from the fact that Jacob's sons returned immediately when they heard the news?
   (2). In view of what the text says, what was the basis of the reaction by Jacob's sons?
   (3). Put yourself in the position of Jacob's sons.
      (a). What would you feel?
      (b). Why would you feel that way?

h. In Genesis 34:8, Hamor started the negotiations by requesting that Dinah be given to Shechem as a wife.
   (1). Would this, in your estimation, be the best approach to negotiations for a bride?
   (2). Think of yourself in Jacob's situation. How would you feel about the beginning of Hamor's negotiations?

i. There is a sudden shift in the negotiations in Genesis 34:9, 10.
   (1). What is the change in negotiations?
   (2). What does that information tell you about the negotiations?
   (3). What did Hamor offer Jacob?
   (4). What did Hamor neglect to tell Jacob, in these verses?

j. In Genesis 34:11, 12, there is another surprising shift in the negotiations.
   (1). What is the surprising shift?
   (2). Why was it surprising?
   (3). What does this mean?
   (4). There is a "blank check" sound to the offer Shechem made to Jacob. How do you evaluate this situation.?

k. From 34:6 to 12, the author focused on the request of Hamor. Beginning in 34:13, he described the response to Hamor from the family.
   (1). How would you identify the author's description of their motivation?
   (2). How would you explain the fact that Jacob's sons answered when the negotiations were between Jacob and Hamor?
   (3). What is the difference between a "dowry" and a "gift"?
   (4). Put yourself in the place of Jacob and his sons. In view of the tragedy perpetrated by Shechem, how would **you** respond?
   (5). Hamor was asking for a binding agreement. Under what conditions was Jacob able to keep this proposed vow?

l. In Genesis 34:14, Jacob's sons said, "We can't do such a thing."
   (1). What was it they couldn't do?
   (2). Why couldn't they do such a thing?
   (3). Jacob's sons said it would disgrace them to give their sister to an uncircumcised man. What did they mean by this?
   (4). What would be the implications for Hamor and the Hivites if they accepted the condition set by Jacob's sons?
   (5). Read 34:16, carefully. What inconsistency, if any, can you find here?
   (6). Read 34:17 again. If you were Hamor or Shechem, what would you feel and think when you heard this statement?

4. In Genesis 34:18-31, Jacob's sons deceived the Hivites and did a terrible thing.
   (a). In Genesis 34:18, the author reported the response of Hamor and Shechem to the condition set by Jacob's sons.
      (1). What reason can you find in the story, so far, that would suggest this response?
      (2). Put yourself in the position of Jacob's sons. How would you feel when you received the response from Hamor?
   b. In Genesis 34:19, what does Shechem's "honor" have to do with this action?
   c. In 34:20, 21, Hamor and Shechem went to the city gate to discuss this condition of circumcision with other men of their tribe.
      (1). If you were one of the leaders of this tribe, how would you feel when you heard the report in 34:20, 21?
      (2). What does "These men are friendly toward us" and " the land has plenty of room for them," have to do with the mission of Shechem and Hamor?
   d. In Genesis 34:22, Hamor added a new ingredient to the discussion. If you were one of the tribal leaders, how would you feel about the conditions? What information do you find in the text to support your thinking?
   e. In Genesis 34:23, Hamor continued his request before the leaders of the tribe.
      (1). What did Hamor say in this verse?
      (2). What motives surface in his presentation to the men of the tribe?
      (3). What does this tell you about the character of Hamor?
   f. The response of the men of the tribe was recorded in 34:24.
      (1). What was that response?
      (2). What does this response tell us about the character of the people?
      (3). In view of our previous study, how would Jacob and his sons feel about this decision?
   g. In Genesis 34:25, the author records the tragic action of Simeon and Levi.
      (1). Why would Jacob's two sons kill the men of the clan when Shechem was the one guilty of the crime?
      (2). Why would Simeon and Levi kill the men and not the women and children?
      (3). This action was not, to our knowledge, a part of the original plan. What reasons can you find for this apparent change?
      (4). What does this verse tell you about Simeon and Levi?
   h. In Genesis 34:25, the author reported they killed every male. In 34:26, however, the author reported specifically about the death of Hamor and Shechem.
      (1). What reasons can you suggest for this second report?
      (2). If you were Simeon or Levi, how would you feel following these events?
   i. In Genesis 34:27, the author described other things Simeon and Levi did to Hamor's people.
      (1). What did they do?
      (2). What does this tell you about these two sons?
   J. In Genesis 34:28, 29, the author described the other things that were done by Simeon and Levi.
      (1). What did they do?
      (2). What was the justification for these actions?

(3). Make a chart on which you compare/contrast the message of Genesis 34:23 with 34:28, 29.
(4). What does this chart tell you?
(5). Can you think of a New Testament verse which describes what you learned in this comparison?

k. In Genesis 34:30, Jacob responded to Simeon and Levi concerning their actions.
(1). Describe Jacob's emotional condition as he talked with Simeon and Levi.
(2). On the basis of Jacob's statement, in verse 30, why was Jacob offended by their actions?
(3). In this verse, Jacob mentioned the Canaanites and Perizzites, but not the Hivites. How can we explain this fact?

l. In Genesis 34:31, Simeon and Levi responded to Jacob's fiery statement.
(1). How would you describe the emotional tone of their response?
(2). What did they say?

5. As we indicated earlier, this chapter is an interruption in the story of Jacob.
a. What special message does the author provide in this parenthetical chapter?
b. What, if anything, does this chapter say about God?
c. What does this chapter say about the way you want to live your life? Just how different will it be?

LESSON 10: GENESIS 34:1 - 31

THE SEDUCTION OF DINAH

Introduction

In the best documents of the book of Genesis, there are two paragraphs in chapter 34. The paragraphs are summarized as follows:

34:1-17	Shechem Humiliates Dinah
34:18-31	Jacob's Sons Deceive Hamor; Avenge Dinah

If you look carefully, you will observe that chapter 33 deals with the meeting of Jacob and Esau. Chapter 35 deals with the death of Isaac; it begins where chapter 33 ends. One could leave out chapter 34 and do no damage to the story line at all. Chapter 34, however, deals with a totally unrelated subject - the Seduction of Jacob's daughter - Dinah. This chapter is a small parenthesis in the main-stream of the story of Jacob.

As we come to the conclusion of this chapter, we need to answer two questions:

- Why is this chapter inserted into the Jacob narrative?
- What does this chapter add to our understanding of this entire narrative?

Genesis 34:1-17 - Shechem Humiliates Dinah

Though the content of chapters 33 and 34 seem to have very little in common, the Hebrew text for 34:1 begins with the word "and." This suggests that chapter 34 is a continuation of the content of chapter 33. That, I believe, is not really the case.

At the end of chapter 32, Jacob made a deep commitment to God. This was immediately followed by the unfortunate encounter with Esau. At the end of chapter 33, Jacob built an altar to Jehovah and called it El Elohe Israel. Now immediately following that worship experience Dinah was compromised.

Experiences of deep commitment to God seem to be followed by times of great pain and stress. We see more about this later.

In verse one, the author gives some unusual insights.

> *Now Dinah, the daughter Leah had borne to Jacob, went out to visit the women of the land. Genesis 34:1*

The author identified Dinah as "the daughter of Leah." The accepted means of identification would have been as the daughter of her father - "the daughter of Jacob." Some Jewish commentators suggest that Dinah lost the right to be called "Jacob's daughter" because of her inappropriate conduct even in going out to see the daughters of the land. Certainly, every member of the family knew that they were to avoid contact with the pagan people. Dinah apparently rejected this restriction on her freedom.

Whether Dinah's error was in mingling with pagan peoples or attracting the attentions of Shechem, the text is not clear. It is clear that whatever the cause, tragedy followed.

The author continued describing the series of events.

When Shechem son of Hamor the Hivite, the ruler of that area, saw her, he took her and violated her. Genesis 34:2

The author identified Shechem as "the son of Hamor the Hivite." The Hivites were one of the seven Canaanite nations that Israel, at the time of the Exodus, was to destroy in the promised land, but failed to accomplish. These people tended to live in the central north west (Tyre). They worshipped Baal. Like their ancestors, they were good tradesmen, but also followed herds of sheep and goats.

Shechem's despicable treatment of Dinah **may** reveal at least two features concerning their lifestyle:

- Women were not held in high esteem. In the Hivite culture, no one would think anything of the prince committing what we refer to as "forcible rape." Their attitude is further attested to by the fact that afterwards he insisted his father secure Dinah for his wife. Though not universal, this was not uncommon among idolatrous tribes.
- They were proud, self-confident people. They knew they could do whatever they wanted without other people successfully objecting.

Verse three is a bit of a surprise.

His heart was drawn to Dinah daughter of Jacob, and he loved the girl and spoke tenderly to her. Genesis 34:3

We are surprised by this verse because we do not expect a person guilty of rape to seriously want to marry his victim. Shechem was smitten by his affection for Dinah. He spoke "to the heart" of Dinah. It describes an attempt to win her affection for himself.

If you make a comparison between Genesis 34:2 and 34:3, it leaves you with a serious question. Why would Shechem violate Dinah and then turn around and push his father to get her for his wife.

Our text reads "... he loved the girl and spoke tenderly to her." The Hebrew text is somewhat different. " He loved the **little girl** and spoke to the heart of the **little girl**." The word "little girl" is used, in most instances, to identify a girl below the age of twelve, at which age, they would be considered physically mature. In our legal system, this would be considered child rape, but not in theirs.

The text gives us reason to think that Shechem was serious in his desire for Dinah. Observe how he dealt with the situation.

And Shechem said to his father Hamor, "Get me this girl as my wife." Genesis 34:4

One might wonder why Shechem went to his father and pleaded with him to get Dinah for his wife. Why didn't he take care of that himself? In that culture, it was not permissible for a man or woman to arrange their own marriage. This was done by the fathers in their families. It was usually agreed upon by the fathers without consultation with their children. It is interesting that they would make such a strong request that Jacob give Dinah to Shechem as a wife when they knew that it was not possible for Jacob to do this.

Verse five describes Jacob's reaction to the devastating news about his daughter.

When Jacob heard that his daughter Dinah had been defiled, his sons were in the fields with his livestock; so he kept quiet about it until they came home. Genesis 34:5

This is an unusual picture of Jacob. He was the impetuous one. He would often act first and think later. That is not what we see here. Though the text does not say specifically, it is fair to assume that Jacob was filled with fury. The unusual picture here is that Jacob "held his peace." The Hebrew text is more graphic, " He was silent."

Jacob's eleven sons were in the field caring for his livestock. Had Jacob said anything, he could have been in grave danger, for he was all alone. He was able to keep his counsel, at least until his sons and servants returned from the fields. It could have just as easily described a situation where they returned from distant pastures several days hence. The text is not helpful at this point.

During this time, Shechem and Hamor (Chamor) were preparing to approach Jacob to secure Dinah as a wife for Shechem. In order for us to be able to understand what was happening in this instance, we have to adjust our thinking for the moment. At this point, our sensibilities cause us to be disturbed; to wonder, how could you dare to show your face after such a terrible act. They did not see it in this light. Notice how the author described the meeting of Jacob and Hamor.

Then Shechem's father Hamor went out to talk with Jacob. Genesis 34:6

Shechem's father appears to be dealing with this in a matter-of-fact manner much as he might deal with the sale of sheep. This is probably due to the fact that he did not consider the recent events as evil or tragic; just common for a ruling family.

The text says Hamor "went out **to talk** to Jacob." The Hebrew word for "talk" is (dabar) (דָּבַר) might be better translated "to arrange". This described an all-out, no-holds-barred negotiations. Near Eastern people were and are great bargainers. This art reaches its powerful apex in the negotiations for a bride. The text says that Jacob kept quiet until his sons returned. The way the text is worded, Hamor came to negotiate before the sons returned from the fields. If this is true, then Jacob held his silence while Hamor was trying to negotiate to get Dinah as a wife for his son, Shechem. This would have been a very awkward, frustrating situation for Hamor. The Hivites were proud people. They were not accustomed to being ignored. The fact that Hamor went to Jacob seeking a covenant put him at a disadvantage in the negotiations. In such dealings, everyone wanted to be the one who was approached. This indicated that the person who made the approach had the greater need and gave the one approached some leverage with which to work . He knew that he could be a bit less cooperative because the other party had the greater need.

There is real tension present when Jacob's sons returned from the fields.

Now Jacob's sons had come in from the fields as soon as they heard what had happened. They were filled with grief and fury, because Shechem had done a disgraceful thing in Israel by lying with Jacob's daughter- a thing that should not be done. Genesis 34:7

The wording of verse seven describes a number of feelings on the part of Jacob's sons.

- When they heard the news, the boys came immediately. This suggests deep concern on two sides:

1. Jacob was concerned enough that he sent word to his sons that a tragedy had taken place.
2. Jacob's sons came immediately when they heard what had happened. They expected that there was grave danger for the family and came to assist.

- The text says the sons were "filled with grief." The word (atsab) (עָצַב) literally means to carve or fabricate, in a bad sense, great displeasure and vexation. They were designing a level of displeasure like they had never seen before.
- It also says they were "filled with fury." The word for "fury" is (charah) (חָרָה) which means to glow or grow warm with insatiable anger. It is to flare up with destroying anger like a flash of lightening.

This is a frightening picture of the anger of Jacob's sons. In verse seven the author describes the basis of the whirlwind of their fury. Notice again, the author's explanation:

> *"Because Shechem had done a disgraceful thing in Israel by lying with Jacob's daughter - a thing that should not be done. Genesis 34:7c*

The author described the tragedy from at least two levels:

- "**This should not be done**." He described a violation of the law. This law formed the foundation for all conduct among the people of Israel. Any violation of this law was considered an affront, a blasphemy against Jehovah, their God. Any faithful Jew would be willing to die in battle over such a violation of God's law.
- There was also the family disgrace and sense of violation that such a tragic event happened to one of the women they were entrusted to protect.

This event may have been of no consequence among the Hivites, but it was so catastrophic that every male member of Jacob's family would gladly fight to the death to deal with it.

You can feel the tension as you read verse eight.

> *But Hamor said to them, "My son Shechem has his heart set on your daughter. Please give her to him as his wife." Genesis 34:8*

Put yourself in Hamor's situation. The thing your son Shechem had done was not cause for alarm in your culture, after all, he was the son of the tribal chief. You are trying to get this fiery group of Jews to settle down long enough for you to carry out serious negotiations for your son to marry their daughter. The problem is, you cant get them to sit still long enough to make them an offer.

You look into their angry eyes and realize every last one of them would gladly slit your throat. Somehow your words seem lame and unimportant as you try to sound sincere saying, "... My son Shechem has his heart set on your daughter. Please give her to him as his wife." Genesis 34:8b

Such words fall limp and lifeless in the midst of men so infuriated by the tragedy that had occurred. Certainly, Hamor had to realize that rather than bargaining from a position of great honor and strength, his words were ignored and his life was in great danger. Shechem had not only humiliated Dinah; he had brought disgrace to Jacob as well. This was a tragedy that would never be forgotten; it was a dishonor that would merit the most vicious kind of revenge in almost every instance. This being the case, it is a wonder that Jacob

was even able to talk to Hamor about it at all. The rage Jacob felt would make it almost impossible for Hamor to carry on any kind of honorable negotiations at all.

Seeing his efforts to make a wedding arrangement were ignored, Hamor tried a different approach.

> *Intermarry with us; give us your daughters and take our daughters for yourselves. You can settle among us; the land is open to you. Live in it, trade in it, and acquire property in it. Genesis 34:9, 10*

Now the basis of negotiations has completely changed. Hamor is no longer just asking for a wife for his son. He was now asking that the two tribes become one. He was offering them tribal membership. They would no longer be strangers. This would entitle them to the privilege of land and trade. It would also give them the responsibility of mutual defense.

Jacob and his sons knew that this was not permissible for them. People of Israel could not enter into contract with pagan tribes because their pagan deities were a part of every contract these people made.

From the text, it would appear that Jacob and his sons did not even respond to this invitation. That is probably not true. Whatever the response, if any, it was clear to the Hivites that Jacob and his family were not favorably impressed with the invitation.

The negotiations now took another unusual turn. Shechem entered into the negotiations. This, of course, was strictly forbidden.

> *Then Shechem said to Dinah's father and brothers, let me find favor in your eyes, and I will give you whatever you ask. Make the price for the bride and the gift I am to bring as great as you like, and I'll pay whatever you ask me. Only give me the girl as my wife." Genesis 34:11, 12*

Shechem spoke directly to Jacob and his sons, making an offer. It sounds as though Shechem had given Jacob a blank check. That was not the case, but to the untrained, it certainly seemed that way. All bridal negotiations started that way. It was a way to appear to be most generous, even if that were not the case.

In most instances, the negotiations for a bride were carried out exclusively by the two fathers. At this point there is a surprising change in the negotiations.

Shechem addressed both Dinah's father and her brothers. His priority at this point, was a deep desire to "find favor in your eyes." This was a serious request for forgiveness. We should not forget that Hivites, especially the rulers, were not accustomed to asking forgiveness of anyone.

The initial offer, in such negotiations, always seemed to be a blank check. They were not intended to be taken seriously and no one understood them that way. This was the necessary face saving first step. The second offer was usually more serious. Shechem's offer of "I will give you whatever you ask," was not a precise offer.

Shechem became more specific in verse 12. He now spoke directly to the two parts of the negotiations - dowry, gift. You will note, however, that though the statement is different, still Shechem has repeated the "blank-check" approach that no one took seriously. This is a way to try to get the other party to make the first serious offer.

It worked. The sons of Jacob, as angry as they were, made an elaborate offer that would take Shechem and Hamor by surprise.

Because their sister Dinah had been defiled, Jacob's sons replied deceitfully as they spoke to Shechem and his father Hamor. Genesis 34:13

The author describes the nature of the answer of Jacob's sons and then shared that answer with us. This verse contains some important insights.

Their culture demanded great respect be given one's parents. A part of that was that they will never interrupt their father when he was speaking. They would never speak before their father had an opportunity to speak. In this instance, Shechem and Hamor were in the midst of negotiations with Jacob concerning a bride for Shechem. This was an area that must be cared for by the father, unless he was unable to do so and had turned over the management of his affairs to his heir.

Jacob was still quite capable of doing his own negotiating and presiding over his own clan. Nevertheless, the sons responded to Shechem's offer and Jacob said nothing. The question that immediately comes to mind is, why would they do that?

The text does not say, but there are some possibilities that suggest themselves:

- It could be that these boys were just impertinent and answered before Jacob had an opportunity to do so. This is possible, but I have serious doubts about it.
- It could be that the boys were really trying to show intense respect for their father by answering on his behalf so that he did not have to deal with an odious subject. Of the two possibilities, I think this possibility is the more plausible.

Having said that, we must hasten to add that there is a problem with it. As verse thirteen clearly states, "...Jacob's sons replied deceitfully..." It can not be that Jacob's sons simply wanted to protect their father. They were intent upon deceiving Shechem and Hamor. The word "deceive" is "mirmah" (מִרְמָה) which comes from a root word which means "to shoot," "to cause to fall," "to delude or beguile." Whatever they did, it was intended to trap or mislead Shechem, not to protect Jacob.

In this instance, the author also identified their motives. He said, "Because their sister Dinah had been defiled, Jacob's sons replied **deceitfully**..." This is revenge. It is clearly "an eye for an eye" vendetta. Whatever the sons of Jacob had in mind, it was intended to get even with Shechem and his tribe for the atrocity he had perpetrated. There is no way to say this was accidentally vengeful. This is a very deliberate plan the ten brothers have set in motion.

The invitation, made by Shechem and Hamor, would literally bring Jacob and his clan into the tribe of Hamor and under his control. Though it did not seem like much of a request, on the surface, it had far-reaching ramifications.

- It would be a legal agreement. As such, it would require the involvement of their pagan deities. Jacob was strictly forbidden to enter into any agreement with pagans because of this.
- It would bring Jacob and all his household into the tribe and nation over which Hamor was ruler. They would, in effect, come under his control and be his servants.
- As part of Hamor's nation, they would be required to support Hamor in any military venture in which he became involved. These battles always had pagan religious overtones.

- This agreement would concede the land of Canaan to a pagan tribe. This would be a contradiction of God's promise that the land would belong to Jacob and his heritage.

All of these things make it necessary to conclude that there was no way that Jacob could seriously agree to enter into this agreement with the pagan Canaanites.

In verse 14-17, the sons of Jacob laid out the terms under which they were prepared to accept the invitation of intermarriage.

> *They said to them, "We can't do such a thing; we can't give our sister to a man who is not circumcised, That would be a disgrace to us. We will give our consent to you on one condition only: that you become like us by circumcising all your males. Then we will give you our daughters and take your daughters for ourselves. We'll settle among you and become one people with you. But if you will not agree to be circumcised, we'll take our sister and go." Genesis 34:14-17*

The closing sentence, verse seventeen, gives us two important pieces of information:

- Dinah was at this time being kept in Hamor's house. They had to find a peaceful way to get her out.
- The first part of this verse suggests that Jacob and his sons were counting on Hamor and Shechem being unwilling to comply with their condition. This would allow Jacob and his sons to place the blame on Hamor and Shechem when the negotiations failed. They hoped this would make it easier to get Dinah out of Hamor's house. It was a false hope.

Let us look at each verse separately.

> *They said to them, "We can't do such a thing; we can't give our sister to a man who is not circumcised. That would be a disgrace to us." Genesis 34:14*

This statement is absolutely true. It would be a disgrace to Dinah, and her family, to give her as a wife to any uncircumcised man. More than that, it would be an even greater disgrace to Jacob and his sons if they allowed this to happen. Again, this would not be a temporary disgrace to their Jewish sensibilities. Jewish people would forever hold Jacob's name in disgrace if he would do such a thing.

Having described what they could not do, Jacob's sons now turn to what they say they can do.

> *We will give our consent to you on one condition only: that you become like us by circumcising all your males." Genesis 34:15*

In this statement, Jacob's sons have identified the single condition the Hivites must accept. This condition was far more serious than it might appear to be.

- Jacob's sons were, in fact, insisting that Hamor and his people become Jews. Circumcision was the seal of those who worship Jehovah. For this tribal nation to become circumcised, they would have to put away their pagan idols and pledge their allegiance to Jehovah. This was an impossible requirement. There were strong feelings between Jews and Canaanites. The spiritual opposition between the Canaanites and Jews was as great as their political differences.

- If these people accepted Jehovah as their God, then they would become part of Jacob's tribe. He would rule over them and they would owe their allegiance to Jehovah as well as to Jacob.

This tactic was nothing new in the art of bargaining. If you do not want to enter into a covenant with a person, then make the terms impossible. They will then break off negotiations. This being the case, they can never blame you for defaulting. The onus for broken negotiations will always fall on them.

It appears that this was their plan and hope. They wanted to get Dinah back. They did not want a covenant with Hamor.

Then we will give you our daughters and take your daughters for ourselves. We'll settle among you and become one people with you." Genesis 34:16

This verse is the lure that Jacob's sons used. Though they knew they couldn't do it, Jacob's sons promised that if all of Hamor's men would be circumcised, then they would intermarry. We must remember that Jacob had just made an unbreakable covenant to serve Jehovah all his days. There was no way that the family could intermarry with the Hivites as Shechem proposed and Jacob's sons promised.

As we said before, if you can't agree to the requested negotiations, but can't afford to be the one who breaks off the negotiations, then make your terms for the other negotiator impossible to accept. Jacob's sons did this and now awaited the response of Hamor and Shechem.

Let's review the situation as it faced both sides of this negotiation:

- Shechem and Hamor had Dinah in their home. They wanted a way to keep Dinah without fighting the formidable foe that Jacob and his men represented. Their impossible offer put the onus on Jacob if combat followed.
- Jacob and his sons needed to get Dinah back without a battle. They must, however, get her back. Their impossible offer would place the onus on Hamor if combat followed. This was a crisis stand off to see which side would feel the greatest pressure and capitulate to the offer of the other. Verse 17 was the pressure Jacob's sons used to force the hand of Hamor. They desperately wanted Hamor to refuse. They needed it that way. They said it this way:

But if you will not agree to be circumcised, we'll take our sister and go." Genesis 34:17

Now the waiting game was on. Who would blink first? Both had a lot at stake:

- Jacob - If he did not deal with this with utmost care, he and his people could be wiped out or made slaves.
- Hamor - He was faced with a formidable, potential foe in Jacob
- Jacob - Shechem had defiled his daughter and this called for devastating revenge. Hamor, however, was holding Dinah at his house. Any action Jacob might take, at this point, could endanger her as well as his entire clan.
- Hamor - He had to win this negotiation or face certain trouble with Jacob and his family. Their anger over the events with Dinah only made the matter worse.

Genesis 34:18-31 - Jacob's Sons Deceive Hamor; Avenge Dinah

Hamor made the first move. Notice what the text says:

> *Their proposal seemed good to Hamor and his son Shechem. Genesis 34:18*

This statement presents a problem. How could Jacob's son's proposal seem good to Hamor and Shechem? Agreeing to this proposal meant losing their gods, their land and control of their family. They would lose everything. Without a spiritual change, it would be impossible for them to think this proposal seemed good to them.

In the verses which follow, there are hints as to why the author could say this proposal seemed good to Shechem and Hamor. This was a startling turn in the story. Certainly, it was the brother's intent that the proposal be so extreme that Hamor could not possibly accept it. As you can see, it worked out just the opposite. The author, at this point, does not identify the motives of Hamor and Shechem.

Interestingly enough, the text does not describe the culmination of the covenant. Does this mean that they acted without one? It could, but it hardly seems possible.

It could also men that the covenant was so artificial and deceptive that no one had the heart to seal the covenant by eating the covenant meal which made it unbreakable. We simply do not know.

Verse 19 described the steps Hamor and Shechem took to carry out the covenant. This is what the author said:

> *The young man, who was the most honored of all his father's household, lost no time in doing what they said, because he was delighted with Jacob's daughter. Genesis 34:19*

The Hebrew text gives a different word order than does our text. The Hebrew could be translated, "And the youth did not hesitate to do the thing for he delighted in Jacob's daughter and he was more honorable than all his father's house." This wording, which I support, suggests two reasons why Shechem did not delay his own circumcision.

- Because he delighted in Jacob's daughter.
- Because he was the most honored member of Shechem's household. This being the case, his circumcision would have a positive influence on other members of the community to do the same thing.

The author said, "...The young man... lost no time in doing what they said..." This statement is vague enough to be easily misunderstood.

- It could mean that he wasted no time, but talked to others telling them what a good idea it was to accede to the wishes of Jacob's sons.
- It could just as easily mean that Shechem immediately was circumcised hoping to set an example for the other men of the tribe. I favor this possibility over others.

There was still more for Hamor and Shechem to do before their part of the bargain was completed.

> *So Hamor and his son Shechem went to the gate of their city to speak to their fellow townsmen. Genesis 34:20*

As we have indicated previously, in the study of Genesis, the gate did not refer to the entrance of the city. It rather referred to the community leaders who met regularly in the vicinity of the entrance of the city to consider community problems and make decisions in an effort to solve them. This is like the mayor going before the city council.

The fact that Shechem accompanied Hamor to the gate indicates that as the heir in the family he had already begun participating in the political process within the tribe.

Notice the way Shechem presented the case.

> *"These men are friendly toward us," they said. "Let them live in our land and trade in it; the land has plenty of room for them. We can marry their daughters and they can marry ours." Genesis 34:21*

Hamor presented two reasons for his proposal and then presented the proposal itself. The two reasons are as follows:

- "**These men are friendly toward us**." The word translated "friendly" is (shalem) (שָׁלֵם) and comes from a root which means "to be safe," "to be complete," "to be requited when a wrong had been done." It came to be used to describe friendship between former enemies. Based on the fact that Hamor saw Jacob's people as peaceable, he recommended that they allow these people to dwell in the land and trade there.
- **The land was large enough for both the Hivites and the Israelites**. Based on this fact, Hamor urged them to adopt a policy of intermarriage.

Only after making this proposal did Hamor inform the leaders of the condition Jacob's sons had insisted upon. Notice how the author described it.

> *"But the men will consent to live with us as one people only on the condition that our males be circumcised as they themselves are." Genesis 34:22*

Hamor told them that Israel would agree to be "one people" if they would all be circumcised. Hamor never said it, but this condition amounted to the Hivites agreeing to become Jews, forsaking their idols and declaring their allegiance to the God of Israel.

This presentation was apparently insufficient to convince the leaders to agree with Hamor. Notice that in verse 23, he continued his attempt to convince them.

> *"...Won't their livestock, their property and all their other animals become ours? So let us give our consent to them, and they will settle among us." Genesis 34:23*

In this attempt to convince the elders of the city, Hamor shows us at least part of his thinking about the proposal for merger. He described this as a way for the Hivites to take over everything that Jacob owned without having to do battle with him to get it. This tells us something very important about the man. Hamor was capable of working from two sets of motives at the same time. He was capable of dealing with Jacob as a peaceable man with whom he wanted to share intermarriage. At the same time he could plot with civic leaders to use this agreement as a way to take away everything Jacob owned. This is a dangerous man to say the least.

The argument was persuasive. The leaders of the community responded in these terms:

> *All the men who went out of the city gate agreed with Hamor and his son Shechem, and every male in the city was circumcised. Genesis 34:24*

Verse 20 indicates that Hamor and Shechem spoke with the men of the town. This is usually understood to mean that they talked with the elders of the city. The description, in verse 24, is different. Here it talks about every male that went out of the city. All of the elders of the city agreed as did every herdsman who lived there. It is very clear that Hamor had been very convincing in his presentation.

This is a strange situation. Both Hamor and Jacob's sons look at the same situation, but they each see something different.

Put yourself in the place of Hamor. You have won an impossible negotiation. You needed to get a marriage agreement for your son to marry Dinah. You did it! You wanted to convince your people and Jacob to become one people so that eventually you could take away Jacob's vast accumulation of wealth.

You achieved your goal. The stage is set. You have to feel very successful and rich as a result of this.

Jacob's sons had to see it differently. They asked Hamor, in effect, to become a Jew. They should feel good about that. The problem is that this was intended to humiliate Hamor so that he would decline their offer. They hoped that this would give them an easier way to get Dinah back and leave the area. That did not happen. Jacob's sons must now solve two problems:

- How can we get Dinah back when they have accepted our condition of circumcision? We now have no reason to refuse to give Dinah to Hamor's son, Shechem, as a wife. The family will be humiliated if we do give her to him.
- What can we do to get out of an agreement that we didn't want in the first place? Unless we agree to be one people with the Hivites, we will insult them and have war on our hands.

There is reason to believe that Jacob at least knew what his sons were up to if not involved with them in it. This is difficult to say the least. Jacob had just concluded a strong covenant with God and now he is at least knowledgeable, if not involved in the deception. We can not explain this. There is no way to understand this experience in a positive light. We must understand that his daughter's welfare and his reputation are at stake. This does not change the situation, however.

The author continued with the story, where things got even worse than they had been.

> *Three days later, while all of them were still in pain, two of Jacob's sons, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, took their swords and attacked the unsuspecting city, killing every male. Genesis 34:25*

We have no words to describe the depth of the atrocity these two sons of Jacob perpetrated. If they were soldiers in our army, they would be court marshaled for such inhuman actions. At best this is despicable.

The fact that they waited until the third day to commit this horrible crime, makes the element of premeditation necessary. They deliberately chose the time, when every man was in excruciating pain and totally helpless, to carry out their devastating carnage.

It should be noted that this was not the action of all eleven sons of Jacob. Only Simeon and Levi were involved. There was no hint in the text that this was part of the original plan. There will be additional information on this subject later in the chapter.

We may wonder, Why Simeon and Levi? According to the text, they were full brothers of Dinah. They would be more apt to take this situation seriously than her half-brothers. Simeon was Jacob's second son. One might wonder why Reuben, the first-born son, did not carry out the attempt to gain the release of his sister Dinah? We don't know. We do know, from the story of Joseph, that Reuben was not a man of strength. Jacob did not trust him to be the heir of his clan.

Levi was Jacob's third son by Leah. He is known only for two terrible deeds: The massacre of the Hivites and the unfortunate treatment of Joseph.

The text says that Simeon and Levi came upon the "unsuspecting city." Another way to describe it might be "the secure city." This tragedy was the farthest thing from the minds of the inhabitants.

The question arises, Why did they kill only the males? The men were sore and helpless now, but they would heal and revenge would certainly be sought. The women were not a source of danger to the two men. The situation was far worse than the words of the text indicate. As bad as this was, it was not worse than killing all the males of the Hivites. Killing all the males ended the Hivite tribe forever. In that culture, to wipe out the name of a man or a tribe was the most tragic thing that could happen. That is exactly what these two sons of Jacob did to the Hivites.

Verse 25 gives a summary statement of the terrible carnage brought upon the Hivites by Jacob's two sons. Verse 26 begins to look at the tragedy with greater care and depth.

> *They put Hamor and his son Shechem to the sword and took Dinah from Shechem's house and left. Genesis 34:26*

Notice the first details reported by the author:

- They killed Hamor and Shechem
- They freed Dinah from Hamor's house.

It is possible that this verse suggests that Hamor and Shechem resisted the brothers attempt to free Dinah and were thus killed.
It seems reasonable to assume, and it is an assumption, that these were the main goals of everything that the sons of Jacob wanted to accomplish when the negotiations started. We must be reminded again that this was the action of two sons, but not of Jacob.

The text states that they took Dinah out of Hamor's house. What happened to her then? Other than the genealogy in Genesis 46, Dinah is never mentioned again in Scripture. There are several traditions which have arisen concerning her. One is that she stayed in the home of Simeon, much like a widowed daughter. She supposedly died in Egypt and Simeon took her back to Canaan for burial in Arbel.

Another tradition suggests that Dinah bore Shechem's daughter, named Asenath. The child was left under a bush, but was raised in the home of the childless Potiphera and eventually became Joseph's wife. These traditions are unreliable at best, but they give us an idea of what has been conjectured over the centuries.

The story takes another unusual turn in the next verse.

> *The sons of Jacob came upon the dead bodies and looted the city where their sister had been defiled. Genesis 34:27*

At this point, the text is quite vague. When it speaks of "the sons of Jacob," to whom does it refer? It would be an appropriate reference to Simeon and Levi. On the other hand, it would be an appropriate way to identify all eleven sons of Jacob. We do not know to which it refers. My considered opinion is that it refers to Simeon and Levi, not to all the brothers. There is no basis in fact for this assumption, however. Verses 26 and 27 present some interesting data:

Notice that in each verse there is a cause and effect picture.

verse 26

- **Cause** - Shechem violated Dinah and Hamor kept her in his house.
- **Effect** - Simeon and Levi killed them both with the sword. In Israel, this was the usual punishment for adultery.

Verse 27

- **Cause** - "They had defiled their sister." It sounds as though the people of the city had defiled Dinah when in fact it was Shechem who did it. Several scholars attribute this to the fact that the people of the city did not raise their voices against the atrocity of Shechem and thus shared his responsibility. Whatever may be the case, the text clearly says "they," plural, had defiled their sister."
- **Effect** - They (presumably Simeon and Levi) completely plundered the city.

Verse 27 further indicates that the brothers were interested in more than justice. They wanted to also plunder helpless people. This was an odious thing and would be frowned upon by any tribe or culture of that day.

A favorite tool of Hebrew prose was to give an overview of a situation and then give the same information in much greater detail. The author did this a second time in the following verses

> *They seized their flocks and herds and donkeys and everything else of theirs in the city and out in the fields. They carried off all their wealth and all their women and children, taking as plunder everything in the houses. Genesis 34:28, 29*

There is an irony in these verses. You can see it if you compare verse 23 with verses 28 and 29. In verse 23, Hamor identified his intent to use these negotiations to gain everything Jacob had. Verses 28, 29 describe the actual result of the entire experience.

VERSE 23	VERSES 28, 29
Take Jacob's cattle	Take Hamor's flocks
Take Jacob's substance	Take Hamor's herds
Take all Jacob's beasts	Take Hamor's asses
	Take possessions in the city
	Take possessions in the field
	Take their wealth
	Take their little ones
	Take their wives
	Take everything in their houses

The irony is that Hamor set out to take everything Jacob possessed. The end was that Jacob's sons took everything that Hamor and his people possessed. This reminds me of something Paul said in Galatians.

> *Do not be deceived: God can not be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. Galatians 6:7*

We should add that the previous table seems to indicate that more was taken from Hamor than he planned to take from Jacob. That is not the case. What Jacob's sons did to Hamor and his people was exactly what he had planned to do to them. Verse 23 is presented in more summary form, but represents no essential difference from verses 28, 29, whatsoever.

Through this entire episode, Jacob seems to say and do nothing. One wonders, just how does Jacob feel about these events? Did he have anything to do with planning it or carrying it out? The next verse gives us some insights into these questions.

> *Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, "You have brought trouble on me by making me a stench to the Canaanites and Perizzites, the people living in this land. We are few in number, and if they join forces against me and attack me, I and my household will be destroyed." Genesis 34:30*

The text does not say that Jacob did or did not plan the terrible atrocities done to Hamor and his people. The text is clear, he had nothing to do with killing the men and taking their people and possessions. We must piece together bits of information we can gather from the text.

In verse 30 Jacob scolded his two sons because of their inappropriate actions. He did not like what they did. Jacob explained what he meant by his scolding, "You have brought trouble on me by making me a stench to the Canaanites and Perizzites." The sons dealt with the issue immediately before them. In so doing, they failed to consider the equally troublesome ramifications affecting their relationships with the neighboring tribes who were related to the Hivites.

The text does not indicate whether Jacob was morally offended or not. It is certain, however, that militarily he was deeply offended. He explained that the actions of Simeon and Levi would force the neighbors/relatives of the Hivites to avenge the atrocities done to the Hivites. Jacob could defend himself against any one of these clans, but if they banded together he and his family would be destroyed.

Jacob mentioned the Canaanites and Perizzites because these tribes were related to the Hivites. Because of this they were required to come to the aid and defense of the Hivites. Jacob, however, did not mention the Hivites. This was because Simeon and Levi had killed all the Hivite males who could come and fight against Jacob and his clan.

Simeon and Levi defended their actions by saying:

> *But they replied, "Should he have treated our sister like a prostitute?" Genesis 34:31*

The two sons of Jacob tried to justify their vile actions by focusing attention on the sins of others. They asked an obvious question. The anticipated answer to this question was "no." It does not follow, however, that they should do something equally atrocious or worse.

Conclusion

Scan the chapter again. You will note that God is not mentioned once in these 31 verses. This is not surprising in view of the content. Hamor attempted to deceive Jacob. Jacob's sons deceived Hamor. Jacob's sons negotiated a covenant and promised to do exactly what God told them not to do. God could not involve Himself in their dishonest negotiations.

We are always under the responsibility to make sure that our pledges can be fulfilled as we make them. God requires of us a faithfulness to the word we give to others. It is difficult for us to remember, but God is always the silent partner to any agreement which we make. In view of this, we must rethink how we deal with other people in our agreements.

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 11

THE DEATH OF ISAAC

GENESIS 35:1 - 29

1. The best manuscripts of Genesis chapter 35 have five paragraphs. Read each paragraph carefully. On the table below, write a title of seven words or less summarizing the content of each paragraph.

35:1-8	
35:9-15	
35:16-22a	
35:22b-27	
35:28, 29	

2. In Genesis 35:1-8, the author describes God's instruction for Jacob to return to Bethel.
   a. In Genesis 35:1, God gave Jacob some instructions.
      (1). List these instructions.
      (2). Study the list of instructions.
      (3). What did you discover?
      (4). Why would it be better for Jacob to live at Bethel rather than Ephrath or Hebron?
      (5). What did God add to this message by reminding Jacob of his flight from Esau?
   b. In Genesis 35:2, 3, Jacob responded to God's command to go to Bethel and build an altar.
      (1). What instructions did Jacob give his family in preparation to go to Bethel?
      (2). Why was it important to build an altar at Bethel when Jacob had already worshipped there without it?
      (3). List the ways Jacob described God in these two verses.
         (a). What did he say?
         (b). What did he mean?
   c. Jacob's wives gave him both their idols and their ear rings, in Genesis 35:4.
      (1). How can you explain this?
      (2). How can we account for the fact that the women had these things?
      (3). What good would it do to bury these things?
   d. In Genesis 35:5, Jacob and his family fled Shechem to go to Bethel.
      (1). Read this verse carefully.
      (2). What did you learn about Jacob's situation from this verse?
      (3). What did you learn about God in this verse?
   e. In Genesis 35:6, 7, Jacob arrived in Bethel and built an altar.
      (1). Notice that the author identified Jacob's destination as "Luz in the land of Canaan." Why was this additional identification necessary?

(2). Jacob worshipped at Bethel previously without an altar. Why would God insist on one now?
(3). Jacob named the altar "El Bethel." Why would that be important?
(4). In verse seven, Jacob gave a reason for the altar and the name.
(a). What reason did Jacob give?
(b). Why was it important?

f. What is the significance of the name given to the tree near Bethel?
(1). What does the death of Deborah have to do with Jacob's flight from Shechem?
(2). Why was Deborah so important in the story of Jacob?

3. In Genesis 35:9-15, Jacob's name was changed.
a. In 35:9 it says God appeared to Jacob "again." Where was the previous appearance?
b. In Genesis 35:9, God blessed Jacob. What is the significance of this report?
c. In Genesis 35:10, God changed Jacob's name.
(1). What does "Jacob" mean?
(2). What does "Israel" mean?
(3). What difference does the change make?
d. Look at what God said in Genesis 35:11.
(1). What did God say about Himself?
(2). What is the importance of this message?
(3). What did God say about Jacob?
(4). What did this mean?
e. In Genesis 35:12, God made a promise to Jacob.
(1). What did God promise?
(2). What did this mean to Jacob?
(3). What did this say about God?
f. In Genesis 35:13-15, God finished speaking to Jacob and Jacob responded to God's message.
(1). What was Jacob's response?
(2). What did Jacob's response mean?
(3). Why would he name the place "Bethel" when he had given it that name previously?

4. In Genesis 35:16-22a, the author describes both Benjamin's birth and Rachel's death.
a. In Genesis 35:18, Rachel named her baby "Ben Oni" with her dying breath.
(1). Why would she do this?
(2). Why would Jacob change the baby's name from "Ben Oni" to Ben Jamin"?
b. In Genesis 35:19, 20, the author described the death and burial of Rachel.
(1). Reflect on these two verses again.
(2). What did you learn about their way of living?
(3). What do these verses tell you about Jacob's relationship with Rachel?
c. In previous verses and paragraphs, Isaac's second son was called "Jacob." In 35:21, the author suddenly refers to him as "Israel." In Genesis 35:22b, however, the author reverts to the previous name, "Jacob." How can we account for these facts?

d. In Genesis 35:22a, Reuben did a terrible thing.
   (1). What did he do?
   (2). Why would he do such a terrible thing?
   (3). There is a very confusing situation which surfaces in this verse.
      (a). What is this confusing situation?
      (b). How can you explain this situation?

5. In Genesis 35:22b-27, the author identifies the sons of Israel.
   a. In Genesis 35:22b-26, the author lists the sons of Jacob with their mothers. Study the list.
      (1). What have you learned from studying the list?
      (2). What observations can you make about the mothers and their places in the list?
   b. In Genesis 35:27, the author tells that Jacob came home to his father.
      (1). Reflect on this verse again.
      (2). What was the importance of Jacob coming home to his father, Isaac?
      (3). The author indicates that Jacob came to the place where Abraham and Isaac had stayed. Why was this important?

6. In Genesis 35:28, 29, The author records the death of Isaac.
   a. In Genesis 35:28, the author reports the age of Isaac. What is the importance of this?
   b. In Genesis 35:29, the author uses three different images to describe the death of Isaac.
      (1). What are these images?
      (2). Why did the author need three different images?
      (3). What did the last two images add that is not included in the first image?
      (4). The author concludes these images by saying Isaac was "Old and full of days." What did this add to the message the author was conveying?
      (5). The author ends the chapter saying that Isaac's sons buried him.
         (a). Think about this fact for a minute.
         (b). Put yourself in the place of Jacob for a moment. What would it be like to be in his situation during this experience?
         (c). Put yourself in the place of Esau for a moment. What would it be like to be in his situation during this experience?

7. Now go back over the chapter.
   a. What have you learned or had emphasized for you about God in this chapter?
   b. What difference will this make in your thinking?

LESSON 11: GENESIS 35:1 - 29

THE DEATH OF ISAAC

There are five paragraphs in our best documents of Genesis, chapter 35. These paragraphs are as follows:

35:1-8	God Sends Jacob Back to Bethel
35:9-15	God Changes Jacob's Name to Israel
35:16-22a	Benjamin's Birth; Rachel's Death
35:22b-27	The Sons of Israel
35:28, 29	The Death of Isaac

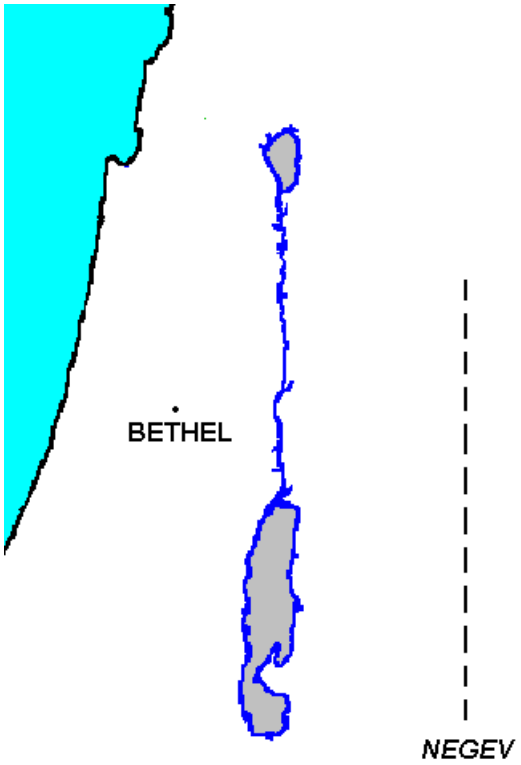
Genesis 35:1-8 - God Sends Jacob Back to Bethel

The author recorded God's conversation with Jacob.

> *Then God said to Jacob, "Go up to Bethel and settle there, and build an altar there to God, who appeared to you when you were fleeing from your brother Esau." Genesis 35:1*

As we observed earlier, Esau wanted Jacob to come South to the Negev. The text does not say where Jacob felt he should go. The author did, however, identify where God wanted Jacob to go. "Go up to Bethel."

There is something unusual here. We use the word "up" for travel in a northerly direction and "down" when describing travel in a Southerly direction. If you look at a Map 10, however, you will notice that Jacob went in a southerly direction, but the author says that "God said to Jacob, 'Arise go up to Bethel.'" The truth is that going South, Jacob was going up to a higher elevation.



Map 10: Going 'Up' to Bethel

God gave Jacob three instructions:

- **Go up to Bethel**
- **Dwell there** (Bethel). This is a reference to God's desire for Jacob to become a resident, a citizen in the area. This was not just a temporary relocation. This was to be his home. He would move about, nomadically, but this would be his residence until further notice.
- **Make an altar to God.** In this command, God identified Himself in two specific ways:

The name the author used was "Elohim." This name focuses our attention on the majesty of God and is used repeatedly in situations which deal with the mercy of God.

The "God who appeared to you when you were fleeing from your brother Esau." This name "God" was "El" which focuses attention on the outstanding power of God. You will remember that we discussed this in our study of chapter 28. This was the story of the dream of a ladder set up to heaven. In that dream, God identified Himself saying, "I am the Lord (Jehovah) the God (Elohim) of your father Abraham, and the God of Isaac." This God of justice, mercy and power promised to give this land not just to Jacob, but to his heritage after him.

Jacob responded in a positive way to God's instructions:

> *So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, "Get rid of the foreign gods you have with you, and purify yourselves and change your clothes. Then come, let us go up to Bethel, where I will build an altar to God, who answered me in the day of my distress and who has been with me wherever I have gone." Genesis 35:2, 3*

Jacob took God's command seriously. Her realized that it meant more than just going to a place called Bethel where God had told him to go. God's command involved more than going. He knew that there was an inner preparation that was as important as going to Bethel. Jacob shared with his family what needed to be done.

These were not casual instructions. Jacob knew exactly what God expected. Let us look at each of these instructions separately:

- **Put away the foreign gods** - It appears that Jacob had not participated in idol worship. We must remember, however, that his wives and their maidservants had grown up in an idolatrous culture. Evidently Jacob allowed them to continue their pagan practices. Now he required them to change.
- **Purify yourselves** - The word "purify" means to be uncontaminated, to be holy, innocent, unadulterated. Jacob was saying that they should remove these things from them; that they should be free from idolatrous contamination.
- **Change your clothes** - There are two possibilities that pertain to this statement. They are to change their clothes, just in case they were wearing clothes they had taken from the dead bodies of the Hivites they had killed. They were to change their clothes as a symbolic gesture. You may remember that when Moses was about to go to Mt. Sinai, he commanded the people to wash and change their clothes. This is a symbol of purity because of the holy nature of God.

- **Go with me to Bethel** - Bethel, to Jacob, was like Jerusalem is for Jewish people today. This was the very special place of worship for him. Here a covenant was made. God kept His promise. Jacob was now coming to fulfill his promise to God.

Notice that Jacob was going to take his entire family with him to Bethel. It is just as clear, however, that though the entire clan was going to Bethel, Jacob would make the altar himself. This altar was to be built to the honor of God (Elohim).

Observe the way Jacob identified God. "...God who answered me in the day of my distress and who has been with me wherever I have gone." Genesis 35:3b Jacob identified God in two ways:

- He answered Jacob's prayer when he was distressed in his relationship with Esau.
- He was with Jacob wherever he went.

Repeatedly in Scripture, what God does is who God is. When Jacob was in deep trouble, God met him and covenanted with him at Bethel - the house of God. Jacob was now in desperate trouble again. God instructs him to return to Bethel. It was not that God would do things in Bethel that he would not do in Shechem. It was a visual reminder to Jacob. There was a pillar standing at Bethel, where he stood it up and poured oil upon it. It was to remind Jacob that as God was faithful in his struggle with Esau, God will be faithful now in an equally threatening situation concerning the relatives of Hamor.

The response of Jacob's wives and maidservants/concubines was not surprising.

> *So they gave Jacob all the foreign gods they had and the rings in their ears, and Jacob buried them under the oak at Shechem. Genesis 35:4*

In that culture and time, a wife or servant did not have the luxury of a choice. The husband/master made decisions and they were expected to obey them. Failure to obey could lead to pain and banishment, at least.

The text says they gave Jacob all the foreign gods they had. This suggests that they had quite a few. That would not be surprising. One of the chief contrasts between Jehovah and the foreign gods was that Jehovah was one God - powerful in every area of life and need. The foreign gods were different - it took many of them to look after all of ones fears and needs.

Notice that the text also says,

> *"...and the rings in their ears." Genesis 35:4b*

Some information concerning this statement, is obscure. We know that heathen peoples sometimes used ear rings as amulets, as charms, as protection against evil that the gods might bring against them. We know that on occasion, these ear rings had an image of the god incised into the surface of it. This does not suggest, however, that all earrings were amulets. We know they were not.

This verse contains an unusual piece of information. The author indicated that Jacob buried the idols under an oak or terebinth tree at Shechem. This is unusual because it appears to violate specific instructions concerning the disposal of idols. Jews were expected to dispose of idols in one of two ways:

- Pulverize them and scatter the contents in the wind.
- Bury them in a body of water where they would never be accessible again.

It is obvious that neither of these were done. We should be reminded, however, that the spirit of that law was observed. The purpose of the law was to make sure the idols would not be used again. Notice, Jacob buried them under a tree - a place that would not be plowed.

The essence of the report in this verse is that they did away with everything that would hinder their entering into the presence of God. Ridding oneself of everything involved with disobedience accomplishes that need.

Another possible reason for burying the idols was the pressure of time. Jacob knew that when the relatives of Hamor, The Canaanites and Perizzites, discovered the tragedy visited upon Hamor, they would come immediately seeking revenge. Jacob had to leave as quickly as possible.

In the next verse, there is a glimpse of just how dangerous it was for Simeon and Levi to kill the tribe of Hamor:

> *Then they set out, and the terror of God fell upon the towns all around them so that no one pursued them. Genesis 35:5*

Because the Canaanites and Perizzites were family to the Hivites, it was required that they avenge their devastated kinsmen. They would accomplish this by killing the ones who killed their relatives.

The author gives us some insights into the situation in this verse. As soon as the idols were buried, Jacob and his entire clan left to go to Bethel. This verse implies that the Canaanites and Perizzites, at the same time, left to avenge the death of the men of Shechem. If these two tribes had reached Jacob, they would have overpowered him and killed them all.

It was for this reason that the author explains that God intervened by striking fear into the hearts of the people of every nearby town. Thus, no one came to avenge Hamor and his clan. The Canaanites and Perizzites were trapped. It was required of them that they avenge the death of their relatives. On the other hand, they encountered something, sent from God, which filled them with terror. The fright was so overwhelming that no one pursued Jacob and his clan, to destroy them. This was amazing. These tribes were strong worriers. They feared no tribe in the area. Nevertheless, no one of the relatives pursued Jacob and his family.

There is a clear message here about God. Even when Jacob's sons had done a terrible thing, still God showed them mercy and protected them. Because He does not change, This is an important message about God for us. Even though we sometimes fail to be His people, still, in the midst of our rebellion, God shows us His mercy and watches over us to keep us in His love.

We remember Jacob for all the wrong reasons. In this story, there is another picture of his character.

> *Jacob and all the people with him came to Luz (that is, Bethel) in the land of Canaan. Genesis 35:6*

God told Jacob to go back to Bethel. That is exactly what he did. There are two names, in this verse, for the place to which Jacob went. The place was originally called Luz. The name "Luz" was an ancient Canaanite word which meant "almond tree." The name was changed to Bethel by Jacob when he first visited the area. This was recorded in Genesis 28:19.

Observe that the author refers to the place as "Luz... in the land of Canaan." Whenever a place is identified this way, in Scripture, it usually means that there is another location somewhere else, that bears the same name. I assume that is the case, but we do not know where that place might be.

Jacob came to Luz/Bethel for a specific reason:

There he built an altar, and he called the place El Bethel. because it was there that God revealed himself to him when he was fleeing from his brother. Genesis 35:7

Jacob faced the same issue we face on a regular basis. One can worship God anywhere, and we do. There is an emphasis in the Scriptures, however, which points us toward a place which is sanctified; a place set apart for the exclusive worship of God. For them it was the altar/temple; for us it is the church.

Jacob built an altar at Bethel. It was an act of obedience to God. It was also an acknowledgment of God's greatness and power. It was an act of trust and faith. Jacob was in a very tenuous situation. The angry relatives of Hamor could easily come and destroy him and he knew it. Jacob also knew that God watched over him. It was in this understanding that God sent Jacob to Bethel to build an altar.

Notice that God did not send Jacob to build a safe fortress. Safety, for Jacob, was in worship and not in military preparations. This is a lesson that we have yet to learn.

Observe also that Jacob called the place "El Bethel. We have previously indicated that "Bethel" means "house of the all-powerful God." In Hebrew, emphasis is attained by repetition. This is a case in point. The addition of the name "El" to "Bethel" would literally be translated "the house of the Almighty, Almighty God." Jacob had to feel extremely vulnerable because of what Simeon and Levi had done. Jacob's naming of the place "El Bethel" was an affirmation of his confidence that his defense was in the Almighty and not in numbers and weapons.

The author goes on to explain the background of Jacob's choice of a name. In this place, God promised to protect Jacob from Esau and be with him wherever he went. God did just that. The author thus suggests that Jacob was confident that God was changeless. Jacob could count on God to protect him from the relatives of Hamor as completely as He protected him from Esau and Laban.

Notice also how the author reported this fact. He did not say, "Because it was there that God protected Jacob from his angry brother Esau." Rather, the author wrote, "Because it was there that God revealed himself to him when he fleeing from his brother." In our eyes, we need protection in time of danger. Jacob knew that he needed God. The reminder of the power of God was sufficient to enable him to trust God for his defense and daily care.

The next verse is a parenthesis in the chapter. This is the only time this servants name in mentioned in Genesis.

Now Deborah, Rebecca's nurse, died and was buried under the oak below Bethel. So it was named Allon Bacuth. Genesis 35:8

One wonders, "why would the author insert this parenthesis at this point in the story of Jacob's life?" We have seen elsewhere in this book, the author used the parenthetic message to give us insights into the life of the family being described. That is again true here.

Reflect on the situation a moment. Jacob was very concerned because his sons - Simeon and Levi - brought shame on the family and the anger of their neighbors when they plundered the clan of Hamor. Jacob required his wives and maidservants to part with their

household gods as God commanded. In the midst of it all, Rebekah's nurse, Deborah died. This would cause pain and disturbance in any family. It would also slow down the process of setting up their semi-permanent residence in the area. The author identified just how painful it was when he identified the place of burial - "Allon Bacuth." This name means "Oak of weeping." It was a way of saying, in the midst of great tensions, great sorrow has come upon our family.

Genesis 35:9-15 - God Changed Jacob's Name to Israel

As we begin our consideration of verse nine, we need to be aware that there are diverse opinions concerning its meaning. First, some scholars believe it was Rebekah who died and not Deborah as our text indicates. Second, some scholars believe that this verse suggests that Jacob had made a return visit to Paddan-Aram. There is no way to confirm or deny these assertions. The text, to the best of our understanding, speaks of the death of Deborah. Unless better information becomes available, we will stay with the text.

In verse nine, Jacob received an immense honor:

> *After Jacob returned from Paddan Aram, God appeared to him again and blessed him. Genesis 35:9*

There are no words to describe the great privilege which was afforded to Jacob. Notice that God has appeared to Jacob twice and both appearances at the same place. There is no hint in the text concerning the means by which God appeared. In almost every instance, where the text indicates that God appeared to someone, it is an angel who spoke on behalf of God.

The text indicates that God blessed Jacob. It is not clear what the blessing involved. It could be that the blessing was comforting message because Deborah had died. It could also be that this is the announcement of the blessing which follows. The text does not indicate which it is, but it seems to me it is a prelude to the blessing which immediately follows. What a great blessing God gave to Jacob:

> *God said to him, "Your name is Jacob, but you will no longer be called Jacob; your name will be Israel." So he named him Israel. Genesis 35:10*

In this verse, we stand in awe as we overhear a very special, private conversation. We must remind ourselves that Biblical names have a very special significance. In our culture, a name is given because the parents like it; it may be given because it is the fad name for that year. Seldom do the parents name a child because of the meaning of the name. In Israel it was different. A child's name had great meaning and significance.

Jacob was a case in point. He was born holding firmly onto the heel of his twin brother who was born shortly before him. It is not accidental that the name Jacob means "heal grabber." In his life, he continued to deserve the name.

There was a change in his life. He sought to do exactly as God instructed him. This was aptly illustrated in chapter 35.

Observe God's message to Jacob, "Your name is Jacob." As we indicated previously, "Jacob"` means "heel grabber." God went on to make a beautiful announcement. "...your name will be Israel." We must admit that "Israel" does not sound any more beautiful than "Jacob." The meaning of the two names however, presents a very different picture. To be

called "heel grabber"/"deceiver" is certainly no honor. To be called "Israel," "one who struggles with God," however, is a distinct honor. This is precisely what God meant by the name change.

God continued the blessing in the next verse.

> *And God said to him, "I am God Almighty; be fruitful and increase in number. A nation and a community of nations will come from you, and kings will come from your body." Genesis 35:11*

The purpose of God identifying Himself, was a way of lending credence to the great promise He was about to affirm for Jacob. Notice, God did not say, "I am Jehovah." The names God used of Himself are specifically tied to the context in which they are found. had God referred to Himself as "Jehovah," that would have been acceptable, but not as appropriate as "God Almighty." This name is "El Shaddai" in Hebrew. It literally means "the All powerful Almighty." In view of what He is about to say, This name is most appropriate. It is a way of saying, "I am the God for whom all things are possible. Nothing is beyond my ability."

In verse eleven, God again promised that Jacob would be the father of nations and kings. Think about that for a moment. He is the head of a small nomadic clan and God promised that his seed would make up many nations. God also promised that his lineage would indeed be kings in the land. In this verse, God also turns His attention in a different direction to complete His promise.

> *The land I gave to Abraham and Isaac I also give to you, and I will give this land to your descendants after you." Genesis 35:12*

There is a beautiful picture of the faithfulness of God in this verse. When God promised the land of Israel, in Genesis 12:7, the promise was "to your offspring" as well. God repeated this promise to Isaac and now repeats it again to Jacob and ascribes it to his offspring as well. This is a beautiful picture of the faithfulness and changelessness of God. It is a way of saying that this land will perpetually be the possession of the children of Abraham.

Notice that when God spoke of giving this land to Abraham and Isaac, he spoke of an accomplished fact, not a possibility

Though Abraham and Isaac were imperfect, they were certainly different than Jacob was, at least in his earliest days. Imagine how humbled Jacob must have felt to share in this great promise with his father and grandfather. That would be a humbling experience, to say the least.

Verse 13 sounds a bit academic.

> *Then God went up from him at the place where he had talked with him. Genesis 35:13*

It is certainly a terse, factual statement. We should remember that God had a specific message to share with Jacob and he shared it. It suggests that God is quite deliberate and intentional in His dealings with His people.

Put yourself in Jacob's position as he experienced this encounter with God. The next verses give us a glimpse of his reaction.

Jacob set up a stone pillar at the place where God had talked with him, and he poured out a drink offering on it; he also poured oil on it. Jacob named the place where God had talked with him Bethel. Genesis 35:14, 15

There is a problem in verse fourteen. In this verse, Jacob erects a pillar to God. Later on in the Old Testament, Israel is required to break down and destroy such pillars. The difference is in the purpose. Jacob's pillar was a designated place, consecrated to God, whereas the pillars which were to be destroyed were a part of the worship of idols.

Jacob set up the pillar, and poured out a drink offering. The text does not identify whether it was water or wine. It appears that the intent was to cleanse this pillar or altar.

Notice also that having poured out the drink offering of water or wine, Jacob also poured oil upon it. Throughout the Old Testament, oil had a single sacrificial purpose. Oil was poured upon people and things to sanctify them; to set them apart exclusively for divine service. Saul was anointed with oil; he was set apart to serve God as king of Israel. Aaron had oil poured upon his head because he was set apart to be a priest to God. These symbolic actions indicate that Saul was not available for any other purpose than to be king; Aaron could not serve in any other capacity than to be the priest of God. Jacob set this place apart as a holy place. It could only be used to honor and glorify God.

In verse 15, Jacob again gave this place a name. The question immediately rises, if Jacob named this place "Bethel," in 28:19, then why does he name it "Bethel" again in 35:15? Good question! First, there is a great difference between the reason we give a place a name and the reason for which they named a place. We name people, places and things, basically, for purposes of identification. They did not. They gave names like "Bethel," which described the situation of the person, place or thing. "Saul" became "Paul" because he was transformed. Jacob's renaming this place made perfect sense to these people. In chapter 28, Jacob called the village of "Luz" "Bethel" because it was the "house of God;" it was the place where God abode and extended His protection to Jacob. In chapter 35 you have a totally new situation. In a time when neighboring tribes would joyfully have killed him, Jacob found comfort and security. Even though the village was renamed "Bethel," "house of God" again, it is a new situation and was considered a fresh, new name.

In verses twelve through fifteen, the author spoke of God on three occasions. In each of these he used the name "Elohim." This name draws our attention to the majesty of God. It is often used in situations where the mercy of God is being expressed.

Some of our Jewish friends believe that the village of "Bethel"/"Luz" was really Mount Moriah - the temple mount in Jerusalem. They view Genesis 35:15, as an affirmation that this place will be a temple to the Lord, forever. Archeological locating, however, does not support the identification of the temple mount as Bethel.

Genesis 35:16-22a - Benjamin's Birth; Rachel's Death

Nomadic life is always difficult. When physical well-being is threatening, it is far worse.

Then they moved on from Bethel. While they were still some distance from Ephrath, Rachel began to give birth and had great difficulty. Genesis 35:16

It is impossible for people who live stationary lives to comprehend the difficulties encountered by nomads or people in transition. This situation was a bit like what the American Pioneers encountered when they moved West by wagon train. The clan of Jacob, however, was on foot.

The text indicates that they went from Bethel to Ephrath. This is an Aramaic name for a place we call "Bethlehem." This is a trip of about 20 miles. For them it would be a trip of from two to four days depending on the movement of their flocks.

The author recorded that some time before they reached Ephrath/Bethlehem, Rachel went into labor. A recent translation of the Hebrew text states that she started into labor and had difficulty in childbirth. The possible complications with childbirth are many. Without the medical advances we have today, it was not uncommon for the mother or child or both to die. Though the text does not say, we assume that the clan stopped and set up camp when Rachel started having labor pains. There is no way to know just how long they camped in that place.

They did not have doctors. In childbirth, women were usually assisted by midwives.

> *And as she was having great difficulty in childbirth, the midwife said to her, "Don't be afraid, for you have another son ." Genesis 35:17*

Sensing the intense pain Rachel experienced, the midwife apparently tried to encourage her telling her she would have another boy. We know, from Genesis 30:24, that Rachel wanted to have another son.

The information in the text is not sufficiently clear to say whether or not Rachel died during or immediately following the birth of her baby. Notice what the author said:

> *As she breathed her last - for she was dying - she named her son Ben-Oni, but his father named him Benjamin. Genesis 35:18*

As we indicated earlier, it is not certain whether the midwife had seen that the baby was a boy or that she was simply trying to encourage Rachel in the midst of her terrible pain. Whatever the situation, Rachel was still alert enough to whisper, in her dying breath, that the child should be called Ben Oni. The word "Ben" means son. "Oni" literally means to pant, to exert yourself in vain, to come to naught. It eventually came to mean mourning. We would translate this name "Son of mourning."

It appears that we can see something of the character of Jacob in the naming of his son. The naming of a child was ultimately the responsibility of the father. Apparently, Jacob wished to preserve the form of the name Rachel gave her son, but also wished to give him a more positive name. Jacob called this baby, his only child born in Canaan, Benjamin. Again, "Ben" means "son." Jacob substituted the name "yamin" for "oni." "Yamin" or (יָמִין) which means "right hand." The one who stands at the right hand is second in command. Joseph stood at Pharoah's right hand. In Jacob's family, Joseph was the heir, the one who would rule when Jacob died. By naming Benjamin, Jacob announced that this child would be second in command of the clan when Jacob died. It is possible that Jacob was suggesting that when the child was born, he decided that the little one would be his heir.

The burial customs of these people were much different from ours.

> *So Rachel died and was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem). Genesis 35:19*

For thousands of years, the Egyptians embalmed their dead. Burial preparations could take several years, in spite of the intense heat in Egypt. Israel was different. They did not embalm their dead. This being the case, they would and still do, bury their dead on the day they die. When Jesus died, He was immediately placed in a tomb. He was wrapped in cloth strips which were smeared with an ointment to keep down the odor of decaying flesh.

When Rachel died, she was buried beside the roadway near Ephrath/Bethlehem. This may seem quite callous, to some from our culture. It was no different to them than it is for us to bury a person in a cemetery or for the pioneers, 100 years ago, to bury people where they died.

Jacob treated the burial of Rachel with as much respect as he possibly could.

Over her tomb Jacob set up a pillar, and to this day that pillar marks Rachel's tomb. Genesis 35:20

Jacob set up a pillar. We need to understand what this is. The word "pillar" is (Matstsebah) (מָצֵבָה) which means something placed in a perpendicular position. It can be a finely chiseled column. It can also identify a memorial stone - a large stone carefully placed on a grave so that everyone would realize that it was a grave marker.

The last sentence in this verse is interesting. It tells us that the book of Genesis was written a substantial number of years after Rachel died. It also tells us that the large stone still marked the site of Rachel's grave.

Jacob continued his journey following the burial of his favorite wife, Rachel.

Israel moved on again and pitched his tent beyond Migdal Eder. Genesis 35:21

Observe that until this point, Rachel's husband had been called "Jacob." Immediately in the very next verse, the author turns to Jacob's new name, "Israel."

The author went on to say that Israel set up his tent "beyond the tower of Eder." To the best of our knowledge, there is no town or village by the name of "Eder." We know that Israel went somewhere between Hebron and Bethlehem. The tower mentioned here was called "tower of the flock" from which shepherds could keep watch against thieves. Micah refers to this tower in his prophecy, 4:8. This means that the tower was in that place a long time and most everyone knew about it. Jerome wrote that this tower was located a little less than a mile outside Bethlehem. At present we do not know the location of that tower.

Wherever it was located, Israel pitched his tent between the tower and the village of Ephrath/Bethlehem.

Though the text does not specifically say so, it appears that Israel stayed in the area for a prolonged period of time.

While Israel was living in that Region, Reuben went in and slept with his father's concubine Bilhah and Israel heard of it. Genesis 35:22a

This seems like a strange parenthesis in the story of Jacob. Though Rachel was dead, Bilhah, Rachel's handmaid, was still Jacob's concubine. When Jewish law was written down, this evil deed was specifically forbidden. In the desert code, this was an evil act worthy of death and was usually dealt with in that manner.

This verse raises a number of questions. Why would Reuben do such a thing? It is possible that the age of Jacob had something to do with this. We must remember that

Reuben was Jacob's first-born by Leah. The naming of Benjamin suggested Jacob was announcing that his second son, by Rachel, was also the second in line to be his heir. When Joseph was sent away, Benjamin was the one to be the heir. This would not set well with Reuben, who was the first-born. It is possible that he thought that by taking his father's concubine that this would be viewed as the first step in his taking control of the clan from his aged father. This, of course, is only conjecture.

There is yet another conjecture. Reuben's mother, Leah, was Jacob's first wife; Rachel was his favorite. When Rachel died, it is assumed by some that Jacob moved his bedroll to Bilhah's tent. Reuben was angry that his mother was now in competition with a maid-servant/concubine and moved Jacob's bedroll from Bilhah's tent and placed it in Leah's tent. These people believe Reuben did not commit adultery with his father's concubine, but simply moved the bedroll.

There are two problems with this theory: First, the text clearly says, "Reuben went in and slept with his father's concubine...." Genesis 35:22a. The Hebrew word for "slept" is (shakab) (שָׁכַב) which means to lie down for rest, sexual relationship, decease or any other purpose. Second, when Jacob was about to die, he blessed each of his sons. In his blessing of Reuben, Genesis 49:4, Jacob mentions this event in explicit adulterous terms saying he (Reuben) defiled his father's couch.

The second question that rises out of this event is equally confusing. IF, as the text indicates, Reuben violated Bilhah, and IF Israel knew about it, THEN how was Reuben punished for his sin? If he was not punished, why not? Why does the text drop the issue immediately upon announcing that Israel knew about it? We can only say we do not know. It certainly was not the usual response to an offense such as this. Though verse 22 is quite brief, it is a vivid, confusing parenthesis in the story of the life of Jacob. One thing is very clear. There is a serious contrast in this paragraph. Much of the chapter describes Jacob's valiant efforts to do exactly as God instructed him to do. Late in the chapter, however, there is a picture of his son sinning against God and his father with no apparent thought or remorse.

Genesis 35:22b-27 - The Sons of Israel

Repeatedly throughout the book of Genesis, when the story of a man's life is ended, there is a listing of his sons. That is exactly what the author does in this instance.

> *Jacob had twelve sons" The sons of Leah: Reuben the first born of Jacob, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar and Zebulun. The sons of Rachel: Joseph and Benjamin. The sons of Rachel's maidservant Bilhah: Dan and Naphtali. The sons of Leah's maidservant Zilpah: Gad and Asher. These were the sons of Jacob who were born to him in Paddan Aram. Genesis 35:22b-26*

There is an interesting order in which the mothers and sons were listed.

LEAH	RACHEL	BILHAH	ZILPAH
Reuben	Joseph	Dan	Gad
Simeon	Benjamin	Naphtali	Asher
Levi			
Judah			
Issachar			
Zebulun			

You will observe that Leah is listed first. She was Jacob's first wife, but was not his intended nor his favorite. It was required that she be mentioned first because she was the oldest and the first wife.

Notice, however, that Bilhah, Rachel's handmaid, was mentioned before Zilpah, Leah's handmaid. There are two probable reasons for this order:

- The women are listed in the order in which Jacob took them as his wives.
- Rachel was Jacob's favorite. Though it was not proper to list her name first, because of age deference; it was possible to list her handmaid before Zilpah as a discrete way of indicating his tent of preference. Though Bilhah was given to Jacob as a wife, she was bound as Rachel's handmaid for life. As such, her residence would be in the area of Rachel's part of the tent and away from Leah's part.

Observe also that verse 26 concludes with the statement, "...these are the sons of Jacob, that were born to him in Paddan Aram." It is true that his first eleven sons were born in Paddan-Aram. Benjamin, as we noticed in the previous paragraph, was born in Canaan. This might be considered an error in the text. It is, in fact, a generalization.

Verse 27 is the closing sentence of the paragraph beginning with verse 22b. The question naturally arises, what does the list of Jacob's sons, 22b-26, have to do with Jacob's journey to finally meet his aged father? As indicated earlier, the listing of a man's sons is a signal of the end of the story of his life in the book of Genesis. You will also remember that in 28:3, Isaac prayed God's blessing upon Jacob. In that blessing, Isaac prayed that the All-powerful Almighty (El Shaddai) would make Jacob fruitful and multiply him. This paragraph is the obvious answer to that prayer.

In Genesis 28, Isaac also prayed that Jacob would inherit the land. Esau now lived outside the land, in the Negev. Jacob for the first time, was returning to his father after more than 22 years. Did he take his time about going to see Isaac? The text does not say in so many words, but I believe that one could make such a case from the text. I can understand Jacob's hesitancy. He had made a number of unfortunate decisions as a young man. Isaac was quite unhappy with him when Jacob fled to his uncle in Paddan Aram.

Observe the way the author identifies the place where Isaac lived:

> *Jacob came home to his father Isaac in Mamre, near Kiriath Arba (that is Hebron), where Abraham and Isaac had stayed. Genesis 35:27*

The author identified the location of Isaac with three different names. "Mamre" is probably the oldest of the three names. The name has an Amorite origin, though used by a number of other tribal groups who at one time or another occupied the area. The author said that Mamre is located near "Kiriath Arba." This name was given to that place in honor of a man named Arba the Anakite. The Anakim were a tribe of unusually large people

who were driven out of the area later, by Caleb. This city was later given the Hebrew name "Hebron."

It is about 30 miles from Bethel to Hebron. If one is following huge herds with a gigantic household and all their possessions, then it is possibly a weeks walk to cover the distance, but certainly no longer than that.

The text carefully does not describe the meeting of Isaac and Jacob. There is nonetheless, some information available. We know what the relationship was between the two when they were together last. There was a tug-of-war within the family. Isaac was partial to his older son, Esau, while his wife was partial to the younger son, Jacob. The lives of Jacob and Esau became the battle ground for the power struggle between the two parents. To Isaac, Jacob was part and parcel with the opposition. Add to this the fact that Jacob had successfully tricked Isaac to think he was Esau and got his father to give him the blessing of the first-born. When Jacob left home, his father blessed him, but it was a blessing of necessity, not of loving desire. Unless Isaac had mellowed greatly with the passing of time, this was not a joyful reunion. Nevertheless, Jacob did return to his father. This was important since he owned the birthright as well as its attendant responsibilities to his father.

The author described the place of Jacob's return in an interesting way, "...where Abraham and Isaac sojourned." Genesis 35:27b. The author was very careful to identify two facts:

- Jacob had returned to the place from which he left more than 22 years previously. This was the agreement he and his parents reached as he fled from his angry brother, Esau.
- Jacob was the family member through whom God was going to continue to give the land to the descendants of Abraham. He had now come to the place where his father and grand-father received fulfillment of that divine oath.

Genesis 35:28 29 - The Death of Isaac

At this point, Isaac was quite old. They knew his death was not far off. At 180 years of age, Isaac had lived the exciting parts of his life already. This verse used the classical means of identifying a persons death.

Isaac lived a hundred and eighty years. Genesis 35:28

The moment you read these words, you know the man is going to die.

These people also had a very common way to express what happened when a person died. They expressed it this way:

Then he breathed his last and died and was gathered to his people, old and full of years. And his sons Esau and Jacob buried him. Genesis 35:29

There are three parts to this description:

- **Then he breathed his last** - the word for "breathed his last" is (gavah) (גָּוַע). It means "to breathe out," "to die," "to give up one's spirit" - that which makes one uniquely human, "to die. " This describes the final event prior to his death.
- **He died** - Having ceased breathing, he was now dead.

- **Was gathered to his people** - the word "gathered" is (aceph) (אָסַף) and means "to gather for any reason," "to take away," "to remove," "to destroy," "to assemble." This was their commonest description of what happens when a Jewish person dies. They had an impression of life after death, whether or not it was well developed. This image described what happened to him following his death.

As you can see, these three images are not synonymous. Each identifies a different time frame and a different situation. Added together, it forms an emphasis upon the fact that he was really dead.

The author spoke of him as being old and full of days. A short life was considered a tragedy and in some instances a punishment from God. By the same token, a long life was considered a blessing from God. It was usually understood to mean the person had lived a good life. We would think of this as "living a full life."

The author closed the chapter saying that Jacob and Esau buried Isaac. Notice that now when the two brothers are mentioned together, Jacob is mentioned first - he holds the honored position though he was the youngest.

We know how Jacob knew his father died - he was there. We wonder how Esau knew. Did he just happen to be present when Isaac died? Did the family send word to him that Isaac was sick and he came to be present before the funeral? We can not be sure, but we do know that both sons were present when Isaac passed away.

Why did Esau come? He left the land to spite his parents, just as he had married foreign women. He lost his love for his father and sought to humiliate him in life. Why come for the funeral? Could it be that he came to see if there was some way he could take over and head of the family anyway?

Think about this scene a moment. There had been trouble years before and Esau swore he would kill Jacob. Twenty-two years later, Jacob returned seeking restoration and it was granted. When Jacob returned, however, Esau wanted him to go with him out of Canaan, but Jacob refused. The text does not describe it, but it appears that the parting though not bitter, was far from cordial. Now Jacob and Esau meet again at the burial of their father. Though Jacob was the younger son, still he is the heir and new ruler of the clan. Everyone who was under the control of Isaac now took direction from Jacob. It is an assumption, but it would appear that the relationships between the two sons was not close.

Conclusion

There are three different names for God in this chapter. Observe that two of the three focus on the Almighty power of God.

NAME	MEANING OF THE NAME
Elohim	**Merciful, eternal God**
El Bethel	**House of the Mighty, Almighty God**
El Shaddai	**The All Powerful Almighty**

There is a cause and effect relationship which permeates the chapter.

Genesis 35:1-4	God protected Jacob and family	Jacob obeyed - he went to Bethel
Genesis 35:7	God promised land and nation protected	Jacob offered sacrifice
Genesis 35:11	El Shaddai - promised them the land	Jacob Worshipped God for His faithfulness

The relationship between God and his people was intended to be the same. God powerfully defended His people even when there was failure. When God's people were at their best, they responded to God's power with their faithfulness and obedience.

God does not change. He is still Elohim - the eternal, merciful God; He is still El Shaddai - the powerful Almighty God; He is still the El Bethel - the dwelling of the mighty, Almighty God.

In the dilemmas of our lives, God is as He was for Jacob - El Shaddai - the powerful , Almighty God we can trust to do whatever is necessary on our behalf. He is Elohim, the merciful eternal in our time of weakness. We must learn to trust the power that cannot fail.

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 12

THE LINEAGE OF ESAU

GENESIS 36:1 - 43

1. In our best Hebrew manuscripts of Genesis chapter 36 there are six paragraphs. Read each paragraph carefully. On the table which follows, write a title of seven words or less for each paragraph.

36:1-8	
36:9-14	
36:15-19	
36:20-30	
36:31-39	
36:40-43	

2. In Genesis 36:1-8, the author identified the lineage of Esau who were born in Canaan.
   a. As you begin your study of chapter 36, take a moment and read I Chronicles chapter 1. What, if anything, can you learn from these passages?
   b. Genesis 36:1, nine words, is a single sentence.
      (1). What does it tell us?
      (2). Why would the author give this information?
   c. In Genesis 36:2, 3, the author identified Esau's three wives.
      (1). Using a Bible Dictionary, discover the difference between Hittites, Hivites and Horites.
      (2). What do these verses tell us about Esau?
      (3). Why were the names and locations of the three wive's families important to our study?
   d. In Genesis 36:4, 5, the author identified the children of Esau who were born "in the land of Canaan."
      (1). What difference would this make?
      (2). There is a definite emphasis on the phrases "In the land of Canaan" and "In the hill country of Seir" in this paragraph. Why would the author make these distinctions?
   e. In Genesis 36:6-8, the author described Esau's move.
      (1). What reason did he give for the move?
      (2). How meaningful is that reason?

3. In Genesis 36:9-14, the author identified Esau's lineage born in Seir.
   a. Compare Genesis 36:1-8 and 36:9-14. What contrast can you observe?
   b. Genesis 36:10-12 seems awkward to read. What possible reasons could you suggest for this fact?

(1). In Genesis 36:12, the author informs us that Eliphaz had a concubine named Timna. What does this information tell us?
(2). To what extent was this practice acceptable?

c. In Genesis 36:13, the author identified the children in the lineage of Esau's son Reuel by Basemath. What information does this verse provide?
d. In Genesis 36:14, the author identified the children Esau had by his third wife Oholibamah. How does this verse add to our store of information?

4. In Genesis 36:15-19, the author identified the fact that Esau's lineage became chiefs over territory.
   a. What does this tell us?
   b. Compare the lists in Genesis 36:11 and 36:16. What does this tell us?
   c. Compare and contrast Genesis 36:14 with 36:18. What did you observe?

5. In Genesis 36:20-30, the author gives the lineage of Seir.
   a. Compare each list of sons with those listed in I Chronicles chapter 1. What does this tell you?
   b. Why is it important that Esau married Oholibamah, a relative of Seir?
   c. In Genesis 36:22, the author identified Timna as the sister of Lotan. Why would this be significant?
   d. In Genesis 36:24, the author informed us that Anah found hot springs in the desert. Why was this so significant?
   e. In the verses of this paragraph, the author gives us little information except the names and relationships of Seir's lineage. Why would he do this?

6. In Genesis 36:31-39, the author lists the kings of Edom.
   a. What does Genesis 36:31 tell us about the timing of these reigns?
   b. Look at the way the author identifies the way each king came to power. What does this tell us?
   c. Look at the location of the royal city of each king in a Bible Atlas. What information does this provide?
   d. In some instances, the author tells us the city of origin for a king. What difference does this make?

7. In Genesis 36:40-43, the author identifies the chieftains of Esau.
   a. In Genesis 36:41, 42, the author said that these people are descendants of Esau.
      (1). With the help of a Bible Dictionary, check to see if each of these people are descendants of Esau.
      (2). How can you explain your findings?
      (3). Study the verse again. What other problem can you detect there?
   b. In Genesis 36:43, the author described the political divisions of the land.
      (1). To what did he refer when he used the phrase "According to their settlements?" What does this tell us?
      (2). The author also spoke of "the land they occupied." What information can we gather from this reference?

8. Having completed the study of chapter 36, make as many comparisons and/contrasts as you can between chapters 35 and 36.
   a. What does this search add to our understanding of the book?
   b. What does the study tell us about the two men?

9. In view of what you have learned in this study:
   a. How has your relationship to God been changed?
   b. What specific differences will these changes make in you?

LESSON 12: GENESIS 36:1 - 43

THE LINEAGE OF ESAU

Introduction

There are six paragraphs in Genesis chapter 36. On the table which follows there is a summary of each paragraph:

36:1-8	Esau's Heritage Born in Canaan
36:9-14	Esau's Son's Heritage in Mt. Seir
36:15-19	Esau's Grandsons Become Tribal Chiefs
36:20-30	The Lineage of Seir
36:31-39	A Listing of the Kings of Edom
36:40-43	A List of Esau's Chiefs

Genesis 36:1-8 - Esau's Heritage Born in Canaan

It is helpful to note that Genesis 36 and I Chronicles 1 are so similar that it appears that the Chronicler copied some of his material from the writer of Genesis.

In verse one, the author makes a clarification that tells us something about the readers:

This is the account of Esau (that is, Edom). Genesis 36:1

At birth, Isaac's first-born was given the name "Esau," which means "hairy." It was only later that he was known as "Edom," which means "red." It is easy to conjecture why the second name or nickname was given. We cannot be certain.

In verses two and three there is repetition.

Esau took his wives from the women of Canaan: Adah daughter of Elon the Hittite, and Oholibamah daughter of Anah and granddaughter of Zibeon the Hivite -- also Basemath daughter of Ishmael and sister of Nebaioth. Genesis 36:2, 3

There are some terms that need clarification as we consider this chapter:

- **Hittites** - The Hittite empire stretched from the Mediterranean Sea north of Tarsus to the Black Sea. They were a warlike people and relished conquest. Spies reported to Moses that there were Hittites in the hill country of Canaan. These Hittites joined the battle against Israel when they started the conquest of the land. The Hittites were not driven out, but intermarried with the Israelites. They were idolaters who assimilated the deities of conquered peoples into their pantheon, or list of the deities they worshipped.
- **Hivites** - These people were tent-dwellers from the north - Mt. Lebanon, Mt. Herman. They were found in Tyre and Sheckem. There were Hivites in Canaan when Israel arrived. The Hivites were not as warlike as the Hittites, but concentrated on

accumulating wealth and enlarging herds. Their presence so far south into the wilderness areas attests to this fact.

- **Horites** - These were the descendants of Seir who moved from an area East of the Tigris, Euphrates Valley and settled near Petra. It is thought that the Horites and the Hivites were both part of a larger ethnic group.

You may remember that Esau's marriage to two Hittite women to spite his parents was recorded in Genesis 26:34. The marriage to Ishmael's daughter, as Esau's third wife, was recorded in Genesis 28:9. God told Abraham that Ishmael, the son of the slave girl Hagar, would not be his seed through whom his lineage was to be "as the sand of the sea and the stars of the heavens." Esau paid no attention to this divine decree. It is almost as though he were looking for a way to rebel against his father and God as well. He brought the lineage of Ishmael back into the family almost in defiance of what he knew God had said.

There is another possible reason that Esau married a third wife. Genesis 36:7 indicates that both Esau and Jacob had "great possessions." This usually meant large herds. The greater the herd, the more people it took to care for them and provide care for the entire family. It was cheaper to marry another wife and raise children to do the work than to buy slaves who had no incentive to make the family inheritance grow. This is a poor motive for marriage, but it was not uncommon in that day.

As we begin to study the lineage of Esau, we need to observe that there appears to be some discrepancies between chapter 36:l, the separate reporting elsewhere in Genesis and I Chronicles chapter one. There are at least two parts to the explanation of this dilemma:

- We know that there are some copyists omissions in the recording of Esau's lineage.
- We also know that in the extended lineage of Esau, some children were the product of incestuous and/or adulterous relationships. This is a strong contrast with the recording of Jacob's lineage in chapter 46. In that record, there are no problems of this nature. This helps us to discern the difference between the lifestyle of the twin brothers.

Having identified Esau's three wives again, the author proceeds to identify the children they bore.

> *Adah bore Eliphaz to Esau, Basemath bore Reuel, and Oholibamah bore Jeush, Jalam and Korah. These were the sons of Esau, who were born to him in Canaan. Genesis 36:4, 5*

If you compare the reports of Genesis 36 and I Chronicles chapter one, it looks like this:

GENESIS 36	I CHRONICLES 1
Eliphaz - from Adah	Eliphaz
Reuel - from Basemath	Reuel
Jeush - from Oholibamah	Jeush
Jalam - from Oholibamah	Jalam
Korah - from Oholibamah	Korah

You will observe that the two lists are exactly the same at this point.

The author concludes this part of the lineage by saying that all of these sons were born "**in** the land of Canaan." This does not appear to be very significant at this point. It will

take on greater meaning later in our study. We will deal with it more carefully at that time.

The author begins a rather obvious contrast in the following verse.

> *Esau took his wives and sons and daughters and all the members of his household, as well as his livestock and all his other animals and all the goods he had acquired in Canaan, and moved to a land some distance from his brother Jacob. Genesis 36:6*

As with Jacob, Esau had been trained to remember that God gave Israel the land of Canaan. They and their families were to remain "**in** the land." With little apparent reluctance, Esau gathered his family and belongings and left the land to get away from his brother. This, again, gives us another glance into the values and lifestyle of Esau.

In the following verse, the author gives more about Esau's leaving Canaan.

> *Their possessions were too great for them to remain together; the land where they were staying could not support them both because of their livestock. Genesis 36:7*

The problem was quite real. Both Esau and Jacob had large herds that were expanding quickly. If the two clans stayed in the same area, there would soon be a serious confrontation over grazing area and water.

It was necessary to put some distance between the clans of Jacob and Esau. It was not necessary for Esau to leave the land God promised their fathers. There were vast regions of the land of Canaan to which either brother might go. In fact, it would have been much safer for Esau to go to another part of Canaan. At least part of the understanding was that Esau did not take the requirement to remain in the land too seriously. He treated this requirement in much the same way he treated the prohibition against taking pagan wives. It became more a way of asserting himself and doing the rebellious thing than seeing the importance of obeying God's command to flee pagan relationships.

In the closing verse of the paragraph, the author began the contrast which dealt with "**in** the land of Canaan."

> *So Esau (that is, Edom) settled in the hill country of Seir. Genesis 36:8*

Having drawn attention to "**in** the land of Canaan" in both Genesis 36:5, 6, the author now contrasts that with Esau's present location "**in** the hill country of Seir." "Mt. Seir" or "in the hill country of Seir" is located between the southern end of the Dead Sea and the Northern boundary of the Wilderness of Paran. It is a wilderness, desert like area, but the type of location that Esau would appreciate.

Again in this verse, the author carefully points out that Esau and Edom were the same person. This would be an important help to a person who was not familiar with the fact.

Genesis 36:9-14 - Esau's Sons Heritage in Mt. Seir

This paragraph is one of the major reasons people skip this chapter when reading the book of Genesis. They think of it simply as a chronicle of "begats."

Look at the way the paragraph begins:

> *This is the account of Esau the father of the Edomites in the hill country of Seir. Genesis 36:9*

You will remember that both Genesis 36:1 and 36:9 begin in exactly the same way. This repetition is more an indication of coming content than a way to provide emphasis. It should be pointed out that the two paragraphs deal with Esau's lineage at different levels:

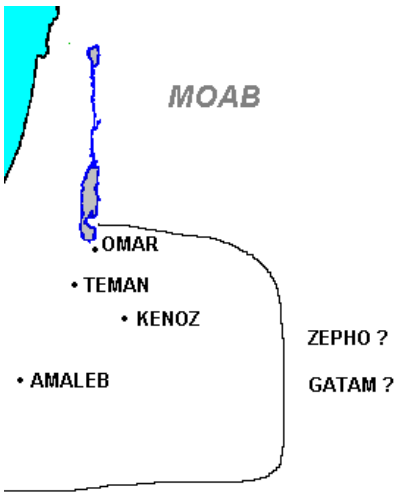
- Genesis 36:1-8 - Chronicle of the immediate sons of Esau.
- Genesis 36:9-14 - Chronicle the son's sons.

The author adds some pertinent information along with the list of Esau's grandsons. In verse nine, he gave us an additional identification of Esau - "The father of the Edomites." This identification tells us two things:

- Esau was the originator of the whole series of tribes, the Edomites, who would later be an important part of the history of Israel.
- Esau's sons were all born "in Canaan," but all of his grandsons were born "in the hill country of Seir." Map 11 which follows will give some indication of where Esau went.

Do not be surprised if you notice that the reading of Genesis 36:10-12 seems awkward. This probably suggests that there were some changes and omissions in the texts made by copyists. We can not say this with certainty, but it seems reasonable.

> *These are the names of Esau's sons: Eliphaz, the son of Esau's wife Adah, and Reuel, the son of Esau's wife Basemath. The sons of Eliphaz: Teman, Omar, Zepho, Gatam and Kenaz. Esau's son Eliphaz also had a concubine named Timna, who bore him Amalek. These were grandsons of Esau's wife Adah. Genesis 36:10-12*



Map 11: The Location of Easu's Family

In verse ten, the author identified, again, the sons of Esau's wives - Adah and Basemath, who was Ishmael's daughter. Both Adah and Basemath had one son:

- Adah - Eliphaz
- Basemath - Reuel

Observe that verse 11 is a list of the sons of Eliphaz by his wife whose name does not appear in the text.

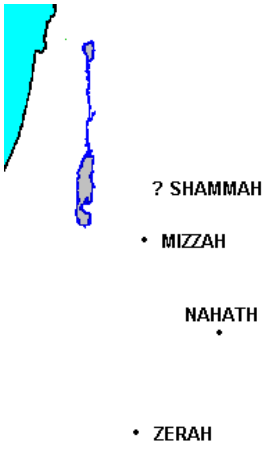
Verse 12 indicates that Eliphaz had a concubine named Timna. She bore him a son named Amalek. Plural wives and concubines were not unheard of among the Jews. This situation can be found in the lives of both Abraham and Jacob. In both situations, however, it was initiated by the wife because she was barren. That was not the case with Eliphaz' family. His wife bore him five sons and we don't know how many daughters. He could not claim his wife's infertility as the reason for the concubine. It appears that this gives us another glimpse into the values and motivation of Esau's family.

We know very little about the sons of Eliphaz. We do know where some of his sons lived. (see Map 11)

Verse 13 continues the lineage with a list of the sons of Reuel.

The sons of Reuel: Nahath, Zerah, Shammah and Mizzah. These were grandsons of Esau's wife Basemath. Genesis 36:13

Reuel had four sons - Nahath, Zerah, Shammah and Mizzah. Again, we know very little about these men. We do know where three of them lived. You can find their location on Map 12 which follows:



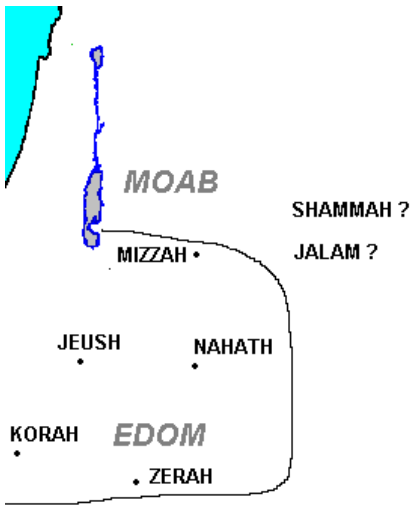
Map 12: The Sons of Reuel

We must keep in mind that Esau married both Adah and Basemath for the express purpose of spiting and humiliating his parents. He accomplished this goal in two ways:

- He married two Hittite women.
- He married two wives when there was no reason to think it was necessary in order to preserve the family.

One should not be too surprised that his family was torn in terms of its values and moral fiber.

Verse 14 lists the lineage of Esau by his third wife, Oholibamah.



Map 13: Jeush, Jalam and Korah

The sons of Esau's wife Oholibamah daughter of Anah and granddaughter of Zibeon, whom she bore to Esau: Jeush, Jalam and Korah. Genesis 36:14

She bore Esau three sons - Jeush, Jalam and Korah. Again, we have almost no information about these three sons. We do know where two of them lived. This is shown on Map 13.

Genesis 36:15-19 - Esau's Grandsons Become Tribal Chiefs

In this paragraph, the author identified how Esau's lineage invested their lives. The author deals with the grandsons according to their mothers.

These were the chiefs among Esau's descendants: The sons of Eliphaz the firstborn of Esau: Chiefs Teman, Omar,

Zepho, Kenaz, Korah, Gatam and Amalek. These were the chiefs descended from Eliphaz in Edom; they were grandsons of Adah. Genesis 36:15, 16

The author begins with the descendants of Adah, Esau's first wife. In verse 15, there is a puzzling situation. The following table should help identify the difficulty.

LIST OF SONS - 36:11	CHIEFS - 36:16
Teman	Teman
Omar	Omar
Zepho	Zepho
Gatam	Kenaz
Kenaz	Korah
Amalek	Getam
	Amalek

Some observations attract our attention:

- Each of Esau's sons, by Anah and the concubine, became a tribal chief.
- The two lists of men are not exactly the same.
- The order, in Genesis 36:16, is not the same as that in 36:11. The order of lineage is always significant. It is possible that the order in 36:11 is the birth order while the list in 36:16 suggests the relative importance of the tribe over which each son ruled.

"Korah" appears as a son-chief in 36:16, but was not listed as a son of Anah in the birth order lineage. It is possible that this "Korah" is the same as the one listed as the son of "Oholibamah. There is a good chance that this man was the illegitimate son of Esau and could not be listed here as the son of Adah, but because she was Esau's wife, his illegitimate children became her care.

In verse 17, the author identified the sons of Esau by his second wife, Basemath, who became tribal chiefs.

The sons of Esau's son Reuel: Chiefs Nahath, Zerah, Shammah and Mizzah. These were the chiefs descended from Reuel in Edom; they were grandsons of Esau's wife Basemath. Genesis 36:17

We need to compare the two lists of Basemath's sons as we did with those of Adah.

BIRTH ORDER - 36:13	CHIEF LIST - 36:17
Napheth	Napheth
Zerah	Zerah
Shammah	Shammah
Mizzah	Mizzah

Some observations need to be made here as well:

- The order in which Basemath's sons were listed, as sons and as chiefs, was exactly the same.
- All of Basemath's sons became tribal chiefs.

In verse 18, the author identified Esau's sons by Oholibamah. She bore three sons.

> *The sons of Esau's wife Oholibamah: Chiefs Jeush, Jalam and Korah. These were the chiefs descended from Esau's wife Oholibamah daughter of Anah. Genesis 36:18*

The table which follows should be helpful in identifying the way in which the sons are listed:

BIRTH ORDER - 36:14	CHIEF LIST - 36:18
Jeush	Jeush
Jalam	Jalam
Korah	Korah

Observe again that Oholibamah's three sons were listed in exactly the same order and all three became tribal chiefs.

An interesting observation surfaces at this point:

JACOB	ESAU
He had 12 sons	He had five sons.
They did not divide into indigenous tribes.	His fourteen grandsons each became a tribal chief.
This indicates a cohesive family	This suggests a divided family.
They had each other to depend upon	Each could depend only on himself and his immediate family.

Genesis 36:20-30 - The Lineage of Seir

The chronicle takes a definite turn in the next verse. This paragraph deals with the lineage of a man named "Seir." He was the chief of the extended tribe which occupied the "hill country of Seir" prior to Esau's arrival. Jews were forbidden to enter the area. In Deuteronomy, God said,

> *Do not provoke them to war, for I will not give you any of their land, not even enough to put your foot on. I have given Esau the hill country of Seir as his own. Deuteronomy 2:5*

This, of course, was long after the time of Esau.

The area of "the hill country of Seir" was a rocky, barren, wilderness much like the hills that surround the Dead Sea today. This was an area where only herdsmen could survive.

The question arises, "Why would the author turn from a chronicle of the lineage of Esau to identify the lineage of a pagan man who ruled over a sparsely populated wilderness the size of several of our states all put together?"

- First, throughout the book of Genesis, the author took the time to list lineages when a momentous event took place or was about to take place.
- There are times when a lineage is presented because it provided vital information for an understanding of events that are otherwise beyond our grasp.

I believe both are involved in this paragraph.

> *These were the sons of Seir the Horite, who were living in the region: Lotan, Shobal, Zibeon, Anah, Genesis 36:20*

The author spoke of "Seir" as a "Horite." The word "Hor" (הר) means cave. They were called Horites" because they lived in caves and crude dwellings. Other than this, we know little about them. Because the land was divided into autonomous tribes, there were no bonds to tie them to each other. They became an easy mark for any coherent army. In Genesis 14, the Mesopotamian army conquered them. Later, Esau and his family entourage conquered them as well.

Having listed the sons of Esau, the author immediately listed the sons of Seir.

> *These were the sons of Seir the Horite, who were living in the region: Lotan, Shobal, Zibeon, Anah, Dishon, Ezer and Dishan. These sons of Seir in Edom were Horite chiefs. Genesis 36:20*

It is interesting to observe that the author of I Chronicles 1:40 ff., followed the example of the author of Genesis in listing the lineage of Esau and then that of Seir.

In these two verses, the author identified the sons of Seir. If you look carefully, you will observe that Seir had seven sons and each of these was a tribal chieftain. It may have been that individual tribes had to form because of their distances from each other and the impossibility of mutual survival unless they did spread out over the whole area.

If you compare this chronology with that in I Chronicles, chapter one, you will find this information:

GENESIS 36:20, 21	I CHRONICLES 1:38
Lotan	Lotan
Shobal	Shobal
Zibeon	Zibeon
Anah	Anah
Dishon	Dishon
Ezer	Ezer
Dishan	Dishan

The names on both lists are the same and appear in the same order.

There are some scholars who believe that the land of Seir was called "Edom" before Esau went there. As indicated earlier, "Edom" means red. These scholars believe the soil/sand was reddish in color and thus called "Edom." This is possible, but it seems more plausible that it was known as "Edom" after Esau took over the area from the people of Seir who had lived there for centuries.

Again, if you compare Genesis 36:20 with Genesis 20:2, it is evident that Esau married Oholibamah who was the granddaughter of Zibeon. We questioned earlier why the author included the lineage of Seir. It is entirely possible that this is part of the reason the lineage of Seir is mentioned.

We know that Esau married a relative of Seir. This would mean that he was honor bound not to do battle with her relatives. We do not know, however, how Esau came to power over the people of Seir. This raises some questions for us:

- **Did Esau become part of the family and then at the death of Seir become the ruler?** This hardly seems possible because Seir had seven sons. It seems reasonable that at least one of them would have the ability and the support to rule over the extended tribes of their family.
- **Did Esau violate the code of family trust and do battle successfully against his wife's family?** In view of the other information we have about Esau, this seems more reasonable.

The truth is we do not know for certain.

In verse 22, the author begins to identify the grandchildren of Seir.

The sons of Lotan: Hori and Homam. Timna was Lotan's sister. Genesis 36:22

Lotan, Seir's first-born son, had two sons: Hori and Homam. We know almost nothing about these sons. In fact, a number of scholars believe there was no son by the name of "Hori." They believe that "Hori," which means cave dweller," was an identification of the extended ethnic group to which Lotan and his son Homam belonged. It seems that such a position goes too far. I prefer to admit that I know nothing about Hori, but that he did exist.

A statement which concludes verse 22, attracts our attention. It says, "Lotan's sister was Timna." In Genesis 36:12, we are told that Timna was the concubine of Eliphaz and bore him a son, Amalek. The fact that Timna was Lotan's sister could mean more than one thing:

- It could mean they both had two common parents.
- It could mean that they had the same mother, but not the same father.
- It could mean they had the same father, but different mothers.

It is thought by some that Elipaz had an adulterous relationship with Lotan's mother from which Timna was born. Timna then became the concubine of Eliphaz. The truth is that there is no way to accurately identify the family ties of Seir's grandchildren. It seems clear that there are some immoral, possibly incestuous relationships involved in the family.

This also could give us another piece of information concerning the reason that the lineage of Seir is included in Genesis. Esau, a wayward man, became involved in a family at least as wayward as he was.

In verse 23, the author describes the lineage of Shobal.

The sons of Shobal: Alvan, Manahath, Ebal, Shepho and Onam. Genesis 36:23

The second son of Seir, Shobal, had five sons: Alvan, Manahath, Ebal, Shepho and Onam.

The list, in Genesis 36:23, is exactly the same as that in I Chronicles 1:40. The list is also in exactly the same order.

We have no information about the lives of these five men. We also have no information about where they lived within the hill country of Seir.

In verse 24, the author listed the sons of Seir's third son, Zibeon.

The sons of Zibeon: Aiah and Anah. This is the Anah who discovered the hot springs in the desert while he was grazing the donkeys of his father Zibeon. Genesis 36:24

He had only two sons - Aiah and Anah. The listing here and in I Chronicles 1:40 are identical both in the names presented and the order in which they appear. We know nothing about Aiah or where he lived. We know little more about Anah. He contracted with Esau for his daughter, Oholibamah, to be Esau's second wife. This tells us a bit about the man:

- He probably had to be an excellent negotiator to make such an agreement with Esau, a man noted for his alternative motivation and craftiness.
- Interestingly, the only notable thing the author could say for him was that he discovered a warm spring while watching his father's donkeys. This doesn't sound like much to us, because water is not as scarce for us as it was for them. It was also important because people thought of these hot springs as having healing powers. Some believe that Anah did not discover warm springs, but that he discovered that if you cross a donkey with a female horse the result would be a mule. This cannot be verified.
- These same scholars believe that Anah was the illegitimate son produced by an illicit relationship between Zibeon and his mother. This, also, cannot be substantiated.

We know nothing else about him.

In verse 25, the author identified the children of Anah.

The children of Anah: Dishon and Oholibamah daughter of Anah. Genesis 36:25

It appears that Anah had only one son and one daughter. Interestingly, I Chronicles lists only the son, Dishon. Genesis 36:25, however, lists the daughter, Oholibamah, as well. This was intentional. As we indicated in the discussion of verse 24, Oholibamah became the wife of Esau. Aside from this information, it is doubtful if she would have been mentioned.

In verse 26, there is a list of the sons of Dishon.

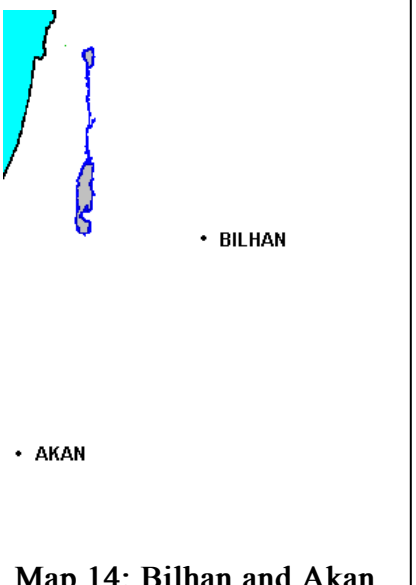
The sons of Dishon: Hemdan, Eshban, Ithran and Keran. Genesis 36:26

The author lists four sons of Dishon: Hemdan, (Chemden in some translations), Eshban, Ithran (Yishran in some translations) and Keran (Cheran in some translations). The list, in I Chronicles 1:41, included the same men and they are also listed in the same order. We know nothing of these men or where they lived.

Verse 27, gives us a list of the sons of Ezer.

The sons of Ezer: Bilhan, Zaavan and Akan. Genesis 36:27

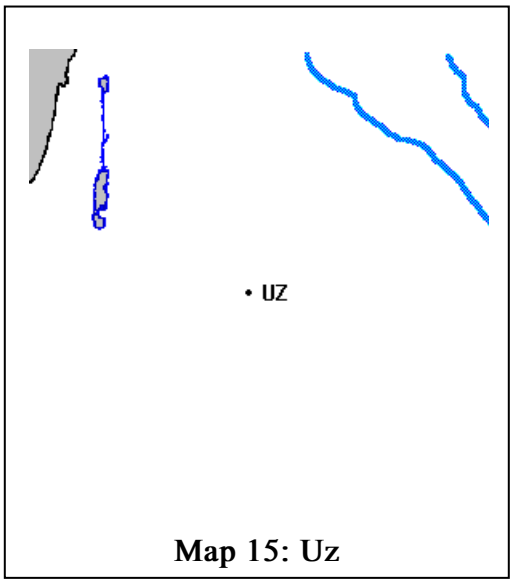
The author identified three sons of Ezer: Bilhan, Zaavan and Akan. I Chronicles 1:42 gives the same list in the same order. We know nothing about Zaavan (Zavan). We understand that Bilhan lived in Mount Seir while Akan lived south east of Kadesh Barnea. Map 14 should clarify these general locations.



Map 14: Bilhan and Akan

Verse 28, lists the sons of Dishan.

The sons of Dishan: Uz and Aran. Genesis 36:28



Map 15: Uz

We should note that some scholars believe that Dishan and Dishon are the same man. We are dealing with speculation, but It seems the evidence is insufficient to conclude that the two names represent one man. The sons of Dishan are listed as Uz and Aran. We have no dependable information on either man. It is thought that Uz lived in an area west of Babylon and east of Mt. Seir. Map 15 should give an impression of his presumed location.

The author then pointed out the political structure of the area.

These were the Horite chiefs: Lotan, Shobal, Zibeon, Anah, Genesis 36:29

If you compare the list of sons and chiefs, you discover some interesting information:

GENESIS 36:20	GENESIS 36:29, 30
Lotan	Lotan
Shobal	Shobal
Zibeon	Zibeon
Anah	Anah
Dishon	Dishon
Ezer	Ezer
Dishan	Dishan

Each of Seir's sons was also the chief of his own tribal group. They are listed in exactly the same order. This suggests that their place of power was commensurate with their place in the birth order.

Genesis 36:31-39 - A Listing of the Kings of Edom

In this paragraph, there is a list of eight kings who reigned in Seir prior to the time of Esau. There is some information, however general, that we can assert.

These were the kings who reigned in Edom before any Israelite king reigned: Genesis 36:31

A question grows out of this paragraph: These are kings over the realm of Seir. All of his sons were tribal chiefs, but none of these kings were sons of Seir. How can we account for this fact? Let us first discover what we can about the eight kings.

We do not know when these kings reigned. Based on verse 31, they reigned prior to the rule of Saul, Israel's first king.

The **first** king of Seir/Edom was identified in the very next verse:

Bela son of Beor became king of Edom. His city was named Dinhabah. Genesis 36:32

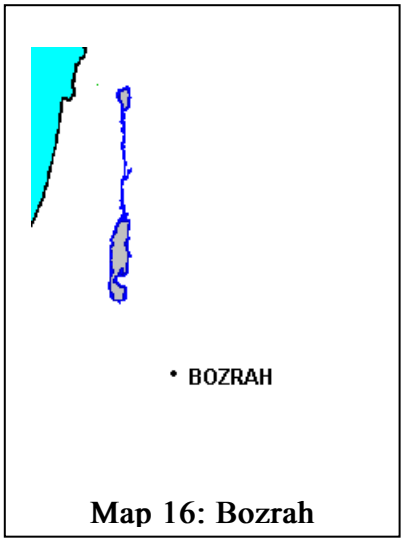
Bela was the first king of this realm. He was the son of Bior. The father's name was Chaldean. We may safely assume that Bela was also of Chaldean origin.

The text also indicates that his royal city was Dinhabah. The location of this city is currently unknown.

The **second** king is described in the following verse.

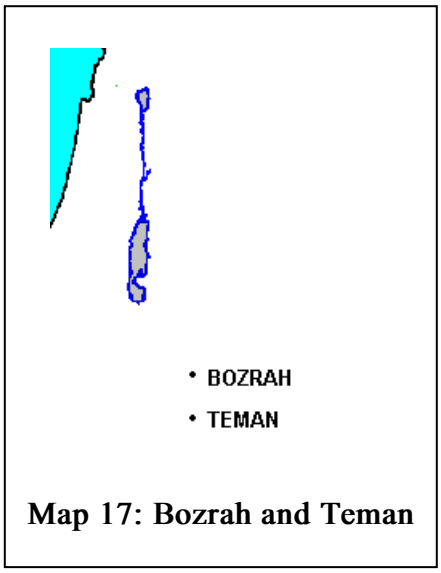
And Bela died, and Jobab the son of Zerah of Bozrah reigned in his stead. Genesis 36:33

Jobab, whose name means "one who howls," was the son of Zerah. Was this Zerah the same as the son of Reuel? He probably was. The text says that the royal city was Bozrah. We can locate this city on Map 16.



Map 16: Bozrah

This city is located about 35 miles south and slightly east of the Dead Sea. The fact that he had Bozrah for his royal city, rather than Dinhabah as Bela had, suggests that the reign of Jobab was not a continuation of the reign of Bela, but a new dynasty. The text does not say, but if our assumptions are true, then this represents a forceful takeover of the land and authority by Jobab.



Map 17: Bozrah and Teman

The **third** king of this wilderness realm was described in the following verse:

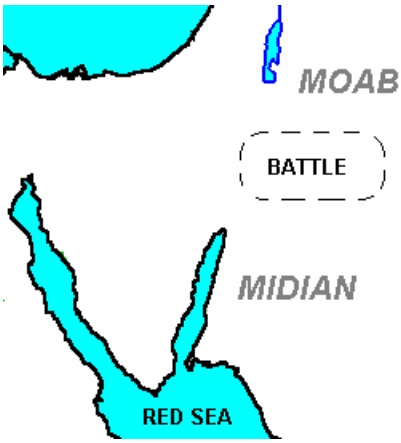
When Jobab died, Husham from the land of the Temanites succeeded him as king. Genesis 36:34

The third king was Husham. The text does not list a royal city for Husham. The text does, however, indicate that Husham was a Temanite. As Map 17 indicates, Teman is about 35 miles south of Bozrah and 65 miles south of the Dead Sea. The text does not place his palace in Teman, but it is a reasonable assumption.

The **fourth** king of Seir was Hadad.

When Husham died, Hadad son of Bedad, who defeated Midian in the country of Moab, succeeded him as king. His city was named Avith. Genesis 36:35

He was the son of Bedad. Verse 35 also uses the phrase "succeeded him as king." In this instance, however, it follows an important battle. The throne was the prize of battle. We know that Hadad won a battle against Midian in Moab. He became king and his royal city was Avith. This city is in Edom, but its exact location is uncertain at this time.



Map 18: The Defeat of Midian in Moab

The scenario changes in the next verse.

When Hadad died, Samlah from Masrekah succeeded him as king. Genesis 36:36

The **fifth** king was Samlah. The change in this transition is found in the wording of the text which says, "Samlah from Masrekah succeeded him as king." In the Hebrew it reads, "Reigned in his place." This can have at least two meanings:

- It can mean that he took the throne from Hadad. This is not too likely.
- It can mean that he succeeded Hadad by design. This seems more realistic.

Though the text does not indicate where Samlah reigned, it appears that he reigned in Avith as Hadad had.

The text also indicates that Samlah came from Masrekah. The location of this city is uncertain at this time.

In the following verse, the **sixth** king, Shaul, is described.

When Samlah died, Shaul from Rehoboth on the river succeeded him as king. Genesis 36:37

The text indicates that Shaul came from Rehoboth on the river. The exact location of this city is uncertain. It was thought, by some scholars, to be located in the Tigris-Euphrates area. If this is true, yet one more foreign king ruled the people of Seir.

The **seventh** king, Baal-hanan, is described in the next verse.

When Shaul died, Baal-Hanan son of Acbor succeeded him as king. Genesis 36:38

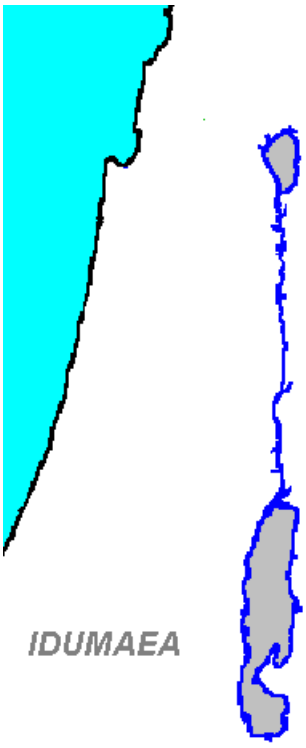
Baal-hanan was the son of Achbor. Unfortunately, we have no further information about Baal-hanan or his father, Achbor, at this time. The following verse repeats the idea that Baal-hanan was the son of Achbor. This is emphasis.

Again the text indicates that Baal-hanan succeeded his predecessor in a peaceful way rather than as a result of victory in battle. This is the same description we saw in verse 36, when Samlah came to power.

The **eighth** king was Hadad.

When Baal-Hanan son of Acbor died, Hadad succeeded him as king. His city was named Pau, and his wife's name was Mehetabel daughter of Matred, the daughter of Me-Zahab. Genesis 36:39

The king claimed Pau as his royal city. This city was located in Idumaea. Map 19 may help with a general location of the royal city. The exact location of Pua is still uncertain.



Map 19: Idumaea

This is the only one of the eight kings whose wife is identified. she was Mehetabel.

We know very little about Mehetabel, Matred or Me-Zahab. In instances where more than one parent is listed in a lineage, it is sometimes an indication of an adulterous or incestuous relationship. We have no other reason to consider this scenario here.

Genesis 36:40-43 - A List of Esau's Chiefs.

Again, without notice, the author shifted the scene. In this brief paragraph, the author tells us nothing about the conquest of Seir by Esau. The paragraph like most of the chapter, is composed of a list. In this list, however, the author described the political design and leadership under Esau.

These were the chiefs descended from Esau, by name, according to their clans and regions: Timna, Alvah, Jetheth, Genesis 36:40

In this, the author has clearly stated that each chief was a descendant of Esau.

It appears that the rule of kings ends with the death of Hadad. When Esau took control of Seir/Edom he divided the whole nation into clans controlled by tribal chieftains.

Esau put his descendants in charge of each of the areas or clans. This creates a problem:

- Some of the people listed are not descendants of Esau. We will point this out as we go.
- Some of these chiefs have feminine names. There is no possible way these chiefs were ruled over by women.

There are some possibilities:

- There could be both a man and a woman with the same name. This has happened elsewhere in Scripture.
- Esau could have named the province after a woman who married into his family. Esau could still put one of his male descendants in charge of the province.

We really do not know how this was handled. The latter possibility seems most plausible.

The author does not identify how Esau divided up the land of Seir under the control of his descendants. Deference would require that the older descendants be assigned their provinces first. These would be among the best areas to be given out.

Observe the political structure as the author described it in Genesis 36:40.

These were the chiefs descended from Esau, by name, according to their clans and regions: Timna, Alvah, Jetheth, Genesis 36:40

Observe that the list is made "by name, according to their clans and regions." This tends to support the idea of naming areas rather than persons.

In Genesis 36:40a, 41 and 42a, the author listed the different provinces which Esau's descendants controlled.

In the last portion of verse 43, the author gave us brief glimpses into the design of Esau's leadership situation. Though these people were chiefs of Edom, they were not descendants of a Jew.

Observe how the author wrote, in verse 43, "according to their settlements." Esau did not drive the people out of Seir. He simply placed his family members over every facet of life in the hill country of Seir or Edom.

The author also spoke of "the land they occupied." Each chief did not conquer his province for himself. The land was conquered and then they occupied it and ruled over it.

By way of emphasis, the author closed this parenthetical chapter reaffirming that it was indeed Esau, the founder of the Edomites, who had taken such control.

Conclusion

The contrast between chapter 35 and 36 is very sharp. Look back over chapter 36. This is not surprising considering the lifestyle of Esau and his lineage.

Chapter 35 is one of the pinnacles of Jacob's relationship with God. In chapter 36, Esau displayed no positive relationship with God at all. It is, therefore, not surprising that this is almost the total information the book gives us about Esau.

There is also a contrast in the political lifestyles between Jacob and Esau described in these chapters. In chapter 35, and the rest of the Jacob narrative, there is a picture of a single clan with each son and his immediate family under the control of the father. This was the model of all their forefathers.

The picture of Esau's lineage, in chapter 36, is different. It is different for at least two reasons:

- The area where Esau's descendants lived was much more barren than where Jacob's family tended their flocks. The barren wilderness in which Esau's family lived, required more distance between herds if they were to survive.
- It takes greater depth of harmony to live in close quarters under a single leader than it does to have each of the sons take his family and live away from the relatives.

It seems that the latter suggestion is the more pertinent reason for the tribal chieftain form of government employed by Esau and his family.

It seems clear that the nature of one's relationship with God has an observable effect upon one's relationship with family and those around us. This suggests that an important ingredient in improving one's family relationships is a serious deepening of one's relationship with God.

Not for sale or resale

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 13

JOSEPH SOLD INTO SLAVERY

GENESIS 37:1 - 36

1. The best manuscripts identify six paragraphs in the thirty-seventh chapter of Genesis. On the table below, write a title of seven words or less for each paragraph.

37:1-4	
37:5-11	
37:12-17	
37:18-24	
37:25-28	
37:29-36	

2. Review chapter titles and paragraph summaries for chapters 35 and 36. Now look at 37:1. What does this review tell you about the author's intentions in this portion of the book?

3. In Genesis 37:1-4, the author described Joseph's report of his brothers' unfortunate conduct in the care of Jacob's flock.
   a. In 37:1, the author pointed out that Jacob lived in the land. What is the significance of this observation?
   b. In Genesis 37:2, the author spoke of "the generations of Jacob." What was he telling us in this verse?
   c. Read 37:3 carefully. Look especially at the words "now" and "because." What is the significance of each of these words?
   d. In Genesis 37:4, there is a cause and effect relationship.
      (1). Identify the cause.
      (2). Identify the effect.
      (3). What is the significance of this?

4. In Genesis 37:5-11, Joseph told his brothers of his dream.
   a. In Genesis 37:5, the author again used the cause and effect relationship. Study it carefully.
      (1). What is the cause.
      (2). What is the effect.
      (3). With only the information we have before us, why would this cause produce this effect?
   b. In Genesis 37:6, 7, Joseph described his dream to his brothers.
      (1). Why would Joseph describe his dream to his brothers?
      (2). There is a surprise in this dream. Identify that surprise.

(3). These dreams are symbolic. Identify the symbolism.

c. In Genesis 37:8, the brothers responded to Joseph's announced dream.
   (1). What was their response?
   (2). There are two parts to the brothers' response.
   (3). What is the difference between them?
   (4). There is a cause and effect relationship in this verse.
      (a). What is/are the cause or causes?
      (b). What is the effect?
      (c). What has the author achieved by relating this episode?

d. In Genesis 37:9, Joseph told his brothers his second dream.
   (1). As we said earlier, dreams are symbolic. Identify the symbolism in this dream.
   (2). There are two surprises in the dream. What are they?

e. In Genesis 37:10, Joseph told his father about his dream.
   (1). Why would he tell his father this dream and not the first one?
   (2). Study the father's reaction. Jacob asked two questions:
      (a). What are they?
      (b). How do they differ?
      (c). Jacob mentions Rachel in his question. How does she figure in this situation?

f. In Genesis 37:11, the author draws a contrast between the response of Jacob and the brothers.
   (1). What is the difference between Jacob's response and that of his sons?
   (2). What did this mean?

5. In Genesis 37:12-17, Jacob sent Joseph to check on his brothers.
   a. Read Genesis 37:2 and then read 37 :12. What did you discover?
   b. In Genesis 37:13, Jacob asked Joseph a question.
      (1). What was the meaning of this question?
      (2). What was the significance of Joseph's answer?
   c. In 37:14, 15, the author described Joseph's attempt to find his brothers. What is the significance of this?
   d. In 37:16, 17, Joseph was told his brothers had gone to Dothan rather than to Shechem. In what way is this significant?

6. In Genesis 37:18-24, the brothers threw Joseph into a pit.
   a. In Genesis 37:18, there is a glimpse into the character of Joseph's brothers. As you read it, what do you see?
   b. In Genesis 37:19, the brothers described Joseph.
      (1). What was their description?
      (2). What does this mean?
      (3). What does this tell you about their relationship?
      (4). What does it tell you about the brothers?
   c. In Genesis 37:20, the brothers suggest a solution to the dilemma they faced concerning Joseph.
      (1). If the brothers killed Joseph, why would they want to throw him into a pit?
      (2). Read the verse again. What does the extensiveness of their planning tell you?

(3). What connection, if any, do you see between the brothers' plans to kill Joseph and the closing statement, "Then we'll see what comes of his dreams"?

d. In Genesis 37:21, 22, Reuben interceded with his brothers on Joseph's behalf.
   (1). Why would Reuben do this?
   (2). How do you explain Reuben's request?
   (3). In what way would Joseph's lot be improved if the brothers listened to Reuben?
   (4). What difference does make whether the brothers laid hands on Joseph?

e. In Genesis 37:23, 24, the author described how the brothers got rid of Joseph.
   (1). List the things the brothers did to Joseph.
      (a). Study this list.
      (b). What can we learn from this study?
   (2). At the close of verse 24, there is an explanation concerning the cistern. In what way does this assist our understanding of the event.

7. In Genesis 37:25-28, the author described the sale of Joseph to the Ishmaelites.
   a. In Genesis 37:25, the author described the materials carried by the Ishmaelite caravan.
      (1). In what way does this help our understanding?
      (2). What difference does it make that the brothers were eating at the time?
   b. In Genesis 37:26, 27, the author described Judah's attempt to get his brothers to sell Joseph.
      (1). Read these verses again, carefully.
      (2). Explain the reasoning Judah presented to his brothers concerning why they should sell Joseph.
      (3). Why was it important for the author to indicate that this was an Ishmaelite caravan?
      (4). According to Judah's speech to his brothers, what was/were his primary concern(s)?
      (5). What did Judah mean, "After all, he is our brother, our own flesh and blood?"
      (6). What can we learn from the closing statement in verse 27, "His brothers agree?"
   c. In Genesis 37:28, the author described the sale of Joseph.
      (1). In verse 25, the author spoke of "an Ishmaelite caravan." In verse 28, he spoke of "Midianite merchants." What is the difference?
      (2). The author indicated that the brothers sold Joseph for "twenty shekels of silver." What is the significance of this?
      (3). Put yourself in Joseph 's position:
         (a). How would you feel when they took away your robe?
         (b). How would you feel when they put you into the "pit?"
         (c). How would you feel when they took you out of the "pit?"
         (d). How would you feel when they sold you as a slave?
      (4). Now put yourself in the place of Joseph's brothers:
         (a). How would you feel when you took away Joseph's robe?
         (b). How would you feel when you threw Joseph into the "pit?"
         (c). How would you feel when you took Joseph out of the "pit?"

(d). How would you feel when you sold Joseph to the Midianites as a slave? (Be honest now!)

8. In Genesis 37:29-36, the brothers deceived Jacob about the disappearance of Joseph.
   a. What is the significance of Reuben tearing his robe in verse 29?
   b. Think carefully about Reuben's statement to his brothers in verse 30. Is this just an emotional outburst? If not, then what was he saying to his brothers?
   c. In Genesis 37:31, 32, the brothers fabricated a report to Jacob concerning Joseph. Study the account very carefully.
      (1). Think of yourself as a judge. On the basis of Genesis 37:31, 32, of what crimes could you convict the brothers?
      (2). Why do you suppose the brothers chose to dip Joseph's robe in blood rather than his undergarment or head-covering?
      (3). Put yourself in the position of the ten brothers as they reported to Jacob. What would be the difference between telling an outright lie and the evasive deception to which they also resorted?
   d. In Genesis 37:33, Jacob recognized Joseph's robe.
      (1). What did Jacob say about it?
      (2). Is there any indication concerning whether Jacob believed this statement or not?
      (3). If you were in Jacob's position, what would you think?
   e. In Genesis 37:34, 35, Jacob responded to the apparent news about Joseph.
      (1). In verse 34, Jacob used three symbols to express the depth of his grief at the apparent death of Joseph.
         (a). Why did he need three symbols?
         (b). What would any two of these express that the third one would not?
      (2). Imagine yourself as one of the brothers trying to comfort Jacob over the death of a son who is not dead. How would you feel?
      (3). What did Jacob mean when he said, "In mourning will I go down to the grave to my son?"
      (4). Was Jacob's statement true?
   f. In Genesis 37:36, the author described the Midianites disposition of Joseph.
      (1). The author speaks of Potiphar, the one who purchased Joseph, as "the captain of the guard." In a Bible Dictionary, Encyclopedia or commentary, check to see what kind of position this was.
      (2). Put yourself in Joseph's position.
         (a). How would you feel about serving as a slave in such a man's home?
         (b). A short time ago you were the inheritor of your father's estate. Everyone in the family would be required to do your bidding. Now you are a slave doing the bidding of your owner or his trusted servant. How would you feel?
   g. Reflect on what this chapter tells us about Joseph's brothers. If you were asked to comment on the quality of their lives, what could you say?

9. After careful study of this chapter, what have you found that will make a difference in the way you view your Christian faith and live your life?

LESSON 13: GENESIS 37:1 - 36

JOSEPH SOLD INTO SLAVERY

Introduction

There are six paragraphs in our best Hebrew manuscripts of Genesis chapter 37. There is a brief summary of these paragraphs on the table which follows:

37:1-4	Joseph Alienates His Half Brothers
37:5-11	Joseph Dreams of the Sheaves
37:12-17	Joseph Sent To Check on Brothers
37:18-24	Brothers Throw Joseph into a Cistern
37:25-28	Brothers Sell Joseph as Slave
37:29-36	Jacob was Deceived About Joseph

Genesis 37:1-4 - Joseph Alienates His Half brothers

We must remember that chapter 36 is a parenthesis in the story. At the end of chapter 35, the author recorded the death of Isaac. Now the author returns to a description of Jacob's life as it leads into the story of Joseph.

> *Jacob lived in the land where his father had stayed, the land of Canaan. Genesis 37:1*

This paragraph begins by giving an overall picture of how Jacob lived. Verse one gives an important contrast. In the parenthesis, chapter 36, Esau and all his descendants lived outside the land of Canaan. In contrast with this, Jacob lived inside the land as his forefathers had. You will remember Abraham's instructions to Eliezer. Under no circumstances was Isaac to leave the land of Canaan. If the bride would not come to Canaan for the wedding, then Eliezer was released from his assignment of securing a bride for Isaac.

In verse one, the author described Canaan as, "The land of his father's sojournings." This is because they were a nomadic people. They lived in tents rather than in houses. They moved as the need for pasture dictated. At no time, however, did they leave the land God had given to their father Abraham.

Verse two sounds as though the author is going to describe the lineage of Jacob as he did Esau.

> *This is the account of Jacob. Joseph, a young man of seventeen, was tending the flocks with his brothers, the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father's wives, and he brought their father a bad report about them. Genesis 37:2*

Throughout the book of Genesis, these words are usually found just prior to a listing of a man's family. This is what you find in chapter 36. For some reason, that does not happen in chapter 37. The words of verse two appear and the author launches into a portrayal of

the life of Joseph, not Jacob. One possible reason for this fact is that the author treats the life of Joseph as **the** lineage of Jacob. This is, in fact, how history will evaluate Jacob's family. Although there were 12 brothers, Joseph was really Jacob's lineage.

The story of Joseph begins when he was 17 years of age. He was already considered a man among the men of his family. He had been a man for at least four years. He was a worker in the family as the other brothers were. In this verse, he served as a shepherd along with his half-brothers.

At this point, the author becomes more specific. He told us that Joseph was a lad, a young man, among the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah. In this sentence, the author has given us some specific information. If you remember, Leah's sons were born first. In desperation to have a child, Rachel gave her servant girl to Jacob to have a child on her behalf. As Leah ceased bearing children, she gave her servant girl to Jacob to have a child on her behalf. These facts suggest that Joseph was working with the youngest of Jacob's other children. All of these young men, however, were older than Joseph.

The event that precipitated the trouble was that Joseph brought an evil report to his father, about his half-brothers. The text does not say, but it appears that Joseph's report was justified.

Certainly the report destroyed already weak relationships within the family. This was not the only factor, however, Each of the boys in the family had a mother different from Joseph. There was a problem of family loyalty that was stacked against Joseph.

Another source of tension, in this scene, was the fact that Joseph was the youngest of eleven brothers. No one took the word of the youngest son seriously. Because of this, the youngest brothers who knew their place, did not disturb the family peace. They tried never to do anything that would criticize or unfavorably evaluate the actions of their older brothers. Joseph ignored this practice to his peril within the family. From the text, it appears that Joseph gave an unfavorable report of his older brothers, the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, not of his oldest brothers, the sons of Leah.

Notice that there is no immediate report of the response to Joseph's unfavorable report. The author instead focuses upon Joseph's relationship with his father, Israel.

> *Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his sons, because he had been born to him in his old age; and he made a richly ornamented robe for him. Genesis 37:3*

The word "now" suggests a change in the direction of the story line. There is such a change, but it does not violate the central idea of the paragraph. The text here sounds as though Jacob loved all his sons but had more of that love for Joseph than for the other 10 boys. In one sense, this is the case, but we must remember that Joseph was no longer his youngest son. Jacob loved his sons and he loved Joseph. Jacob certainly loved Joseph more than the others. Jacob had a relationship with Joseph that was not shared with any of his other sons.

The author suggests a reason for Jacob's unique relationship with Joseph - "because he was the son of his old age." We have adages about the youngest child being spoiled. This is very often true. The author described this situation in very general terms. He has told us this much, but there is more, He will deal with the total picture later.

In this verse, the author also told us that Jacob made "a richly ornamented robe" for Joseph. A "richly ornamented robe" is sometimes understood to mean one that is very ex-

pensive. This is due to the fact that the dye used to color the cloth was very expensive. Since there were several colors, the cost was just that much more.

The "richly ornamented robe" had other features. It was a long robe as opposed to those the rest of the family wore. Only Jacob would wear a robe as that of Joseph. The "richly ornamented robe" had long sleeves. The cuffs of these sleeves hung down eighteen inches or more.

The presentation of this robe was an earth-shaking event in the family. This was because of the significance of the garment. Up until this point, Joseph had been a worker along with his 10 brothers. Only their father Jacob had responsibilities of oversight of the others in the family. Wearing this coat, Joseph could not do physical work. It would get in his way and trip him up. This robe identified him, along with his father, as the ones in the family who provided oversight for all the others. In view of the unimportant position that the younger sons usually held, Joseph had to be in line for terrible relationships with his brothers simply because of his age.

The coat had still another significance. The son who wore the overseer's robe did not do physical work. He was almost always the designated heir of his father. This meant several things. First, it meant that he would get twice the inheritance of the other 10 brothers when Jacob died. This meant that eventually the inheritance for the 12 brothers would be divided into 13 parts and Joseph would get two of them. It also meant that Joseph would take control of the family and everyone in it when their father died. He would be the head of the clan. Again, remember, that he was only 17 years of age. He also had 10 brothers who were all older than he was.

The author described the family response to this situation in verse four.

> *When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him. Genesis 37:4*

In the Hebrew text, the verse begins with the word "and." This word serves as a connective to tie two sentences together. This is a way to emphasize the fact that what the brothers saw was a direct result of what Jacob did - he loved Joseph and gave him the "richly ornamented robe." This convinced the ten brothers that Jacob had a relationship with Joseph that he did not have with them.

The natural result of this was that the brothers hated Joseph. The word "hate" is "sawnay" (שָׂנֵא). This root word means "to hate," "to view as an enemy," "to consider one odious." These are tragic feelings to be experienced between members of a family who are committed to defend one another.

The word "peaceably," on the other hand, is (shawlom) (שָׁלוֹם). It means that the brothers could not speak in a friendly manner to Joseph. They could not wish him health, prosperity and peace. In other words, they could not give him the required greeting that Jews gave each other, and continue to do today.

The way the author constructed verses three and four, is significant. They are a sequence of events and conditions. It looks like this:

Israel loved Joseph more than all his children
and
He made him a richly ornamented robe
and
his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers
and
they hated him
and
they could not speak peaceably to him

There is a connection between Jacob's love for Joseph and his gift of "the richly ornamented robe." In the same way, there is a connection between the facts and the response of the ten brothers.

By the way, the statement about the civil greeting is a negative statement. We need to put the statement in the positive to get the full force of the author's words. Put in a positive way, the statement might read like this: "They spoke to him in an uncivilized manner." The image is quite tragic, but very true.

Genesis 37:5-11 - Joseph Dreams of the Sheaves

Observe the way the paragraph begins:

Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him all the more. Genesis 37:5

In both the Hebrew text and the American Standard Version, the author's use of "and" to begin the sentence again served to tie this paragraph, 37:5-11, to the previous paragraph, 37:1-4. It was the author's way of saying that there is a direct connection between Jacob's love for Joseph, his gift of the richly ornamented robe and Joseph's dream about the sheaves of wheat. In verse five there is a cause and effect relationship that we should note. The cause is clear - Joseph had a dream and told his brothers about it. The effect is just as clear - Joseph's brothers, who hated him already, now hated him even more than they had before.

In verse six, the author described Joseph's description of his dream to his brothers:

He said to them, "Listen to this dream I had: Genesis 37:6

The author does not tell us why Joseph shared this dream with the brothers. Granted, Joseph was young and inexperienced, but it is difficult to understand why Joseph would share this information with his brothers who despised him already.

We must add that one reason he may have shared this information was because it was true. We know that Joseph had the ability to interpret dreams. It is entirely possible, though the text does not say so, that Joseph fully understood and thus responded to the taunts and abuse of his half-brothers by reminding them that this was going to happen whether they liked it or not. This is a reasonable possibility.

Observe the way the author reports the story of Joseph's dream:

We were binding sheaves of grain out in the field when suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright, while your sheaves gathered around mine and bowed down to it." Genesis 37:7

Joseph's description of the dream was quite natural, in one sense. Ever since he became a man, he and his brothers had worked together. It is not surprising that in the dream they were working together. There is, however, one surprise in Joseph's dream. He said that they were binding sheaves of wheat in the field. Now Jacob's family were herdsmen, not farmers. It is doubtful if either Joseph or his brothers had ever bound a sheaf of wheat in their lives. There is a question about why he would have a dream about sheaves because he would not know anything about this trade. It is possible that it could be linked to the fact that grain was the means God used to keep them all alive in Egypt. This, of course, is only conjecture.

Read this verse again. Under the very best conditions, such an announcement would be absolutely devastating to family relationships.

As usual, dreams were symbolic. When Joseph said, "My sheaf arose," he was saying that his sheaf stood upright. This was symbolic language. It is a royal image. A king expresses his authority and stands to make a decree. When he sits down, everyone knows that he is finished.

In contrast to Joseph's sheaf, his brother's sheaves did two symbolic things:

- They gathered around Joseph's sheaf.
- They made obeisance to Joseph's sheaf.

The word "obeisance" is "shawkaw" (סָחָה) which is a primary word meaning "to depress," "to prostrate in homage to royalty or to God."

As you can see, both of these actions are symbolic. The focus is on Joseph as the ruler and on his brothers as the subjects.

Put yourself in the position of Joseph's brothers. This is their little brother. The natural impulse would be anger and resistance. That is exactly what happened. Notice what the brothers said in response to Joseph's description of his dream:

His brothers said to him, "Do you intend to reign over us? Will you actually rule us?" and they hated him all the more because of his dream and what he had said. Genesis 37:8

In this section of the book, the author used a number of different connectives. Each of these gives a definite clue concerning the direction of the story. In the Hebrew text of this verse, he used the word "and." This ties the sentence to the one immediately preceding it. It is a structural way of saying that the brothers' reaction grows out of the content of the dream.

The brothers asked Joseph two parallel questions:

- "Do you intend to reign over us?"
- "Will you actually rule us?"

The word "reign" is "malak" (מָלַח). It is the root word for "reign," "to ascend the throne." The word "dominion" sounds like a word which is synonymous or parallel in meaning to reign. It is "mashal" (מָשַל). It means something that is superior to something or someone else. It is a way for the brothers to say, "Do you think you are better than we

are?" The results are exactly the same no matter how you translate the words. The brothers had two problems with Joseph ruling over them:

- **He was younger than they were**. This should have given them the position of rule over him in their eyes.
- **He was the son of "the other wife" whom their father loved best**. The element of jealousy was very strong within this family.

The natural result of it all was that his dreams and the things he said caused the brothers to hate Joseph even more than they had before.

The next verse is a continuation of the declining family relationships.

> *Then he had another dream, and he told it to his brothers. "Listen," he said, "I had another dream, and this time the sun and moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me." Genesis 37:9*

Again, in the Hebrew text, the author begins the sentence with the word "and." It is a way of saying, "this is going to be more of the same."

The text does not give a reason, but in spite of the fact that relating his previous dream earned Joseph a deeper hatred from his brothers, he still related the second dream to them. The author reported that Joseph told both his father and his brothers. The dream, this time, was different. In this dream, the sun, moon and eleven stars made obeisance to him. The word "obeisance" is interesting. It is the same word he used in the previous dream, in Genesis 37:7. It is "shawkaw" (שָׁכָה) and means "to prostrate humbly before God or some great person." The import of this could not escape his family.

This dream was also symbolic. From our position, we can understand the eleven stars. When Joseph came to power, he had eleven brothers. It is reasonable to assume that the sun represents his father Jacob. If this is true, then the moon represents his mother Rachel. This is my assumption, but it is not based upon biblical statements.

Joseph's use of this dream was different.

> *When he told his father as well as his brothers, his father rebuked him and said, "What is this dream you had? Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow down to the ground before you?" Genesis 37:10*

This verse is one more in a long series of events in Joseph's life. Observe that this time Joseph told his father, as well as his brothers, about his dream. The text does not explain this change. We are reminded that Joseph had the ability to interpret dreams. It seems certain that he understood what his dream was about.

If the sun, in this dream, was Jacob, **then** it explains why Joseph told his father as well as his brothers. I believe that this scenario is true.

The author indicated that Jacob "rebuked" Joseph. The word for "rebuke" is "gawar" (גָּעַר). It is a strong root word which means "to chide," "to reprove" or "rebuke." It carries the intent of scolding a person severely for inappropriate conduct. This makes it clear that Jacob did not agree with Joseph's conduct or ideas.

There is also an element of ridicule in the response of Jacob. He said, "What is this dream that you have dreamed?" It is a question, but it is not a request for information. It is a way to express intense displeasure without using unpleasant words.

Jacob's second question serves a different purpose. Again, Jacob asked a question, but it also is not a request for information. By repeating the sense of Joseph's announcement in question form, Jacob expressed his distress that Joseph would even think such a thing. There is no record of whether Joseph answered his father's questions or not. The silence of the text suggests that he did not answer him.

Joseph's brothers, however, responded differently.

> *His brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the matter in mind. Genesis 37:11*

The author draws a serious contrast between the ongoing response of the brothers and that of Jacob. Notice the difference between the two responses.

- **Brothers** - They "were jealous" of Joseph - The word for "jealous" is "qana" (קָנָא). This word means to be zealous in a bad sense. It is to be envious, to desire to take something from someone else. (a richly ornamented robe, for instance) It is to be extremely zealous in this envy, this desire to take something away from someone else.
- **Father** - He kept Joseph's statement in mind. The word "kept" or "observed" is "shawmar" (שָׁמַר) and means "to build a hedge around." It is to guard, to take careful heed of, to observe carefully. Jacob took special care to remember, to never forget what Joseph had said. He wanted to be careful to remember the words so that he could see if, in fact, they came to pass.

There is a substantial difference between the brothers' studied, practiced envy on the one hand and Jacob's great care to remember on the other. One expresses a great desire to do harm, while the other, though not be happy with Joseph's announcement, is working to remember so as to verify or nullify the statement at a later date. The distress within Jacob's family was almost beyond description.

Genesis 37:12-17 - Joseph was Sent to Check on His Brothers

There is a very obvious contrast between 37:12 and 37:2. Notice what the author said:

> *Now his brothers had gone to graze their father's flocks near Shechem. Genesis 37:12*

In Genesis 37:2, Joseph and his brothers were feeding Jacob's flock together. In 37:12, however, Joseph's brothers were feeding Jacob's flock in Shechem. Joseph was not with them. He had received the richly ornamented robe, the overseer's coat, so he stayed home with Jacob. This could not improve the family relationships any more than the dreams did. Interestingly, the author makes no comment about the effect of this information.

In the next verse, the author gives us a glimpse of the working relationship between Jacob and Joseph.

> *And Israel said to Joseph, "As you know, your brothers are grazing the flocks near Shechem. Come, I am going to send you to them." "Very well," he replied. Genesis 37:13*

In the Hebrew text as well as the American Standard Version, this verse is presented as a question. Jacob's question to Joseph is another example of a question that does not seek an

answer. It is a Jewish way of making a statement. Jacob knew his sons went to Shechem. The question was Jacob's way of saying, "Your brothers are feeding the flock in Shechem."

Jacob said, "Come, I will send you to them." In this command, Jacob made it clear that he was still in command of the family even though he had designated Joseph as his heir.

Joseph's answer to Jacob was equally telling. He said, in the Hebrew text, "Here I am." This was the servant's response to the instructions of his owner. This answer immediately establishes a contrast between the responses of Joseph to his father and those of his brothers with their father.

Jacob sent Joseph to see how his brothers were doing with the flock.

> *So he said to him, "Go and see if all is well with your brothers and with the flocks, and bring word back to me." So he sent him off from the Valley of Hebron. Genesis 37:14*

This verse also begins with the word "and" in the Hebrew. That identifies it as one in a long sequence of events. In this paragraph, Jacob gave Joseph some instructions to carry out. Jacob was in the vale or valley of Hebron at the time of this encounter. He sent Joseph to see his brothers who were supposed to be in Shechem. Joseph went to Schechem, but did not find his brothers.

> *A man found him wandering around in the fields and asked him, "What are you looking for?" Genesis 37:15*

The wording of this verse suggests that Joseph may have been in an area where he had never been before. This, however, is conjecture. The text says that a man found him. This could suggest that he was lost. The word "found" is "matsah" (מָצָא). This root word means "to come to," "to come upon," "to acquire," or "to appear." The context in the verse suggests that while Joseph wandered thorough the area, this man came on the scene.

The wording of the text is interesting. Notice how Joseph conducts himself in this situation.

> *He replied, "I'm looking for my brothers. Can you tell me where they are grazing their flocks?" Genesis 37:16*

Joseph appears to be searching for his brothers in unfamiliar territory. The way Joseph is searching for his brothers causes us to wonder if he was surprised that they were not where he expected them to be. We will say more about this later.

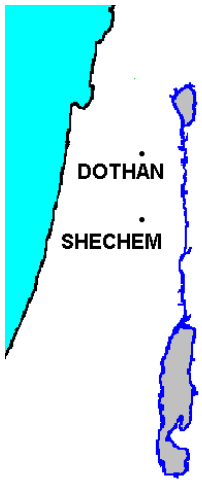
The man Joseph encountered gave him some very important information. He said:

> *"They have moved on from here," the man answered. "I heard them say, 'Let's go to Dothan.'" So Joseph went after his brothers and found them near Dothan. Genesis 37:17*

The man told Joseph that he heard the brothers say, "Let us go to Dothan." That is where Joseph found his brothers. There is some information we need to highlight. In that day, we would seldom, if ever, hear of a shepherd in the company of anyone other than the shepherds with whom he worked. Being a shepherd seems easy, but it was not. It is very draining work. When one was not working he was asleep. There was really no time for

socializing. In is possible that this man met Joseph's brothers in the field while they were carefully tending their flock. The tenor of the passage does not fully support that possibility. Though the text does not say so directly, it appears reasonable to assume that the brothers were spending some time socializing that could have been well spent caring for the sheep.

The second surprise in this verse has to do with what the man heard them say. In the care of sheep, shepherds would go toward or in the direction of a given place, but they seldom if ever went **to** a city. They followed their herd as the need for food dictated. The third surprise about this is that the brothers told anyone where they were going. A person could see a flock going in a certain direction, but that would not necessarily tell where the shepherds were going. The danger of theft and bodily harm was so great that shepherds would do almost anything rather than identify their destination. In this case, that appears to have been violated. At best, this indicates that the brothers may have been careless about letting others know where they were going. At worst, it could mean that they may have spent too much time away from the sheep and under the pressure of too much to drink identified their destination.



Map 20: Dothan and Shechem

The fourth surprise in this verse is the destination itself. It is clear that Joseph expected to find his brothers at Shechem. As you can see on Map 20, Dothan was at least 20 miles beyond Shechem.

The text does not raise a question about this, but perhaps it should. They were expected to be near Shechem, which was already a considerable distance to make the sheep walk. To go at least 20 miles each way farther would not be wise at all. The text does not tell us why the brothers were so far from the place they should have been. We will say more about that shortly.

Notice also that the text says that Joseph found his brothers "**in** Dothan." We do not know just how literally to take this statement. Does "in Dothan" mean inside the city limits? I doubt that. Could it also mean **near** Dothan? If that is the situation, and I believe that it is, then Joseph found his brothers in a very compromised situation, which they would not want to have to explain to their father.

Genesis 37:18-24 - Brothers Throw Joseph into Cistern

Whatever the situation was, Joseph did not totally surprise his brothers. They saw him coming. This suggests that at least some of the brothers were watching the sheep when Joseph arrived. Notice their reaction:

> *But they saw him in the distance, and before he reached them, they plotted to kill him. Genesis 37:18*

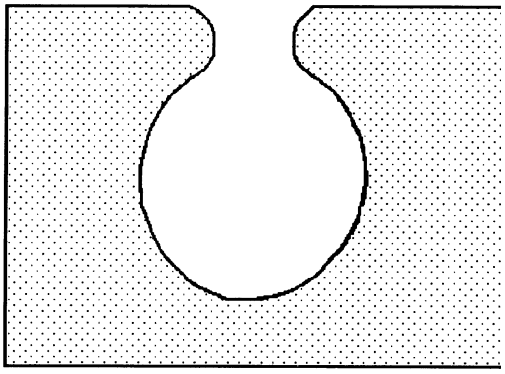
The brothers saw Joseph a long way off. The text does not say how they knew it was Joseph at such a distance. Could they tell by his richly ornamented robe? Could they tell by the way he looked? By the way he walked? We really do not know. We do know how it affected them. The text says that they conspired against him to slay him. Their hatred of Joseph would have been enough to cause them to do this. It appears, however, that there was another possible reason for their plot. They were a long way from where their father thought they were. They may well have been afraid that Joseph would tell their father, again, and felt that they had to do away with him in order to keep him from telling their father, Jacob. The text does not say this, but it is an interesting possibility. The extent of their bitterness is evident in the next verse:

> *"Here comes that dreamer!" they said to each other. Genesis 37:19*

When anger and hatred reach their apex, they turn to sarcasm and ridicule. They no longer called him their "brother," or "Joseph." He was now sarcastically called, "the master of dreams." This was mockery of the worst kind. Their hatred of Joseph was about as bad as it could get. The overflow of their bitterness was not yet spent. Notice what else they said:

> *"Come now, let's kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns and say that a ferocious animal devoured him. Then we'll see what comes of his dreams." Genesis 37:20*

It was clear that they planned to kill Joseph. Dothan was an area with a considerable amount of rain. To capitalize on this available water, the people of the area dug cisterns, which some translations call "pits." This was a hole carved in the bedrock and plastered inside so as not to lose the water that was channeled into it. The cistern was shaped like this:



Drawing 1: The shape of a Cistern

These cisterns were very deep. Anyone who was lowered into it or fell into it could not get out without assistance with a rope or ladder. Their plan for Joseph had three steps:

- **Kill him**
- **Throw him into a cistern** - There were three potential causes of death in the cisterns - Starvation, drowning and being poisoned by snakes and scorpions.
- **Lie** - say an evil beast devoured him. The term "evil" is "Rawah" (רָעַע) and means "to break in pieces." It was a beast that would totally destroy by mangling the body.

They concluded their plan by making an arrogant reference to Joseph. We need to look carefully at their slur. It was God who gave Joseph the dream. Now the brothers were talking triumphantly about God's dream in terms of ridicule and not respect. Though it was said in mockery, they were claiming power greater than the dream or its originator.

There is a contrast in the next verse.

When Reuben heard this, he tried to rescue him from their hands. "Let's not take his life," he said. Genesis 37:21

We have just read of the bitter hatred of the brothers and their desire to kill Joseph and ridicule his faith. In the very next verse Reuben is trying to find a way to save Joseph's life. The tragedy of this verse is Reuben's approach. He planned to save Joseph by subterfuge. Reuben was the oldest son. If he had even an average amount of courage he could have instructed his brothers to stop that plan and they would have to obey him.

Lacking that strength, Reuben **persuaded** them not to kill Joseph. This suggests that their talk about killing Joseph was not idle chatter. They meant it.

In this verse, the word "deliver" is "shoob" (שׁוּב) and literally means to "turn back," to "turn away." In this instance, it means to rescue or to restore. Though Reuben did not have the strength to take a stand as the eldest brother, still he did what he could . He devised a plan to rescue Joseph from the fatal plans of the other brothers. Reuben pleaded with his brothers not to kill Joseph.

Verse 21 tells what Reuben asked the brothers not to do. Verse 22, however, contains his suggestion of what they should do.

"Don't shed any blood. Throw him into this cistern here in the desert,, but don't lay a hand on him." Genesis 37:22

Reuben suggested that they throw Joseph into a cistern. If Reuben meant what he said, that would have been a horrible way for Joseph to die. He would have died a slow death of starvation and dehydration, drowning or being poisoned by snakes or scorpions.

It sounds as though Reuben was concerned lest his brothers be guilty of murder. If they put Joseph into the cistern to die, they would have been just as guilty. It is interesting, in the closing chapters of Genesis, when Jacob blessed his sons, he did not praise Reuben for trying to save Joseph, but Judah.

The last phrase in the verse begins with the words "in order to..." This tells us that the author is going to give us a reason for the things immediately preceding the word. The author said,:"... in order to deliver him out of their hands." At least in part, Reuben was motivated by a desire to protect the life of Joseph; to keep his brothers from committing murder. The other side, however, is that Reuben was the son most offended by Joseph's dreams and his reception of the overseer's coat. His potential for hatred had to be as high as anyone else's. **If** he really wanted to protect Joseph's life, **then** it would have to be because he wanted to protect himself against his father's anger.

Joseph had to be surprised by the treatment he received.

So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe - the richly ornamented robe he was wearing - and they took him and threw him into the cistern. Now the cistern was empty; there was no water in it. Genesis 37:23, 24

Observe that the first thing the brothers did was to strip Joseph of his coat, the coat of many colors. The word "stripped" is "pashat" (פָּשַׁט) and means "to plunder in a most hostile way," "to spoil," "to rip off an enemies' clothes."

It was as though they could remove Joseph's authority by removing his coat, the badge of his authority.

These two verses are part of the same sentence. Notice the list of things they did to Joseph:

- They stripped off his coat
- They took him - this appears to mean he was taken forcibly
- They threw him into a pit

The word "cast" is "shawlak" (שָׁלַךְ) and means "to literally throw out," "to hurl something away like garbage." It conveys the idea that Joseph was unceremoniously thrown into this cistern in spite of the fact that it was carved out of stone. It is doubtful if he broke any bones, but it is surprising that he did not. This was quite a violent reception for Joseph, one who had really done nothing to them.

The author concludes verse 24 with an explanation - "the pit was empty, and there was no water in it." This information tells us two things:

- There was no danger of Joseph drowning because of water that had been left in the pit.
- The fact that the cistern was dry tells us the time of year. It is after summer, but before the rainy season, which is January through March. That would be the only time a cistern would be completely dry.

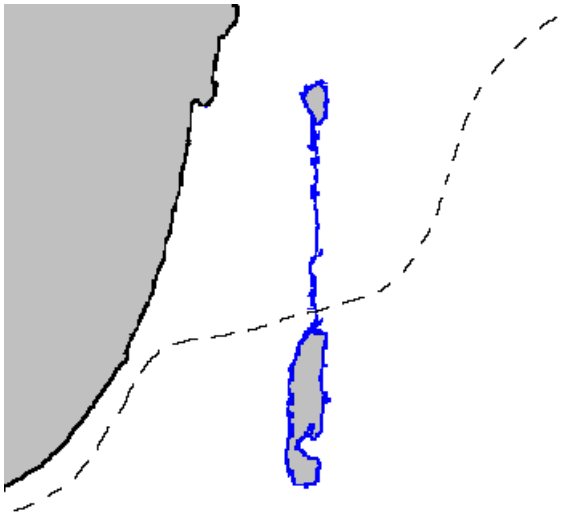
It is hard to imagine how much they had to hate Joseph in order to allow themselves to do this.

Genesis 37:25-28 - Brothers Sell Joseph as a Slave

As we look at the conduct of the brothers, there appears to be a deep callousness in this verse:

> *As they sat down to eat their meal, they looked up and saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead. Their camels were loaded with spices, balm and Myrrh, and they were on their way to take them down to Egypt. Genesis 37:25*

In verse 24, the brothers threw their brother Joseph unceremoniously into a cistern, which act could easily have broken an arm or leg, and left him there to die of starvation and dehydration. In verse 25, they immediately sat down to eat. That is a depth of hatred that is hard to imagine.



Map 21: Ishmaelite Caravan Route

While they were eating, they noticed a caravan of Ishmaelites. This caravan was carrying expensive wares. The list of things gives us a clue of the origin of these items:

- Spices or tragacanth, storax from northern Palestine
- Balm from Gilead
- Myrrh or Ladanium from Arabia

The text does not say that these descendants of Ishmael had brought these items from their places of origin. They may have done so. It is more probable that they purchased these items in what is now Northern Syria and brought them south and west from there. You can see a possible route of their travels on Map 21. It is the dotted line.

There is a surprising turn of events in the story which the author intended to be a shock for us.

> *Judah said to his brothers, "What will we gain if we kill our brother and cover the blood? Come, let's sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him; after all, he is our brother, our own flesh and blood." His brothers agreed. Genesis 37:26–27*

Perhaps you will remember, this was the same reasoning used by Reuben earlier in this chapter. Judah, the fourth son of Jacob by Leah, made a most unusual suggestion. He urged the brothers not to kill Joseph - there would be no profit in that. He suggested that they sell him to the Ishmaelites. They would then at least get a little money and not have the guilt of murder on their hands. This was shocking. Judah was willing to sell his brother in order to get a little more than one piece of silver for each brother. That is a picture of callousness not seen before in Genesis. There is also deceit here. He said, "Let not our hands be upon him." That might ease their consciences, but there is a problem with his suggestion. In the normal course of events, a slave could be expected to life an average of two years. Whether sold as a slave or left in the pit, the brothers were condemning Joseph to what they knew was certain death. Judah was guilty of false concern "... for he is our brother, our flesh." This false concern, the pretense that they wouldn't want to harm their own flesh and blood, is sickening. Joseph would be just as dead if he starved to death in the cistern or died of abuse as a slave.

To make matters worse, Judah suggested that they sell Joseph, a Jew, to an Ishmaelite. Jews would not even talk to an Ishmaelite if they could avoid it. They would certainly not sell a Jew to their half-cousins, the Ishmaelites. On the other side, the Ishmaelites would be thrilled to buy a Jew to sell as a slave. To make matters still worse, the Ishmaelites were headed for Egypt. Joseph would certainly be sold there. The Egyptians despised the Jews. You may remember an event in the story of Joseph. When he ate with his brothers, the Egyptians sat at a separate table because it was not permissible for them to eat with a Jew. This is what Judah recommended as Joseph's future out of concern for his flesh and blood. It is obvious that Judah placed profit ahead of his brother's welfare. He was willing for Joseph to die in order to gain a little profit.

We must remember that what Judah proposed, the brothers agreed to do. They were no better than he was. They were just as greedy; just as guilty.

Verse 28 sounds different, but it is not.

So when the Midianite merchants came by, his brothers pulled Joseph up out of the cistern and sold him for twenty shekels of silver to the Ishmaelites, who took him to Egypt. Genesis 37:28

In verse 25, the author spoke of an Ishmaelite caravan. Now in verse 28, he spoke of a "Midianite caravan." These Midianites, were, in fact, descendants of Ishmael.

The author refers to these Midianites as "merchant-men." The word is "sawkar" (סָחַר) which means "to travel around as a peddler. " These men, though distant relatives, had nearly as bad a reputation as the shepherds.

There is an indication that the brothers removed Joseph from the pit. Notice the way it is written, "they drew and lifted up Joseph out of the pit." The word "draw" is "mawshak" (מָשַׁךְ) and means "to draw out" probably by means of a rope or even by his "richly ornamented robe."

It also says that the brothers lifted Joseph up. The word "lifted" is "alaw" (עָלָה). It literally means "to ascend." In this sentence, it means "to go up quickly."

The author concluded the paragraph by saying that they sold Joseph for **twenty** pieces of silver. There is irony in this information. A slave was sold for 30 pieces of silver. The price the brothers received was less than wholesale. It tells you how eager they were to sell him and get the money.

The Ishmaelites took Joseph to Egypt to sell him there. It appears that this means that he was sold at the slave market which they had in every large city.

Put yourself in Joseph's position. You came to see how your brothers were doing. When you arrive, they immediately take away your "richly ornamented robe," your badge of authority, and throw you into a cistern. You know that there is no way you could get out without assistance. If someone does not rescue you, a slow, inch-by-inch death awaits you. Suddenly they lift you out of the cistern and your hope rises. These are quickly dashed as they bargain with the despised Ishmaelites, your bad relatives, over the price they would pay for you as a slave. This morning you were the overseer of your father's household. Tonight you are a slave, bound for one of the worst places in the world to be a slave, Egypt. The shock, disbelief, fear and confusion of these fast-moving events would be mind-boggling to say the least.

Now, look at these experiences from the brothers' point of view. You are in a place you have no business to be. You are doing things which would make your father very angry if he knew about them. The level of your care of the flock could hardly be worse. Who cares?! Father is not here; he does not know; he could never find out.

Suddenly your little half-brother shows up. You are caught! He now knows everything. He told your father before when you didn't work properly. Now he has been named overseer of the family. There is no doubt he will tell on us again. He thinks he is so much better than we are. Besides, he is the son of that other wife. Our mother is Jacob's real wife. We do not understand why Jacob loves our mother less. Joseph says nasty things about us bowing down to him. Take that coat of authority away from him. "Now how will you make us bow down.?" Let's get rid of him. Better yet, let's make a profit and sell him as a slave. Then he can learn to bow down in the way he wants us to do. Master of dreams, enjoy your slavery in Egypt. I believe this is a realistic impression of what the brothers thought and said. It only lacks some foul jibes and nasty name calling that would go along with it all.

Genesis 37:29-36 - Jacob Was Deceived About Joseph

For some reason, Reuben seems to have been absent when Joseph was sold into slavery. Reuben was serious about releasing Joseph from the cistern. Notice how the author described the situation:

> *When Reuben returned to the cistern and saw that Joseph was not there, he tore his clothes. Genesis 37:29*

When he returned to help Joseph out of the cistern, the brother was not there. The text says that Reuben tore his clothes. This was their way of expressing uncontrollable sorrow. This expression was saved for the worst tragedies of life. In Reuben's mind, this certainly qualified. The trauma that he felt was beyond description. We will say more about the torn garments later.

There seems to be some confusion in the next verse.

> *He went back to his brothers and said, "The boy isn't there! Where can I turn now?" Genesis 37:30*

If Reuben told his brothers that Joseph was not in the cistern, they would wonder why he went to check on the dreamer. Nevertheless, that is what he did.

This seems like a strange action for Reuben, but he was trapped. He devised a scheme to save Joseph and himself without confrontation with his brothers. The plan appeared to back-fire. He had to ask the brothers what had happened. He was the oldest son and as such was responsible for what the others did when he was present.

Reuben presented his problem to his brothers. When he said, "The boy isn't there! Where can I turn now?" In effect, he was saying that he could not go home without Joseph, but could not find him. Now it was everyone's problem.

They solved it in a way that fit their character:

> *Then they got Joseph's robe, slaughtered a goat and dipped the robe in the blood. They took the ornamented robe back to their father and said, "We found this. Examine it to see whether it is your son's robe." Genesis 37:31, 32*

This is a case of premeditated, practiced deception. They never said Joseph was dead. They created a situation where it would appear that this was the only possible conclusion. Again, the brothers never said the blood on the coat was Joseph's. They didn't even say the coat was his. They lied and said that they had found the coat. Well, they did find it, but it was on Joseph's back when they found it. In fact, they asked Jacob if this was Joseph's coat. This is another instance of deception. They had to pretend that they did not know if it belonged to Joseph or not. They did know.

Observe the way they asked Jacob the question: "We found this. Examine it to see whether it is **your son's** robe." It reminds one of the older son in the parable of the Prodigal Son. The self-righteous, older brother referred to the prodigal as "that son of yours" rather than "my brother." The other 10 brothers of Jacob referred to Joseph as "your son's coat" rather than "our brother's coat." It gives you yet another insight into the family relationship. One must ask the question, Why did the brothers dip the coat in blood rather than dipping Joseph's undergarment or his head-covering? It appears that this was their way of showing Jacob the great contempt they had for the fact that he had given this honor

to their younger brother, the son of that other woman, rather than the eldest son of his first wife.

An important piece of information is missing from this story. We wonder what conversation transpired leading up to the brothers' deception. The text is silent. Again, I believe that a conservative, holy imagination can be helpful here.

When Joseph did not return, Jacob would be very concerned. When the brothers returned and Joseph still had not returned, Jacob would certainly be very alarmed. He would ask them direct questions about Joseph. He would certainly ask them, "Did you see Joseph?" It is possible the brothers could get away with a deflecting question like, "Did you send Joseph out to see us?" Or they could have said, "Were we supposed to see him? We didn't know he was coming." Jacob's level of tension over Joseph's absence would be too high to risk evasive action at this point. It appears that they told an outright lie - "We never saw him." At this point, one more lie or deception wouldn't seem to make much difference to them. They had a lot to hide. They were determined to keep this information from their father.

> *He recognized it and said, "It is my son's robe! Some ferocious animal has devoured him. Joseph has surely been torn to pieces." Genesis 37:33*

The author does not tell us whether Jacob believed his sons or not. It appears that at the time he saw the richly ornamented robe, he was too overcome with grief to ask intelligent questions.

The text said, "He recognized it." The word "recognized" is "nawkar" (נָכַר) which suggests "to scrutinize" or "to look intently at something." The word implies two things:

- There is recognition
- There is suspicion

This information suggests that Jacob recognized the coat at once but was quite suspicious about the details surrounding Joseph's disappearance. Jacob knew how much his other sons hated Joseph. He knew that there was no great sense of loss on their part whether they pretended great sorrow or not. Still, Jacob was overcome with his own sense of loss, at least for the time being.

Jacob's answer was as tragic as it was true - "It is my son's coat." He immediately jumped to two conclusions:

- An evil beast devoured him. The word "evil" comes from "rawah" (רָעַע) and can mean "to spoil" or "break in pieces." It is exactly the same word, however, that is used in Genesis 2:9 where the author described the tree of the knowledge of good and **evil**. In this instance, we understand it to refer to an animal, like a lion, which is ferocious and powerful. It is interesting that in 37:20, when the sons were plotting the death of Joseph, they decided to suggest this to Jacob. Did they do that? We can only wonder, but it is plausible.
- Joseph is, without doubt, torn in pieces.

The depths of Jacob's sorrow cannot be overdrawn. Notice how the author described it:

> *Then Jacob tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and mourned for his son many days. All his sons and daughters came to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted.*

"No" he said, "In mourning will I go down to the grave to my son." So his father wept for him. Genesis 37:34, 35

The Jewish people are emotional and symbolic about life. Their expressions of sorrow are a case in point. The author lists the things Jacob did when he was convinced Joseph was dead:

- He tore his garments. This practice continued even in the time of Jesus. When Jesus admitted to being the Son of God, the High Priest, Caiaphas, tore his garment in rage.
- He put on sackcloth
- He mourned for his son several days.

The tearing of his outer garment was a symbol of intense pain, grief and shame. It is interesting that just as the meaning of peace is to be whole, so the tearing of the garment, so that it can never be whole again, is a symbol of grief, the absence of peace. The extent of Jacob's grief is demonstrated by the fact that he tore both his outer garment as well as the soft, comfortable inner-garment.

In the place of this soft , very comfortable inner garment, Jacob wore the infamous "sackcloth." This was a garment, often called a "hair-shirt" made of goat hair. It is very stiff and most uncomfortable. Because of this, every movement of Jacob's body was uncomfortable and even painful on occasion. It was a constant reminder of the greatness of his loss.

The mourning the loss of his son for several days was common whenever such loss was experienced. This expression of sorrow was affected by the two previous symbols of grief. Together, they give an impressive picture of just how painfully Jacob took the apparent loss of his favorite son.

In the American culture, we do not have a real concept of mourning. When a person dies, others think of the family as being in mourning until the time of the funeral, but not much after that. This does not mean that they do not grieve. It simply means that there is no formal time of mourning that is recognized. Many European countries have an official time of mourning. A person who has lost their spouse in death will be in **official** mourning for at least a year and many will wear black clothes for the rest of their lives to signal that they are in mourning. The text describes Jacob's mourning for Joseph as "many days," but it is not more specific than that. We have no way to be sure, but it appears to be a much longer than the text suggests.

During the official time of mourning, it was expected that close family members, sons and daughters, would make every effort to comfort the one who was grieving. The author indicated, in verse 35, that this was done. The word "comfort" is "nacham" (נָחַם) which literally means "to breathe strongly," it is "to sigh", it is a deep expression of sorrow. It is an attempt to console one whose sorrow is beyond control.

In most instances, those attempts to comfort the bereaved were accepted. In extreme cases, the mourner would refuse to be comforted. The word refused is "maheen" (מָאֵן) which means "to utterly refuse." Jacob's grief, obviously, was of this nature. This should not be construed as stubborn refusal to be comforted. It is grief so intense that the grieving one cannot be comforted. This was the case with Jacob.

Notice the way Jacob responded to the comforting of his sons and daughters. "In mourning will I go down to the grave to my son." Jacob spoke of "sheol." This was the Jewish concept of death and burial, Some Jews thought of the grave as one of the levels of gehinnom - the abode of spirits. They believed that burial - going to be with their forefathers - was a foretaste of what they expected eternity to be.

Jacob was saying I will mourn until I die and then I will join my son Joseph. Jacob may indeed have mourned for many years, but not until the time he died. Within 20 years, Jacob discovered that Joseph was alive and spent a significant amount of time with him in Egypt.

The author concluded this sentence saying, "And his father wept for him." This is one additional illustration of the extent of Jacob's grief. He could hardly suffer greater sorrow than he did.

The final sentence in the paragraph shifts the focus away from Jacob's grief and looks at Joseph.

> *Meanwhile the Midianites sold Joseph in Egypt to Potiphar, one of Pharoah's officials, the captain of the guard. 37:36*

It was a foredrawn conclusion that the Midianites would sell Joseph as a slave as soon as they reached Egypt. The author's report sounds quite casual and matter-of-fact. It was not. This was a shocking statement. The shock has to do with the nature of Potiphar's position. The text speaks of him as "captain of the guard." He was that. This title had some interesting overtones. He was the one responsible for the prison where political prisoners were kept. Because of this, he was also the chief executioner of the realm. He did not necessarily carry out the executions, but he was the officer in charge when such a punishment was carried out. It is not surprising that his residence was on the prison grounds. The person who held this position was fiercely loyal to the Pharaoh. Because of this, his favor was vigorously sought and his power greatly feared. Slaves would be frightened to be purchased by this man. He would be known to have no concept of mercy, even in his home or personal life.

If you were Joseph, you would soon learn how unfortunate you were to have been purchased by this man to whom mercy was a foreign word.

This chapter is a vivid illustration of just how degraded people can become. It is difficult to imagine one human being selling another human being into slavery. History assures us that, in fact, this has happened in almost every era in one way or another. America's history is clouded by the fact that many thousands of slaves were brought here under conditions more animal than human. The idea that a human being could sell a member of his own family into slavery is just more than the mind can encompass. Still, this is what Joseph's brothers did.

We must remember that this is basically the only mark, a hideous one, that these brothers would leave on the history of mankind. True, their names were on the breastplate of the high priest, but that was more symbol than reality. As the tendency of fire is to go out, so the tragic history of mankind is toward degradation and not toward improvement.

Conclusion

Reflecting over chapter 37, it appears that the brothers were searching for ways to deal in greater decadence. If we look carefully at our own times, the conditions are not markedly different. We wonder if it is possible for human beings to stoop lower than they have. The evening news will reveal that it is much more than possible.

An important observation in this chapter has to do with Joseph. The author reports how Jacob responded to the tragedies he encountered. The writer gives a detailed picture of the way the brothers responded and planned their deception. There is not a word, not a hint as to the way Joseph responded to their atrocities. It appears Joseph was able to keep his counsel, to wait upon God rather than to react to his brothers evil.

As difficult as this may be, there is a message here for us. The trial of our faith will come. In the midst of abuses we may not deserve, we can hold our counsel, lean upon God. In the end, Joseph was exonerated. We will be as well. Righteousness always wins, in the end. The difficult part is waiting for God's time to demonstrate the righteousness He has created in us.

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QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 14

TAMAR EXPOSES JUDAH

GENESIS 38:1 - 30

1. There are three paragraphs in our best documents of Genesis 38. Read each paragraph carefully. On the table below, write a title of seven words or less for each paragraph.

38:1-11	
38:12-23	
38:24-30	

2. In Genesis 38:1-11, the author covers several years in the life of Judah's family.
   a. In Genesis 38:1, Judah left his brothers and went to visit his friend Hirah. This innocent sounding report contains a problem. Please identify the problem.
   b. In Genesis 38:2, Judah got married. What does this tell you about Judah?
   c. Read Genesis 38:3-5 very carefully. There is an interesting contrast in these verses.
      (1). What is the contrast?
      (2). What does the contrast tell us?
   d. In Genesis 38:6, Judah displayed something of his character. What did you discover?
   e. There is a theological problem in Genesis 38:7.
      (1). What is the problem?
      (2). How do you deal with this problem?
   f. In Genesis 38:8, Judah gave his son an unusual instruction. What reason can you see for such an instruction?
   g. Genesis 38:9 is sometimes used as a verse which condemns masturbation.
      (1). What is the issue in this verse?
      (2). Why did Onan do what he did?
   h. There is a serious theological issue in Genesis 38:10.
      (1). What is the theological issue?
      (2). What other Biblical illustrations should be considered in conjunction with this verse?
   i. Study Judah's instruction to Tamar in Genesis 38:11.
      (1). What was the instruction?
      (2). What was Judah's motive for giving that instruction?
      (3). Why would this be important to Judah?

3. In Genesis 38:12-23, Tamar tricked Judah.
   a. In Genesis 38:12, Judah suffered a loss,
      (1). In this verse there is a contrast with Genesis 37:34, 35.
      (2). What two things are contrasted?

(3). What does this tell you about Judah?

b. In Genesis 38:13-15, Tamar decided to take matters into her own hands.
   (1). Put yourself in Tamar's position.
      (a). How would you feel when Judah failed to keep his promise?
      (b). What would you do in this circumstance?
   (2). Did Judah react in the way Tamar hoped and expected him to react?

c. In Genesis 38:16, Judah unknowingly approached Tamar, whom he thought was a prostitute, seeking sexual favors.
   (1). What questions does this verse raise in your mind?
   (2). What did Tamar do to solve the problem of not being given to Shelah as his wife?
   (3). How would her actions solve the problem?
   (4). What does the fact that Tamar went to Enaim to carry out her deception tell you about her motive?
   (5). Read carefully Tamar's response to Judah's request.
      (a). How did she respond?
      (b). What does this tell you about Tamar?
   (6). Think carefully about what Judah did.
      (a). In view of the teachings of this chapter, what are the implications and side-effects of his actions?
      (b). What does this tell you about Judah?
   (7). What does the fact that Judah thought Tamar was a prostitute tell you about him?

d. In Genesis 38:17, 18, Tamar and Judah negotiated concerning Judah's request.
   (1). What was Judah's offer?
   (2). Does this seem sufficient to you?
   (3). Did Tamar think it was sufficient?
   (4). Read carefully Tamar's response to Judah's offer.
      (a). Was she satisfied?
      (b). What else did she request?
      (c). Why would she make such a request?
      (d). How did Judah respond to her additional request?
      (e). What does this fact (question 4d above) tell you?

e. In Genesis 38:19, Tamar ends her deception.
   (1). In what ways did Tamar deceive Judah?
   (2). Why was this necessary?

f. In Genesis 38:20, 21, Judah attempted to pay his debt to the prostitute as promised.
   (1). Why did Judah send the young goat by his Adullamite friend rather than delivering it himself?
   (2). What does the fact that Judah did send the young goat tell you about Judah?
   (3). Put yourself in Judah's position. Why would you have sent the goat when you could have decided not to do so?
   (4). Why did Tamar negotiate so carefully and then fail to tell Judah that she was not from Enaim?

g. In Genesis 38:22, The Adullamite reported his failed mission to Judah.
   (1). How do you think the Adullamite felt giving this report?

(2). How do you think Judah felt when he heard this report?

h. In Genesis 38:23, Judah responded to the report of the Adullamite. Read it carefully.
   (1). What did he say?
   (2). Explain what Judah meant in each phrase of his response.

4. In Genesis 38:24-30, Tamar shocked Judah.
   a. In Genesis 38:24, Judah received a report about his daughter-in-law. Read the verse carefully.
      (1). Specifically, what did the report tell Judah?
      (2). Was the report completely true?
      (3). Study again Judah's response to this news:
         (a). What was his response?
         (b). Why would he respond in this manner?
      (4). Put yourself in Tamar's position. How would you feel to hear this verdict?
   b. In Genesis 38:25, the author reported Tamar's response to the punishment announced by Judah.
      (1). Study her response in great depth.
      (2). Describe, in full detail, what Tamar did and did not do.
      (3). Explain why she did each thing cited in the previous answer.
   c. In Genesis 38:26, Judah responded to Tamar's presentation following his announcement of her punishment.
      (1). What did Judah say?
      (2). What did Judah mean by his statement?
      (3). This verse records a new experience for Judah. What was it?
      (4). This verse tells us something about what Judah did and something he did not do. Please identify both of these.
      (5). What other options did Judah have besides the things he did and did not do listed above?
      (6). What does this entire verse tell you about Judah?
   d. In Genesis 38:27, 28, the author shifts the spotlight of attention to the birth of the twins.
      (1). What does the fact that one baby put his arm out, but the other baby was born first tell you?
      (2). Why was the midwife so careful to tie a scarlet cord on the wrist that first emerged?
      (3). What did the midwife mean, "this one came out first"?
   e. In Genesis 38:29, the mid-wife made a seemingly sarcastic statement about the child who was born first.
      (1). What did she say?
      (2). What did she mean by that statement?
      (3). Look at a Bible Dictionary or Bible Encyclopedia to see what this child's name means.
         (a). Who gave this child his name?
         (b). Why would anyone give a child such a name?
   f. In Genesis 38:30, the author described the birth of the second twin.

(1). Look up the name of this baby in a Bible Dictionary or Bible Encyclopedia.
(a). What does the name mean?
(b). Why would they give him such a name?
(2). Why would the author emphasize, again, the scarlet cord?

5. Review chapter 38 again. Remember that it is a parenthesis intruding into the story of Joseph.
   a. What reason(s) can you find for telling this story?
   b. What reason(s) can you find for telling this story at this point in the story of Joseph?

6. In view of the story of this chapter, think very carefully about what God is telling you in this chapter.
   a. What has God told you about Himself in these verses?
   b. What has God told you about yourself in this chapter?
   c. What will you do about these discoveries?

LESSON 14: GENESIS 38:1 - 30

TAMAR EXPOSES JUDAH

Introduction

There are three paragraphs in Genesis chapter 38. They are as follows:

38:1-11	Judah Urged Tamar to Return Home
38:12-23	Tamar Tricks Her Father-in-law
38:24-30	Tamar Exposed Judah's Paternity

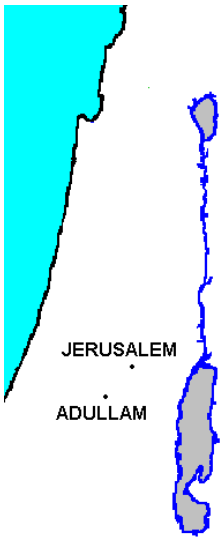
In the same way that chapter 36, the story of Esau, was a parenthesis in the story of Jacob, so chapter 38, the story of Judah, is a contrasting parenthesis in the story of Joseph. Whatever we see in this story must be contrasted with the story of Joseph before we can ascertain the full impact of its significance.

Genesis 38:1-11 - Judah Urged Tamar to Return Home

This chapter begins on a confusing note. Notice what the author wrote:

At that time, Judah left his brothers and went down to stay with a man of Adullam named Hirah. Genesis 38:1

The text tells us that Judah left his brothers and went to visit Hirah, an Adullamite. We do not know if he went with his father's knowledge and blessing or not. From Map 22 you can see where Judah went.



Map 22: Judah Left His Brothers

Note that the text says that Judah went "down." On Map 22 you can see that Adullam is about 20 miles south and west of the city of Jerusalem. It was, at one time, the palace residence of the Canaanite king over the region. You can also see that this was at least 60 miles from the place where Judah would have been with his father and brothers.

The text states that Judah went there to visit with his friend, Hirah. We do not have good information about this man. Some translations refer to Hirah as Judah's "shepherd," but that is a very doubtful translation. His "friend" is a much more promising way to translate the word. Little if anything else is known about him.

We do not know how Judah knew Hirah. We can be sure that they knew each other previously. This was not Judah's first contact with Hirah. Were that the case, he could only have been his guest for three days. The text suggests it was much longer than that. This verse sounds very innocent. That is misleading. We must remember that the Adullamites were idolatrous people. Judah's going there was not appropriate for a descendant of Abraham.

There is an unusual statement in the next verse. It is confusing because it violated the customs of that day and culture.

> *There Judah met the daughter of a Canaanite man named Shua. He married her and lay with her. Genesis 38:2*

While Judah was a guest of Hirah, he saw a woman he liked. She was the daughter of Shua, a Canaanite. First we must deal with the idea that there were Canaanites in the area. The name "Canaan" came from the grandson of Jonah. Several tribes occupied the land when Abraham came from Haran. The Canaanites were idolatrous. They worshipped many idols and adulterous activities were a part of the worship these people observed.

The confusion in this verse has to do with Judah's marriage to this unnamed woman. People who had their father's blessing had a wedding arranged by their father. Isaac is a good example of this practice. A person could be married without the blessing of his/her father, but it was seriously frowned upon. Esau's marriages are an excellent example of such arrangements. The NIV text says that he married her, but the Hebrew text mentions neither a marriage nor the fact that Jacob made the arrangements. Judah's conduct suggests a marriage relationship, but it is not confirmed. There are some serious questions here.

The reason for suggesting that Judah was married to this woman is found in the next three verses:

> *She became pregnant and gave birth to a son, who was named Er. She conceived again and gave birth to a son and named him Onan. She gave birth to still another son and named him Shelah. It was at Kezib that she gave birth to him. Genesis 38:3-5.*

Verse three describes the birth of Judah's first son, Er. The Hebrew text clearly identifies the fact that when this woman bore a son, it was Judah who named the child "Er" which means "watchful." This means that Judah exercised the paternal right to accept or reject the child, became responsible for him and gave him a name.

Verse four, however, presents a different picture. In this verse, there is no mention of Judah with the exception of the oblique suggestion of conception. After that, only the woman is mentioned:

- She bore the son
- She gave the boy his name

There is no announcement or explanation concerning this change at all.

There is a similar situation in verse five. When Judah's third child was born, there was again no mention of his presence or concern. The woman ,whose name we do not know, gave the child his name - Shelah. It should be noted that Hebrew sources, usually add a comment about a person who is unnamed in Scripture. It is not universally true, but

often they suggest that this identifies a person who is guilty of a grave sin. We can not be sure of that intention in this case, but it was disobedience for him to marry a Canaanite and may have been unlawful for him to leave the land of Canaan.

It appears that Judah continued to live in the area of Adullam though we do not know the location of Kezib.

Judah got a wife for Er, his firstborn, and her name was Tamar. Genesis 38:6

Here you can see the Eastern practice where the father arranges for the wedding of his sons. This is a picture of Judah carrying out his paternal duties of arranging for the wedding of his son. We know nothing of Tamar's background except that she is probably a Canaanite, but the text is silent on the issue.

For different reasons, verse seven is also somewhat unusual.

But Er, Judah's firstborn, was wicked in the Lord's sight; so the Lord put him to death. Genesis 38:7

The author has now moved passed the sins of Judah. He is presently focusing his attention on the life of Judah's eldest son, Er. The text says that "Er was wicked in the Lord's sight." The text does not identify the nature of Er's great sins. The word for "wicked," is "rah" (רַע) which means "bad," "evil," "displeasing," "wretchedness." Because of the proximity of the Canaanite culture and worship, it would be reasonable to assume that the sin had to do with the adulterous practices of their idolatrous worship.

This was a highly unusual situation. The most obvious conclusion to be drawn from the facts is that this had to be a crime which was almost beyond description. Unfortunately, there is no way to say for certain the identity of this evil.

There is a bit of Near Eastern culture which shows in the following verse:

Then Judah said to Onan, "Lie with your brother's wife and fulfill your duty to her as a brother-in-law to produce offspring for your brother. Genesis 38:8

The greatest tragedy for a Jew would be for his name to die out because he had no son. Because people often died early in life, and because it was a tragedy to die childless, they had what is called a kinsman-redeemer. This person was the oldest living son in the family. If a brother got into financial difficulties and had to sell his land, his kinsman-redeemer must buy back the land. If a man got into serious financial difficulty and had to sell himself as a slave, his kinsman-redeemer must buy him back. If a married man died childless, his kinsman-redeemer must make the dead brother's wife pregnant. The child born of this union would be the child of the deceased brother. Boaz, in the book of Ruth, is an example of this situation. While teaching this passage in the Ukraine, a woman in the class responded that she had grown up in Armenia and they had the same custom there. This practice was common throughout the entire near-east.

In the text, verse eight, Judah instructed his son, Onan, to perform the duty of a husband's brother for the widow of his oldest son. Onan knew that this was to raise up an heir to the name of his brother, Er. The text does not indicate why this was so repulsive to Onan. Onan did not refuse to have sexual relations with his sister-in-law. He just refused to make her pregnant. Thus, what he did violated two Jewish laws:

- The prohibition of adultery
- The prohibition of sexual relations with a sister or sister-in-law.

Again, this was so repulsive to God that Onan was also killed.

In the next verse, Onan responded to the instruction of his father, Judah.

> *But Onan knew the offspring would not be his; so whenever he lay with his brother's wife, he spilled his seed on the ground to keep from producing offspring for his brother. Genesis 38:9*

Unfortunately, people have taken this verse out of context and used it as a proof text against the practice of masturbation. Those seeking a text which forbids the practice of masturbation must look elsewhere. This text does not deal with that issue at all.

Onan did not tell his father that he was unwilling to be a kinsman-redeemer. He deceived Judah and Tamar. He pretended to fulfill the role of a kinsman-redeemer. In fact what he did was simply to have sexual relations with Tamar, but stopped before she could become pregnant.

Observe the way that verse nine begins," But Onan knew that the seed would not be his." The text identifies no reason that the author said this. There are some possibilities:

- He and his brother had a feud and he was angry enough to want his brother's name to be eliminated.
- He was upset because his first child, thought to be his strongest and best, would belong to his brother and not to him.
- He hated the system and did not want to be a part of it.

There may be other possibilities, but it appears that the first possibility is the most likely. It appears that he wanted to prevent a child from being born and thus perpetuate his brother's name.

Whatever the purpose, the author clearly indicates "The thing which he did was wicked in the sight of the Lord."

> *What he did was wicked in the Lord's sight; so he put him to death also. Genesis 38:10*

The word "wicked "is "yara" (יָרַע) which means "something bad," "something good-for-nothing," "to do great harm," "to deal wickedly." This was evil in the sight of the Lord, not because Onan refused to preserve his brother's name, but because he was guilty of adultery and incest as described by Old Testament law. Notice that the author used the name "Lord", which is "Jehovah" in the Hebrew text, to identify God in this situation. This is hardly coincidental. The name "Jehovah" was used repeatedly in the Old Testament in situations where judgment was involved. That is exactly what we have here. Because of this "God put him to death also."

In this situation we find ourselves confronted with the justice and wisdom of God. Our finite minds cannot comprehend why God would slay Onan and Er for their sins, but did not do the same for Cain or Esau. One could conjecture, but it is far better to simply admit that we do not understand what God has done; that His justice is far beyond our limited logic.

There is no record of Judah's response to his son's deception, sin and eventual death. Did Judah know what Onan had done? The text does not say. It appears that he had to know, but the text is silent. If he did not know, then he had to wonder whether it was Tamar or Onan who was infertile.

Suddenly Judah moves in a different direction than he had previously.

Judah then said to his daughter-in-law Tamar, "Live as a widow in your father's house until my son Shelah grows up." For he thought, "He may die too, just like his brothers." So Tamar went to live in her father's house. Genesis 38:11

When Er died, Judah did what was expected in that culture - he gave the wife to his second son. When Onan, his second son, died, however, Judah responded differently. He had another son. The text does not identify his age. In the record of Judah's sons, Genesis 38:2-5, it appears that he was at least a year younger than Onan, but not much more than that. On the other hand, there is no record that he was married. There appears to be no doubt that he was of marriageable age, but probably not fully grown up as yet. Judah's conversation with Tamar about waiting until Shelah was "grown" was interesting. The Hebrew word translated "grows up" is "Gawdeesh" (גָּדִישׁ). This unusual word was used to describe stacking wheat or corn. It was also used to describe a boy who had not only reached the height of a man, but had matured physically.

Judah now had only one son left to be his heir, to care for his family and preserve his own name. It appears he does not wish to take a chance of losing his only living son trying to preserve the name of his son. Judah's responsibility was to arrange for a wedding for Shelah. He was rather protecting his own name.

Judah told Tamar that he wanted her to wait until Shelah had grown up. The text clearly showed Judah's concern when he said, "He may die too, just like his brothers." If Judah was really concerned for Shelah's safety, then he was thinking that the death of Er and Onan was Tamar's fault. That being the case, it would still be the same situation when Shelah was fully grown. It appears that the suggestion that Tamar go to her father's house was a ploy to get rid of her and escape the responsibility of preserving the name of her husband. A possible explanation for this would be the hope that she would marry again and the danger would be alleviated. Another possible explanation would be that Judah was afraid that if Tamar were in his house, she might seduce Shelah and the danger of Shelah's loss would be heightened. If Tamar went to live with her father, Judah would still have Shelah as his heir and if he married and had a son, then Judah's own name was safe. The basic motive which underlies this scenario is selfishness.

It must have seemed to Judah that he had gotten away with subterfuge again. If that was his thought, he was badly mistaken. It also appeared to him and his brothers that they had gotten away with the sale of Joseph.

Genesis 38:12-23 - Tamar Tricks Judah, Her Father-in-law

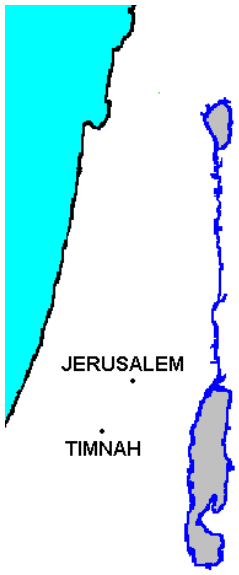
The paragraph begins with a natural turn of events which was nonetheless surprising.

After a long time, Judah's wife, the daughter of Shua, died. When Judah had recovered from his grief, he went up to Timnah, to the men who were shearing his sheep, and his friend Hirah the Adullamite went with him. Genesis 38:12

It was quite common for a woman to die before her husband did. This was most often through childbirth, but often just because life for a woman was so hard. There is an irony here. Judah deprived Tamar of the opportunity to have a spouse and children. In the end, he lost his spouse and that was one more step in his demise.

A contrast is completed in this verse. When Jacob thought Joseph was dead, he could not be comforted. His son Judah, lost his wife, but he was comforted. It gives a perspective of what Jacob thought of his son and what Judah thought of his wife.

It was shortly after his wife died that Judah and his friend, Hirah, went up to Timnah to check on the shearing of his sheep.



Map 23: Judah Went to Timnah

Timnah was located about 12 miles south and west of Jerusalem. This whole situation is one more piece of evidence which suggests that Judah did not suffer greatly over the loss of his wife. It was important to have the sheep shorn, but it was not important that he travel up there to be with his shearers during the shearing season.

Following Judah's suggestion that Tamar return to her father's tent and become part of his family again, we do not know how Tamar felt, except that there was a husband available for her and Judah would not allow her to have him. It is reasonable to assume that she felt great disappointment and concern over how she would be cared for and possibly an intense anger. Certainly she experienced great anger when Judah failed to give her to his son, Shelah, as he had promised.

Verse 13 sets the stage for us to discover how she felt about the recent events in her life.

> *When Tamar was told, "Your father-in-law is on his way to Timnah to shear his sheep," Genesis 38:13*

The text does not tell us who it was who told Tamar that Judah was taking a trip to Timnah. It probably had to be a woman because a man was not supposed to have any dealings with a woman who was not his wife. Whoever told her had all the facts correct:

- He was going to Timnah
- His alleged purpose was to oversee the shearing of his sheep.

Tamar decided to take matters into her own hands.

> *She took off her widow's clothes, covered herself with a veil to disguise herself, and then sat down at the entrance to Enaim, which is on the road to Timnah. For she saw, that though Shelah had now grown up, she had not been given to him as his wife. Genesis 38:14*

In that culture, if a man died, his widow wore the clothes of mourning until she married again or until she died. Tamar was still a widow. If Judah hoped she would marry again, he would be disappointed. Tamar prepared herself to look like one of the temple prostitutes who served in pagan temples and sat by the entrance of the city of Enaim. We are not certain of the location of Enaim at this point.

It appears that she was set on revenge, not just the securing of a husband. If Judah would not give her his son, Shelah, to preserve the name of her husband, then she would trick him into caring for that responsibility himself. She ran the risk of being approached for sexual favors by someone other than Judah. Revenge can take many different forms.

At the end of the verse, her motives are clearly stated. The word "for" indicates that the reason for the foregoing activity is about to be given. "For she saw that Shelah was grown up, and she was not given to him to wife." This is revenge with added insult. Now there is no denying that Judah had broken his agreement. Revenge, however, is not a productive way to deal with the problem - two wrongs do not make a right.

Judah was attracted to this possible liaison.

> *When Judah saw her, he thought she was a prostitute, for she had covered her face. Genesis 38:15*

This verse can be misleading. It sounds as though the reason Judah thought Tamar was a prostitute was because her face was covered. Granted, Judah could not tell that it was Tamar because of the veil. This did not suggest to him, however, that she was a prostitute. A woman's veil completely covered her head with the exception of two small openings through which she could see. Under such a veil, it would not be possible to discover a woman's identity. In most instances, one could tell that a woman was a prostitute because she removed her head covering altogether. The text does not explain this situation. It is probable that Judah assumed that she was a prostitute because she was sitting by the gate of the city. The respectable women of the city would not sit at the gate of the city. Respectable women were expected to refrain from attracting the attention of men. To sit at the city gate, Tamar placed herself so as to attract the attention of the men of the city and particularly those who might be passing through the city.

Judah was not totally aware of what was about to transpire.

> *Not realizing that she was his daughter-in-law, he went over to her by the roadside and said, "Come now, let me sleep with you." "And what will you give me to sleep with you?" she asked. Genesis 38:16*

Judah did know, however, that his request for sexual favors was not appropriate for the people of God. He knew that this was wrong. It did not keep him from pursuing these desires.

He did not know that the woman he thought was a prostitute was, in fact, his daughter-in-law, Tamar. Leviticus 18:15 describes Judah's action as a terrible sin from a different perspective.

> *Do not have sexual relations with your daughter-in-law. She is your son's wife; do not have relations with her. Leviticus 18:15*

Again, we must remember that Judah did not know that this woman was his daughter-in-law. Though he did what the Levitical law forbade, in terms of sexual relations with a daughter-in-law. He did not plan to do so and did not know he had sexual relations with Tamar. The other side of this is that he was obviously planning to have sexual relations with a woman who was a prostitute in the idolatrous temple there.

There is another reason that Judah was not totally aware of the evil he was about to do. When approached by Judah, Tamar started bargaining with him about the payment she

would receive for such favors. She bargained so well that Judah could have been convinced that she was a professional prostitute. Several questions come to mind:

- **How did Tamar know how to bargain for such sexual favors?** Even in America, people who have never been involved with prostitution have some idea of the cost of such a relationship. She could have heard of this through conversations with other women at the well.
- **Why didn't Judah recognize Tamar's voice?** Women, in that day, said very little in the presence of a man. Women spent a lot of time talking to each other at the well. This was, in part, because they were not permitted to speak elsewhere. Judah would not have heard Tamar's voice more than a few times because of the fact that she had no children to teach and instruct. In view of his sexual anticipation and no expectation of meeting Tamar, it is not surprising that her deception succeeded.
- **Why didn't Judah recognize Tamar during their illicit relationship?** The text does not identify the place where this adulterous relationship took place. We assume that it must have been in a tent of some sort. If that was the case, it would be possible for her to escape detection in the near darkness inside the tent.

Tamar engaged in some hard bargaining with Judah before engaging in intimacy with him.

> *"I'll send you a young goat from my flock," he said., "Will you give me something as a pledge until you send it?" she asked. He said, "What pledge should I give you?" Your seal and its cord, and the staff in your hand," she answered. So he gave them to her and slept with her, and she became pregnant by him. Genesis 38:17, 18*

We must remember that this was a time when hard currency was not available in that part of the world. Every financial exchange was accomplished through barter. It appears that Tamar was satisfied with his offer. Whether or not that was the going rate, it is impossible to tell. One might guess that this was substantially more than the usual price. We should be reminded, however, Tamar was not so much interested in the price as she was in becoming pregnant by her father-in-law.

Tamar's concern was that she wanted a "pledge" to make sure that he would pay as he promised. We will deal with this more carefully later in the study. A "pledge" is "awrab" (עָרַב). It literally means "to braid or intermix in order to make strong." It became a term used to indicate something of value given in security that the terms agreed upon would be carried out.

From our vantage point, it is easy to see why Tamar would require a pledge from him. Judah had made a promise to her before. The problem was, he did not make good on his promise. She was taking steps to see that it did not happen again.

In verse 18, Judah does not object to Tamar's request. He simply wanted to know what pledge she had in mind. Had Judah's thinking been otherwise, he certainly would have objected at this point.

Tamar knew exactly what she wanted. She immediately requested three things that she would hold as surety until Judah delivered the young goat.

She asked for his signet. This "signet" was "khatham" (חָתַם) which literally means "to close up," "to seal." This was a ring or cylinder of stone into which was carved the head of a lion to indicate that Judah was the ruler of his clan. They would then carve a design into the signet which could be identified as his family signet. This would be somewhat similar to the English family crest. This ring or cylinder could be pressed into soft wax or clay and leave an exact replica of the unique design which identified the owner of the ring, but no one else. If Tamar was looking for a way to identify Judah, and she was, she certainly found the best example in the signet. In Exodus, the author described the preparation of the priestly robes. He wrote:

> *They mounted the onyx stones in gold filigree settings and engraved them like a seal with the names of the sons of Israel Exodus 39:6*

The author used the signet carving design to describe how these stones were to be carved.

Tamar also requested Judah's "cord." The Hebrew word for "cord" is "Pawtheel" (פְּתִיל) and was used to identify a bracelet or a thread which is twined. The word was also used to identify the cord or fine metal chain upon which a man hung his signet ring or cylinder. Tamar wanted both the signet and the chain. We must ask, why would she want both the signet and the chain? If Tamar had just the signet, Judah could claim that he had lost it when the chain and or twine holding it broke. With both the chain and the signet in hand, Tamar would successfully diffuse this attempt to escape identification.

Tamar also asked for the staff he carried. A staff was a rod of wood about four feet long and approximately one and one half inch thick. The staff served four basic purposes:

- It was often inscribed with the name of the owner. Wood was scarce in that area. A man would usually keep his staff all his life. They would carve designs as well as the owner's name into the shaft. The staff usually identified the owner.
- Travelers, as well as the old and the infirm, used a staff to help them climb steep hills or cross irregular paths.
- Shepherds used a staff to aid them in climbing hills. It was also used to beat bushes and brush where sheep would stray and snakes would hide.
- A staff was also used to identify a person's position or status in the community. It was like a poor man's scepter.

It is easy to understand why Tamar would want the staff. It was positive identification. It was also very helpful in travel. The owner would want to retrieve it as soon as possible.

Tamar succeeded in getting Judah to give her all of his identification. She did not tell Judah that she was not a native of Enaim. This suggests that she did not want the young goat at all. Tamar wanted to become pregnant by Judah and then publicly humiliate him by presenting his undeniable identification to the whole community as the father of her unborn child. The text says that Judah gave Tamar the pledge she asked, all of his identification.

Tamar deceived Judah in more than one way:

> *After she left, she took off her veil and put on her widow's clothes again. Genesis 38:19*

- Tamar made Judah think that she was a prostitute
- Tamar also made Judah think that she was from the city of Enaim.

The latter deception gives us some important information. It tells us that she did not want Judah to bring the "kid of the goat." If she told him where she was from, he might become suspicious that this prostitute was in fact his daughter-in-law. Again, if Judah brought the kid, then she would have to surrender the signet, chain and staff. All of these would identify the one who had made her pregnant. Tamar's very life depended upon her ability to retain these pieces of identification. This is because Judah would be the one who must deal with her indiscretions. This provided her with the perfect opportunity to both humiliate Judah and make him responsibility for her care.

This verse suggests that though she had engaged in an unacceptable sexual practice with Judah, this did not reflect her usual way of life. Prior to the encounter with Judah, she had been dressed as a widow and would have been protectively treated as such. Immediately following the liaison with Judah, she put on her widow's garments again and returned to her celibate life.

There is another glimpse of Judah in this paragraph.

> *Meanwhile Judah sent the young goat by his friend the Adullamite in order to get his pledge back from the woman, but he did not find her. He asked the men who lived there, "where is the shrine prostitute who was beside the road at Enaim?" "There hasn't been any shrine prostitute here," they said. Genesis 38:20, 21*

Judah had been an unreliable individual in many ways throughout his life. Nevertheless, in this instance he was a man of his word.

We must ask ourselves, Why would Judah send his Adullamite friend to deliver the kid? The text does not provide an answer. It is reasonable to assume that, at least in part, Judah was motivated by guilt. The Adullamite friend was either a wonderful friend or else greatly indebted to Judah to be willing to take this journey and attempt to pay this embarrassing debt. We must also remember, however, that for the Adullamite this was not considered an embarrassing situation. It was part of their culture, their worship.

Though the text gives no answer, one is forced to wonder whether Judah was so prompt in paying his debt because he was so reliable or if it was his urgent desire to receive his identification again. It is probably a bit of both, but we do not know for certain. There is a possible hint. Notice in verse 20, that the author said, "Judah sent the young goat by the Adullamite in order to get back his identification. This does not rule out Judah's responsible action. It does, however, suggest that rescuing the identification was primary.

The final clause of the sentence, :"but he did not find her," was a sad statement. To Judah, two things would certainly come to mind:

- **The prostitute would think that he did not keep his word**. Even when she took his identification in pledge, he did not do as he promised. We know she did not think that way. She knew he could not possibly keep his promise and she did not want him to do so.
- **Judah was now without all his identification** Though the signet was somewhat like a modern credit card, it could not be misused by the prostitute. The loss, for Judah, was that three things he valued greatly were no longer in his possession. The signet and the staff he would use as long as he lived. These would then be passed on to his heir. It is thought by many scholars that this staff is the one Moses used when parting the Red Sea and when he struck the rock.

The Adullamite, having exhausted his covert ways of finding the prostitute, was forced to be more public about it.

> *He asked the men who lived there, "Where is the shrine prostitute who was beside the road at Enaim?" "There hasn't been any shrine prostitute here," they said. Genesis 38:21*

There is an interesting piece of information in this verse. When the Adullamite asked the men of Enaim, "Where is the shrine prostitute?" He used the word "kedeshah" (קְדֵשָׁה). There is another word for a prostitute "Zanah" (זָנָה). This word identifies a woman who engages in sexual acts for pay, but it has no identification with idol worship. An example of this is found in Judges 23:18.

> *You must not bring the earnings of a female prostitute or of a male prostitute into the house of the Lord your God to pay any vow, because the Lord your God detests them both. Judges 23:18*

On the contrary, "Kedeshah" emphatically refers to prostitution dedicated to idols. This is well illustrated in the following verse:

> *And when you choose some of their daughters as wives for your sons and those daughters prostitute themselves to their gods, they will lead your sons to do the same. Exodus 34:16*

This is the kind of prostitute the Adullamite told the men of Enaim he was trying to find. This word does not simply identify a woman who engages in sexual acts for payment. The word "kedeshah" literally means "consecrated." It is a woman who devoted her life and body to the worship of an idol, usually the goddess of fertility. This dedication was expressed by engaging in illicit sexual intercourse as an act of worship and not as an expression of love or a service for money.

The significance of this is that Judah was knowingly willing to engage in the worship of idols in order to have intercourse with this woman. This gives us another glimpse of the moral character of the man.

The men of the city knew exactly what he was talking about. They told him there had been no "kedeshah" here. They were right. This does not mean that there was no adulterous worship by the people of Enaim. We know that they were regular participants in this form of worship. It does mean that none of the consecrated prostitutes practiced their evil trade in the city.

The Adullamite had to return to his friend without accomplishing his task.

> *So he went back to Judah and said, "I didn't find her. Besides, the men who lived there said, "There hasn't been any shrine prostitute here." Genesis 38:22*

The Adullamite's report was honest and precise. The words he spoke to Judah were exactly what the men of Enaim said to him. This was a long trip for the Adullamite. It was also a great disappointment to have to give such a report to his friend, Judah. The friendship between Judah and the Adullamite must have been very strong.

The text records a response from Judah concerning the inability to find the prostitute in Enaim.

Then Judah said, "Let her keep what she has, or we will become a laughingstock. After all, I did send her this young goat, but you didn't find her." Genesis 38:23

Judah's words do not place him in a very favorable light. They seem to betray some unfortunate feelings:

- "**Let her keep what she has**..." - Judah knew that his signet, chain and staff were of no monetary value to the prostitute. Clearly, there was no way he could find the woman who held his identification. It is his apparent attitude that is disturbing. It sounds as though he does not care that she will not receive the kid that she was promised.
- "**Or we'll become a laughingstock**" - It appears that Judah was more concerned about becoming a laughingstock than he was about his unpaid debt. We might refer to this as "looking out for number one." The fear of being a laughing stock implies that he was aware of the fact that what he had done was not only wrong, but also quite ridiculous.
- "**I sent this young goat, but you didn't find her**." - This appears to be an expression of no concern on Judah's part. It is as though he felt he could forget it. His conscience was clear, as far as paying the debt was concerned. He had tried.

If you contrast this with Joseph, you can see a tremendous difference between the two men. These are the kinds of things that identify the real character of a person.

Genesis 38:24-30 - Tamar Exposed Judah's Paternity

There is a space of time between the end of verse 23 and the beginning of verse 24. Observe how the author reports the situation.

About three months later Judah was told, "Your daughter-in-law Tamar is guilty of prostitution, and as a result she is now pregnant." Judah said, "Bring her out and have her burned to death!" Genesis 38:24

Though this verse speaks of "three months," it was probably more than six months since the liaison between Judah and Tamar. By this time it would be visibly clear that Tamar was pregnant. Put yourself in Tamar's position for a moment. You are a widow. You wear clothes which indicate that you are in mourning over the loss of your husband. This has been your position in the community for several years. Now, suddenly, people can see that you are pregnant. Many questions would be asked. Worse yet, most people would make assumptions without bothering to ask questions. The women of the community would refuse to associate with you. They would no longer allow you to meet with them at the well, morning and evening, to talk. You would be an outcast to everyone except those who were in the same situation that you are. What a terrible condition in which she had to live!

Interestingly, no mention is made of the means by which Judah was informed of Tamar's harlotry. We cannot account for this.

The English texts reads somewhat differently from the Hebrew texts. "Tamar your daughter-in-law has committed adultery and also see/observe she is pregnant by whoredoms (plural.)" This contains important pieces of information:

- **Tamar committed adultery** - The word for "adultery" here is "zanah" (זָנָה) which we described earlier. The message was that Tamar, who was pledged to be the wife of Shelah, was engaging in sexual acts for pay. This, also, was during the time that she was pledged to be Shelah's wife. This in itself was a crime.
- **Tamar was pregnant by whoredoms**(plural) - This may not seem very significant to us, but it was very meaningful to them. This was a time when the moral climate was very bad. By law, adultery was to be punished. Things had gotten so bad that a woman was not punished unless she was having sexual relations with more than one partner. The plural form of "whoredom" suggests that the message given Judah about his daughter-in-law was that she was involved with more than one partner. Thus, she should be punished.
- It is not surprising that Judah would respond as he did. Judah's response in 38:24b, however, raises some questions:
- **When he had done the same thing himself, how could he condemn her?** As head of his clan, he was required to sit in judgment, along with two other men of high respect. The other two were apparently older than Judah, because the youngest of the three judges, required for such a crime, gave his judgment first and announced the final verdict. That was Judah's required task. Judah's statement was a requirement, not just his own double standard.
- Can you imagine how guilty he must have felt as he was required to pass the death sentence upon her when he was as guilty as she was?

Why would Jacob choose the punishment of burning as he did? In Deuteronomy, the author makes a statement that is important here.

> *If, however, the charge is true and no proof of the girl's virginity can be found, she shall be brought to the door of her father's house and there the men of her town shall stone her to death...Deuteronomy 22:20, 21a*

The normal punishment for adultery was stoning. In the Gospels, a woman taken in adultery was brought to Jesus to see what he would say about her. Jesus suggested that the man who was without sin cast the first stone. Even in His time, the punishment for adultery was stoning.

If you read in Leviticus, however, there is a clue concerning this issue.

> *If a priest's daughter defiles herself by becoming a prostitute, she disgraces her father; she must be burned in the fire. Leviticus 21:9*

If the daughter of a priest became a prostitute, she must be burned. In practice, this punishment was applied to the children of the head of a clan as well. This was a way of thinking that the child of a leader was expected to hold a higher standard because their family was involved in leadership. People would look up to them and emulate their way of life. Judah was the head of his clan and thus was required to pronounce this very severe judgment upon Tamar.

The text does not identify the process by which Tamar was brought before Judah for trial. The fact that Tamar appeared for the trial suggests that her father, or his heir, agreed that the truth must be discovered and if necessary justice meted out. Otherwise he would

have refused to allow her to go and a struggle for honor would have taken place between the two families.

Tamar demonstrated that she was shrewd in her dealings:

> *As she was being brought out, she sent a message to her father-in-law. "I am pregnant by the man who owns these," she said. And she added, "See if you recognize whose seal and cord and staff these are." Genesis 38:25*

Notice how carefully Tamar dealt with this dangerous situation:

- **Tamar did not deny the charge**. That would have been fruitless. She had no husband and she was obviously pregnant.
- **She did not confront Judah publicly, at first**. She sent a message, privately, to him. This left Judah a way out. It also left an opening for her own life to be preserved.
- **She did not accuse Judah of anything**. Tamar did not say that Judah did anything. This created a situation in which he would be less defensive.
- **She made a simple statement and presented evidence**. Is it a coincidence that she presented three pieces of evidence to identify the father of her unborn children? I think not. Jewish law required the word of two or three witnesses to establish truth. The three judges would be forced to believe that these pieces of identification did, in fact, single out the father.
- **She used words Judah would recognize**. Others may not have realized it, but Tamar couched her question in these terms, "See if you recognize whose seal and cord and staff these are." This was an unnecessary question. Judah and everyone present would know immediately that these things belonged to him. Judah would also remember that on another day, he and his brothers had asked a similar question, "We found this. Examine it to see whether it is your son's robe." Genesis 37:32. Knowingly or unknowingly, Tamar had thrust Judah into a situation where he was devastated by the guilt of two tragedies.

There is pathos in the words of Judah's response. Observe how the author described it:

> *Judah recognized them and said, "She is more righteous than I, since I wouldn't give her to my son Shelah." And he did not sleep with her again. Genesis 38:26*

The author said, "Judah **recognized** them." The word "them" refers to Judah's three pieces of identification. The word "recognize" is "nawkar" (נָכַר). It means "to scrutinize carefully," "to look intently." It carries an implication of acknowledging the veracity of that which is being scrutinized. Using this word, the author was saying that Judah looked very carefully at the three pieces of identification and acknowledged that they were his.

This verse represents a change in Judah's outlook. His attitude has been, "I tried, now it is her problem." This is different. We must remember that Judah was very suspicious of Tamar. He blamed her for the death of his two sons. In this verse, however, he acknowledged that she was more righteous than he was. The word "righteous" is "tsadaq" (צָדַק). It means "to live right, in a moral sense." It was used to describe one who had been cleansed, not one who was never soiled.

Judah, for the first time, confessed his wrong. He admitted that he wronged her by failing to give her to Shelah as he promised. Judah had sinned in the past, but he had never

admitted his error. He always looked for a way to justify his actions, if not deny them by silence or dishonesty. This change must be viewed in his favor, though his wrongdoing against Tamar was obvious.

There is an interesting turn in the information. The author told us what Judah did not do - he did not have any further sexual relations with Tamar. Having borne a child by her, he could have taken her as his wife and avoided the ill-will of the people. He did not do that. The author, however, did not tell us what Judah did. Did he give Tamar to Shelah as he had promised? Did he send her back home again? The text does not say.

In verse 27, the author shifts the scene to the time when Tamar was to give birth.

> *When the time came for her to give birth, there were twin boys in her womb. Genesis 38:27*

The text does not tell us if the existence of twins had been known prior to the time of birth. We will consider information shortly that suggests that they knew about the presence of twins briefly before the birth experience. This verse sounds as though they discovered the existence of the twins at the time that labor began. It seems certain that the mid-wife knew that Tamar was going to have twins before the birth process began. Thus it was not a surprise. Twins were somewhat rare, but not unknown.

There seems to have been a problem in the birth process.

> *As she was giving birth, one of them put out his hand; so the midwife took a scarlet thread and tied it on his wrist and said, "This one came out first." Genesis 38:28*

The text indicates that at the time the babies were being born, a hand emerged first. This makes it clear that it was a very difficult delivery. Any birth is difficult, but this is far more so.

The text does not tell us why the midwife tied a scarlet cord on the arm. Did she expect the baby to draw back his arm? The text is silent on this issue.

Notice the mid-wife's statement, "So the midwife took a scarlet thread and tied it on his wrist and said, 'This one came out first.'" One might wonder why she was concerned about which was born first when they were probably born within minutes of each other. We must remember that this was Tamar's first and only pregnancy with Judah. The determination of which child was born first had important ramifications concerning which of the two would be the one in control of this part of Jacob's family. The mid-wife was ascribing the position of "first-born" to the baby with the scarlet cord on his wrist.

> *But when he drew back his hand, his brother came out, and she said, "So this is how you have broken out!" And he was named Perez. Genesis 38:29*

It is a bit surprising that after the baby drew his arm back inside the mother's body, the other baby was born first. Was this because of the assistance of the mid-wife? It would seem to be so, but the text is silent.

The mid-wife said, "So this is how you have broken out!" There is a tinge of sarcasm and rejection in her words. Whatever her thoughts, the author went on to say "He was named Perez." The Hebrew text can be understood to mean, "He named him Perez." This is apparently a reference to Judah. We would consider it unfortunate to give an infant such a strange name. "Perez," however, means "breaking out." This strange name reminds us of the name that Hosea gave to one his children, - "Lo-Ruhamah" which means "not

loved" (Hosea 1:6). We can only deal with this by saying that they viewed this situation differently than we do. We need to keep in mind that the mid-wife's statement was an accurate assessment of what happened.

There is no indication of how much time elapsed between the birth of the two boys. Our best guess is that it was a very short time.

> *Then his brother, who had the scarlet thread on his wrist, came out and he was given the name Zerah. Genesis 38:30*

Though this is the second baby to be born, the mid-wife considered him to be the first-born.

The author mentions the fact that this second child, that had the scarlet cord around his wrist, was named "Zerah." The name "Zerah" (זֶרַח) means "a rising of light," a brilliance. Some scholars believe that this name comes from another word "zeroah" (זְרֹעָה) which means "a stretched out arm," which is a symbol of power. The text is not conclusive. It is easy to see how either of these names might be the one used by the author:

- Zerah - because of the bright colored which was tied to his wrist before birth.
- Zeroah - because he put his arm out before his brother was born.

The text is not clear. Therefore, it is not possible for us to be conclusive.

There are several parentheses like chapter 38, the story of Judah, in the book of Genesis. In each instance, the parenthesis describes an unfortunate situation. The lineage of Esau, chapter 36, is an illustration of this idea.

These parentheses present a negative contrast with the life of the person under consideration. In chapter 36, the story of Esau is a very negative contrast with the story of Jacob, in which chapter 36 is a parenthesis. The story of Judah was a negative contrast with the story of Joseph in which it is a parenthesis.

These parentheses tend to deal with an issue or situation which is also found in the story where it intrudes. In chapter 36, the author deals with three things in the life of Esau:

- He sought ways to disobey his parents.
- He married a Canaanite woman and, when he saw how it hurt his parents, he married another one. He knew he was supposed to marry someone from his own background and spiritual heritage.
- He remained outside the land of Canaan most of his life. He knew he was not supposed to do this.

In the story of Jacob, you see just the opposite picture.

- He was told to go to his family in Haran to find a wife. He did it.
- He knew he was to return to the land of Canaan and remain there. He did it even though he faced a situation where Esau would not understand.
- He did as his mother instructed him even when it got him into trouble. When told to go to Haran, he went.

You will find the same situation in the negative contrast between Judah and Joseph.

- Judah had no respect for the truth. He was willing to lie if it might get him out of a troublesome situation.

- Judah sought out an opportunity to have sexual relations with a woman who was not his wife.
- Judah was often willing to compromise his word to achieve his own goals.

Now look at the life of Joseph:

- He knew that telling the truth could cause a serious rift between himself and his family. Nevertheless, he told the truth about his dream as well as Pharoah's dream.
- Joseph had the same sexual desires that Judah had. When pressed by Potiphar's wife to compromise his purity, he refused to become involved and fled. This ultimately landed him in prison.
- Joseph was unwilling to compromise his commitment to his owner, Potiphar, no matter what it might cost him.

The total contrast between Joseph and Judah is quite obvious.

Notice that in both instances - Esau and Jacob, Joseph and Judah - the people are part of the same family. People then and now tend to lump a whole family together - all good or all bad. Two modern adages come to mind, "An apple never falls far from the tree," and " Like father, like son."

It is a picture of the power of God to take a life committed to Him and totally transform it. Jacob and Esau grew up in the same home, same family, same parents, the same opportunities. Joseph and Judah were part of the same family. Still God took Jacob and Joseph, two men committed to Him, and made them models of righteousness.

Observe, also, that the two parenthetical pictures give us a vivid picture of the moral decay that was present everywhere around Jacob and Joseph. In the midst of these callused, degraded and degrading surroundings, these people stood for God and righteousness despite the potential high cost of such a stand.

The question naturally arises, why does the author introduce the parenthesis of the life of Judah at this point?

Judah was one of the leaders in the plan to get rid of Joseph. He was the one who suggested selling Joseph to the Midianites. The author told the tragic story of Judah near the beginning of the story of Joseph. It obviously stands in stark contrast to the life of Joseph.

There is another contrast in these two stories. The life of Judah ends in shame, embarrassment and oblivion. It becomes the constant backdrop against which the author paints the marvelous picture of the beautiful and meaningful life of Joseph.

Again it is one more picture of the great power of God to take a life which appears to be doomed and make of it a trophy to the mercy and power of God.

Conclusion

This chapter is a picture painted in the dark. It is an image of the pathos of what might have been. **If only** Judah had been as eager to obey his father as he was to have his own way. **If only** he had been committed to serving God rather than idols. **If only** he had been committed to truth rather than expediency. **If only** he had been committed to purity rather than physical satisfaction. **If only!** The problem was that he wasn't!

It is a dire picture of what happens in a life where the individual seeks his own way, purposes and standards. This is a picture of our personal satisfaction generation. Who could be surprised that God is not mentioned once in this chapter?

God has issued a stern warning in the story of the life of Judah. The burning question is, are we going to listen to His warning?

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 15

JOSEPH AND POTIPHAR'S WIFE

GENESIS 39:1 - 23

1. There are three paragraphs in our best documents of Genesis chapter 39. Read each paragraph carefully. On the table below, write a title of seven words or less for each paragraph.

39:1-6	
39:7-18	
39:19-23	

2. In Genesis chapter 39 there is repeated emphasis upon the fact that Potiphar was an Egyptian and Joseph was a Jew. What does this emphasis tell us?

3. Genesis 39:1-6 describes the entry of Joseph into Potiphar's house.
   a. Read Genesis 39:1 very carefully.
      (1). Identify each piece of information the verse conveys.
      (2). What do these pieces of information tell us?
      (3). How is this information useful in understanding the text?
   b. In Genesis 39:2, there are three more pieces of information about Joseph.
      (1). What are they?
      (2). What do they tell us about Joseph?
   c. In Genesis 39:3, 4, there is a cause, effect relationship.
      (1). What is the cause?
      (2). What is the effect?
      (3). What do you gain from this information?
   d. In Genesis 39:5, the author described an unusual phenomenon.
      (1). What is it?
      (2). How do you account for this?
      (3). What does this tell you about God?
   e. In Genesis 39:6, there are two sentences.
      (1). What, if any, is the relation between the two sentences?
      (2). The first sentence is a repetition of information from Genesis 39:5. Why would the author do that?

4. In Genesis 39:7-18, the author tells of a tragic encounter.
   a. In Genesis 39:7-9, the author tells of the request by Potiphar's wife and Joseph's response.
      (1). What was her request?
      (2). What was Joseph's reply?
      (3). What reasons did he give?

(4). What does this tell you about him?

b. In Genesis 39:10, the author tells of the aftermath of the encounter in Genesis 39:9.
   (1). What was the attitude of Potiphar's wife?
   (2). What was Joseph's attitude?
   (3). How did he demonstrate that attitude?

c. In Genesis 39:11, 12, the author reports another attempt by Potiphar's wife, to achieve her goal.
   (1). List everything she did.
   (2). In what ways was this request different from the previous one?
   (3). List the things Joseph did?
   (4). What else could he have done? Would it have helped?

d. In Genesis 39:13-15, Potiphar's wife told the other slaves her story of what Joseph had done.
   (1). What was her report?
   (2). What part, if any, was true?
   (3). What part, if any, was false?

e. The short message of Genesis 39:16 gives an important insight. What is it?

f. In Genesis 39:17, 18, Potiphar's wife reported to him her version of what had happened.
   (1). Compare her report to the servants, verse 14, with her report to Potiphar, verse 17, 18. What did you find?
   (2). What is the meaning of these differences?
   (3). What do these things tell you?

5. Genesis 39:19-23 tells of Joseph's prison experiences.
   a. The author records, in Genesis 39:19, Potiphar's response to his wife's report.
      (1). How did Potiphar respond?
      (2). Put yourself in Potiphar's place. How would you feel receiving this report?
   b. In Genesis 39:20, Potiphar acted upon his wife's report.
      (1). What did he do?
      (2). Why would he do that?
      (3). What possible inferences can one make from this verse?
   c. In Genesis 39:21, the author described what prison life was like for Joseph.
      (1). Compare verse 21 with verses 19 and 20. What did you find?
      (2). If you were a prisoner, could you possibly evaluate your life with the words of Genesis 39:21?
      (3). What does this tell you?
      (4). There are two descriptive phrases in this verse.
         (a). What are they?
         (b). What do they mean?
         (c). In what ways are they alike? Different?
   d. In Genesis 39:22, the author continued to describe Joseph's life in prison.
      (1). Compare Genesis 39:21 with Genesis 39:22. What did you find?
      (2). Think carefully about the content of verse 22.
         (a). What two pieces of information does verse 22 contain?
         (b). What does this tell you about the warden?

(c). What does this tell you about Joseph?

e. In Genesis 39:23, the author continued to describe Joseph's prison experience.
   (1). Compare Genesis 39:23 with 39:19-22. What did you find?
   (2). Why would the author report it in this way?
   (3). What does this tell you?
   (4). What writing tool does the author use in Genesis 39:23? What does this tell us?
   (5). The author gives a reason for the warden's actions in this verse.
      (a). What is the reason?
      (b). What does it tell you?
   (6). Put yourself in the place of another prisoner who observed what the author reported in this verse.
      (a). How would you feel?
      (b). What would you think?

6. Review chapter 39 looking for spiritual principles.
   a. What does it say about righteousness?
   b. What does it say about evil?
   c. What does it say about the obedient life?
   d. Look at these pieces of information in contrast with your view of temptation and suffering. What did you find?

7. What differences will this study make in your thinking about the obedient life?

LESSON 15: GENESIS 39:1 - 23

JOSEPH AND POTIPHAR'S WIFE

Introduction

In this chapter we return to the story of Joseph. The entire chapter deals with the seemingly tragic episode of Potiphar's unnamed wife attempting to seduce Joseph. I used the words "seemingly tragic" advisedly. It does seem tragic. On the other hand, it was also one of those evil experiences that God transformed so as to accomplish His goals and frustrate the evil person's selfish goals.

There are three paragraphs in our best manuscripts of Genesis chapter 39. There is a brief summary of the content of each paragraph on the table below:

39:1-6	Joseph Bought By Potiphar
39:7-18	Joseph Refused Potiphar's Wife
39:19-23	Joseph Imprisoned by Potiphar

39:1-6 - Joseph Bought By Potiphar

Notice that the information in Genesis 37:36 is repeated in Genesis 39:1

> *Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. Potiphar, an Egyptian who was one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him there. Genesis 39:1*

It may seem redundant to say, "One of Pharaoh's officials" and then say, "The captain of the guard." Actually it is not redundant. There are three specific pieces of information about Potiphar in this verse:

- **He was an Egyptian** - Actually, the Hebrew text speaks of Potiphar as an "Egyptian man." Throughout the Old Testament this was a way to identify a very important person. Potiphar was a prominent Egyptian. To call Potiphar an "Egyptian" seems quite superfluous. With the eventual exception of Joseph, all of Pharaoh's officials were Egyptians. There is another way in which this is significant. Because he was an Egyptian, he was entitled to have slaves of his own. As we will see shortly, he had a number of slaves.
- **He was one of Pharaoh's officials** - We need to translate this into the American political structure to aid our understanding. In Washington, the president has a group of top officials who give leadership to the several departments of government. In Egypt, Potiphar was one of these leading men. Again in the American system, we have an Attorney General. This person is charged with the responsibility of the legal branch of our national government. That is the kind of position that was held by Potiphar.
- **He was Captain of the Guard** - In the Egyptian system, Potiphar was the man in charge of their legal system. His job description, however, was a bit different from that of our Attorney General. One might think of him as the Chief Executioner.

People who had earned the mistrust or ill-will of the Pharaoh were placed in the hands of Potiphar, "the captain of the guard." In this position, his favor was diligently sought and his ill-favor desperately feared.

The power and prestige of this man could hardly be overestimated. To do his job, he had to be totally devoted to the Pharaoh; a man with emotions of steel. This was a no-nonsense politician of the first order. Slaves would not be happy to discover that they had been purchased by him.

At first glance, the following verse seems to be a contradiction.

The LORD was with Joseph and he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master. Genesis 39:2

Joseph had been the heir in his father's house. Suddenly his own brothers sold him into slavery and he ended up in Egypt, where no Jewish person wanted to be. This one who had been an overseer in his father's house was now a slave. In this situation, the author begins the story by saying, "The LORD was with Joseph."

The balance of the sentence is the key to understanding what the author meant. The verse is made up of three distinct pieces of information.

- **The LORD was with Joseph** - We often think of this as meaning that God was making everything in Joseph's life easy and enjoyable. This is a misunderstanding of God's relationship with His people. "The LORD was with Joseph" can mean several things. Egypt was a nation that was deeply involved in idolatry. The LORD was with Joseph enabling him to continue worshipping Jehovah without becoming entangled in the massive idolatry of Egypt. The political lifetime of a high official, and his household, was precarious at best. "The LORD was with Joseph" and he was spared the danger and intrigue of such a system.
- **And he prospered** - Many Christians want the presence of God to keep them out of difficult and dangerous situations. From a Biblical perspective, the evidence of God's presence is shown in the way He works in our lives in the midst of tragic situations, not that He keeps us out of them. This is what Jesus spoke about when he prayed, "My prayer is not that you take them out of the world, but that you protect them from the evil one." (John 17:15.) The evidence of God's presence with Joseph is that He prospered him in the midst of his seemingly tragic surroundings and conditions. Only God could enable His servant to prosper in slavery.
- **He lived in the house of his Egyptian master** - This was unusual. Later in the book of Genesis, there is information that helps us understand the surprise of this statement in 39:2:

They served him by himself, the brothers by themselves, and the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves, because Egyptians could not eat with Hebrews, for that is detestable to Egyptians. Genesis 43:32

Egyptians refused to eat with Joseph, as they would with any Jew. It was "detestable." Everyone in Potiphar's house had to know that Joseph was a Jew. The Egyptians would not even eat with a Jew, but Potiphar allowed him to live in his house. This is part of the evidence that "the Lord was with Joseph."

It is one thing to say "the LORD was with Joseph," but evidence is what really counts.

When his master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD gave him success in everything he did, Joseph found favor in his eyes and became his attendant. Potiphar put him in charge of his household, and he entrusted to his care everything he owned. Genesis 39:3, 4

As Potiphar watched his strange new slave, he observed two things in particular:

- **Potiphar saw that the LORD was with him** - This is a general statement. It suggests that there was visible evidence that God was with Joseph. His life as a slave was different from other slaves in the same condition. We must remember that Potiphar was an idolater. He did not believe in Jehovah., but the evidence was so compelling, this strong idolater had to admit that Jehovah was real and He was with his slave, Joseph.
- **Potiphar saw that the LORD gave him (Joseph) success in everything that he did**. This is a more specific statement. This is visible, indisputable evidence. Potiphar could see that everything Joseph did prospered in a way that was not true for other slaves. The text does not say, but I suspect that Potiphar observed that Joseph prospered and succeeded in tasks where other slaves, even Egyptian slaves, had failed miserably. In all of this, Joseph had a serious limitation, he was a Jew and Egyptians detested Jews. In spite of this, Potiphar saw undeniable evidence that God was with Joseph.

There is a cause - effect relationship in verses three and four:

Verse three - Cause	Verse four - Effect
Potiphar saw Jehovah was with Joseph	Joseph found favor in Potiphar's eyes
Potiphar saw the LORD gave him success in everything he did	Joseph became Potiphar's attendant
	Potiphar put Joseph in charge of his household
	Potiphar entrusted Joseph with everything he owned

What a statement! Throughout this chapter, the Egyptian background of Potiphar was highlighted. This stresses the ill-will that existed between the Jews and the Egyptians. In spite of this, Potiphar not only allowed Joseph to live in his house, he placed everything he had in Joseph's care and control. This slave became Potiphar's attendant. This meant that everywhere he went, in the official buildings, Joseph would be at his side to assist and advise. This had to bring Potiphar more than his share of questions, jibes and perhaps ridicule. Nevertheless, it was worth the cost to Potiphar to have Joseph in charge of his affairs.

Verse five is one more illustration that God was with Joseph.

From the time he put him in charge of his household and of all that he owned, the LORD blessed the household of the Egyptian because of Joseph. The blessing of the LORD was on everything Potiphar had, both in the house and in the field. Genesis 39:5

This is a way of repeating the message of verse four for purposes of emphasis. When Jewish writers wanted to stress a message, they used repetition to accomplish it. Sometimes the repetition was an exact duplication of previously recorded words. Psalm 136 is a case in point. In each of the 26 verses of this Psalm, David wrote, "his love endures forever." In other instances the repetition is similar to previous statements, but not exactly the same. This was usually done when the author wanted to include new information while at the same time emphasizing the theme he wanted to stress. Verse five is such a verse. There are two parts to the verse. Each part illustrates the fact that God was with Joseph.

- God blessed Potiphar because of Joseph from the moment the Chief Executioner placed his house and all he owned in Joseph's care.
- The blessing of the LORD was on everything Potiphar had both in the house and in the field. "In the field" specifies what the author meant, in the first part of the verse when he said, "All that he owned." Apparently Potiphar was a rich landowner as well as holding a prestigious position in Pharaoh's government.

The fact that Joseph had control of everything Potiphar owned was so startling the author wanted to stress it one more time.

> *So he left in Joseph's care everything he had; with Joseph in charge, he did not concern himself with anything except the food he ate. Now Joseph was well-built and handsome,... Genesis 39:6*

Again, this is a repetition which emphasizes the author's message and adds additional insights as well. The author stressed again, a fourth time in three verses, that Potiphar placed everything he owned in Joseph's care. It was the author's way of emphasizing that Potiphar entrusted all his responsibilities as well as his possessions to the care of this despised Jewish slave. Oh, how that must have sent a shock through the upper levels of Egyptian government! The additional information, in this verse, concerns Potiphar's attitude toward what Joseph controlled. Potiphar trusted Joseph so completely that he did not even think about the care of his possessions and responsibilities.

There are at least two possible understandings of the phrase, "Except the food he ate."

- It could be the author meant Potiphar was aware of the food he ate because he saw it and tasted it. He couldn't help knowing what it was.
- It could be that the prohibition from eating with a Jew extended to the purchase and preparation of food as well. If that is true, then Potiphar would have had to entrust this responsibility to the care of someone else.

The text does not help us here. My own feeling is that the author was suggesting the second possibility.

The closing portion of this verse is quite interesting. In the English text, the sentence continues into verse seven. In the Hebrew text, the words, "now Joseph was well built and handsome," are a sentence in themselves. Obviously, the ideas are related, but don't form a single thought. In fact, the Hebrew text might literally be translated, "**And** Joseph was handsome of form and handsome of appearance." There were visual reasons why Potiphar's wife would take romantic notice of this Hebrew slave.

A question arises. Jewish people were despised by the Egyptians. This being the case, why would she choose to approach a Jewish slave rather than an Egyptian or some other acceptable nationality? The text does not give us this information. Part of it must have

been his appearance and demeanor. It may have been, in part, the position he held in Potiphar's home. It could also indicate a level of desperation. Ultimately, we do not know.

Genesis 39:7-18 - Joseph Refused Potiphar's Wife

Because of the statement at the end of verse six, the information in the following verse should not be a surprise.

> *And after awhile his master's wife took notice of Joseph and said, "Come to bed with me!" Genesis 39:7*

The text implies that it was Joseph's looks and demeanor that prompted Potiphar's wife to seek this illicit relationship with him.

The text sounds as though this were a single event. From the perspective of the Hebrew text, it is reasonable to consider this an ongoing experience. It appears that she was constantly pushing Joseph to comply with her desires.

There is another facet to this picture. Her invitation was as blatant as it was persistent. This put even more pressure on Joseph to comply.

There is yet another consideration to this situation. Potiphar's wife was considered his master almost as much as Potiphar was. For a slave to refuse to obey a command or even a suggestion of his master would bring severe punishment and even death. It was not healthy to say "no" to the master.

Put yourself in Joseph's position for a moment. You have worked hard and **earned** a very important and prestigious position in this elite home. The temptation to enjoy the benefits and opportunities of your accomplishments would be very strong.

You are a man without a wife, but with all the desires that every other man has. To have such an invitation would be beyond his wildest dreams. The physical temptation would be almost irresistible.

You are a slave in a land where slaves have no rights at all. They are considered property, not people. This woman is almost as much your master as her husband is. To say "no" to her was tantamount to suicide. She could command and other servants would whip you to death.

Remember where you live! This is the home of the Chief Executioner, which probably adjoins the prison for political prisoners at the palace. It is a short walk to certain death.

You are a slave! Your master has the power of life and death over you. If you give in to his wife's desires and he discovers you, she can say it was your idea. The word of a slave stood for nothing. Even if he didn't catch you, someone would probably tell him about your evil deed. He is the Chief Executioner and you would certainly be put to death. Thus, if you do as she urges you, you risk certain death. If you refuse her invitation, you are just as apt to die. In such situations, people usually choose the risky direction they would enjoy the most.

In the face of all the things that urge your compliance with her desires stands the will of God. Jehovah - the eternal Judge - commands you to live a life of purity and faithfulness, even in your servitude. You not only serve God; you love Him. You know that to please this woman, you must bring great displeasure to God. This is the mental dilemma in which Joseph had to decide how he would deal with this very tempting invitation.

Against the background of these understandings, we want to look at the next verses:

But he refused. "With me in charge," he told her, "my master does not concern himself with anything in the house; everything he owns he has entrusted to my care. No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?" Genesis 39:8, 9

Notice that verse eight begins with the word "but." This word indicates that the information which follows will stand in sharp contrast with the material which precedes it. That is exactly what we discover here. The content of verse seven would cause one to anticipate Joseph's compliance with his master's wife's invitation. In fact, just the opposite is what happened.

These two verses make it clear that Joseph was not simply being rebellious against his master. He refused her invitation and then explained the reasons for his actions. Observe the reasons Joseph gave for his refusal:

- **Potiphar doesn't worry about anything in his house because I am in charge.** - "My master does not concern himself with anything in the house"
- **I am in total control of Potiphar's house** - "No one is greater in this house than I am."
- **Everything, except you , his wife, is available to me** - "My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife."
- **It is, therefore ,unthinkable that I would betray his trust in this way** - "How then could I do such a wicked thing."
- **It would be a sin against God (Elohim - the God of mercy)** - "... and sin against God."

These five explanations boil down to two basic ideas:

- It would be a terrible betrayal of the trust Potiphar had placed in him.
- It would be a sin against God.

Joseph's response to Potiphar's wife gives an insight into his character:

- Joseph treasured the confidence he had earned from Potiphar. He was willing to risk personal harm, even death, rather than give in to this blatant appeal to his physical satisfactions.
- In an idolatrous land where moral decay was rampant, Joseph was committed to purity of life and, if necessary, sacrificial obedience to God.

What a man of God he was!

This was not the end of the story. Potiphar's wife was a woman of dogged persistence.

And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her. Genesis 39:10

It is difficult to imagine a slave being able to refuse such an invitation as this at all. Add to this the fact that all day, every day, the urging invitation persisted and increased.

Notice that Joseph did more than say "no." He was very careful not to be there alone. This is more than refusal. Joseph was absolutely determined both to refuse the invitation as well as to do everything possible to prevent even the invitation to be offered again.

There are no lengths which are too far for evil to go to achieve its vile desires.

One day he went into the house to attend to his duties, and none of the household servants was inside. Genesis 39:11

This tragedy does not represent a time when Joseph was struggling with lowered resistance. He was being just as careful and determined as he had been when she first invited him into her bed. She was constantly inviting and looking for opportunities to accomplish her evil desires.

She finally found an excellent opportunity - he had come into the house to care for his responsibilities. At the same time, all the other servants were out of the house. In this scenario, two things were in her favor:

- The opportunity was available - Joseph was present.
- Safety from detection was reasonably assured - the other servants were out of the house.

The text does not say why the other servants were not present. It is possible that it was coincidental. It is more likely that she arranged for all of the servants to be away so that her evil design could be accomplished. This, however, cannot be established.

There is another added ingredient in her attempted liaison. Notice how the author reported it:

She caught him by his cloak and said, "Come to bed with me!" But he left his cloak in her hand and ran out of the house. Genesis 39:12

When an invitation failed, Potiphar's wife turned to a mild, but effective form of pressure - she strongly seized his garment. This suggests she was afraid he would refuse again and flee her presence. Questions arise concerning this verse:

Knowing she was still trying to get him to compromise his standard of purity, why did Joseph come close enough for her to grasp his cloak, his badge of authority in the house? The text does not say. Some scholars conjecture that Joseph had weakened enough to come close to her. This is possible , but cannot be verified. It could be that the things Joseph had to do took him into a part of the house where she was or had come. We do not know.

When she grabbed his cloak, why didn't he just pull it away from her? He was certainly strong enough. Some suggest that he may not have been sure he wanted to pull away. That is possible. It is just as possible that his only thought was to get away from her as quickly as possible. We can only conjecture concerning the real reason.

Potiphar's wife's problems were now compounded - her desire for a sexual liaison with Joseph were frustrated; she was rejected; her slave refused to obey her wishes.

When she saw that he had left his cloak in her hand and had run out of the house, she called her household servants. "Look," she said to them, "this Hebrew has been brought to us to make sport of us! He came in here to sleep with me, but I screamed. When he heard me scream for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house." Genesis 39:13-15

In verse 13, she sized up her situation. It was very clear that her desires had been made plain, but were not satisfied. She had to act. For whatever reason, Joseph abandoned his cloak of authority and fled the house.

Potiphar's wife called the men of her house. This means that though these men were not in the house, they were not far away. This tells us that she was willing to take some serious risks in order to go to bed with Joseph.

Just as the Scriptures give us an understanding of who God is and what righteousness looks like, it also gives a vivid illustration of what evil looks like. That is the case in this story.

Observe that when she talked with the slaves of the house, she blamed her husband for the evil she had done. When people do wrong they want to place the blame on someone else. There is a difference between our text and the Hebrew text. Our text says, "This Hebrew has been brought to us to make sport of us." The Hebrew text is more direct, "He (Potiphar) brought us a Hebrew man to sport with us." In both instances, the responsibility is on Potiphar, but it is more direct in the Hebrew text.

Notice also that as she lays the ground work for the lie she is going to tell Potiphar, she attempts to form a coalition with the servants. In each of the versions it says "...make sport with **us**," not make sport of **me**." If the servants buy her idea of "we" rather than "me," then her position will be much stronger when she lies to Potiphar.

Sin always leads to additional sin. Having blamed Potiphar for bringing Joseph into the house, she then had to lie about him. She said, "He came in here to sleep with me." She blamed Joseph for just the opposite of what he did. He tried to avoid even her presence. She claimed that he came seeking to go to bed with her.

She also lied about herself. She had done everything possible to get him to join her in bed. Her statement, however, portrays her as screaming for help, as doing everything possible to avoid his untoward advances. This, of course, was not true. Not until she knew her efforts were in vain did she scream for others to come.

Notice her report was not totally false. When it was to her advantage, she told the truth. She said "He left his coat beside me and ran out of the house." There is a half truth even when her story was mostly false. Joseph did leave his cloak of authority with her. The false impression was that he left it in her clutches trying to escape so that his error would not be discovered. The truth, of course, was that he was trying to avoid her undesired advances.

It might be possible that Potiphar's wife acted spontaneously, though I doubt it. Her actions at this point seem more obvious.

> *She kept his cloak beside her until his master came home. Genesis 39:16*

This is a premeditated act. The text states that she kept the cloak beside her, "until his master came home." It is clear that her motive was to create a problem between Joseph and his master. This also gives us added illustration of the designs of evil. The cloak was the evidence she provided along with the story she told Potiphar:

> *Then she told him this story: "That Hebrew slave you brought us came to me to make sport of me. But as soon as I screamed for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house. Genesis 39:17, 18*

The word translated "story" is "dabar" (דָּבָר) which means "word," "matter," or "thing." A free translation of the Hebrew text might be, "she spoke to him these same words." If you compare the two accounts, there are significant differences:

VERSE 14 - TO SLAVES	VERSE 17 - TO POTIPHAR
"This Hebrew **MAN** has been brought to **us** to make sport of **us**."	"That Hebrew **slave** you brought **us** came to me to make sport of **me.**"
Speaking to slaves, she called Joseph a Hebrew MAN. This would prevent the servants from siding with a fellow sufferer.	Speaking to Potiphar, she called Joseph a Hebrew **slave**. In this manner she increased the apparent affront to her as his owner.
When speaking to servants, she talked about the Jewish MAN who would make sport of US. She spoke of a threat to THEM and to her.	When she spoke of Joseph making sport "**to ME**" because she was certain Potiphar would not be as concerned about his advances to the female slaves.
"He came in here to sleep with me." This would rouse their concern over the unfortunate thing Joseph was accused of doing.	Interestingly, she did not mention Joseph's alleged intent to sleep with her. We will say more about this later.
The report about the cloak was the same.	The report about the cloak was the same.

Something rises up within us in disgust that a person would do such a terrible thing. We find ourselves wishing her husband would see through the lies, false accusations and manipulation. It is a clear picture of the depths to which evil will stoop.

Genesis 39:19-23 - Joseph Imprisoned by Potiphar

In this paragraph, the spotlight shifts away from the manipulative wife to Potiphar himself.

> *When his master heard the story his wife told him, saying, "This is how your slave treated me," he burned with anger. And Joseph's master took him, and put him into the prison, the place where the king's prisoners were bound: and he was there in the prison. Genesis 39:19, 20*

It is assumed by most scholars that Potiphar's wife demonstrated Joseph's alleged improprieties. The text hints in this direction, but does not say so in so many words.

Put yourself in Potiphar's position. It was unheard of for anyone to entrust so much of his life and property to a despised Hebrew slave. There would certainly be eyebrows raised, and questions asked. The "proper" people of the political community would certainly wonder about Potiphar's propriety and wisdom in using a Jew as an assistant and the manager of all his affairs.

Potiphar had been more than kind to Joseph despite the fact that Joseph had brought both success and prosperity to his house. Potiphar's sense of being used, of betrayal had to be beyond comprehension.

To hear his wife say, "This is how your **slave** treated me" was just too much. There are at least two ways her words could be taken:

- She may have been pointing the accusing finger at Potiphar for bringing a Jewish slave into the household. It would be like saying, "If you hadn't brought him here, this would not have happened."
- She could have been expressing outrage at the slave, but not at her husband.

The text is not helpful at this point, but I tend to think that the former possibility is more plausible.

The text clearly described Potiphar's response. It consists of two parts:

- **He burned with anger** - The word "burned" is "charah" (חָרָה) literally means "to glow" like incense. It was also used to describe something so hot that it nearly exploded with heat. The word "anger" is "aph" (אַף) and literally means "nostril." It describes anger so intense that one's nostrils flair and breathing is very hard.
- **Potiphar took Joseph and put him into prison.** This refers to the facility over which he held control; the prison where the king's prisoners were kept.

Questions arise at this point:

One immediately wonders, was Potiphar angry at his wife or was he angry at Joseph? There is no way to tell from the text. There is compelling reason to think he might be angry with his wife, but we do not know that he knew what the text tells us about the story.

One wonders, why did Potiphar place Joseph in prison when anyone would expect that he would rather put him to death? The text is not helpful in answering this question. It was not uncommon for a slave to be put to death for disobedience. It would be even more understandable for a slave to be put to death for attempting to go to bed with his master's wife. The text does not say so, but there are many scholars who believe that Potiphar suspected that his wife was involved in this kind of liaison with other men. If that were true, he would not have been too surprised if she became involved with yet another man. This kind of immoral conduct was very common in the court and the entire culture. Their thinking would be that Potiphar did not kill Joseph because he was convinced that it was not his fault. He placed Joseph in prison rather than killing him because it was socially and politically necessary for him to do something, but he did not have to put the man to death for something that was probably not his fault.

Because Potiphar was the Captain of the Guard, the Chief Executioner, there were many servants who were constantly at his command. Why, then, did he take Joseph to the prison rather than send him there in the custody of a servant? The text is not helpful in answering this question, either. If Potiphar was suspicious of his wife, as some scholars believe, then he would want to make sure that nothing untoward happened to the slave that had been so beneficial to him in the past. He could have entrusted Joseph's incarceration to several different servants. The only way he could be sure that nothing unfortunate happened to him was to take care of it himself. Did he do that? We can only conjecture. I believe he did, but can not prove that assumption.

There is a subtle inference in verse 20 that should not be overlooked. The author said, "...put him in prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined." This was a very special place. When a person was placed in this prison, he had no hope of ever being released. Severe punishment was meted out to prisoners in this facility. The fact that this was the place where the king's prisoners were kept meant that Potiphar was in control of it. This had to be a frightening discovery for Joseph as well.

This is a dramatic point in the story. The statements which follow, however, display a serious shift in focus:

> *The Lord was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden. Genesis 39:21*

Though it is not evident in our text, this verse begins with the word "and" in the Hebrew text. It is interesting to note that almost all the verses of chapters 37 through 39 begin with the word "and" in the Hebrew text. As indicated earlier, these chapters read a bit like the Gospel of Mark. It sounds as though each incident follows immediately the previous one. That is not accurate, but it sounds that way.

It is a bit startling to read these tragic events and then read, "And the Lord was with him." This is because of our misinformed understandings. We tend to think that **IF** God is with us, **THEN** everything will go well. The Scriptures do not teach this, but we find ourselves thinking that way just as Israel did.

God was with Joseph in the midst of the trauma and tragedy that seemed to engulf his life. This is more than a platitude. The author offered two specific illustrations of God's presence with Joseph:

- **God showed Joseph kindness in the eyes of the prison warden** - This might not seem like much to us, but it was to Joseph. Prison wardens were usually chosen because they were tough and ruthless. It was usually a contradiction to speak of kindness and a warden in the same breath. Nevertheless, God worked in such a way that this hardened warden showed kindness.
- **God granted Joseph favor in the eyes of the prison warden** - Again, this is surprising. A warden never forgot that he was dealing with prisoners. These people were in his care because they had proven themselves to be untrustworthy. Still, God gave Joseph favor in the warden's eyes. The word "favor" is "chawnan" (חָנַן). The word literally means "to bend." It was used to describe a superior stooping in kindness to an inferior. It was sometimes used concerning the heathen supplications to their idols. From this, the idea of finding favor developed.

These two statements are general in nature. The author will now give more specific information to describe what he meant by these two statements:

> *So the warden put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison, and he was made responsible for all that was done there. Genesis 39:22*

Again, the Hebrew text begins this verse with the word "and." The Hebrew text is a bit more dramatic than our English translations:

> *And the warden gave the house of the prison into Joseph's hand. All the prisoners who were in the prison house and all that they did there, he did."*

The author made two specific points in this verse:

- **Joseph**, a prisoner, **ran the prison.** The warden did not check on him nor did he guard Joseph.
- **Joseph was responsible for everything that happened** - This is a prisoner's dream! Can you imagine what would happen if a prisoner were allowed to run a prison, even for a day?! Joseph had such favor with the warden that he was allowed to be responsible for everything that happened in the prison.

This was astonishing! We must remember that if anything unfortunate happened in the prison, the warden would pay for it with his life. That gives us quite an impression of just how much favor God gave Joseph with the warden. We must also remember this was God's doing.

We would easily assume it was because Joseph was an exemplary prisoner. The author was specific. This was a grace God gave to Joseph; it was the product of God's presence with Joseph.

The author wants to stress the idea even more. He did this again, by repetition with additional information:

> *The warden paid no attention to anything under Joseph's care, because the Lord was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did. Genesis 39:23*

Joseph not only ran the prison, he did so without oversight or being guarded. That is amazing! One could see the warden letting a model prisoner do some work so he did not have to do it. This is different. Joseph took complete charge of the prison.

Put yourself in the place of one of the other prisoners. You were in this prison years before Joseph arrived. There is such a thing as seniority rights in a prison. You have heard the rumor that Joseph was placed in this prison because he tried to seduce the Chief Executioner's wife. You know that he is a Jew. You may be a prisoner, but you are Egyptian and Egyptians hate Jews. You also discovered that this Jew worshipped Jehovah rather than the idols that were a part of your background. Now suddenly you see him running the prison. You would begin to wonder what was happening. You couldn't believe that the warden would trust a Jew with anything. You notice that everything is going well and you can't believe it. A despised Jew would probably make a mess of everything in the prison, but now it is better. Consternation would be the conservative way to express what was going on in your mind.

In this verse, the author states the effect and then identifies the cause:

Effect - "The warden paid no attention to anything under Joseph's care..."

Cause - Because the Lord was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did."

Again, the Hebrew text is a bit more direct. It presents verse 23 in these words:

> *"For there was no warden of the prison house looking to anything that was in his hand. Jehovah was with him and what he was doing, Jehovah prospered."*

The word "prospered" is "tsaleach" (צָלַח). It means to push forward, to break out with mighty force. Eventually, it came to mean profitable or prosper. The prospering was God's doing, not Joseph's. Joseph just did what he was supposed to do.

Conclusion

There are several spiritual principles at work in this passage. We need to be aware of what they are and how they interact with each other.

The basic premise is simple and forthright - righteousness will build up the person; evil will seek to destroy the person. No matter what appearances may be, this is always the case.

The presence and power of God in the dilemmas of life mean that we can have confidence, not the assurance of comfort. You may remember that all of the people in Hebrews 11 experienced the presence of God in the midst of their struggle.

In the heat of our spiritual battles, we must remember that what we do to/for others is an expression of what we do to God. When Nathan confronted David with his great failure, David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against Jehovah." II Samuel 12:13a

When struggles come, we naturally wonder, "Why?" We must remember, when the attack of evil is the strongest, righteousness will highlight the goodness of God. This will make plain just how terrible evil really is. That, God will do. We do not have to do it.

We shun pain and temptation because we know our weakness. God is able to strengthen us to go through this. God will keep us from destruction, but not from pain and temptation. God will even use the attack of evil to strengthen His people and honor His holy name.

Though we can not understand it, people can see that God is with us and is prospering our efforts. It is beyond our comprehension, but God will even bless the ungodly because of his servants. Potiphar, an idolater, was blessed and prospered because Joseph lived and served in his house. We must ask ourselves, whom will God bless because we are with them?

It is painful, but it is a faithful observation. There is no record of Joseph's complaint or accusation of those who did him wrong or sinned against Him. Our complaints are not really the result of pain. We often complain and accuse because we, down deep, are afraid people will get away with their evil acts. It appeared as though they got away with these things in Joseph's life. The end of the story shows just how false this impression really was.

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QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 16

JOSEPH INTERPRETED THE DREAMS OF THE CUPBEARER AND BAKER

GENESIS 40:1 - 23

1. In our best documents of Genesis chapter forty, there are three paragraph. On the following table, write a summary of seven words or less for each paragraph.

40:1-8	
40:9-15	
40:16-23	

2. In Genesis 40:1-8, the author reported that Pharaoh's cupbearer and baker had dreams.
   a. In Genesis 40:1, the author described a tense situation in Pharaoh's court.
      (1). Why would a cupbearer be so important to the Pharaoh?
      (2). Study the verse carefully. Are there any hints concerning the nature of the offenses of these two officials?
   b. In Genesis 40:2, there is a hint concerning the seriousness of the offenses of these two officials. What is the hint? What does it tell you?
   c. Think carefully about the wording of Genesis 40:3.
      (1). What surprising information do you find there?
      (2). What does this information tell you?
   d. In Genesis 40:4, there is an even greater surprise.
      (1). What is the surprise?
      (2). What does this tell you about Potiphar and Joseph?
      (3). What specific insights does this verse give you concerning the character of Joseph?
   e. In Genesis 40:5, the author introduced the dreams of the cupbearer and baker.
      (1). This verse seems very awkwardly written. What could account for this?
      (2). List the pieces of information you find in this verse. What did you learn from this exercise?
   f. In Genesis 40:6, Joseph observed something about the two officials.
      (1). What did Joseph observe?
      (2). What does this tell you about Joseph and his attitude?
   g. In Genesis 40:7, Joseph questioned the cupbearer and baker concerning their appearance.
      (1). What did he ask them?
      (2). Why was it important for him to ask them?
      (3). Compare the wording of verses six and seven. What did you discover?
   h. There is a contrast between Joseph and the two officials in Genesis 40:8.
      (1). What is the contrast?
      (2). What does it tell you?

3. In Genesis 40:9-15, Joseph heard and interpreted the cupbearer's dream.
   a. Read verse nine carefully. What does a vine have to do with a cupbearer's life?
   b. Read Genesis 40:10, 11, again carefully.
      (1). What is there in these verses that would give Joseph the interpretation that he gave the cupbearer?
      (2). In Genesis 40:12-14, Joseph interpreted the cupbearer's dream.
         (a). In verse 12, Joseph talked about branches as days. What would cause Joseph to understand that three branches means three days?
         (b). In Genesis 40:13, Joseph continued his interpretation.
            [1]. Put yourself in Joseph's position as he interpreted this dream. What would you feel?
            [2]. Put yourself in the cupbearer's position. How would you feel when you heard this interpretation?
         (c). In Genesis 40:14, Joseph made two requests of the Chief cupbearer.
            [1]. What were the requests?
            [2]. What do these things tell you about Joseph's situation?
         (d). In Genesis 40:15, the author gives us a glimpse into Joseph's life that we have not seen before this.
            [1]. If you were Joseph and said these words, what would you be trying to tell the Chief cupbearer?
            [2]. Reflect upon the two statements in this verse.
               [a]. What is the significance of the first statement?
               [b]. Why would he feel the need to say this?
               [c]. What is the significance of the second statement?
               [d]. What would be missing in the story if he had not made this statement?

5. In Genesis 40:16-23, Joseph addressed his attention to the dream of the chief baker.
   a. In Genesis 40:16, 17, the chief baker reported his dream.
      (1). Read Genesis 40:16, 17 very carefully. On the basis of the text, what do you think the chief baker would have done if the previous interpretation had not been positive?
      (2). This was an unusual dream. On the basis of the text, what can you discover about the interpretation?
   b. In Genesis 40:18, 19, Joseph interpreted the chief baker's dream.
      (1). Write down each statement Joseph made in his interpretation. What can you learn from this list?
      (2). Put yourself in Joseph's position as he gave this interpretation. What would you feel?
      (3). Now, put yourself in the chief baker's position.
         (a). What questions would race through your mind?
         (b). How would you feel?
            [1]. How would you feel about Pharaoh?
            [2]. How would you feel about Joseph?
            [3]. How would you feel about the chief cupbearer?

c. In Genesis 40:20-22, the author described Pharaoh's removal of the two officials from the prison.
   (1). Look carefully at Genesis 40:20
      (a). What does Pharaoh's birthday party have to do with the release of these two officials from prison?
      (b). Why would he choose to release the two officials "in the presence of his officials."?
   (2). Read Genesis 40:21 very carefully.
      (a). Compare this verse with 40:13. What does this study tell you?
      (b). If you were Joseph, how would you feel to see the chief cupbearer being restored? Why would you feel that way?
   (3). Read 40:22 again.
      (a). Compare Genesis 40:22 with 40:19. What did you learn from that study?
      (b). Look carefully at the last half of Genesis 40:22.
         [1]. What does it tell you?
         [2]. Why does the author include this information here?
      (c). In Genesis 40:23, there is a surprising turn of events.
         [1]. If you were Joseph and realized the truth of this verse, how would you feel?
         [2]. Make two columns on a sheet of paper. In one column write the things Joseph did for the chief butler/cup bearer. In the second column describe how the chief butler treated Joseph
         [3]. What does this study tell you?

6. Now reflect on your study of the story of Joseph and the two high officials from Pharaoh's court.
   a. What did you learn from this chapter?
   b. What does the chapter tell you about God?
   c. What did you discover about yourself in this study?
   d. What changes will you make in your life because of this study?

LESSON 16: GENESIS 40:1 - 23

JOSEPH INTERPRETS DREAMS OF THE CUPBEARER AND BAKER

Introduction

In chapter 40, the story of Joseph takes a turn. It describes life inside the prison. There are three paragraphs, in Genesis chapter 40, in our best documents of the book.

40:1-8	The Butler and Baker Dream Dreams
40:9-15	Joseph Interprets the Cupbearer Dream
40:16-23	Joseph Interprets the Bakers Dream

Genesis 40:1-8 - The Cupbearer and Baker Dream Dreams

The chapter begins with a time of tension and uneasiness in the palace of Pharaoh. Observe the way the author reports the upheaval.

> *Some time later, the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt offended their master, the king of Egypt. Genesis 40:1*

The Chief of the Butlers was one of the most trusted officers of the king. He was the king's cupbearer. He was over all the provisions of food and drink for the palace. There were many butlers under his direction. It was his primary task to protect the life of the king by making sure that no one tried to poison him. He carried out this task by drinking from the king's cup before the king did. If he did not get sick and die, then the king knew that it was safe for him to drink of the cup also. Intrigue was rampant in the palace of every nation. There were many who had tried to poison their king only to bring about the untimely death of the cupbearer. This would make the cup bearer very eager to protect the life of the king.

The baker was really the chief of the bakers. This title referred to the one who was the head of all the bakers of the palace. In addition, the chief baker was responsible for the preparation of bread and other food that was offered to the many Egyptian gods. In effect, he served in the priestly role. This gave him a degree of prestige in the Egyptian hierarchy. The chief baker was also a highly trusted official of the Pharaoh. It would be easy to poison the Pharaoh by placing poison in the food he was to eat. If the king could not trust the chief baker, he had to be removed immediately. This is how critical his trustworthiness had to be.

The text indicates that these two highly placed and ultimately trusted officials offended Pharaoh, the king of Egypt. The text, however, does not state what had alienated these men from the king. The word "offended" is "chawtah" (חָטָא) and comes from a military context. In Judges 20:16, left-handed slingers could throw stones at a target and not "miss." The word "miss" is "chawtah." It is similar to the Greek understanding of sin - to miss the mark. It is a failure to live up to expectations. Apparently, the offense of the

nameless chief of cupbearers and chief of bakers was that they did not perform their duties in a way that pleased the Pharaoh. Because the cupbearer was later restored to his position, there is good reason to doubt that these two officials were involved in a scheme to poison the Pharaoh. Had that been the case, he would never have been restored to his trusted position later on. There are many possibilities of how these men offended the king. It could have been nothing more serious than a fly found floating in the king's wine goblet or a tiny pebble in his bread. This is a detail that will probably remain a mystery. What is clear is that they had done something or failed to something the king thought they should have given greater care.

Notice, the text says that these two high officials "offended their master, the king of Egypt." The word "master" is "adone" (אָדוֹן). This word means "sovereign" or "to rule." It was also used as one of the names for God - Adonai. It describes one who controls with absolute authority. The "Adonai" is the owner, the master who dictates every action. This, indeed, was the relationship all officials held with the Pharaoh.

The response of Pharaoh was crystal clear:

> *Pharaoh was angry with his two officials, the chief cupbearer and chief baker...Genesis 40:2*

The word angry is "qatsaph" (קָצַף) and usually means "to be wrathful," "unusually angry" There is no statement about why Pharaoh was so angry with these two officials. There is also no explanation concerning why Pharaoh's anger did not turn to murder when officials displeased him. Such a reaction was not unusual.

As the story continues, you can see something of the importance of Potiphar.

> *And put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, in the same prison where Joseph was confined. Genesis 40:3*

When two of the most highly trusted individuals in the court were punished, they were placed in his care. This suggests that Pharaoh trusted Potiphar at least as much as he did the chief cupbearer and Chief Baker, and probably more.

The author used the word "ward." It is "mishmar" (מִשְׁמָר). In twelve of the twenty-two times it appears, it describes a place of confinement, a prison. Observe, the author indicates this is the same prison where Joseph was imprisoned.

There is information in the next verse which is somewhat surprising. In view of recent events, this is one of the last things I would expect Potiphar to do.

> *The captain of the guard assigned them to Joseph, and he attended them. After they had been in custody for some time. Genesis 40:4*

The captain of the guard was Potiphar. Though he had placed Joseph in prison, still he placed two of the highest Egyptian officials in Joseph's care. This tells us something about both men:

Potiphar - This verse is one of the reasons some people believe that Potiphar considered Joseph to be innocent. They believe he put Joseph into prison because he had to in order to save face. The fact that Potiphar placed these important prisoners in Joseph's care is evidence of how much he trusted his Jewish slave. I believe this is true.

Joseph - Certainly Joseph had to feel betrayed that his master, whom he served so faithfully, had placed him in prison for a crime he did not commit. We will say more about that later. This would normally cause resentment that would affect his attitude and behavior in the prison. It is obvious, however, that though Joseph had been wrongfully treated, and he knew it, his attitude and conduct were so appropriate that Potiphar would entrust these very important prisoners to his care. What a witness this was both for God and for Joseph!

The text says, "He (Joseph) attended them." The word "attended" is "shawrath." (שָׁרַת). It means "to provide service as a slave," "to minister to another." It appears that the author meant that Joseph served these men as their slaves had done when the men enjoyed the favor of the Pharaoh.

The author indicated that the two prisoners were in custody "for some time." This word is "yamim" (יָמִים) and in 2008 of the 2274 references it is translated "day." It comes from a root word that means "hot." Remember that was a hot climate. One way to keep track of time was to count the times it was hot. This, of course, was every day. This is a very general term. It was used to identify spans of time from 24 hours to 1000 years. In this instance, it described a period of time which was lengthy, but not precisely defined. This part of the verse tells us that Joseph served them and took responsibility for them over a lengthy span of time.

During the time these two officials were in Joseph's care, they had an unusual experience.

> *Each of the two men - the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt, who were being held in prison - had a dream the same night, and each dream had a meaning of its own. Genesis 40:5*

The author wrote with extreme care, almost to the point of being redundant. There are several pieces of information in this verse:

- Both men were in prison on this night - This was a means of bringing emphasis to the text.
- Both men had a dream on the same night.
- The dreams were different, but each had a specific meaning.

The author redundantly repeated the fact that the men who had these dreams were indeed the chief cupbearer and chief baker of Egypt. This awkward sentence was written this way to stress the fact that though it was unusual, they were the ones in prison, the ones who dreamed separate dreams the same night.

The author previously indicated that Joseph was servant to these high officials in prison. As he performed this responsibility on one occasion, he noticed something unusual.

> *When Joseph came to them the next morning, he saw that they were dejected. Genesis 40:6*

The word "dejected" is "zaeph" (זָעֵף) and carried the idea of sadness and dejection. It also has the connotation of being troubled in heart, of being filled with rage. It appears that both ideas are needed to describe what Joseph saw in the men's faces that morning.

Joseph's response was a natural one. Notice what he said to them:

So he asked Pharaoh's officials who were in custody with him in his master's house, "Why are your faces so sad today?" Genesis 40:7

The author again stresses the fact that these two men were top government officials by repeating their identity. This may be because it suggests two things which might be hard to believe:

- Two such highly placed officials would seldom be found in prison.
- It would be unusual to find two such highly placed officials in the care of a Jewish slave, particularly one who had been accused as Joseph was.

Observe that in verse six, Joseph saw that their faces were "dejected." When he asked them about this, however, he used a different word - "sad."

- Verse six - "Dejected" - As we indicated, in verse six, this word combines the idea of sadness and rage. It is sadness mixed with rage, or at least out of humor.
- Verse seven - "sad" - This word is "rah" (רַע). It described something "bad," "the opposite of good." It was used to describe the garden scene with its tree of good and "evil." In the Scriptures it was used to describe things from displeasure to the opposite of "good."

Why would he make such a distinction? The text does not say. It may be that Joseph was uncertain concerning how to describe what he saw on their faces - seeing one thing one time and something else at another.

The two men explained their dilemma in simple terms:

"We both had dreams," they answered, "but there is no one to interpret them." Then Joseph said to them, "Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell me your dreams." Genesis 40:8

Obviously the two men did not take this event lightly. Dreams were considered prophetic in nature. These men were afraid of what the troubling dreams might mean for their lives. Life had already taken a tragic turn landing them in prison. More ominous news they did not need.

They had no one to interpret their dreams. Being in prison they had no hope of finding an interpreter. With no hope of discovering the truth, they did a very human thing - they feared the worst.

It is thought by some that a dream must be interpreted not later than one day after the person dreamed it. The second day would be too late. It is not possible to substantiate this line of thinking, but it is interesting.

Look carefully at Joseph's response to the explanation the two officials gave him. There is a contrast in this verse. These are the contrasting parts:

Officials - "We both had dreams...but **there is no one to interpret them**." They viewed life in strictly humanistic terms. If human help was not available, then there was no help. We know that in ancient times there was a whole school of dream interpretation. These experts studied books on the subject to learn it well. Such men were kept in the palaces of kings and rulers to give them advice about future events for them and their people. In the prison, however, these officials had no interpreter and they were afraid.

Joseph - "Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell me your dreams." Joseph, on the other hand, saw all of life in conjunction with God. God was in the palace, but also in the prison. Therefore, God's people were never unable to find help.

Joseph's second statement is particularly interesting - "Tell me your dreams." Joseph claimed no power to interpret. God interprets, not man. Having said this, Joseph said, "Tell me your dreams." Though Joseph does not say it, the implication is clear - God interprets, but Joseph is the one through whom God works, in this instance, inside or outside the prison.

The contrast has to do with who is in control; who it is that acts on behalf of those in need of wisdom. For the officials, it was the well trained; for Joseph it was God.

This is a quality you see over and over again in the life of Joseph. He used every possible event and situation as an opportunity to focus attention upon God and the greatness of His power.

Genesis 40:9-15 - Joseph Interpreted the Cupbearer's Dream

There are two parts to this paragraph. They are as follows:

- Genesis 40:9-11 - The Chief Cupbearer Reported His Dream
- Genesis 40:12-15 - Joseph Interpreted the Butler's Dream

A. Genesis 40:9-11 - The Chief Butler Reported His Dream

This portion of the paragraph is made up of a single quotation. It is the Chief Butler's report of the dream he had the night before.

> *So the chief cupbearer told Joseph his dream. He said to him, "In my dream I saw a vine in front of me." Genesis 40:9*

The first thing to note is that we know this official's title, but we do not know his name;. This is significant. In the Old Testament, people who are nameless are usually the "bad guys" of the story. This person is one of the main characters of this part of the story, but remains nameless.

To the Jew, the vine and the wine are symbols of great joy. That will be true in this instance, as well. The whole story has not yet been revealed, but it portends to be a story of joy with a happy ending.

There is an interesting observation in the next verse:

> *And on the vine were three branches as soon as it budded, it blossomed, and its clusters ripened into grapes. Genesis 40:10*

This verse is interesting because of the way it is reported. It sounds as though it all happened in a minute or two. It is like time-lapse photography. The whole process, which takes months in real life, was compressed into a brief dream, which took only minutes at the most.

The chief cupbearer continued with his report of the dream:

> *Pharaoh's cup was in my hand, and I took the grapes, squeezed them into Pharaoh's cup and put the cup in his hand. Genesis 40:11*

The cup bearer was more than a server for the king. He was trusted with the security of the vessels from which the king would eat and this was important because any one of these could be used to poison the king. When he said, "Pharaoh's cup was in my hand," he was saying he had again been entrusted with the ultimate responsibility of protecting the king. We must view the person in this position as more security personnel than food preparer.

The chief butler/cup bearer did not make the wine so much as he was overseer of the process and responsible for the security of the wine his men had prepared. It was ultimately important for the cup bearer to be responsible in his work. His life depended upon it. When the food and drink was all prepared, the cup bearer must eat of the food and drink from the cup before they were presented to the king for his consumption. As the cup bearer reported his dream, this is what he was talking about.

B. Genesis 40:12-15 - Joseph Interprets the Cup Bearer's Dream

In this paragraph, the spotlight shifts from the unnamed cupbearer to Joseph.

> *This is what it means, " Joseph said to him, "The three branches are three days." Genesis 40:12*

If you reflect back on the dreams of Joseph, in Genesis 37, you will remember that these dreams are very symbolic. The sheaf of wheat stood for Joseph. The same thing is true in this dream. It is not surprising that the three branches represent three days. The need for unusual security would be very great on an occasion such as this.

Joseph continued the interpretation:

> *Within three days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your position and you will put Pharaoh's cup in his hand, just as you used to do when you were his cup bearer. Genesis 40:13*

Joseph told the cup bearer that Pharaoh would "lift up your head and restore you to your position." We have no trouble understanding the later part of this prophecy - "restore you to your position." The first part is more difficult. It is a way to describe an honor. In some areas of religious leadership, when a person is promoted from one position to a higher one, they speak of it as being "elevated." One is honored when his head is raised up; he is disgraced when his head is bowed. It is clear that Joseph was reporting that conditions, for the cup bearer, would return to their situation before his imprisonment.

Having finished the interpretation, Joseph turns his attention to his own situation.

> *But when all goes well with you, remember me and show me kindness; mention me to Pharaoh and get me out of this prison. Genesis 40:14*

There are two requests in this verse:

Remember me - The word "remember" is "zakar" (זָכַר). This word has a double focus. It suggests mental activity, the calling to mind a person who had not been part of one's thinking for some time previously. The word also suggests specific action. To "remember me" is to act on my behalf.

Throughout history, influence peddling has been a highly refined art form. A cup bearer had two valuable assets: He was constantly in the immediate presence of the king. He was also a man of great influence with the king. The king would seriously consider any suggestion made by his chief butler/cup bearer. Joseph was saying, "Please do not forget me when you become the consort/associate of the king.

Mention me to Pharaoh - Joseph wants the cupbearer to talk to Pharaoh about him. This does not suggest casual conversation. If an official mentioned a person to Pharaoh, it had to be because he believed the upcoming request was worthy of Pharaoh's attention and action.

Because this is true, it was a great risk for the cupbearer to honor Joseph's request. The cup bearer's reputation was on the line when he approached the king. If Joseph did something unfortunate, the cup bearer would be held responsible for it. If the king thought the request was ridiculous, the cup bearer's influence would be greatly diminished if not destroyed.

There is a bit of a surprise in the next verse

> *For I was forcibly carried off from the land of the Hebrews, and even here I have done nothing to deserve being put in a dungeon. Genesis 40:15*

This is the first place in the story of Joseph where he expressed his feelings about what happened to him since he was sold by his brothers. Joseph expressed two feelings:

- **"I was forcibly carried off from the land of the Hebrews"** - This was a way of saying Joseph was abused by being sold as a slave by his brothers to his distant relatives. It was clear that he would be sold in Egypt. This was frightening to any Hebrew. Also, this meant that he was taken out of the land of Israel and that was considered disobedience, a tragedy.
- **"I have done nothing to deserve being put in a dungeon"** - Joseph was, for the first time, proclaiming his innocence. He claimed, unequivocally, that he had done **nothing** to deserve imprisonment.

The word "dungeon" is "bore" (בּוֹר). It is a reference to a "cistern," "a hole dug in the rock of the ground." This was probably a cistern type cell inside the prison. These were a part of every prison. This was an escape-proof cell. It is possible that the whole prison was designed in this way. This would be reasonable in a prison designed to incarcerate prisoners who incurred the disfavor of the king.

Genesis 40:16-23 - Joseph Interpreted the Chief Baker's Dream

At this point the spotlight shifts. In this paragraph there are four segments:

- Genesis 40:16, 17 - The Baker Reported His Dream
- Genesis 40:18, 19 - Joseph Interprets the Baker's Dream
- Genesis 40:20-22 - Pharaoh Released Both Officials
- Genesis 40:23 - The Cupbearer Failed Joseph

A. Genesis 40:16, 17, The Baker Reported His Dream

Notice that this segment begins with an explanation.

> *When the chief baker saw that Joseph had given a favorable interpretation, he said to Joseph, "I too had a dream; On my head were three baskets of bread." Genesis 40:16*

The word "baskets" is "sal" (סַל) which identifies a basket woven from willow strips. In the Hebrew text, this verse begins with "and the chief butler saw..." This construction ties verse 16 to the previous verses; it highlights the baker's motive. It could mean that the

Baker was not planning to share his dream with Joseph. At least, having heard the positive interpretation Joseph gave the cup bearer, the baker decided to find out what his dream meant.

The report of the dream is interesting. Notice, the baker had the baskets on his head. The baskets were made in such a way that one could carry three of them at once. It seems strange to us for a man to carry baskets on his head. That was quite normal for them.

The baker continued the report of his dream, saying:

In the top basket were all kinds of baked goods for Pharaoh, but the birds were eating them out of the basket on my head. Genesis 40:17

There is an emphasis on the fact that the contents of the basket were for the king. In verse 16, it says "There were three baskets of bread." The word "bread" is "khoree" (חֹרִי) which means white bread. This is a way of saying, this bread was for the king. Now in verse 17, the baker frankly states that this food is "baked goods for Pharaoh." It stresses the fact that in the dream he was doing what he had been doing prior to being put in prison.

The report indicated that the birds were eating Pharaoh's food. A number of Hebrew scholars point out that birds are sometimes used as a symbol of the enemies of Israel. This assumption can not be verified. The context, however, seems to support that position.

B. Genesis 40:18, 19 - Joseph Interpreted the Bakers Dream

In the second part of this paragraph, Joseph gave the interpretation of the dream:

This is what it means," Joseph said," The three baskets are three days. Within three days Pharaoh will lift off your head and hang you on a tree. And the birds will eat away your flesh." Genesis 40:18, 19

Three baskets, like three branches, Genesis 40:10, represent three days. As in the other dream, it represents something that will happen in three days.

When Joseph interpreted the chief baker's dream, he prophesied three things:

- **Within three days Pharaoh will lift off your head** - Some scholars take this phrase literally. They believe the chief baker was beheaded. There is a problem with this understanding. The problem appears in the next phrase. Joseph said, "Pharaoh will lift off your head and hang you on a tree. And the birds will eat away your flesh." First, beheading was an accepted form of capital punishment in Egypt at that time. It is possible that Pharaoh would be so angry that he would instruct Potiphar to behead the baker and hang his headless body on a post or tree. It is not probable, however. It is more likely that "lift off your head" is a symbolic statement. The Hebrew word for "lift" is " nawsaw" (נָשָׂא) which means "to lift," "to spare," "to respect," "to accept." Notice that these synonyms suggests the restoring of a person to respect and position again. With this in mind, the addition of the word "off" does not seem appropriate. It would seem appropriate to believe that "lift" was a symbolic way of saying that Pharaoh would remove the chief baker from prison.
- **"Within three days Pharaoh will hang you on a tree"** - This probably refers to crucifixion. Crucifixion was a Roman invention, but it could have been used in Egypt. We know that the Egyptians did hang people who were guilty of terrible crimes. Notice that in our text the words "within three days, Pharaoh will..." are

understood. The use of the word "and" implies the identical subject for "hang you on a tree" as the author used for "will lift off your head."

- **"The birds will eat away your flesh."** - At the least, this indicates that the victim was considered a criminal. In most Near Eastern countries, the immediate family could claim the criminals body for burial. In view of this, it is safe to assume that he either had no family or they were afraid/ashamed to claim the body. As was common in that part of the world, when criminals were hanged or crucified, their bodies were often left as a warning to others not to do the same thing.

Put yourself in the place of the chief baker for a minute. Your fellow prisoner, the chief cupbearer received a very favorable interpretation to his dream and he was rejoicing. When you received your interpretation, your hopes were dashed. You would have a tendency to feel slighted, abused whether it was deserved or not. Think about what it would have been like in that prison for the next three days. The Chief Butler would be so happy that he could hardly contain himself. On the other hand, the chief baker was so angry and frightened that it would put a damper on the rejoicing of the chief cupbearer.

C. Genesis 40:20-22 - Pharaoh Released Both Officials

In these three verses, the spotlight shifts back to Pharaoh's court. The author made an interesting statement in verse 20:

> *Now the third day was Pharaoh's birthday, and he gave a feast for his officials. He lifted up the heads of the chief cupbearer and the chief baker in the presence of his officials. Genesis 40:20*

This verse is interesting because of the way it was written. On account of the emotional nature of the Hebrew language, the intent of the author's first sentence is not clear. It can mean that it was a birthday party for Pharaoh as it sounds. If, however, a son was born to Pharaoh, he too would be called "Pharaoh." It is, therefore, possible that the ruling Pharaoh gave a feast celebrating the birth of his heir who would one day rule in his place. From the text it is impossible to tell which possibility was intended by the author.

Verse 20 indicates that on the third day, the Pharaoh "lifted up the heads of the chief cupbearer and the chief baker in the presence of his officials." This suggests that the Pharaoh interrupted the birthday celebration to bring these two men out of prison. Most rulers needed some visible act to impress both his mercy and his justice on the minds of his officials and constituents. The release of Barabbas, in the Gospels, was a case in point. This was the message Pharaoh delivered by the release of the chief cupbearer during the feast. On the other hand, rulers never wanted their officials to forget that it was a health hazard to disobey the Pharaoh or to fail to do exactly as the Pharaoh wanted you to do. The terrible death of the chief baker would drive this point home.

It is wonderful that Joseph could interpret the dreams. That, however, is not enough. A prophet was established by the verification of his prophecy.

> *He restored the chief cupbearer to his position, so that he once again put the cup into Pharaoh's hand. Genesis 40:21*

Joseph, in verse 13, prophesied two things for the chief cupbearer:

- Pharaoh will restore you to your position.
- You will put Pharaoh's cup in his hand.

Verse 21 is confirmation that Joseph's prophecy was fulfilled in every detail. It was a great risk for Joseph to make this interpretation. The position of Chief Butler required great trust. If he lost the confidence and good graces of the Pharaoh, it was unheard of that he would ever be trusted again. Nevertheless, that is what Joseph interpreted and that is what happened. At this point, half of Joseph's interpretation has come to pass as he said.

Next the author dealt with the situation of the baker.

> *But he hanged the chief baker, just as Joseph had said to them in his interpretation. Genesis 40:22*

Notice that this verse begins with the word "but." This always indicates the presence of a strong contrast. In this instance, the contrast is between the experience of the chief butler and the chief baker.

You will remember, in our study of verse 19, we dealt with the means by which the baker would be put to death - was it by hanging or by decapitation? In verse 22, it clearly states that Pharaoh hanged the chief baker. This clarifies the questions raised in verse 19.

As we have said, over and over in this study, repetition is the means of emphasis used in Biblical books. The last half of verse 22 is an example of this. The author said, "Just as Joseph had said to them in his interpretation." Observe the layout of this part of the story.

- the two men told Joseph their dreams
- Joseph interpreted both dreams
- The author immediately adds a parenthesis - Just as Joseph had said to them in his interpretation."

Here are three separate presentations of the same information. It is a way of emphasizing what Joseph had pronounced in his interpretation.

D. Genesis 40:23 - The Cupbearer Failed Joseph

There is great tragedy in verse 23.

> *The chief cupbearer, however, did not remember Joseph; he forgot him. Genesis 40:23*

Joseph had been good to the chief cupbearer and the chief baker:

- He had cared for them all during their stay in the prison.
- Joseph relieved the cupbearer's fears by interpreting his frightening dreams.
- It is possible, though the text does not say so, that Potiphar received a good report from Joseph about the chief cupbearer's conduct in the prison.

One of the difficult crosses to bear, as a Christian, is ingratitude. It is not always easy, for us to share with others as we know we should. To achieve that goal and then be confronted with passive or aggressive ingratitude can sometimes tax one's grace to the limit.

Joseph experienced this passive ingratitude. The chief cupbearer simply forgot about him. That would cause great distress. There is a beautiful insight into the character of Joseph, here. Later in the story, Joseph is placed in a position much higher than the chief butler/cupbearer. At that time, there was apparently no latent desire to repay the cup bearer's forgetfulness. This tells you something concrete about the personality and character of the man, Joseph.

Conclusion

As we review this chapter, our minds are drawn to the fact that this is a strong contrast with chapter 39:

- **Chapter 39** - This chapter includes a focus on a woman who was controlled by an evil passion. She was willing to manipulate and destroy others to satisfy her desires and hide her lust.
- **Chapter 40** - One focus in chapter 40 was on a man who was twice used to satisfy the desires and ambitions of others. In spite of this, he still trusted in God; he continued to be a faithful servant; he sought out opportunities to minister to the needs of others when his own needs were great.

In chapter 40, there is also an insight into power. Egypt was the greatest power in the world of that day. Nevertheless, there is a devastating picture of intrigue, politics in its worst form, the use of people and the value of things at the top of Egypt's political pyramid.

There is also a glimpse of what God can do through an obedient servant. Joseph understood that God was involved in every experience of life. The interpretation of dreams belonged to God, but He works vividly, convincingly through the lives of humble servants.

The author gives us an interesting picture of the means through which God works. We are busy looking for the big important things God wants to do through us. Through a simple act of kindness and caring, by a humble, obedient servant, God set the stage for one of the monumental expressions of his will, the rescue of two nations and the preservation of the lineage of the Messiah.

We must also remember, however, that the initial responses to Godly kindness and faithfulness are often forgotten and taken for granted. One of the shining examples of God's sovereignty was his ability and desire to take the evil designs and actions of people and use them to accomplish His holy will and to bless even the perpetrators of these evil acts.

There is a pointed reminder, in this chapter, that the road to obedience weaves through the valley of frustration. It does not make logical sense to continue to be faithful when your apparent reward is to be forgotten or taken advantage of. The story of Joseph, in this chapter, however, emphasizes the fact that it makes great spiritual sense to be faithful and obedient, being oblivious to the consequences.

These important facts should have a dynamic, changing effect upon the way we think and act as servants of God. It is, therefore, incumbent upon us to reevaluate the way we think and make choices as children of God, seeking to make deliberate choices of obedience and service to God, for His mercy is astounding.

Not for sale or resale

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 17

JOSEPH INTERPRETS PHARAOH'S DREAMS

GENESIS 41:1 - 57

1. There are six paragraphs in Genesis chapter 41. On the table below, write a brief summary of seven words or less for each paragraph.

41:1-8	
41:9-13	
41:14-24	
41:25-36	
41:37-45	
41:46-57	

2. In Genesis 41:1-8, the author described Pharaoh's dreams:
   a. In verse one, the author identified that "two full years had passed."
      (1). What does this tell us?
      (2). The author further indicated that the scene of this verse was "by the Nile." What difference would this make?
   b. In Genesis 41:2-4, the author described Pharaoh's first dream.
      (1). This dream deals with seven cows. What is the significance of this?
      (2). Summarize the message of these three verses.
   c. In Genesis 41:5-7, Pharaoh had a second dream.
      (1). What was his dream?
      (2). What was the significance of the content of this dream?
      (3). What is the significance of two similar dreams?
   d. In Genesis 41:8, the author wrote that Pharaoh, "was troubled, so he sent for all the magicians and wise men of Egypt."
      (1). Describe, in detail, what we know about Pharaoh's frame of mind as he woke up that morning.
      (2). What is a "magician?"
      (3). What is a "wise man?"
      (4). What was the significance of the fact that Pharaoh's advisors could not help him?

3. In Genesis 41:9-13, the cup bearer Joseph helped was returned to Pharaoh's court.
   a. In Genesis 41:9, the chief cup bearer spoke of "my shortcomings." Of what did he speak?
      (1). What is a "shortcoming?"
      (2). Identify what the author meant when he spoke of "chief cup bearer."

b. In Genesis 41:10, there is a description of an unfortunate experience some time in the past.
   (1). What would be the responsibility of the chief baker?
   (2). What might he be guilty of that could cause him to be imprisoned and killed?
   (3). What does the author's report of Pharaoh's emotional state tell you about this situation?
c. In Genesis 41:11, 12, the Chief cupbearer reported to Pharaoh the events that took place while he was in prison.
   (1). What does this tell you about the chief cupbearer?
   (2). How did the chief cup bearer identify Joseph?
   (3). What is the tone of the chief cupbearer's report? What does this suggest?
d. In Genesis 41:13, 14, the chief cupbearer reported the results of Joseph's interpretation of his dream.
   (1). What was his report?
   (2).How was his interpretation verified?

4. In Genesis 41:14 - 24, Pharaoh shared his dream with Joseph.
   a. In Genesis 41:14, the author reported how Joseph was prepared to stand before Pharaoh.
      (1). What can we learn from this verse?
      (2). The text indicates that Joseph was brought from the dungeon. What does this tell us about Joseph's accommodations and situation?
   b. In Genesis 41:15, Pharaoh spoke to Joseph about the dreams.
      (1). What did Pharaoh say?
      (2). Compare this report with the previous report of Pharaoh's dream. What did you learn?
   c. In Genesis 41:16, Joseph responded to Pharaoh's report of his dream.
      (1). What was Joseph's response?
      (2). Why was it important for Joseph to say what he did? What difference would it make?
   d. In Genesis 41:17, Pharaoh poured out his heart to Joseph.
      (1). Why is it important that this took place along the Nile?"
      (2). What significance is there, if any, to the fact that he was standing by the river?
   e. In Genesis 41:18, Pharaoh continued to describe the dream.
      (1). What significance is there, if any, to the fact that there were cows in this dream?
      (2). Why not sheep or goats?
      (3). What was added when the author indicated that these cows were "fat?"
   f. In Genesis 41:19, the author drew a contrast.
      (1). What is the contrast?
      (2). Pharaoh attempted to describe just how "ugly" these cows were.
         (a). How did he express it?
         (b). Does this seem to be an exaggeration or the statement of simple fact?
   g. In Genesis 41:20, the author shocked us by reporting events as they happened:
      (1). What did he tell us?
      (2). What significance do you find in this statement?

h. In Genesis 41:21, Pharaoh described the conclusion of the dream.
   (1). What did he see?
   (2). If you were Pharaoh, how would you respond to such a dream?
   (3). Is there any significance to the fact that he woke up at this point?

i. In Genesis 41:22-24, Pharaoh described a second dream.
   (1). What was the dream about?
   (2). In verse 23, Pharaoh described another impossible event. What was it?
   (3). What is the significance of the repetition of the fact that no one could interpret the dreams?
   (4). On the table which follows, draw a comparison of the two dreams.

COWS	GRAIN

   (5). In view of the above information, what can we learn from this comparison?

5. In Genesis 41:25-36, Joseph gave an interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams.
   a. In Genesis 41:25, Joseph said, "The dreams of Pharaoh are one and the same." What does that mean?
   b. Compare 41:25 with 41:26. What does it tell you?
   c. In Genesis 41:27, Joseph identified the meaning of the seven lean heads of grain. How did he explain it?
   d. In Genesis 41:28, Joseph repeated his initial evaluation.
      (1). What did he say?
      (2). What did he mean?
   e. In Genesis 41:29, 30, Joseph described the dreams in greater detail.
      (1). What did he say?
      (2). How devastating does Joseph anticipate this will become?
   f. In Genesis 41:31, Joseph repeated just how strongly this situation will affect the nation.
      (1). What did he say?
      (2). What was gained by this repetition?
   g. In Genesis 41:32, Joseph explained why Pharaoh received these dreams.
      (1). How did Joseph explain it?
      (2). What message did Joseph present to Pharaoh?
   h. In Genesis 41:33, Joseph did something unheard of.
      (1). What did he do?
      (2). Why did he do it?
      (3). Why were his suggestions necessary?
   i. In Genesis 41:34, Joseph continued with his advice.
      (1). What did this verse add to Joseph's advice?
      (2). Think of yourself as one of the farmers in Egypt. How would you feel when you heard about this?

j. In Genesis 41:35, Joseph explained the rationale for the recommendation he had spelled out. What is this rationale?
k. In Genesis 41:36, Joseph concluded his unsolicited recommendation. There appears to be a flaw in Joseph's recommendation.
(1). What is the apparent flaw?
(2). How would you explain this?

6. In Genesis 41:37-45, Pharaoh chose Joseph to be second in command of Egypt.
a. In Genesis 41:37, the author reported on the evaluation of Joseph's recommendation by Pharaoh and his leaders.
(1). What was that response?
(2). Think carefully about why this was miraculous?
b. In Genesis 41:38, 39, Pharaoh made some statements about God which seemed shocking.
(1). Since Pharaoh did not believe in God, why would he speak to his advisors about Him, in verse 38?
(2). Observe what Pharaoh said to Joseph in verse 39.
(a). What did Pharaoh have to believe in order to say that?
(b). In view of Pharaoh's statements in this verse, how would you describe Pharaoh's impression of Joseph?
c. In Genesis 41:40, 41, Pharaoh gave Joseph his job description. How would you explain it?
d. In Genesis 41:42, Pharaoh gave Joseph three presents.
(1). What were the presents?
(2). What did the presents mean?
e. In Genesis 41:43, Pharaoh bestowed a high honor on Joseph. How does it differ from Genesis 41:42?
f. In Genesis 41:44, Pharaoh summarized Joseph's new power. In your own words, how would you describe it?
g. In Genesis 41:45, Pharaoh gave Joseph a new name. What reasons can you give for this action?

7. In Genesis 41:46-57, Joseph began the monumental task of ruling the land of Egypt.
a. What does Genesis 41:46 tell you about the kind of ruler Joseph was?
b. What does Genesis 41:47 tell you about Joseph's prophetic skills?
c. In Genesis 41:48, the author described Joseph's plan for storing the excess grain. What rationale can you see for what he planned to do?
d. In Genesis 41:49, the author exaggerated a bit. What was his exaggeration? Why would he resort to this?
e. In Genesis 41:50-52, the author suddenly interrupts the story to tell us about Joseph's family. Why?
f. In Genesis 41:53, there is a dire announcement. Why was it important to say this?
g. In Genesis 41:54, there are four distinct pieces of information:
(1). What are the pieces of information?
(2). What do they add to our understanding?

h. In Genesis 41:55, the author gave a glimpse of Pharaoh's impression of Joseph. What was that impression?
i. In Genesis 41:56, the author described Joseph's care of the Egyptian people. How would you describe it?
j. In Genesis 41:57, the author described Joseph's care of people from neighboring countries.
   (1). How would you describe it?
   (2). Compare Genesis 41:56 with 41:57. What did you learn.

8. Reflect on Genesis chapter 41.
   a. What does it tell you about God?
   b. What effect can this have on the way you deal with God in everyday life?

LESSON 17: GENESIS 41:1 - 57

JOSEPH INTERPRETED PHAROAH'S DREAMS

Introduction

In our best manuscripts, there are six paragraphs in Genesis chapter 41. There is a brief summary of each paragraph on the table which follows:

41:1-8	Pharaoh Dreamed Two Dreams
41:9-13	Cup Bearer Told Pharaoh - Joseph Interprets Dreams
41:14-24	Pharaoh Told Joseph His Dreams
41:25-36	Joseph Interprets Pharoah's Dreams
41:37-45	Joseph Made Second Ruler of Egypt
41:46-57	Joseph Instituted Seven Year Storage Plan

Genesis 41:1-8 - Pharaoh Dreamed Two Dreams

There is a period of silence between the end of chapter 40 and the beginning of chapter 41.

> *When two full years had passed, Pharaoh had a dream: He was standing by the Nile. Genesis 41:1*

The text does not indicate what happened during these two years. We can only assume that it was daily life as usual for two long years. That would mean Joseph was still in charge of special prisoners on behalf of Potiphar. You will remember that Potiphar and his wife were responsible for Joseph being in this maximum security prison. Though the text is silent, Joseph is apparently still doing an outstanding job of literally running the prison for his master, Potiphar.

Put yourself in Joseph's position. Everyone seems to take advantage of you. Your own brothers sold you as a slave when you were just trying to do your job the best you could. You refused to sin with Potiphar's wife so he put you in prison. You interpreted the cup bearer's dream and he promised to remember you to the Pharaoh. Two years have passed. He has forgotten you. The feelings that go with this kind of thinking are devastating. You feel used, betrayed. A sense of futility takes over your mind. One has to wonder what good it does to be faithful. All that gets you is more abuse and frustration. A lesser man would give up on goodness. He would begin to wonder: "Why wasn't I just a buddy to my brothers? Why didn't I do as Potiphar's wife demanded? Why was I concerned with the cup bearer's comfort?

That was not Joseph's outlook. It will become clear that Joseph did not change his attitude or his surprising superior service to his master, Potiphar.

In the last half of verse one, the author began the description of the first dream. There is a slight, but important variation in the Hebrew text. "...Pharaoh was dreaming." The impact of this translation is that this describes an ongoing experience. Apparently Pharaoh

dreamed this dream night after night. This understanding heightens the impact of the dream and Pharaoh's burning desire to have it interpreted for him.

It is not accidental that the scene of these dreams is "yehore" (יְאֹר) It is an Egyptian word transliterated into the Hebrew and means "the river." This is a reference to the river Nile. We must keep in mind that for the Egyptians the Nile was a god to be served and interceded. We will deal with that more carefully a bit later.

The author continued with his report of Pharaoh's dream.

> *When out of the river there came up seven cows, sleek and fat, and they grazed among the reeds. Genesis 41:2*

Notice that the seven beautiful cows are in wonderful condition. We must again remind ourselves that the Jewish language and people are very symbolic. The number seven is the symbol of perfection/completeness. Whatever else is involved, the seven cows are a perfect or complete representation. These seven animals are cows or heifers. It should be noted that the Egyptians worshipped a bull and his consort, a cow. God could have used seven of most anything to be the symbol here. He chose, however, to use the cow. It is a way to exalt God over the gods of Egypt.

These cows were depicted as feeding among the reeds or marsh plants. This suggests that there was sufficient water for the marsh plants. You will notice that there are often strong contrasts within dreams. That is certainly true in these dreams.

> *After them, seven other cows, ugly and gaunt, came up out of the Nile and stood beside those on the riverbank. Genesis 41:3*

There is a second group of seven cows. In contrast to the first group, these are thin, lean animals which stand beside those which are fat and well fed. Notice that these lean cows are emaciated, but they do not graze at all. We must remember that we dealt with the significance of the cows coming out of the Nile. The symbolism is exactly the same as it was earlier.

The dream goes on to describe the activity of the lean cows:

> *And the cows that were ugly and gaunt ate up the seven sleek, fat cows. Then Pharaoh woke up. Genesis 41:4*

This is surprising. In the animal kingdom, it is the strong and well fed which consume the weak and ill-fed. That is not true in this instance. We will say more about this when we come to interpretation. The seven lean cows totally consumed the seven fat cows. It is not surprising that Pharaoh woke up at this point. That would wake almost anyone.

The author continued his report of the balance of Pharaoh's dream.

> *He fell asleep again and had a second dream: Seven heads of grain, healthy and good, were growing on a single stalk. Genesis 41:5*

Again there is a slight variation in the Hebrew text. It says, literally, "he fell asleep and dreamed a second time." Speaking of "a second time" the author suggests that this is not a new dream, but a revisiting of the dream he had before.

This time he dreamed about seven heads of grain on a single stalk. Again, God could have used seven of anything to symbolize His message. He chose, however, to use ears of grain. The existence of seven ears on one stalk is a symbol of abundance.

The question arises, Why did God give the dream a second time, when one would have told the same message. Two possibilities are:

- Repetition was a favorite form of emphasis among the Jews. There is no doubt that this is a strong emphasis here.
- As we have seen before, Scripture teaches that two witnesses are required to establish truth. That is exemplified in this passage.

This second dream follows the same format as the first. Notice how it is reported.

> *After them, seven other heads of grain sprouted - thin and scorched by the east wind. Genesis 41:6*

This second dream is not a duplicate of the first. It does, however, follow the same format precisely. It begins with seven good healthy things followed by seven of the same things that are unhealthy and poorly.

The question arises, why would God choose heads of grain as the symbol in this second dream? Grain was the major ingredient in bread. Bread was the staple of their diet. Grain was the symbol of food for the Egyptians as well as the Israelites. It was a hint that this dream involved food.

Notice that the author reported this statement of heads of grain differently than the pervious one. It was a hint that this dream involved food.

Notice, also, that the author reported this statement of heads of grain differently than the previous one. In verse five, he reported "seven heads of grain...growing on a single stalk." In verse six, however, he reports it as "seven other heads of grain sprouted." These are obviously different.

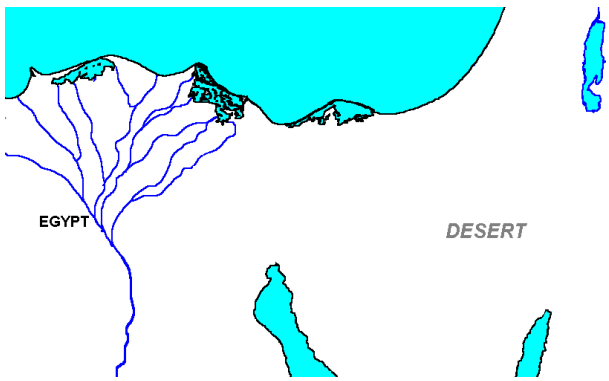
Seven healthy and good heads on a single stalk is a description of abundance pushed to its extreme. Seven individual heads which are thin and scorched is a picture of the worst disaster they could imagine.

Notice that verse six speaks of these seven individual heads as being "scorched by the east wind." If you look at Map 24, the only think you see directly east of Egypt is desert. If a west wind blows off the ocean, it is cold and damp. If an east wind blows off the desert, it is very dry and extremely hot. The people of that area would know exactly what one was talking about.

The format of the two dreams are so much alike that even the surprise is the same.

> *The thin heads of grain swallowed up the seven healthy, full heads. Then Pharaoh woke up: it had been a dream. Genesis 41:7*

Again it is a surprise that the thin devours the fat and healthy. We must remember that this is symbolism, not a picture of nature and the way it works. We will deal with the



Map 24: A Hot East Wind

interpretation shortly.

The text states that Pharaoh woke up; it was a dream. It is not surprising that such a dream would wake him up.

The closing sentence of this paragraph is a picture of ultimate frustration.

> *In the morning his mind was troubled, so he sent for all the magicians and wise men of Egypt. Pharaoh told them his dreams, but no one could interpret them for him. Genesis 41:8*

In verse seven, it says that Pharaoh dreamed and then woke up. In verse eight, however, it begins with, "In the morning." This observation suggests that several hours transpired between verse seven and eight. This gave Pharaoh time to think about his unusual and inexplicable dreams. Whatever else it did, it certainly raised the level of fear and frustration.

The word "troubled" is "pawam" (פָּעַם) and means to tap or beat regularly. Did you ever try to read an important document and suddenly become aware that the kitchen faucet was dripping? That is what Pharaoh experienced. It is to be impelled to action by sheer agitation.

It troubled Pharaoh enough that he called all his wise men, diviners and advisers to ask for their interpretation of his dream. Let's put this into perspective. What would the news media think if the President of the United States called all his advisors together and said, "I had a strange dream last night. I dreamed that seven fat cows came up out of the Delaware River and seven lean cows followed them and the lean cows ate the fat cows. Now, what does that mean?" The media would have a field day and the next presidential campaign would make a mockery of him because of it. I mention this to indicated something of just how much it bothered Pharaoh and what the possible implications were for him. To give balance to this, people put much more stock in dreams then than they do now.

The men that Pharaoh called make an interesting list. Magicians were the astrologers of the day. They were people with great knowledge of the occult. Wise men were those who were skillful in technical matters and administration. They were cunning men; shrewd and crafty.

In calling these men, Pharaoh brought the very wisest of men in human wisdom and the spirit realm. The result was that all their human and occultic wisdom rendered them useless to help the Pharaoh.

Put yourself in Pharaoh's position. You have the wisest men of the realm as your advisors, you are haunted by your dream and they cannot help you. You risk embarrassment and humiliation by describing the dreams, but you have to know. Add to this, you believe that dreams are the way that the gods communicate coming events and directions. Their inability to answer your questions causes you to wonder about their wisdom and the dependability of the advice they gave you previously. The whole picture of this verse is one of pathos and frustration.

Genesis 41:9-13 - Cup Bearer Reports to Pharaoh: Joseph Interprets Dreams

The focus of the text changes dramatically as we begin this new paragraph.

> *Then the chief cup bearer said to Pharaoh, "Today I am reminded of my shortcomings. Genesis 41:9*

The word "shortcomings" is "khate" (חֵטְא). This is the principle word for sin in the Old Testament. As we indicated earlier, it was used in a military context to indicate the ability to sling a stone at a target and not "miss." It is to do less than one sets out to do.

The text does not tell us what jarred the memory of the chief cup bearer. In view of the context, it is not difficult to guess what it was. These are tragic words, and yet there is also a ray of hope in them. The words of the chief cup bearer help us to discover the nature of his error. It was not that he did not mean his promise to Joseph. His error was one of memory, not will. Nevertheless, it meant that Joseph stayed in prison for a crime he did not commit.

The chief cup bearer spoke of a time he would rather forget.

> *Pharaoh was once angry with his servants and he imprisoned me and the chief baker in the house of the captain of the guard. Genesis 41:10*

There is a hint of a possible disturbance in this verse. Two of the Pharaoh's most trusted servants are imprisoned and one eventually executed. This says that there was great uneasiness in the court. It would not be unreasonable to think that someone had tried to carry out a coupe. At least, someone had angered the Pharaoh sufficiently to put trusted people in prison and kill one. The Pharaoh had to be feeling quite threatened to do anything this drastic.

Notice what the chief cup bearer said to Pharaoh: "Pharaoh was angry with his servants and he imprisoned me." It is entirely possible that this was just a polite way for the chief cup bearer to speak to the Pharaoh. It is just as possible that he was speaking of two different Pharaoh's when he spoke these words. We can not be certain, but it seems to me that it is a polite way to refer to the Pharaoh. Whatever the case, the chief cup bearer was very precise in his report of the event.

Notice the precision with which the chief cup bearer refers to his experience:

> *Each of us had a dream the same night, and each dream had a meaning of its own. Genesis 41:11*

The repetition in this verse seems awkward. Whenever you find this, it is an attempt to emphasize specific, important pieces of information. It was the chief cup bearer's way of stressing the fact that each man had a dream and the dreams were different.

Up to this point, the Pharaoh probably knew everything the chief cup bearer told him. Now, the chief cup bearer is sharing new information with the Pharaoh.

> *Now a young Hebrew was there with us, a servant of the captain of the guard. We told him our dreams and he interpreted them for us, giving each man the interpretation of his dream. Genesis 41:12*

Observe that the chief cup bearer identified Joseph in two ways:

- He was a young Hebrew servant/prisoner.
- He was a servant of the captain of the guard.

There were important reasons for the author to include both identifications. It was most unusual for a Jewish person to be a slave in Egypt. Egyptians had no dealings with Jews if possible. We will see more about this later on in our study. They would be glad to see Jews as slaves but it would be awkward for them at best. It would also be unusual for a

Hebrew to be incarcerated in the prison set apart for political prisoners. To our knowledge, there were no Jews in Pharaoh's court.

Though Joseph was in prison, he still served his master, Potiphar. You will remember that Potiphar was the captain of the guard, the man responsible for the political prisoners of Pharaoh. Though Joseph was put in prison as punishment, nevertheless, he was placed in charge of the most important prisoners incarcerated there. This suggests that Joseph was doing an outstanding job of serving his master even though Potiphar was punishing him. This says some wonderful things about Joseph.

Having carefully identified Joseph, the chief cupbearer, then, turned to the information he wanted to share with the Pharaoh "We told him our separate dreams and he interpreted them." That was the kind of information Pharaoh wanted to hear. His own wise men were unable to interpret his dreams. There is some question about the meaning of this statement. Does it mean that the wise men of Pharaoh were unable to give an interpretation? That is possible, but hardly probable. Another possibility was that the wise men were unable to give an interpretation that verified itself by coming to pass. This was the way prophets were verified and dreams were dealt with in the same way. We can not say for certain, but it seems possible. Here was a man, a Jew, who could interpret dreams. That had to attract Pharaoh's attention.

The chief cup bearer continued with his volunteered information:

> *And things turned out exactly as he interpreted them for us: I was restored to my position, and the other man was hanged. Genesis 41:13*

It is interesting to note that the Hebrew text reads a bit differently. One might translate it in these words:

> *"He returned me to my office (estate), and he hanged him."*

In both parts of this verse, the chief cup bearer used the word "he" to identify the Pharaoh rather than the common word "you." This is important because the chief cup bearer was talking with the Pharaoh at the moment. To speak of the Pharaoh as "he," suggests that they might have recently had a new Pharaoh to replace one who had died. This is not strong evidence, but it is interesting to see how the chief cup bearer dealt with the issue.

Whatever else this verse suggests; whatever precipitated the punishment of these two officials, it had to be very important in order for the Pharaoh to hang one of his most trusted servants.

Genesis 41:14-24 - Pharaoh Told Joseph His Dream

Notice how the Pharaoh responded to the information volunteered by the chief cup bearer

> *So Pharaoh sent for Joseph, and he was quickly brought from the dungeon. When he had shaved and changed his clothes, he came before Pharaoh. Genesis 41:14*

One might wonder why Joseph was suddenly cleaned up so well, relieved of over two years growth of beard. It was not to give Pharaoh the impression that things were better in the prison than they really were. Pharaoh would not have been offended by poor prison conditions. That was normal and expected. There may be a hint in the book of Esther.

But he (Mordecai) went only as far as the king's gate, because no one clothed in sackcloth was allowed to enter it. Esther 4:2

Sackcloth was for mourning and for prisoners. In most parts of the Near East, one must be properly attired, prepared for the presence of the king. It was out of respect for the Pharaoh that Joseph was shaved and given clean clothes.

There is an ambivalence, for the chief cupbearer, in the response of Pharaoh. It is great to see the Pharaoh take your suggestion and act upon it. At the same time, it is also a frightening thing. When Pharaoh acts upon your advice, you immediately become responsible for the results.

The chief cup bearer was in a difficult situation. Pharaoh was always an impatient man. He demanded to see Joseph immediately and he would be angry if he were kept waiting.

Being in the dungeon for over two years, Joseph would require a good deal of cleaning up to be presentable to the Pharaoh. If Joseph were not presentable, Pharaoh would be just as angry as he had been with the chief cupbearer. Though the text does not comment upon it, I suspect that when Joseph came before Pharaoh, he encountered a ruler who was almost beside himself from anger and fear.

Pharaoh came right to the point when he spoke with Joseph:

Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I had a dream and no one can interpret it. But I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it." Genesis 41:15

This was a great, and in some ways, tragic confession for Pharaoh to make. Rulers, in that time, relied on their wise men and magicians in much the same way that modern rulers rely on their intelligence network. The security of Pharaoh's throne could be compromised if this information got out. At the least, Pharaoh would be less than comfortable because of it.

Observe, also, that there was no hedging or tampering with the truth. Pharaoh's opening statement contained three pieces of information:

- I had a dream.
- No one has been able to interpret it.
- I heard you interpret dreams.

That is the kind of integrity I like.

Compare this report of the dream with that which was previously given. You will notice that it is exactly the same as the previous report.

Joseph's response was equally direct. Observe what he said,

"I cannot do it," Joseph replied to Pharaoh, "but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires." Genesis 41:16

First, there is a slightly different wording in the Hebrew text. It might read something like this:

Joseph answered Pharaoh saying, "Not I, God will announce the peace/prosperity of Pharaoh."

There is a difference in the two versions. In the English, there is an impression that Joseph was incapable of interpreting. He said, "I cannot do it." In the Hebrew text, the impression is that Joseph was careful to give credit to God, where it belongs.

Take note of the way Joseph describes the interpretation God will give. In our English translation, Joseph was quoted as saying, "but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires." The Hebrew text is more theologically sound - "God will announce the peace of Pharaoh." This is an important difference. God is not preoccupied with meeting our whims and desires. God is involved with meeting our needs. That is what Joseph announced.

The text does not indicate Pharaoh's response. Observe, however, the way Pharaoh began to share his dream with Joseph.

> *Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "In my dream, I was standing on the bank of the Nile." Genesis 41:17*

It is interesting that Pharaoh launched into a recital with no further question. Remember, he was talking to a slave, which is almost incomprehensible. It appears that this reveals just how desperate Pharaoh was to get an interpretation to his dream.

The fact that Pharaoh was standing on the banks of the Nile suggests that the dream was cast in a worship setting before the Egyptian Nile god.

Pharaoh continued his report:

> *When out of the river there came up seven cows, fat and sleek, and they grazed among the reeds. Genesis 41:18*

Observe that the report of this part of the dream is identical with the previous report, in 41:2. The way Pharaoh reported the appearance, it was as though the cows were pregnant. He repeated the fact that the cows grazed among the reeds. It is a picture of a marshy situation. It suggests that there was plenty of water at the time. Whatever this is, it describes something lush and plentiful.

As we said earlier, one of the characteristics of dreams is that they usually contain abrupt contrasts. That is certainly true here.

> *After them, seven other cows came up scrawny and very ugly and lean. I had never seen such ugly cows in all the land of Egypt. Genesis 41: 19*

Pharaoh's picture of these seven cows was graphic. He used four descriptive words to portray their condition.

- **"Scrawny"** - This is a word that comes from the weaving industry. The word "scrawny" is "dalaw" (דַּלָּה). It describes the weaving threads of warp hanging in the loom. It came to mean sickly.
- **"Very ugly"** - This literally means an evil form, very evil or very bad. The Hebrew word "rah" (רַע) means bad, wretched, spoiled.
- **"Lean"** - The word "rak" (רַק) means to be very thin or emaciated.
- **"I had never seen such ugly cows in all the land of Egypt"** - The word "ugly" is "roah" (רעַ) which means to be lean, to spoil, to ruin something by breaking it in pieces. Pharaoh was not suggesting these cows were broken in pieces. He was saying that these cows were so lean that they were beyond hope of recovering.

You will note that Pharaoh could make such a comparison in a land where there were very few cattle. We must add, however, that Pharaoh would only see fattened animals, not emaciated ones, unless he set out to do so.

Having painted a picture of the scene, Pharaoh described the action that took place.

The lean, ugly cows ate up the seven fat cows that came up first. Genesis 41:20

Obviously, the image of cows eating cows is not natural - it does not happen that way. We must remember, however, that dreams are symbolic. We can accept the image of the dream because it is not an actual event, but a symbolic one. Basically, the dream is saying that one thing/event consumes another. The thing consumed was to become just like the one consuming it. The one consumed however, was in better condition than the one consuming it.

Slight differences in English text may or may not be significant, depending upon the subject and the writer. In Biblical Hebrew, however, that is seldom if ever true. Slight differences in wording are almost always significant. They usually give us additional information not presented in other descriptions. Pharaoh's dream is a case in point. In Genesis 41:3, Pharaoh spoke of the lean cows using the word "ra" (רַע) which means bad, calamitous, misery, wretchedness. In Genesis 41:20, Pharaoh used the same root, but the word is different. Here he used the word "raq" (רַק) which means emaciated. The wretched cows of Genesis 41:3 are referred to as emaciated in Genesis 41:20.

The description took a surprising turn:

But even after they ate them, no one could tell that they had done so; they looked just as ugly as before. Then I woke up. Genesis 41:21

Observe that the verse begins with the word "but." The New International Version translates the word "but." Both the King James and the American Standard Version translate the word "and." The Hebrew prefix is "and," but it signals an indirect contrast. When large amounts of food are consumed, there is always a visible change in the physical shape of the consumer. The surprise in Pharaoh's report is that the lean cows consumed cows larger than themselves and it did not show. This was startling. The lean cows ate well, but were still emaciated. In the Hebrew, the word "ugly" "rah" (רַע) used in Genesis 41:20, is used again in Genesis 41:21 to describe the appearance of the emaciated cows after consuming the fat ones. Pharaoh concluded this portion of the report by saying, "Then I woke up." It is to be roused from deep sleep. It can carry the idea of being startled awake. The fact that he woke up indicates the end of the dream. There is also a hint here that the dream was very shocking to him.

Imagine how Pharaoh must have felt telling this strange dream to a Jewish prisoner-slave. It must have seemed so strange, so ridiculous.

Pharaoh continued the report of his dream:

In my dreams I also saw seven heads of grain, full and good, growing on a single stalk. Genesis 41:22

You have to admit, his dreams were different. Again, the content of the dream attracted attention because it was so unusual. It is extraordinary to have seven heads of grain on one stalk.

Notice that the heads were "full." In one Old Testament situation, this word was used to describe the full number of days for a pregnancy to be completed. In I Chronicles 21:24, David wanted to buy a threshing floor for a place of sacrifice and demanded that he have the opportunity to pay the full price, the total value of the land in order to make it a gift to God. It suggests that the grains had become as large as they would get.

Pharaoh further described these heads as "good." The word "good" is "tov" (טוֹב) and means "to be good in the broadest sense of the word." Many of its uses suggest something pleasant, agreeable to the sight.

This strange, unusual dream has not ended.

> *After them, seven other heads sprouted - withered and thin and scorched by the east wind. Genesis 41:23*

The second part of the dream follows the same format as the first part. Observe in this dream, however, that though the seven good heads all appeared on one stalk, the seven withered, thin heads apparently showed up on individual stalks. At least, there is no mention of a single stalk as in Genesis 41:22

Pharaoh used three words to describe the appearance of these last seven ears of grain:

- **"withered"** - the word "withered" is "tsawnam" (צָנַם) which means to shrink, to wither. It also suggests something that is hardened by the sun.
- **"thin"** - this word "thin," however, means more than something small. The Hebrew word "daq" (דַּק) means to be gaunt and emaciated, dwarfed.
- **"Scorched"** - This word is "shadaf" (שָׁדַף) which means to be scorched or blasted with a hot wind.

If you think carefully, these heads of grain are not desirable to say the least. Nevertheless, that is what Pharaoh saw in his dream.

Having described the seven poorly heads of grain, Pharaoh continued with the content of the dream.

> *The thin heads of grain swallowed up the seven good heads. I told this to the magicians, but none could explain it to me. Genesis 41:24*

You may remember that in the previous dream, Pharaoh used one word for "thin" when describing the cows and another word for "thin" when he reported that the thin cows consumed the fat ones. In this part, however, the word is exactly the same in both instances.

If you read this verse again, it seems as though Pharaoh's report of the magician's failure is part of the dream. Think about this last sentence of the paragraph. These magicians were the most reliable advisors in the world. They were no help to Pharaoh at all. Certainly, Pharaoh had to be dejected and despondent. He put his full trust in them and they let him down.

Notice, also, that Pharaoh mentioned the failure of the magicians, but he did not report to Joseph that the wise men were also unable to interpret the dreams. He apparently also failed to tell Joseph just how disturbed he was by the whole experience. He may have figured that it was quite obvious to Joseph on the basis of what he was willing to do in order to get an interpretation of the dream.

Genesis 41:25-36 - Joseph Interpreted Pharaoh's Dream

Having heard the full report of Pharaoh's dream, Joseph began to interpret it.

Then Joseph said to Pharaoh, "The dreams of Pharaoh are one and the same. God has revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do." Genesis 41:25

In this verse, there is an insight into the nature of the dreams. Notice that Joseph used the plural "dreams." They are, in fact, two dreams. He went on to say, "The dreams of Pharaoh are **one and the same**." Logically, this is not possible. What God was saying, through His servant Joseph, is this - There were two dreams, but they carry a single message. The question naturally arises, If the message of the cows and that of the ears of grain are the same, why did God use both? You will remember that for people of the Near East, repetition is the major means of adding emphasis to a conversation or writing. This message is so important that special emphasis must be placed upon it. One must admit, it would be an unforgettable emphasis.

The closing sentence in this verse poses a question. The New Testament urges us to live a holy life so that God can use us as His servants. There are several instances in the Old Testament, however, where God accomplished His will through the efforts of pagan individuals. We must ask how this is possible. There are some pieces of information that form a response to this question:

- So far as we can tell, Pharaoh did not volunteer to be God's servant. God was able to work through Pharaoh despite his pagan allegiance.
- Pharaoh was working in conjunction with one of God's choicest servants, Joseph.
- God's purpose was at least two fold:
  1. He desired to show Pharaoh His great power.
  2. He desired to use this experience to accomplish an important purpose in the life of His servant Joseph
- Pharaoh's purpose was to serve his own interests, rather than to serve God. Still God could take these selfish efforts and turn them around to accomplish His will. This is one of the greatest demonstrations of the Sovereign power of God. He took Pharaoh's selfish actions and used them to place Joseph in a position where he could serve God and preserve God's people Israel.

Joseph said, "God has revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do." The word "revealed" is "nawgad" (נָגַד). It literally means "to front." This is more than an announcement. It was God's way of giving the information in such a way that Pharaoh would realize that God was in control; God was greater than any ruler, including Pharaoh.

Having identified what God was doing, Joseph proceeded to explain the dream:

The seven good cows are seven years, and the seven good heads of grain are seven years; it is one and the same dream. Genesis 41:26

One can easily see the parallel between the seven good cows and seven good years. There have never been many cows in that part of the world. Cows are an excellent source of protein, but it takes much more grass per pound of meat to raise cattle than to raise sheep or goats. This is a major consideration in that part of the world. To talk about cows as your food was to talk about an outstanding, lavish menu.

The image in the vision was changed from cows to "good heads of grain." This image is just as interesting as the one of "the seven good cows." In Egypt, rain is a scarce commodity. To speak of seven good heads of grain is to identify the conditions which are quite unusual. This condition only occurs where there has been abundant rain. The farmers would consider it a miracle if they had seven years in succession when the heads of grain were good/quite full. Needless to say, it was unheard of to think of seven good growing years in succession. The word good is "tov" (טֹב) . It describes something good or prosperous.

Joseph attempted to clarify an issue which might be confusing.

It is one and the same dream. Genesis 41:26b

It would be easy to think that he had been talking about a fourteen year span of time when things would be terrible. That, of course, was not the case. Joseph's explanation removes the problem.

The question naturally arises, Why would God use two images to describe the same period of time? As happened so often, repetition was their best means of emphasis. It is not surprising that later, the Scriptures declared that truth was established at the word of two or three witnesses.

In our text the next verse reads as follows:

The seven lean ugly cows that came up afterward are seven years, and so are the seven worthless heads of grain scorched by the east wind. They are seven years of famine." Genesis 41:27

The Hebrew text, however, begins with the word "and." This indicates that the material which follows is part of the information which preceded it and is equal to it.

This is a vivid image. The word "lean" literally means to be empty, or emaciated. On the other hand, the word "ugly" means "bad," but can also mean "sickly." Whatever else it may be, Joseph portrayed a graphic picture. He concluded the picture by saying that these represent seven years of famine. Observe that he has used two vivid, devastating pictures to convey the message of the vision. Look carefully at the imagery he employed:

- **Seven worthless heads of grain** - The word translated "worthless" is "reyq" (רֵיק)and means empty, void, cast out. This could describe a stand of grain which matured properly, but dropped its seeds before they were completely ripe. This happens. The result is that you have standing straw, but no grain to harvest. It is bad to have a poor harvest; it is a devastating tragedy to have no harvest at all. The loss is double. The precious seed is lost and so is the anticipated return on the investment of seed and labor.
- **Scorched by the east wind** - the word "scorched" is "shadaph" (שָׁדַף) and is sometimes translated "blight," or "blasted." It is one of those natural catastrophes which are sometimes used by God to punish the vile and disobedient. Notice that he spoke of the "east wind." Egypt seldom received the "east wind." They usually received the more moderate south east wind. The east wind , which could blow from two to four days, was so destructive it could totally wither a stand of grain in a single day. This was a shocking, devastating announcement that Joseph made.

Famine would not be a new experience for the people of Egypt. Seven consecutive years of famine would be a totally new experience for them. That would decimate the nation and bring about a rebellion which would terminate Pharaoh's rule. This was a shocking announcement, to say the least.

With the completion of verse 27, Joseph interrupts his interpretation to give Pharaoh some very important explanations.

> *It is just as I said to Pharaoh: God has shown Pharaoh what he is about to do. Genesis 41:28*

This is a very strong statement. All his life, Pharaoh knew that the wizards and wise men were the avenue through whom the idols spoke to the ruler of Egypt. Now, God has spoken directly to Pharaoh in a dream. God - Elohim - the God of mercy - did require that His holy servant, Joseph, be the one to describe this dream to Pharaoh, but the dream was given directly to the ruler. This was a new experience.

Had God desired to do so, He could have allowed this great tragedy to be a surprise. Even in the devastation that is coming, God expressed mercy. In spite of all the trauma, the prevailing picture of the devastating power of God is tempered by His great mercy.

Joseph now presented an overall picture of events which will quickly begin to take place.

> *Seven years of great abundance are coming throughout the land of Egypt, but seven years of famine will follow them. Then all the abundance of Egypt will be forgotten, and the famine will ravage the land. Genesis 41:29, 30*

This is crucial information in the interpretation. In these verses there is an opening understanding of God's mercy. God will allow the devastation, but He warned Pharaoh in advance so that he could prepare for the coming tragedy. In these verses, God is giving Pharaoh a glimpse into the events which will very shortly come to pass. It was broadly accepted, at that time, that fulfillment was the verification of the prophet. When the seven years of famine followed seven abundant years, Pharaoh would be absolutely certain God had spoken through Joseph.

Joseph told Pharaoh that Egypt would forget the seven years of abundance. This is a hint concerning just how devastating the famine would be. When Joseph said, "...the abundance in Egypt will be forgotten," he was not just talking of a loss of memory. "Forgotten" can also be interpreted to cease to care, to cease to be important.

Joseph continued, "The famine will ravage the land." The word "ravage" is "kalah" (הָלְכ) and literally means to end, to finish, to perish. It suggests utter destruction so that nothing useful is left. Needless to say, this is a dangerous suggestion for Joseph to make to the Pharaoh.

Verse 31 sounds like a restatement of verse 30.

> *The abundance in the land will not be remembered, because the famine that follows it will be so severe. Genesis 41:31*

There is repetition here, for purposes of emphasis, but the wording is not exactly the same. The word "abundance" literally means to satiate, to eat until you cannot stand the sight of food. The overflowing abundance, for which Egypt had been known, will not be remem-

bered. People will forget that this was Egypt's experience and reputation. This change in people's awareness of Egypt will be caused by the severity of the famine.

Joseph continued the explanation:

> *The reason the dream was given to Pharaoh in two forms is that the matter has been firmly decided by God and God will do it soon. Genesis 41:32*

According to the rules of good writing, this sentence should read, "...the matter has been firmly decided by God and **he** will do it soon. (Genesis 41:32b") Joseph's second use of the name "God" "Elohim" (אֱלֹהִים) the God of mercy, to impress upon Pharaoh that though he is the king, God is the one who uniquely controls the forces of nature.

Joseph explained the reason the dream was given to Pharaoh in two forms.

- **Stress that God has firmly decided to do this** - This decision is set in stone. There are no conditions under which this will be changed. There will be seven abundant years and seven years of famine.
- **To stress the immediacy of this situation** - This is not a situation which can be studied over time. Joseph stressed the fact that this is going to happen NOW!

In this verse there is an impression of what God is like. There is lovingkindness in His informing Pharaoh in advance about the coming stress. It is an even greater picture of His mercy that He would give the dream in two expressions to make sure that the Pharaoh understood.

Observe the way Joseph started the next verse:

> *And now let Pharaoh look for a discerning and wise man and put him in charge of the land of Egypt. Genesis 41:33*

The words "and now" are connectives which tie the two sentences/ideas together. The use of the word "now" suggests a turning point in the story. That is appropriate. Joseph has been explaining Pharaoh's dream. At this point, however, he turns to unsolicited suggestions concerning the way Pharaoh should deal with this pending trauma. Under most circumstances Joseph's suggestions would have been considered impertinent. Pharaoh did not invite Joseph to be his counselor. He asked this Jewish prisoner to interpret the dream. Requested or not, Joseph instructs Pharaoh how to solve the dilemma. This was a very dangerous decision on Joseph's part. It would be expected that Pharaoh would see this as an affront to his intelligence and leadership and not as a kindness. The word is "raah" (רָאָה). It means "to consider," "to stare perceptibly." There is a bird of prey, a vulture, called "raah." It is noted for its ability to see its prey a long way off. The word was used to describe careful scrutiny, one who sees everything.

Joseph listed two criteria:

- **A discerning man** - a man of cunning, a prudent man; a man of deep perception.
- **A wise man** - a man of great skill in administration, a shrewd man, in the best sense of the word. One who has the ability to see what needs to be done and knows how to accomplish the goal.

When Joseph suggested that Pharaoh put this man in charge of the land of Egypt, he was suggesting several things:

- This is a very demanding job description.

- This will take this man's total time and dedication to do the job the way it should be done.
- In order to accomplish this task the administrator of this project must be invested with a great deal of power.
- This will not be an easy task.

There is some discussion about whether Joseph was lobbying for this job and whether he knew he would be chosen for the task. We must begin by saying the text is silent on this issue. We should remember, however, that Joseph was a Jew, a slave and a prisoner. Each of these by itself would bar him from consideration for the post. Egyptians despised Jews. They thought of slaves a property, not as individuals. The fact that Joseph was a prisoner placed a cloud of mistrust over him. This would be the one position in the entire realm with the highest potential for graft and embezzlement. Humanly speaking, there was no way Joseph could be considered for the job.

Joseph recommended that Pharaoh find a wise and discreet administrator and give him full responsibility for the entire national program.

Joseph continued with his recommendations:

> *Let Pharaoh appoint commissioners over the land to take a fifth of the harvest of Egypt during the seven years of abundance. Genesis 41:34*

Put yourself in the place of the Egyptian farmers. All they can see is a bumper crop. Their bulging granaries make the talk about pending famine sound foolish. You no sooner get a bumper crop and the government places a 20% tax on your harvest. Farmers everywhere despise taxes. Someone was bound to let it be known that this crazy idea came from a Jewish slave who was a prisoner. That, too, would detract from its potential for acceptability.

Nevertheless, Joseph encouraged Pharaoh to appoint commissioners over each district of the land. These commissioners were to oversee the collection of the surplus grain God was giving to Egypt. This part of their job description would be in force for the entire seven abundant years.

Joseph gave additional instructions concerning the task of the commissioners.

> *They should collect all the food of these good years that are coming and store up the grain under the authority of Pharaoh, to be kept in the cities for food. Genesis 41:35*

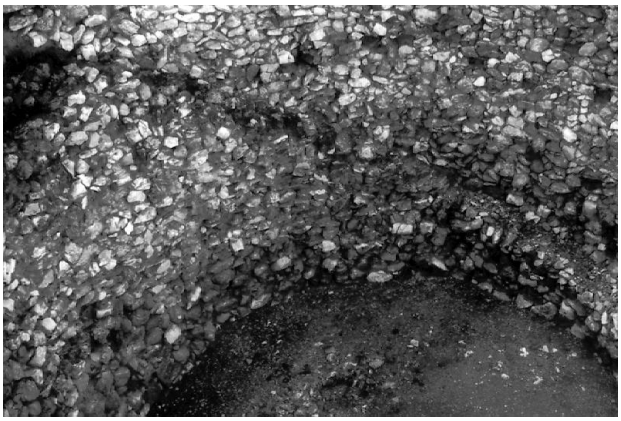
The district commissioners were to collect the grain and store it. This was a difficult task. Some would not want to give up 20% of their harvest. Seeing so much grain in one place, some might be tempted to steal large amounts of this stored food. It was thus not surprising that Joseph spoke of this collection and storage mission as being "under the authority of Pharaoh." People would think twice before refusing to pay the 20% tax or stealing from the accumulated grain.

There were two kinds of granaries in Egypt. In the region near the Nile, grain was stored above the ground. In the arid areas of the country, grain was stored in silos below the surface of the ground. Remember, this was an area where rain was no threat to the safe keeping of grain in a subterranean silo. The silo in Picture 1 is located at Megiddo.

They can be found in many other parts of the Near East. As you can see, these silos are lined with stone and included in the wall is a circular stairway going all the way to the bottom.

Joseph continued with his plan for the survival of Egypt:

> *This food should be held in reserve for the country, to be used during the seven years of famine that will come upon Egypt, so that the country may not be ruined by the famine. Genesis 41:36*



Picture 1: A Subterranean Silo

Think about this for a moment. Joseph was being wrongfully detained in an Egyptian prison and at the same time God used him to develop a plan of survival for the land of his oppressors. God used Joseph's persuasive skills to convince Pharaoh to allow this plan to be set in motion. This gives us an additional piece of information about the kind of person Joseph was; the character of this man of God.

There is a potential problem with the solution Joseph offered. He suggested that they store up 20% of the harvest for seven years. This meant that the people had 80% to live on during the abundant years and only 20% to live on during the years of famine. This sounds like a flawed plan. There are some possible explanations.

- **The 80% may include excess** - It is possible that the harvest was so abundant that when the 20% was removed, the farmers still had a huge surplus to store or sell. Under these conditions, they could live on 20% of their harvest without difficulty. If they had 40% or 60% excess, then they would have huge stores of grain or large accumulations of extra money gained from the sale of their massive excess grain.
- **They might have been able to raise some crops during the famine** - This is possible, but not probable. The picture of the famine, in Joseph's description, was one in which they would barely have enough to drink to say nothing of providing water for crops.

Genesis 41:37-45 - Pharaoh Elevated Joseph to Rule Over Egypt

This paragraph would have been the talk of the market place. Absolutely no one would have expected Pharaoh to make such a daring move.

> *The plan seemed good to Pharaoh and to all his officials. Genesis 41:37*

This verse indicates that the plan seemed good to Pharaoh. The statement is almost casual. Wrapped in this casual statement was Joseph's entire life. He risked a lot in his interpretation. He risked much more in making an administrative suggestion which Pharaoh had not requested. Joseph had to breathe a sigh of relief at this point.

Pharaoh, however, was only half the potential problem that Joseph faced. Every palace was crawling with people who were trying to gain the king's favor, trying to gain position and possessions from the king. Egypt was no exception. Put yourself in the place of one of these position-seekers. They hate Jews with a passion. This by itself would turn them against Joseph and his plan. Add to this the facts that he was both a slave and a prisoner. These pieces of information would become the battle cry of the palace-climbers. Add to this the fact that if Joseph was acceptable to Pharaoh, then that was one more position that was not open to them. This makes it easy to see what a miracle it was when the author said, "And in the eyes of all his servants." The word "servants" is interesting. It is "ebed" (עֶבֶד) which literally means servant. There are times, however, when this word refers to subjects. I understand this to mean that the people of Pharaoh's court thought it was a good plan and the people of the land agreed.

Observe Pharaoh's response:

> *So Pharaoh asked them, "Can we find anyone like this man, one in whom is the Spirit of God?" Genesis 41:38*

Pharaoh gave immediate indication that he liked the plan and set about implementing it. It is not accidental that Pharaoh added the qualification, "one in whom is the Spirit of God." This suggests that Pharaoh was receptive to Joseph's message about the power of God. Pharaoh wanted someone who possessed the same qualities and presence that Joseph had.

The way Pharaoh asked his rhetorical question would solicit a negative answer. It is as though he was making a statement rather than asking a question - "We cannot find anyone like this man, one in whom is the Spirit of God." Aside from Joseph, there really was no one, that we know of, in whom the Spirit of God dwelt.

It sounds as if Pharaoh did not wait for an answer to his rhetorical question. He spoke directly to Joseph:

> *Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one so discerning and wise as you." Genesis 41:39*

An attempt to understand this surprising turn of events can take a number of directions:

- **Sarcasm** - the truth of a prophecy was confirmed when the prophesied actions came to pass. To put Joseph in charge gave him every possible opportunity to bring that about. Prophets, whose message did not prove to be true, were often killed.
- **Straight forward action** - Pharaoh simply believed Joseph's interpretation and trusted him to carry out the plan he had suggested.

The latter possibility appeals to me. This was a very serious situation. Pharaoh would not dare to toy with the provision of food for his people for seven years. This could wipe out the nation as a whole. The fact that he pursued the plan indicates, for me, that Pharaoh believed and trusted Joseph .

Joseph was careful to indicate that God had given him the interpretation. Acting upon Joseph's suggested plan, Pharaoh ascribed both the interpretation and the plan for survival to God. Notice that Pharaoh speaks of God by the name "Elohim," (אֱלֹהִים). This name for God is used in situations where the mercy of God is emphasized. The Jewish people used this name to celebrate the eternal majesty of God. In the use of this word, Pharaoh was

saying that God was a merciful God when his own idols were known to be capricious and prone to harsh and unmerciful conduct toward the Egyptian worshippers. Think of what it took for Pharaoh to say these words:

- Pharaoh was a deity to his own people. He acclaimed the power of God, Elohim, to reveal the future to Joseph, a slave and prisoner, while he, as king and deity, could not know it. He risked his reputation and position with his people to take such a position.
- He risked the anger and confrontation of every power-hungry man in Egypt by choosing a Jewish slave/prisoner in preference to them. Their embarrassment was great; his risks were multiplied.

Pharaoh continued by detailing the terms of Joseph's appointment.

> *You shall be in charge of my palace, and all my people are to submit to your orders. Only with respect to the throne will I be greater than you. So Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I hereby put you in charge of the whole land of Egypt." Genesis 41:40, 41*

The word translated "palace is "bayith" (בַּיִת). It is almost always translated "house," "household," "dwelling."

Observe carefully the responsibility Pharaoh placed on Joseph:

- Joseph was exclusively responsible for the household of Pharaoh. This included the care and maintenance of the palace. Joseph was over the hundreds of slaves who did all the work in the palace. He was responsible for all the guests and special feasts it took to entertain the large number of guests there would be in the household. He would, also, be responsible for Pharaoh's harem and the care of all his children.
- He was in complete charge of accumulating the 20% of the grain harvest from every field in Egypt. He was responsible for preparing the storage areas, storing the grain, and the security of it after it had been collected.
- Joseph was the practical ruler of Egypt. He ran the nation. All Egyptian people, except Pharaoh, did exactly as this young Jewish slave commanded.

This was a tremendous responsibility. It indicated Pharaoh's great trust and confidence in Joseph. These people were very symbolic. They needed to know the symbol that verified Pharaoh's words about Joseph.

> *Then Pharaoh took his signet ring from his finger and put it on Joseph's finger. He dressed him in robes of fine linen and put a gold chain around his neck. Genesis 41:42*

The signet ring Pharaoh wore was the symbol both of his power and his wealth. Pharaoh gave this precious ring to Joseph. There was no limit to the amount Joseph could spend and charge it to the realm of Pharaoh. By the same token, Joseph could sign almost any decree with this ring and it would be as if Pharaoh had signed the document. When Pharaoh gave Joseph the signet ring, the ruler conferred on Joseph the power to rule as he had instructed Joseph previously. Any document marked with this signet would carry the full authority of the Pharaoh and would be treated with the same respect.

The author's mention of fine robes was not a description of finery. It should be noted, however, that this robe was made of flax found only in Egypt. Garments made of this material were worn only by the aristocracy and nobility. This was one more way to make sure everyone knew the honor Pharaoh bestowed. The robe every man wore was his badge of power. Joseph's brothers hated his robe of many colors because it identified him as heir-apparent of his father's estate even though he was the eleventh son of his father. The same was true of this robe. It was like a military officers uniform - it identified the level of his power. The robe said to everyone, this man is more powerful than anyone except Pharaoh.

The author also identified a gold chain Joseph wore around his neck. The gold chain was the third symbol of honor given to Joseph by Pharaoh - the ring; the linen robe; the gold chain. All who saw this chain would know that Joseph enjoyed the special favor of Pharaoh. To challenge or contradict the man who wore this gold chain was to challenge Pharaoh himself. This would not be healthy.

It was one thing for Pharaoh to confer these powers upon Joseph in the privacy of the throne room; it was quite another thing to do it in public.

> *He had him ride in a chariot as his second in command, and men shouted before him, "Make way!" Thus he put him in charge of the whole land of Egypt. Genesis 41:43*

Pharaoh had a chariot which was reserved for his exclusive use. There was another chariot which could only be used by the man whom the Pharaoh appointed as second-in-command of the realm. Only when the people saw Joseph riding in this chariot could they be certain that the rumors of his elevation to this position were true.

Pharaoh reserved the greatest honor for last. When Pharaoh rode down the special road leading to the palace, servants ran ahead of him. The heralds cried out, "avrech." (אַבְרֵךְ) which means, " bow the knee." This display of respect was reserved for the Pharaoh and could only be used for someone else if he made an official decree to allow it . You may remember, in Esther 3:2, King Ahasuerus had to make a special decree to compel everyone to bow down when Haman passed.

This would be the procedure in all future processionals. In this instance, however, a special procession was made through the city. During this procession, Joseph would ride, in his special chariot, at the right hand slightly behind the Pharaoh. This was the official announcement to the whole realm that Joseph would henceforth rule on behalf of Pharaoh.

The author concluded the description of these honors Pharaoh placed upon Joseph by saying, "Thus he put him in charge of the whole land of Egypt." The ceremony was complete.

The symbolizing and processions were over, but one thing was yet required.

> *Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I am Pharaoh, but without your word no one will lift hand or foot in all Egypt." Genesis 41:44*

This was the decree that made all of Pharaoh's statements and symbolic actions legally binding. No one could change this except Pharaoh who made it. As happened so often, Pharaoh used a very familiar figure of speech to describe what he was talking about. Pharaoh said two things:

- "I am Pharaoh." - This is the claim to final, ultimate authority. He was the final seat of authority in the land. All authority, even delegated authority, found its source in him.
- ("but" - in contrast to his ultimate authority, he described Joseph's delegated authority.)
- "Without your word no one will lift hand or foot in all Egypt." Pharaoh used an image that was commonly used to describe the relationship of a master and a slave. It would be appropriate to say, "All Egypt shall be your servant."

Having installed Joseph in the most powerful position in all Egypt, Pharaoh found it necessary to turn his attention to damage-control.

> *Pharaoh gave Joseph the name Zaphenath-Paneah and gave him Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On, to be his wife. And Joseph went throughout the land of Egypt. Genesis 41:45*

Names were extremely important in that part of the world. The giving of a name was never a casual endeavor. Questions immediately come to mind - Why would Pharaoh give Joseph a name? This appears to be an effort, on Pharaoh's part, to give credence to Joseph's appointment. Egyptians hated Jews. They would not be happy to take orders from a man with a Jewish name. It was also customary for a person elevated to an important national position to receive a new name: i.e., Daniel became Beltshazzar (Daniel 4:8), Moses changed the name Hosea to Joshua (Numbers 13:16).

Why would Pharaoh give Joseph this particular name? Zaphenath-Paneah is an interesting name. There are differences of opinion concerning the meaning of Zaphenath-Paneah. Some believe it means "Savior of the world." Other scholars believe the name means "Revealer of dreams." The truth is that we cannot be sure.

There are also questions concerning Asenath, the wife Pharaoh gave to Joseph. First, it was not unusual for a king to take the daughter of an important man as his wife or the wife of one of his officials. This was a common way to initiate or maintain cordial relationships between two areas.

- The name Askenath literally means "who belongs to Neith." "Neith" is the Egyptian name for the goddess "Minerva - the goddess of wisdom." Think about this for a moment. This woman was named in honor of one of the major deities of the people of Egypt. Also, her father was a highly respected priest who belonged to the same level of priests as the Pharaoh himself. Thus, Joseph, the man who stood alone for God in a pagan nation, now has a wife linked to Egyptian idolatry as closely as it was possible to be. It should be acknowledged that in that day a wife had very little affect upon the thinking and decisions of the family. These were the prerogatives of the husband. Nevertheless, there have been a number of women, in Biblical history, who have had a negative affect on their husbands.
- The father of Asenath, Potiphera, is also the subject of controversy. Some say he was Potiphar, who put Joseph into prison in the first place. Other scholars disagree. The truth is we do not know. The text indicates that he was "Priest of On." The word "Priest" is "kohen" (כֹּהֵן) which was the title of those who served in the Jerusalem temple as well as the wilderness tabernacle. This title can also refer to a chief ruler such as the case of Melchizadek. My impression is that Potiphera was a

priestly ruler, of great importance, who had a daughter whom he named in honor of the goddess "Neith."

Notice that Potiphera was the "Priest of On." "On" is another name for Hieropolis. This city was located on the east side of the Nile delta just north of Memphis and ten miles northeast of Cairo. It was known for the fact that it was the city of the sun god "Ra." Many sun cults were centered in the city. It appears that Potiphera was a priest in the worship of the sun god.

Observe that it was only after Joseph was given an Egyptian name and an Egyptian wife that he traveled around the land as the ultimate ruler of Egypt under the command of Pharaoh.

Genesis 41:46-57 - Joseph Began His Rule, the Famine Began

The author begins this paragraph in a somewhat unusual manner.

Joseph was thirty years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh king of Egypt and Joseph went out from Pharaoh's presence and traveled throughout Egypt. Genesis 41:46

In the two sentences comprising verse 46, the author emphasized Joseph's age and repeated the fact that Joseph left the presence of Pharaoh and traveled throughout Egypt.

The age of Joseph, at this point, is important because it gives us some additional information. He began serving Pharaoh at 30 years of age. We know that he was sold to Potiphar at the age of 17. This means that he spent about a year as the servant of Potiphar and about twelve years in prison.

Put yourself in Joseph's position. What would happen to you after being imprisoned twelve years when you had been falsely accused? Interestingly enough, there is no record of Joseph's negative reaction. The text simply tells how Joseph made the most of a tragic situation and God was with him. The author repeated the information about Joseph traveling throughout Egypt. This was not accidental.

Joseph did not start his monumental task until he had both the authority and the symbols of it. That would make it very unwise for anyone to refuse to cooperate. When the people of the remote districts dealt with him, they were dealing with a man granted Egyptian status; a man involved in the power structure of the nation. In a sense, they were dealing with Pharaoh through him.

The author gives a straight forward summary of the food situation during the years of plenty :

During the seven years of abundance the land produced plentifully. Genesis 41:47

The word "plentifully" is interesting. It is "qomets" (קֹמֶץ) which means a handful. In times of famine, grain was checked carefully and each grain of wheat was carefully protected. In abundant times, however, grain was stored by handfuls. Individual grains were hardly noticed. This was a graphic way to describe abundance.

The author, having described abundance, then described the way in which the grain was stored.

Joseph collected all the food produced in those seven years of abundance in Egypt and stored it in the cities. In each city, he put the food grown in the fields surrounding it. Genesis 41:48

This is a picture of localized application. The text sounds as though Joseph collected the entire crop. This, of course, would not be possible. It does mean that all of the 20% claimed by Joseph for Pharaoh was collected. This required a royal construction project. The text states that the grain was kept.

There is some dispute about whether the surplus grain was stored in the city store houses "kametz" (כָּמֵץ) or "gametz" (גָּמֵץ) an "in-ground pit." As we said earlier, these in-ground silos were common in the Near East. These were usually located inside the cities. It appears to me that the author spoke of the in-ground silos. which were located in the cities. This would remove the need to transport the food long distances to a central collection point.

Observe that the author used the words "in Egypt" when speaking of the surplus. This and other statements, in this part of the book, give us a degree of certainty that the surplus food was in Egypt, but was not to be found in neighboring countries.

In the following verse, the author attempted to describe the extent of the abundance.

Joseph stored up huge quantities of grain, like the sand of the sea; it was so much that he stopped keeping records because it was beyond measure. Genesis 41:49

In the course of the seven years, they accumulated far more than they needed and ceased the count. They counted to make sure that they had enough to sustain them through the seven devastating years of famine. The massing of a grand total was otherwise unimportant.

When the author spoke of the huge quantities of grain, "like the sand of the sea," he used a common word picture. When God spoke to Abraham about the extent of his lineage, he likened them to "the sands of the sea shore." The author used the image here again, for the same purpose.

There is a rather unusual situation in the following verse.

Before the years of famine came, two sons were born to Joseph by Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On. Genesis 41:50

Genesis 41:50-52, describe Joseph's family situation. Observe that Genesis 41:46-49 describe Joseph's elevation to Viceroy of Egypt and his program of storing 20% of the grain harvest during the seven years of abundance. Genesis 41:53-57, on the other hand, deal with the seven years of famine. Genesis 41:50-52, which are part of the same paragraph, deal with neither the years of abundance nor those of famine. These verses form a brief parenthesis in the midst of this picture of abundance and famine. The question immediately arises, Why would the author insert this personal parenthesis about Joseph in the midst of the abundance-famine story? There are several possibilities. We will look carefully at the verses and then attempt to answer the question.

In the words, "Before the years of famine came," the author has given us some important time information. Joseph became the Viceroy of Egypt at the age of 30. He was apparently married to Asenath during that year. From this we can ascertain that these two boys were born when Joseph was between the ages of 31 and 37.

This information also gives us a hint concerning the times during which the boys were born. Joseph had prophesied there would be seven years of indescribable abundance. Each passing year offered greater credence to his prophetic words. Certainly all would not be sweetness and light. There would naturally be some detractors from his position and performance. Basically, however, these years would far surpass the twelve years he spent in prison.

During these years of abundance and appreciation, two sons were born to Joseph and Asenath. Observe that the author took unusual pains to identify Asenath as "the daughter of Potiphera, priest of On." There could be a couple of reasons for this careful identification:

- **Asenath was not a Jew**. To identify her as the daughter of Potiphera identified Asenath, Joseph's wife, as an Egyptian and not a Jew.
- **She was a member of a family of position** - To identify her as the daughter of the priest/chief of On, identified Joseph's wife as the daughter of a member of a family of very high position in the kingdom. Identifying her as the daughter of the chief/ priest of On, identifies her as one who came from a family deeply entrenched in pagan practice and belief.

It is interesting that the author interrupts the story of the success of Joseph's program to describe the family born to Joseph. It is possible that there is a clue to the author's purpose. The author spoke of Joseph's family in these words:

> *Joseph named his first born Manasseh and said, "It is because God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father's household." Genesis 41:51*

This parenthesis, Genesis 41:50-52, is unusual. The fact that the author takes time to translate the meaning indicates that there was a special significance to it.

The name of the first-born is "Manasseh," which means "cause to forget." This verse could be taken wrongly. There is no doubt that Joseph had experienced his measure of trouble and pain. Joseph did not say that God had made him forget his father. He said three things:

- The thing that happened was a divine action. God did it.
- God made Joseph forget all his toil. That was a miracle. Joseph had worked hard for 12 or 13 years. His payment for such was that one person after another mistreated and took advantage of him. In his new position and the success of the program he designed, God had enabled him to look beyond his pain.
- God made Joseph forget "all my father's house." In this brief phrase, there is more pain than four words can express. It appears that Joseph had been hounded by questions about his family. He could probably see why his brothers might be angry with him, but to sell him into slavery and certain death, how could they do that? He didn't like their values either, but he would not kill them. Again, his father might disagree with him, but how could he side with his brothers against him? In such distress, one can be hounded with these questions day after day; year after year. Joseph said that God had enabled him to forget all his family.

This is a way of saying that for the first time life was very positive for Joseph. He was working as hard as ever, but there were no negative payments coming from his hard work.

In verse 52, Joseph continued with his explanation:

The second son he named Ephraim and said, "It is because God has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering." Genesis 41:52

The name "Ephraim" comes from the Hebrew word which means "to be fruitful." Joseph dealt with this name in exactly the same way he dealt with the name "Manasseh." The reason Joseph gave for this name was that God had made him fruitful in the land of his affliction. This statement looks forward and backward:

- **Looking backward** - Egypt was the land of his affliction. This was a painful reminder that though Joseph never complained, the events of his life in Egypt were nearly beyond the ability of a human being to bear. Joseph's pain was indescribable.
- **Looking forward** - "God made Joseph fruitful." There is a theme that runs through the story of Joseph. It is composed of six features:
  - ♦ Joseph was righteous
  - ♦ Those around Joseph were grossly unrighteous
  - ♦ Though Joseph had done no wrong, he was punished:
    1 Sold as a slave by his brothers
    2 Falsely accused and imprisoned because of Potiphar's wife
    3 Agreement was broken by the cupbearer
  - ♦ Joseph served his overseers most effectively
  - ♦ God was with Joseph.
  - ♦ Joseph was blessed by God:
    1 Joseph was honored by those he served.
    2 Joseph eventually held power over all who harmed him

Having concluded the parenthesis dealing with the naming of Joseph's sons, the author returned to his description of Joseph handling of the famine in Egypt. He summarized the seven years of plenty in these terms:

The seven years of abundance in Egypt came to an end. Genesis 41:53

It is a very brief sentence, but its foreboding was shocking to say the least. Seven years of plenty, joy and hope now came to an abrupt end.

The author immediately moved from reporting seven years of plenty and proceeded to describe the seven years of famine.

And the seven years of famine began, just as Joseph had said. There was famine in all the other lands, but in the whole land of Egypt there was food. Genesis 41:54

There are four distinct pieces of information in this verse:

- The seven years of famine began.
- Joseph prophesied this famine would come.
- All the nations around Egypt experienced famine.
- Egypt, alone, had bread enough and to spare.

It is easy to see that Joseph's accuracy in establishing the survival program was the salvation of his land of slavery as well as opportunity. The word picture is very clear. Surrounding nations were hungry; Egypt had bread enough and to spare.

Observe the way the author described the progress of this story:

> *When all Egypt began to feel the famine, the people cried to Pharaoh for food. Then Pharaoh told all the Egyptians, "Go to Joseph and do what he tells you." Genesis 41:55*

Egypt had experienced seven years of unprecedented bounty. Now the tide changed. Other nations had already experienced famine. At this point, Egypt was beginning to experience some of the same.

As the food supply dwindled, the people sought relief from Pharaoh himself. They needed access to the 20% of their harvests that Joseph had collected. This gives us a hint of just how desperate the people became. It was risky business for anyone to demand that Pharaoh do anything. Because they were so hungry, they gladly took that risk in the hope of finding something to eat.

Observe that the author wrote, "...and Pharaoh said to **all the Egyptians."** The use of the word "all" gives us an impression of just how pervasive the distress and famine had become.

The instructions of Pharaoh give us a hint of his trust and confidence in Joseph. Notice his words "Go to Joseph and **do what he tells you**." Without knowing what Joseph's instructions might be, Pharaoh was confident the instructions of his second in command would be wise and helpful. Political leaders, in any era, seldom made claims of this level for themselves, much less those who served under their direction.

The author continued to describe the events which accompanied the famine:

> *When the famine had spread over the whole country, Joseph opened the storehouses and sold grain to the Egyptians, for the famine was severe throughout Egypt. Genesis 41:56*

In this verse the author described Joseph's plan to deal with famine in Egypt. The author began the verse by describing the scope of the famine - the famine had spread over the whole country."

Joseph realized that the situation was severe. It would require strong measures on the part of the government. His decision was to open the storehouses. These silos were filled to overflowing during the seven years of abundance. Because the crops had been so bountiful, the people had accumulated large sums of money as Joseph bought up the excess food.

The author continued by saying, "...and sold grain to the Egyptians." The accumulated grain was sold back to the people as it had been bought from them. This made it possible for the government to have grain to sell. It also enabled the people to have the necessary money to purchase the needed grain.

At the close of the verse, the author emphasized again just how severe this famine was. He described it by saying "the famine was severe throughout Egypt." The word "severe" is "chazag" (חָזַק) and means to be strong, to fortify. It is to withstand all efforts to alleviate the famine. They had often experienced famine, but never like this. Not only was Egypt suffering; all the nations around them had an even greater famine.

The author then turned the focus of his attention to the effect of the famine on other countries.

> *And all the countries came to Egypt to buy grain from Joseph, because the famine was severe in all the world. Genesis 41:57*

You will remember, famine struck surrounding countries during the seven years of Egyptian bounty. This famine continued and increased. Now the surrounding nations came to Egypt to buy grain. It is significant that Egypt grew so much grain that there was enough to feed their people as well as those of their deprived neighbors.

I think it is phenomenal that Egypt was willing to share their bounty with struggling nations. It is common knowledge that in times of famine, people tend to become very protective of whatever resources they may possess. They will not sell whatever the price offered because money is useless when people are starving.

Notice the way the author concludes the verse and paragraph - "Because the famine was **severe** in all the world." The word "severe," in this instance, is exactly the same as the word used in verse 56, to describe the depth of the famine in Egypt. The repetition of this word serves to give strong emphasis to the message. One can see the expansion of the theme. In Genesis 41:56, the author described the severe famine in Egypt. In Genesis 41:57, the author used the same word to describe the severe famine in that whole part of the world.

Conclusion

In this chapter, there is a strong contrast.

- Pharaoh's "wise men" and "diviners" have been totally helpless to understand and interpret the dreams of Pharaoh. This devastated their reputation as men of wisdom who could interpret any dream.
- Joseph, on the other hand, acknowledged he could not interpret dreams, but God can. He made it clear that God could give him the interpretation of any dream.

Joseph made no claim for himself, but indicated that God was the Omniscient one. "God will give Pharaoh an answer of peace."

Joseph gave Pharaoh more than an interpretation of his dreams. He told Pharaoh that "God has shown Pharaoh what he is about to do." It is a way of saying that God is intimately involved in the minute details of the kingdom. God is in control of history, even as it is being spelled out in daily life.

Throughout the story of Joseph, there is no complaint about the hardships and disappointments that were a part of his life in Egypt. As he named his children, we get a slight glimpse of the impact of tragedy upon this servant of God. When Ephraim was born, Joseph said, "God has made me fruitful in the land of affliction." Joseph attributed his ability to cope with affliction and grinding abuse to the faithful help of God.

When Manasseh was born, Joseph said, "God made me forget all my toil and my father's house." Joseph could have been torn apart by the haunting memories of what his family had done. It was the mercy of God, not his self-control that enabled him to diffuse the memories that frustrated and enraged him.

Joseph saw the power, the mercy and all-knowing character of God involved in every detail, every feeling of his life. Because God was in control, he did not have to respond in fear and anger every time adversity came his way.

What God did for Joseph, He still does. If we believe that God is all powerful, that He is merciful in all our traumas; that he is as faithful to us as he was to Joseph: we will be able to increasingly deal with the distresses of life without rancor. It is not that Joseph had great self-control. He had great trust in who God is.

That being the case, we need to rethink the things we see as tragedies in our Christian lives. The God who moved Joseph from the prison cell to the throne room can do the same thing in devastating experiences of our lives. Properly viewed, there are no real tragedies in the lives of those who fully trust in God.

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 18

BROTHERS' FIRST TRIP TO EGYPT FOR GRAIN

GENESIS 42:1 - 38

1. In Genesis chapter 42, there are four paragraphs. On the table which follows, write a summary of seven words or less for each paragraph.

42:1-17	
42:18-25	
42:26-34	
42:35-38	

2. In Genesis 42:1-17, Joseph met his brothers and accused them of being spies.
   a. In Genesis 42:1, Jacob spoke to his ten brothers.
      (1). What did he say?
      (2). How would you describe the feelings of Jacob as he spoke?
      (3). If you were one of the brothers, how would you feel listening to Jacob say this?
      (4). Would it make any difference which brother you were?
   b. In Genesis 42:2, Jacob made a surprising statement.
      (1). What did he say?
      (2). Why was this surprising?
      (3). Where would Jacob get this information?
      (4). What did Jacob accomplish by saying, "so that we may live and not die"?
   c. In Genesis 42:3, the author made a seemingly insignificant report.
      (1). What did he report?
      (2). Why was it necessary for ten brothers to go?
   d. Review Genesis 42:4 carefully.
      (1). The author mentioned that Benjamin was Joseph's brother. Why was that important here?
      (2). What was the significance of Jacob's fears?
   e. In Genesis 42:5, the author reported the arrival of the ten brothers in Egypt.
      (1). What did he tell us?
      (2). What are the implications of this verse?
   f. In Genesis 42:6, the spotlight shifts to Joseph.
      (1). How does the author describe Joseph's position?
      (2). Why was this important?
      (3). How did the brothers respond to Joseph?
      (4). Why was that significant?
   g. In Genesis 42:7, 8, Joseph recognized his brothers.
      (1). Why would Joseph be able to recognize the brothers, but they were unable to recognize him?
      (2). Why would he pretend to be a stranger to his brothers?

(3). Why would Joseph speak harshly with his brothers?
(4). Think carefully about the brothers' reply. What can we learn?
(5). Why would Joseph ask where they came from when he already knew?

h. In Genesis 42:9, Joseph accused his brothers.
(1). What was his accusation?
(2). What basis does Joseph have for this accusation?
(3). What relationship can you see, in this verse, between Joseph's dream and his accusation?

i. In Genesis 42:10, 11, the brothers responded to Joseph's accusation.
(1). There are four parts to this response. What are they?
(2). Read them again. What do these responses tell you?
(3). Is this an adequate response?

j. In Genesis 42:12, Joseph contradicted his brothers.
(1). What did he say?
(2). What basis did he have for saying this?
(3). How realistic were Joseph's accusations?

k. The brothers responded to Joseph's charges in 42:13.
(1). How did the brothers address Joseph?
(2. Why would they do this?
(3). They gave five pieces of information in their own defense.
(a). What information did they give?
(b). What was the significance of each pieces of information?

l. In Genesis 42:14, Joseph responded to the brothers' response.
(1). On the following table, compare the brothers' response (42:13) with Joseph's reactions (42:14).

Genesis 42:13	Genesis 42:14
1. 2. 3. 4. 5.	

(2). What can you discover from this comparison?
(3). What basis can you find for Joseph's response?

m. In Genesis 42:15, Joseph made an announcement.
(1). Why does Joseph add, "As surely as Pharaoh lives"?
(2). What difference does this make?
(3). They were being tested. Why was this important?
(4). Think of yourself as one of the brothers. What would you think as you heard Joseph's announcement?

n. In Genesis 42:16, Joseph continued his announcement.
(1). The brothers face some major obstacles in attempting to fulfill Joseph's requirements.
(a). What obstacles are there?
(b). What can they do to overcome these obstacles?

(2). What basis does Joseph have to test their truthfulness?
(3). Joseph, again, used the statement, "As surely as Pharaoh lives." What is the significance of this?
(4). What is the significance of Joseph's attempt to prove that they were spies?
(5). Explain the logic of Joseph's accusation?

o. In Genesis 42:17, Joseph surprised his brothers.
(1). What was the surprise?
(2). What would Joseph hope to accomplish by this move?

3. In Genesis 42:18-25, Joseph reversed himself and said some surprising things.
a. In Genesis 42:18, Joseph spoke to his brothers as they returned from three days in prison.
(1). What did Joseph say?
(2). What were the implications of these statements?
(3). There were at least two surprises in this verse. What are they?
b. In Genesis 42:19, Joseph completely reversed himself.
(1). What was the reversal?
(2). There is a major problem with Joseph's instructions. What is it?
(3). Why did Joseph continue to deal with their integrity when they have been telling the truth?
c. In Genesis 42:20, Joseph reiterated his demands.
(1). Why was it so important for them to bring Benjamin to Joseph ?
(2). Knowing all that he does, why does Joseph talk about them dying?
(3). Notice how the brothers responded. What does this tell you?
d. In Genesis 42:21, the brothers talked among themselves.
(1). How did they evaluate their situation?
(2). What basis can you see for their conclusion?
(3). If you were the brother who spoke these words, what emotions would be going through your mind as you spoke?
e. In Genesis 42:22, Reuben spoke to his brothers.
(1). What did he say?
(2). How would this affect the brothers?
3. What did Reuben mean when he said, "Now we must give an account for his blood."?
(4). Review chapter 37. Compare Reuben's actions in chapter 37 with his statement in 42:22. What did you learn?
f. In Genesis 42:23, 24, the author gave us a special insight.
(1). In Genesis 42:23, the author gave us some information the brothers did not have. What difference would that make?
(2). In Genesis 42:24, Joseph responded to what he had heard his brothers say. What could have caused this response?
(3). Joseph surprised his brothers, again, at the end of verse 24.
(a). What did he do?
(b). Why would Joseph choose this brother?
(c). What was gained by doing this?
g. Joseph again did something surprising in Genesis 42:25.

(1). What three things did Joseph do?
(2). How can you account for this?
(3). What does this tell you about Joseph?

4. In Genesis 42:26-34, the brothers reported to Jacob.
   a. The end of Genesis 42:25 and the beginning of 42:26 are a single sentence.
      (1). What does it tell us?
      (2). What is the significance of this information?
   b. There is another shock in Genesis 42:27.
      (1). What is it?
      (2). What is the significance of it?
      (3). The author mentioned that they found silver. What is the significance of this, if any?
   c. In Genesis 42:28, the brothers responded to this discovery.
      (1). What was their response?
      (2). Why would they respond like this in view of their discovery?
      (3). In view of their lives, what does God have to do with this situation?
   d. In Genesis 42:29, 30, the brothers told Jacob about their experience in Egypt.
      (1). How did the brothers identify Joseph?
      (2). What does this suggest?
      (3). What did they tell Jacob?
      (4). What did they not tell Jacob?
      (5). How would Jacob respond to this?
   e. In Genesis 42:31, the brothers responded.
      (1). What did they say?
      (2). Compare what they told Jacob about Joseph, in Genesis 42:30, with their reply to Joseph, in Genesis 42:31.
         (a). What did you learn?
         (b). What did it mean?
   f. In Genesis 42:32, the brothers continued their report.
      (1). In this verse, the brothers added some information which they had not previously shared with Joseph.
         (a). What did they share?
         (b). Why would they share this?
      (2). If you were Joseph and heard this, how would you feel?
      (3). If you were Jacob and heard this, how would you feel?
   g. In Genesis 42:33, 34, the brothers continued their report.
      (1). In these verses, Joseph made three demands.
         (a). What were these demands?
         (b). What was the purpose of these demands?
         (c). Would meeting these demands meet Joseph's announced purpose?
         (d). Study the demands again. What do they tell you about Joseph?
      (2). In verse 34, Joseph announced three promises that he would keep.
         (a). What were these promises?
         (b). Are they reasonable promises in view of his purposes?

(c). Study verse 34 again, in terms of who will gain the most - Joseph or the brothers.
Who gained the most? Explain your answer.

5. In Genesis 42:35-38, Jacob responded to the demand that Benjamin return with his brothers to Egypt.
   a. In Genesis 42:35, there is another surprise.
      (1). What was the surprise?
      (2). What did it mean?
      (3). How did Jacob and his sons react? Why?
   b. In Genesis 42:36, Jacob gave his answer to Joseph's demand.
      (1). What did Jacob say to his sons?
      (2). If you were Jacob and said these words, what would you mean by them?
      (3). How would you describe Jacob's emotional condition?
      (4). Is Jacob blaming the Viceroy of Egypt or the brothers?
      (5). What does this suggest?
   c. In Genesis 42:37, one of the brothers responded to his father.
      (1). Who spoke?
      (2). What did he say?
      (3). In what way was his offer helpful or unhelpful?
   d. In Genesis 42:38, Jacob responded to his son's offer.
      (1). How did Jacob respond?
      (2). Explain how reasonable or unreasonable Jacob's response was.
      (3). Put yourself into the place of the ten brothers when Jacob said this.
         (a). Was Jacob's statement true?
         (b). What would Jacob's words mean to you?
         (c). How do you account for Jacob's fears for Benjamin?

6. Read Genesis chapter 42 again.
   a. What have you learned about human nature?
   b. What have you learned about God.
   c. In what way will this have a changing effect upon your life?

LESSON 18: GENESIS 42:1 - 38

BROTHERS' FIRST TRIP TO EGYPT FOR GRAIN

Introduction

There are four paragraphs in this chapter. There is a brief summary of each paragraph on the table which follows:

42:1-17	Joseph Accuses Brothers of Being Spies
42:18-25	Joseph Kept Simeon, Sent Grain and Money Back
42:26-34	Brothers Tell Jacob - Ruler Abusive, Bring Brother Back
42:35-38	Jacob Refused to Send Benjamin

Genesis 42:1-17 - Joseph Accuses Brothers of Being Spies

Conditions had deteriorated substantially. When such things happen, there are predictable side-effects.

> *When Jacob learned that there was grain in Egypt, he said to his sons, "Why do you just keep looking at each other?" Genesis 42:1*

There was a hint of tension in Jacob's words as he sought to motivate his sons to go to Egypt to buy food. Though the text does not comment, it appears that there had been strong differences of opinion between Jacob and his sons and these words were just part of that. One should not be surprised that the brothers were reluctant to go back to Egypt. True, the situation with Benjamin caused real concern, but there was also a reluctance to return because they feared the man who was in charge of the food distribution, Joseph. The burden of the drought and the apprehensions from their last trip had begun to take their toll on the entire family.

There appears to be some sarcasm in Jacob's words, but they deal with a real situation. If they were hungry in good times, they could work and get enough to eat. During the drought, however, there was nothing they could do but stand around and look at each other. The fear and frustration this causes often leads to edginess within the family.

Jacob had something on his mind when he chided his sons.

> *He continued, "I have heard that there is grain in Egypt. Go down there and buy some for us, so that we may live and not die." Genesis 42:2*

One might wonder how desert people, like Jacob, heard any news at all from the outside world. We must remember that they lived in the vicinity of Hebron, some 22 miles south of Jerusalem. This was on the caravan route from Egypt to the east. The caravan drivers were prime sources of news and gossip from whatever parts of the world they visited. Though the text does not say, this is most certainly the source of Jacob's information.

Having shared the news he had heard, Jacob instructed his sons to go immediately and buy food for the family. Jacob's statement, "so that we may live and not die," expressed the urgency of their situation.

The ten brothers were duty bound to obey the command of their father.

Then ten of Joseph's brothers went down to buy grain from Egypt. Genesis 42:3

Notice that the author talked about ten brothers. Jacob had made an executive decision that Benjamin was not to go to Egypt under any conditions. This was a serious decision. They needed to take as many men as they could to bring back food.

The ten brothers, therefore, went to Egypt to buy food. The question arises, why did all ten brothers need to go. There may have been several reasons, but two stand out:

- The more men who go, the more donkeys they can take along to bring food back. We must remember that it was at least a two or three week journey each way. They had to make as much of the trip as possible.
- The more brothers who went, the greater were their chances of returning without their food being stolen by highway robbers.

All of this heightens the importance of Jacob's decision that Benjamin would not go no matter what the consequences might be.

There is a contrast in this passage:

But Jacob did not send Benjamin, Joseph's brother, with the others, because he was afraid that harm might come to him. Genesis 42:4

Verse three indicates that the ten sons of Jacob went to Egypt to buy grain. The contrast is between the ten brothers, in verse three, and Benjamin, in verse four.

- Ten brothers - they went to Egypt to buy food.
- Benjamin - He was not allowed to go to Egypt.

You will notice that the author gives a reason Jacob would not allow Benjamin to accompany the ten brothers. He said, "Because he was afraid that harm might come to him." In the Hebrew text, it simply says, "Lest harm meet him." Observe, also, that the author did not identify the source of this possible harm. This was necessary since Jacob could not prove that the ten brothers were responsible for the tragedy that apparently had happened to Joseph. The fact that Jacob would not allow Benjamin to accompany the ten brothers suggests that he may well have had some serious suspicions concerning their involvement in the disappearance of Joseph.

The author gives us a more complete picture of the scene in Egypt.

So Israel's sons were among those who went to buy grain, for the famine was in the land of Canaan also. Genesis 42:5

On the basis of the information we have seen so far, some might get the impression that Jacob's family were the only ones suffering from this famine. As you read this verse, it is clear that this is a condition that has affected the entire area. This accounts for the fact that people from all over that part of the world came to purchase grain. In view of this fact, one gets a fuller view of what Joseph said when he was about to interpret Pharaoh's dream.

"The reason the dream was given to Pharaoh in two forms is that the matter has been firmly decided by God, and God will do it soon." Genesis 41:32

God was not only keeping Israel alive through the time of drought. The Egyptians and all the other idolatrous peoples of the areas were sustained by God despite their idolatrous commitment. This is a vivid picture of the mercy and love of God displayed in his powerful control of nature.

The spotlight now shifts from the ten brothers to Joseph.

Now Joseph was the governor of the land, the one who sold grain to all its people. So when Joseph's brothers arrived, they bowed down to him with their faces to the ground. Genesis 42:6

The author described Joseph's position in Egypt as "governor." The word "governor" is "shalat" (שָׁלַט) and means "to dominate," "to govern," to rule." It is the one who has power to rule. Obviously, Pharaoh was the ultimate ruler, the one who had the final say, but when he made Joseph the second ruler of the land, the authority of day to day governing was transferred to him.

After identifying Joseph's position, he carefully described the way the ten brothers approached him, "They bowed down to him with their faces to the ground." This was an expression of deference and respect for his position of power. Bowing down before him, the ten brothers acknowledged Joseph as their master. This reminds us of a much earlier situation.

He said to them, "Listen to this dream I had; We were binding sheaves of grain out in the field when suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright, while your sheaves gathered around mine and bowed down to it." His brothers said to him, "Do you intend to reign over us? Will you actually rule us?" And they hated him all the more because of his dream and what he had said. Genesis 37:6-8

At the time, the brothers thought this dream was preposterous. In fact, the dream was a precise prophetic announcement of exactly what was to happen years later.

This had to be a dramatic moment for Joseph. Notice how the author reported the event.

As soon as Joseph saw his brothers, he recognized them, but he pretended to be a stranger and spoke harshly to them. "Where do you come from?" he asked. "From the land of Canaan," they replied, "to buy food." Genesis 42:7

Put yourself in Joseph's place. You are in a position of great power. Suddenly, you see your ten brothers bowing down before you. It is reasonable to assume that the memory of his boyhood dream flashed through his mind. The text does not say, but it is reasonable to think he remembered that these are the ones who wanted to kill him, but sent him into slavery. Certainly the painful memory of the unjust commitment to prison raced through his mind as well. It had to be a bitter-sweet moment for the viceroy of all Egypt. The thoughts and emotions he experienced on that occasion must remain a mystery; the text is silent.

The text does tell us several things:

- **When Joseph saw his brothers, he recognized them**.

- **He pretended that he did not know them**. The Hebrew text literally says, "He remained a stranger toward them." One might translate this, "He knew them but treated them like strangers." This is pretense on Joseph's part. The question comes up, why would he intentionally deceive his brothers? We will deal with that issue later.
- **He spoke harshly to them**. The text does not indicate why he did this. There are possibilities:
  - ♦ He was simply showing his pent-up anger at them.
  - ♦ It could be part of his pretense mentioned earlier

  Though the text does not clarify the situation, the second possibility seems more plausible.
- **He inquired where they came from, though he already knew the answer**. It appears that this is also a part of his pretense.
- **The brothers answer was direct and honest**. They came from Canaan and came to buy food. It is quite possible that Joseph used the pretense and deception in order to see if they would tell the truth. He had known them to be less than honest on previous occasions.

Their answer, "to buy food," brings the dream to mind again. It is interesting that in his dream, the brother's sheaves bowed down before his sheaf. Now, many years later, the dream comes true. The startling fact is that it has to do with the grain that comes from that sheaf.

The author gives us some information that even the participants did not know.

Although Joseph recognized his brothers, they did not recognize him. Genesis 42:8

At first, this may seem strange. Reflection, however, should make it much easier to comprehend.

- Joseph had every reason to think that his brothers were still alive. They were young enough that it would have been surprising to learn that they were dead.
- The brothers, however, had no reason in the world to believe that Joseph was still alive. A slave had an average life expectancy of two or three years. In their minds he would certainly be dead.
- Joseph knew where they lived. He would not be surprised to see them dressed in the native dress with which he had been familiar in his childhood.
- The brothers, however, would never in their wildest dreams have expected to see Joseph dressed in royal garments and serving as the Viceroy of Egypt. Even if he looked the same, they would have rejected the possibility.
- All ten of these brothers were older than Joseph. Older people tend to change in appearance less than younger people. In this way, it would be easy for Joseph to identify his brothers.
- Joseph was younger than the ten brothers. This means that he could be expected to change more than the ten brothers did. This fact, by itself, would make it harder for the brothers to identify him.

- Joseph was not speaking Hebrew. This fact would make it more difficult for the brothers to identify him as Joseph.
- The brothers spoke Hebrew which is what they would be expected to speak.

All of these situations would make it easy for Joseph to recognize them and difficult for them to recognize Joseph.

There is a seeming contradiction in the story.

> *Then he remembered his dreams about them and said to them, "You are spies! You have come to see where our land is unprotected." Genesis 42:9*

This sentence is made up of two parts:

- He remembered his dreams about them.
- He said, "You are spies! You have come to see where the land is unprotected." Had the brothers not been so frightened, they would have realized how impossible this charge was. Egypt was the greatest power in the world. They were the only ones who had any food. The people in Canaan were busy trying to stay alive. They had no time or energy to mount a campaign against Egypt and everyone knew it.

These two statements seem to have little to do with each other. There are a couple of scenarios that could be plausible:

- He remembered his dreams and knew he would have dominion over then and expressed it in this way.
- He remembered his dreams and it made him angry. He expressed his anger in vindictiveness.
- When he remembered his dreams, he continued his pretense of being harsh and abrasive.

It appears that the third possibility is more plausible.

Whatever that case may be, observe the answer the ten brothers gave.

> *"No, my lord," they answered. "Your servants have come to buy food. We are all the sons of one man. Your servants are honest men, not spies." Genesis 42:10, 11*

I suspect that they were very nervous by this time. It was dangerous when a person with total power was suspicious of one's motives. Nevertheless, notice the answer the brothers gave. In their reply, they gave four pieces of information:

- **"They objected to Joseph's accusations."** This gives us an impression of just how frightened they were. Unless one feared for his life, he would never contradict a ruler who has absolute power. This would usually bring the ruler's wrath. The brothers felt it was necessary to clarify their motives even if it meant contradicting the Viceroy.
- **"Your servants are come to buy food**." They called themselves "your servants." The word "servants" is "ehbed" (עֶבֶד) and was used to describe a slave or bondservant. They knew that they were totally under Joseph's control. These words and their bowing down before Joseph symbolized the same idea.

Their honesty told Joseph that they had come to buy food. The trip to Egypt was bitter-sweet for the brothers. They were glad to get the food, but they despised the Egyptians.

- "**We are the sons of one man**" - This was meant to help Joseph understand that they had no political motive for coming from Canaan to Egypt. A subversive group would rarely be made up of men who were all brothers.
- "**Your servants are honest men, not spies**." The word "servants" is the same one they used in verse ten. They strongly emphasized their dependent position. This is not surprising. If they do not get food from Egypt, they and their families will starve.

  They stressed the fact that they are "honest men." They wanted to convince Joseph that they were just in their claims; they were exactly what they claimed to be.

  This was important because Joseph accused them of being spies. Had Joseph really believed this, the brothers would have been killed on the spot.

Joseph continued his aggressive interrogation.

"No!" he said to them. "You have come to see where our land is unprotected." Genesis 42:12

Joseph's negative response, "no!" was very confident and strong. Certainly, when the ten brothers heard this they could be sure that their days were numbered.

Having denied the brothers' claim, Joseph not only claimed that they were spies, but also ascribed motives to their clandestine presence. Joseph's suggestion was a common practice and is also today. When Israel was about to go into Canaan, they sent spies into the land to gain information in preparation for their invasion.

As we said earlier, this was ridiculous. Egypt had the largest army in the world. They had more chariots than others had soldiers. There was no army in Canaan. When you are threatened with death, you are too busy trying to stay alive to think through things like this.

The brother's reply gives us an insight into their thinking.

But they replied, "Your servants were twelve brothers, the sons of one man, who lives in the land of Canaan. The youngest is now with our father, and one is no more." Genesis 42:13

In this reply they stressed two pieces of information:

- **They again stressed the fact that they were his servants**. They have used the description "your servants" three times in four verses. It was essential for them to be seen as servants and not as enemies. To repeatedly describe themselves as "your slaves" was intended to stress that relationship and offset the idea of being an enemy.
- **They again identified themselves as brothers**. This emphasis suggests that they felt that this would help the Viceroy, Joseph, to understand that they were not spies.

  They were so intent on stressing that they were brothers that they added a new piece of information. They stressed the fact that they were ten of twelve brothers,

all the sons of the same man. This information had not been previously shared. Notice that they told Joseph that their father lived in Canaan at this time. This was one more attempt to stress the fact that they were peaceful citizens, not spies as Joseph had said.

As you look at this verse, they also identified the reasons that only ten brothers came to buy food:

- "**The youngest is now with our father**." This would be new information to Joseph. Based upon his own experience with these ten brothers, Joseph had no reason to believe that Benjamin was still alive or still living in the family. He, too, could have been sold as a slave. That is what they had done to Joseph.
- "**One is no more.**" Imagine what Joseph must have felt as he heard these words. It told him that they thought he was dead. They had every reason to think so. It was rare for a slave to live that long.

  Observe the way they said it. It is as though he had just died a natural death. They knew better than that. In their minds, he died because he was a slave. They presented it to Joseph as though he had just died a natural death. Joseph, of course, knew better than that.

In Genesis 42:14-17, Joseph made an accusation that he knew was absolutely false. On the basis of the information he had, there is no logical way Joseph could reach the conclusion he shared with them. Notice how he spoke.

Joseph said to them, "It is just as I told you: You are spies!" Genesis 42:14

It was totally illogical for Joseph to reach this conclusion on the basis of the information he had received. He was obviously playing a part. It is as though he said to them, "I hear what you say, but I know better. You are spies!"

Put yourself in the place of Joseph saying these words. You would have a very difficult time trying to say these words when you really know better. You would know that they were telling the truth, but could not let on that you know that without letting them know who you are. He probably had two sets of feelings. On one side, it would be good to know that his father and brother are still alive. On the other side, it would be hard not to be angry about what they had done to him years before.

Now put yourself in the place of the ten brothers. You know his accusations are false. However, you have no way to prove your statement and convince the viceroy of your innocence. Fear and frustration had to be rampant among the ten. There might have been one among them whose conscience reminded him of another day when a young man was lowered into a cistern and eventually sold as a slave. The dilemma that young man, Joseph, faced was that he could do nothing to redeem himself from these terrible tragedies.

In the following verse, Joseph continued his response to their defense.

"And this is how you will be tested: As surely as Pharaoh lives, you will not leave this place unless your youngest brother comes here." Genesis 42:15

Again, Joseph knew the brothers were telling the truth. He pretended to be convinced of their dishonesty. Joseph's words had to hit their ears like a clap of thunder. They had to be devastated and frustrated. They knew they were innocent, but the proof the viceroy demanded was totally out of the realm of possibility.

Joseph made an announcement, not an agreement. He said, in effect, that they would be given an opportunity to prove that they were telling the truth.

This announcement came in the form of an irreversible covenant. This is what Joseph meant when he said, "As surely as Pharaoh lives." This means that Joseph bound himself by this oath for as long as Pharaoh lived. As far as the brothers were concerned, this may as well have been a changeless covenant.

The terms of the covenant were then given, "You will not leave this place unless your younger brother comes here." To the ten brothers, this meant that they would spend the rest of their lives in prison or be killed immediately. They already knew Jacob would not allow Benjamin to accompany them when conditions were good. Now, with nine of his sons held as ransom, there was no possible way he would agree to send Benjamin under far more dangerous conditions.

In verse 16, Joseph continued his terms of their release.

> *"Send one of your number to get your brother; the rest of you will be kept in prison, so that your words may be tested to see if you are telling the truth. If you are not, then as surely as Pharaoh lives, you are spies!" Genesis 42:16*

Joseph put the brothers in an absolutely impossible position. One of the ten brothers must go and bring Benjamin back. The problem, however, was that Joseph did not say which brother was to go. The brothers must decide. That was impossible. Everyone knew that the one who went to get Benjamin would live and be free, the other nine would be killed or die in prison. Each of the ten brothers would want to be the one sent back to get Benjamin. On the other hand, not one of them would want the job of explaining to Jacob why it would be wise for him to send his heir into this very dangerous situation. For the ten brothers this was a lose, lose situation.

Joseph was very direct. This text was to demonstrate whether or not the brothers were telling the truth. He then threatened them, "If you are not (telling the truth) then as surely as Pharaoh lives, you are spies!" The repetition of these last phrases stressed the idea that if they proved false they would die.

Having identified the difficult terms they must meet, Joseph gave them some time.

> *And he put them all in custody for three days. Genesis 42:17*

The text does not tell us whether they knew they were being placed in custody for three days. These three days accomplished a couple of things. They had an important decision to make - Which of them would go to try to get Jacob to send Benjamin and in the process gain his own freedom? It, also, gave them a tiny glimpse of what Joseph had experienced for years on their account. Those three days had to be three of the worst days of their lives. They knew they had to choose one of their number, but each of the ten wanted to be the one who was chosen.

Genesis 42:18-25 - Joseph Kept Simeon, Sent Grain and Money Back

Having left the ten brothers in prison for three days, Joseph now brought them out.

> *On the third day, Joseph said to them, "Do this and you will live, for I fear God:" Genesis 42:18*

It should have appeared to them that they must now declare which of them would be released to go to get Benjamin.

It must have shocked them when Joseph changed the decree which he made three days earlier. The brothers should have realized that something was not quite as it seemed when Joseph said, "Do this and you will live, **for I fear God**." Two things should have caught their attention:

- He was offering them a way to escape death when three days earlier he was pressing for ways to find them guilty of spying. This would have lead to certain death.
- Joseph said, "For I fear God." This was totally out of character for an Egyptian ruler. They were worshipped as deities and they worshipped the Pharaoh as well as hundreds of other idols. Now they hear the ruler saying, "I fear God." The word "fear" is "yahray" (יָרֵא) and means "to stand in awe," "to hold in reverence," "to hold in honor." The word "God" is "Elohim" (אֱלֹהִים). This is the name for God which stressed his omnipotence. It is the name for God which was used when the author described His acts of mercy and grace. These ten brothers had never heard of an Egyptian ruler who worshipped "Elohim." Only the Jews worshipped "Elohim." This should have given the brothers a hint. Apparently, it did not.

In verses 19 and 20, Joseph reversed himself and did something Egyptian rulers never did, he changed his mind in favor of mercy on ones for whom he had decreed death.

> *"If you are honest men, let one of your brothers stay here in prison, while the rest of you go and take grain back for your starving households." Genesis 42:19*

Notice that verse 19 is a conditional sentence. These can be identified by the presence of "if...then..." "**If** you are honest men, **then** let one of your brothers stay..." This offer assumes that they are honest men who need only an opportunity to prove it. Up until he detained them for three days, Joseph treated the ten brothers as dishonest men.

It was appropriate for Joseph to make this change. Granted, they had dealt dishonestly with him in years gone by. Nevertheless, since coming to Egypt to buy food, they had been totally honest with him and he knew it.

In this offer, Joseph had been very careful and yet generous. He gave them an opportunity to demonstrate their integrity while at the same time protecting his own interests.

You will note that Joseph presented his brothers with the opposite problem. Three days earlier they had to decide which of the ten would go free. Now they must decide which one of the ten would go to prison while the others went free. To complicate this already impossible decision, these men had learned that ultimately they were all selfish and could not be trusted to be faithful to each other in a situation where personal sacrifice may be involved. How would you like to be a part of that decision?

In the end of verse 19, the harsh sounding viceroy, Joseph, expressed genuine compassion, "...while the rest of you go and take grain back for your starving households." Genesis 42:19b. This kindness had to be a shock to the brothers and all who heard it. When we finally deal with the reason Joseph pretended to mistrust his brothers, we will have to deal with this expression of compassion as a part of that whole experience. We will do it.

In verse 20, Joseph continued with his offer.

> *"But you must bring your youngest brother to me, so that your words may be verified and that you may not die." This they proceeded to do." Genesis 42:20*

Though he had expressed compassion, he was still dealing with the possible sentence of death that the detained brother would confront. Joseph reminded the brothers that if they did not verify their words, by bringing Benjamin to Egypt, it would mean that they had lied; they were spies and the detained brother would die.

In very succinct fashion, the author indicated that they set their possibility of relief in motion. They had no other option.

This was a very devastating time for the ten brothers.

> *They said to one another, "Surely we are being punished because of our brother. We saw how distressed he was when he pleaded with us for his life, but we would not listen; that's why this distress has come upon us." Genesis 42:21*

The emotions of Genesis 42:21-24 were almost unbearably high. The more complicated the situation became, the more they struggled and finally had the courage to say what all of them were thinking. Their guilt rushed to the surface and the whole memory, repressed for many years, broke loose and roared to the forefront of their minds. The words of this verse were the words of one unnamed brother, but they carried the feelings and beliefs of all ten men. They believed that they were being punished for what they had done to Joseph.

Observe that he spoke first in generalities and then in vivid particulars. He spoke generally saying, "We are being punished because of our brother." The memory became much more vivid and particular. "We saw how distressed he was when he pleaded with us for his life, but we would not listen." Read this verse again. There is a grinding pathos in that memory. Their guilt was immeasurable. They could not believe their own hard-hearted dealings with a member of their own family. One can sense the deep feeling of regret for the callousness that pervaded their actions which were so vivid, yet far removed by many years. They believed this dilemma was their punishment for that callused evil deed of so many years before. Though the text does not say, the pain had to be intensified by the fact that for nearly two decades they thought that they had gotten away with the abuse of Joseph and the deception of Jacob. Now it was clear that they had been found out and were paying for their evil deeds.

In every group, there always seems to be one who dissociates him/herself from the guilt of the experience and points the finger at the other participants. Reuben filled that role in the family.

> *Reuben replied, "Didn't I tell you not to sin against the boy? But you wouldn't listen! Now we must give an accounting for his blood." Genesis 42:22*

Now the truth of the matter is that Reuben did try to get them to spare Joseph's life.

> *When Reuben heard this, he tried to rescue him from their hands. "Let's not take his life," he said. "Don't shed any blood. Throw him into this cistern here in the desert, but don't lay a hand on him." Reuben said this to rescue him from them and take him back to his father. Genesis 37:21-22*

That is only part of the story, however. Reuben was the oldest son. Had he the courage, he could have forced his brothers to do the right thing rather than planning to deliver Joseph by subterfuge. He lacked the courage of his conviction and position. Because of this, he shared the responsibility of Joseph's plight along with the other brothers.

If you read Genesis 42:22, carefully, there is a suggestion that Joseph's blood was required of them, but Reuben talks as though it was required of the nine brothers, but not of himself. It may have made him feel better, but he was just as guilty as the rest.

Look at the other nine brothers as they listened to Reuben. They already admitted that their current problems were a punishment for what they had done to Joseph. Add to this the accusations of Reuben and you create some very strong emotions. They would feel even more guilty than they had before. They might also feel some frustration with Reuben. No one appreciates having someone play holier-than-thou and rubbing it in when he did not have the courage to stand for what was right.

In the following verse, the author gave us an insight the brothers did not have.

> *They did not realize that Joseph could understand them, since he was using an interpreter. Genesis 42:23*

The ten brothers only heard Joseph speaking the language common to the Egyptian court. As the text indicates, Joseph only spoke to them through an interpreter. This brings some thoughts to mind. Given the Egyptian hatred of Jews, the interpreter could easily have added his own level of venom to the harsh words spoken by Joseph.

It had been more than a decade since Joseph had spoken his native tongue. It would still be possible for him to understand his brothers conversation even though it would have been a bit rusty by then. Again, in the next chapter, Genesis 43, Joseph's steward talked with the ten brothers about "Your God and the God of your father..." It is fair to assume that Joseph had shared something of his faith with his staff. In that process, he may have had to refresh his memory of his native tongue. His steward spoke Hebrew with the ten brothers. It is possible that Joseph held conversations, in Hebrew, with his steward or perhaps taught him the language. All of these possibilities help us understand how Joseph could still understand his brother's conversation.

Verse 24 is more conclusive evidence that Joseph was playing a part in this encounter.

> *He turned away from them and began to weep, but then turned back and spoke to them again. He had Simeon taken from them and bound before their eyes. Genesis 42:24*

Joseph's immediate response was real. His attempt to hide his reaction was intended to keep the brothers from discovering his identity.

The word "weep" is "bawkaw" (בָּכָה) and means "to weep," "to mourn," "to weep bitterly." It is the emotional response to losing a loved one; to weep in uncontrolled grief. Joseph was so smitten by what he heard that he could not control his grief. Eventually, Joseph regained control and turned to face his brothers again.

The text does not tell us if the brothers ever decided who would be left in custody or not. It does tell us that when Joseph regained his control, he had Simeon taken out of the group and tied up in front of their eyes. Two questions demand our attention:

1. **Why did Joseph choose Simeon**? It is possible that the brothers chose Simeon or that he volunteered. Neither of these possibilities seem appropriate. Simeon was Jacob's second son, by Leah. Reuben was the oldest son, but was not respected as the heir. Though the text does not say, some scholars believe that Simeon was the one who encouraged the other brothers and then put Joseph into the cistern.

If that was true, and it could be, think of how Simeon must have felt as he was selected to be imprisoned and bound as his brothers watched helplessly.

2. **Why did Joseph intentionally bind Simeon in front of all his brothers**? In fact, we do not know. It would seem reasonable to assume that this would give them an idea of what they had caused to happen in Joseph's life. They would experience that helpless feeling Joseph experienced when his brothers placed him in a cistern and again when they sold him as a slave, and yet again when he was unjustly placed in prison. If, indeed, Simeon instigated the tragedies inflicted upon Joseph, it must have caused him a great deal of guilt at this point.

Having been caught off guard emotionally, Joseph moved quickly to regain his composure and his rulers demeanor.

Joseph gave orders to fill their bags with grain, to put each man's silver back in his sack, and to give them provisions for their journey. After this was done for them, Genesis 42:25

This was unusual, to say the least. Joseph had his servants load the grain for the brothers. It is doubtful if they would do this for other customers. Joseph, also, had his servants place each man's silver back in his sack, on top of the grain. This definitely was unusual. The Egyptians were willing to help other people survive, but they also charged them a high price. Notice that Joseph instructed his servants to give his brothers adequate provision for the return trip to Canaan. This was not done otherwise. All of these things were designed to show the brothers that they were receiving special treatment. This was not clear at the time, but it would be before the day was ended.

Genesis 42:26-34 - Brothers told Jacob the Ruler was Abusive.

The next sentence began in verse 25 and concluded in verse 26.

After this was done for them, they loaded their grain on their donkeys and left. Genesis 42:25b-26a

As you read this, it appears that the nine brothers loaded their animals as anyone else who had come to buy food. There is no hint in the text that they knew what Joseph had done.

You may have noticed that according to the text not one of the brothers objected to Simeon's detention. Apparently, none of them volunteered to take his place. On the other hand, there is no indication that he protested Joseph's choice.

There is confirmation, in the following verse, that the nine brothers did not know what Joseph had done.

At the place where they stopped for the night one of them opened his sack to get feed for his donkey, and he saw his silver in the mouth of his sack. Genesis 42:27

Put yourself in the place of this unnamed brother. There had to be a mixture of emotions. The first had to be one of confusion. He had to be confused over how the money got into the sack. He knew he had given the silver to the steward, yet here it was. The next emotion he felt had to be fear - fear of what Joseph might do to him if he returned the money: fear that his brothers would not believe that he had no idea how the money got into his sack. Their distress would be great because they were in jeopardy as much as he was.

Notice that the author said, "**his** silver," rather than just "silver." One must wonder, how would he know that it was his silver. By the way, the fact that they paid for the grain in silver, tells us that it was extremely expensive. In Egypt at this time, silver was a more precious metal than gold. If the grain had been inexpensive, they would have paid for it in gold.

He expressed something of his shock when he said,

> *"My silver has been returned," he said to his brothers. "Here it is in my sack." Their hearts sank and they turned to each other trembling and said, "What is this that God has done to us?" Genesis 42:28*

Observe the way this unnamed brother informs the others of his discovery. There is surprise in his words. It is not the way he would report it if he had known about it in advance. Again in this verse, the brother spoke of "my silver." He could have recognized it as "my silver," because of the distinctive pouch in which he had carried it. He may have recognized it as his money because of the denomination of coins he found in the pouch. We are not certain what helped this brother realize that it was his money.

In the last half of the verse, the brothers responded to this brother's discovery. The author identifies two responses:

1. "**Their hearts sank**." The Hebrew text literally said, "Their hearts **departed** them." The word "departed" is "Yatsa" (יָצָא) In this usage it can mean "to go out," "to go forth." It was their way to describe a situation which left them speechless. It was a trauma with which they did not know how to cope.
2. "**They turned to each other trembling**." The word "trembling" is "khawrad" (חָרַד) and means "to shudder with terror." It was the word they used to describe a severe earthquake. The brothers were frightened beyond their ability to control. Turning to each other was an expression of helplessness. These men were beside themselves with fear.
3. **They believed it was punishment**. They said, "What is this God has done to us?" It is interesting that the brothers ascribed this frightening turn of events to an act of God. This, however, does not highlight their spirituality so much as their guilt. They knew they had done wrong. They, also, knew that God punishes wrongdoing.

All of this took place on the first night out from the Egyptian capital. They were still inside Egypt when they discovered this. They still had between two and three weeks to think this over before they got home. That being the case, the fear they experienced would only get much worse with each passing day. They would become increasingly aware of what they had done to Joseph, but there was nothing they could do to correct that error. The longer it took, the worse they would feel.

There was a great deal of pressure on the nine brothers.

> *When they came to their father Jacob in the land of Canaan, they told him all that had happened to them. They said, "The man who is lord over the land spoke harshly to us and treated us as though we were spying on the land." Genesis 42:29, 30*

Notice that there is no report about the trip. The author tells us nothing they said about the grain they purchased. The first thing they told Jacob was that the leader had spoken harsh-

ly with them. This tells us just how much this situation weighed upon their minds. The constant pressure of thinking about Joseph for two to three weeks suddenly burst upon Jacob.

Notice what the brothers said to him,

"The man who is lord over the land spoke harshly to us and treated us as though we were spying on the land." Genesis 42:30

Their response is interesting:

- When they discovered their silver, all they could think of was how terribly they had treated Joseph.
- Upon their arrival all they could talk about was how the ruler, Joseph, had mistreated them.

There is a very human tendency. People cannot escape the throbbing pain of guilt, but they will do everything possible to escape the punishment.

In this verse, the nine brothers voiced two complaints to Jacob:

1. **The Lord of the land spoke harshly with them** - The word "harshly" is "kaw-shaeh" (קָשָׁה) and means "severely," "to be dense," "cruel." They described it as anything but a picnic. Such a report would be calculated to solicit Jacob's sympathy.

   One can understand why they would speak of this. They knew that they had to pose an impossible request to their father. They were going to need all the help they could get.

2. "**He treated us like spies**" - Harsh words would make one uncomfortable. the accusation of being spies would be totally devastating. Then, as now, a person convicted of spying had no hope of remaining alive. There is no way to describe the level of fear this experience created in the nine brothers.

   This would elicit a level of empathy from Jacob which would far surpass the previous report. Jacob had been a foreigner. He knew how dangerous and frightening this could be.

They were leading up the explanation about Simeon. Both of these pieces of information would help their cause.

We should observe that both of their comments were totally truthful. This is remarkable, in view of their past record of dealing with the truth. W do not understand why this is true.

The brothers continued their report to Jacob by telling him how they responded.

But we said to him, `We are honest men; we are not spies." Genesis 42:31

The verse begins with the word "but." This always identifies a contrast. In this instance, the author contrasted the accusations of Joseph with the explanations of the brothers. Specifically, Joseph had accused them of being spies, but had not accused them of being dishonest. In fact, however, to be accused of being a spy is to be accused of living a dishonest life. Their response was strong and direct:

- **"We are honest men"** - This was crucial to establish. If this was not accepted, then everything else would be in question. At this point, the statement was true. They had told Joseph the truth. This created a problem both for the brothers and

for Joseph. They had not always been truthful men and they knew it. It is hard to convince others of your integrity when you yourself remember vividly specific instances of gross dishonesty.

- For Joseph it was the same. He knew they were telling him the truth now. He could, also, remember when their horrible fabrications had meant devastation in his own life.
- "**We are not spies**" - The acceptance of this second statement depends upon their ability to convince Joseph of the first. It can be easy to prove that a person is a spy. It is nearly impossible to prove that a person is not a spy.

It appears that the brothers were not certain that Joseph was convinced. Therefore, they continued with their attempt to prove their innocence.

> *"We were twelve brothers, sons of one father. One is no more, and the youngest is now with our father in Canaan." Genesis 42:32*

This was unsolicited information. It had to be because they were afraid that they had not yet convinced Joseph of their innocence. The things they said give us clues concerning their purpose.

- **We were 12 brothers** - Observe that this is in the past tense. This had to be a time when the nine brothers were most uncomfortable. Something had happened to create a situation where they were no longer 12. They had created this devastating condition.

  The purpose of identifying the fact that they were all brothers is clear. Spies would not come from the same family. If Joseph realized that they were all from the same family, he would be more likely to believe that they were not spies. The additional information would push Joseph in that direction, but would raise another set of questions. It is awkward explaining that you were 12 brothers when only nine stand here now.
- "**Sons of one father**" - This statement makes the previous one more emphatic. It stresses the fact that they were immediate family in a most dramatic way. It is like saying, "We couldn't be spies, we are all sons of the same father." That had more meaning for them than for us. Spies seldom lived very long. If all of a man's sons went on a spying mission together and were caught, that man would have no heir to care for him in his old age. That would be like loosing one's Social Security coverage in our culture.
- "**One is no more**" - Having said they were twelve sons of one father, the brothers had a problem. There were only ten of them present. They had to account for the other two. That is what they were doing in this report to Jacob. They had to account for the absent brothers. In this statement, they account for one of the missing brothers. Put yourself into the picture for a moment. Think of yourself as Jacob hearing your ten sons say, "One is no more." Jacob had experienced devastating grief over the loss of his heir and favored son. Now he had to be reminded and reopen those old wounds again. It was not just pain. There was confusion; wondering what really happened to Joseph. There was some strong suspicion. It is not accidental that Jacob refused to allow Benjamin to go with the ten brothers. He

never accused the ten, but it was clear that he had strong suspicions concerning their involvement.

Put yourself in the place of the brothers when you tell your father, "One is no more." You would remember making Jacob believe that Joseph had been killed by wild animals. You would remember the pleading of Joseph as he was lowered into the cistern and again as he was sold as a slave. This would be almost too painful to bear.

- "**The youngest is now with our father in Canaan**." - The fact that Jacob would not allow Benjamin to travel with his ten brothers was painful and awkward for the ten. Brothers were supposed to defend each other to the death. They were faced with a situation where their own father was afraid to trust them with the protection of their brother. This scene was most uncomfortable for all of the brothers.

They continued with their explanation to Jacob.

Then the man who is lord over the land said to us, "This is how I will know whether you are honest men: Leave one of your brothers here with me, and take food for your starving households and go." Genesis 42:33

Joseph's statement indicated his purpose as well. He was attempting to determine whether or not the ten brothers were honest men. Notice that Joseph's plan had a familiar ring. They were to leave one brother with him just as they had left another brother with the owners of a caravan years before. Notice that Joseph would learn two things at once.

- He would learn whether or not the brothers were telling the truth. He had to be certain they were telling the truth. He had been, however, testing them throughout this entire experience.
- He would also learn whether the brothers would function at any different level than they had previously with him. Selfishness was as bad as dishonesty.

Verse 34 is the third condition which Joseph placed upon his brothers.

"But bring your youngest brother to me so I will know that you are not spies but honest men. Then I will give your brother back to you, and you can trade in the land." Genesis 42:34

1. Leave one brother with me. (verse 33)
2. Take grain to your starving family. (verse 33)
3. Bring your youngest brother to me. (verse 34)

This is a conditional statement. If they would do these three things, then Joseph would also do other things:

1. **He would know that they were not spies**. It appears that he already knew this. Doing these things would establish, at least in the minds of the brothers, that Joseph understood that they were not spies.
2. **He would know that they were true men**. This was new. His previous dealings with his brothers demonstrated that they were devious and dishonest.
3. **He would return Simeon**. When they delivered Joseph into bondage, no arrangements were made for his return. When Joseph took Simeon in bondage, he arranged for his return and would keep his promise.

4. "**And you shall traffic the land**." They would not only be free; not only receive the food they needed: they could travel anywhere in the land. This dealt also with their ability to sell their animals throughout the land. One of the by-products of this promise is that while all Egypt was nearly penniless and sold into slavery, Jacob and his family were increasing in wealth.

Genesis 42:35-38 - Jacob Refused to Send Benjamin

In this paragraph the author continued the brothers report of their experience in Egypt and on the way home. The author picked up the story at the end of what was apparently the first day out from Egypt.

> *As they were emptying their sacks, there in each man's sack was his pouch of silver! When they and their father saw the money pouches, they were frightened. Genesis 42:35*

As you read this verse, it seems clear that these brothers had not emptied their sacks at the time referred to in 42:27. This discovery had to be a shock to the nine brothers who surprisingly found their "bundle of money" in their sack. The author described the brother's response, "They were afraid." The word "afraid" is "yare" (יָרֵא) and means "to be afraid," "frightened," "to encounter a terrible situation." It would be appropriate to translate this word "terrified." It is to be shaken beyond their ability to control. On this trip it had become a familiar experience. Because the author said, "...in each man's sack was his pouch of silver." We assume that there had to be some way for them to know that it was not just money, but their money. We must remember, however, that the text does not say so.

The fact that the author said, "they were frightened." immediately raises the question, "What was it about finding the money that caused them fear?" Why didn't finding the money cause them excitement and joy? In crisis situations, worst case scenarios tend to preoccupy our minds. Also, in traumatic events logic can often have little to do with what we think, say and do.

Up to this point, Jacob had not responded to the report of his sons.

> *Their father Jacob said to them, "You have deprived me of my children. Joseph is no more and Simeon is no more, and now you want to take Benjamin. Everything is against me!" Genesis 42:36*

This is a stunning attack on the brothers. Read it again. Jacob placed the blame solely on these nine brothers. "You have deprived me of my children." It was not, "two of my sons are gone." This makes no assessment of blame. Jacob's words point the finger. It is as though he said, "You did it."

As you read this verse, Jacob looked at the situation of Simeon as being dead already. It is as though he said, "There is no possible hope that I will ever see my son again." Again, notice what Jacob said, " Joseph is no more and Simeon is no more." The brothers had successfully convinced Jacob that Joseph was dead. Now, Jacob believed that Simeon was as dead as he thought Joseph was.

This, however, was only part of the story. The balance of the verse reveals the most penetrating part of Jacob's pain, "And now you want to take Benjamin. Everything is against me!" In a sense, Jacob saw three of his twelve sons as being dead. Joseph, to the

best of his knowledge, was already dead. Simeon would inevitably die as a result of these events. Under other conditions, they could just walk away from this Egyptian viceroy. It would mean that Simeon would be a slave and/or die. It would also mean that Benjamin could be protected. This, however, was a luxury they could not afford. Jacob, and all the families in that part of Canaan were dependent upon Joseph for food. If the sons went back to Egypt for food, they would have to deal with Joseph. This meant placing Benjamin at risk.

Jacob said, "Everything is against me." Jacob has drawn back the curtain and given us a glimpse of the depth of his heart-break, his inner agony. Remember, from the first part of the verse, Jacob blamed his sons for the tragic situation in which they found themselves.

The text does not give us a reaction from the nine sons. It had to be tense, guilt-ridden and desperate.

It is a bit surprising that Reuben is the one who spoke, not Judah.

> *Then Reuben said to his father, "You may put both of my sons to death if I do not bring him back to you. Entrust him to my care, and I will bring him back." Genesis 42:37*

This is surprising because though he was the first-born, he had never been the leader that his culture expected him to be. When the brothers decided to get rid of Joseph, Reuben could have asserted his elder-brother position and saved Joseph. Reuben chose the easy way out and said nothing, planning to rescue Joseph by clandestine efforts rather than by the power of his position. He failed. We have no background information to suggest that Reuben would take a stand on anything.

Reuben was taking a significant risk. He was not the leader of the clan. He had no way to be certain that his brothers, who did not respect him, would not do something foolish. He had no way to know what the Egyptian viceroy would do to surprise and hurt them. In spite of all these risks, Reuben made a difficult effort to be responsible and reassure Jacob. It may have been the first time. The problem with this was that though it was a dramatic risk for Reuben, it would be of no help to Jacob. If Reuben's assurances failed and if Jacob killed Reuben's sons, it would only be an additional affliction of pain and loss to Jacob as much as to Reuben.

In the closing verse of this chapter, Jacob responded to Reuben's surprising offer.

> *But Jacob said, "My son will not go down there with you; his brother is dead and he is the only one left. If harm comes to him on the journey you are taking, you will bring my gray head down to the grave in sorrow." Genesis 42:38*

Jacob's words were firm and unyielding, "My son will not go down there with you." There is no room to negotiate with this statement. His words seem final. Jacob seemed to say, "I have lost all that I am going to lose. There will be no more." One can understand Jacob's position. He was frightened; angry; cornered. He was not, however, thinking clearly. He could not just decide to ignore the viceroy. This Egyptian official had food and Jacob couldn't live without it. Jacob had to deal with him. To ignore the viceroy's demand was not an available option.

Think about Jacob's next statement, "His brother is dead and he is the only one left." There is no doubt that the brothers knew exactly what Jacob was saying. It is as though Jacob had two sons instead of twelve. When Jacob believed Joseph was dead, he still had

eleven sons. His words here tell a different story. When Joseph was thought dead, Benjamin was the only son left who counted. It had to be like cold steel in the heart of the ten sons who were NOT born to Rachel. This had to be devastating.

The closing portion of the verse is a conditional statement. These can always be identified by the presence of "if...then." Jacob said, "If harm comes to him on the journey you are taking, you will bring my gray head down..." There are at least two implications in this statement:

- Jacob fully expected that harm would befall Benjamin if he was allowed to accompany his brothers.
- Jacob believed that the actions and choices of his sons, already, were responsible for the conditions they already faced. He was further convinced that if he allowed Benjamin to accompany them, still more agony would follow.

Jacob concluded his statement with an assessment of his feelings, "You will bring my gray head down to the grave in sorrow." In effect, Jacob was saying, "This would kill me." Aside from the expected sorrow from the loss of a favored son, there is another cause of Jacob's sorrow. Benjamin was now Jacob's heir, the only son he really trusted. If Benjamin were taken away, Jacob had no trustworthy son to take control of the direction of the family. This was a tragic situation for Jacob. It was a man's responsibility to not only provide for the care of his family, but to provide direction and an inheritance for them after his death. Jacob had provided well right up to this time. If Benjamin died, however, there would be no certainty of the future direction of the family. This would bring shame upon Jacob's memory. This is at least part of what Jacob meant by this final statement.

Conclusion

As in other chapters, there is a beautiful picture of the nature of God emerging from the ugly picture of the selfishness and mistrust which identified the relationship of Jacob and his sons.

In the opening paragraph of this chapter, God was proven faithful to His word - the dream came true after decades had passed. God was portrayed as actively pursuing His purposes directly through the tragic and sinful lives of those who had opposed His design.

In the second paragraph, the brothers saw two contrasting pictures. They saw the consequences of evil deeds. They also saw mercy which they knew they did not deserve. That is what God is like.

In the third paragraph, the brothers were reminded of the fact that though God loves and forgives, He also punishes. As this picture takes sharper focus, there is a parallel picture of mercy which is just as clear.

The concluding paragraph is a picture of a family in pain. This is a view of a selfish family at their worst. Even here, God is merciful; God provides even for those who live in conflict with His purposes and character.

Not for sale or resale

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 19

DINNER FOR TWELVE BROTHERS

GENESIS 43:1 - 34

1. In Genesis chapter 43, there are three paragraphs. On the table below, write a title of seven words or less for each paragraph.

43:1-15	
43:16-25	
43:26-34	

2. In Genesis 43:1-15, the author focused our attention on Israel's decision to send Benjamin to Egypt as the ruler, Joseph, had demanded.
   a. In view of Genesis 42:38, what is the significance of the author's brief statement in 43:1?
   b. In Genesis 42:34, Joseph clearly stated that if Benjamin did not come to Egypt, they would not see his face again. Jacob, however, repeatedly refused to allow Benjamin to go. In view of this, why did Jacob, in 43:2, instruct his sons to go and buy food?
   c. In 43:3-5, Judah again explained the impossibility of Jacob's instruction.
      (1). Why was Judah saying this when Reuben was the oldest son?
      (2). Reflect on the statement of Judah in these verses. What emotional tone do you detect in these words?
      (3). What is the significance of the fact that Judah quoted Joseph twice in these verses saying, " You will not see my face again unless your brother is with you."?
      (4). Put yourself in Jacob's position.
         (a.) Why would you insist on the sons going to Egypt without Benjamin when they have repeatedly told you it was impossible?
         (b.) How would you feel about this whole episode?
   d. In Genesis 43:6, there is a very subtle change from the previous chapter.
      (1). See if you can identify it?
      (2). Why does the author suddenly start calling the father "Israel" when he has been calling him "Jacob?"
      (3). Think about Israel's question in this verse. Why would he ask such a question?
   e. In Genesis 43:7, the brothers answer Israel's question.
      (1). Read the answer carefully.
      (2). What is the emotional tone of their reply?
      (3). In your own words, what did the brothers tell their father here?
      (4). Think about Joseph's words to his brothers. Of whom did he speak when he said, "Do you have another brother?"

f. In Genesis 43:8-10, Judah spoke to his father concerning this impasse:
(1). What is the emotional tone of Judah's request in verse 8?
(2). What was Judah's appeal in verse 8?
(3). In verse nine, Judah changed his tactic. What was his new approach?
(4). There is a serious insinuation in verse 9. What is it?
(5). What are the implications of Judah's commitment in verse 9?
(6). Why was this offer so dangerous?
(7). In verse 10, Judah made an unusual remark.
(a). Could this statement be true?
(b). What is the emotional tone of this statement?

g. In Genesis 43:11-14, there is a distinct change.
(1). What is the change?
(2). Study verses 11 carefully. In view of the draught, why would Israel tell them to take all this food as a gift? Identify each item Israel instructed the sons to take.
(3). Think carefully about verse 12.
(a). Why would Israel tell them to take silver instead of gold?
(b). What are the implications of Israel's instructions concerning the money the brothers found in the mouth of their sacks?
(4). Study both 43:13 and 42:38.
(a). How do you account for this change of Israel's mind?
(b). Put yourself in Israel's position. How would you be feeling?
(5). In 43:14, Israel pronounces his prayer of blessing on the sons as they go.
(a). Study this blessing carefully. What do you find there?
(b). What did Israel mean when he said, "If I am bereaved, I am bereaved."?
(6). In Genesis 43:15, the author tells of the trip to Egypt. What stands out in your mind about this statement?

3. In Genesis 43:16-25, the author described the scene where Joseph and his brothers ate together.
a. In 43:16-18, the author described the instructions to prepare a dinner for Joseph and his brothers.
(1). What is the significance of the instructions in verse 16?
(2). Put yourself in the place of the eleven brothers. How would you feel when you saw this taking place? What would it mean to you?
(3). In Genesis 43:18, the author described the reactions of the brothers when they were brought into Joseph's house.
(a). What were their feelings?
(b). What was the basis of their feelings?
(c). How realistic were their fears?

b. In 43:20-22, the brothers talked with the steward about the events that were in progress.
(1). Say these words out loud as though you were the one saying them to the steward. What do you feel?
(2). What was the reason for rehearsing these details with the steward?
(3). Look at the way the brothers addressed the steward. What does this tell you?

c. In verse 23, the steward responded to the brother's questions.
   (1). What was he trying to do by his response?
   (2). What did he do to achieve this goal?
   (3). Read the verse carefully again.
      (a). What, if anything, do you see that is unusual?
      (c). What does the restoring of Simeon to the brothers have to do with the statement by the steward?
d. In verse 24, the steward did several things.
   (1). What was the significance of these actions?
   (2). If you were one of the eleven brothers, how would you feel when you observed this?
e. In verse 25, there is a hint of the brother's response.
   (1). What was that response?
   (2). Upon what did they base this response to what they saw?

4. In Genesis 43:26-34, the author described the dining experience between Joseph and his brothers.
   a. In verse 26, the author described the events of the meeting between Joseph and the brothers. How would you describe these events?
   b. Read the verse again. There are two events described here:
      (1). What are the events?
      (2). What is the significance of each?
   c. Put yourself into the picture described in verse 27.
      (1). If you were Joseph, what would you be feeling?
      (2). If you were the brothers, what would you be feeling?
      (3). As you read the verse again, what feeling do you get?
   d. There are two parts to verse 28.
      (1). What are the two parts?
      (2). What is the significance of the way the brothers spoke of their father?
      (3). What is the significance of the bowing low before Joseph?
   e. In verse 29, the author said, "He saw his brother Benjamin, his own mother's son." This is obviously an added emphasis. What is the significance of it?
      (1). Joseph appears to be very casual in his statements in this verse. Why would he do this?
      (2). Joseph spoke directly to Benjamin in verse 29.
         (a). What did he say?
         (b). What is the significance of this statement?
         (c). What is there in this verse that is confusing?
         (d). How do you explain it?
   f. In verse 30, there is a dramatic change.
      (1). What was the change?
      (2). Why would this be important?
      (3). How was that change handled?
      (4). What would you have done?
   g. Read verse 31 carefully.
      (1). Imagine yourself doing these things.

(2). What would you feel as you did these things?
(3). What does this tell you about Joseph?

h. On the basis of verse 32, make a drawing of the table arrangements at this meal.
(1). Imagine yourself seated at the table with the Egyptians. What would you see?
(2). Imagine yourself seated at the table with Joseph. What would you see?
(3). Imagine yourself seated at the table with the brothers. What would you see?
(4). The author explained why the Egyptians sat at a separate table. What impact does this information have on the meaning of the text?

i. Genesis 43:33 should have given the brothers some information.
(1). What information should it have given them?
(2). What is the significance of this information?
(3). What does the author indicate concerning the effect of this event?
(4). Why would it affect the brothers in this way?

j. Verse 34 describes the meal itself.
(1). What did Joseph do in relationship to Benjamin?
(2). What was the meaning of this action?
(3). What would be the reaction of the other brothers?
(4). The closing sentence of the chapter seems different from the remainder of it.
(a). In what way was it different?
(b). What was the cause of this difference?
(c). What does this mean to the brothers?

5. Reflect upon this chapter again.
a. What picture do you see here?
b. What picture do you see of God's people?
c. What does this say to the way we live our lives?

LESSON 19: GENESIS 43:1 - 34

DINNER FOR TWELVE BROTHERS

There are three paragraphs in Genesis chapter 43. A summary of their content is as follows:

43:1-15	Israel sent Benjamin and His Brothers to Egypt
43:16-25	The Brothers Prepare to Dine with Joseph
43:26-34	Joseph and His Brothers Dine in His House

Genesis 43:1-15 - Israel Sent Benjamin and His Brothers to Egypt

In the last verse of chapter 42, and the beginning of chapter 43, there is a struggle in progress.

Now the famine was still severe in the land. Genesis 43:1

Jacob and his family were running out of food. He wanted his sons to go to Egypt and buy food. Though sons were not to oppose the will of their father, the boys had a problem. They were duty bound to obey their father. He would not understand the impossibility of his request. The boys were at an impasse.

- They were running out of food.
- Joseph had told them not to return without Benjamin.
- Jacob would not allow this.

In this verse, the author indicated that the famine was very severe. Shortly their dilemma would mean real tragedy.

So when they had eaten all the grain they had brought from Egypt, their father said to them, "Go back and buy us a little more food." Genesis 43:2

Though a crisis was now upon them, Jacob had not relented. He simply told his sons to go to get some food. It seemed clear that he had no intentions of letting Benjamin go with them. There had to be a deep concern, over shrinking supplies, and a deep disappointment over the fact that his sons would not obey his instructions. The sons had often disobeyed or avoided their father's directions. This was apparently not an unusual treatment of their father.

They had eaten all the food Jacob's sons had brought from Egypt. Now their situation was more serious. The emphasis, in verse two, gives us an insight into their thinking. "Go buy us a **little more** food." They were dealing with severe rationing.

Observe that it was Judah who responded to Jacob's instructions.

But Judah said to him, "The man warned us solemnly, 'You will not see my face again unless your brother is with you.' If you will send our brother along with us, we will go down and buy food for you. But if you will not send him, we will not

go down, because the man said to us, 'You will not see my face again unless your brother is with you.'" Genesis 43:3-5

Judah's words were strong, but direct. There is nothing that suggests disrespect. He was dealing with a specific instruction given them by this ruler in Egypt. The fact that Judah quoted the ruler's instructions gave emphasis to what he was saying. When he repeated the quotation he made an additional emphasis You will remember that the boys had given Jacob this message previously, but he rejected it. As indicated earlier, Joseph's instructions were worded so as to give strong emphasis to the command. It appears to some that this is a very strong father-son confrontation. I do not believe it is. Judah simply stated the conditions under which they could return to Egypt and bring back food. It is a direct "If...then" kind of statement.

- **IF** - you will send our brother with us.
- **THEN** - we will go down and buy the food.,

It is a cause and effect relationship. **IF** Jacob allowed Benjamin to go, **THEN**, they would be able to go and bring back food. Without Benjamin, they could go, but they could not bring back food.

One can understand Jacob's reluctance to allow Benjamin to go with them. These ten brothers were sons of Leah or the two concubines. Joseph had been the only son of Rachel and had been chosen to be the heir, though he was the youngest of the eleven sons. Joseph disappeared, mysteriously, while in the area where his ten brothers were watching the flock.

Now Benjamin, the son of Rachel, and the youngest of Jacob's sons, was the heir. Because Jacob seemed quite certain that the ten sons of Leah and the concubines had done away with his previous heir, Joseph, he was not going to take a chance on losing his new heir to the same members of the family.

This constitutes an impasse. Jacob could not let Benjamin go to Egypt. Without Benjamin, the brothers could not get food.

Judah closed his plea with his father by restating the words of Joseph, "You shall not see my face except your brother be with you."

There is a very subtle change as we look at verse six.

Israel asked, "Why did you bring this trouble on me by telling the man you had another brother." Genesis 43:6

The last time Jacob was mentioned by name, in 42:36, he was called "Jacob." Now, without explanation, in 43:6, he was referred to as "Israel." Both names identify the same man, but Jacob's name was changed to "Israel" at Bethel, in Genesis 35:10. God said he would no longer be called "Jacob." Between 35:10 and the end of the book, this man was referred to as "Jacob" on 44 occasions. Jewish commentators speak of the two different names saying that the name "Israel" was used when speaking of his spiritual role as patriarch of Israel. This may be. You will also notice, however, that the name "Israel" appears when he did something good or was about to do so.

First, we should observe that his name is now "Israel." It is appropriate to call him by that name. It is also the first hint that he is slowly changing his attitude about the need to send Benjamin with his half-brothers to get the food.

When Judah finished his announcement, Israel responded in a different tone than before. Though no statement has been made, it was clear that Israel had conceded to the requirement Joseph made and Judah repeated.

Almost as an afterthought, Israel chided Judah and his brothers, asking them, "Why did you have to tell the man that you have a brother?" To us, this seems overly critical. In one sense it is, but not really. These people had a cardinal rule in dealing with strangers. Answer the questions you are asked, nothing more. It appeared to Israel, at least, that if they had obeyed that rule, he would not be faced with the prospect of parting with his son and heir.

This had already been rehearsed for Israel when his sons returned from Egypt. Did he forget? Was he preoccupied and simply forgot he had been told? Was he just too upset to acknowledge that this was information he had clearly heard?

His sons wasted no time in responding to his statement.

> *They replied, "The man questioned us closely about ourselves and our family. 'Is your father still living? 'He asked us. 'Do you have another brother?' We simply answered his questions. How were we to know he would say, 'Bring your brother down here?'" Genesis 43:7*

Their reply was accurate and could be expected. In effect, they said, "He asked us a direct question about our family." You will remember the story of Benjamin's birth. If the story was told in strictly chronological order, then Joseph was sold as a slave to Egypt, Genesis 37:28, after Benjamin was born. This was a serious possibility, but it cannot be confirmed. The brothers probably didn't realize it, but note the questions they quoted from Joseph's statement:

- Is your father yet alive?
- Have you another brother? Some texts omit the word "another" and portray Joseph as simply saying, "Have you a brother?" This is also the wording of the Hebrew text.

Whichever way the text reads, it raises some interesting questions:

- By using "brother," was Joseph seeking information about Benjamin?
- By using the word "brother," was Joseph testing them to see if they would admit that they had a brother, Benjamin?
- By using the word "brother," was Joseph testing them to see if they would admit that they had another brother who was no longer with them?
- By using the word "brother," was Joseph thinking of both Benjamin as well as himself?

The text does not speak to this issue, but one might hazard a guess to say that Joseph was at least speaking about Benjamin and may have been speaking of himself as well.

When Judah said, "We simply answered his questions," he was saying that he had done just as his father had taught him to do with strangers. He followed this explanation by saying, "How were we to know that he would say, 'Bring your brother down here?'." This question put in a positive statement would be, "There is no possible way we could anticipate that he would tell us to bring our brother down."

It is not clear why Judah was the spokesman at this time. We know that he was the fourth son, not the first. Even when an oldest son was inept and incompetent, he still insisted on his right to his position as spokesman for the clan. You will remember that in Genesis 42:22, Reuben reminded his brothers that he had warned them not to harm Joseph. This, however, was a little bit of "I told you so." Reuben was the oldest son, but he said nothing here. We know that Reuben was still alive, for we will encounter him again at the end of the book. He could have volunteered to be surety on behalf of Benjamin. The fact is, however, he did not.

Simeon was the second son. He could not accept the responsibility because he was taken by Joseph to guarantee that the others would return - 42:24.

Levi was the third son. We know that he was still living because we will also encounter him again at the end of the book. He could have taken his rightful place, but he did not. The author gives no reason for this fact.

The fourth son of Leah, whether by default or because he was the unofficial leader who took over because no one else did, Judah dealt with Israel in this decision.

In the next verse, Judah continued to deal with Israel

> *Then Judah said to Israel his father, "Send the boy along with me and we will go at once, so that we and you and our children may live and not die." Genesis 43:8*

Judah had impressed upon Israel that this was a life or death situation. If Judah took the boy with him, he could get food and none of them would die of starvation. This is a picture of a father appealing to his father so that both families could live.

Verse nine is a very strong statement for a man to share with his father.

> *"I myself will guarantee his safety; you can hold me personally responsible for him. If I do not bring him back to you and set him before you. I will bear the blame before you all my life." Genesis 43:9*

It was clear to Judah that his father did not trust him, or his brothers for that matter. Because of this, Judah took a great risk. He became "surety" for his little brother. There were well established rules for this action, but Judah spelled out the details. He wanted his father to understand that he was serious about his offer. Notice the agreement Judah made with his father:

- **I will be surety for him** - I will be totally responsible for him. No matter what happens to him, you may hold me personally responsible for it.
- **If I do not bring him back to you**.
- **If I do not set him before you**. If I do not present him to you just as I received him from you
- **THEN - I will bear the blame before you all my life**. In our ears, this sounds like flamboyant, extravagant speech. It was different in their minds. Judah took responsibility for his brother. If he failed, he would bear the blame and punishment of his father as long as he lived. It could cost him his life. When Judah said, "As long as I live," he was saying far more. He was also saying that all future generations of his children would bear the same guilt. Israel had probably never heard such a selfless offer in his life.

Verse ten could be confusing.

As it is, if we had not delayed, we could have gone and returned twice." Genesis 43:10

We cannot be sure, but his words were probably an exaggeration. It was hundreds of miles to the capital city of Egypt. It would take at least three weeks to make the trip. When Judah said, "...returned a second time," it seems to me he was saying they could have made the trip twice. His statement was probably a hyperbole, an exaggeration to make a point.

Verse eleven signals a total change in Israel's attitude.

Then their father Israel said to them, "If it must be, then do this: Put some of the best products of the land in your bags and take them down to the man as a gift - a little balm, and a little honey, some spices and myrrh, some pistachio nuts and almonds. Take double the amount of silver with you, for you must return the silver that was put back into the mouths of your sacks. Perhaps it was a mistake." Genesis 43:11, 12

In the past, he had staunchly refused to consider sending Benjamin. Following Judah's covenant, Israel designed the best way to accomplish their goal. Israel said, "if it must be, then do this..." It was Israel's way of dealing with a situation he could not win. It was like saying, "This is not my idea; I don't like it: but if it must be, then here is the best way to go about it." Israel instructed them to take a gift. This is a part of their culture. One does not just ask for a favor. You bring a gift first. The gift may be small, but it was disrespectful to do otherwise. Notice the gifts that Israel suggested:

- The best products of the land - the things that people like best about our fruit production.
- A little balm (balsam). This is a very fragrant resin which exudes from the bark of a balsam tree.
- A little honey - There are two kinds of honey:
  - ♦ There is the honey produced by bees.
  - ♦ There is the honey which exudes from the dates in that part of the world.
- Some spices - this is either a form of bees wax or an aromatic gum. I prefer the latter choice.
- Myrrh - The Hebrew name for Myrrh is "lote" from which some get the word "lotus." It is a sticky gum which was quite expensive.
- Pistachios* - These are very common now, but were rare delicacies in that day. They could be found in southwestern Israel.
- Almonds* - The almond was the earliest nut tree to bloom. They were numerous in that part of the promised land.

*We must remember that there was a drought in the land. These two kinds of nuts would keep for a while, but not as long as this would require. It may well be that Israel was saying that they should take the oil pressed from these nuts, rather than the nuts themselves.

Israel also suggested that they take double the "silver," not double the money. It may seem strange to us, but in that area, silver was more valuable than gold. You may remember

that Joseph's chalice was made of silver, not gold. For this reason, Israel told them to take double the amount of silver that they needed. This tells us that they were going to pay the high dollar for the little grain that they were going to receive.

Observe that five of the seven gifts were food. The question naturally arises, if they have these kinds of food, why are they talking about dying of starvation? Notice that these foods are seasonal. The fruit would not keep in that climate. The spices and nuts would keep, but they are not sufficient to provide their nutritional needs. Besides, the nuts would not keep very long in such a hot climate.

These people needed grain to round out their diet. That was the part they were talking about. These gifts were also the very best that they had to offer in their draught situation.

Verse thirteen represents a frightening statement in the mind of Israel

"Take your brother also and go back to the man at once." Genesis 43:13

Israel told Judah to do exactly what he said he would not allow. Put yourself in Israel's position. You still are not sure that the ten boys were not involved in Joseph's death. Benjamin has taken Joseph's place and it is not certain that they will not do the same thing again. His reluctance is easy to understand.

Verse fourteen is further evidence of just how frightened Israel really was.

And may God Almighty grant you mercy before the man so that he will let your other brother and Benjamin come back with you. As for me, if I am bereaved, I am bereaved. Genesis 43:14

It is not accidental that Israel used the name "God Almighty". This is the Hebrew name "El Shaddai". It is a compound name.

- **God** - El - it comes from the root word which means strength.
- **Almighty** - Shaddai - it comes from a word which describes a strong man or fortress, a warrior who totally destroys.

Israel was pronouncing a travel blessing on his sons. Literally, he was saying, " May the all powerful almighty give you mercy before the man." Israel continued with his major concern, "...that he will let your other brother and Benjamin come back with you." Now, Joseph had already said that if they brought Benjamin, he would release Simeon and provide them food. They knew from experience that one cannot always depend on the word of a man with power. They often said one thing on one occasion and then say something different on another occasion. Israel was simply praying that this would not happen.

Israel's faith was not very strong. Notice the way he concluded his blessing: "If I am bereaved, I am bereaved." You can understand Israel's fears. He was dealing with ten sons, whom he suspected of being in some way responsible for Joseph's apparent death. He was also dealing with the promise of a ruler whose power made it easy for him to change his mind rather than keep the promise. Israel's words represent resignation of the most devastating kind. As he gave in to the inevitable, he was not certain he would ever see his son and heir again.

Verse fifteen covers about a month in one verse:

So the men took the gifts and double the amount of silver, and Benjamin also. They hurried down to Egypt and presented themselves to Joseph. Genesis 43:15

This verse seems very matter-of-fact in its presentation. To a Jewish reader of that day, it would have been shocking. A father's word and decision were final. As the saying goes, "Father may not always be right, but he is always father." That did not affect the outcome in this decision. Apparently all ten brothers did as Israel reluctantly instructed them.

- They took "the gifts."
- They took double money
- They took Benjamin

They fulfilled Joseph's demands and now stood before him requesting an opportunity to buy food.

Genesis 43:16-25 - The Brothers Prepared to Dine with Joseph

Observe the way the author described the meeting:

When Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he said to the steward of his house, "Take these men to my house, slaughter an animal and prepare dinner; they are to eat with me at noon." Genesis 43:16

It is clear that Joseph recognized Benjamin. We believe Benjamin was born before the brothers sold Joseph into slavery. It is possible that Joseph recognized him. It is just as possible that Joseph did not recognize Benjamin, but did recognize that there was an additional person among the 10 whom he had not seen before. If this is the case, he would assume that this must be Benjamin.

When Joseph recognized that the brothers had done exactly as he said, he made preparations to have them eat with him in his house. These were his instructions:

- Bring the men into the house.
- Kill an animal - probably a goat - and prepare it.

He then announced that the men would eat with him at noon. This was their most important meal of the day. It was also highly unusual for the second most powerful ruler in the land to invite poor people from Israel to be his guests at dinner.

Bringing the men into the house was more than opening the door for them.

The man did as Joseph told him and took the men to Joseph's house. Genesis 43:17

This was a custom practiced throughout that part entire part of the world. There was a time set a side when they would rest. As we move through this text, we will see more details of this process.

Now the men were frightened when they were taken to his house. They thought, " We were brought here because of the silver that was put back into our sacks the first time. He wants to attack us and overpower us and seize us as slaves and take our donkeys. Genesis 43:18

Remember the ten brothers were foreigners. They would be frightened wherever they were taken. This was simply because they did not know what was happening. We assume that nothing was said to them about where they were going and what would happen when they arrived at their destination. The more they moved around the palace, the more uncomfort-

able they felt. This was finally more than they could take. Notice the text says, "They were frightened." This word was used to express both awe and trembling fear. The author was trying to express a level of fear that was beyond the ability of the brothers to control. Their inner fears were visible in their physical movements. The text goes on to say that they were afraid because they were brought to Joseph's house. Mild expressions of fear are usually private, personal. It is when they become intense that they are shared with others. That is what happened in this experience. Ten brothers, including Benjamin, were frightened enough to talk about what they thought was happening. They concluded that they were going to be punished because of the money in the mouth of their grain sacks. They also surmised that because of this, the Egyptians would take them captive and confiscate their animals. It is amazing what unbridled fear can do to us.

Verse 19 describes what fear had done to the eleven brothers.

> *So they went up to Joseph's steward and spoke to him at the entrance to the house. Genesis 43:19*

Fear either disables a person or moves them to action, even if it is meaningless action. Notice that they went to the steward of Joseph's house. They talked with him about their dilemma. Now, the steward could bring this matter to the attention of people with greater authority, but he could not solve their problem. He was the person with the greatest authority at the time. The text says they spoke to him at the door of the house. Did the steward have a station at the door in order to oversee the workers and the events of the house? Had he taken a position there to make sure the brothers did not leave? The text does not say, but it would appear to the brothers that this was his purpose.

Their question of the steward reflects their concern:

> *"Please sir," they said, "We came down here the first time to buy food. But at the place where we stopped for the night we opened our sacks and each of us found his silver - the exact weight - in the mouth of his sack. So we have brought it back with us. We have also brought additional silver with us to buy food. We don't know who put our silver in our sacks." Genesis 43:20-22*

In our text, the brothers referred to the steward as "sir." The Hebrew text is more specific - it uses the word "adonai" which means "master." It is, indeed, one of the names most commonly used for God in the Old Testament. They were giving great deference to this slave who had been made a steward in charge of the house of Joseph. This was the kind of position that Joseph held in the household of Potiphar. In the verses quoted above, the brothers rehearsed all the events of their previous trip to Egypt. Notice the sequence of events:

- They came to buy food. v. 20
- They discovered the money after a day's journey back toward Israel. It is like saying that they did not know that the money was there. v. 21
- We have brought the money back with us. v. 21

Each of these statements was carefully chosen to indicate that they were totally innocent of any wrongdoing.

Verse 22 was intended to clinch the idea of their innocence:

- We have additional money also to buy food this time.

- We do not know what put the money in our grain sacks.

These men told the truth, but they were afraid they could not convince the steward of their innocence.

Verse 23 gives the steward's response to their troubled plea. Notice carefully what he said:

> *"It's all right," He said, "Don't be afraid. Your God and the God of your father has given you treasure in your sacks; I received your silver." Then he brought Simeon out to them. Genesis 43:23*

The steward began by saying, in the Hebrew text, "Peace to you." If the brothers had not been so frightened they would have realized that the steward, probably an Egyptian or other gentile, gave them a Hebrew greeting. They were far too frightened to notice such a small detail. The steward instructed them to have no fear. Again the word "fear" was used, in that day, in two ways - It described a sense of awe which is found in worship. It also described the trembling which is found in one whose life is threatened. It was one thing for him to say, "do not fear." He knew what was happening. It was quite another for them to regain their composure and relax. He was right. They had nothing to fear, but they did not know this.

A second thing that should have caught their attention was that the steward apparently spoke their language. They could have missed this because when Joseph spoke with them, he spoke through an interpreter. Had they realized it, they might have wondered how this steward could know the language.

There was a third clue - the steward said, "Your God, and the God of your father." The word he used for God was "Elohim." This name focuses upon the eternality and mercy of God. The name was also used repeatedly in instances where the mercy of God was being lifted up. The fact was that the steward spoke of God as "Elohim". Certainly, "Elohim" was not worshipped by the people of Egypt. The fact that the steward even knew the name of God should have made the brothers suspicious that this man knew much more than he was telling them. He spoke of "the God of your father." This was a Jewish way of speaking of the God of Israel. These brothers knew well about the meaning of God's name, but it is amazing what fear can do to our analytical skills.

The steward said that it was "the God of your father" who put the money in their sacks. If you go back to Genesis 42:25, Joseph was the one who commanded a servant to put the money into the brother's sacks. Was the steward lying? If so, Why? Is it possible that the steward really meant what he said? Now, he knew that a servant put the money in the sacks as Joseph had commanded. The possibility here is that the steward could have believed that it was by the mercy of God that Joseph gave this very valuable gift. This is especially true if he was aware of what the brothers had done to Joseph.

He then made a statement that many have considered a lie. He said, "I had your money." Notice, he did not say, " I **have** your money." That would have been a lie. Saying, "I **had** your money," was a true statement. He had the money, just before he had it put into the sacks of the brothers..

Finally, to quell their fears, the steward brought Simeon back to them. They should have gathered from this that they were safer here than they thought. Interestingly, there is no mention of their reaction to this welcome surprise.

In the next verse, the steward continued to try to calm the brothers:

The steward took the men into Joseph's house, gave them water to wash their feet and provided fodder for their donkeys. Genesis 43:24

In this verse, the steward did three things that should have helped the brothers realize that their fears were unfounded.

- **The steward took them into Joseph's house**. One was never invited into your house unless you were at peace with him.
- **They were given water to wash their feet**. They were received into Joseph's house as welcomed guests. This could not have escaped their attention. This was the way Jewish people welcomed a stranger or other persons with whom they were friends. Apparently the servant was an Egyptian. This could account for the fact that he gave them water for their feet rather than washing their feet. Egyptians were forbidden to come into personal contact with Jews. We will encounter this situation again very shortly. To wash the feet or to have them washed was an indication that you were a welcomed guest. The owner of the house obligated himself to provide food, shelter and protection for you for at least three days. The brothers were very familiar with this custom.
- **Their donkeys were given fodder**. This also was part of the service required of a host on behalf of a stranger in their home.

The text does not record the reaction of the brothers. There is a hint, however, in the following verse:

They prepared their gifts for Joseph's arrival at noon, because they had heard that they were to eat there. Genesis 43:25

The fact that they stopped trying to second-guess their circumstances and started dealing with life as it was presented to them is a clue. They started to "prepare," this word means to stand something erect, to present something in its best form. It is much more than placing a gift in plain sight. In that culture, a gift was not just handed to a person in high position. They prepared the gift so that the presentation was as attractive as it could possibly be. These Jewish brothers had very little to give as a gift. They had to make their humble gift as presentable as possible. This took time. The author added a simple reason at the conclusion of the verse. He said, "**Because** they had heard that they were to eat there." Only at this point did all the hints seem to make sense, or did they? You never ate bread with an enemy or someone you did not trust. Whether the brothers realized it or not, Joseph had given them every reason to understand that they had nothing to fear.

Genesis 43:26-34 - Joseph and His Brothers Dine at His House

This paragraph begins with a total shift in the emotional tone of the brother's experience. Notice the chain of events:

When Joseph came home, they presented to him the gifts they had brought into the house, and they bowed down before him to the ground. Genesis 43:26

When Joseph came home, the brothers immediately presented their gift. This was important. The gift must be presented before any request could possibly be made. This same experience is true today, even in eastern European countries. People have approached me

to do something for them. Before they ask anything, however, they first give me a gift. This is what the brothers did and the reason they did it.

The author also pointed out that "they bowed down before him to the ground." You may remember, this is what Joseph saw in his dream in Genesis 37:5-11. This dream was very specific and the whole family knew it meant that they would bow down to him. This ultimately resulted in his being sold into slavery. Nevertheless, they did bow down; the dream was fulfilled.

Joseph, of course, was still playing a part with them.

> *He asked them how they were, and then he said, "How is your aged father you told me about? Is he still living?" Genesis 43:27*

Joseph was very casual in his attempt to get information from his brothers. He began by inquiring about their welfare. It was a casual question, but represented interest and concern. This was appropriate in view of the dire circumstances in which the brother's families lived.

Only after Joseph casually inquired about their welfare did he inquire about the "aged father." The Hebrew text speaks of "your father the old man." The word for "old man," is translated "aged," "ancient, "to be very old." It would be difficult to think of a less personal inquiry than to say, "Is your father well, the old man of whom you spoke?" They could never guess just how very important and personal this information would be for Joseph. After 12 or more years had passed, it would not be unusual for Joseph to think his father might be dead. He would never have thought that he would ever get information about his father again.

Joseph had to know, "Is he yet alive?" They could never guess how eagerly he awaited their answer.

> *They replied, "Your servant our father is still alive and well." And they bowed low to pay him honor. Genesis 43:28*

The author does not identify the brother who spoke on behalf of the eleven. It is reasonable to assume that Judah was still the one who spoke.

Observe the way the spokesman referred to Israel, "Your servant our father." This statement identified the entire family as servants of Joseph. You may remember that in Genesis 37:8, the family became bitterly angry because Joseph talked in terms of the family bowing down to him. Now that prediction had become reality. No one seemed to mind, either.

The spokesman informed Joseph that his father was well and still alive. This may have startled the brother. When this ruler asked about Benjamin, he then demanded that Benjamin be brought to Egypt. The spokesman may have feared that the ruler would now demand that his aged father come also. This, of course, is conjecture, but highly possible in view of past events.

The closing sentence in this verse is additional confirmation of the vision Joseph had seen at least thirteen years previously. "And they bowed low to pay him honor." The Hebrew text speaks of prostrating themselves upon the ground. All of this was a way of acknowledging that one was at the disposal of; indebted to the other. They prostrated themselves. The brothers were compelled to fall down before Joseph, even as the dream indicated.

In the next verse, the spotlight shifts to Joseph:

As he looked about and saw his brother Benjamin, his own mother's son, he asked, "Is this your youngest brother, the one you told me about?" And he said, "God be gracious to you, my son." Genesis 43:29

The question arises concerning why Joseph would need to "look about." The Hebrew text says that Joseph "raised his eyes..." This could be that Joseph, as the ruler, looked down to indicate that this conversation was ended. Whatever the event, Joseph looked up and saw Benjamin. Notice the way the author spoke of it, "And saw his brother Benjamin, **his own mother's son**..." The other ten men were also his brothers, but by three different mothers. Benjamin was his only full brother. It says that he asked his brothers, "Is this your youngest brother, the one you told me about?" It would have been easy to realize that he had not seen this person before. He was obviously much younger than the other brothers. Did he look different than his half-brothers? Perhaps like his mother? It was safer for Joseph to deal with them as though he did not recognize Benjamin. It is possible that he did not recognize him. It had been at least 13 years since they last met. Whatever the reason, Joseph questioned the brothers as if he had no knowledge at all.

Joseph's affirmation of Benjamin may have gone unnoticed, but it would have caused them to take notice if they were listening carefully. Joseph said, "God be gracious to you, my son." The Egyptians had many gods, but "Jehovah" was not one of them. If they were alert, they would surely wonder, "Why does this Egyptian ruler speak of the God of Israel?" There was no love lost between the Jews and the Egyptians, either culturally or religiously. Surely the brothers must have noticed that the ruler spoke of Jehovah."

A second part of this blessing should have caught the attention of the brothers. One of the things that characterized the many Egyptian gods was that the people were afraid of them. These gods were considered capricious, looking for opportunities to harm and even destroy the people. Thus, Egyptian worship was a frightened effort to avoid the wrath of their gods. This Egyptian ruler mentions the God of Israel, wishing his grace upon Benjamin.

Joseph spoke of him as "my son." It did not mean that Benjamin was Joseph's son. This was rather a kindly way for an older man to refer to one who was much younger.

In the next verse, the author described Joseph's response to this encounter.

Deeply moved at the sight of his brother, Joseph hurried out and looked for a place to weep. He went into his private room and wept there. Genesis 43:30

Up until this point, Joseph was highly composed and very much in command. All of a sudden, the scene changed.

The text does not tell us if Joseph had ever wondered or had longings about whether he would see his only brother. It is reasonable that often in the loneliness of his prison experience he thought of his mother, father and his little brother.

The Hebrew text is somewhat more graphic: "And Joseph hurried, for his emotions were deeply moved toward his brother." This is a picture of emotions about to go completely out of control. The feelings were so strong, Joseph had to quickly do something or have an emotional collapse in front of these eleven men. That was unthinkable. People in high places just did not do such things. Egyptian leaders were to be strong and unmoved. That was about to be unmasked before their very eyes. The text says that Joseph was

"deeply moved" over his brother. The word translated "deeply moved" is "racham" (רַחַם). It expresses deep compassion. It was sometimes used to describe the feelings of a young woman for her unborn child.

The Midrash, Jewish commentaries on the Scriptures, indicates that there was a conversation, between Joseph and Benjamin, which caused Joseph's emotional collapse. It states that Joseph asked Benjamin if he had a maternal brother, and Benjamin answered that he did, but he had disappeared. Joseph was supposed to have asked if Benjamin had any children and he answered, "ten." Benjamin was supposed to have given the names of each child and explained that each was named for some tragedy in the life of his brother who disappeared. It was at this point that Joseph could no longer hold his strong appearance. There is, of course, no evidence to verify this touching story. Did it happen? We do not know. It is a possible situation.

The author continued his description of this emotionally charged moment. He said that Joseph "went into his private room and wept there." The room to which Joseph fled was a private room where no one but himself could enter. There he could weep without being discovered. Joseph needed a place to vent the great mixture of unsuspected joy and shock which came together in his heart in this experience. He wept and kept on weeping. This was not a one-minute escape. Joseph apparently left his brothers alone, waiting for their lunch, for a long time.

Think of how you would feel if you were Joseph. You never thought you would see your brother again, but now he stands before you. The rush of emotions was indescribable.

Now put yourself in the place of his brothers. They have been on an emotional roller-coaster. First, they feared for their lives. Then, they were taken to the house of the ruler to eat with him as his honored guests. Then, he met the family and ran out of the hall in an emotional outburst. There followed an interminable silence, nothing happened, nothing was said. Frightened people tend to put the worst possible explanation on everything that happens. This all had to happen to them at this time.

In the following verse, the author described Joseph's return to control:

> *After he had washed his face, he came out and, controlling himself, said, "Serve the food." Genesis 43:31*

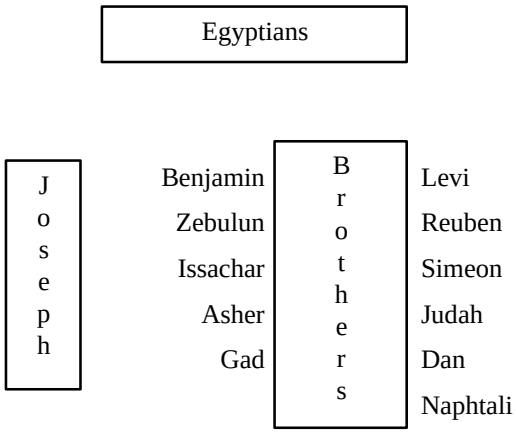
The author identified four things that Joseph did:

- **He washed his face** - He did not want them to know he had been crying. This suggests that Joseph cried profusely. It would even affect the color of his face and redden his eyes. It is quite natural to wash one's face at a time like this.
- **He came out** - He returned to the hall where he had received his brothers. He felt much more in control than he had before he left.
- **He controlled himself** - The word "controlled" is "aphaq" (אָפַק) and means to contain, to restrain oneself. It was sometimes used to describe a fortress.
- **He told the servants to serve food** - It was time to eat. As we have seen before, this was a symbol of forgiveness, if they had only realized it.

The next verse gives a verbal drawing of the dining room:

They served him by himself, the brothers by themselves, and the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves, because Egyptians could not eat with Hebrews, for that is detestable to Egyptians. Genesis 43:32

It appears that the room would look something like this.



The Egyptians considered it an abomination to eat with an Israelite; even if he was the one who had saved them from starvation and was the second ruler of the land. This fact gives us an insight into the palace situation at that time. If Joseph had denounced his Jewish background, then the Egyptians would have eaten at the table with him, but would have refused to eat with his brothers. This fact indicates that though Joseph was in a land that despised his heritage, he did not try to hide it or renounce it. He clung to the fact that he was a Jew. This fact would certainly bring opposition from people who coveted his position. It might even prove dangerous to his political and physical health. It gives another glimpse into the personal and spiritual character of the man.

It is also clear that Joseph accepted this kind of prejudice whether to keep the position he had attained or to do something for his people, we do not know.

If you sat with the Egyptians, you would be observers, close up, of an unusual experience. You would probably know about what the brothers had done to Joseph. You would be struck by the generosity of Joseph. A lesser man would have had them killed immediately.

If you sat with Joseph, there would probably be at least four things going through your mind:

- Perhaps a loss of awareness of the people at the Egyptian table.
- There would be a flood of memories; a total recall of past pain.
- There would also be the obvious strain visible on the faces of the brothers.
- There would also be a calming memory of the prophecy being now fulfilled after so many years. This would stir an elation of praise and thanksgiving.

The air would have been charged with emotion and expectation at every table.

In verse 33, Joseph demonstrated his acceptance of the ritual place of the first-born.

The men had been seated before him in the order of their ages, from the firstborn to the youngest; and they looked at each other in astonishment. Genesis 43:33

The text does not say whether there was any help, from the brothers, in seating each person in their proper birth-order. The fact that they were astonished suggests that no help was given, but it was clear that the servants had placed each brother in his proper position. The text suggests that the brothers were "seated" rather than seating themselves. It may well be that Joseph called out the name of each man as he was about to be seated. This would make it clear that Joseph was aware of the birth order. There is no way to be certain about this situation.

The idea of the birthright involved several concerns. One of these was his position of honor in the family. He would sit in the place of honor at special meetings and feasts. This accounts for the location of Reuben in the previous diagram. He would be the host of every special meal in the family. The firstborn usually spoke on behalf of the family. That part, however, was not performed by the oldest son, Reuben, in this instance. Having grown up in the family, Joseph would be well aware of Reuben's unwillingness to accept his leadership position in the family. In spite of the way Reuben had failed Joseph, still Joseph gave his oldest brother the respect his position should have merited.

The text states that the brothers were astonished. The author, however, does not say why this was true. It is reasonable that they were pleasantly surprised that the steward was able to seat them according to their age without help. This too should have been a hint to them. How could the steward know exactly the age, chronologically, of the family without someone from the family giving them instructions?

The final verse in the chapter describes the serving of the banquet.

> *When portions were served to them from Joseph's table, Benjamin's portion was five times as much as anyone else's. So they feasted and drank freely with him. Genesis 43:34*

It was customary for the host to serve his guests rather than for each one to serve himself as is often done in our culture. The author indicated that portions were sent to each brother from Joseph's table. During any special meal, it was customary for the master of the feast to give special pieces of food to the honored guest. Reuben sat in that honored position. Joseph sent food to each brother, but he gave the special treatment to his full brother, Benjamin rather than to Reuben. This change in the custom of the first born honor would not go unnoticed. This would be especially true when the honor went to the youngest rather than to the oldest.

The question naturally arises, Why would Joseph send Benjamin a portion five times larger than that of the other brothers? Could it be that Joseph was doing this to show attention to him for having taken him away from his father who depended upon him to care for his entire estate? It is possible. Could it be that Joseph wanted to honor his only full brother; the only one in the family who had not been a part of selling him into slavery? That is certainly a real possibility. Ultimately, the text does not tell us.

Why would the author tell us about the way they drank? First, the text indicates that they drank enough so that they were becoming intoxicated. This fact tends to suggest that they had become less concerned about their safety and began to fully participate in the feast to which Joseph had invited them.

Not for sale or resale

Conclusion

As you read this chapter you are privileged to share the most intimate moments with a family of boys who had experienced many struggles together. The author has given us a picture of a man of God who was greater than the things that had been done against him. Here is evidence that it can be done.

The chapter gives us a picture of God as being with His people and blessing them, as opposed to the way the Egyptians thought of their gods.

As I read this chapter, I want to be very quiet. I want to take off my shoes because this is certainly holy ground. It gives me new encouragement to try to be the kind of man Joseph was. I want to find the strength to look past pain to see just how great God is; how much more He wants to do in my life.

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 20

JOSEPH PLANTED A CUP IN BENJAMIN'S BAG

GENESIS 44:1 - 34

1. In Genesis chapter 44, there are three paragraphs. On the following table, write a summary of seven words or less for each paragraph:

44:1-13	
44:14-17	
44:18-34	

2. In Genesis 44: 1-13, the author described Joseph's plan to hide his own personal cup in Benjamin's grain sack.
   a. In 44:1, 2, Joseph gave the steward instructions concerning the hiding of the cup:
      (1). List the instructions Joseph gave the steward. Study the list. What observations can you make?
      (2). Think carefully about the morality of Joseph's instructions. Was his plan a deception? If so, is that acceptable?
      (3). Why would Joseph have the money put into the mouth of each sack rather than just giving the grain to the eleven brothers?
      (4). What is the significance of placing Joseph's cup in Benjamin's sack? Why not the sack of the oldest brother, Reuben?
   b. In Genesis 44:3, the author reported that the men were sent on their way at daybreak. Why would it be important to include this piece of information?
   c. In Genesis 44:4, 5, Joseph sent his steward to apprehend the eleven brothers and retrieve his cup.
      (1). If Joseph wanted his cup back, then why did he have it placed in the sack in the first place?
      (2). Read carefully the things Joseph instructed his steward to say to the eleven brothers. What have you discovered?
      (3). Are there false accusations in these verses? If so, what does that say to you?
      (4). In verse five, the steward said, "Isn't this the cup my master drinks from and also uses for divination."
         (a). What is divination?
         (b). Does this necessarily say that Joseph used divination?
         (c). What is your response to this statement?
   d. Read Genesis 44:6 carefully. What information, if any, do you learn from this brief sentence?
   e. Reflect on Genesis 44:7.
      (1). From this brief response, what can you discover about the brothers and their response?
      (2). Put yourself into the brother's position. How would you respond?

f. In Genesis 44:8, the brothers continued to defend themselves:
   (1). What is their defense in this verse?
   (2). Some would claim that this verse is evidence that Joseph was taking revenge against his brothers. What would you say to this charge? What other options would you consider?
g. In Genesis 44:9, the brothers spoke with renewed confidence.
   (1). Was their position a necessary one? Was it wise?
   (2). Who was speaking in this verse?
   (3). What was the purpose of the position they offered?
   (4). Who stood to gain the most from this agreement? Why?
h. In Genesis 44:10, the steward responded:
   (1). Compare the agreement the brothers offered, 44:9, with the one the steward repeated, 44:10. What did you find?
   (2). Was the steward's restatement of the agreement better or worse for the brothers?
i. In Genesis 44:11, the author begins to describe the search, the moment of truth.
   (1). Describe the scene from the brother's perspective.
   (2). Now, describe the scene from the steward's perspective.
j. Think of the dramatic scene which unfolds in Genesis 44:12.
   (1). Describe the feelings of Benjamin as the search unfolds.
   (2). Describe the feelings of the steward at this time.
k. In view of Genesis 44:13:
   (1). Draw a comparison between the feelings of Benjamin and his brothers.
   (2). What emotions do you identify with the statement, "Then they all loaded their donkeys and returned to the city."?

3. In Genesis 44:14-17, the author described the meeting between Joseph and his brothers.
   a. In Genesis 44:14, the author tells us that "Joseph was still in the house.
      (1). What was the significance of this information?
      (2). The author mentioned that "Judah and his brothers came in." In what way was this important?
      (3). What is the significance of the fact that "They threw themselves to the ground before him."?
   b. In Genesis 44:15, Joseph confronted his brothers.
      (1). What did Joseph mean when he said, "What is this you have done?"
      (2). Read this verse carefully. How would you describe Joseph's ethics, his rightness or error in this situation? What issue, if any, do you find here?
      (3). Think carefully about what this paragraph says concerning Joseph and divination.
         (a). How would you describe this situation?
         (b). In what way, if any, were his actions and words appropriate for a man of God?
   c. In Genesis 44:16, the brothers answered Joseph's confrontation.
      (1). What can you find in the verse that tells you something about their attitude?
      (2). What guilt did Judah speak of when he said, "God has uncovered your servant's guilt."?

(3). What does this verse tell you about the character of Judah and his brothers?
(4). Look carefully at the three questions in this verse. What was Judah saying in these questions?

d. In Genesis 44:17, Joseph responded to Judah's surrender.
(1). Compare the steward's agreement, Genesis 44:10, with Joseph's statement, Genesis 44:17. What do you learn from this?
(2). Put yourself in Joseph's position as he spoke in Genesis 44:17. What would you be feeling?
(3). How would you describe Joseph's feeling as he said, "Far be it from me to do such a thing"?
(4). How realistic was it for Joseph to say, "The rest of you, go back to your father in peace"?

4. In Genesis 44:18-34, Judah pleads desperately with Joseph.
a. Judah had been talking with Joseph.
(1). What suggestion can you make concerning Judah's statement, "Please, my lord, let your servant speak a word to my lord"?
(2). Why would Judah say to Joseph, "Do not be angry with your servant, though you are equal to Pharaoh himself"?
(3). Judah was a spokesman among his brothers on a previous occasion. Compare Judah's statement, in Genesis 37:26, 27, with this statement, in Genesis 44:18. What did you learn?

b. In Genesis 44:19, 20, Judah continued his appeal to Joseph.
(1). Read these verses carefully. What, in your impression, was Judah's attitude as he spoke?
(2). What does Joseph's question have to do with Benjamin's alleged guilt?
(3). What could Judah hope to achieve by reminding Joseph of this conversation?
(4). Judah said, speaking to Joseph, "His brother is dead." How would Judah know that information?
(5). In these verses, Judah gave five specific pieces of information:
(a). Identify the five pieces of information.
(b) Explain what Joseph could hope to attain by the use of this information.

c. In Genesis 44:21, Judah continued his rehearsal of this conversation with Joseph.
(1). Read and reread this verse. What is the atmosphere; the attitude of Judah as he retells the story?
(2). What does this verse add; what does it accomplish for Judah's appeal?

d. In Genesis 44:22, Judah repeats his response to what Joseph had commanded.
(1). What did Judah mean by this response?
(2). What did Judah want to accomplish by what he said here?

e. In Genesis 44:23, Judah continued to rehearse the conversation.
(1). What emotional tone do you sense in his words?
(2). What could he hope to accomplish by these words?

f. In Genesis 44:24, the rehearsal was continued.
(1). Of whom does he speak?
(2). What did he say in this brief sentence?
(3). What difference will this statement make?

g. In Genesis 44:25, Judah again continued to rehearse the events.
   (1). What does this sentence say?
   (2). What difference does it make?
   (3). What does this have to do with Benjamin's apparent guilt and retention?
   (4). What did this have to do with Joseph?
h. In Genesis 44:26, Judah went on with his rehearsal of events.
   (1). There is something startling in this verse. What is it?
   (2). What new information does Judah add in this sentence?
   (3). Why would Judah say this?
   (4). What response would Judah seek from Joseph?
i. In Genesis 44:27, 28, Judah continued the rehearsal.
   (1). Why did Judah say, "your servant my father"?
   (2). Judah quoted Israel as saying, "You know that my wife bore me two sons..."? Why would Israel say this when he had twelve sons and all of them were present as Judah quoted this statement?
   (3). If you were one of the brothers, how would you feel as you listened to your father say this?
   (4). Where did Israel get the idea that Joseph was torn to pieces?
   (5). If you were one of the brothers and heard Israel say, "He has surely been torn to pieces," how would you feel at that time?
   (6). Again, what did Judah hope to accomplish by going over this part of the conversation?
j. In Genesis 44:29, Israel was quoted concerning the depth of his sorrow.
   (1). In your own words, what was he saying?
   (2). As you read his statement, does it seem like an overstatement or understatement? Why?
k. In Genesis 44:30, 31, the explanation continued:
   (1). Who was speaking?
   (2). Identify the main points of his message.
   (3). What could he hope to attain through this report?
l. In Genesis 44:32, the presentation continued:
   (1). Who was speaking?
   (2). What did he say?
   (3). What did this have to do with the issue he was trying to present?
   (4). What did he hope to achieve by the inclusion of the words of this verse?
m. In Genesis 44:33, he had concluded his presentation and makes his request.
   (1). Who was speaking?
   (2). What was his request?
   (3). How reasonable was this request? Why?
   (4). What can we learn from this request?
   (5). Compare the request, in Genesis 44:33, with the statement in Genesis 37:27. What can we learn from this comparison?
n. In Genesis 44:34, The family spokesman offered one final appeal and explanation.
   (1). What was the appeal?
   (2). How reasonable was it?
   (3). What was his final explanation?

(4). What benefit would this explanation add?

5. In Genesis, chapter 44, there is far more detail than is found in most of the rest of the book of Genesis.
   a. How do you account for this fact?
   b. What would prompt the author to do this?

6. Throughout the book, the author repeatedly used the stories of different people to tell us something about God.
   a. What does the story of Judah, in chapter 44, tell you about God?
   b. What does the story of Joseph, in Genesis 44, tell you about God?

7. As you reflect on this chapter, what difference will it make in the way you live your life and relate to God?

LESSON 20: GENESIS 44:1 - 34

JOSEPH PLANTED A CUP IN BENJAMIN'S BAG

Introduction

Genesis chapter 44 is made up of three paragraphs. A brief summary of each paragraph is recorded on the following table.

44:1-13	Joseph's Cup Was Planted in Benjamin's Sack
44:14-17	The Brothers Returned to Joseph's House
44:18-34	Judah Pleads to be Substituted for Benjamin

It is quite clear from the outset that this is going to be a very emotional study. It will also be a study that requires careful observation concerning the ethics of what is being done.

Genesis 44:1-13 - Joseph's Cup Was Planted in Benjamin's Sack

Again, this chapter begins, in the Hebrew text, with the word "and." As we indicated earlier, this suggests a quick ongoing style. It is not interested in giving every detail, but rather in giving selective pieces of information which convey a very specific message. In this respect, it is a bit like the Gospel of Mark.

The scene shifts at the beginning of the chapter:

> *Now Joseph gave these instructions to the steward of his house: "Fill the men's sacks with as much food as they can carry, and put each man's silver in the mouth of his sack. Then put my cup, the silver one, in the mouth of the youngest one's sack, along with the silver for his grain." And he did as Joseph said. Genesis 44:1, 2*

There is no way to discover how much time elapsed since the end of chapter 43. As we will discover later, it had to be at least overnight. The steward to whom Joseph gave instructions was the same man the brothers approached in 43:19.

In Joseph's commands, it was clear that these Jewish men would receive unusual treatment. Considering the way Egyptians hated Jews, this must have surprised the steward. There were three surprising commands that Joseph gave the steward.

- **Fill the men's sacks "as much as they can carry**." This was substantially more than was usually given. This would be clear to everyone who heard about it.
- **Put each man's money in the mouth of his sack**. The fact that the grain was paid for in silver suggests that the price was very high. This fact makes it all the more surprising that Joseph instructed his steward to place the money in the top of each man's sack. Joseph's gift to the eleven men was very large.
- "**Put my cup, the silver one, in the mouth of the youngest one's sack**." Silver was their most precious metal - more valuable than gold or any other metal.

Add to this the fact that it was Joseph's personal cup and the value is immediately apparent.

Observe that Joseph did not explain his actions to the steward. That must have been, at first, a source of intense confusion and frustration for the steward.

The question naturally arises, why would Joseph instruct the steward to put the money in the mouth of the sacks? Why didn't Joseph simply refuse their payment? The answer is not immediately obvious. We will deal with this at greater depth later in the chapter.

Similarly, the question arises, Why would Joseph select Benjamin's sack for this action rather than Reuben or Judah? For one thing, it creates an atmosphere of mystery. This will serve Joseph's goals well a little later.

The author wrote, "and he did as Joseph said." This gives us a glimpse of the position Joseph held in Egypt at that time. He spoke and men acted.

There is an interesting observation in the following verse:

As morning dawned, the men were sent on their way with their donkeys. Genesis 44:3

The text says that this happened just as dawn broke. This was customary because of the heat of the area. They traveled as early as possible in the day while it was still cool. You will remember that it was a custom of the area that a person would not leave a house where he had received hospitality without being sent on his way. That is exactly what the author refers to in this statement - "the men were sent on their way." If the men were sent on their way as dawn broke, then it follows that they had received the hospitality of desert people. This means that they had been the guests of Joseph for at least the night and perhaps more. He would have provided a place for them to sleep and given them their food while they were his guests. The mention of the donkeys was important for two reasons:

- The brothers had earlier feared that their donkeys would be taken from them. This statement indicates that their fears were unfounded.
- The mention of the donkeys clearly indicates that the heavy load of grain that Joseph had commanded was indeed given to the brothers. It would not have been possible for them to take that much grain with them on foot.

The plot thickens as we come to the next verses:

They had not gone far from the city when Joseph said to his steward, "Go after those men at once, and when you catch up with them, say to them, 'Why have you repaid good with evil? Isn't this the cup my master drinks from and also uses for divination? This is a wicked thing you have done.'" Genesis 44:4, 5

There are several appropriate observations which can be made from these two verses. Joseph waited until the brothers had left the city and were safely on their way home. This gave the brothers time to settle down and get comfortable on their return trip home. They would not be thinking of anything such as this happening to them. It also suggests that Joseph did not tell his steward what he was doing up until this point. This had to be quite a shock for him. He would not have been surprised to see a ruler change his mind in this way. It happened often.

Notice that Joseph said, "go after those men.,.." Joseph did not say, "go after my brothers." Though the text does not speak to the issue, there is no reason to believe that

Joseph had yet confided to the steward that these were his brothers. There was an episode, in 43:30, when Joseph fled the dining room and wept in his private room. According to the text, there is no reason to believe that this outburst was explained.

This series of events was carefully planned. It was not an afterthought or a change of mind. The statement Joseph instructed his steward to make was a serious accusation. There were two accusations in the statement:

- He accused them of ingratitude, of repaying good with evil.
- He accused them of theft.

This would frighten the brothers to say the least.

In verse five, Joseph told the steward to ask the question, "Isn't this the cup my master drinks from and also uses for divination?" The implication is that Joseph practiced divination with the missing cup. Divination has been defined as:

> *The art of obtaining secret knowledge especially of the future. (It) is a pagan counterpart of prophecy.*[1]

We must acknowledge that for some, at least, the interpretation of dreams was considered divination. That is not supported by the Scriptures. Divination was always condemned in the Scriptures. Even when Joseph interpreted dreams, he specifically and carefully made it clear that it was God who was giving the interpretation and not Joseph. By the same token, God always punished Israel whenever they became involved in pagan divination. This of course, did not happen to Joseph. Some would say that Joseph pretended to use divination by tapping this cup/dish as he announced the chronological seating of each brother. (This is the way people used divination). The text does not say that Joseph did this. Joseph also always made a distinction between the efforts of the magicians and what God did through him. Even in this statement, Joseph does not say that he practiced pagan divination. He asked a question which can be used to assume he practiced this pagan art, though he does not say that he did. My inclination is to believe that Joseph's statement was designed to do two things:

- It was NOT to say that Joseph practiced pagan divination. The servant asked a question which implied that Joseph divined, but did not say so.
- It was designed to SUGGEST (not to say) that this was a divining cup. This would suggest just how terrible their theft would have been.

The text does not discuss this crucial issue. We are therefore left to our own conjectures about the subject.

Joseph instructed the steward to tell "these men" just how evil their supposed action was. I believe this was done to impress the brothers with just how awful their supposed actions were.

Verse six confirms an earlier discovery.

> *When he caught up with them, he repeated these words to them. Genesis 44:6*

The steward did exactly as he had been told. This again tells us of his dependability and his master's reputation.

In the following verse, the brothers responded to the shocking words of the steward:

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[1]1. Merril F. Unger, Unger's Bible Dictionary, (Chicago: Moody Press 1957) p. 271

But they said to him, "Why does my lord say such things? Far be it from your servants to do anything like that." Genesis 44:7

The brothers have developed far more confidence by this time. In good Jewish style, they answered the steward's question by asking a question. Observe the tenor of their words:

- **They were respectful** - They referred to the steward politely as "lord."
- **They were direct** - The question they gave to the steward was forceful, but not quite rude.
- **They were confused** - They could not understand why he would say such a thing to them. They were totally innocent and they knew it.
- **They were shocked** - Israel's sons were not angelic, but we have no reason to believe that they were thieves. Just the suggesting of such a thing would surprise them.

This is exactly the way you would expect a person to respond when he/she was strongly accused, given no opportunity to explain, but knew nothing wrong had been done. That was exactly the case with the brothers of Joseph.

In verse eight the brothers continued their response to the steward's accusation:

"We even brought back to you from the land of Canaan the silver we found inside the mouths of our sacks. So why would we steal silver or gold from your master's house?" Genesis 44:8

Observe that these words were more forceful than the previous statements they had made in their defense. The basis of this statement is logic. They were saying that his accusation does not make sense. They reminded him that they brought money from home to pay for the last supply of grain. Upon their return home, they found the silver in the mouth of their sacks. Now, they returned to buy more grain, and brought the previous money with them also. This was a way of saying we took expensive steps to be as honest as possible with these encounters. It did not make sense for them to bring extra silver back with them to get food and then steal his silver cup as they were leaving.

One must raise the question of why Joseph would intentionally put his brothers through this agony. Is it right for Joseph to play cat and mouse with his brothers the way he did? That depends on Joseph's motives. If Joseph did this just because he wanted sweet revenge; because they had put him through so much pain years ago, then he was wrong. It is possible that Joseph was trying to see if there was any change, on their part, in terms of the way they dealt with Rachel's other son. It is possible that Joseph wanted to see if there had been any change of heart concerning the way they had dealt with him. It is just as possible that Joseph wanted his brothers to see just how wrong they had been in what they did. If this is the case then his motive was not revenge, but rather a desire for them to discover the depths of his forgiveness and a deep awareness of what God had done on behalf of all of them. The text is silent on this issue, but I personally prefer the latter suggestions.

By this time, the brothers seem to be expressing a lot of confidence as well as some righteous indignation. There is a bit of boldness in their next statement to the steward:

"If any of your servants is found to have it, he will die and the rest of us will become my lord's slaves." Genesis 44:9

Their confidence apparently caused them to make more of an offer than was necessary. It would have sufficed for them to say that he should look through everyone's sack to satisfy himself that they did not have the cup as he had accused them. This encounter reminds one of the confrontation between Laban and Jacob over the idols that Laban accused Jacob of stealing.

In verse nine the spokesman, probably Judah, made an agreement designed intended to convince the steward that it was not possible that one of the brothers had stolen the cup. One might wonder if the spokesman bothered to check with his brothers before he made such a commitment. This was a serious agreement. Under other circumstances, the agreement would have been carried out as they agreed. The text is silent, but I doubt if the spokesman asked anyone. The agreement was twofold:

- The guilty party would die.
- The other ten brothers would become Joseph's slaves.
- No consideration was given to the result if the cup was not found.

This was intentionally a one-sided agreement. It would be a gamble if both sides had something to lose. This was intended to show the steward just how trustworthy they were.

The steward did not make a counter offer.

> *"Very well, then," he said, "Let it be as you say. Whoever is found to have it will become my slave; the rest of you will be free from blame." Genesis 44:10*

Notice in this verse the steward really changed the terms of the agreement. This was permissible because he was reducing the terms of the agreement. Had he increased the terms of the agreement terms it would not have been acceptable. Unbeknown to the spokesman, the steward really made the terms much more unacceptable to the brothers. This was not clear to them at the time. They were convinced they would be exonerated in this agreement. Still the changed terms were apparently acceptable to the brothers:

- The guilty party would be a slave for life.
- The other ten brothers would return home without guilt.

On the surface, these new terms seemed to be less severe in both instances. We will say more about this a little later.

As you read this next verse, you feel like you are eaves-dropping on a scene where you can see something the players cannot see.

> *Each of them quickly lowered his sack to the ground and opened it. Genesis 44:11*

It is a very tense experience just to read these verses. The brothers hurried to take down their sacks and open them. They knew they had done nothing wrong. This was their opportunity to show it. There is a certain excitement in this verse. There is raw anticipation in their eager actions.

The author paints a great picture of drama.

> *Then the steward proceeded to search, beginning with the oldest and ending with the youngest. And the cup was found in Benjamin's sack. Genesis 44:12*

We can only imagine what Reuben, Simeon, Levi and Judah thought as they opened their grain sacks and demonstrated that they did not have the cup. The text, of course, gives no details of their immediate feelings. There had to be a mixture of feelings - a great sense of

elation mingled with an overpowering feeling of "Didn't I tell you so?" The steward began with the eldest and worked his way chronologically through the family. This was the only way he could do it. Any other order would have been an insult to the older members of the family. As the steward examined each grain sack, there had to be two very strong feelings present:

- A mighty sigh of relief from the son whose grain sack was just examined and did NOT yield the missing cup.
- A mounting tension as the steward finished examining one sack and moved to the next.

Imagine what went through the mind of the steward as he moved from one sack to the next. He knew where he would find the cup. Certainly he could see the sigh of relief as he finished with each sack. He could also see the gripping tension which would show on the face of each brother as the steward was about to search his sack. The tension reached its climax when the cup was found in the sack.

Observe the way the author described the brothers response to the discovery:

At this, they tore their clothes. Then they all loaded their donkeys and returned to the city. Genesis 44:13

Imagine the shock and horror that pierced the heart of Benjamin as the steward brought the cup out of his sack. Two sets of emotions might well have reigned at the same time.

BENJAMIN	THE TEN BROTHERS
Shock	Disbelief
Horror	Rage - How could you do such a thing?
Confusion - How could that happen?	Fury - (illogical) - That is just like Rachel's son to do such a thing.
Defensiveness - He would attempt to explain to the ten brothers. He did not do it and did not know who did.	
Anger - Why did his brother have to volunteer such an agreement?	

The text is silent about these emotions, but they are quite reasonable possibilities. We have previously encountered the tearing of clothing. This is a symbol of ultimate sorrow. It almost always accompanied the death of a loved one or the reception of tragic news. When Jesus was on trial, in Matthew 26:65, He was asked if He was the Christ. When He answered in the affirmative, the high priest tore his clothes. This was a symbol of his rage.

The author also reported, "Then they all loaded their donkeys and returned to the city." This was just the next thing that needed to be done. There is an aura of resignation in their actions. The spokesman, probably Judah, had volunteered an agreement. Now they were bound to keep it. They could see everything in life that had meaning for them just evaporate before their eyes.

Genesis 44:14-17 - The Brothers Returned to Joseph's House

In the Hebrew text, this paragraph begins with the word "and." Repeatedly, this was used to identify the ongoing nature of the author's report. He is giving a quick, high-lighting survey of events. He did not attempt to give every detail.

In verse fourteen, the author described the meeting of Joseph with his brothers:

> *Joseph was still in the house when Judah and his brothers came in, and they threw themselves to the ground before him. Genesis 44:14*

The author gave us an impressive picture of a very tense moment. Joseph, of course, knew what was happening and waited for the steward to return with the brothers. Notice that the author described the brothers return by saying, "...when Judah and his brothers came in..." It is clear that Judah was the leader of the clan.

The author indicated that "the brothers threw themselves on the ground when they saw Joseph." The word "threw" means to "cast down," to throw down with force. It describes just how frightened the brothers were; how much they had to respect Joseph.

Throwing themselves on the ground was a symbol that the ones who prostrated themselves before the leader were under his control and were prepared to do his bidding. Again, this is exactly what Joseph saw in his dreams many years before.

Notice the way Joseph spoke to his brothers:

> *Joseph said to them, "What is this you have done? Don't you know that a man like me can find things out by divination?" Genesis 44:15*

As you read the two questions Joseph asked, you are struck with the directness and forcefulness of his words. Joseph knew that none of this was real. He designed the plan to plant his cup in Benjamin's sack. This tells us that his words were spoken for their effect upon the brothers. We have already discussed the reasons which may have underlaid his treatment of the brothers.

When Joseph said, "What is this you have done?" he knew they had done nothing. Had Joseph lied to his brothers? He certainly misled them. It appears to me that he did this to help his brothers see the extent of his power. This could simply be an expression of outlandish pride. It is just as possible that he wanted them to see that it was God who had given him the dream; it was God who caused it to happen. We will deal with this more extensively a little later in the story.

Joseph's second question is more troublesome. In the question, he infers that he used divination. If true, this would be more than shocking. As you focus attention on this question, there are some pieces of information you should keep in mind:

- Joseph never directly said that he used divination.
- Divination was a pagan practice which was not done by any man of God. Whenever people turned to divination, God punished this disobedience.
- Joseph did not need divination to know future events. God gave him a dream which accurately portrayed events in his life which were now coming to pass. God gave him insight into the dreams of Pharaoh without the help of divination. These are clear evidence that God had given him insights into the future.

- Joseph clearly credited his ability to interpret dreams to God and not his use of divination.

These facts cause me to conclude that Joseph did not use divination as it was hinted. It appears to me that it was an attempt to help the brothers see the hand of God working even in unfortunate circumstances. Again, we will speak to this more carefully a little later in the study.

In verse 16, the author reported Judah's response to Joseph's questions:

> *"What can we say to my lord?" Judah replied, "What can we say? How can we prove our innocence? God has uncovered your servants' guilt. We are now my lord's slaves - we ourselves and the one who was found to have the cup." Genesis 44:16*

Again, Judah spoke for the eleven brothers. This suggests that though some of the brothers may have been distressed that Judah suggested the agreement, when it was not required; still no one was upset enough to take the leadership away from him.

In true Hebrew Judah fashion, Judah answered Joseph's two questions with three of his own. Still in his answers, Judah has told us some things about himself. Look at the parts of his reply:

- **"What can we say to my lord?"** The word "lord" is "adonai" (אָדֹנִי), which is used over 6,000 times in the Old Testament. It was the word a woman used when speaking to her husband. It was also the name a son used to speak to his father. It means master, sovereign, the one who exercises control over life. It tells us something of the respect with which Judah viewed Joseph. There is also a real integrity in his words. He could have said something else. Instead, he simply owned the fact that he really had nothing he could say. He was asking, what can we say that would touch your heart of compassion.
- **"What can we say?"** This does not reveal a loss for words as much as it adds strong emphasis to Judah's intention. In one sense, it is a negative statement. One might say it positively by saying, "There is nothing I can say." Judah had claimed innocence and integrity. Now, however, it appears that they have been found out in a most embarrassing situation. In this second question, though the words are nearly the same, he is asking, " We know we did nothing wrong, but in view of the evidence, how could we insist on our rights?"
- **"How can we prove our innocence?"** This question apparently grows out of his remembrance that they had not put the money in their sacks, but when they opened the sacks, there it was. He knew they were innocent, but what could he say that would prove it?
- **"God has uncovered your servants' guilt."** In the Hebrew it says, "The God..." The addition of the word "the" stresses the fact that this God is unique; there is none like Him. Observe that Judah used the name "Elohim" to identify God. This name was used to stress two things - God is supremely merciful and powerful. This raises a question: When Jewish people spoke of God judging His people, they usually used the name "Jehovah," translated "LORD" in most of your versions. Here Judah speaks of the judgment of God and uses the name "Elohim." Why?

The text, of course, does not explain. It may be that Judah felt a great need for mercy at this point. We cannot be certain.

A second question arises. to what sin does Judah refer when he said, "God has uncovered your servants guilt?" He could refer to this apparent theft. He could also refer to their sin against their brother, years ago. Whatever Judah's reference it seems that he clings to their innocence in this matter.

- **"We are now my lord's slaves - We ourselves and the one who was found to have the cup"** - Again, Judah spoke of Joseph as "lord." There had been a great deal of trouble in the family because Joseph had a dream in which he was the "lord" and his brothers were the servants. Unknowingly, Judah brought that dream to full fruition when he called Joseph "lord" and spoke of himself as Joseph's slave. Judah was prepared to concede to the terms of the agreement even though he was not convinced of their guilt.

Judah, in his final statement, tried to protect Benjamin by saying he would be a slave. Though the steward said they could go free, Judah kept his statement of the agreement.

Perhaps the most telling thing about the situation was Judah's final remark. There was no love lost between the children of Rachel and those of Leah and the two concubines. Still Judah did not attempt to separate the others from Benjamin when dealing with possible slavery. Judah knew that he had offered that all eleven would be slaves if the cup was found to be with them. The steward changed it to only affect the guilty party. Judah, nevertheless, now ignored the stewards seemingly more lenient offer and presented all eleven brothers to become slaves, as he had agreed. Joseph could not have missed this fact.

In verse 17, Joseph responds to Judah's surrender:

But Joseph said, "Far be it from me to do such a thing." Only the man who was found to have the cup will become my slave. The rest of you, go back to your father in peace." Genesis 44:17

In view of the fact that Joseph designed this traumatic experience, it seems a little high-handed for him to say, "Far be it from me to do such a thing?" Perhaps we need to read the rest of his statement before we draw a conclusion. Notice, he also said, "Only the man who was found to have the cup will become my slave." The rest of you go back to your father in peace." That may be easier said than done. We need to put these two parts of Joseph's statement into perspective. The table which follows should prove helpful.

THE STEWARD'S AGREEMENT GENESIS 44:10	JOSEPH'S STATEMENT GENESIS 44:17
"Very well, then," he said, "Let it be as you say. Whoever is found to have it will become my slave; the rest of you will be free from blame."	But Joseph said, "Far be it from me to do such a thing! Only the man who was found to have the cup will become my slave. The rest of you, go back to your father in peace."

As you observe the preceding table, it becomes clear that Joseph insisted on exactly what the steward had said in his acceptance of the agreement. You may remember that I said, as

we studied this verse, the more lenient version might turn out to be much more unacceptable than the harsher one that Judah proposed. As it now stands, Benjamin will be Joseph's slave and the ten brothers will go free. That part is great for the ten brothers. There is a problem with this blessing, however. With their freedom, they must now go home and tell their father what had happened. This would be both extremely difficult and very painful. They knew that father would be counting the number of people, even at a distance, well before they arrived at the camp. If one was missing, again, he would certainly assume it was Benjamin and perhaps die of shock and sorrow. If Israel survived the shock, they knew they would listen to him saying a lot about "That is exactly what I told you would happen. Now neither of my sons are here to take control of the family." This of course would be particularly painful for the ten to hear because they too were his sons, but not by Rachel. In effect, Israel would be saying he really had only two sons.

Certainly Joseph knew that the brothers return home without Benjamin would be anything but peaceful. It fit the role that Joseph was pursuing in front of his brothers.

Genesis 44:18-34 - Judah Pleads to be Substituted for Benjamin

This paragraph is the climax of the drama. Notice the way the author begins:

> *Then Judah went up to him and said: "Please, my lord, let your servant speak a word to my lord. Do not be angry with your servant, though you are equal to Pharaoh himself." Genesis 44:18*

Again, the author begins the paragraph with the word "and." It indicates the author is giving a quick survey of events rather then a comprehensive account. Observe that it was Judah who again spoke on behalf of the brothers. The author has given us a picture of a throne room scene. A person could make a request of the king. In situations of extreme need and trauma, a person could get permission to come even closer to the king to plead for help and understanding. This would not be a casual event. If a person asked this permission unnecessarily, his life would be in danger. He was taking his life in his hands and he knew it. This is the reason he said, "And do not be angry with your servant, though you are equal to Pharaoh himself."

Judah requested this privilege by saying, "Please, my lord, let your servant speak a word to my lord." In the Hebrew it is more graphic, "O my lord, let your servant speak a word in my lord's ears..." This is the request for permission to come closer in order to make a personal request. Realizing the danger of what he was doing, Judah quickly added, "...and do not let grow your anger on your servant, for you are as Pharaoh." Already Joseph could see a change in Judah. The table below compares two Scripture verses which should give us an idea of the change Joseph observed.

GENESIS 37:26, 27	GENESIS 44:18
Judah said to his brothers, "What will we gain if we kill our brother and cover up his blood? Come, let's sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him; after all, he is our brother, our flesh and blood." His brothers agreed.	Then Judah went up to him and said: "Please, my lord, let your servant speak a word to my lord. Do not be angry with your servant, though you are equal to Pharaoh himself."

The brother who condemned Joseph to slavery to satisfy his anger and greed, now risked his life to appeal to this Egyptian ruler on behalf of his father. This is a great change.

Verse 19 through 34 are the explanation and petition that Judah made before Joseph.

> *My lord asked his servants, "Do you have a father or a brother?" And we answered, "We have an aged father, and there is a young son born to him in his old age. His brother is dead, and he is the only one of his mother's sons left, and his father loves him." Genesis 44:19, 20*

Observe that Judah was polite and spoke appropriately, despite the fact that he was under great pressure. He referred to Joseph as, "my lord."

The question naturally arises, "What does Joseph's question have to do with the idea that Benjamin was accused of the theft of Joseph's cup?" Actually, the two are unrelated events, but happen in the lives of the same two people.

Judah's words were carefully chosen. Observe that he began with Joseph's request, "My lord, asked his servants, 'Do you have a father or a brother?'" Joseph would remember that he had asked this question. Beginning at this point achieved one other thing, it was a way of saying, "We did not just bring him here, you asked questions about the family."

Judah reported to Joseph the answer he had given to his question at their earlier meeting.. It would not be difficult for Joseph to remember the exchange that Judah was rehearsing. Joseph would know that he was telling the truth. This was very important. Judah listed five pieces of information in the report of his response:

- **"We have an aged father..."** - Judah stressed the fact that Israel was very old. This was a key point in Judah's request. Everything depended upon Joseph's awareness that their father was very old - he was frail; he could not withstand shock. He is far beyond the time when he could father another child should this one be taken from him.
- **"There is a young son born to him in his old age."** - This was to remind Joseph of Benjamin's importance to Israel. The youngest child in the family was usually doted upon by the father. He knew he would have no more children. This made the last one very special to him. Speaking of this child of Israel's old age, the Hebrew text says, "He is young." The word for young carries more meaning in Hebrew than our English word "young." The Hebrew word "kawtawn" (קָטָן) literally means "less." The youngest child in the family would have less years and less importance. In English it simply means one has lived a shorter time than his siblings.

- **"His brother is dead."** - What a situation! This was an assumption on Judah's part. Anyone who had been a slave for two years or more would certainly have died during that time. Imagine Joseph's feelings as he listened to the announcement of his apparent death. I suspect that Joseph may have had difficulty trying to keep a straight face as he listened. The mention of Joseph was crucial for two reasons:
  - ♦ He was the first son of Israel's favorite wife.
  - ♦ He was the one designated to rule the family after Israel died.
- **"He is the only one of his mother's sons left"** - It is always tragic to lose a son. It is even more tragic to lose an only son or an only remaining son. It was critically important for Judah to impress this fact on Joseph. Judah was building a case which was logical and at the same time highly emotional.
- **"His father loves him"** - The word "love" is "awhab," (אָהַב) and means to have great affection for. This is a word used to describe God's love for Israel in Isaiah 43:4. Judah has described a very intense love of a father for his son. Now, Israel loved all his children. His love for Benjamin, however, was very different. This is what Judah had to impress upon the Egyptian ruler, Joseph.

In verse twenty-one, Judah continued his presentation:

Then you said to your servants, "Bring him down to me so that I can see him for myself." Genesis 44:21

Judah continued to remind Joseph of their previous encounter. "Bring him down to me so I can see him for myself." The Hebrew text reads slightly differently - "Bring him to me and let me set my eyes on him." Joseph's instructions were firm and direct. Judah wanted Joseph to realize that they brought Benjamin to Egypt at his specific instruction. Thus they hoped put at least part of the responsibility on Joseph. That, of course, was a bit naive.

In verse twenty-two, Judah repeats the response he gave Joseph in relation to the instruction that Benjamin come with them to Egypt.

And we said to my lord, "The boy cannot leave his father; if he leaves him, his father will die." Genesis 44:22

Judah reminded Joseph that his response included two pieces of information:

- **"The boy cannot leave his father"** - The implication is that the father and son are inseparable. It was a family policy. When Joseph was the heir-apparent, Israel let him go out to the place where the brothers shepherded the family flock. The result was that Joseph never came home. Israel had only one other son by Rachel and he was not going to allow that to happen again. Therefore, Benjamin could not leave his father.
- **"If he leaves him (father), his father will die"** - Judah wanted Joseph to fully understand the implications of obedience to his instructions. In effect, Judah was saying, "you might as well have killed my father." This was very serious; it was life or death for Israel.

It was important for Judah to say this. He had to impress upon Joseph the unfortunate nature of his instructions. Only then could Judah hope to get Joseph to take some ownership for the severity of the results of his demand. That, of course, did not happen.

In verse twenty-three, Judah reported Joseph's response to the previous statement by Judah and the brothers.

> *But you told your servants, "Unless your youngest brother comes down with you, you will not see my face again." Genesis 44:23*

As his presentation continued, Judah became bolder. He reminded Joseph that he was the one who demanded that Benjamin come to Egypt. This was one more effort to impress Joseph that he was involved in the responsibility for the existing condition.

This was a futile effort on Judah's part. The fact that Joseph demanded that Benjamin come to Egypt was totally unrelated to Benjamin's conduct when he arrived. Had Benjamin really stolen the cup, it would have been his responsibility and his alone.

Judah continued his review of events in verse twenty-four:

> *When we went back to your servant my father, we told him what my lord had said." Genesis 44:24*

In this verse, Judah attempted to demonstrate, to Joseph, that they had acted responsibly in relation to his command. He instructed the brothers to bring Benjamin. The brothers took this information to Israel - the only one who could give permission for Benjamin to go. He wanted to remind Joseph that they did what they could. We should observe that Judah referred to his father as "thy servant my father." Granted, this was a polite identification, but it was more. It spoke of Israel as a servant of Joseph just as the brothers were. This too was part of Joseph's dream years before.

Judah shared Israel's response with Joseph in verse twenty-five:

> *Then our father said, "Go back and buy a little more food." Genesis 44:25*

It was as though the brothers had said nothing to Israel at all. Israel seemed to ignore their report and told them to return to Egypt for a little food. It was the impaired thinking of a frightened old man, their father, that caused the delay. He wanted Joseph to know what they went through to bring Benjamin with them. At this point, the extent of their efforts was meaningless trivia, if Benjamin was guilty.

Judah belabored the description of how hard it was to get Israel to allow Benjamin to accompany them to Egypt.

> *But we said, "We cannot go down. Only if our youngest brother is with us will we go. We cannot see the man's face unless our youngest brother is with us." Genesis 44:26*

These words express a directness with which no son was ever to speak to his father. This was the beginning of a father-son confrontation that would embarrass and humiliate any Jewish family. It was intended to convince Joseph of two things:

- How hard the brothers worked to carry out Joseph's command.
- How difficult a task that was.

We should remind ourselves of Judah's situation. He approached Joseph's seat of power at great personal risk. He and his brothers were facing either a lifetime of slavery or the

need to explain to their father, Israel, why they did not bring back their brother. Neither of these was an exciting option for them. It is thus, easier to understand if Judah was a bit calculating in this presentation.

Judah continued with his description of the exchange between Israel and his sons:

Your servant my father said to us, "You know that my wife bore me two sons. One of them went away from me, and I said, 'He has surely been torn to pieces' And I have not seen him since." Genesis 44:27, 28

These were painful words for Judah to recall. Israel spoke as though his second wife, Rachel, was his only wife. Judah and the other nine brothers were not born to Rachel. As Israel spoke, they would feel as though he did not consider them his real sons. They felt like male children in his house, but not sons.

Judah recounted the explanation Israel gave for his unwillingness to send Benjamin. This response was painfully true. It must have sent a shiver down the spines of every one of the sons. They knew something that they were afraid Israel would discover. Again, Israel presented his reasons in four simple statements:

- **His wife bare him two sons** - This sounds like a rejection of the other ten sons. That is not really the case. Israel rejected what he considered Laban's trick in giving him Leah as his wife rather than Rachel for whom he had bargained. This, however, did not make his other sons feel any better.
- **His first son, by Rachel, went out and did not return.** - He had been convinced that his son was torn in pieces by a wild animal.
- **"I have not seen him since"** - This was a cause-effect relation for Israel. The cause was, he sent his son away from his encampment. The effect was that he never saw the son again. The logic of this was, if you do not send him out, you do not lose your son.
- **Logic** - If you take my only remaining son, by Rachel, and harm comes to him, I will die of sorrow. Israel was saying that he could not bear to lose his son and heir a second time.

Again, Judah was very calculating in laying the ground-work for his request of the Egyptian ruler, Joseph. The report of this exchange was intended to accomplish two things in the mind of Joseph:

- To touch his heart of compassion
- To help Joseph see how hard the brothers had to work in order to comply with his command. Their logic was this: the difficulty of our efforts ought to count for something in the meting out of judgment. That, of course, had nothing to do with the apparent wrongdoing by Benjamin.

"If you take this one from me too and harm comes to him, you will bring my gray head down to the grave in misery." Genesis 44:29

Israel dealt with several issues at once. He was afraid Benjamin would disappear as Joseph had. This suggests, again, that he did not trust the ten sons of Leah and the two maidservants. Israel was also dealing with his own unresolved pain over the loss of his firstborn son by Rachel. It can be safely assumed that following the disappearance of Joseph, Benjamin was made the heir of the family. The loss of Benjamin would mean there was

none of Rachel's children to carry out the duties of the heir. That would leave the control of the family to one of the ten sons. Israel did not trust any of them.

Israel's statement about sorrow may seem to be extreme. It may, in fact, be an understatement.

In verse thirty, Judah prepared to make his strong closing statement:

> *So now, if the boy is not with us when I go back to your servant my father and if my father, whose life is closely bound up with the boy's life, sees that the boy isn't there, he will die. Your servants will bring the gray head of our father down to the grave in sorrow. Genesis 44:30, 31*

These verses are a projection of what will happen when they return without the boy. Judah identifies two consequences the brothers would certainly encounter if they returned without Benjamin:

- **Israel would die** - The shock would be too great for him. The brothers would not even have the opportunity to explain what had happened. Israel could tell from a distance that one was missing and he would die of shock and despair.
- Though the brothers did not mention it, there were undesirable consequences if a father died under these conditions. They feared he would pronounce a curse on them and it would devastate the lives of each brother as long as they lived. Israel's dying thoughts of his sons would be of their betrayal of him and the destruction of the heir he had appointed over his house. This would be like accusing them of murder and betrayal. This is a tragic frame of mind for a father to take to his grave.
- They would bear the guilt of the death of their father as long as they lived.

Judah apparently hoped to enlist some understanding on the part of Joseph, of just how difficult it was for both Israel and his sons. It was important that Joseph realize just how diligently the brothers worked to carry out his instructions.

Again, however, if Benjamin were guilty, then there was no connection between how hard the brothers had worked and the indiscretion it appeared that Benjamin had done.

In verse thirty-two we get down to one of the major concerns of Judah in this risky presentation:

> *Your servant guaranteed the boy's safety to my father. I said, "If I do not bring him back to you, I will bear the blame before you, my father, all my life!" Genesis 44:32*

The Hebrews text for this verse begins with the word "for." This suggests that Judah was about to give a reason for his request. Judah began his explanation by stating he had guaranteed Benjamin's safety. He then disclosed the terms of his guarantee - "If I do not bring him back to you, I will bear the blame before you, my father, all my life." Earlier, we discussed the implications of this guarantee. With this devastating explanation, Judah concluded his presentation.

In verse thirty-three, Judah will make the appeal for which he requested permission to approach the throne and for which he gave the previous explanation.

Now then, please let your servant remain here as my lord's slave in place of the boy, and let the boy return with his brothers. Genesis 44:33

This appears to be a totally new experience for Judah. As we observed earlier, in Genesis 37:27, his previous outlook and actions were totally different. The following table should be of help in identifying this fact.

Come, let's sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him; after all, he is our brother, our own flesh and blood." His brothers agreed. Genesis 37:27	Now then, please let your servant remain here as my lord's slave in place of the boy, and let the boy return with his brothers. Genesis 44:33

In Genesis 37:27, Judah was unconcerned about what his actions would to do his brother, Joseph. His major concern was that he had found a way to make some extra money. This was a cold, callous outlook on life. Now, in Joseph's presence, Judah pleads for an opportunity to place himself in slavery for life in order to spare his younger half-brother the same plight and protect his father from a sorrowful death.

This was the petition Judah wanted to plead before the Egyptian ruler, Joseph. This was a shocking, amazing transformation in Judah. The closing sentence of the petition gives an insight into just how desperately Judah wanted Joseph to grant his petition. This was a very emotional statement. He portrays it as an impossible situation. In his final words, Judah begs Joseph not to force him to see the misery that will come upon his father. It is interesting, but not accidental, that the one who was eager to send his innocent brother into slavery was now presenting himself for a voluntary life of slavery.

In Genesis 44:34, the author quotes Judah's final statement:

"*How can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me? No! Do not let me see the misery that would come upon my father." Genesis 44:34*

The Hebrew text, for this verse, appropriately begins with the word "for." This suggests a final explanation. If you state Judah's message in a positive form, he said, "I cannot go back to my father without my brother. If I do, I can expect to see my father destroyed." The reverence and respect for the elderly would not permit Judah to do this. This was true in Egypt as well as in Israel. Judah was simply reminding Joseph of the impossibility of the situation this turn-of-events had created. This should trigger understanding and compassion in any son. That is exactly what Judah hoped to accomplish.

Conclusion

We need to reflect upon the message of this chapter. The story of Joseph is a study in one's dealings with abuse. Had Joseph intended to take revenge against his brothers, chapter 44 would read differently. This fact would astonish most people. Many see, "an eye for an eye," as a normal reaction. It is certainly common thinking. Joseph has given us a hint, in this chapter, concerning what to expect. Why the games? It appears it was to remind the brothers of just how serious their evil deeds had been.

Honest forgiveness is rare, but real. In this chapter, we see the initial steps of that beautiful process.

Judah surprises us in this chapter. Some will see no change in him at all. They would say that he had no other choice, he just did what he had to do. Not so! When Joseph was faced with death, Judah made a suggestion, but it had several characteristics:

- It benefited him financially. He was looking out for himself.
- He took no risk to help the brother who would one day rule the family.
- He had no concern for the effect their actions would have on Israel.
- He was prepared to make no sacrifice to benefit his brother in any way.

In chapter 44, each of these characteristics was reversed. For whatever reason, he was a changed man. There is a hint concerning the reason behind this change. At great risk, he spoke intimately with Joseph and admitted his guilt before God. He realized, perhaps for the first time, the extent of his error. This is the story of a man who was changed when he realized the extent of his wrong. People can be changed. Evil can be stopped. This is a vital message for our time.

God is mentioned only once in the chapter, and then by Judah in his confession. Thinking that Benjamin had stolen the cup, Judah said, "God has uncovered your servants' guilt." Judah said in effect, " No evil can ultimately be hidden from God." This is a characteristic of God we do well to remember today.

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 21

JOSEPH REVEALED HIMSELF: INVITED FAMILY TO GOSHEN

GENESIS 45:1 - 28

1. In Genesis chapter 45, there are three paragraphs. On the table which follows, write a brief summary, of seven words or less, for each paragraph.

45:1-15	
45:16-20	
45:21-28	

2. In Genesis 45:1-15, Joseph identified himself to his brothers.
   a. Verse one is a dramatic, emotional outburst.
      (1). Imagine yourself as Joseph. What would you feel in this situation?
      (2). Imagine yourself as one of the ten brothers. How would you respond to this emotional experience? Why would you respond in this way?
   b. In Genesis 45:2, you get a glimpse of just how emotional the scene was. What does the verse tell you?
   c. In Genesis 45:3, Joseph identified himself.
      (1). Compare Genesis 44:31 with 45:3. What questions come to mind?
      (2). Put yourself into the scene as one of the ten brothers. What do you discover?
   d. In Genesis 45:4, Joseph identified himself for the second time.
      (1). Why was it necessary?
      (2). Why would he want them to come close to him?
      (3). What is added by Joseph saying of himself, "...the one you sold into Egypt"?
   e. In Genesis 45:5, Joseph made a perplexing statement.
      (1). What questions are raised in your mind by this verse?
      (2). How would you answer these questions?
   f. In Genesis 45:6, Joseph made a prophetic statement about the balance of the famine. How does this fit in with what Joseph was saying in 45:5 and 45:7?
   g. In Genesis 45:7, Joseph repeated the theme of his talk with his brothers.
      (1). What was the theme?
      (2). What does it accomplish?
   h. In Genesis 45:8, Joseph described his relationship with the Pharaoh.
      (1). How does Joseph describe that relationship?
      (2). Make a comparison of Joseph's statements in 45:5; 45:7; and 45:8. What did you learn?
      (3). What questions do these statements raise?
      (4). What answers can you give?
   i. In Genesis 45:9, Joseph instructed his brothers to carry a message to his father.
      (1). What messages did Joseph send to Jacob?
      (2). Why were these particular messages important?

(3). Why did he place an emphasis on immediacy?

j. In Genesis 45:10, Joseph identified one reason why they were to live in Goshen. What other reasons come to mind?

k. In Genesis 45:11, Joseph concludes his promise.
   (1). What promise did he make?
   (2). What reason did he give for this?
   (3). What did you learn from these discoveries?

l. In Genesis 45:12, Joseph changed the subject.
   (1). What is the issue in this verse?
   (2). What two suggestions does he make to alleviate the problem involved?

m. In Genesis 45:13, Joseph instructed his brothers to give his father specific messages.
   (1). What messages did Joseph send to his father?
   (2). Why were these messages important?
   (3). Joseph talked about "everything you have seen." What would that include?

n. In Genesis 45:14, the author described the meeting of Joseph with his full-brother Benjamin. What significance can you associate with Joseph's actions?

o. In Genesis 45:15, the author reported that after Joseph kissed each brother, they talked with him.
   (1). What is the significance of Joseph kissing each brother?
   (2). What does this have to do with the fact that they talked with him afterwards?

p. As you reflect back on Joseph's actions with his brothers, what can you discover concerning Joseph's forgiveness of his brothers?

3. In Genesis 45:16-20, Pharaoh invited Joseph's family to live in Goshen.
   a. Read Genesis 45:16 carefully.
      (1). What does it tell you?
      (2). The verse begins, "When the news reached Pharaoh's palace." What does this tell you?
   b. In Genesis 45:17, Pharaoh gave Joseph instructions concerning the locating of his family in Goshen.
      (1). Read the verse and reflect upon it.
      (2). What does this reflection tell us about Pharaoh?
      (3). What does this reflection tell us about Joseph?
   c. In Genesis 45:18, Pharaoh made another generous offer.
      (1). What was the offer?
      (2). What makes it so generous?
      (3). What does this tell us?
   d. In Genesis 45:19, 20, Pharaoh instructed Joseph to make a still more generous offer to his family.
      (1). What was the offer?
      (2). Why would Pharaoh instruct them not to worry about their belongings?
      (3). What does this new offer tell us?

4. In Genesis 45:21 - 28, Israel agreed to go to visit Joseph.
   a. In Genesis 45:21, there are two foci.

(1). What are these foci?
(2). What is the significance of each one?

b. In Genesis 45:22, Joseph gave presents to his brothers.
(1). What did Joseph give them?
(2). Why did the brothers need these?
(3). Compare the gift to Benjamin with those to the other brothers. What does this tell you?

c. In Genesis 45:23, Joseph gave the brothers gifts to give Jacob.
(1). What were the gifts?
(2). The author carefully mentioned male and female donkeys. Why was this significant?

d. In Genesis 45:24, Joseph sent his brothers on their way.
(1). What does this mean?
(2). Why did he instruct them not to quarrel on the trip?

e. In Genesis 45:25, the author described the long, hot trip from Egypt to Canaan.
(1). What does this brief sentence tell us.
(2). Jacob's name had been changed to "Israel." In this verse, he is called "Jacob" again. What reason, if any, can you find for this?

f. In Genesis 45:26, the 11 sons told Jacob about Joseph.
(1). What did the sons tell Jacob about Joseph?
(2). Put yourself in the sons' position. Record your thoughts and feelings.
(3). Put yourself in Jacob's position. What would you think and feel when this was disclosed?

g. In Genesis 45:27, the author describes Jacob's reaction.
(1). What was that reaction?
(2). What helped him to come to that conclusion?

h. In Genesis 45:28, Jacob responded to the report of his sons.
(1). What was his response?
(2). What did Jacob mean when he said, "before I die."
(3). In your own words, identify Jacob's thoughts and feelings about what happened.

5. As you review this chapter, think carefully about what happened.
a. What is the message of the chapter?
b. In what way will your walk with God be different because of these discoveries?

LESSON 21: GENESIS 45:1 - 28

JOSEPH REVEALED HIMSELF; INVITED FAMILY TO GOSHEN

Introduction

In Genesis chapter 45, there are three paragraphs. A brief summary of the content of each paragraph appears on the table which follows:

45:1-15	Joseph Revealed Himself to His Brothers
45:16-20	Pharaoh's Command: "Come to Goshen."
45:21-28	Israel Agrees to Go to Goshen

Genesis 45:1-15 - Joseph Revealed Himself to His Brothers

The first verse of this chapter was shocking:

> *Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all his attendants, and he cried out, "Have everyone leave my presence!" So there was no one with Joseph when he made himself known to his brothers. Genesis 45:1*

This was the emotional climax of the story of Joseph, chapters 37 - 50. There is ultimate frustration in this verse. Several feelings and emotions demanded expression at the same time.

Joseph was the practical ruler of Egypt. He was expected to be a person of total control. Deep, very human emotions demanded expression. This seriously challenged his carefully honed image in the eyes of the people in Egypt. All the repressed feelings of abuse, rejection, loneliness and concern rushed into his mind like an ocean wave crashing against the beach.

The need to confront his own feelings about the way these men had treated him must have flooded his mind. Whether he would entertain the thought or not, he had to deal with the irony of the contrast between his own position of power and success and the helplessness of his brothers who had sold him into slavery.

Joseph just saw evidence of thinking and behavior, on the part of Judah, which was totally different from what he had experienced previously. Judah had compassion for Israel and concern for his half-brother, Benjamin.

For more than a decade, Joseph hadn't seen his real brother. Now he could actually see him standing in his reception hall. The joy and sorrow, the tragedy and affirmation, the fear and anticipation, the anger and forgiveness all erupted at once within this carefully controlled ruler of Egypt.

Joseph dealt with this emotional explosion by sending all the Egyptians out of the room. The author expressed the violent emotion in this way, "Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all his attendants, and he cried out," The word "control" is "awphak" (אָפַק) and means to contain, to restrain, to control. The power of his emotions was greater than the force of his emotional control.

Put yourself in the place of the brother's. You are a foreigner and one of the brothers was caught in the apparent theft of the rulers divining cup. At great risk, you have appealed for permission to take the place of the accused brother. Now the ruler of Egypt is obviously emotionally out of control because of you. This has to be a time of indescribable tension and fear. No words could describe the possible tragedies that would race through your mind. These men were totally alone and absolutely vulnerable before an emotionally distraught ruler whose authority could not be challenged. In this charged situation, Joseph identified himself to his brothers.

Interestingly, the author made no reference to the initial response of the brothers. Was it beyond description? Was it too intense to believe? We do not know.

Though the author does not identify the response of the brothers, Joseph's response was clearly stated:

> *And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard him, and Pharaoh's household heard about it. Genesis 45:2*

The Hebrew text does not says , "Pharaoh's household heard about it." This gives the idea that servant gossip about this episode soon reached the palace of Pharaoh. The Hebrew text rather says, "The Egyptians heard and the house of Pharaoh heard..." This suggests how far away the weeping could be heard.

As we reported earlier, certainly no one had heard Joseph cry before. That changed drastically. This verse gives two basic pieces of information:

- Joseph wept out loud.
- People outside the house could hear him

The verse was written in such a way as to give an impression of how loudly Joseph cried. Part of the grandeur of an official residence is the great distance which separates it from other buildings. When that building is the Egyptian palace, it is doubly true. If Joseph's crying could be heard by the Egyptians - through the very thick walls and across the great distance - it had to be very loud. If, on the other hand, they could hear the crying all the way to Pharaoh's household, it had to be louder than any crying they had ever heard. We must remember that any crying they heard would be loud enough to make us extremely uncomfortable. This had to be like nothing they had ever heard.

Verse three details what Joseph said at the end of verse one:

> *Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph! Is my father still living?" But his brothers were not able to answer him, because they were terrified at his presence. Genesis 45:3*

Verse three demonstrates a very common practice of the author - he sometimes stated a fact in general form and then spelled out exactly what that meant. Verse one says Joseph made himself known to his brothers. Verse three tells us what he said.

Observe the scene. This Egyptian ruler just had an experience of uncontrolled emotional release. It was so loud that it could be heard several blocks away. Now the ten brothers, foreigners were all alone with him in his house. If that was not frightening enough, his next statement would be, "I am Joseph." With this statement, all of their extreme fear had to turn to absolute terror. Their minds had to be flooded with the guilty memories of what they had done to him. It would be vivid.

- They had mocked and humiliated him for three reasons:
  - ♦ He was their much younger brother
  - ♦ Despite the fact that he was their younger brother, Jacob made him the heir of his household. They felt that this was unfair.
  - ♦ He was the son of that other wife, not their mother.
- They put him in a pit - cistern - to die of dehydration and starvation.
- They removed him from the cistern only because it would be possible to sell him into the certain death of slavery.

Any one of these would conjure up images of impending torturous death when they discovered that the ruler of Egypt was their brother. It is possible that the 11 brothers never heard Joseph's question about his father. There is no record of any verbal response to Joseph's inquiry. In is unthinkable that they would just ignore a question from such an important person.

It is interesting that Joseph asked the question, "Is my father still living?" Just six verses previous to this, Genesis 44:31, Judah talked about Israel as being alive. This was the main reason he gave for not being able to return with Benjamin. There may be several possibilities:

- Joseph may have thought that because they were so frightened they had been less than candid in Judah's previous statement about Israel.
- It is possible that Joseph hoped they might be able to give him more information about his father.

We are dealing with conjecture, but it seems that the first suggestion has the greater merit.

In this verse, the author reported the brothers response to Joseph's announcement, "... his brothers were not able to answer him." The word translated "answer" is "awnah" (עָנָה) and can be translated, "...his brothers were unable to speak." I believe this translation of the word is faithful to the flow of the story. The ten men were so stunned and frightened that they were speechless.

The author also said, "They were troubled at his presence." The word "troubled" can also be translated "terrified." It appears that this was exactly their condition. They were completely terrorized. The brothers were speechless and appeared disoriented.

If the announcement of Genesis 45:3 were not terrifying enough, now Joseph pushed them beyond their emotional boundaries, when he said:

> *"Come close to me." When they had done so, he said, "I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt!" Genesis 45:4*

This frightening instruction was doubly threatening. A ruler usually had one of two purposes in mind when he invited someone to approach his throne or official chair.

- He could be preparing to grant a special request for which the beneficiary had requested permission to approach the throne.
- He could be preparing to deny the special request and punish the person for wasting his time with absurd pleas.

Both of these were possible, but the former is far more likely, in my opinion. The brothers, however, were too frightened to realize this distinct possibility. Whatever their feelings and fears, they did as Joseph instructed them.

Picture yourself as Judah. You suggested that you and the nine brothers sell Joseph into slavery and it was done. You assumed that he was dead. Suddenly this powerful, emotional ruler of Egypt tells you that he is Joseph. If that isn't enough, he instructs you to come closer to his throne. That would be the last place you would want to be. Then he spoke those thundering words, "I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt." It would be a miracle if he could control his emotions or his trembling extremities. The ability to speak, in this condition, would be totally out of the question. Every possible emotion would be strained to the breaking point.

Did Joseph sense the need to calm his brother's fears and put them at ease? We do not know, but it seems likely. Look carefully at the way Joseph attempted to calm them. He said:

> *"And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you." Genesis 45:5*

"Now, do not be distressed..." The word "distressed" is "atsah" (עָצַב) which means to glow with fury, to be incensed with yourself beyond control. This is interesting. The author described some unbelievable levels of fear. Joseph, however, urged them not to be uncontrollably angry with themselves because they had sold him into slavery. Notice that there are two ideas being treated in this verse:

- Joseph was being frank and direct with them. He did not pretend that they were not responsible for his being in the cistern or sold into slavery. He dealt with it in direct terms. "I am the one you sold into slavery."
- Joseph, however, did not want to bludgeon his brothers with the evidence of their sin against him. He rather urged them not to be burning with anger against themselves because of what they had done.

Notice that Joseph said, "It was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you." Joseph placed a positive perspective on what had happened. He claimed God had done this to save lives. If, in fact, God did this, then it is a monumental expression of mercy. The people whose lives were saved were far from obedient people of God. Still, a way was opened to preserve their lives.

There is a Godly quality expressed in this verse - mercy in the midst of declared responsibility. The author reported Joseph's words in a somewhat casual manner, but it was anything but that. How seldom have we experienced this kind of mercy at the hands of others? How often have others received it from us?

Joseph continued by expressing the cause for his merciful stance, "Because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you." This statement is fraught with questions. These are questions that we must confront. We will come to grips with these issues more clearly a bit later in our study. We will attempt to answer them at that time.

In verse six, Joseph continued his explanation:

> *"For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will not be plowing and reaping." Genesis 45:6*

In this verse, Joseph attempted to show just how threatening the food situation had become. He reported that there had been a famine for two years. A famine is always a frightening experience. There have been many famines that were much longer than two years. There is a hint as to just how severe this famine was. In two years, Israel and his family were completely without food. It was not the two years that was frightening. It was the fact that there were still five years to go. This gives two insights:

- The famine would last two and a half times as long as it had so far.
- There is, however, an accumulative effect to famine. It doesn't just mean that it will be this bad for five more years. It will be worse. First there is not enough water to grow crops. This had an affect upon the animals from which the Jews got much of their nourishment. This leads to a decline in the health conditions of the human population. People will die of thirst, dehydration, malnutrition and general bodily function failure.

In verse seven, Joseph repeated his theme - "God sent me ahead of me."

"But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance." Genesis 45:7

In our English text, the verse begins with the word "but." In the Hebrew text, however, the word is "and." It reflects the kind of reporting the author has used. In this instance, the word "and" seems to have the added force of showing the divine response to the tragic conditions previously described.

One of the ironies of grace is the way God chooses to bless those whom ungodly men curse. His brothers vindictively sold Joseph as a slave. This was a consignment to nothingness. God placed Joseph in the second most powerful position in the world. He guided the concerns of the Pharaoh and controlled the entire nation of Egypt. Describing what God had done, Joseph said,

"So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt." Genesis 45:8

Joseph stressed again that it was God who sent him, not his angry brothers. Joseph ascribed all of the events and their consequences to the actions of God. He emphasized that God had done three things in his life:

- It was God who made him a "**father**" to Pharaoh. The word "father" is used in a figurative sense. It was used to identify a "patron," one who gave guidance and counsel to one less versed in the solution of a particular problem.
- God had made him "**lord**" over Pharaoh's household. The word "lord" is "awdone" (אָדוֹן) and means sovereign, controller, master. It is the name by which slaves refer to their master. It was also a very common name for God. Every servant in Pharaoh's household was considered Joseph's servant. He did not mean that he had replaced the Pharaoh. He rather meant that he had control of the whole land in order to preserve the nation from extinction during the famine.
- God made Joseph the "**ruler**" of all Egypt. The word "ruler is "mawshal" (מָשַׁל) and means to have dominion, to rule, to reign, to have power. In effect, this title suggests that though he was not the Pharaoh, Joseph essentially controlled most everything that happened in the land of Egypt.

As we have seen before, the author of Genesis uses the names for God in specific ways that are in parallel with the context in which it is used. In verse eight, Joseph spoke of God as "the God" and used the name "Elohim" to identify his great mercy, even when dealing with tragic circumstances.

Compare Joseph's statement in Genesis 45:5 with those in 45:7, 8.

Genesis 45:5	Genesis 45:7	Genesis 45:8
And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. Genesis 45:5	But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. Genesis 45:7	So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt. Genesis 45:8

One can make several observations concerning these statements:

- All three statements express the fact that God sent Joseph. It was not his brothers. It was not an accident of history.
- In Genesis 45:5, Joseph expressed concern over his brother's frightened response to his disclosure. This does not appear in 45:7 or 8.
- In 45:7 Joseph stressed the fact that the purpose of the divine action was to preserve life.
- In 45:5, Joseph stated that he was sent to save lives.
- In 45:7, He enlarged on the meaning of the idea that God sent him to save lives. He said, "to preserve a remnant...to save your lives by a great deliverance." God's design was much broader than just an effort to preserve 11 men and their families. He was protecting their lineage, to keep his covenant with Abraham concerning his lineage. Joseph demonstrated, again, that God was the great deliverer.

Joseph used the repetition of similar statements for purposes of strong emphasis. He wanted them to remember that God had performed a remarkable act of mercy. As was so often the case, two or three presentations of a truth or statement served well for purposes of emphasis. They also serve to establish truth.

Earlier we indicated that it would be necessary to discuss the significance of Joseph's claim that God sent him to Egypt, not his brothers. This is a good point at which to examine these issues:

- **Was it a good thing that Joseph was sold as a slave?** It was not good that Joseph was sold as a slave. It is always a tragedy when any individual is treated as property, rather than as one created in the image of God. Though it was not a good thing that Joseph was sold as a slave, one must add that some very good, positive things happened as an end result of this situation.
- **Was it a good thing that Joseph was punished by Potiphar for a crime he did not commit?** It can never be considered a good thing when the innocent are

punished for a crime they did not commit. Again, we must remind ourselves that this tragedy made it possible for some exceptionally good things to take place later on.

- **It was Judah, not God, who recommended to the nine brothers that Joseph be sold as a slave**. **How could Joseph say that it was God?** Indeed, it was Judah who spoke the words that united the brothers in selling Joseph as a slave. The total experience differs from the initial experience. If you look at the initial experience, all that you see is that each brother received two or three dollars, but Joseph received a sentence of heartbreak and rejection. There was nothing in what they did that helped Joseph or ultimately helped them. If, on the other hand, you look at the total experience, you have a different view. The brothers did a terrible thing. At the same time, however, something/Someone else was at work. It appears that Joseph understood quite clearly. God took the terrible deed the brothers intended to devastate Joseph and used it to accomplish something good in Joseph's life and mercifully preserved those bent on doing a dastardly deed. In this sense, Joseph was right; God sent him ahead of his brothers. God showed His greatness NOT by preventing the brothers from selling Joseph, but by turning the brother's evil deed into a blessing. God demonstrated His sovereign power over people, kings and evil powers.
- **Would God punish the innocent in order to show kindness to the guilty?** There is no recorded experience in Scripture where God punished the innocent in order to show kindness to the guilty. In the cross, God allowed the innocent Messiah to suffer in order that all of us guilty sinners might receive His mercy and grace. In the story of Job, God did not do violence to Job, but He **allowed** Job to suffer severely in order to demonstrate the greatness of His holy power. Because God is both holy and sovereign, it is appropriate for Him to put us to the test in such a way.
- **What the brothers did was evil. Can we, with integrity, say God did that?** There is no doubt the brother's actions were evil and contemptible. It is NOT that God did an evil thing. It is that God took the evil that greedy and jealous men contrived and used it for His glory; used it to honor the abused innocent and to show mercy to the perpetrators. This is what the Biblical writers meant when they wrote of "the Lord God," the merciful judge.
- **In view of the ungodly actions of Judah and his brothers, how can Joseph claim that God sent him there?**

  The sovereign power of God was not demonstrated in His forbidding the brothers from sending Joseph into the certain death of slavery. God showed His sovereign power by taking their terrible crime and using it for his glory, the defense of the innocent and the protection of even the guilty.

Having finished his explanation, Joseph now moved to an equally important consideration, his father:

> *"Now hurry back to my father and say to him, 'This is what your son Joseph says: God has made me lord of all Egypt. Come down to me; don't delay.'" Genesis 45:9*

In the English text, the verse begins with the word "now." The Hebrew text, however, begins with the words, "Hurry back..." The English text has captured the sense of Joseph's words. The word "now" indicates that there is a change in the direction of the conversation. There is an urgency in Joseph's voice when he said, "Now hurry back to my father and say to him..." Joseph's interest for speed had at least two concerns:

- He was concerned for his father's worry over Benjamin. The sooner they arrived in Canaan, the sooner Israel would stop worrying.
- It seems certain that Joseph was eager to see his father after nearly two decades of separation.

In the Hebrew text it reads, "Hurry and go up to my father." We know that people usually refer to the North as "up," and to the South as "down." In a literal sense, however, most of Egypt was lower, closer to sea level than the hill country where Israel and his family lived.

Joseph spoke carefully when he said, "Say to him, this is what your son Joseph says..." The Hebrew text says, "So says your son Joseph..." The words, "so says," were the usual formula with which prophetic statements were introduced. In one sense this is really a prophetic statement.

Joseph continued describing his plans for his family

> *"You shall live in the region of Goshen and be near me – you, your children and grandchildren, your flocks and herds, and all you have." Genesis 45:10*

We must consider carefully the possible reasons both Pharaoh and Joseph chose to give Joseph's family a place to live in Goshen. These are some of the considerations:

Even today, Goshen is the very best land in all Egypt. This would be a very special gift under normal considerations. Remember this is a time of draught. At this time there was little difference between Goshen and the rest of the country in terms of the ability to grow crops or grass for their herds. Though it was poor, Goshen was better for their flocks than any other part of the country.

It appears Joseph was looking beyond the years of draught to times when Goshen would again be far better than all the rest of Egypt.

The ever present animosity between the Egyptians and the Jews was a concern. There were several reasons for these bad feelings. One of them had to do with the fact that the Egyptians were idolatrous people. Israel was to stay away from such people as much as possible. Living in Goshen made this a distinct possibility. In the land of Goshen, there would be more distance between Jacob and his family and their neighbors.

It was close to where Joseph lived. The family probably lived near Rameses. Joseph, however, probably lived in Memphis which was more than 70 miles away. Joseph wanted to spend time with his father and the family. This was possible if they lived near Rameses. It would be impossible if they still lived in Canaan. The wording of verse ten makes it clear that Joseph would give them a very large area in which to live. The size of their herds would require several square miles for grazing.

A question arises as we consider the next verse:

"I will provide for you there, because five years of famine are still to come. Otherwise you and your household and all who belong to you will become destitute." Genesis 45:11

Jacob and his family brought their herds, their source of food, when they came to Goshen. In verse 11, however, Joseph was talking about providing everything that they needed. The way Joseph spoke made it clear he would take care of all their needs during the entirety of the famine. With this in mind, and in view of the shortage of grazing, why would Jacob and the family need the huge herds they had accumulated? There are a couple of reasons:

- The animals were the repository of the wealth of Jacob. They would do whatever possible to maintain the wealth they had accumulated. Jews did not really trust Egyptians. If anything happened to the gift Joseph offered, then they still had their flocks to depend on.
- Jacob and his family were herdsmen. They loved to care for the sheep. It was the place where they gained their identity and purpose in life.

The closing sentence in verse 11 gives an impression of just how desperate conditions were - "otherwise you and your household and all who belong to you will become destitute." The word "destitute" is "yarash" (יָרַשׁ) and means to be impoverished, to be disinherited, to be driven out. Things were so bad that without Joseph's total care of the whole family, they would experience abject poverty.

Verse 12 takes a different turn:

"You can see for yourselves, and so can my brother Benjamin, that it is really I who am speaking to you." Genesis 45:12

Joseph's statement gives us reason to believe that the brothers might have had some trouble believing Joseph's invitation and promise. The ruler's focus was on the fact that he had spoken these promises himself. He could have sent a steward to tell them. This would not have made it as binding upon him as his own words. Unlike more modern times, if a ruler gave his personal word, it was as good as accomplished. Joseph was pointing to this fact by his statement in verse 12.

He gave them a second reason to trust him. The ten brothers could have a difficult time believing Joseph wanted to give them such a gift when they had tried so hard to destroy him. First, he gave them his word, which should have been enough. Then he pointed out a fact the ten brothers might have overlooked. Benjamin was also a recipient of this promise and invitation. There were two things which were different in his case:

- He was Joseph's full brother. The animosity and separation Joseph shared with the ten brothers were not true for him.
- Benjamin was not party to the attempt by the ten brothers, to do away with Joseph.

Joseph's point was that none of the things that caused the ten to be cautious in their trust of Joseph's invitation were true for Benjamin. Nevertheless, the same things Joseph offered and promised the ten were offered both to Benjamin and to Jacob. This should have been sufficient evidence to convince the brothers.

In the next verse, Joseph continued his instructions to his brothers.

"Tell my father about all the honor accorded me in Egypt and about everything you have seen. And bring my father down here quickly." Genesis 45:13

He instructed his brothers to tell Israel two things:

- "About all the honor accorded me in Egypt."
- "About everything you have seen."

The question immediately arises, "Why would Joseph want them to tell this to Israel?" There are many possibilities, but two come to mind:

- It could be simply his pride.
- It could be his attempt to give Israel additional reasons to believe the difficult story the brothers would have to tell him.

The text does not say so, but the latter seems more reasonable to me.

Notice that Joseph said, "Tell my father about all the glory accorded to me in Egypt." The word "glory" is "kawbode" (כָּבוֹד) and means literally "to be heavy," "to be burdensome." Only later did it take on the idea of being "wealthy," to be powerful," "glorious," and "stately." It is to be honored by the bounty showered upon you. This was especially impressive since this was in Egypt, where Jews were despised.

Joseph does not explain what he meant by "everything you have seen." It seems safe to assume that this would include several factors:

- The power he exercised in Pharaoh's court.
- The royal apparel and symbols of power with which he was adorned.
- The grandeur and magnificence of his palace.
- The total authority he exercised in the land and over his servants.

It seems doubtful that Joseph was displeased that these symbols of success and power were his. On the other hand, neither is there any reason to believe that these considerations caused him a problem of pride.

Joseph concluded his instructions to his brothers by stressing the urgency to bring his father quickly. This repetition conveys intense urgency. Joseph was eager to see his father, Israel.

There is a very emotional scene in the following verse:

Then he threw his arms around his brother Benjamin and wept, and Benjamin embraced him, weeping. Genesis 45:14

Why would Joseph choose to put his arms around Benjamin and weep? Why not the eldest son, Reuben, or the spokesman Judah? All 11 men were Joseph's brothers, but only Benjamin had the same mother Rachel. Joseph was quite honest about the depth of relationship he shared with his half-brothers.

There is another factor. Among the brothers, only Benjamin was not involved in selling Joseph into slavery. Everyone would assume that Joseph would have no animosity toward him. Thus it would be safer for the brothers if Joseph started these symbolic events with his full brother.

There was significance in what Joseph did. He did two symbolic things:

- He threw his arms around his brother, Benjamin. Today when diplomats of the Middle East greet each other at the airport, they put their arms around each other.

This is a symbol of trust. When you put your arms around someone, you are vulnerable to them. Thus, this was only done when safety was certain.

- Joseph wept on Benjamin's neck. You find this same scenario in at least three other places in the Scriptures:
  Genesis 33:4 - When Esau met Jacob
  Genesis 46:29 - When Joseph met his father, Israel.
  Acts 20:39 - When Paul was leaving Ephesus.

There is a common thread running through these passages. In each instance, this was the parting or reunion of people who were eager to see each other or deeply saddened at the anticipation of parting. This should have given the other ten brothers a clue concerning Joseph's feelings and intentions. I could understand thoroughly if it did not.

Observe, also, that the author gave us a picture of Benjamin's response. He said, "...Benjamin embraced him weeping." The Hebrew text simply says that Benjamin wept upon his brother's neck. This, too, was a symbolic act. When Benjamin wept on Joseph's neck, it tells us that he trusted Joseph. The word "wept," which was used twice in the verse, suggests bitter weeping, similar to their wailing for the dead.

Verse 15 is a miraculous event.

> *And he kissed all his brothers and wept over them. Afterward his brothers talked with him. Genesis 45:15*

When Joseph kissed his brothers and wept violently over them, he signaled two things:

- He was treating them exactly as he had treated his full-brother Benjamin. If there were still fears, and there probably were, this should have helped to calm them.
- The kiss was a symbol of forgiveness. This was the final symbol to help the brothers to relax. They never kissed anyone with whom they held a grudge.

Observe that the author immediately said, "Afterward his brothers talked with him." You will remember earlier we mentioned that Jews had four ways to symbolize their forgiveness for each other:

- Take the alienated person into your home.
- Eat with the alienated individual.
- Share your salt with the alienated individual. This would take place at the meal.
- Kiss the one you formerly mistrusted.

In this chapter, Joseph used each of these symbols to assure his brothers that they were no longer alienated from him. It is not surprising that they were finally able to speak to Joseph following these gestures. What can one say at this point? Such forgiveness was shocking to discover and impossible to understand in that day as well as our own. Joseph's concept of who God is and how He works enabled him to do the impossible - to forgive his brothers without reservation. There is no way to imagine the emotions and thinking of the brothers. They realized that they were guilty of a terrible crime. Under most circumstances, an offended powerful brother would have killed them. Joseph forgave them.

- It seems there had to be a strong sense of relief that they were not killed.

- It seems there had to be a great sense of confusion. This was a culture where offended parties, family or not, dealt with the offender in terms of an "eye for an eye." They had to ask, "Why would he do this?"

The silence of the brothers, up to this point, had to express just how frightened they were.

Genesis 45:16-20 - Pharaoh's Command: Come To Goshen

The scene shifts in this paragraph.

When the news reached Pharaoh's palace that Joseph's brothers had come, Pharaoh and all his officials were pleased. Genesis 45:16

The author reported an interesting phenomenon when he said, "When the news reached Pharaoh's palace that Joseph's brothers had come..." Every palace was served by slaves. The gossip line between the slaves of different segments of governments was flawless. This was the way leaders kept abreast of events within the capital. Careful leaders even used this gossip line to manipulate events within the court. It was the functioning of this system that apprised Pharaoh that Joseph's brothers had come.

The fact that Pharaoh and his officials were pleased with this news tells us something about the relationship of Joseph with other officials in the government. One cannot assume that they were just generous. It has to suggest that though the Egyptians generally despised Jews, they really appreciated Joseph because of the way he engineered the preservation of food for the present time of famine.

This gives us another piece of information. The slavery gossip line takes time. The full details probably could not have traveled through Pharaoh's court before the following day. We tend to think of this whole series of events taking place in one day. It probably took longer.

When this information came to the attention of Pharaoh, he acted:

Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Tell your brothers, 'Do this: Load your animals and return to the land of Canaan, and bring your father and your families back to me. I will give you the best of the land of Egypt and you can enjoy the fat of the land.'" Genesis 45:17

This was given in the form of a royal command. It is interesting that the Pharaoh promised the brothers the same area that Joseph had promised. This was the very best land in all Egypt. It tells us just how much Pharaoh appreciated Joseph and his work. Did Pharaoh suggest "the best land of Egypt" on his own accord or did he learn that this is what Joseph had in mind? The text is silent at this point. Pharaoh may have heard of Joseph's promise, but that would not be binding upon him. I suspect whether he heard of Joseph's idea or not it reflects what he wanted to do and his appreciation for Joseph.

Pharaoh said, "You can enjoy the fat of the land." This was a ruler's way of being magnanimous. Within reason, Pharaoh was writing a blank check for their care. The irony of this statement is that this happened during the second year of a draught. There wasn't much "fat of the land" at that time. Nevertheless, he promised they would be well cared for at the expense of his kingdom. For an Egyptian ruler to promise this to a large group of Jews was a miracle.

There is a very unusual instruction found in the following verse:

"...and bring your father and your families back to me. I will give you the best of the land of Egypt and you can enjoy the fat of the land." Genesis 45:18

If you look carefully at this verse, you will note that this was a great gift to Jacob and his lineage. It was even a greater gift to Joseph himself. The invitation Pharaoh offered was usually reserved for the royal family. It was expected that the nation would care for every need of the Pharaoh's family. Pharaoh, now, extended that privilege to Joseph and all his family. This is even more significant when we remember that Joseph's family was Jewish and they were despised by the Egyptians. It tells us something more about the level of respect with which Pharaoh held Joseph. The fact that this apparently did not cause any disturbance among the common people indicates that there was also a high level of acceptance among them for Joseph.

Pharaoh continued with his instructions to Joseph:

"You are also directed to tell them, 'Do this: Take some carts from Egypt for your children and your wives, and get your father and come. Never mind about your belongings, because the best of all Egypt will be yours.'" Genesis 45:19, 20

At this point, Joseph was acting as Pharaoh's ambassador. He received a specific message to convey to his brothers. He was expected to deliver it exactly as it was given.

Having made a generous offer, Pharaoh went on to make it even better. He commanded that they be given carts with which to bring their families to Egypt. Pharaoh not only wanted to care for Joseph's family when they reached Egypt; he also wanted their trip to be as comfortable as possible. Observe that the carts are for their children, their wives, and their father. For all but the most prestigious, carts were for possessions; the people walked. Pharaoh was treating the family with the dignity he offered Joseph.

In verse 20, Pharaoh enlarged his invitation even more. He encouraged them not to bring their belongings from Canaan. Whether or not he considered household things and belongings from Canaan as unclean, we do not know. He was telling them, "Let us take care of everything you need."

The brothers had to be in total shock when Joseph delivered this message from Pharaoh. Interestingly, there is no report of their reaction.

Genesis 45:21-28 - Israel Agrees to Go to Goshen

This paragraph represents one of the most awkward encounters in the Scriptures. In the first verse, the brothers responded to the instructions from Pharaoh:

So the sons of Israel did this. Joseph gave them carts, as Pharaoh had commanded, and he also gave them provisions for their journey. Genesis 45:21

The sons did exactly as Pharaoh, through Joseph, had instructed them. In good Middle East style, Joseph sent his guests, his brothers, away with presents. It affirms for the recipients of hospitality that they leave on most friendly terms.

The text indicates that he also gave them "provisions for the journey." The author wrote carefully. The 11 brothers came to Egypt to buy food. This food would be different from what Joseph gave them as "provision for the journey." As would be expected, the "provision for the journey" would require less cooking and preparation than the food the brothers had come to buy.

All of this, however, was a present from the Pharaoh. Verse 22 is a bit different:

To each of them he gave new clothing, but to Benjamin he gave three hundred shekels of silver and five sets of clothes. Genesis 45:22

The brothers probably did not need new clothing. The Egyptians have always been fine weavers. The text does not comment, but one would suspect that these clothes were not only of finer quality than their previous attire, but also they were probably the kind of clothing that only government officials and their families could afford to wear.

By the way, In our text it says, "To each of them he (Joseph) gave new clothing." These could be interpreted to mean one or more outfits. In the Hebrew text, it is in the plural. This means that Joseph gave each man at least two new outfits. We should remember that in Genesis 44:13, the author indicated "At this they tore their clothes." This was a very common way to express deep sorrow and distress. It was usually done in connection with the loss of a loved one.

Notice that the author continued, "but to Benjamin..." In the Hebrew text it says, "and to Benjamin..." Whether you use the word "and" or the word "but", there is a contrast between what he gave Benjamin and what he gave the other ten brothers. As indicated earlier, he probably gave each of the ten brothers at least two outfits of clothing. On the other hand, he gave Benjamin five outfits. As we will see momentarily, there is another symbolic gift included here. It is interesting that he gave Benjamin five outfits of clothing. You may remember that in Genesis 43:34, Joseph gave Benjamin a portion of food five times greater than that of his brothers. We cannot be certain of the symbolic meaning of five portions and five outfits. One possibility has to do with the fact that Benjamin was now the heir and would receive a larger portion of the inheritance than the other ten brothers. It does tell us, however, that there is symbolic significance to the gifts Joseph gave his brothers.

Observe that Joseph also gave Benjamin 300 shekels/pieces of silver. The author does not tell us the significance of this gift. There are a couple of pieces of information that could possibly help us. As we indicated in chapter 37, the brothers accepted 20 shekels of silver for Joseph as a slave, but the real price of a slave was 30 shekels. It was forbidden of any Jew to sell a Jew as a slave, to a Gentile. If he did, he could be forced to pay up to 300 shekels of silver to get the slave back. If this is the symbolism of a slave for each of his brothers - 10 x 30 = 300. This had to be difficult for the brothers to see their half-brother, the son of the second wife, receive so much more than they had received. Imagine how the brothers felt when they received farewell presents from the brother whom they had sold into slavery. The giving of a farewell gift, like sending travelers on their way, was a way of saying that they are leaving under amiable conditions.

Having given each of his brothers a generous farewell present, Joseph turned his attention to his father.

And this is what he sent to his father: ten donkeys loaded with the best things of Egypt, and ten female donkeys loaded with grain and bread and other provisions for his journey. Genesis 45:23

Joseph sent ten male donkeys "loaded with the best things of Egypt." Speaking of the gift in this way suggests that these gifts were luxuries, not necessities for the journey. It may well have been elegant clothing or luxurious carpets for his tents. The Egyptian weaving

was by far the best in the world. Whatever it was, it took ten male donkeys to carry it. This was a very large gift.

Joseph had still another gift to send his father, Israel. He sent ten female donkeys loaded with food stuffs for the journey back. The 11 brothers already had enough food for their trip from Egypt to Canaan. This large supply was to care for the needs of the excess of seventy people who would return from Canaan to Egypt.

The question naturally arises, "Why would Joseph send ten male and ten female donkeys as a gift. I know of at least two reasons:

- When animals were given as a present, it was customary to give both male and female. When Jacob sent animals as a present to Esau, he sent both male and female.
- If he sent 20 male donkeys, it would never be more than that. Eventually, it would be less because some would die. If he sent male and female donkeys, then the size of the gift would be increased as the female animals bore their young. Thus a gift would eventually become a source of great wealth.

The latter seems to be the primary idea behind such a gift.

There is a cultural image in the following verse:

> *Then he sent his brothers away, and as they were leaving he said to them, "Don't quarrel on the way!" Genesis 45:24*

A stranger who had stayed in your home could not safely leave to continue his journey unless you sent him away. This would be an insult to the host. He would certainly chase down his disrespectful guest. The fact that Joseph sent his brothers away meant that there were no hard feelings between them. This is another declaration by Joseph that though they did him harm, he was not going to punish them.

Joseph knew his brothers quite well. Apparently the last thing that Joseph said to the brothers was, "Don't quarrel on the way." With everything that had just happened, one might think that the farthest thing from their minds would be quarreling with each other. Joseph knew better; thus the exhortation. There are many things they might quarrel about. These might be part of the list:

- Joseph had given Benjamin more than five times as much as he gave the other ten. This in itself could be a very difficult problem and spark severe quarreling. Joseph had had personal experience with their jealousy.
- There was also a backlog of guilt that thrust itself to the surface when Joseph revealed himself. He knew his brothers well enough that they would quarrel about who was responsible for getting them into such a dangerous situation. The brothers had a natural animosity with Benjamin because he was the son of the second and preferred wife. Add to this the fact that he was now the heir; that they thought he had endangered their lives by stealing Joseph's cup; that Joseph had given him many times over what he had given the others. The surprising thing would have been if they had not quarreled with him and among themselves.

Having received Joseph's instructions, the brothers were on their way:

> *So they went up out of Egypt and came to their father Jacob in the land of Canaan. Genesis 45:25*

The author summarized the lengthy trip in one sentence. From the silence of the text, we assume that it was uneventful. There is serious doubt, however, that they traveled together for weeks without quarreling.

The author stated that they came to Israel in Canaan. He said this without further comment. It is doubtful if Jacob could see the sons coming with laden donkeys and carts they had not taken with them without being at least puzzled about how this happened.

Though we cannot explain it, we should take note that Israel was called Jacob here. Back in Genesis 35:10, God changed his name to Israel. In spite of this, he continued to be called Jacob until he agreed for Benjamin to go to Egypt in Genesis 43:6. At that point, he was called Israel again. Now he is called Jacob. It is clear, however, he had done nothing underhanded to initiate the use of this name again. We cannot explain the return to his former name.

When the brothers arrived, they spoke to Jacob about their trip.

> *They told him, "Joseph is still alive! In fact, he is ruler of all Egypt." Jacob was stunned; he did not believe them. Genesis 45:26*

We probably have record of only part of that conversation. The brothers shared two pieces of information about Joseph with Jacob:

- **Joseph was still alive.** - This had to be hard for them to share. They had worked hard to convince Jacob that his heir-apparent son Joseph was dead. All their explanations about the blood stains would now seem awkward. Now, they had to tell him that Joseph was very much alive.
- **He was the ruler of all Egypt.** - This would also be difficult for the brothers to share. Their actions in selling Joseph as a slave would create severe guilt since he had become so successful and powerful.

This had to be one of the moments of greatest tension for the brothers. They should wonder what they would say if Jacob asked questions about this situation.

In verse 26, the author also records Jacob's reaction to this news. He began by saying, "Jacob was stunned." The Hebrew text is more graphic, "His heart grew numb/feeble." The word "numb/feeble" is "poog" (פּוּג). It means to numb, to grow feeble or to faint. The word "heart" is "laeb" (לֵב). It can mean the physical organ called a heart. It can also identify the tender feelings of an individual.

Put yourself in Jacob's place. He had been led to believe that his son and heir was dead. Now they told him that Joseph was not only alive, but the ruler of Egypt. Just to discover that his favorite son was now alive was enough to cause him to be stunned. Add to this the fact that Joseph was the ruler of Egypt and you can understand why one translation renders this idea, "His heart froze."

As we have said before, Egyptians hated the Jews with a passion. It would be almost impossible for Jacob to imagine that Joseph could possibly be the controlling force in Egypt.

Jacob's second reaction was, "He did not believe them." This is easy to understand. Given the same circumstances, I would not believe them either, would you?. Past experiences had probably afforded Jacob a number of good reasons to disbelieve their story.

The brothers now had a difficult task trying to convince Jacob that they were telling the truth.

But when they told him everything Joseph had said to them, and when he saw the carts Joseph had sent to carry him back, the spirit of their father Jacob revived. Genesis 45:27

According to this verse, the sons attempted to convince Jacob in two ways:

- **"They told him everything Joseph had said to them."** The way this is written suggests that the brothers gave Jacob a word for word report of what Joseph had said to them. The author is rather general at this point. Does this mean that they reported everything Joseph said or just what he said immediately prior to their departure? I believe that they told Jacob what Joseph said, just prior to their departure. I believe they did not tell him what Joseph said about "You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good."
- "**When he saw the carts Joseph had sent to carry him back**" - The text is not explicit, but we would expect that these were not just ordinary carts. They came from the palace. The would be appropriately elegant for royal use. Add to this the fact that Jacob knew that the brothers did not have these carts with them when they left Canaan bound for Egypt.
- **The return of Simeon** - The text does not mention the return of Simeon, whom Joseph detained to insure that Benjamin would be brought to Egypt. It seems the fact that Simeon was returned had to also contribute to Jacob's ability to believe that Joseph was in fact alive.

These pieces of information had a telling effect upon Jacob. As the author described it, "The spirit of their father revived." The word spirit is "rooakh" (רוּחַ) and means wind, breath, the spirit of a rational being. The "spirit" is that part of a person what expresses the individuality, the vigor, the zest for living. Again, the word "revived" is "khawyaw" (חָיָה) and means to live, to revive, to quicken to life again, to be whole, to recover. However, you may describe the response, this was a startling experience. What a marvelous surprise this must have been for Jacob. He had grieved for his favorite son for many years. Now, he discovered he had no reason for grief; his son was both alive and powerful.

Jacob continued to respond to these startling revelations about his favorite son:

And Israel said, "I'm convinced! My son Joseph is still alive. I will go and see him before I die." Genesis 45:28

There is an understandable elation in his voice. Again, the Hebrew is a bit different from our text. Instead of "I'm convinced," the Hebrew text simply says, " Enough!" Whichever way you say it, Jacob was telling his sons that they didn't have to explain it any more. He believed his son was alive.

Having established that his son, Joseph, was alive, Jacob announced his intentions. "I will go and see him before I die." Some have understood these words to mean that Jacob was a very sick man. Admittedly, Jacob was a very old man. He may have been ill, but the text does not tell us so. It may reflect the idea that Jacob had for years been preoccupied with the loss of his favorite son. In our culture, we would call this depression. There is certainly a sharp contrast between the Jacob we saw at Bethel, in Genesis 35:9-15, and the man we observe just prior to the return of the 11 with the Egyptian carts. I believe the statement "I will go and see him before I die," tells us just how much of Jacob's attention

the apparent death of Joseph had occupied. This apparent tragedy had totally consumed him. Now, Jacob was released from the obsession of his grief and it showed immediately.

Conclusion

In this chapter, the author focuses our attention on a number of important issues. He reminds us that the life of the righteous may not always be easy. This will be distressing to some, but it is a message mirrored elsewhere in Scripture.

There is an ongoing confrontation between righteousness and evil in the world. Evil in all its horrible expressions, will ultimately be confronted and defeated. It may happen now or in the future, but it will be. Certainly, the ten brothers thought that their terrible deed had gone unnoticed. To their horror, they discovered that was not true.

There is a picture of the mercy of God upon the rebellion of evil men. The ten brothers deserved to be punished, but Joseph was not eager to punish them. We are called upon to reflect the mercy of God in our dealings with the failures of our brothers and sisters. We are called upon to forgive as we have been forgiven.

An exciting discovery in this chapter helps us to realize that God is so sovereign he will take the evil intent of the wicked and use them to accomplish his righteous designs.

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QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 22

JOSEPH WELCOMED HIS FAMILY INTO GOSHEN

GENESIS 46:1 - 34

1. In Genesis chapter 46, there are three paragraphs. On the following table, write a title of seven words or less for each paragraph.

46:1-7	
46:8-27	
46:28-34	

2. In Genesis 46:1-7, the author described the message God gave to Jacob at Beersheba.
   a. Jacob was in Hebron prior to chapter 46.
      (1). Why did he have to go to Beersheba to offer sacrifices?
      (2). Would it have been the same if he had made these sacrifices in Hebron? Why?
   b. In Genesis 46:2, Joseph's father was called both "Israel" and Jacob."
      (1). What, if anything, can we gather from this?
      (2). In verse two, God spoke to Israel and said, "Jacob, Jacob." What does this mean?
      (3). Jacob's response was, "Here I am." What does it mean?
   c. In Genesis 46:3, God identified Himself to Jacob.
      (1). How did God identify Himself? What does it mean?
      (2). What, if any, is the relationship between the name God gave for Himself and the instruction He gave to Jacob?
      (3). Place Genesis 46:1 and 46:3 side by side and compare them. What do you learn?
   d. In Genesis 46:4, God gave Jacob some promises.
      (1). What were the promises?
      (2). What is the significance of each one?
   e. In Genesis 46:5, Jacob transported his people and belongings in carts provided by Pharaoh. These were nomadic people who could transport their belongings in their own carts. Why did they need Pharaoh's carts?
   f. In Genesis 46:6, 7, the author said nearly the same thing in two ways. What, if any, is the difference between the messages of these two verses?

3. In Genesis 46:8-27, the author identified the lineage of Jacob that went to Egypt.
   a. Why would it be important to give such a list at this point in the story?
   b. On the following table, record the names of the sons of Jacob in the order in which they were listed in chapter 46.

BIRTH ORDER	ORDER IN GENESIS 46
Reuben	
Simeon	
Levi	
Judah	
Dan	
Naphtali	
Gad	
Asher	
Issachar	
Zebulun	
Joseph	
Benjamin	

(1). Study the lists carefully. List your observations in written form.
(2). How can you account for the situation you discover in this information?
(3). There has to be a reason for the way the author has recorded these names. Can you see any suggestion in this chart? If so, what?

c. Another table may shed some light on the reason the sons are listed as they are. You will find the mothers listed in Genesis chapters 29 and 30.

ORDER IN GENESIS 46	MOTHER
Reuben	
Simeon	
Levi	
Judah	
Issachar	
Zebulun	
Gad	
Asher	
Joseph	
Benjamin	
Dan	
Naphtali	

(1). Look carefully at this table to see if you can identify a design in it. If so, what is it?
(2). What can we learn from this study?

d. There is another way to look at the way the people are listed in Genesis 46:8-27. On the following table, list the number of people going into Egypt who were descendants of each mother.

MOTHER	NUMBER OF DESCENDANTS
Leah	
Zilpah	
Rachel	
Bilhah	

(1). Now study your findings carefully.
(2). What observations can you make?
(3). What, if anything, does this tell you about the reason the people were listed as they were?

e. In Genesis 46:12, there is a puzzling piece of information.
(1). What is this information?
(2). Why would the author include these people?

f. In Genesis 46:26, 27, the author gives two different numbers of people who went into Egypt.
(1). What were these numbers?
(2). How can we account for the two sets of numbers?

g. Compare Genesis 46:3 with Exodus 12:37.
(1). What observations can you make?
(2). What does this tell us about God?

4. In Genesis 46:28-34, the author described Joseph's meeting with his father.
a. In Genesis 46:28, 29, Jacob sent Judah "to get directions to Goshen." Think carefully about this fact.
(1). Why would he send Judah?
(2). Why was it necessary to send anyone?
(3). 'These verses also describe the meeting of Joseph and his father.
(a). What has the author told us in the facts he listed in these verses?
(b). Put yourself in Joseph's position. What would you have felt?
(c). Put yourself in Jacob's position. What would you have felt?
(d). Put yourself in the position of one of the ten brothers. How would you have felt?

b. In Genesis 46:30, Israel finally spoke to Joseph.
(1). What did he say?
(2). What did he mean?

c. In Genesis 46:31, 32, Joseph told his brothers and the family what he was going to do.
(1). Why was this important?
(2). What difference would it make?

d. In Genesis 46:33, 34, Joseph prepared his brothers to meet Pharaoh. Pharaoh already thought it was a good idea to put Joseph's family in Goshen. In view of this fact, why was Joseph so careful in his preparation of the family to meet Pharaoh?

5. This chapter contains a certain amount of detail information, but it also tells us something about God and about God's people.

a. What does it tell you about God?
b. What does it tell you about God's people?
c. In what way can you apply this information to your life and relationship with God?

LESSON 22: GENESIS 46:1 - 34

JOSEPH WELCOMED HIS FAMILY INTO GOSHEN

Introduction

Genesis chapter 46 contains three paragraphs. The following table contains a brief summary of each paragraph.

46:1-7	God Spoke to Jacob at Beersheba
46:8-27	Jacob's Lineage Going into Egypt
46:28-34	Joseph Met His Father

Because twenty of the thirty-four verses of this chapter are taken up with a list of Jacob's lineage, many do not bother to read the chapter. I believe this is unfortunate. It may not always be exciting reading, but it is pertinent and meaningful, if we take the time to discover what is there.

Genesis 46:1-7 - God Spoke to Jacob at Beersheba

From the perspective of the flow of the story of Joseph, the important fact here might be that Jacob left Canaan, bound for Egypt. From the perspective of the whole book, the important factor was Jacob's time of worship at Beersheba.

> *So Israel set out with all that was his, and when he reached Beersheba, he offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac. Genesis 46:1*

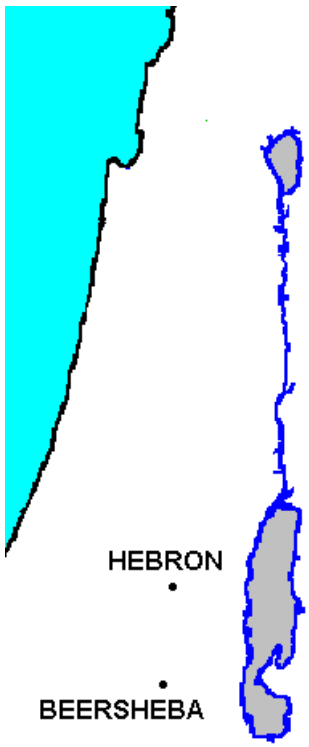
The question arises, Why did Jacob wait until he reached Beersheba to offer a sacrifice to God? Why didn't he offer his sacrifice in Hebron when he discovered that Joseph was still alive? He could have done so. It appears that the decision to worship and offer sacrifices at Beersheba represents Jacob's preference, not a requirement. Beersheba was important to Jacob for several reasons. This was the southern-most city in the land of Israel. This was his last opportunity to offer his sacrifice inside the land of Israel. That of course, was very important. Beersheba, a mountain village about 28 miles southwest of Hebron was an important place in the lives of each of the patriarchs. This is the place where Jacob's father, Isaac, was born. It was also the place where God appeared to Isaac and promised to multiply his seed. In Beersheba, Isaac received permission to leave the land, during an earlier draught, to go to Egypt. Jacob left from Beersheba to go to his uncle Laban. In Beersheba there was also an "Eschel," a tamarisk grove his grandfather planted and an altar his father had built. A great deal of his family history and relationship with God was identified with this place. In this respect, it was a celebration of the continuing faithfulness of God with His people.

Notice that Jacob offered sacrifices (plural) to "the God of his father Isaac." This does not indicate, as some suggest, that Jacob was relying on his father's relationship with God. On at least 19 occasions, Scripture speaks of "The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." These were a way of speaking of God who was faithful to Abraham, was faithful to Isaac

and faithful to Jacob. The phrase "God of his father Isaac" was used in the same manner. The name for God, in this verse, is "Elohim." This name stresses the omnipotence of His nature. It is used, most often, in contexts which stress the mercy of God.

Jacob offered sacrifices to God, at Beersheba and God spoke to him.

> *And God spoke to Israel in a vision at night and said, "Jacob! Jacob!" "Here I am," he replied. Genesis 46:2*



Map 25: Jacob Offers Sacrifices at Beersheba

As in verse one, the author spoke of Joseph's father as "Israel." Immediately following this, the author records God's call and in this quote Joseph's father was called "Jacob." Again, the text gives no explanation for this change. There is nothing we can find in scholarly writings that helps to explain this situation.

The name "Jacob" - "heel grabber" - was given him because even in the womb he attempted to supplant his twin brother, Esau. Throughout much of his life, this same kind of conduct was characteristic. When his life was changed, at Bethel, his name was changed to "Israel" - meaning power with God.

One might expect to see the author call him "Jacob" before the Bethel experience and then "Israel" thereafter. One might even expect the author to call him "Jacob" when he was not at his best and "Israel" at those times when his relationship with God was superior. Such was not the case. The author appears to go back and forth from "Israel" to "Jacob" and from "Jacob" to "Israel" with no apparent reason. In this verse, where Jacob's faith was not in question, in any way, the author called him "Israel" and God called him "Jacob" twice. Until we can make further discoveries concerning this question, we can only point out that it happened. Observe that God spoke personally with Jacob. That is what God is like.

In this place, the author used this name in a context where God calms His uneasy servant. This is a sharp contrast to the pagan deities of the area who were thought to frighten those who worshipped them. Indeed, their sacrifices were given out of fear, not adoration.

We should also observe Jacob's reply. He said, "Here I am." This gives us at least two pieces of information:

- He recognized the call of God. That is not true for everyone.

- He was available for whatever God wished to say to him. This too is not always true.

In verse three, God continued to speak to Jacob while he slept:

"I am God, the God of your father," he said. "Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you into a great nation there." Genesis 46:3

Observe the way God identified Himself. He used the names "El" and "Elohim." Observe how God used these names:

- The name "El" stresses the fact that He is the supreme God, the one elevated above all others.
- "The God of your father" - In this form, the name Elohim stresses the eternal nature of God. It is repeatedly used in situations where the mercy of God is highlighted. In this instance, it is very personal. The name "the God of your father" could well be translated, "The eternal, omnipotent God of mercy who was faithful to your father." In this sense, it also conveys the idea of being changeless. Though the idols of Jacob's neighbors were impersonal, "Elohim" knew Israel and spoke to him by name.

Compare these verses:

Genesis 46:1	Genesis 46:3
So Israel set out with all that was his, and when he reached Beersheba, he offered sacrifices to **the God of his father Isaac**.	"I am God, **the God of your father**," he said. "Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you into a great nation there.

Jacob knew God as "The God of his father." God spoke about Himself to Jacob as "The God of your father." It is a high moment of worship and praise when God's expression of Himself and our awareness of His presence are precisely the same.

When God spoke to Jacob, it was with words of encouragement. He should have been greatly elated to discover that Joseph was alive, but he was being taken out of the land God had given him; a land he was not supposed to leave. God encouraged Jacob, "Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt." The word "afraid" is "yare" (יָרֵא). Some synonyms mean "to tremble" and "shake." This word was later used to describe Israel's fear of the fires of Sinai. Terror is an apt way to describe the feeling. God instructed him not to be terrorized. Stated positively, we might put it this way, "Go down to Egypt with great confidence and encouragement." This tells us something about what God is like. He is an encourager of the frightened, not a terrorizer of the helpless.

God gave Jacob a series of promises. The first of these was, "I will make you into a great nation there (Egypt)." For decades, God had promised that the lineage of Abraham would be a great nation. This is the first time God gave any indication about the details of that promise. Whatever it meant to be a great nation, God identified that it would begin to happen in Egypt. It may not seem like much, but it was far more specific than God had ever been before. This made it a very exciting promise for the patriarch.

In the following verse, God continued to spell out his promises to Jacob.

I will go down to Egypt with you, and I will surely bring you back again. And Joseph's own hand will close your eyes." Genesis 46:4

As you can see, God gave Jacob three specific promises in this verse. We will deal with them separately.

- **"I will go down to Egypt with you."** Jacob was uneasy about going to Egypt. First, as all his relatives had been taught, God gave this land to Israel. They were not to leave it. To leave the land was considered disobedience to God. Second, Egypt and Israel had never been good friends. Culturally, the Egyptians considered the Israelites an abomination. The Jewish impression of Egyptians was as bad. Politically, there had been strained relations between Abraham and the Pharaoh. These wounds were nurtured rather than healed. Leaving Canaan to go to Egypt was a traumatic experience. One can almost hear Jacob saying, "Why couldn't Joseph be ruler somewhere else? Why did it have to be in Egypt?"
- **The divine promise was appropriate.** God never promised to remove us from difficult circumstances. He did promise to be with us in the midst of it. God promised Jacob, "I will surely bring you back again." God promised Jacob that he would bring him back into Canaan again, but He did not say when. It was not that Israel would be a mighty army. It was that God would bring them back by His own power.
- **"And Joseph's own hand will close your eyes."** It was the responsibility of the heir of the household to attend his dying father. After this, the control of the family would pass to this heir. One of the heir's final duties was to place his hands upon the eyes of his deceased father to make sure that the eyelids were closed before burial. The purpose of this promise was not that Joseph would place his hands upon Jacob's eyes. It was a way of saying that Joseph would be there; that Joseph, Jacob's initial heir who for many years was considered dead, would be with him in his final hours.

Verse five has an interesting twist:

Then Jacob left Beersheba, and Israel's sons took their father Jacob and their children and their wives in the carts that Pharaoh had sent to transport him. Genesis 46:5

The author begins this verse by calling Joseph's father "Jacob." He immediately referred to him as "Israel." In the same sentence, the author again referred to him as "Jacob." The text gives no explanation for these changes. Some scholars have suggested some possible explanations:

- The name "Israel" was used in situations where he was strong in righteousness. The name "Jacob" was used when he was not.
- The name "Israel" was used when he was moving in proper directions. The name "Jacob" was used when he faltered.

There are occasions when these seem to be appropriate explanations. On this occasion, however, they do not explain the use of these names.

Observe that the carts Pharaoh sent were for "Israel" as well as the women and the children. This identifies the high level of sensitivity Pharaoh had for the comfort and well-

being of Joseph's family. We must keep in mind that these were nomadic people. They moved often. They had all the means they needed to bring their belongings to Egypt. It was not a means of travel Pharaoh provided. It would be clear to anyone who saw this large group traveling that these vehicles belonged to Pharaoh. Egyptians despised Jews. They would not be reluctant to do them harm. It would be different if these people saw that the Jews were traveling in carts that belonged to Pharaoh. The royal insignia on the vehicles would cause them to think twice before doing Joseph's family any harm.

Verse six is a general description of how Jacob chose to respond to Pharaoh's instructions.

> *They also took with them their livestock and the possessions they had acquired in Canaan, and Jacob and all his offspring went to Egypt. Genesis 46:6*

Pharaoh sent word instructing Jacob not to worry about bringing all his belongings to Egypt. He would be responsible for everything Jacob and his family needed.

The verse begins "They also took with them their livestock..." The word "livestock" includes any of the domestic animals which these people kept in herds. It usually meant sheep and goats. Only occasionally did it include cattle, as some translations suggest. There is no mention of anything Jacob left behind in cooperation with the urging of Pharaoh to leave his things in Canaan and let Egypt provide for all his needs.

Having described the possessions Jacob took with him, the author now turned his attention to the family that accompanied Jacob on the trip to Egypt.

> *He took with him to Egypt his sons and grandsons and his daughters and granddaughters -- all his offspring. Genesis 46:7*

Observe how the author stressed this information:

- First, he gave a detailed list - "sons and grandsons and his daughters and granddaughter." This was quite specific.
- "All his offspring." This is a more general statement.

This move from the specific to the general statement was not just to consume space. It is a way to emphasize that Jacob took everyone with him; no one was left behind.

Genesis 46:8-27 - Jacob's Lineage Going into Egypt

It was not unusual for the author of Genesis and other early writers to list the names of all participants when they were about to embark on a momentous experience. That is exactly what happens here. Let us do an overview of 46:8-27 first. The author lists each of Jacob's sons along with their lineage. It is recorded in this order.

Order in Genesis 46	Birth order
Reuben	Reuben
Simeon	Simeon
Levi	Levi
Judah	Judah
Issachar	Dan
Zebulun	Naphtali
Gad	Gad
Asher	Asher
Joseph	Issachar
Benjamin	Zebulun
Dan	Joseph
Naphtali	Benjamin

Observe that the sons were not listed, in 46:8-27, in the order of their birth. This was very significant. The listing in birth-order was exactly like a listing of the order of those in line to occupy the English throne today. It is therefore safe to assume that there is some purpose behind the order in which the author listed the sons.

There is an identifiable order in the way the author listed Jacob's sons. On the following table we have listed the name of the mother beside each son.

Order listed	Son	Mother
1	Reuben	Leah
2	Simeon	Leah
3	Levi	Leah
4	Judah	Leah
5	Issachar	Leah
6	Zebulun	Leah
7	Gad	Zilpah
8	Asher	Zilpah
9	Joseph	Rachel
10	Benjamin	Rachel
11	Dan	Bilhah
12	Naphtali	Bilhah

A number of observations are appropriate:

- The first six sons were the sons of Leah, though only the first four are in the proper birth order.
- Leah's sons, Issachar and Zebulun, were ninth and tenth in the birth order, but fifth and sixth in chapter 46. This suggests that the sons may be listed according to the mothers who bore them.
- Zilpah was the servant of Leah. Because Leah gave Zilpah to Jacob, to have children by her, the sons she bore were considered sons of Leah. It is not surprising that they are listed along with the sons of Leah rather than in their birth order.

- Rachel's sons, Joseph and Benjamin, were eleventh and twelfth in the birth order, but ninth and tenth in the Genesis 46 list. It appears this was true because Bilhah's sons were technically Rachel's sons, but not natural birth sons and therefore were listed after Rachel's sons.
- Dan and Naphtali were fifth and sixth in the birth order, but were listed eleventh and twelfth in the Genesis 46 list. This is because though Bilhah bore these two before Zilpah and Rachel bore their two sons, respectively; Bilhah was the servant of Rachel and bore her sons on behalf of Rachel, the second wife.

Reflection on these observations suggests to me that the order of the listing of Jacob's sons, in Genesis 46:8-27, was on the basis of maternal identification rather than birth order.

The question arises, since Rachel was the favorite wife, why were her children listed last? We must keep in mind that Leah was Jacob's first wife; she bore him children first. Historically this would be an important piece of information in our search.

As I look over the list of sons and their lineage, I see another possibility concerning the way the sons were listed. It focuses upon the four women who bore Jacob's children. Observe the number of persons identified with each woman. The following table lists the women in the order in which they are mentioned in chapter 46.

THE MOTHER	SIZE OF LINEAGE
Leah	33
Zilpah	16
Rachel	14
Bilhah	7

Observe that they are listed in a descending order according to the number of their lineage who went out of Beersheba into Egypt. In this and the previously stated possibility, the listing is exactly the same.

Without explanation, the author listed the grandchildren of Judah, Leah's son, and Asher, Zilpah's son, but lists the grandchildren of none of the other brothers. It is possible that they were the only ones who had grandchildren, but that is not probable. One could speculate further, but that would not be fruitful. The text makes no effort at all to explain this unusual situation.

You will observe that in 46:26, 27, a summary is given.

> *All those who went to Egypt with Jacob -- those who were his direct descendants, not counting his sons' wives -- numbered sixty-six persons. With the two sons who had been born to Joseph in Egypt, the members of Jacob's family, which went to Egypt, were seventy in all. Genesis 46:26, 27*

If you include the grandchildren of Judah and Asher, plus the daughter of Asher, Serah, you get a total of 70 people. In 46:12, however there is a puzzling piece of information:

> *The sons of Judah: Er, Onan, Shelah, Perez and Zerah (but Er and Onan had died in the land of Canaan). The sons of Perez: Hezron and Hamul. Genesis 46:12*

The question arises, If these two sons - Er and Onan - died in Canaan, then why does the author list them among the descendants of Jacob who went into Egypt? We do not know

the total answer. You will remember that Genesis chapter 38 is a parenthesis in the story of Joseph. In that chapter, Er, a wicked man, died childless. Onan, his younger brother, was required to raise up seed to his older brother Er. Onan had a relationship with Tamar, but refused to make her pregnant. God struck him dead. There is little possibility that either of these two brothers were present at Beersheba as Jacob prepared to leave for Goshen. Strange and unusual explanations are offered by some scholars, but the truth is that we do not know.

It is interesting to note that in Genesis 46:26, 27, the author gives two counts of the people:

- One includes Joseph and his family
- One does not include Joseph and his family

It is a way of saying Joseph was counted among Jacob's family in Egypt, but he did not go down from Beersheba. The full impact of this number of people does not fully express itself until the time of the Exodus, some 400 years later. Remember, at Beersheba, God told Jacob,

> *"I am God, the God of your father," he said. "Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you into a great nation there." Genesis 46:3*

Now turn to Exodus chapter twelve:

> *The Israelites journeyed from Rameses to Succoth. There were about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides women and children. Exodus 12:37*

This tells us just how great the nation had become during the 400 years in Egypt.

Genesis 46:28-34 - Joseph Met His Father

In the first verse of this paragraph, we get an insight into a question we faced earlier:

> *Now Jacob sent Judah ahead of him to Joseph to get directions to Goshen. When they arrived in the region of Goshen, Joseph had his chariot made ready and went to Goshen to meet his father Israel. As soon as Joseph appeared before him, he threw his arms around his father and wept for a long time. Genesis 46:28, 29*

In previous chapters, Judah had been the spokesman for the brothers, but there had been no evidence that he, at any point, represented his father. That does happen in this verse.

The question arises, Why did Jacob send Judah and not Benjamin? There may be several possibilities:

1. It is possible that he was signaling the fact that Judah was now his heir. That is doubtful. He indicated, earlier, his distrust of the ten brothers.
2. He had reason to believe that when Joseph did not return, the place of his heir was reserved for Benjamin, the only remaining son of his favorite wife, Rachel. Since that time he has given us no reason to believe that he has changed his mind.
3. It is possible that the position of heir remained with Benjamin, but Jacob was not going to allow him to go away from him again. He knew that whenever his heir was allowed to leave home, tragedy struck. In this scenario, Jacob could send Judah, but leave the place of heir in the hands of Benjamin.

4. It is possible that Judah was sent because he was quite familiar with the route and was the leader of the ten brothers who had traveled as much as he had.

Of these four possibilities, I believe the third comes closer to reality than the others.

Because the brothers had been to the capital more than once, they needed no help in finding their way there. They had been through part of Goshen, but did not know where the Pharaoh had in mind for them to live. It was thus necessary to get instructions concerning their destination.

Judah's task was to go and get these directions. He was unable to do it that way. Joseph had decided to meet his father in Goshen. Notice it was "Israel" Joseph met, not "Jacob."

There is a touching experience recorded in verse 29. The author described the encounter in three statements:

- **"As soon as Joseph appeared before him (Israel.)"** The word "appeared" is "Raah" (רָאָה). This is the name of a vulture well known because of its ability to spot its prey a long way off. The author was saying that as soon as Joseph could see his father a long way off, he hurried to him.
- **"He threw his arms around his father."** The text literally says, "He fell on his neck." There is great emotion in this meeting. Notice the text does not describe Israel's participation in the meeting. That, however, will come later. The author carefully described Joseph's reckless abandon. All of the court's decor of conduct had been put aside. The great leader of Egypt has cast aside all royal expectations and allowed his true emotions to run rampant. The father he never thought he would see again now stood before him. It was almost more than he could handle. He hugged his father. What a beautiful sight.
- **"He wept for a long time"** - Observe that Joseph wept while he hugged his father. This is weeping for great joy. There was no tearing of his garments as they did in times of sorrow and loss. Joseph had the ability to show love and joy in the midst of circumstances that would certainly remind him of wrongs his brothers had done to him.

Another concern was that the brothers were now witnessing the reunion of Joseph and Jacob. They had sold Joseph into slavery and never told their father. Sooner or later, they must have feared that Jacob might ask how Joseph came to be in Egypt in the first place. At this point, the truth of their terrible atrocity would become evident. This should have caused them a great deal of fear.

Israel finally responded to his son's expression of love and joy.

> *Israel said to Joseph, "Now I am ready to die, since I have seen for myself that you are still alive." Genesis 46:30*

As happened so often, a disappointed father/mother struggled to hold on to life in the fleeting hope to see his/her son who for so long had been separated from him/her. When the meeting finally took place it was not uncommon to hear the parent say, "Now let me die in peace." It was a way of saying, "I have held on to see my son again. Now I am ready to die." A different scene in the New Testament has some of the same elements in it. Simeon had been told by God that he would see the Messiah before he died. When Jesus was

brought to the temple, in Luke 2:29, the joy and elation of the moment was indescribable. It gives an impression of the emotions packed into Israel's statement to Joseph.

In the following verse, Joseph spoke to his brothers about what he had planned to do.

> *Then Joseph said to his brothers and to his father's household, "I will go up and speak to Pharaoh and will say to him, `My brothers and my father's household, who were living in the land of Canaan, have come to me. The men are shepherds; they tend livestock, and they have brought along their flocks and herds and everything they own.'" Genesis 46:31, 32*

In these two verses, Joseph took control of the family. This, of course, was what Jacob had in mind from the beginning. It is clear, however, that he will be collaborative rather than dictatorial with the family. This is a sharp contrast with the way his brothers had treated him. He was sharing with them, in advance, exactly what he would do and say. In verses 31 and 32, Joseph explained what he would do in order to secure the proper place for his family to live.

- "**The men are shepherds**" - Again, shepherds were on the lowest rung of the cultural ladder. Joseph knew that this would be a negative statement to Pharaoh. If they indicated that the brothers brought their flocks with them, Pharaoh would want them to be in the best land of Egypt, but hopefully not too close to the capitol. Sheep were an ambivalence to Egyptians. They needed them as a source of meat for their diet, but they wanted to be as far from them as possible.
- "**They have brought...everything they own**" - This is not going to be a brief visit. It is rather a complete relocation. They are not going back to Canaan any time soon. It is interesting that Joseph would tell this to Pharaoh when the ruler had specifically told them to leave their old belongings behind. It was a way of saying that the family planned to take care of themselves as much as possible.

In the next verses, Joseph tried to help his brothers understand what Pharaoh would do when he told him about the family occupation. Joseph was priming his brothers for their meeting with Pharaoh.

> *"When Pharaoh calls you in and asks, 'What is your occupation?' you should answer, 'Your servants have tended livestock from our boyhood on, just as our fathers did.' Then you will be allowed to settle in the region of Goshen, for all shepherds are detestable to the Egyptians." Genesis 46:33, 34*

Joseph knew that Pharaoh would inquire concerning Israel's family. He saw this as a way to position the family in the proper place in Goshen. By some, Joseph has been accused of playing politics; of being deceitful. That is a possible scenario. I prefer to think of it in another way. The subordinates of any despot had to do everything with great care, lest they anger the king. It appears that Joseph was choosing the best way to accomplish the things that needed to be done without causing a stir. Because this was his own family, he could be very vulnerable even though Pharaoh was very fond of him. We must remember that there were many jealous people in the court who would be looking for something with which to blame Joseph.

Observe, again, that Joseph pointed out to his brothers that shepherds were "detestable" to the Egyptians. The word "detestable" is very strong. It is "teobah" (תּוֹעֵבָה) and identifies

something disgusting, something abhorrent, an abomination. It is what the Israelites thought of idols. The Egyptians would identify it as the worst thing they could think of.

Think about Joseph's position. He was trying to make a place for his family. Pharaoh thought this was an excellent idea. One problem Joseph faced, however, wherever he dealt with Egyptians in the placing of his family, Most every Egyptian would be repulsed by just the sight of Joseph's family, for two reasons:

- They thought that Jews were so disgusting that they would not even eat at the same table with them.
- In the minds of most Egyptians, any person, and especially a Jew, who shepherded animals was a disgusting abomination. Think how hard it would be to find an area where the family could live in peace with their neighbors.

Joseph started with Pharaoh himself. He explained to his brothers the way they should identify themselves. This, he thought, would guarantee a place close enough to allow Joseph to visit the family; far enough away to cause no stir in the court.

Conclusion

This is a chapter people tend to overlook. Yet, within these paragraphs there are some very important impressions about God and His people.

For all his weakness and failure, still Jacob found God to be provident and loving. This is startling when you think of how Jacob lived and treated others.

The mercy of God is so obvious when you think of how the brothers had treated Joseph and now God used Joseph to protect their lives and provide for their families. The mercy of God is beyond our imaginations.

There is also a picture of the way God treats the faithful. Though Joseph had been tragically treated by most everyone he encountered, still God used even the tragedies to place His faithful servant where he could bless those who misused him. Ultimately, God also allowed Joseph to see his father and care for him during a time of very severe draught. That is the kind of merciful God we serve.

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QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 23

JOSEPH KEPT EGYPT ALIVE; GRAIN FOR ANIMALS AND LAND

GENESIS 47:1 - 31

1. In Genesis chapter 47, there are four paragraphs. On the following table, write a summary of seven words or less for each paragraph.

47:1-12	
47:13-19	
47:20-26	
47:27-31	

2. In Genesis 47:1-12, Joseph presented his family to the Pharaoh.
   a. In Genesis 47:1, Joseph gave Pharaoh at least four pieces of information:
      (1). What information did Joseph provide?
      (2). What could Pharaoh learn from this presentation?
   b. Genesis 47:2 is brief and interesting.
      (1). Read Genesis 47:1, 2 carefully. Does the content of verse two logically follow the content of verse one?
      (2). What can we learn from this verse?
      (3). What questions does this verse raise for you?
   c. In Genesis 46:31, 32, Joseph told his brothers what he would say to Pharaoh. In Genesis 47:1, Joseph spoke to Pharaoh. On the following table, compare the plan with the actual experience.

THE PLAN	THE ACTUAL EXPERIENCE

      (1). What difference, if any, did you find between the two?
      (2). If there is a difference, what is the significance of it?
   d. In Genesis 46:34, Joseph told his brothers how to speak to Pharaoh. In 47:3, the author reported what the brothers said to Pharaoh. On the following table, compare Joseph's instructions with the statement of the brothers.

JOSEPH'S INSTRUCTIONS	THEIR STATEMENT

(1). What difference, if any, do you find between the two?
(2). If there is a difference, what is the significance of it?

e. In Genesis 47:4, there are two statements and a request.
(1). What are the two statements?
(2). What do these statements tell Pharaoh?
(3). What impression should these statements create for Pharaoh?
(4). Observe the request the brothers made.
(a). What did they request?
(b). Why would they make this request?

f. In Genesis 47:5, 6, Pharaoh responded to Joseph's presentation of his family.
(1). How did Pharaoh respond?
(2). What does this say about Joseph?
(3). What does this say about Pharaoh?
(4). At the end of verse six, Pharaoh made a request.
(a). What was the request?
(b). Put yourself in Joseph's position. Given the family history, how would you feel when given this request?
(c). What would you do?

g. In Genesis 47:7, Joseph continued his presentation.
(1). Whom did he present?
(2). Why did he wait until this point to make this presentation?
(3). What is the significance of the blessing recorded here?

h. Read Genesis 47:7 and then 47:8.
(1). What is the question?
(2). What does the question in verse eight have to do it the report in verse seven?

i. In Genesis 47:9, Jacob answered Pharaoh's question.
(1). What was his answer?
(2). Read verse nine several times. If you were saying these words, how would you feel?

j. In Genesis 47: 10, Jacob gave his blessing to Pharaoh.
(1). What is the significance of giving a second blessing?
(2). Now, read Hebrews 7:7. What does this have to do with the events of 47:7, 10?
(3). What does this tell us about what Jacob was doing?

k. In Genesis 47:11, the author described Joseph's dealing with the instructions of Pharaoh.
(1). How did Joseph demonstrate his faithfulness to his family?

(2). How did Joseph show his faithful service to Pharaoh?

l. In Genesis 47:12, Joseph did still more for his family.
(1). What did he do?
(2). Was his action really necessary?
(3). What does this tell you about Joseph?

3. In Genesis 47:13-19, Joseph developed a plan to keep the Egyptian people alive without losing their dignity.
a. Read again Genesis 47:12, 13.
(1). What did you discover?
(2). What did you learn from this discovery?
b. In Genesis 47:14, the author describes another way Joseph developed to care for Egyptian people.
(1). What did Joseph do?
(2). Why was this significant?
c. In Genesis 47:15, the author gives us a glimpse of just how difficult life was at that time.
(1). What does the author describe?
(2). Just how bad was it?
d. In Genesis 47:16, Joseph responded to the dilemma of the Egyptian people.
(1). What solution did Joseph offer?
(2). Compare 47:14 and 47:16. What did you discover in this comparison?
e. In Genesis 47:17, the author described Joseph's dealings with the Egyptians.
(1). Study the list of animals involved in this exchange. What does this tell us?
(2). Review this verse again. If you were one of these Egyptians, what impression would you develop concerning Joseph?
f. In Genesis 47:18, 19, the Egyptian people came to Joseph for help.
(1). Read these verses carefully. What does this tell us about the relationship between them?
(2). If these verses were presented on the evening news, what would you understand about the condition of things?
(3). Observe that the people made the offer. What does this tell us?
(4). Again look at 47:16, 18, 19.
(a). What do you observe?
(b). What does this tell you?
(c). What trend can you detect here?

4. In Genesis 47:20-26, Joseph is pictured working with the people to help them survive.
a. In Genesis 47:20, Joseph demonstrated his sense of values.
(1). What did he do?
(2). Who benefited from his actions?
b. Compare 47:20 and 47:21.
(1). What did you find?
(2). Think carefully about 47:21.
(a). What did Joseph really do?
(b). How would you evaluate Joseph's actions?

(c). Was he being harsh or generous?

c. In Genesis 47:22, the author described an exception to the rule Joseph imposed upon the Egyptians.
   (1). What was the exception?
   (2). Whose idea was this?
   (3). How should we think of this in terms of Joseph's participation in Egyptian idolatry?
d. Read 47:23 very carefully.
   (1). What did Joseph really do?
   (2). How would you evaluate his actions? (was he kind, arrogant, generous, miserly, etc.)
   (3). What was Joseph saying to the people?
e. In Genesis 47:24, Joseph identified the terms under which the people were to live and work.
   (1). What were the terms of his agreement?
   (2). How would you evaluate the agreement in terms of its generosity?
   (3). How would evaluate this agreement from a tax standpoint?
f. In Genesis 47:25, the people responded to Joseph's agreement.
   (1). What was their response?
   (2). What does this tell you about their attitude?
g. In the first part of 47:26, the author identified the law that was still in effect?
   (1). What was that law?
   (2). Why would it be important that it was still in effect?
h. In the second part of Genesis 47:26, the author repeated information he had provided previously.
   (1). What was the information?
   (2). Why did he repeat it?

5. In Genesis 47:27-31, the author shifted his focus to the preparation for Israel's death.
   a. In Genesis 47:27, the author gave us some information about the conditions of Jacob and his family.
      (1). How would you describe those conditions?
      (2). In view of these current conditions in Egypt and Canaan, what does this tell us?
   b. In Genesis 47:28, the author made a summary statement about the life of Jacob.
      (1). What did he say?
      (2). Why did he say that?
   c. In Genesis 47:29, 30, Jacob called for Joseph.
      (1). Why did Jacob call for Joseph?
      (2). Identify the four requests Jacob made of Joseph?
      (3). Explain what Jacob meant by these requests?
      (4). What principle seems to motivate Jacob in this experience?
      (5). How did Joseph respond?
   d. In Genesis 47:31, Jacob seems to do a strange thing.
      (1). What did Jacob do?
      (2). Why would this surprise Joseph?

(3). Why would Jacob do this?
(4). What was Joseph's response?
(5). What satisfaction, if any, do you see in Jacob's actions?

6. Reread chapter 47 and reflect upon what it tells you about God.
   a. What glimpse of God do you see in this chapter?
   b. In what way does this increase our knowledge of God?
   c. How can you use this information to grow in your spiritual life?

LESSON 23: GENESIS 47:1 - 31

JOSEPH KEPT EGYPT ALIVE; GRAIN FOR ANIMALS AND LAND

Introduction

In the 31 verses of this chapter, there are four paragraphs. A brief summary of each paragraph appears on the following table:

47:1-12	Joseph Presented His Family to Pharaoh
47:13-19	Joseph Bought All Egypt for Pharaoh
47:20-26	Joseph Showed Kindness to the People
47:27-31	Israel Prepared to Die

This chapter covers a period of 17 years after Israel and his family went into Egypt. There is a very strong contrast in the chapter. While all Egypt sold their possessions and themselves to the Pharaoh, in order to buy food, Israel and his family experienced astonishing prosperity. We will say more about this as we proceed through the story.

Genesis 47:1-12 - Joseph Presented His Family to Pharaoh

Though our text does not read that way, the Hebrew text begins this paragraph with the word "and."

> *Joseph went and told Pharaoh, "My father and brothers, with their flocks and herds and everything they own, have come from the land of Canaan and are now in Goshen." Genesis 47:1*

This gives the story a play-by-play feeling. This is compatible with the way the rest of the book is written.

This verse gives the gist of the message Joseph conveyed to Pharaoh. Whenever anyone went into the presence of the Pharaoh, it was always a bit of a risk, somewhat frightening. The cupbearer was a good illustration of this situation. Though Joseph was trusted and respected, still he had to be careful. Joseph knew that his suggestion was one that Pharaoh had previously suggested. It still needed to be dealt with in careful terms.

Joseph's message was brief, but sufficient to apprise Pharaoh of the whole situation. There were four pieces of information:

- **My father and brothers have come** - this would tell Pharaoh that Joseph and his family had done exactly as Pharaoh had instructed them.
- **They brought their flocks and herds** - This would put Pharaoh's mind at ease concerning the brothers attitude - would they want to provide for themselves or would they want to get everything they could from the Egyptian's generosity? The presence of the animals would require work. This would assure Pharaoh that they were prepared to do for themselves.

- **They brought all their belongings** - This fact carried more than one meaning. It assured Pharaoh that they had not come for a brief visit. As nomads, they had everything they needed for survival. They could have left it all in Canaan, as Pharaoh suggested. The fact that they brought their possessions, which would be less elegant than those provided by Pharaoh, would give the ruler an impression of their motives and attitudes. They did not come to live in luxury.
- **They are now in Goshen** - This is the place where Pharaoh instructed them to come. It was a way of assuring Pharaoh that his wishes were being carried out exactly.

Obviously, this should please Pharaoh as much as it did Joseph. This was certainly one reason Joseph suggested that they go to Goshen.

Verse two does not follow verse one in sequence. Notice what it involves:

He chose five of his brothers and presented them before Pharaoh. Genesis 47:2

This verse reports something that Joseph did in advance. He chose five of his brothers to appear, along with Israel, before Pharaoh. The author does not identify which of the eleven brothers were included in the five. This is unfortunate because it would be almost impossible for them to decide among themselves. In our text it says, "He presented them before Pharaoh." The word "presented" is literally "to place;" "to set up." Some suggest that this means that he had them come before Pharaoh in humbled fashion so that they would not appear too strong. This line of thought suggests that Joseph feared Pharaoh would conscript the brothers for his army if they looked strong. This, of course, cannot be verified.

The presentation to Pharaoh was very important. Pharaoh had not seen Joseph's family. He needed to see them because he was giving them a place to live as an expression of his appreciation for Joseph. It was really a two-sided presentation:

- Pharaoh officially presented the gift to the family through Joseph.
- Joseph presented his family as an opportunity to express their gratitude for the wonderful gift he had given to them.

In the third verse, Pharaoh did as Joseph had anticipated.

Pharaoh asked the brothers, "What is your occupation?" "Your servants are shepherds," they replied to Pharaoh, "just as our fathers were." Genesis 47:3

The text does not indicate why Pharaoh was interested in their vocation. It seems obvious that Joseph knew Pharaoh well enough to know that this would happen. We can conjecture that, at least in part, he was trying to get to know the family of his trusted aid.

Joseph must have been shocked to hear his brothers reply, "Your servants are shepherds,' ..., 'just as our fathers were.'"

Consider what they said - "We are shepherds." The word "shepherd" presupposes a keeper of sheep. This would not be significant to us. To an Egyptian, especially to Pharaoh, it would be shocking. The Egyptians considered shepherds as abominable as they did Jews. In this instance there were two factors which were repulsive to the Egyptians. They were admitting that they were both Jews and shepherds. In both instances, they would be considered abominable. This could have destroyed Joseph's plan for his family's care as well as his own future.

There are some changes here that we need to observe. The meeting with Pharaoh did not go as Joseph planned. Look at Joseph's portion:

THE PLAN	THE ACTUAL EXPERIENCE
Then Joseph said to his brothers and to his father's household, "I will go up and speak to Pharaoh and will say to him, 'My brothers and my father's household, who were living in the land of Canaan, have come to me. The men are shepherds; they tend livestock, and they have brought along their flocks and herds and everything they own." Genesis 46:31, 32	Joseph went and told Pharaoh, "My father and brothers, with their flocks and herds and everything they own, have come from the land of Canaan and are now in Goshen." Genesis 47:1

The difference may seem trivial. It was not. The statements mean two different things:

- **The plan** - It could be interpreted to mean that they had arrived. It could also mean that they had come to let Joseph take care of them. It could be that Joseph feared this interpretation. When there is resentment, such as the Egyptians for the Jews, the worst possible meaning can be placed on every statement.
- **The experience** - Though the statement is only slightly different, still there is a difference. Having changed the wording, it could more easily be understood to mean that Pharaoh invited them and they had come in response to that invitation.

With Egyptian feelings about Jews as sensitive as they were, any improvement would be like a breath of fresh air.

The brothers also did not follow Joseph's instructions. Compare what Joseph instructed with what they said to Pharaoh.

THE PLAN	**THE ACTUAL EXPERIENCE**
"you should answer, 'Your servants have tended livestock from our boyhood on, just as our fathers did.' Then you will be allowed to settle in the region of Goshen," Genesis 46:34	Pharaoh asked the brothers, "What is your occupation?" "Your servants are shepherds," they replied to Pharaoh, "just as our fathers were." Genesis 47:3

The difference, in this instance, is more pronounced.

- **The plan** - To refer to oneself as one who tended livestock was not offensive to the Egyptians. They had horses, cattle and goats in abundance. Indeed, Pharaoh had his own special herds. The idea of answering only the questions one is asked was what Joseph instructed them to do. The more general answer was much more apt to make life easier for the entire family.

- **The experience** - We do not know why the brothers did not speak exactly as they were instructed to do. We only know that they did not follow instructions. When they identified themselves as shepherds, it could only mean that they cared for sheep. This branded them in the eyes of most every Egyptian as an abomination. Joseph was trying to avoid this. They not only identified themselves as shepherds, but also identified their father and their ancestors in the same way.

In verse four, the brothers further clarified their purposes for being in Egypt.

> *They also said to him, "We have come to live here awhile, because the famine is severe in Canaan and your servants' flocks have no pasture. So now, please let your servants settle in Goshen." Genesis 47:4*

For some undisclosed reason, the brothers said more than Joseph instructed them. They said, "We have come to live here for a while." The Hebrew text presents a slightly different meaning. "To sojourn in the land are we come, for there is no pasture for your servants flocks." This statement presents two pieces of information:

- "**To sojourn in the land are we come**" - A sojourner is one who is not a citizen of the land. He is one who has no rights; one for whom the people have no responsibility. A sojourner is just passing through. He has no intentions of staying permanently. This status stresses the temporary nature of his stay.
- "**There is no pasture for your servants flocks**" - This identifies the purpose of their presence. If there had been pasture for their animals, they would not have come. It was a way of saying, "We have no intention of being a burden to you or your people."

They concluded their statement with a request that they be allowed to stay in Goshen for the present. This meant that Pharaoh, Joseph and the brothers all agreed that the place for Joseph's family was in Goshen.

In the next two verses, Pharaoh responded to Joseph.

> *Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Your father and your brothers have come to you, and the land of Egypt is before you; settle your father and your brothers in the best part of the land. Let them live in Goshen. And if you know of any among them with special ability, put them in charge of my own livestock." Genesis 47:5, 6*

What a gracious offer! It is very clear that Pharaoh's respect for Joseph was so great he withheld nothing to make sure that Joseph's family was provided for with Egypt's best. It wasn't that he decided generously. It was so bountiful that he gave Joseph permission to make the choice. In effect he was saying, "Give them the best of the land of Goshen, our very best land."

Almost as an afterthought, Pharaoh made a request, "And if you know of any among them with special ability, put them in charge of my own livestock." The word translated "special ability" "chayil" (חַיִל) was often used in a military sense. It usually refers to persons of strength, skill or virtue, people who could be depended upon in the heat of battle.

The burden of Pharaoh's request was this, "put them in charge of my own livestock." The word "put them in charge" is "sar" (שַׂר) and means the person in charge, the commander, the steward." He wanted them to be in charge of the men who cared for his live-

stock. By the way, the word translated "livestock" is usually translated "cattle." It can be used for domesticated animals.

Joseph was on the spot. As you read these verse, you wonder, "Did Joseph ever tell Pharaoh how he came to be a slave?" The text does not say, but it seems doubtful. Imagine how Joseph must have felt as Pharaoh asked if he knew of a brother who was strong and virtuous. Oh, the pain Joseph must have endured without letting it show on his face.

What did Joseph do with Pharaoh's request? Did he honor the request and recommend Judah or one of the other ten? Did he refuse? Did he find a convenient excuse to defer from a recommendation? The text is silent. We would not dare to hazard a guess. We must be content to accept the fact that in His eternal wisdom, God has drawn a curtain over that which we really long to see.

In verse seven, Joseph presented his father to Pharaoh.

> *Then Joseph brought his father Jacob in and presented him before Pharaoh." Genesis 47:7a*

There is little reason to believe that the author has recorded every word of their conversation. He has, however, given us the gist of it.

Put yourself in Joseph's place. You thought that your father was dead, but now he is with you. You and your father were very close before your brothers sold you into slavery. Now you have the opportunity to present him to the most powerful man in the world. There would be both joy and real satisfaction to say the least.

Observe that the first thing "Jacob" did was to pronounce a blessing upon Pharaoh. Did he pronounce the blessing because Pharaoh had accepted responsibility for them? That would be appropriate. Did Jacob bless Pharaoh because he had befriended Joseph? That, too, would have been appropriate. Did he do it for both reasons? We just do not know.

Imagine the scene, if you will. Jacob stands before Pharaoh, the most powerful man in the world, a man worshipped as a god by his people and blesses him, probably in the name of God. Jacob knew Pharaoh was mighty. He also knew that Pharaoh was without power in the presence of Jehovah.

In verse eight, Pharaoh inquired concerning Jacob's age.

> *Pharaoh asked him, "How old are you?" Genesis 47:8*

This appears to be Pharaoh's inquisitive nature. He met the brothers and asked, "What is your vocation?" Now he met Jacob and immediately asked, "How old are you?" The question comes to our mind, "Why would Pharaoh ask?" Did Jacob look very old and frail? Was Jacob in surprisingly good condition for a man of so advanced years? The author, however, does not give us even a clue.

Jacob responded to Pharaoh's inquiry.

> *And Jacob said to Pharaoh, "The years of my pilgrimage are a hundred and thirty. My years have been few and difficult, and they do not equal the years of the pilgrimage of my fathers." Genesis 47:9*

He gave more answer than Pharaoh requested. He indicate that he was now 130 years old. In his response, Jacob identified his life in three different ways:

- **It was a pilgrimage** - The word for pilgrimage is "mawgoor" (מָגוּר) and means "temporary abode," "sojourn," "to be a stranger," "to turn aside from the road," "to be afraid because of hostility." It can be used to describe a lifetime, but is most commonly used to describe a lifetime of fear and tentativeness that comes from not belonging. A "pilgrim," one who is just passing through, has no rights, has good reasons to fear. Jacob said his whole life had been like this.
- **My years have been few and difficult** - This may seem strange when he had just said that he was 130 years old. By our standards, that is very old. We do not know how old that was for them. It seems certain, from the statement which follows this one, that he was not feeling old comparing himself with his forefathers.
  - ♦ Isaac - 180 years old (Genesis 35:28)
  - ♦ Abraham - 175 years old (Genesis 25:8)
- **At a very advanced age, 35-40 years is a lot**. We can easily see why he would speak as he did. In this statement, Jacob also said his pilgrimage had been "difficult" - "rah" (רָע) which means "to spoil" or literally "to break in pieces." It is "something evil," "to do harm," "to hurt," or "be wicked." If you look at Jacob's life, you must agree that it was a life often gone bad and spoiled, even if it was the result of his own doing.
- **They do not equal the years of the pilgrimage of my fathe**r..." - Jacob stressed that it was clear that his father had lived longer than he would. That proved to be an accurate statement. It appears that Jacob felt that a person's life was incomplete if he lived a shorter time than his father. Indeed, long life was one of the major indicators of a righteous life in their thinking. This was a quite common, if erroneous, trend of thought then as well as in our own time.

There was a pang of sadness in Jacob's words as he spoke to Pharaoh. This may account for the fact that Pharaoh did not pursue the subject or ask other questions.

In the verse which follows, there is an interesting report:

Then Jacob blessed Pharaoh and went out from his presence. Genesis 47:10

Again, the author referred to Joseph's father as "Jacob" in spite of the fact that his name had been changed to "Israel." This event happened some time after Jacob's life-changing experience at Bethel. God was quite important in his life. Is it possible that Jacob blessed Pharaoh for a number of reasons, one of which was to stress the fact that though Pharaoh was the most powerful man in the world, God was still greater. It is a Biblical principle that the lesser is blessed by the greater.

And without doubt the lesser person is blessed by the greater. Hebrews 7:7

A poor shepherd with God as his help is really greater than Pharaoh, the most powerful man in the world. Jacob would have been aware of this understanding. Is it possible that he was suggesting that though Pharaoh was the most powerful man in the world, Jacob, with God at his side was greater still?

Observe that in this verse, the author also said, "Jacob... went out from his (Pharaoh's) presence." At this point, Pharaoh had not spoken to Jacob about where he was to live. This causes one to think that, perhaps, this was the first sign that Jacob had now turned his

care over to Joseph. He had been Jacob's primary heir and we will later see evidence that points to that fact again.

In verse 11, Joseph shows himself to be the care provider for the family:

> *So Joseph settled his father and his brothers in Egypt and gave them property in the best part of the land, the district of Rameses, as Pharaoh directed. Genesis 47:11*

There are two distinct levels of Joseph's faithfulness in this verse:

- **Joseph was faithful to Pharaoh** - The ruler had instructed Joseph to give his family land in Goshen, the very best land in Egypt. The following may give an impression of Jacob's new location. Ramesis is in the northern part of the area labeled "Goshen." It was a huge portion of the best land in all Egypt. Since the time of the Ramesis, this fertile land had been the exclusive property of the rulers of Egypt. This meant that the placing of Joseph's family was a direct gift from the Pharaoh and not from the nation of Egypt. Joseph did exactly what Pharaoh told him to do. There was a risk in this. He could be charged with showing favoritism to his family.
- **Joseph was also faithful in caring for his family** - He could have given his brothers grain and sent them back to struggle in Canaan. Joseph brought them to Egypt and cared for his father and family in the best possible way.

The author continued his picture of Joseph's care of his father and family in the next verse:

> *Joseph also provided his father and his brothers and all his father's household with food, according to the number of their children. Genesis 47:12*

To give the family land was one thing; to make sure they had food was quite another. There is an interesting picture of Joseph here. This issue is not that he provided food, but the way he did it:

- He could have provided for his father and not for his hard-hearted brothers. The fact is, he did not do that. This was great mercy.
- Joseph could have provided some food for the whole family. He did more. Joseph provided food for each family, "According to the number of their children." The more children his brother had, the more food Joseph provided.

Genesis 47:13-19 - Joseph Bought All Egypt for Pharaoh

There is a serious contrast between verses 12 and 13:

Joseph also provided his father and his brothers and all his father's household with food, according to the number of their children. Genesis 47:12	There was no food, however, in the whole region because the famine was severe; both Egypt and Canaan wasted away because of the famine. Genesis 47:13

In **Genesis 47:12**, Joseph provided his family not only a place to live, but all the food they needed to live well.

In **Genesis 47:13**, however, the author indicated that there was no food for the Egyptians in their own land.

Though conditions were difficult, at best, still Joseph took care of his family as he provided for the Egyptians. The author recorded, in verse 13, that "both Egypt and Canaan wasted away because of the famine." The word "wasted away," is "lawhah" (לָהַה) and means "to burn," "to be rabid," "insane from exhaustion," or "to faint." It describes what we would call being overcome by heat. It describes a condition that was so hot and dry that both people and the land spent themselves just to survive. The author's description is extremely graphic. It is like nothing we have ever experienced. People living around the desert would know exactly what it was like.

In the following verse, the author began his description of the way Joseph dealt in relation to this great need.

> *Joseph collected all the money that was to be found in Egypt and Canaan in payment for the grain they were buying, and he brought it to Pharaoh's palace. Genesis 47:14*

In every era, people in high places are tempted to use graft for their own profit. Observe how Joseph dealt with the money he received from the sale of the grain he had stored. The author gave us important pieces of information in this statement:

Joseph collected all the money in Egypt - He sold grain until all the money in the nation had been collected.

Joseph collected all the money in Canaan - This means that they were able to not only feed the people of Egypt, but Canaan as well. We must remember that Canaan was not highly populated, but Joseph was able to provide food to keep them from starving. Perhaps for the only time in history, one nation literally had all the money from two sovereign nations.

Joseph brought the money to Pharaoh's palace - There is no report of money being used for other purposes. The money Joseph collected was taken to Pharaoh's palace. He held all the money from the sale of the grain. Joseph saw his task as doing this on behalf of his master.

In the following verse, the author described a tragic dilemma:

> *When the money of the people of Egypt and Canaan was gone, all Egypt came to Joseph and said, "Give us food. Why should we die before your eyes? Our money is used up." Genesis 47:15*

For some reason, we tend to think this happened in Egypt, but the text clearly states that it was also true in Canaan. The people's money ran out long before the famine was over. Put yourself in the place of these people. There is a strong panic that takes hold of us when we have used up our money, but our problems have not yet been solved. This is the frame of mind in which "all Egypt came to Joseph." Their words to Joseph reveal the panic of which we spoke.

Their attitude was obvious. You have food and we need it. We have no money, so give us the food or we will die. When they said, "Why should we die before your eyes?" the extremity of their desperation was obvious. There may be something else here. Notice they talked about "die before your eyes." The text does not say, but it is possible that they

were saying that they were weak enough to die there. They might also be saying they wouldn't leave without food. Desperation has no fear of possible consequences.

The intensity of their desperation was evidenced by the fact that they ended their plea with a frank admission - "Our money is used up." There was no pretense or deception. They were penniless and hungry. they needed help.

In verse 16, Joseph gave the hungry people an instruction.

> *"Then bring your livestock," said Joseph. "I will sell you food in exchange for your livestock, since your money is gone." Genesis 47:16*

Joseph could have simply given them the food. It would have been a political plus for him. The opposition he received as a Jew would be offset by his generosity. His home training instructed him otherwise. Joseph reminded them that they were not helpless, at least not yet. To receive something for nothing was not acceptable for him. In effect Joseph said, "You have livestock, I will trade you food for animals."

This may seem like Joseph was taking advantage of them. I doubt it. If Joseph did nothing, they would die. The text does not say what Joseph did, with the huge herds he accumulated through these exchanges. It is safe to assume he hired people to care for the animals. It is even more possible that he paid each herdsman to care for the animals they had sold.

In the following verse, the author described the people's response to Joseph's offer.

> *So they brought their livestock to Joseph, and he gave them food in exchange for their horses, their sheep and goats, their cattle and donkeys. And he brought them through that year with food in exchange for all their livestock. Genesis 47:17*

Notice the list of animals they exchanged: Horses, sheep and goats, cattle and donkeys. All of these were useful to Pharaoh and it kept the people alive.

Observe also the closing statement, "He brought them through that year with food in exchange for ALL their livestock." The exchange was for ALL their livestock. Joseph controlled all the money and now all the animals in Egypt and in Canaan. He now controlled more wealth than anyone else in the world.

The author continued the drama in the following verse. Observe how he described the situation:

> *When that year was over, they came to him the following year and said, "We cannot hide from our lord the fact that since our money is gone and our livestock belongs to you, there is nothing left for our lord except our bodies and our land. Why should we perish before your eyes -- we and our land as well? Buy us and our land in exchange for food, and we with our land will be in bondage to Pharaoh. Give us seed so that we may live and not die, and that the land may not become desolate." Genesis 47:18, 19*

The desperation has increased. The people came to Joseph seeking help. They were very direct. They owned the fact that they had sold him everything except themselves and the land. It was preferable for them to live in debtors slavery rather than die of starvation.

Verse 19 describes their logic when he said, "Why should we perish before your eyes - we and our land as well?" The anticipated answer to their questions was "You shouldn't

perish." They suggested the sale of themselves and their land to Joseph in exchange for food. This suggests an intensifying of their panic.

Think about their request for a moment, "Buy us and our land in exchange for food." After life itself, freedom is one of our most prized possessions. It was their way of saying that this was their final hope of survival. The fear and resignation in this request is too intense to fully describe.

Observe that they gave two reasons why Joseph should do this:

- "**That we may live and not die**." They were going to die of starvation if Joseph did not help them by accepting their offer.
- "**And that the land may not become desolate**". The use of the word "and" before this clause places it in a position of equal importance with preserving the people's lives. They tended to treat the land as they would a person. They would not want the land to be desolate any more than they would want a person to be desolate; any more than they wanted to die.

Genesis 47:20-26 - Joseph Showed Kindness to the People

There is an interesting situation in the first verse of this paragraph.

So Joseph bought all the land in Egypt for Pharaoh. The Egyptians, one and all, sold their fields, because the famine was too severe for them. The land became Pharaoh's. Genesis 47:20

Joseph's actions seem strangely modern:

- By law, Joseph decreed that each person give 20% of his harvest to the government. This was a form of taxation.
- Joseph stored this surplus.
- In the time of drought, Joseph sold the grain to the people who gave it in exchange for their land.

At this point, Pharaoh was much richer and owned all the land in Egypt except the land of the priests. The people were poor, but happy to be alive. In spite of this, Joseph kept Egypt as well as his own people alive.

The wording of our text, in Genesis 47:21, could be misleading.

and Joseph reduced the people to servitude, from one end of Egypt to the other. Genesis 47:21

The Hebrew text reads a bit differently:

"And he made the people go into the cities from the end of the boarder of Egypt to the other." Genesis 47:21

There is a big difference between the two translations:

- Our text - It sounds as though Joseph treated every citizen of Egypt as a slave.
- The Hebrew text - It sounds as though Joseph moved people to the large cities, where the grain was stored to eliminate the huge problems of transporting the grain to every little village in the land.

There was a notable exception to Joseph's plan to consolidate the population in and around the large cities.

> *However, he did not buy the land of the priests, because they received a regular allotment from Pharaoh and had food enough from the allotment Pharaoh gave them. That is why they did not sell their land. Genesis 47:22*

There is some controversy about the identity of the "priests." Some suggest that they were religious officials who were involved with the idol worship in Egypt. Others, however, contended that they were government officials.

The Hebrew word translated "priests" is "kohane" (כֹּהֵן). It means "officiating priest." There is a different word for civic official. I believe the author described religious leaders of Egypt. Part of the problem with this is that some do not understand why Joseph would make an allowance for idolatrous religious leaders. That is a question. The provision for the priests was probably a law of the land over which neither Joseph nor anyone else had any control.

You may remember that when Israel went into Canaan, land was set aside for the exclusive use of the Jewish priests. It appears that the situation is the same here.

According to the text, this was an arrangement between Pharaoh and the priests. This was just one of many things over which Joseph had no control whatsoever.

It is said that the true test of a leader is identified by what he/she does when there is no restriction. That describes Joseph's situation well.

Notice how Joseph spoke to the Egyptian people.

> *Joseph said to the people, "Now that I have bought you and your land today for Pharaoh, here is seed for you so you can plant the ground." Genesis 47:23*

As you read this verse, the kindness of Joseph stands out in your mind. He spoke to them as though they were free citizens, not like people who had sold themselves to Pharaoh. Joseph provided them with seed and food and trusted them to use it properly and plant Pharaoh's crop.

In verse 24, Joseph described the terms of their agreement:

> *"But when the crop comes in, give a fifth of it to Pharaoh. The other four-fifths you may keep as seed for the fields and as food for yourselves and your households and your children." Genesis 47:24*

Joseph was generous. This was a tenant farmer situation. At that time, the owner would take 80% of the harvest and the farmer would have to live on 20%. Joseph simply turned that agreement around and gave 80% to the people and 20% to Pharaoh, the owner. This kind of generosity from top governmental leaders was as unheard of then as it is today.

The response of the people was predictable.

> *"You have saved our lives," they said. "May we find favor in the eyes of our lord; we will be in bondage to Pharaoh." Genesis 47:25*

The people of Egypt recognized that Joseph had not only saved their lives, but now made a most generous offer to them. They were so elated that they were willing to be Pharaoh's servants.

Good governmental decisions are often identified by their durability.

So Joseph established it as a law concerning land in Egypt – still in force today – that a fifth of the produce belongs to Pharaoh. It was only the land of the priests that did not become Pharaoh's. Genesis 47:26

We do not know when this chapter was written. It was certainly put in writing long after the events took place. The author's words, "So Joseph established it as a law concerning land in Egypt – still in force today – that a fifth part of the produce belongs to Pharaoh," are confirmation of that fact. We must remember that at the time of this writing, the famine was over. Nevertheless, the law was considered fair enough that it continued to be in effect long after the crisis had ended.

In the second half of this verse, the author repeated the fact that the lands of the priests were exempt from being taken over on behalf of Pharaoh. This was mentioned for purposes of emphasis.

Genesis 47:27-31 - Israel Prepared to Die

Observe how the author begins this paragraph:

Now the Israelites settled in Egypt in the region of Goshen. They acquired property there and were fruitful and increased greatly in number. Genesis 47:27

Our text begins with the word "Now." This word would suggest a shift in the directions the author took in the story.

In the Hebrew text, however, the paragraph begins with the word "and." This suggests a continuation of the message of the previous paragraph. If you read verses 20-26 and 27-31, you will note that the second paragraph is a continuation of the events of the first.

The author started this verse saying, "And the Israelites settled in the region of Goshen." It is as though this had just happened. That, of course, is not true. We know that Jacob lived in Goshen at least 17 years before he died. This was some time after his death. It is clear the author's reference is to the time, nearly two decades earlier, when Jacob and his sons came to Egypt and settled in Goshen.

The second part of this verse is interesting. Some have understood this to mean that Jacob's family acquired land in Goshen. The text says, "They acquired property there..." The Hebrew text is even more specific:

And Israel lived in the land of Egypt in the land of Goshen; and they owned in it and they were fruitful and multiplied exceedingly." (HEB) Genesis 47:27

This suggests a few possibilities:

- This could be a reference to "the property" Pharaoh had given Jacob and his family when the first came to Egypt.
- Joseph gave Jacob's family land in Goshen, but because of their prosperity, they had to buy more land in order to give proper care to their flocks. If this were the proper understanding, there would be a problem. You may remember that God said to Abraham,

  Then the LORD said to him, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years." Genesis 15:13

A stranger is one who has no rights and owns no property. This is clearly contrary to what God said to Abraham and everyone knew it.

- It could mean that Joseph brought the farm people into the cities in order to ease the problems of distributing the food. It is possible that when the draught was over, Jacob's family regained the land Joseph had given them and also acquired much of the rest of Goshen to care for the growing needs of their flocks.

We do not know which scenario is most appropriate, but the second, though an act of disobedience, seems more reasonable. We do know, however, that Jacob's family owned land in Egypt. In effect, they were no longer strangers, foreigners, there.

As you have observed, the author used a set pattern when he reported the death of a major participant.

> *Jacob lived in Egypt seventeen years, and the years of his life were a hundred and forty-seven. Genesis 47:28*

As usual, the author reported the number of years Jacob had lived, 147. He also indicated the number of years he had lived in Goshen, 17.

At this point, it is as though the author drew back the curtain to give us a glimpse of a very intimate, private conversation between Jacob and Joseph.

> *When the time drew near for Israel to die, he called for his son Joseph and said to him, "If I have found favor in your eyes, put your hand under my thigh and promise that you will show me kindness and faithfulness. Do not bury me in Egypt," Genesis 47:29*

It is not surprising that Jacob called for Joseph rather than his other sons, when he was about to die. Despite the fact that the 11 sons were in the same place where Jacob lived, Joseph was his heir. He would be responsible to carry out Jacob's wishes after his death.

It was not unusual for a person to preface a serious request with the words, "If I have found favor..." It appears at least eight times in the Old Testament. You will remember that when Jacob met Esau, he used these words as he urged Esau to receive his gift. Jacob was, perhaps, more urgent than he had ever been in his life. His request was absolutely essential for the meaning of his life. Jacob's request was very intense. In this regard, the American Standard Version uses the words, "I pray thee." The Hebrew text used the word, "Please" "naw" (נָא). It is a word which speaks of entreaty and pleading. It identifies the attitude with which Jacob framed his request.

Jacob's request, in verses 29 and 30, is in four parts:

1. "**Put your hand under my thigh**" - This statement is presented very delicately. Literally, Jacob did not refer to his thigh, but rather to the circumcised organ. This was not an attempt to be crude. Prior to the giving of the law, this was the way irrevocable oaths were made. After that, oaths were taken upon the law of God.

   It would be easy for us to be shocked or put off by this practice. We should not be. They did not deal with it in these terms. Remember, this was a way of establishing an irreversible oath. Jacob asked Joseph to place his hand there for a valid reason. This was the source of Jacob's lineage. It was a way of saying, graphically, "As long as my lineage exists, you will never be free of the promise you make

to me now." It was a vivid way to remind Joseph about just how serious and important this request was.

2. **"Promise that you will show me kindness and faithfulness**." Jacob was about to die. Joseph could promise him anything. Jacob would not be present to know if Joseph kept his promise or not. The word "kindness" is "chesed"(חֶסֶד) which means "kindness," "mercy." It was usually identified with "mercy." It is a spiritual quality of receiving favor we obviously do not deserve.

   Jacob also asked for "faithfulness." This word is "ehmeth" (אֱמֶת). It comes from the root word which means "to build up," "to foster faithfulness like a parent," "to be faithful," "to be dependable." It is a way of saying, deal with me in my death as though I were alive and present. There is also a hint of regret in Jacob's words. He had dealt harshly with Joseph when the boy announced his dreams. His request for mercy is a way of saying, "The way I treated you years ago demonstrates I do not deserve the wonderful care you give me now, much less the request I am making."

3. **"Do not bury me in Egypt**..." Genesis 47:30 It was very important that Jacob have God's blessing upon leaving the land of Canaan. This was because Jacob took it seriously that God had covenanted to give the land to the seed of Abraham as an ongoing inheritance. Because of this, it was important not only that he be buried in Israel, but in the place where his forefathers were buried.

   In Genesis 46, God made this promise:

   "I will go down to Egypt with you, and I will surely bring you back again. And Joseph's own hand will close your eyes." Genesis 46:4

   The determination to be buried in Israel expressed his faith in that promise.

   Relationships between Jews and Egyptians had historically been strained. If for no other reason, Jacob would not want to be buried there.

   There was also a spiritual reason. The Egyptians were idolaters. They worshipped many gods, among them Pharaoh and his son. Because Joseph was held in such high respect, Jacob may have feared that he could be added to their pantheon of gods, or that his burial might become a part of their idolatrous worship. This would be a reasonable concern.

4. "**When I rest with my fathers, carry me out of Egypt and bury me where they are buried**." Genesis 47:29, 30a Jacob did not view his life as an isolated individual. He understood his life to be an integral part of an ongoing relationship between God and Israel. This was his way to affirm that relationship.

Joseph responded to Jacob's intense request in a very direct manner:

"I will do as you say," he said. Genesis 47:30

Joseph's words were a promise to his father. There are two things that indicate just how binding the promise was:

- Joseph was the effective ruler of Egypt. His word was law. This required that once his word was given, it had to be absolutely dependable.

- Joseph was Jacob's heir. It was his obligation to carry out the wishes of his father. This was especially true concerning Jacob's final wishes and instructions concerning his burial.

Jacob had every reason to rest comfortably, convinced that Joseph would do exactly as he had promised.

That was not the case, however. Notice how Jacob responded to Joseph's promise.

> *"Swear to me," he said. Then Joseph swore to him, and Israel worshipped as he leaned on the top of his staff. Genesis 47:31*

Obviously, Jacob was not satisfied. It did not mean that he mistrusted Joseph. It meant that he was absolutely determined that he would do everything within his power, even to causing his heir to take actions following his death, to be a part of what God had promised to do on behalf of him and his lineage.

Conclusion

In this chapter, everyone was busy doing what people must do, trying to survive. Permeating the whole story, however, is glimpse after glimpse of God.

Jehovah assured Jacob that he would not only be provided for in Egypt, but would prosper. This is exactly what He caused to take place in Jacob's life when he accepted Pharaoh's invitation.

As the draught worsened, we see what God can do through the life of a dedicated servant. Joseph had every natural reason to be distant from the Egyptian people and royalty. Egyptians hated Jews. High officials of the Egyptian government put him in prison, for years, when he had done nothing wrong. Nevertheless, God worked through Joseph to not only keep these Egyptians alive, but to look out for their interests as well. Jacob's determination to be buried in Canaan was more than stubborn insistence. He knew God would keep His promise. Jacob was so convinced of this that he did everything necessary to be a responsible participant in that covenant relationship.

Threading through each paragraph of this chapter, one can see the faithful providence of God for His people and even for those who rejected Him and worshipped idols.

There are many times when we look at the events of our lives and wonder just what God is allowing to happen; wondering what God is doing in my life. These are the times when we need to learn to trust that what God has always been, He must continue to be. It is a matter of faith, not understanding.

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 24

ISRAEL BLESSED JOSEPH'S SONS

GENESIS 48:1 - 22

1. In Genesis chapter 48, there are two paragraphs. On the following table, write a summary of seven words or less for each paragraph.

48:1-7	
48:8-22	

2. In Genesis 48:1-7, Joseph learned that Jacob was dying.
   a. In Genesis 48:1, Joseph brought his sons to see their grandfather.
      (1). What was the significance of this?
      (2). What difference does this make?
   b. In Genesis 48:2, the text tells us that Jacob rallied. What would be responsible for that?
   c. In Genesis 48:3, Jacob rehearses his experiences at Luz/Bethel.
      (1). Why does he review these experiences?
      (2). What difference did it make at this late point in Jacob's life?
   d. In Genesis 48:5, Jacob made an unusual announcement.
      (1). What was that announcement?
      (2). Why would Jacob say a thing like that?
      (3). In Genesis 48:1, Joseph's sons are called "Manasseh and Ephraim." In Genesis 48:5, Jacob referred to the young men as "Ephraim and Manasseh." What, if anything, does this mean?
   e. In Genesis 48:5, 6, Jacob made a distinction between Joseph's children born before the family came to Goshen and those born after the family's arrival. What difference would this make?
   f. Read Genesis 48:6, 7, again.
      (1). How can we account for the difference in content?
      (2). Why would Jacob included this information here?

3. In Genesis 48:8-22, Jacob pronounced his blessing upon Ephraim and Manasseh.
   a. Read Genesis 48:8.
      (1). What did Jacob mean?
      (2). What does this verse add to our store of information?
   b. Read Joseph's reply, in Genesis 48:9, to Jacob's question in Genesis 48:8.
      (1). What did Joseph stress?
      (2). What is the significance of the blessing Jacob mentioned in this verse?
   c. In Genesis 48:10, the author explained that Jacob's eyesight was failing.
      (1) Why would the author report this information?
      (2). What is the significance of the kiss and embrace?
   d. Read Genesis 48:11 carefully.

(1). If you were Jacob and said these words, what would you be trying to emphasize?
(2). To what does Jacob ascribe the credit for this privilege?
(3). What is the significance of this ?

e. Joseph did something unusual in Genesis 48:12.
(1). What did he do?
(2). What did it mean?
(3). Why did he do it?

f. In Genesis 48:13, Joseph acted with special care.
(1). What did he do?
(2). Why did he do this so carefully?

g. The author was giving a careful description in Genesis 48:14.
(1). Why was he being so precise?
(2). What did this mean?
(3). What difference would it make?

h. There is a surprise in Genesis 48:15.
(1). What is the surprise?
(2). Why is it there?
(3). Study Jacob's description of God in this verse.
(a). What did he say about God?
(b). What does this tell us about Jacob?

i. In Genesis 48:16, Jacob continued his description of God.
(1). What did he say?
(2). What does this add to our store of knowledge about God?
(3). In this verse, Jacob began his blessing of Joseph's sons.
(a). Write out the blessings Jacob bestowed upon the two boys.
(b). Explain what Jacob meant by each statement.

j. In Genesis 48:17, There is a slight confrontation between Joseph and Jacob.
(1). What was the issue of their differences?
(2). What difference would this make to Ephraim and Manasseh?
(3). How did Joseph respond? How would you describe his attitude?
(4). Read the verse again. How would Jacob be expected to respond to such an action?

k. In Genesis 48:18, Joseph confronted his father Jacob.
(1). What was the issue?
(2). Was Joseph right in his contention?
(3). Upon what did Joseph base his position?
(4). Was there any reason why Joseph should have known better?

l. In Genesis 48:19, Jacob responded to Joseph's confrontation.
(1). Describe Jacob's attitude toward this disagreement?
(2). What reason did Jacob give for his actions?
(3). Was it appropriate for Jacob to take this position?
(4). What else could Jacob have done?

m. In Genesis 48:20, Jacob blessed Joseph's two sons.
(1). What blessing did Jacob give them?
(2). What was the meaning of it?

(3). There is an explanation at the conclusion of the verse.
(a). What explanation did Jacob offer?
(b). What difference would it make?

n. In Genesis 48:21, Jacob gave an explanation and two blessings.
(1). What was the explanation?
(2). What blessings did Jacob give Joseph on this occasion?
(3). What does this tell us about Jacob's relationship with God?

o. Read Genesis 48:22 again.
(1). Why would Jacob give Joseph this bonus?
(2). What did it mean?

4. Review what this chapter tells you about God and His actions.
a. What did you learn?
b. What was the author trying to tell us?
c. What difference would that make?
d. What changes will it initiate in the way you live?

Not for sale or resale

LESSON 24: GENESIS 48:1 - 22

ISRAEL BLESSED JOSEPH'S SONS

Introduction

There are two paragraphs in Genesis chapter 48. On the table which follows, there is a brief summary of each paragraph:

48:1-7	Joseph was Informed that Israel Was Dying
48:8-22	Jacob Blessed Ephraim and Manasseh

Genesis 48:1-7 - Joseph Was Informed That Jacob Was Dying

This paragraph begins on a very sad note:

Some time later Joseph was told, "Your father is ill." So he took his two sons Manasseh and Ephraim along with him. Genesis 48:1

It is always a sad note when one's parent dies. In this situation, it was far worse. For much of his life, Joseph was denied the privilege of being with his father, Jacob. Now all too soon after their reunion, Jacob was about to die.

Observe that the author did not include the name of the one who brought the untimely news. Obviously, there is no explanation of this situation in the text. It is quite possible that the unidentified messenger was a servant. In most instances, servants were considered like a chair. To report their actions without using their name would not be uncommon.

The messenger told Joseph that his father was "ill." This word means "sick," "deep pain." It is even used to describe a woman in travail.

Notice also the way the author reported the incident. He did not say, "Joseph hurried to see his father." The author said, "He took with him his two sons Manasseh and Ephraim." Certainly, Joseph wanted to see his father. He was just as eager, however, to bring his sons to see their grandfather. Joseph wanted Jacob to bless his children before he died. To some extent, Jacob would consider Joseph's sons as his own. It was customary for a man to bless his sons, if at all possible, before he died. That is exactly what Joseph had in mind.

The author continued the story in the following verse.

When Jacob was told, "Your son Joseph has come to you," Israel rallied his strength and sat up on the bed. Genesis 48:2

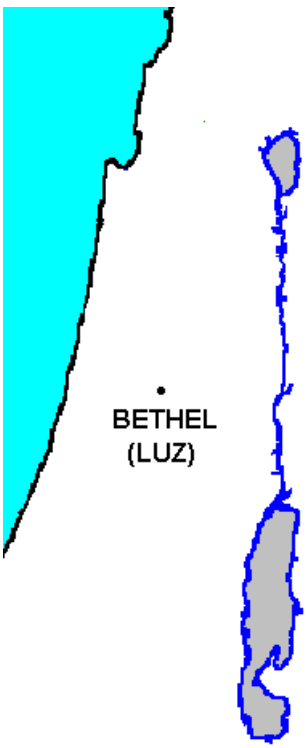
Again, the messenger was unnamed. Perhaps for the same reason as before. The way the author reported this incident suggests that Jacob was really quite weak. It sounds as though it was all Jacob could do to make himself presentable. The way the messenger informed Jacob that Joseph was coming suggests that this was his servant. Whenever a visitor approached a wealthy man's home or tent, a servant would announce their arrival. When Jacob learned that Joseph approached, it says, " He strengthened himself and sat upon the bed." There is a picture here that people of that culture would understand. When-

ever someone approached, the head of the family would seat himself to receive them much as a king would receive an ambassador or an official visitor. Jacob was, in effect, the king of his clan.

It seems clear we do not have the total conversation between Jacob and Joseph. Notice the way it begins.

> *Jacob said to Joseph, "God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan, and there he blessed me." Genesis 48:3*

There is no record of a greeting. Jacob begins talking about his experience at "Luz." As you may know, "Luz" is an early name for the place we know as Bethel. It is identified on Map 26.



Map 26: Luz

This was very important in the mind of Jacob and he wanted to share it with his heir.

Jacob said, "God Almighty (El Shaddai) appeared to me." The report of this experience is reported in Genesis 35:9-15. In that report, the author quotes God as saying, "I am God Almighty." The original experience was exactly as the author reported it the second time. This was also important because the name of God was very significant. It seemed impossible for God to do as He promised Jacob on that occasion. For God to call Himself "God Almighty," gave Jacob reason to believe the unusual promise God made. On the table which follows, compare and contrast the two accounts.

GENESIS 35:11, 12	GENESIS 48:3, 4
And God said to him, "I am God Almighty; be fruitful and increase in number. A nation and a community of nations will come from you, and kings will come from your body. The land I gave to Abraham and Isaac I also give to you, and I will give this land to your descendants after you." Genesis 35:11, 12	Jacob said to Joseph, "God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan, and there he blessed me, and said to me, 'I am going to make you fruitful and will increase your numbers. I will make you a community of peoples, and I will give this land as an everlasting possession to your descendants after you.'" Genesis 48:3, 4

1. In Genesis 35:11, God said, "Be fruitful and increase in number." In Genesis 48:4, God said, "I am going to make you fruitful and will increase your numbers." The difference is in the source of the action.
2. In Genesis 35:11, God said, "A nation and a community of nations will come from you, and kings will come from your body." In Genesis 48:4, however, God said, "I will make you a community of peoples." The difference, again, is the source of the action.
3. In Genesis 35:11, God said, " kings will come from your body." This statement is missing from Jacob's report in Genesis 48:12.
4. In Genesis 35:12, God said, "The land I gave to Abraham and Isaac I also give to you, and I will give this land to your descendants after you." In Genesis 48:4, Jacob quotes God as saying, "I will give this land as an everlasting possession to your descendants after you."

This makes it clear that Jacob was not trying to give Joseph a word for word report. Jacob gave Joseph a report of that event in so far as it affected what he was doing at the moment. Jacob established two facts:

- He was in the line of those to whom God gave this irrevocable promise.
- This was God's doing.

Jacob set the stage to relate this to Joseph's children.

In verse five, Jacob continued this private conversation with Joseph:

> *"Now then, your two sons born to you in Egypt before I came to you here will be reckoned as mine; Ephraim and Manasseh will be mine, just as Reuben and Simeon are mine." Genesis 48:5*

This is a little difficult for people in our culture. There is a distinct difference between children and grandchildren for us. Our children are our own. They do not belong to the grandparents. In that culture, however, there was a sense in which Joseph's children belonged to Jacob. He was exercising that right in these verses.

The word "Now," at the beginning of verse five, suggests a turn in the conversation. In this verse, Jacob asserts his claim, "Now then your two sons born to you in Egypt before I

came to you here will be reckoned **as mine**." He was saying "These boys are not mine because I am their father. They are mine because I am their grandfather."

Jacob then made a very careful distinction, "Ephraim and Manasseh, even as Reuben and Simeon shall be mine." Some questions come to mind as we read these words:

- Birth order is very important. This is the first time Joseph's sons are referred to in reverse order - Ephraim and Manasseh rather than Manasseh and Ephraim. When referring to his own sons, Reuben and Simeon, Jacob referred to them in their birth order. Why would he do this? Notice, Jacob drew a parallel. He spoke of "Ephraim and Manasseh" - listed in reverse order - as his sons, just as Reuben and Simeon listed in birth order - were his sons. We will deal with this more carefully a bit later in our study.
- Jacob drew a comparison between his first two sons - Reuben and Simeon - and Joseph's two sons "Ephraim and Manasseh" Why would he do that? In most cases, the people often died or were killed unexpectedly. For this reason the second son was often listed with the heir. In these instances, if something happened to the heir, the first born son, the second son would become the heir.

In this verse, Jacob listed Ephraim, the younger son, before he listed Manasseh, the first born son. This was Jacob's way of saying that Ephraim would rule the family.
The following verse dealt with the same issue:

> *"Any children born to you after them will be yours; in the territory they inherit they will be reckoned under the names of their brothers." Genesis 48:6*

Jacob drew a distinction between Joseph's children born in Egypt before Jacob came to live in Goshen and those who would be born after that time. Jacob said these later children would be Joseph's children, but Ephraim and Manasseh were his children. It was a way of saying that these two counted in the lineage, but if Joseph had other children, they would not count in the power order of Joseph's lineage.

Notice that Jacob said, "they will be reckoned under the names of their brothers." It was a way of asserting that Ephraim and Manasseh would control the later children. These later children would eventually be known as the "brother" or "sister" of Ephraim. It was through Ephraim and Manasseh that any other brothers would receive their portion of the inheritance.

In the next verse, the author tells of the death of Rachel.

> *"As I was returning from Paddan, to my sorrow Rachel died in the land of Canaan while we were still on the way, a little distance from Ephrath. So I buried her there beside the road to Ephrath" (that is, Bethlehem). Genesis 48:7*

As you can see, the author draws a contrast between Genesis 48:6 and 48:7; between the joy of Joseph's possible children and the sorrow of Jacob's loss of Rachel, his favorite wife. It is as though Jacob said to Joseph, "Your mother died before we reached our destination, Bethlehem." From the parenthesis in the verse, it is clear that the name of the village changed. It had been named "Ephrath," but it had not been called that for some time. There would be some who read this who would not be familiar with the previous name.

Genesis 48:8-22 - Jacob Blessed Ephraim and Manasseh

There is a bit of pathos in the beginning of this paragraph.

When Israel saw the sons of Joseph, he asked, "Who are these?" Genesis 48:8

The words of verse eight suggest two possible scenarios:

- It could be that Israel was blind or so nearly so that he could not make out a particular person standing before him.
- It is possible that he had not seen Joseph's two sons prior to this time and did not know who they were.

In view of the context, it would appear that he had lost his sight sufficiently that he could not recognize the two boys, though they were very close to him.

Joseph volunteered information to aid his father.

"They are the sons God has given me here," Joseph said to his father. Then Israel said, "Bring them to me so I may bless them." Genesis 48:9

If you look closely at Joseph's answer, you will note that it tells you something about the man. He said, "They are the sons God has given me here." Joseph attributed his family to God. He saw God as being intimately involved in all of life.

Jacob knew that he was about to die. One of his final responsibilities was to bless the children (his children) of his heir. This is the first indication that we received that Joseph was again Jacob's heir. There will be other indications as we continue the study.

Verse ten is an explanation that we have assumed, but now is spelled out in detail.

Now Israel's eyes were failing because of old age, and he could hardly see. So Joseph brought his sons close to him, and his father kissed them and embraced them. Genesis 48:10

In our text, the verse begins with the word "now." This suggests that an explanation is forthcoming. In the Hebrew text, however, the verse begins with the word "and." In this case, "and" carries the same connotation as the word "now." They did not have prescription glasses as we do. If I had lived in that day, I would have had eyesight as poor as Jacob's though I am not nearly as old.

The kiss and embrace were both symbolic actions. To give a person a kiss was to give a visual expression to the fact that there was no hostility between the two people involved. The embrace symbolized the fact that there was total trust between the two. Because Jacob was going to pronounce his blessing upon the two boys, it was important for him to make it clear that there was no hostility; that there was total trust.

There is a comparison here that could escape our observation. In Genesis chapter 27, Isaac was faced with the same situation. His eyes were too dim to discern which son was before him. It was extremely important that the blessing be given to his eldest son, Esau. That, of course, did not happen. As a result, Jacob received the blessing instead of Esau. Now the situation is reversed. Jacob is now the man with poor eyesight and his grandsons stand before him. Now, he must rely upon the assistance of others.

We wonder if this thought occurred to Jacob as he was about to bless Manasseh and Ephraim. It is reasonable to think that he did think of it.

There is an air of astonishment in the next verse.

Israel said to Joseph, "I never expected to see your face again, and now God has allowed me to see your children too." Genesis 48:11

Jacob was convinced that Joseph was dead. He had no reason to hope that Joseph was still alive or that he might see his son again. Now, however, Jacob not only saw his favorite son again, but lived long enough to pronounce the grandfatherly blessing upon his two grandsons. This was an astonishing thought to Jacob.

Observe Jacob's outlook. He attributed this blessing to God - " God has let me see your children too." This identifies Jacob's understanding of God's participation in our individual lives.

There is a cultural understanding in verse 12.

Then Joseph removed them from Israel's knees and bowed down with his face to the ground. Genesis 48:12

Our text sounds as though Manasseh and Ephraim were standing between Jacob's knees. The Hebrew text is less specific. It reads: "and Joseph brought them from his knees..." One cannot be dogmatic about this, but it appears that Manasseh and Ephraim were standing between Joseph's knees. Joseph did not bow down before his father until his sons had been removed from between his knees.

Bowing down was an expression of respect and deference. It is what a slave did before his master. Interestingly enough, we never see the other 11 sons bow down before Jacob in this manner. This is not too surprising. Joseph was the heir and he acknowledged his responsibility to his father, to carry out Jacob's final wishes. True, we never see the 11 sons bow down to Jacob in this manner. On the other hand, we never see Jacob bless the children of the other 11 brothers as he blessed Manasseh and Ephraim. This was not a casual action. Jacob was intentional when he blessed Joseph's sons. It was a symbol that Joseph would be the one through whom the lineage passed.

Joseph had some very specific ideas in mind as he presented his sons for his father's blessing.

And Joseph took both of them, Ephraim on his right toward Israel's left hand and Manasseh on his left toward Israel's right hand, and brought them close to him. Genesis 48:13

As we view this verse, we must remember the visual expression of royal power. The second most powerful person stood at the king's right hand. The third most powerful person stood at the king's left hand. Joseph had this in mind as he presented his two sons to his father.

The following chart should help us see what Joseph did:

R	JACOB	L

MANASSEH	EPHRAIM

L	JOSEPH	R

By placing Manasseh on his left, Joseph had presented him on Jacob's right side, the place of greater power. Again, by placing Ephraim on his right side, Joseph had placed his younger son on Jacob's left hand, the place of secondary power. Because of their relative ages, this is the way the two boys would be considered.

There is an interesting picture of the way Jacob and Joseph dealt with each other.

> *But Israel reached out his right hand and put it on Ephraim's head, though he was the younger, and crossing his arms, he put his left hand on Manasseh's head, even though Manasseh was the firstborn. Genesis 48:14*

A reading of verses 13 and 14 shows that Jacob and Joseph saw things differently. This should not be viewed as a situation where Joseph challenged Jacob's position as a grab for power. Joseph was simply following tradition. It was customary that the eldest son should be the heir and should receive the blessing. It appears that Joseph assumed that Jacob would follow that tradition.

Think about that for a moment. Granted, many fathers would hold with the tradition. Did Joseph have any reason to think that Jacob would hold that position? Look at Joseph's life. He was his father's eleventh son, but Jacob still chose him as his heir. It appears that Joseph should have had ample reason to think his father would be directed by either divine choice or his own evaluation of Manasseh and Ephraim rather than by tradition.

It is also possible that Joseph felt that Manasseh would be a more dependable family leader than Ephraim. Because the text is silent on this issue, we can only conjecture concerning their motives.

Whatever the motivation, some information is available. Notice that Jacob did not confront Joseph concerning the way he presented his sons for the blessing. On the other hand, Jacob did not change his mind. Jacob simply placed his right hand upon Ephraim's head without comment. This required that he cross his arms.

The Hebrew text gives some added information at this point. "And he guided/sent out his right hand and put it on the head of Ephraim, and he was the younger, and his left hand on the head of Manasseh , crossing his hands, for Manasseh was the first-born." (Heb.) Genesis 48:14 There is an element of intentional action suggested here. It is not as strongly stated in our text. It is as though Jacob said to Joseph, "I know Manasseh is the first-born, but Ephraim will lead your family." Jacob's words were more than a blessing. He was making a prophetic announcement.

Though it is nowhere stated in the text, one gets the impression that they believed God gave a dying father prophetic insight into the future of his sons as he pronounced his final blessing upon them.

There is a surprising statement in the next verse.

Then he blessed Joseph and said, "May the God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day," Genesis 48:15

Joseph brought his sons to Jacob to pronounce his blessing upon them. Jacob placed his hands on the head of Ephraim and Manasseh in a specific way to pronounce a blessing upon them. In spite of this, notice that when Jacob spoke he pronounced a blessing upon Joseph.

How can we understand this action? The account of this blessing is recorded in Genesis 48:15-22. All of Genesis 48:15, 16a are Jacob's picture of God and his angel. Observe how Jacob identified God:

- "**The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked**." The name for God Jacob used was "Elohim." As we have said before, this places an emphasis on God's mercy and great power. Jacob in his pronounced blessing, used a formula - ("before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked" or " the God of Abraham and Isaac.") - which was usually intended to identify the faithfulness of God. It is a way of saying, "The merciful God who was faithful to Abraham and Isaac, will also be faithful to you."
- "**The God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day**" - Again, the name for God Jacob used was "Elohim." We usually associate the image of God as a shepherd with David because of Psalm 23. Here is a much earlier reference to such an awareness of God.

  The Hebrew text is slightly different. It says, "The God who has fed/led me since I was born until this day." (Heb.) Genesis 48:15b. The difference is slight, but meaningful. Our text focuses upon the person of the shepherd. The Hebrew text focuses upon two specific functions of the shepherd - feed and lead. Prophetically, Jacob could see that these qualities of God were going to be absolutely important to Joseph and his family in the future. Jacob's statement about God as shepherd, "All my life to this day," reemphasizes the faithfulness of God.
- "**The angel who has delivered me from all harm**..." Though we cannot trace the origins of the idea, Jacob had a well developed understanding of angels and their ministry on behalf of God and His people. He understood that the angels were charged to deliver him from harm.

The balance of verse 16 is Jacob's blessing upon his two grandsons.

"the Angel who has delivered me from all harm -- may he bless these boys. May they be called by my name and the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac, and may they increase greatly upon the earth." Genesis 48:16

This blessing is in four parts:

"**May he (angel) bless these boys**" - The angel blessed Jacob by delivering him from all harm, (literally evil). Jacob called upon Elohim to send this angel and bless Ephraim and Manasseh in the same way. It should be noted that Jacob started his blessing with an intensely spiritual concern. This is part of the impact of Jacob's experience at Bethel.

"**May they be called by my name**" - This is not a concern over the names of Joseph's two sons. It is a way of saying, "May they live in such a way that they would be worthy to

be identified with the later part of Jacob's life because of their Godly lives. Again, this is a deep spiritual concern.

"**May they be called by the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac**" - Abraham and Isaac were the ones through whom God chose to bestow His covenant upon Israel. We must observe, however, that Abraham had Ishmael and Isaac had Esau. Both of these sons were disobedient and rebellious. In both instances, though they were the oldest sons, they were excluded from the lineage of the covenant. Jacob's request that they be identified with Abraham and Isaac had a twofold significance:

- May they be men of righteousness.
- May they be in the lineage of covenant so that the covenant may be realized through their lineage.

"May they increase greatly upon the earth" - The Hebrew text is far more graphic. It says, "As fish grow into an host in the midst of the earth..." The suggestion is twofold:

- May these boys multiply prolifically. The reference to fish is comparative. We must remember that both Abraham and Isaac experienced times in their lives when their lineage was not prolific.
- Fish multiply quietly in the solitude of the depths of the body of water they inhabit. May these two sons experience this same peace and solitude as their families grow.

We must remember that people in that day saw a large family as a distinct blessing from God and an evidence of righteousness.

Jacob's blessing was a wonderful gift to the two brothers. We should note that though Jacob was careful to place his right hand on Ephraim's head and the left hand on Manasseh's head, still the same blessing was given to both, at least at this point.

At this time, there is a turn in the story.

> *When Joseph saw his father placing his right hand on Ephraim's head he was displeased; so he took hold of his father's hand to move it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's head. Genesis 48:17*

Up until now, Jacob and Joseph saw this experience differently, but they did not confront one another over it. Now, that has changed. Our text says that Joseph was "displeased." The word the author used was "yahrah" (יָרַע) and means "to tremble," "to be broken up by a violent action." This is a very strong response. It cannot be thought of as casual. Joseph was really disturbed and did not hide it.

The author identified two things that point out Joseph's frame of mind.

- "**It displeased him**" - As we indicated earlier, "displeased" means "to quiver and tremble with displeasure." It is to be emotionally distraught.
- "**He held up his father's hand, to remove it from Ephraim's head unto Manasseh's head**." Again, the text does not tell us what went on in Joseph's mind. It is possible that he felt his aged father, with very faulty vision, may not have been clear concerning which was the first-born.

For whatever reason, Joseph was trying to prevent a tragedy. He was willing to risk insulting his father to prevent this unfortunate turn of events.

Joseph felt the need to explain his unusual action.

Joseph said to him, "No, my father, this one is the firstborn; put your right hand on his head." Genesis 48:18

Joseph knew that Jacob was not tied to the tradition that the first-born should be the heir. Joseph was a living example of that fact. Still, Joseph was committed to it, at least in this instance. Nevertheless, Joseph did not act out of disrespect.

Now Joseph and Jacob are clearly on opposite sides of the issue. How can they resolve their impasse?

But his father refused and said, "I know, my son, I know. He too will become a people, and he too will become great. Nevertheless, his younger brother will be greater than he, and his descendants will become a group of nations." Genesis 48:19

There was a tension in Joseph's words to Jacob. Read this verse again. There is no tension or pressure in Jacob's statement to Joseph.

Notice that the author begins Jacob's response by saying "But his father refused." It was clear that he and Joseph disagreed, but he was not willing/able to change what he was doing.

Finally, Jacob spoke, "I know, my son, I know." The repetition, of course, is for purposes of emphasis. When you read Jacob's statement, a question comes to mind: What did Jacob know? There are a few possibilities:

- He could have been saying that he knew that Manasseh was the first-born.
- He could have been saying that he knew Joseph felt the first-born should receive the blessing.
- He could have been saying that he knew all the things Joseph's brothers had done to him.

The text is silent, but it appears that the first suggestion deserves serious consideration.

Having said these things, Jacob continued to explain his thinking to Joseph. He explained it in three or four statements:

- "**He also shall become a people**" - This was unusual. No family dared to hope that two congenial clans would come from their one family. Jacob was saying that this would be the case with Joseph's family. This fact can be seen in the division of the land as Israel entered Canaan under Joshua. There was a tract of land given to both Ephraim and Manasseh just as there was for Reuben, Judah and Dan.
- "**He also shall be great**" - Again, this was highly unusual in a family. It would be a blessing if the heir of the family was great. Jacob was saying that both Ephraim and Manasseh would be great. The word "great" is "gawdal" (גָּדַל) and means "to twist." It is a picture of a twisted cord becoming much stronger than it was previously. "It is "to be large," "to be powerful."
- "H**is younger brother shall be greater than he**" - Having mentioned the greatness that would come to Manasseh, Jacob quickly moved to describe what Ephraim would be like. This had to be a severe disappointment to Joseph. The author does not tell us why this is true. It is surprising, since Joseph himself does not fit into the tradition he insisted upon.

We must wonder, What does Jacob mean when he said, "His younger brother will be greater than he"? We know what it does not mean. The statement which follows this statement deals with the fact that Ephraim's lineage will be larger and more powerful than Manasseh's. The author never says exactly the same thing twice in a row. The second statement always included additional information. It appears that Jacob was talking about the two men rather than their lineage. He might have been saying, Ephraim would become a greater leader than Manasseh; it may be that Ephraim would become a more reliable person than Manasseh.

"His descendants will become a group of nations." Jacob draws a lopsided contrast between the lineage of Ephraim and Manasseh. Notice what Jacob said about the two:

- Manasseh - He will become a people.
- Ephraim - His descendants will become a group of nations.

This had to create a vacillation in Joseph. He would be happy that Ephraim would become so great. He would have to experience unusual disappointment that his first-born was not as great.

Jacob continued his blessing.

He blessed them that day and said, "In your name will Israel pronounce this blessing: `May God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh.'" So he put Ephraim ahead of Manasseh. Genesis 48:20

It would be easy, at this point, to become preoccupied with the struggle over Ephraim and Manasseh. We need to remember that Jacob not only prophesied the future of Joseph's sons, but also blessed them. There is no record that he did this for the children of any of his other sons. There is no hint as to why this is true. We could conjecture, but no one knows.

Jacob announced that all Israel would bless Joseph's sons. Jacob bestowed a great honor upon Ephraim and Manasseh. He said that these two men would be held in high regard by all Israel. The evidence of this honor would be that their names would become a part of the fatherly blessings in Israel. Aside from the size and power of their lineage, the fathers in Israel would ask God (Elohim - the God of power and mercy) to make their sons like Ephraim and Manasseh. What a blessing! What father would not want this to be said about his sons?

In a family, the sons were usually identified according to their ages. Up until this blessing by Jacob, Joseph's sons were identified as "Manasseh and Ephraim." In this blessing, Jacob changed that. He spoke of "Ephraim and Manasseh," not according to their age, but according to their position. From this time on, they will be spoken of as "Ephraim and Manasseh."

In the following verse, the blessing ended and Jacob spoke to Joseph about his own impending death.

Then Israel said to Joseph, "I am about to die, but God will be with you and take you back to the land of your fathers." Genesis 48:21

This means that as far as we know, Joseph had stopped his attempt to change Jacob's approach to the blessing of Joseph's sons. It is doubtful that Joseph changed his mind, however, it is possible that because of Jacob's prophetic blessing, Joseph now agreed with Jacob. Was Joseph's silence a sign of his changed thinking? Was it a sign of his deference and respect due his aged father? The text is silent and we can only conjecture.

If you read the verse again, you will notice that Jacob was still prophesying his blessing upon Joseph. There is a contrast in verse 21.

- Jacob - He was about to die. He could do nothing further for Joseph.
- God - He was not going to die, but would be with Joseph and Israel while they were in this strange land.

God would not only be with them, He would take them back to the land of Canaan. This was an astounding miracle. Notice that Jacob said, "God" would do this. The name "God" is "Elohim" - the omnipotent God of mercy. This is a particularly significant name for God, in view of Jacob's blessing.

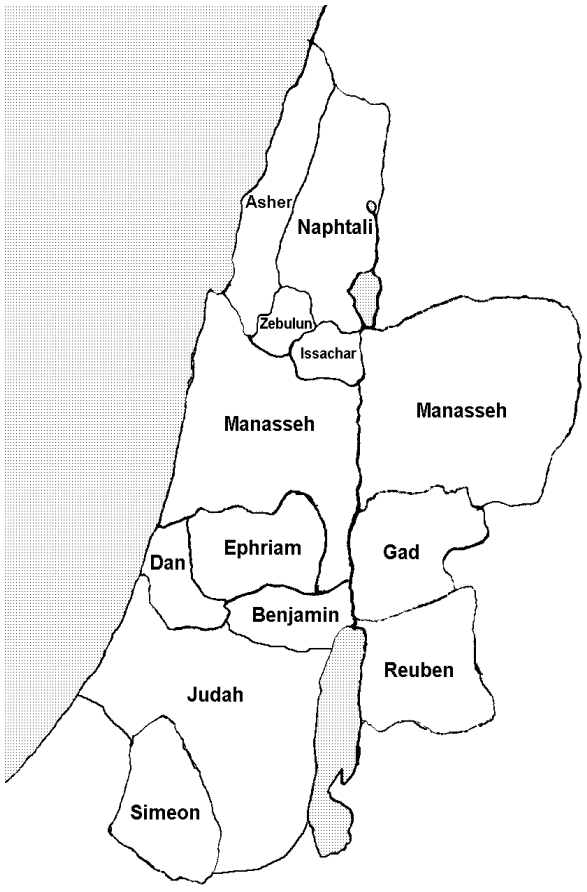
Observe that Jacob spoke of Canaan as "the land of your fathers." In this reference, Jacob identified Joseph with the patriarchs with whom God covenanted to give them the land; to be their God.

In the closing verse of the chapter, Jacob continued his blessing.

> *"And to you, as one who is over your brothers, I give the ridge of land I took from the Amorites with my sword and my bow." Genesis 48:22*

Because Joseph was Jacob's heir, he was to receive two portions of inheritance while the 11 brothers were to receive one portion each.

Map 27 identifies the portion that the family of each of Jacob's sons received as they occupied the land of Canaan. Observe that there is a portion for Ephraim and one for Manasseh. We can not determine which piece of land is referred to in Genesis 48:22, but it appears to be the one marked "Manasseh." You will also observe that there is no area listed for Levi. This is because they were the priestly family and as such, they were to receive individual portions of land, near Jerusalem, which would be called "cities of



Map 27: Division of Land

refuge." These lands would be free of all taxes and from conscription.

Conclusion

Though the chapter deals with Jacob's blessing of Joseph, Ephraim and Manasseh, still there are several glimpses of who God is and what He does scattered throughout the verses. There are at least five places in the chapter where the author stresses God's **faithfulness**.

Genesis 48:3, 4 - God promised to give Israel the land. Jacob prophesied in confidence of God's faithfulness.

Genesis 48:15 - God was the faithful provider all during Jacob's life.

Genesis 48:21 - Jacob promised that God would be faithful to his promise and bring them back to Canaan. He did.

Genesis 48:22 - In his prophetic blessing, Jacob could see the difficult times which faced Joseph and his people. Jacob prophesied that God would be with them in this time of trouble.

Genesis 48:16 - God charged his angel to protect Jacob from evil all his life.

God was **merciful**, as "Elohim." (48:9) God had given Joseph sons.

Throughout this chapter, the major emphasis was upon the faithfulness of God. We need to take this fact seriously. There are many Christians who spend much time in prayer. One of the problems, however, is that they pray, but do not expect anything to happen. Because God is eternally faithful, He will do now exactly as He did in the lives of Jacob and Joseph. He will do exactly as He has promised in His word. If God is faithful, then He will do as He promised; He will answer prayer; He will meet our needs. If we do not expect God to be faithful, then we dishonor Him and do not really believe He is a faithful God. The way we act, pray, and think must reflect what we believe God is like.

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 25

GENESIS 49:1 - 33

ISRAEL BLESSED HIS SONS AND DIED

1. There are 14 paragraphs in Genesis, chapter 49. On the following table, write a summary of seven words or less for each paragraph.

49:1, 2	
49:3, 4	
49:5-7	
49:8-12	
49:13	
49:14, 15	
49:16-18	
49:19	
49:20	
49:21	
49:22-26	
49:27	
49:28	
49:29-33	

2. In chapter 47, we looked at the listing of Jacob's family as they went into Egypt. We took the time to compare the birth order with the order in which they were listed. It will be helpful to do something of the same nature in our study of Jacob's blessing of his sons. The author records the order of the birth of Jacob's sons in Genesis 29:32 - 30:24, and 35:18.
   a. In this chapter, Jacob dealt with his sons differently. On the following table, compare the birth order of Jacob's sons with the order in which they were blessed. Record also the mother's name for each son.

BIRTH ORDER	BLESSING ORDER	MOTHER'S NAME

b. Study the table carefully.
   (1). What did you learn from this study?
   (2). What did you discover about the order of blessing?

3. In Genesis 49:1, 2, Jacob called his sons to share with them his parting blessing. What information does this brief paragraph give us?

4. In Genesis 49:3, 4, Jacob pronounced his blessing upon Reuben.
   a. If you read verses three and four carefully, they appear to contradict each other. How can we account for this?
   b. In verse four, Jacob refers to an incident that was recorded earlier.
      (1). Where was that event recorded?
      (2). What did Reuben do?
      (3). How did Jacob respond to his son's actions?

5. In Genesis 49:5-7, Jacob gave his blessing to both Simeon and Levi. Read these verses carefully.
   a. What did Simeon and Levi do to receive the curse from Jacob?
   b. Is there anything that can be said in defense of the actions of Simeon and Levi?
   c. Read verse seven carefully. To what or whom did Jacob direct his curse?

6. In Genesis 49:8-12, Jacob gave his prophetic blessing to Judah.
   a. Read verse eight carefully. In this verse Jacob described Judah's future in three statements:
      (1). What are the statements?
      (2). What does Jacob mean by these statements?
   b. In verse nine, Jacob used a comparison to describe what life would be like for Judah's family.

(1). What comparison did Jacob make?
(2). What did Jacob say about Judah?

c. In verse ten, Jacob changed his poetic description of Judah's future.
(1). What was Jacob speaking about in this verse?
(2). What specific prophetic announcement did Jacob make in this verse?
(3). About what/whom was Jacob speaking?

d. In verse 11, the intention of Jacob's blessing changes again. What promise did Jacob make here about Judah?

e. In verse 12, Jacob continued the beautiful picture of Judah's future.
(1). What did Jacob say about Judah's future?
(2). Compare the message of verse 12 with that of verse 11. What did you discover?

7. In Genesis 49:13, Jacob pronounced his blessing upon Zebulun.
   a. In this blessing, Jacob spoke about the future occupation of Zebulun. What did Jacob say?
   b. What did Zebulun understand as a result of Jacob's blessing?

8. In Genesis 49:14, 15, Jacob blessed Issachar.
   a. Describe, in your own words, what Jacob said about the kind of person Issachar would be.
   b. Describe, in your own words, what Jacob prophesied about the kind of future Issachar could anticipate.

9. The author reported Jacob's prophetic blessing upon Dan in Genesis 49:16-18.
   a. How did Jacob describe the future of Dan?
   b. In verse 18, Jacob cried to the Lord in a petition concerning Dan. Why would this be necessary?

10. In Genesis 49:19, Jacob pronounced his prophetic blessing upon Gad.
    a. How does the location of the territory assigned to Gad help to understand Jacob's prophecy?

    Look at a map which identifies the territory that each of the tribes would occupy. How does the location of the territory assigned to Gad help to understand Jacob's prophecy?

    b. How can we understand Jacob's description of the way Gad will defend himself and his people?

11. In Genesis 49:20, Jacob blessed Asher:
    a. What did Jacob mean by his blessing?
    b. How can we account for the vast difference between Jacob's blessing for Asher and that which he gave to Gad and Dan?

12. In Genesis 49:21, Jacob blessed Naphtali.
    a. Where is the territory that was assigned to Naphtali?
    b. What, if any, bearing does this have on the blessing Jacob gave Naphtali?

c. Study this brief prophecy very carefully. What was Jacob saying in this graphic statement?

13. In his longest prophetic pronouncement, Jacob blessed Joseph in Genesis 49:22-26.
    a. Again, if you look at a map, you will notice that Joseph's sons both received a tract of land. Study the map to see if you can find an explanation for this fact.
    b. Joseph used another poetic picture to describe Joseph's future. How would you explain the picture Jacob used in 49:22?
    c. There is a sharp contrast between verses 22 and 23.
        (1). What is the contrast?
        (2). What did Jacob mean?
    d. Reflect on Genesis 49:24
        (1). What picture has Jacob described concerning Joseph's future?
        (2). Why does Jacob use these names for God?
        (3). What does Jacob say with these names that would not be included by speaking of "God"?

14. In Genesis 49:27, Jacob gave his prophetic blessing to Benjamin.
    a. Think about the poetic picture Jacob paints concerning Benjamin's future. What did Jacob describe?
    b. What descendants of Benjamin can you think of who would fit this description?

15. In Genesis 49:28, the author made a comment about Jacob's blessing of his sons.
    a. How would you describe this statement?
    b. Why did the author need to make this statement?

16. The author described the death of Jacob in Genesis 49:29-33.
    a. In verse 29, Jacob explained the instructions he was in the process of giving. What explanation did he give?
    b. On the following table, record each piece of information Jacob gave, in Genesis 49:29-33, concerning his burial.

        (1). Study this table. How many pieces of the information deal with the relatives who were also buried there?

(2). What can we learn from these facts?
(3). What does the remaining information deal with?

16. Reflect upon the message of this chapter.
    a. What message was the author trying to convey?
    b. What implications does this have for your life?
    c. What changes do you foresee in your life because of what you have learned in this study?

LESSON 25: GENESIS 49:1 - 33

ISRAEL BLESSED HIS SONS AND DIED

Introduction

There are 14 paragraphs in Genesis chapter 49. A summary of each paragraph appears on the table which follows:

49:1, 2	Jacob Called His Sons to Receive His Blessing
49:3, 4	Reuben Renounced For His Sin
49:5-7	Simeon and Levi Cursed For Murders
49:8-12	Judah Acclaimed as Kingly Tribe in Abundance
49:13	Zebulun - He Will Be Wealthy Trader
49:14, 15	Issachar Will Be a Slave
49:16-18	Dan - the Giver of Justice
49:19	Gad - Strong, Though Severely Attacked
49:20	Asher Will Live in Luxury
49:21	Naphtali Will Have a Wonderful Future
49:22-26	Joseph - Persecuted, but God Protected Him
49:27	Benjamin the Plunderer
49:28	The Author's Note
49:29-33	The Death of Jacob

As you move through a study of this chapter, you will observe that Jacob does not bless all of his sons in the order of their birth. The following table should prove helpful in this understanding.

BIRTH ORDER	BLESSING ORDER	MOTHER'S NAME
Reuben	Reuben	Leah
Simeon	Simeon	Leah
Levi	Levi	Leah
Judah	Judah	Leah
Dan	Zubulun	Leah
Naphtali	Issachar	Leah
Gad	Dan	Bilhah
Asher	Gad	Zilpah
Issachar	Asher	Zilpah
Zebulun	Naphtali	Bilhah
Joseph	Joseph	Rachel
Benjamin	Benjamin	Rachel

Observe that six sons are blessed in the order of their birth. Six sons are blessed in an order different from their birth-order. As we study the chapter, we will try to make observations and suggest possible answers to the questions raised by the information in this table.

Observe that 49:2-27 are in poetic form. The remaining seven verses are either explanations of what Jacob was doing or a description of his dying moments.

Genesis 49:1, 2 - Jacob Called His Sons to Receive His Blessing

From the previous chapter, you will remember that Joseph came with Manasseh and Ephraim to visit Jacob, his dying father. Having blessed Joseph, his heir, along with Joseph's sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, Jacob called his other sons together.

> *Then Jacob called for his sons and said: "Gather around so I can tell you what will happen to you in days to come." Genesis 49:1*

Notice that Jacob advised his sons that he would give a prophetic message about their future. The power of the righteous to pronounce a blessing upon a person was considered to be a privilege conferred upon them by God. It was God who gave the righteous the insight to make the pronouncement which would prove to be exactly what happened to them in later times. There are some who look upon such blessings as self-fulfilling prophecies. The text gives us no help at this point. It seems that God indeed gave righteous men of old an insight into the future that enabled them to pronounce blessings upon individuals and these proved to be true. This is precisely what Jacob did.

In verse two, Jacob called his sons to gather at his bedside.

> *"Assemble and listen, sons of Jacob; listen to your father Israel." Genesis 49:2*

Here is an instance where Jacob used both his names in the same sentence. This particular use may lend some credence to the Jewish idea that the name "Jacob" was used on most occasions, but "Israel" was used when referring to his spiritual role. That could be the case in this instance. For whatever reason, Jacob used both his names - Jacob and Israel.

Some writers read a number of things into the meaning of this verse. It should be noted that this is the first verse of the poetic segment which occupies most of the chapter. At first glance, there seems to be repetition in verse two. In Jewish literary form it is called a

"parallelism." It is made up of a primary statement followed by a second statement which is parallel to the first, but usually adds a second bit of information to the first.

Genesis 49:3, 4 - Reuben Renounced for His Sin

This had to be a shocking experience for Reuben. Observe how Israel spoke to his son:

"Reuben, you are my firstborn, my might, the first sign of my strength, excelling in honor, excelling in power." Genesis 49:3

Israel acknowledged that Reuben was indeed his first-born son. This was a position of honor and respect. Jacob did not take that away from Reuben.

Reuben was the first evidence of Jacob's ability to father a child. In Jewish thought, this first-born son was the height of his father's procreative strength. Jacob acknowledged this fact. In the words, "Excelling in honor, excelling in power," Jacob described the place of honor and respect ascribed to a first-born son.

Jacob was as just, however, as he was merciful.

"Turbulent as the waters, you will no longer excel, for you went up onto your father's bed, onto my couch and defiled it." Genesis 49:4

Having described Reuben's honor, Jacob also described his weakness. Jacob used a word picture to describe Reuben's character. It was as if Jacob said, "You held a place of honor, but your character is undependable and erratic."

Jacob referred to an event that happened years earlier. The episode is recorded briefly in chapter 35:

While Israel was living in that region, Reuben went in and slept with his father's concubine Bilhah, and Israel heard of it. Genesis 35:22

This verse is immediately followed by a list of the women and the children they bore for Jacob. There are at least three problems with Reuben having sexual relations with Bilhah:

1. She was not his wife. This was adultery.
2. Bilhah was Jacob's concubine. The law was very clear that a man may not have sexual relations with his father's wife ("Do not have sexual relations with your father's wife; that would dishonor your father." Leviticus 18:8) To be precise, Leviticus gives no specific prohibition concerning the concubine of one's father. it seems reasonable to assume, however, that the prohibition would be the same. We must also be aware of the fact that the law had not yet been given. That did not make much difference. Most of the law was being observed before it was codified.
3. You will also remember that Bilhah was the hand maid of Rachel, but Reuben was the son of Leah. There was fierce competition between Leah, Zilpah and their children on one hand and Rachel, Bilhah and their children on the other. Reuben's immoral act was more than that. It was also a serious attempt to dishonor and humiliate the enemy of his mother.

Looking at Genesis 35:22, you will observe, probably with surprise, that there is no record of Jacob confronting or punishing Reuben for this immoral act. I do not believe that Jacob just forgot about it. Though the text is silent at this point, I believe that there was some form of rebuke or punishment for Reuben when Jacob returned.

Whatever may be the case, it is clear that Jacob had not forgotten the action. Now as he was about to die, he reminded Reuben of what he had done and renounced him saying, "Turbulent as the waters, you will no longer excel." As it usually happens with sin, the evil may be but for a moment, but the consequences endure for life.

Reuben had a wonderful opportunity. He was Jacob's first-born son. He could have been the spiritual and cultural head of the family when Jacob died. He lacked the strength to lead his brothers. More seriously, he lacked the spiritual depth to be a moral example within the family. Because of this condition, the occasion of his father's final blessing was a time of sorrow and pain rather than the joy it should have been.

Genesis 49:5-7 - Simeon and Levi Cursed for Murder.

Jacob's words to Simeon and Levi seem a bit unusual:

> *"Simeon and Levi are brothers -- their swords are weapons of violence." Genesis 49:5*

In a literal sense, Simeon and Levi were brothers. Jacob spoke accusingly. This brings three things to mind.

- There is nothing wrong in being brothers. They had no control over that situation.
- Simeon and Levi were not more brothers than were the other ten.
- They were as much "brothers" of Zebulun and Naphtali as they were of each other.

It is clear that Jacob spoke figuratively, not literally. He was saying that these two men acted in consort; that they shared a common passion. It is this shared passion of which Jacob spoke.

Jacob continued his description, saying, "Their swords are weapons of violence." There is considerable controversy over the meaning of these words. It appears that Jacob's intent was that weapons of violence were the tools with which they were most skillful. This was a strong statement in Jacob's household.

In verse six, Jacob described his relations to his sons' values:

> *"Let me not enter their council, let me not join their assembly, for they have killed men in their anger and hamstrung oxen as they pleased." Genesis 49:6*

As you know, this section is written in poetic form. In a literal sense, these words do not mean too much. Jacob said, "Let me not enter their council. The Hebrew text says, "Into their conspiracy, my soul shall not enter.." The word "conspiracy" is "sode" (סוֹד) and describes intimate, secret assembly or consultation. Jacob said he wanted no part of the kind of planning they would do.

Jacob then said, in a parallel statement, "let me not join their assembly." An "assembly" is "kawhawl" (קָהָל), a secret gathering usually for designing war. Again, Jacob said he wanted no part of their warlike planning. Obviously, Jacob wanted nothing to do with the kind of thinking and motivation by which these sons lived.

He, then, explained his reasons: Jacob said, "They have killed men in their anger and hamstrung oxen as they pleased." This was a reference to the actions of Simeon and Levi in Genesis chapter 34.

In the city of Shechem, Dinah went to visit the women from this evil, adulterous city. She knew better than to do this. During that time, Shechem, the young man for whom the city was named, took her and morally violated her. This was a terrible thing, but it was more than a simple, evil act. It completely changed Dinah's life. She would be shamed for life. She could never be married to anyone else. Her father was shamed, but if he took revenge, his entire family would be killed.

Simeon and Levi were determined to avenge their sister's honor. They not only got revenge, they got it in a terrible way. Observe what they did:

- In the name of their beliefs, they deceived Shechem and the men of the city. They told Shechem they could not pledge their sister to a man from an uncircumcised people.
- He wanted Dinah for his wife. He convinced his country men to be circumcised.
- When they experienced great pain, following their circumcision, Simeon and Levi killed every man in the city.
- They took the wives and children captive and plundered the area.
- When chastised for their tragic act, they rejected Jacob's rebuke.

Observe the way Jacob pronounced his prophetic understanding of their future:

"Cursed be their anger, so fierce, and their fury, so cruel! I will scatter them in Jacob and disperse them in Israel". Genesis 49:7

Jacob said that Simeon and Levi had casually murdered men and abusively treated animals. It is one thing to kill a man for his sin. It is quite another to kill every man in the city for that sin. Because of this, Jacob placed a curse on their fierce anger and their cruel fury. He was not condoning what Shechem had done. A second wrong, however, did not make it right.

Genesis 49:8-12 - Judah Was Acclaimed as Kingly Tribe in Abundance

In these five verses, Jacob pronounced his blessing upon Judah. Notice how the blessing begins:

"Judah, your brothers will praise you; your hand will be on the neck of your enemies; your father's sons will bow down to you." Genesis 49:8

The name "Judah" is "Jehuwdah" (יְהוּדָה) which literally means "to celebrate." The word "praise," as used in verse eight, is "yadah" (יָדָה) which literally means "to hold out the hand," "to revere" or "to praise." It is interesting just how closely they are linked. In this verse, Jacob cites three expressions of commendation which will be received by Judah.

- "H**is brothers will praise him**" Jacob said Judah would receive the praise of his family. This is especially true because he represents the kingly line.
- "**Your hands will be on the neck of your enemies**" - This, too, is a royal picture. It suggests that he would be successful in battle. Nowhere is this so beautifully accomplished as in the reign of David.
- "**Your brother's sons will bow down to you**" - It may sound awkward to say, "father's sons" rather than "brothers." It is more accurate. If Jacob had said,

"brothers," he would only have meant Leah's sons, but Jacob meant all his sons. This, of course, was another prophecy of Judah's royal line.

Jacob changed the image he used to describe Judah in the next verse.

"You are a lion's cub, O Judah; you return from the prey, my son. Like a lion he crouches and lies down, like a lioness – who dares to rouse him?" Genesis 49:9

Look at the images Jacob used:

- "**You are a lion's cub**" - A cub is a potential lion just as a prince is preparing to be a king. Jacob was predicting Judah's future.
- "**You return from the prey, my son**" - Jacob continued to describe Judah's life using the image of a lion. When a lion has conquered his prey, he will eat his fill before rejoining the others. Jacob alludes to this as the kind of victory Judah would experience.
- "**Like a lion he crouches and lies down**" - The lion is constantly ready to attack and conquer his prey. He may be resting, but he is equally alert to opportunity or danger. That is the future Jacob saw for Judah.
- "**Like a lioness - who dares to rouse him?**" The lion may be much stronger than his mate. When the lioness rests with her cubs, however, the lion is no match for her flaming anger. Jacob will be like this with his enemies.

In verse ten, Jacob changed the image once again:

"The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his." Genesis 49:10

In this verse, Jacob described Judas's future in royal terms. Observe the way he speaks of this:

- **"The scepter will not depart from Judah."** - This was an unusual prophecy. It would be a great blessing to know that his son would be a king. It would be astonishing to discover that your lineage would forever reign in Israel.
- "**Nor the ruler's staff from between his feet.**" This picture also reminds us that Judah would be king. It was the symbol of power, the ruler's staff, which would remain in his direct family.
- "**Until he comes to whom it belongs"** - Jewish scholars understand this to be a Messianic reference, and with good reason. It is impossible to say that Jacob was thinking of the coming Messiah, but it is possible. This much is clear, it reminds us that one day a descendant of Judah will sit upon the throne, not of Israel only, but of the world. There are some versions in which this phrase is translated, "Until he comes to whom tribute belongs." The intent is the same.

Again, in verse 11, Jacob changed the image he used to describe Judah's future.

"He will tether his donkey to a vine, his colt to the choicest branch; he will wash his garments in wine, his robes in the blood of grapes." Genesis 49:11

- **"He will tether his donkey to a vine.**" - First, we should be reminded that in that day, the white donkey was an appropriate means of royal transportation. There are

several interpretations suggested for this segment. All of these suggest a Messianic reference. All of them also suggest that this image describes a harvest condition that is so great that one could tether a grown donkey to a vine without fear of doing damage to it. This suggests just how strong the vines would have become.

- **"His colt to the choicest branch**" - This again is considered a Messianic suggestion. Also, several possible interpretations all suggest that this statement describes an unusual level of abundance. It is such that one can tie his colt to a branch and completely load the animal from that branch. Jacob had described an unusual level of abundance which awaited Judah and his heirs.

Once more, Jacob changed the image he used to describe the beautiful royal future.

- "**He will wash his garments in wine, his robes in the blood of grapes**" - We must remind ourselves that Jacob was using poetic word pictures to describe Judah's life in vivid terms. It may mean he will experience abundance - that is to stain his clothing as he treads the huge grapes. Again, it may mean that he returns home gloriously with his clothes deeply stained with the blood of his defeated enemy; it is a picture of rejoicing.

In verse 12, Jacob paints still a different picture of abundance.

"His eyes will be darker than wine, his teeth whiter than milk." Genesis 49:12

His eyes will be darker than wine." -This is a picture of the physical effects which result when a person has an abundance of good things to eat. This phrase is sometimes translated, "His eyes are red from wine." In either instance, Jacob's intent would be the same. He was announcing that Judah would live in abundance.

"His teeth whiter than milk" - Some translations of this phrase read, "White toothed from milk." In either case it is a second hyperbole, an exaggerated statement for purposes of effect, to emphasize the important message that there was abundant pasture for their herds. This was a rare experience in Palestine. This, then, would produce a lavish supply of milk.

As Judah listened to his blessing, he should have rejoiced greatly. Surely his future was bright.

Genesis 49:13 - Zebulun Will Be a Wealthy Trader

At first reading, Zebulun's blessing seems strange. Notice what Jacob said,

"Zebulun will live by the seashore and become a haven for ships; his border will extend toward Sidon" Genesis 49:13

It sounds as though Jacob was simply giving a location; Zebulun's future address. It is interesting that Jacob had spoken of his first four sons in the order of their birth. Having blessed Judah, the leader of the eleven brothers, excluding Joseph, Jacob changed the process.

Zebulun was the next son that Jacob mentioned. He was the tenth son in the birth-order, but the fifth son in the order of blessing. Zebulun was the sixth son born to Leah. We will have more to say about why Zebulun was not blessed in the order of his birth a little later.

Jewish people loved the land, but they were afraid of a large body of water, such as the Mediterranean Sea. It is not surprising that the Apostle John reminds his readers that there will be no sea in heaven. Jacob prophesied that Zebulun would live by the sea shore. Indeed, one of the best harbors for sea-going vessels on the Mediterranean coast of Israel is found within the plot of land reserved for Zebulun. It is near Sidon.

To say that Zebulun would, "Live by the seashore and become a haven for ships," was to acknowledge that his major endeavors in life would be in commerce. It was and continues to be a lucrative business.

Jacob concluded the blessing upon Zebulun saying, "His border will extend **toward** Sidon." This is important. If you look at the locations for each of the twelve tribes, in Joshua 19, you will see that the city of Sidon was given to Asher. We have two major possibilities:

- Zebulun was given a tract of land along the sea coast, but the land away from the coast, belonged to Asher.
- It is possible that "Sidon" does not refer to the modern city of Sidon, but to a little known village within Zebulun's territory.

I prefer the first possibility. Well known or not, this place had to be an excellent seaport. Sidon was one of the best.

Genesis 49:14, 15 - Issachar Will be a Slave

You may have noticed that the first six sons to be blessed were all sons of Leah. She, of course, was Jacob's first wife, though not his favorite. Though the text does not say, it is highly possible that the reason that these six sons were mentioned first was because they were born to Jacob's first wife. We cannot prove this suggestion, but it seems to be a reasonable scenario.

The next son to receive his blessing from Jacob was Issachar.

> *"Issachar is a rawboned donkey lying down between two saddlebags." Genesis 49:14*

Issachar was the fifth son of Leah, and the tenth son of Jacob. In spite of this, he is the sixth son to receive his father's blessing.

The picture that Jacob described concerning Issachar's future was disappointing at best. To say that Issachar was "a rawboned donkey lying between two saddlebags," provides a few images for our minds:

- It is a picture of dogged strength.
- It is a picture of subservience.
- It is also a picture of unflinching determination.

They knew well how difficult it was to get a donkey to get up and carry a load when it was determined not to do so. This is, in part, the picture Jacob drew of Issachar's future.

In the following verse, Jacob continued his prophetic announcement dealing with Issachar.

> *"When he sees how good is his resting place and how pleasant is his land, he will bend his shoulder to the burden and submit to forced labor." Genesis 49:15*

There are several pieces of information in this verse.

The land he occupied, which was in southern Galilee, along the Jordan River, is the bread-basket of Israel and has been for many centuries. Jacob said that when Issachar saw how wonderful his allotment of land was, he was willing to work hard and even be the servant of a conquering nation in order to live there. History records that the people who lived in that area were conquered repeatedly and became slaves of their conquerors.

Genesis 49:16-18 - Dan, the Giver of Justice

The next three verses tell of Jacob's prophecy concerning his son Dan.

"Dan will provide justice for his people as one of the tribes of Israel." Genesis 49:16

Dan was the oldest son of Bilhah and the fifth son of Jacob. Despite this fact, Dan was the seventh son whom Jacob blessed. The text described Dan as the one who provided justice for his people. There was indeed a man of the tribe of Dan who judged Israel and avenged his people of the awful treatment of the Philistines. His name was Samson. He brought justice to Israel and judgment to the Philistines with the help of no one but God. Samson did this just as David brought justice to Israel and judgment to the Philistines when he slew Goliath with help from no one but God.

Jacob continued his prophetic message about Dan in verse 17:

"Dan will be a serpent by the roadside, a viper along the path, that bites the horse's heels so that its rider tumbles backward." Genesis 49:17

Dan was the northern most tribe in Israel. Whenever an army came from the north or northeast, Dan was the first part of Israel they would encounter. The armies that came against Israel, from the north, were great and powerful. Dan was not that large. Dan could never mount a military offensive against any of the invading armies. Instead, they had to devastate the invaders by terrorist surprises. They surprised the great armies the way a viper bites at the heel of a horse and thus dismounts the rider. In this way, Dan brings justice against their enemies.

Jacob concluded this blessing with a cry to God:

"I look for your deliverance, O LORD." Genesis 49:18

Certainly Dan had greater exposure to impending danger and fewer defenses and defenders than anyone else in Israel. Jacob, aware of the dangers his son's lineage would face, cried out to God, "I look for your deliverance, O Lord." The name "Lord" in this instance, was "Jehovah," the eternal God who is the God of justice.

Genesis 49:19 - Gad- Violent, Though Severely Attacked

Gad, the first of Zilpah's sons and the seventh son of Jacob, was the eighth son to receive his father's blessing.

"Gad will be attacked by a band of raiders, but he will attack them at their heels." Genesis 49:19

To give us perspective, we need to visualize the territory that would be given to Gad. As Map 27 on page 482 indicates, the tribe of Gad was located on the east side of the Jordan River. It started out about five miles north of the Dead Sea and continued approximately 30 miles further north. The western boundary was the Jordan River, and it continued eastward about 40 miles. They were in an area where the Ammonites were a serious threat and a powerful force.

Jacob's words were prophetic. He said, "Gad will be attacked by a band of raiders." They were. The Ammonites were fierce fighters and they despised all Israelites, no matter the tribe to which they belonged. They mounted serious attempts to destroy the people of Gad.

The second half of the verse was equally prophetic. He said, "But he will attack them at their heels." Again, the people of Gad were no match for their enemies. Full scale military approaches were not an option for Gad's defense. With pinpoint prophetic accuracy, Jacob described a form of guerrilla warfare by which the people of Gad defended themselves. If you read the book of Judges, you will observe that though it would be of little benefit to Gad, his descendants crossed the Jordan River and fought bravely to free the land on behalf of the other tribes.

Genesis 49:20 - Asher Will Live in Luxury

It was marvelous that God enabled Jacob to comprehend the future of his sons when they were not in the land as Jacob gave the sons his blessing. As you can see on Map 27 on page 482 the territory given to Asher was located at the extreme northwest corner of Israel.

Jacob said of Asher:

"Asher's food will be rich; he will provide delicacies fit for a king." Genesis 49:20

This area was geographically "off the beaten track" for an army that was marching through Palestine. This gave them a relative sense of security from attacks from everyone except their northern neighbors. Much later, these northern neighbors would be powerful and threatening. At the time Israel entered Canaan, these neighbors were not strong.

As you can see on Map 27, Asher was ideally located. They were on the Mediterranean coast. This meant that they received major benefit from the rains coming off the sea. Add to this the fact that their eastern boarder was the mountain range. The clouds would deposit most of their moisture on the western slopes and that was Asher. This made it an ideal area to grow things. Because of the terrain, it was not an excellent location for growing crops like grain, but excellent for grapes and trees such as the olive. Notice what Jacob said, "Asher's food will be rich." In fact, they could grow almost anything except grain. With all the rain, almost everything else grew well.

Jacob also said, "He will provide delicacies fit for a king." It was not accidental that in Deuteronomy 33:24, Moses said, "...and let him bathe his foot in oil." The olive groves of Asher were unmatched in the land. There are reports in the Talmud and elsewhere which indicated that Laodicea found vast stores of oil in Asher when they could not find it anywhere else. It is known that kings used the oil of Asher as an emollient, to make their skin soft. There is, also, some information that the vast supply of oil for the temple came from Asher.

If you compare Jacob's blessing of Asher with that given to Gad and Dan, you will observe that Asher's blessing is as beautiful as the other two are bleak and foreboding. The location of the three tribes are to a large extent responsible for this difference. If you study the book of Judges, you will note that Asher did not drive the people of the land out any more than Dan or Gad. When their men were needed in battle, (Judges 5:17), Asher did not respond any more than did Gad or Dan. In Judges 6:35 and 7:23, however, the men of Asher did answer the call to arms.

Genesis 49:21 - Naphtali Will Have a Wonderful Future

On Map 27 you can see that Naphtali was located directly east of Asher. This suggests that they will get less rain than Asher, but their supply would be ample for their needs. Naphtali was the second son of Rachel's servant, Bilhah. He was also the sixth son of Jacob. Notice how Jacob spoke of his future.

"Naphtali is a doe set free that bears beautiful fawns." Genesis 49:21

We know that the area given to Naphtali was good for the growing of crops. This was especially true in the plains just north of the Sea of Galilee where they received a lot of water which came from the snow cap on Mount Hermon.

Notice the way Jacob spoke, "Naphtali is a doe set free." When a female deer, a doe, is released again into the wild, it runs with unparalleled speed. Judges 4:6 tells of the battle against Sisera. Deborah told Barak to bring 10,000 soldiers from Naphtali for the battle. They were the swiftest soldiers in the land.

The last phrase in this verse requires careful attention. Our text reads, "that bears beautiful fawns." The import of this translation suggests that the land was filled with abundance so that animals could thrive.

The Hebrew text, however, reads, "Who brings beautiful sayings." This is quite different. We know that in some instances a hind was used in the same way that pigeons were used To carry messages. The text does not confirm either possibility. The later statement is a better translation. We must ask ourselves, "What was Jacob saying about Naphtali?" It seems to me that Jacob was saying two things:

- There will be an abundance for the people of Naphtali. That was good news.
- They were among the swiftest and most helpful men in battle. This was a great gift to the defense of Israel.

Genesis 49:22-26 - Joseph Was Persecuted, But Protected by God

Joseph was one of the six sons who were blessed in the order of their birth. In Genesis 48:22, Jacob told Joseph that he was again the heir of his family. That being the case, Jacob would give Joseph, "the ridge I took from the Amorites." As we know, the heir, usually the oldest son, would receive an inheritance of twice as much as each of his brothers received. If you look at Map 27 again, you will see that both of Joseph's sons - Ephraim and Manasseh - received a tract of land. Observe that the two tracts of land together are more than double that received by any other tribe. Only Judah comes close to being as large as of these two portions of the land of Israel.

Notice how Jacob blessed Joseph:

"Joseph is a fruitful vine, a fruitful vine near a spring, whose branches climb over a wall." Genesis 49:22

Jacob said, "Joseph is a fruitful vine." These people knew that not every vine was fruitful. Those that were not fruitful were cut down and replaced. Joseph was a fruitful vine. This suggests two things:

- As a fruitful vine produces an abundance of grapes, so Joseph would add greatly to the storehouse of Israel.
- This also suggests that he will continue and endure.

Jacob continued with his comparison of Joseph and a fruitful vine. He said that Joseph was, "A fruitful vine near a spring." This being the case, the fruitful vine would constantly draw water from the spring and grow and produce much faster than those that had to be watered. This part of the verse calls to mind Psalm 1:3 where the psalmist compares the righteous man to a "tree planted by streams of water."

Again, Jacob continued his comparison, "whose branches climb over the wall." In an area of little rain fall, the branches do not grow long. We must remember that in that day, grape vines grew along the ground not up on wires as they do in the United States and other western countries. Jacob said that Joseph was such a hardy plant that he grew along the ground and up over the wall. That being the case, they could expect one fantastic harvest.

Jacob continued his blessing in verse 23:, but the emphasis has changed:

"With bitterness archers attacked him; they shot at him with hostility." Genesis 49:23

In verse 22, Jacob talked about Joseph's prosperity. In verse 23, however, Jacob announced that Joseph could anticipate some very serious opposition.

This statement, as you can see, is in the past tense. It is called the prophetic past tense. It is a statement of coming events stated as though they had already taken place. Jacob spoke in poetic terms and did not specifically identify who the archers were who attacked Joseph. Several people qualify:

- It could be his brothers who tried to kill him and ended up selling him as a slave.
- It could be Potiphar's wife who tried to seduce him and then lied about him, sending him to jail.
- It could have been the Egyptian officials who were jealous of his position.

The problem with each one of these is that they had already taken place. It seems that Jacob was speaking in the past tense of an event that had not yet taken place. We know that there would come a drastic change in Joseph's reputation. When a new Pharaoh came to power, Joseph was no longer in his favor. (See Exodus 1:8) It appears to me that this is the direction of Jacob's prophetic words.

In the following verse, Jacob described Joseph's reaction to this attack:

"But his bow remained steady, his strong arms stayed limber, because of the hand of the Mighty One of Jacob, because of the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel," Genesis 49:24

Jacob used poetic language to indicate that Joseph defended himself quite well.

A seeming paradoxical situation exists in Joseph's life. In Genesis 50:23, the author tells us that Joseph lived to be 110 years old and saw the children of both Ephraim and Manasseh. In Exodus 1:8, the author told us that there was a new Pharaoh and that Joseph did not sustain his confidence as he had with the previous Pharaoh. We also know that Israel went from being honored guests in Egypt to being slaves of the Egyptians. It is not possible to identify the situation of which Jacob spoke. My personal feeling is that Jacob referred to the coming problems Joseph would experience when a new Pharaoh came to power. Whatever the identification might be, Jacob prophesied that Joseph would skillfully defend himself.

In the last part of this verse, Jacob explained how this would come to pass. He said, "Because of the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel." In this phrase, Jacob used two names for God:

- **"The Mighty one of Jacob**" - The word "Mighty One" is "Abbiyr" (אַבִּיר) which means "chiefest," "Strong One," "Valient One." This is an ascription to the mighty power of God. It is a way of saying, "The Mighty one in whom Jacob placed his trust."
- "**Shepherd of the Rock of Israel**" - The word "Shepherd" is "raah" (רָעָה) which means "to tend a flock," "to rule over a flock," "a keeper of the helpless." Israel was often helpless and Jehovah was their keeper.

Jacob spoke of God as "Shepherd of the Rock of Israel." The word "rock" is "eben" (אֶבֶן) which means "to build of stone," "a stone." Jacob spoke of God as the one who gave total care of Jacob, the rock upon which Israel was built.

In verse 25, Jacob identifies two more names for God:

- "**Because your father's God helps you**." - The name for God in this phrase is "El" (אֵל) and literally means "Strength" and is usually translated "The Almighty," or "Mighty One."

  Jacob said that Joseph was able to remain strong because the Almighty God, whom his father served, was his source of strength.
- **Because the Almighty one who blesses you.**..." - The word "Almighty," in this instance, is "shaddai" which comes from the word "shadad" (שָׁדַד). The word literally means "To be burly," "To be powerful," "To destroy," "To waste." Jacob said, in effect, Joseph was able to remain strong against fierce opposition because of the Irresistible One who blessed him.

In the last part of this verse, Jacob identified the ways in which this carefully described, powerful God blessed Joseph:

- "**Who blesses you with blessings of the heavens above**." - This a reference to the dew and the rain. The people of Israel believed that dew and rain were a gift from God. We must remember that this was a land where there might be only a few inches of rain per year. People from humid climates tend not think of dew as a benefit at all. For them, however, dew was essential. Nothing would grow if they depended strictly upon the rains for moisture. Jacob was saying that the Almighty God of their fathers would bless Joseph with dew and rain. This would guarantee a rich harvest.

- "**Blessings of the deep that lies below**." - This is a reference to the subterranean water sources. These are not uncommon in that area. The import of this was that in central Palestine, where the parcels of land for Ephraim and Manasseh were located, there are a number of these springs and water-spouts. They are especially important in years when rainfall is short. It is a good way of saying that through these, God has guaranteed good crops even in lean years.
- "**Blessings of the breast and womb**." - Because of the oppressive heat and the difficulty of life for them, many women were unable to conceive, or were unable to carry their baby to full term. Jacob promised that the Almighty God of their fathers would bless them in such a way that the women would conceive and would carry their babies to full term.

  This is also a promise that the mothers in Joseph's family would be able to provide sufficient nourishment for their nursing infants.

Notice that this is a two fold blessing. Each is incomplete without the other. Nourishment is necessary for survival. Survival can not continue unless children are born. God has promised that both would be provided.

Jacob also described the quality, the power of this blessing. He said, "Your father's blessings (Jacob's) are greater than the blessings of the ancient mountains." A Hebrew text reads a little differently, "The blessing of your father surpassed the blessings of his fathers." In either case, Jacob was trying to impress upon Joseph the greatness of the blessing he has bestowed upon him. Jacob was right!

Jacob concluded the blessing of Joseph in these beautiful words, "Let all these rest on the head of Joseph, on the brow of the prince among his brothers." This was a beautiful closing statement. Jacob used a poetic picture, a parallel to describe Joseph's place in the family. The blessing of Jacob, and those of his fathers, form a crown, a diadem upon the head of Joseph. Part of the blessing which comes upon Joseph from Jacob and his fathers, was that as he ruled over Egypt, Joseph in his righteousness would also be the ruler, the heir, over the family of Jacob.

Genesis 49:27 - Benjamin the Plunderer

What a contrast between the blessing Jacob pronounced upon Joseph and his full brother Benjamin. Jacob said,

> *"Benjamin is a ravenous wolf; in the morning he devours the prey, in the evening he divides the plunder." Genesis 49:27*

Some Hebrew texts translate this verse as follows: "Benjamin is a wolf who tears his prey." As in each of the other instances, Jacob spoke of Benjamin's descendants more than of Benjamin himself. It was true of Benjamin's lineage. Saul, a descendant of Benjamin, established his power by brutally dealing with enemy neighbors. Again, Mordecai and Esther were of the lineage of Benjamin. They were not ravenous, but with great daring they provided safety for their people.

In the latter part of this verse, Jacob continued to describe Benjamin's lineage. He said, "In the morning he devours the prey." This is unusual. Most of the time wolves will stalk their prey at night. Jacob said that the descendants of Benjamin were so aggressive they would attack in the daylight.

Jacob continued, "In the evening he divides the plunder." Having been brazen to attack when a wolf would not, the descendants of Benjamin would destroy their enemies and divide the spoil at night, as the wolf does.

Jacob was saying that the descendants of Benjamin would be so aggressive and fierce in battle that they could not be trusted to rule.

Genesis 49:28 - The Author's Note

The author presents this verse in an unusual way.

> *All these are the twelve tribes of Israel, and this is what their father said to them when he blessed them, giving each the blessing appropriate to him. Genesis 49:28*

The author had just reported the prophecy Jacob gave each of his twelve sons. He then comments "All these are the twelve tribes of Israel." In part, this is a way of specifically saying he was blessing only his twelve sons and not Ephraim and Manasseh. This comes into the picture because Jacob had already pronounced a blessing on Joseph's two sons at the end of chapter 48.

The author continues his very precise description of Jacob's blessings when he said, "This is what their father said to them when he blessed them giving each the blessing appropriate to him." The author carefully asserted that Jacob did not give a general blessing, but gave each son a blessing which uniquely fit him and no one else.

Genesis 49:29-33 - The Death of Jacob

Having completed his final task, and his life almost gone, Jacob turned to give instructions concerning his burial.

> *Then he gave them these instructions: "I am about to be gathered to my people. Bury me with my fathers in the cave in the field of Ephron the Hittite," Genesis 49:29*

Some may wonder why it was so important that Jacob be buried in the one place on earth where his fathers and their relatives were buried. We should understand that it was not just important, it was essential. Jacob's determination to be buried with his father, Isaac, and mother, Rebecca, had at least two foci:

- He was determined to be buried with his fathers so that he could share his death with his forebearers as he had also shared life.
- He felt it was absolutely essential that he be buried in the land of Canaan rather than in Egypt where he was dying. Being buried in Canaan was an affirmation that God had indeed given the land of Canaan to their lineage. It also affirmed that, with the exception of the trip to Egypt during the famine, they had been faithful and remained in the land.

As you read Genesis 49:29-32, observe the great care with which Jacob identified the location where he was to be buried. There are a number of reasons why Jacob was so insistent and precise in his instructions. Look at the table which spells out the information Jacob gave his sons. It should shed some light on this issue.

Bury me with my fathers - v. 29
In the cave in the field of Ephron the Hittite - v. 29
The cave in the field of Machpelah (near) facing Mamre (Hebron) in Canaan - v. 30
The cave Abraham bought as a burial place from Ephron the Hittite, along with the field. - v. 30
Abraham and Sarah are buried there - v. 31
Isaac and Rebekah are buried there - v. 31
Leah is buried there - v. 31
The field and cave were bought from the Hittites. - v. 32

Look carefully at this table again. Jacob's 12 sons all knew everything he said, before he said it. It appears that the 12 sons had been at the burial site and knew the story of its history in the family. If this is true, then a serious questions comes to mind. Why would Jacob make such an issue of this when everyone knew he wanted to be buried there and knew all the details? There are several possibilities:

- At least in part, Jacob wanted to make it perfectly clear, that he was going to be buried with his fathers in Canaan and not in Egypt.
- Four of the eight pieces of information deal with the identity of relatives with whom Jacob was determined to be buried. This was a message to his sons: I will be buried with no one else, nowhere else. It also suggests that no one else is going to be buried there, not even his sons.
- The remaining four pieces of information deal with the location and previous ownership of the grave site. It had been 17 years since the family left Canaan. It is possible that the Hittite local residents near Hebron might dispute Jacob's right to be buried there. There is no statement in the text of the Old Testament that any of Jacob's sons were buried in that burial plot.

  Again, observe that Jacob identified the specific location (the cave in the field of Machpelah facing Hebron in Canaan.) The location of the land was indisputable.

  Jacob identified the specific previous ownership of the land - they were Hittites, the owners name was Ephron. There was a serious possibility of a problem with the current residents over a foreigner owning property in their land. This was illegal. As we mentioned at the time we studied the transaction, when Abraham gave Ephron the price of the field and cave, the owner "gave" the land to Abraham for a burial site. It was illegal to sell property to a foreigner. If the current residents contested such ownership and they had done so in the past, then Jacob's sons would have the necessary information to defend their ownership of the land. If that happened, and it had happened in the past, the sons could identify the persons with whom the transaction was made and confirm the ownership by Abraham's descendants.

The way Jacob talked about his own burial in this cave, there is a question about whether he was to be the last one buried there. From the time of Abraham, there was a serious concern about the descendants of Ishmael returning to declare their precedence over the lineage of Isaac. You will remember that when Abraham died, Ishmael made it a point to be

present. He and his descendants knew where the burial site was located. The family would not have been surprised had Ishmael's lineage been present and even have usurped the place by burying Ishmael there along with his ancestors. It appears to me that Jacob's obvious concern lay with all of these possibilities.

In verse 33, the author recorded the end of a very colorful career:

> *When Jacob had finished giving instructions to his sons, he drew his feet up into the bed, breathed his last and was gathered to his people. Genesis 49:33*

Observe that he began by saying, "When Jacob had finished giving instructions." Jacob had accomplished exactly what he set out to do on this, his final day. He was, now, ready to die and knew that he would.

The author described the death of Jacob in three graphic statements:

- **"He drew his feet up into the bed.**" - We should not envision that Jacob had a bed like ours, high off the floor. Think rather of a thin mat laying upon the ground. When the author said, "he drew his feet up into the bed," it suggests that Jacob had been sitting up, but now he lay down upon his bed.
- **"Breathed his last**" - this suggests that he died and that his death was sudden. When one stops breathing, he also stops living.
- "**Was gathered to his people**." - This phrase appears 50 times in the Old Testament and five of these are in the book of Genesis. In each instance it refers to the death of a person. This phrase is one of those statements that people within the culture understand without explanation. People outside the culture, however, would not be certain of its meaning.

The phrase gives us a glimpse into their understanding of death. Usually, in American culture, death and burial are considered a very personal thing. The closest thing we have to a community in death is the "family plot" idea. Not so for the Jews. For them, it is as though they had a community relationship with their deceased relatives beyond death. The author said that Jacob, in his death, became part of a relationship with relatives who has passed on before him.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, three themes intertwine and emphasize each other. These themes are crucial to an understanding of Genesis. They are as follows:

- Our previous conduct determines our future conditions.
- God is all powerful. Therefore, we can place our full trust in Him. The pictures of God, in chapter 49, are very significant:

  He is the mighty one - one we can trust.

  The Shepherd of the Rock of Israel. Both "shepherd" and "rock" are symbols of safety and security in that culture.

  Father's God - (El) the powerful God who was faithful to Abraham and Isaac, will be faithful to you as well.

  The Almighty One - (El Shaddai) - an irresistible power to bless in every possible way:

The heavens above - rain
The earth and the deep - springs and dew
Breast and womb - the blessings of progeny

The justice of God is always expressed in mercy - Though Judah and his brothers had done terrible evils, there was mercy for them. They were not immediately destroyed.

All of us are in need of the mercy of God. Our past actions call for judgment, but even in judgment, there is mercy. In our moments of deft integrity, we are as guilty as Judah ever thought of being. God spared Reuben, Simeon and Levi, despite their horrendous sins.

Our actions are crucial, not casual. In the web of our daily thoughts and deeds, we forge a destiny for ourselves. The only ray of hope for us is the fact that God is merciful and in His great power, dependable.

Because this is true, we can trust Him. We can rejoice in his blessings because he is all powerful and longs to bless us. We can rejoice in His mercy. The depth of our former sin only emphasizes the beauty of His mercy which He showers upon us each day.

Not for sale or resale

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 26

JOSEPH DIED - COVENANT - TAKE ME BACK TO CANAAN

GENESIS 50:1 - 26

1. In Genesis, chapter 50, there are four paragraphs. On the following table, write a summary of seven words or less for each paragraph.

50:1-6	
50:7-14	
50:15-21	
50:22-26	

2. In Genesis 50:1-6, Joseph requested permission to bury his father.
   a. Genesis 50:1 reports Joseph's reaction to the death of his father. What does it tell us?
   b. Verses two and three report the embalming of Jacob.
      (1). Jewish people did not embalm their dead. Why would Joseph have Jacob embalmed?
      (2). Verse three indicates that the Egyptians mourned Jacob for 70 days. What does this tell us?
   c. Verse four tells us that Joseph went to "Pharaoh's court," seeking permission to leave Egypt to bury his father in Canaan.
      (1). Why would Joseph seek permission through "Pharaoh's court" rather than through Pharaoh himself?
      (2). Read verse four again, carefully. What can you discover about Joseph's motivation in this verse?
   d. Compare verse four with verse five.
      (1). What common idea do you find?
      (2). As you compare the two verses, what common attitude can you detect?
      (3) What is the significance of Joseph's promise at the end of the verse?
   e. What can we gather from verse six in view of Joseph's request and promise in verse five?

3. In Genesis 50:7-14, the author reported the burial of Jacob.
   a. In verse seven, the author described the funeral procession.
      (1). How would you describe this in modern terms?
      (2). In view of this picture of the procession, what does it tell us about Joseph?
      (3). With the picture of Genesis 50:7 in mind, read Genesis 43:32 again. What do you learn from this comparison?
   b. In Genesis 50:8, the author continued describing the list of people who attended the funeral. Why would this be important?
   c. In Genesis 50:9, the author adds another dimension to the funeral procession.

(1). What is it?
(2). Why would this be important?

d. In Genesis 50:10, the author gave some surprising information.
(1). Look at a map and trace the way one would have to go to visit the places mentioned in verse ten.
(2). Why would Joseph want to do this?
(3). This verse indicates that Joseph observed seven days of mourning. Why would they do this when they had already observed 70 days of mourning in Egypt?

e. In Genesis 50:11, the author described the reaction of the Canaanites to this spectacle at Mamre. How would you describe their reaction?

f. In Genesis 50:12, the author told of the burial of Jacob. In this brief sentence, what does the author tell us?

g. In Genesis 50:13, it appears the author repeated what he said previously in the chapter. Why would he do this?

h. In Genesis 50:14, the author described Joseph's return to Egypt. Why would this be important?

4. In Genesis 50:14-21, the scene changes abruptly.
a. In verse 15, the brothers panicked with fear that Joseph might now punish them. What basis did they have for this fear?

b. In Genesis 50:16, there is a surprise.
(1). What is the surprise?
(2). How can we account for this unusual disclosure?
(3). Why would the brothers send word to Joseph instead of going to him in person?

c. In Genesis 50:17, the brothers reported a request from Jacob to Joseph.
(1). What was Jacob's request?
(2). To what did Jacob refer when he spoke of the brother's "sins"?
(3). How did Jacob refer to the brothers in this request?
(4). Why did he do that?

d. In Genesis 50:18, the brothers finally came to Joseph.
(1). What did they do?
(2). What did they say?
(3). What does all of this mean?

e. In Genesis 50:19, Joseph responded to the emissary and the brothers with two separate statements:
(1). What was Joseph's first statement?
(2). What did Joseph attempt to accomplish by this statement?
(3). In the second statement, Joseph asked a question:
(a). What question did he ask?
(b). What answer would Joseph anticipate to his question?

f. In Genesis 50:20, there is a strong contrast in the text.
(1). What two things are contrasted?
(2). What did Joseph say about these things?

g. In Genesis 50:21, Joseph responded to the message from Jacob.
(1). How might he be expected to respond?
(2). How did he respond?

(3). What message did he send to his brothers?
(4). What does this tell you about Joseph?

5. In Genesis 50:22-26, the author described the death of Joseph.
   a. In Genesis 50:22, the author gave a brief summary of the end of Joseph's life.
      (1). There are three pieces of information in this verse. What are they?
      (2). What does the author mean by this information?
   b. In Genesis 50:23, the author gave us a glimpse of Joseph as a grandfather.
      (1). What did the author tell us when he said that "Joseph saw the third generation of Ephraim's children"?
      (2). Notice that there is a difference between the way the author described Joseph's dealing with Ephraim's grandchildren and those of Manasseh. How can we account for this difference?
   c. In Genesis 50:24, Joseph gave his parting instructions to his brothers.
      (1). What did he tell them?
      (2). What does this tell us about Joseph?
      (3). What does this tell us about God?
   d. In Genesis 50:25, Joseph made a request of his brothers.
      (1). What was his request?
      (2). Why would it be necessary for Joseph to require his brothers to take an oath?
      (3). What is the relationship between Joseph's request and his statement which accompanies it?
   e. In Genesis 50:26, the author brought the book to a close.
      (1). What information does the author present?
      (2). The author reported that they embalmed Joseph. Why would they do this?
      (3). In view of all we have studied in the book of Genesis, is Genesis 50:26 an appropriate conclusion?

6. Reflect on your study of chapter 50.
   a. What did you learn about God?
   b. What difference will this make in your life?

LESSON 26: GENESIS 50:1 - 26

JOSEPH DIED - COVENANT - TAKE ME TO CANAAN

There are four paragraphs in Genesis, chapter 50. A summary of their contents is as follows:

50:1-6	Joseph Received Permission to Bury Jacob
50:7-14	Joseph Buried Jacob in the Cave of Machpelah
50:15-21	Joseph's Brothers Fear His Revenge
50:22-26	Joseph Died; "Take Me Back to Canaan"

Genesis 50:1-6 - Joseph Received Permission to Bury Jacob

It was now clear to the entire family that Joseph was the heir again. He was totally in control of Jacob's family in a way he had not been prior to the time Jacob died.

Joseph immediately took command of the family in an unusual way:

> *Joseph threw himself upon his father and wept over him and kissed him. Genesis 50:1*

Joseph had been his father's original choice as the heir. There was a real love relationship between father and son. Joseph's initial reaction expresses that relationship.

Joseph kissed his father. I have no doubt that Joseph gave his father a kiss. His brothers may have done the same, but the text does not say. There is more involved, however, in Joseph's actions. As we have said, repeatedly, the kiss was the sign of acceptance. It affirmed that relationships between the two persons were without problem. You may remember, in our previous study, we reported on Genesis chapter 46. In that chapter, God spoke to Jacob at Beersheba and said,

> *"I will go down to Egypt with you, and I will surely bring you back again. And Joseph's own hand will close your eyes." Genesis 46:4*

Upon the death of the father, it was the responsibility of his heir to make certain his eyes were closed as soon as he died. This saying came to be known as a way of indicating that the heir took care of the details concerning his father's death. This was God's promise to Jacob in Genesis 46:4. Joseph's actions, in Genesis 50:1, confirm that promise. There were a number of burial preparations for which the heir must give attention. It is to this that the author referred in 50:1.

Joseph was the heir and he immediately assumed leadership of the family in order to make the necessary preparations.

> *And Joseph commanded his servants the physicians to embalm his father: and the physicians embalmed Israel, taking a full forty days, for that was the time required for embalming. And the Egyptians mourned for him seventy days. Genesis 50:2, 3*

As the second most powerful man in Egypt, Joseph had a host of talented professionals at his command. The best doctors were available to him. The Egyptians embalmed their

royalty, but not their common people. Doctors performed the embalming because the process required a considerable knowledge of human anatomy.

The process was carried out by washing the body with unusual care and then the body was anointed with sweet smelling spices and oils to retard unpleasant odors and slow down the decomposition. By injecting fluids through the navel each day and also by massage therapy, the body was eventually freed from putrefaction. It would dehydrate and turn rigid. Thus the process was completed. In view of this process, it was not surprising that it took 40 days to complete the embalming.

There is some discussion among Jewish scholars about whether Jacob should have been embalmed at all. The embalming process, perfected by the Egyptians, was more a religious ritual than a medical procedure. They believed that the soul of the ruler would return to the body after death. Because of this, they wanted to make sure that the body was maintained so that it would provide a proper habitation for the soul.

Jews, on the other hand, did not believe in embalming. Even as far back as Jacob, Jews insisted that they be buried so that the natural decomposition of the body would be allowed to take place. This was an attempt to be in accord with the divine announcement, "To dust you shall return." Genesis 3:19.

The Jewish time of mourning was seven days. The text says, "The Egyptians mourned for him seventy days." This was the normal period of mourning for Egyptian officials of high rank. The text does not say whether or not Joseph took part in these expressions of sorrow. Because he was an important official, one would expect that Joseph would participate. Did the 11 brothers participate? We do not really know, but it would seem appropriate for them to participate as well.

The following verse is quite interesting and raises some questions:

> *When the days of mourning had passed, Joseph said to Pharaoh's court, "If I have found favor in your eyes, speak to Pharaoh for me." Genesis 50:4*

The first question which comes to mind is, "Why did Joseph go to Pharaoh's court rather than to the Pharaoh himself?" There are several possibilities:

1. Joseph was the sole ruler of Egypt. He was not an Egyptian and he never forgot that fact. Though he ruled the land, still he was not the Pharaoh. The Pharaoh had ultimate authority even though Joseph managed the whole nation.
2. The text does not say that Joseph had to go through members of "Pharaoh's Court." This suggests that it was Joseph's choice to do so. He may have chosen this means simply thinking it was an appropriate way to proceed.
3. Because Joseph was really the sole ruler of the land, any time that he was away from the palace for a protracted period of time, it would put a strain on the smooth running of the government. This would cause him to seek counsel at this point.
4. It is possible that he thought Pharaoh would fear his reluctance to return to his responsibilities once he had been back in Canaan. If so, this would be a very wise move on Joseph's part to get confirmation as well as permission.
5. It is reasonable to assume that there would be some personal jealousies among the members of "the court" toward Joseph. If so, it would be a strategic move to win them over before the request was considered.

All of these suggestions would be possibilities. My own preference, however, would be the third suggestion. There is no doubt that his absence from the palace would make running the government awkward all the time that he was in Canaan.

Joseph's approach to people who may not have been overly sympathetic with him was well designed. Notice what he said, "If I have found favor in your eyes, speak to Pharaoh for me." If the members of "the court" were sensitive about this foreigner having greater power than they did, then Joseph's humble approach was superb. I believe that there is at least an element of this in Joseph's request.

Joseph's wording of his request was carefully drawn:

> *"My father made me swear an oath and said, 'I am about to die; bury me in the tomb I dug for myself in the land of Canaan' Now let me go up and bury my father; then I will return." Genesis 50:5*

The design was perfect. He gave his reason first; only then did he make his request.

There are two appeals in his reason for the request:

- "**My father made me swear an oath**" - Everyone in government would be sensitive to the spot on which this places an official. If he ever goes back on an oath, his political career has ended. They would be very sympathetic with the importance of Joseph keeping the word of his oath.
- **This was Jacob's dying request** - In Egypt as well as among the Jews, it was ultimately important to keep good relationships with one's father and obey his directions. It was even more imperative that one observe his father's dying wish, especially if it concerned the place of his burial. Observe that it is not just to make sure that Jacob was buried in Canaan. It was a specific place where he had dug his own tomb.

It is appropriate for the rulers to have power. Most people are not disturbed by that unless the ruler demands power. This will alienate people. Joseph took this into account. He requested permission to go. It would be much easier for Pharaoh to give the request a favorable consideration.

Observe that Joseph immediately followed his request with a promise - "then I will return." In this promise, Joseph anticipated one of Pharaoh's possible concerns.

The text does not indicate how the request was processed. It simply gives Pharaoh's response:

> *Pharaoh said, "Go up and bury your father, as he made you swear to do." Genesis 50:6*

We must assume that the members of "the court" honored Joseph's request and brought the matter to the attention of the Pharaoh.

As one would expect, Pharaoh's reply was simple and direct. It was a command. This would be expected from an absolute ruler.

Observe that Pharaoh referred to Joseph's oath - "As he made you swear to do." Pharaoh would want Joseph to be very sensitive to keep any oath that he made. Things were going well in Egypt. Joseph had brought them safely through a frightening time of famine. Joseph had been faithful to his word, in every respect. Pharaoh wanted to be able to continue to be able to trust any oath Joseph might make to him.

Genesis 50:7-14 - Joseph Buried Jacob in the Cave of Machpelah

As you read these verses, there is an exciting sense of grandeur and ceremony here:

So Joseph went up to bury his father. All Pharaoh's officials accompanied him -- the dignitaries of his court and all the dignitaries of Egypt. Genesis 50:7

It is difficult to remember that Joseph had been a slave in Pharaoh's palace. When had a king given a slave permission to leave his captivity and return to his homeland to bury his father? That is what Pharaoh did. It was as much a statement of triumph for Joseph as it was a statement of fact.

Picture this scenario in your mind. There is something majestic and awe inspiring about what the author described. "All Pharaoh's officials accompanied him - the dignitaries of his court and all the dignitaries of Egypt." It is as though only Pharaoh is left in the royal city to control the government in Joseph's absence. This was not the case, but it could be viewed that way. The author stressed the fact that all the dignitaries went with Joseph. Notice that the author said this in two ways:

- "**All Pharaoh's officials accompanied him**" - This is a general statement which gives a basic impression of the list of those who left Egypt and went into Canaan.
- **"The dignitaries of his court and all the dignitaries of Egypt**" - This second statement is not different from the first, just more specific and emphatic. This is the way the Hebrews always added emphasis to their words. The author really wanted to stress the fact that all the Egyptian dignitaries went to Canaan with Joseph.

This is astounding. You may remember that in our study of Genesis 43, the author said,

They served him by himself, the brothers by themselves, and the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves, because Egyptians could not eat with Hebrews, for that is detestable to Egyptians. Genesis 43:32

If a Jew was so detestable that an Egyptian would not share a table with him, think how it must have affected all the dignitaries of Egypt to leave their beloved Egypt and go into the ghastly place called Canaan. Nevertheless, they went into Canaan.

The author continued, in verse eight, with these words:

besides all the members of Joseph's household and his brothers and those belonging to his father's household. Only their children and their flocks and herds were left in Goshen. Genesis 50:8

Joseph's household included many more than his wife and children. There were many servants and officials who had special skills and abilities. That in itself would be a formidable crowd. His brothers and those who belonged to his father's household were also a large group. Notice that the author then turned to identifying the ones who did not go along - their children, their flocks and their herds. Leaving their children and flocks behind was insurance that both Joseph and his brothers would return.

This was not just an ordinary group of people. It would be like the president of the United States and his cabinet all traveling to the same place. The group may be small in number, but the people who must accompany them is huge.

Chariots and horsemen also went up with him. It was a very large company. Genesis 50:9

It was a matter of national security for Joseph to travel outside of Egypt. The presence of some of the best troops in the Egyptian army gave silent witness to that possible danger.

We must remember that this procession is not walking. They are riding in vehicles drawn by horses or oxen. Still, the trip from Goshen to the burial site was long. It would take them two to three weeks each way. The trip would take from two to three months altogether. There were literally hundreds of people in the procession. These people had to be provided for in terms of food and clothing and shelter for that time. There would have to be a large number of vehicles just to carry the supplies that they would need.

Imagine, if you can, just how long and impressive was the procession from Goshen to Mamre. It must have spread out for miles along the road going to Canaan. There is an irony in this picture. The Egyptians considered the Jews to be detestable. In spite of this, here is the entire royal court, with the exception of the Pharaoh, traveling into Canaan to attend the funeral of a Jewish man. It does not take a great imagination to grasp what must have been going through their minds as they entered into the land of Canaan.

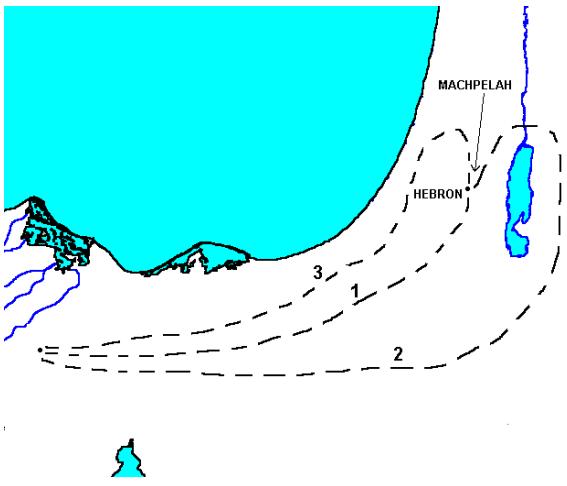
There is a bit of a surprise in the verse which follows:

When they reached the threshing floor of Atad, near the Jordan, they lamented loudly and bitterly; and there Joseph observed a seven-day period of mourning for his father. Genesis 50:10

According to the wording of this verse it sounds as though they had gone the long way around to get to Hebron for the burial.

This raises several problems.

1. The land to the east and to the west of the Jordan River were both called "across the Jordan." Map 28 indicates that the shortest route to Hebron was to go along the coast directly to Hebron on the west side of the Jordan River as well as the Dead Sea.
2. Another possibility was that they followed the same route which the children of Israel followed hundreds of years later on their way to Canaan out of Egypt. This would take them to the east side of the Dead Sea and the Jordan River and they would cross into Canaan near Mt. Pisgah and go south and west to Hebron for the burial.
3. A third possibility was that they could have stayed on the west side of the Jordan River and traveled through Beersheba



Map 28: Journey to Hebron

and north to Hebron rather than traveling along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea.

We honestly do not know which way they went. From a strictly logical viewpoint, it would probably look like this:

1. It would be much more direct, though not as comfortable, to go through the desert and hill country to Beersheba on the way to Hebron. Again, this route would not bring them near the Jordan River.
2. It is possible that they traveled along the Mediterranean coast. This was by far the most comfortable and convenient way to go. It involved traveling a longer distance to provide that comfort. This route would not bring them close to the Jordan River.
3. It is possible that they went on the east side of the Dead Sea and crossed to the west side of the Jordan and then to Hebron. It is a mountainous area occupied by people who are hostile to the Jews - Ishmael's lineage. This would be an Egyptian caravan. The Ishmaelites would be reluctant to attack an Egyptian caravan. This is the only scenario in which they would be near the Jordan River.

Observe that the author indicated that when they reached the threshing floor of Atad, **near the Jordan**, the lamentation began. That means that whichever route they took, it had to bring them out near the Jordan, where the lamenting began. The first option mentioned above is the only one of the three that achieves that necessary goal.

The text says that "they lamented loudly and bitterly. "The word "lament" is "caphad" (סָפַד) and means "to wail" or "mourn." This is the precursor to the practice that was continued at the time of Jesus. In the first century, professional mourners were hired to wail and scream at funerals to express how devastated the family was at the loss of their loved one. It appears that this kind of wailing was going on as they came into Canaan. Add to this the fact that this Egyptian expression of sorrow took place in the land of Canaan.

The author continued with his picture of the scene by saying that "Joseph observed a seven-day period of mourning for his father." This was the usual period of mourning observed for all the Jews, not just the officials. The text does not say whether the loud wailing was done by the Egyptians or by the Jews. My own preference would be to say that it was done by both the Egyptians and the Jews.

This loud ceremony was not done in a vacuum. The Canaanites, who lived in the area, could hear and see what was happening. The author records their impression of these proceedings.

> *When the Canaanites who lived there saw the mourning at the threshing floor of Atad, they said, "The Egyptians are holding a solemn ceremony of mourning." That is why that place near the Jordan is called Abel Mizraim. Genesis 50:11*

As had been for a long time, the Canaanites were living in the land. These people were totally different from the Jews. They had to be curious to see what this huge procession was doing in their area.

One might wonder why the Egyptians would mourn in the threshing floor. For one thing, it probably suggests that this was not the time of harvest. If that were the case, the threshing floor would be full. The most important reason that it would be held in the threshing floor would be that it was the only place large enough to hold that many people without disturbing crops and pasture land.

This whole experience made such an impression on the Canaanites that they changed the name of the place to "Abel Mizraim" which means "mourning of the Egyptians."

Both in verse ten and eleven, the author describes this place as "near the Jordan." Repetition is almost always a means to emphasize a particular piece of information. This presents a problem. If you look at Map 28, you will see that the cave of Machpelah is nowhere near the Jordan. There are some possibilities:

- It is possible that the mourning session was held "near the Jordan" and then they proceeded to the burial site near Hebron.
- It is less possible that the burial site was considered to be "near the Jordan."

We do not really know the answer to this question.

When the seven days of mourning were completed, the author indicated that the brothers buried Jacob as he had instructed.

So Jacob's sons did as he had commanded them: Genesis 50:12

In this brief statement, the author has given us more than one piece of information:

- This task was done by the 12 brothers, not by Joseph alone.
- Everything that Jacob commanded them had been done, just as he instructed them.
- This may have been one of the only times that Jacob's sons did something together and did what Jacob wanted them to do.

One might expect that the next verse would record the next event. That did not happen. The verse which follows is rather a summary statement.

They carried him to the land of Canaan and buried him in the cave in the field of Machpelah, near Mamre, which Abraham had bought as a burial place from Ephron the Hittite, along with the field. Genesis 50:13

The things that Jacob had requested of them, had now been accomplished, just as they were instructed. Jacob was afraid that he would be buried in Egypt. This would have been the ultimate failure for him. He had lived his life in Canaan and knew that he belonged there. He had risked his life to stay in the land when Esau wanted him to leave with him. Now he was determined to be buried there. He had buried his wife there along with his parents and their parents. The reciting of the details about the location and the former owners was just one more way to emphasize that the things Jacob commanded were done exactly as commanded.

In the closing verse of this paragraph, the author recorded Joseph's actions following the burial.

After burying his father, Joseph returned to Egypt, together with his brothers and all the others who had gone with him to bury his father. Genesis 50:14

You may remember that Joseph, when he requested permission to go to bury his father, promised that he would return when the burial was completed. In this verse, Joseph kept that promise. The author also informed us, here, that all those from the family, the court of Pharaoh and the guards also returned to Egypt from Canaan. Again, imagine what this caravan looked like as they moved back toward Egypt. It was a very large group and must have been impressive to say the least.

Genesis 50:15-21 - Joseph's Brothers Fear His Revenge

The story takes a dramatic turn at this point. Notice how the author reports the scene:

When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?" Genesis 50:15

Joseph's brothers anticipated trouble. There are at least three reasons to anticipate trouble:

- Some people anticipate trouble because it seems that the worst things happen to them, so they try to prepare themselves for the worst on any given occasion.
- Others anticipate trouble because they want to be prepared for any contingency all the time. In their childhood they took the Boy Scout motto - "Be prepared" - seriously.
- Some others anticipate the worst because they know that they deserve it. Joseph's brothers fell into this category.

The brothers had not forgotten that they had done a terrible thing to Joseph. Now they knew that he was in a position to do them great harm if he so desired. They were afraid of Joseph's revenge when Jacob was alive. Their fear was tempered by the fact that Joseph would not kill them and bring great sorrow on Jacob. To that extent, they had enjoyed a measure of safety.

The whole situation was now different. Jacob was no longer present to exert a restraining influence on Joseph's anticipated revenge. The brothers were afraid for their lives.

In reality, their question gives a picture of their own thoughts and values. Selling Joseph was venting their anger at his actions and position without concern for what their actions might do to Joseph and Jacob. Now they were afraid that Joseph would do exactly the same to them and they knew they would not like that.

Notice what they said, "What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him." It might be more precise to translate this statement, "what if Joseph will **nurse** hatred against us,..." It was a picture of Joseph feeding his bitterness, cultivating his gaping lust for revenge, his burning desires to inflict equal pain and anguish. Talk about guilt! Certainly, they knew that they deserved Joseph's revenge. They were busy thinking about what they deserved. They had no time to reflect upon the continuous examples of mercy with which Joseph had showered them. "What if..." is a frightening thought for a guilty person.

Look carefully at the following verse:

So they sent word to Joseph, saying, "Your father left these instructions before he died:" Genesis 50:16

Until this time, the author told us nothing about this conversation between Jacob and his 11 sons. Did that conversation really take place? Did the brothers make this up? We really do not know. The brothers were quite capable of most any kind of deception. As we reflect upon the brothers actions when Joseph revealed himself to them, we can detect some real sorrow. One wonders whether it was a sorrow for sin or sorrow that they got caught and were now in a position where they could pay for that sin with their lives.

The author reported that the brothers "sent word to Joseph." The question arises, "Why didn't they just go to Joseph?" Joseph had been away for a couple of months. There had

to be a lot of work piled up waiting for his attention. It may have been that the only way they could reach him was to send him a message.

That may be true, but there is another possibility that seems more realistic. There is strong evidence of their fear. It probably seemed safer to send a message than to take the risk of looking their brother in the eye and saying what they had written.

By whom did they send this message? Several possibilities come to mind:

- It could have been that the family chose the sons of Bilhah to carry the message. Some believe that Joseph spent his time, as a young child, with Dan and Naphtali, the children of Bilhah. These two boys were considerably older than Joseph. Dan was Jacob's fifth son and Naphtali was his sixth. Joseph, on the other hand, was the eleventh son of Jacob. Add to this the fact that the sons of Bilhah were not involved in the atrocities inflicted upon Joseph by Leah's sons. They could not stir up painful memories in Joseph, just by the sight of them.
- Still others believe that Bilhah herself was the one who carried the message to Joseph. This could be a reasonable choice. Bilhah was Rachel's maid-servant. It is probable that she cared for Joseph as a mother when Rachel died.

The only problem here was that a woman could not come before the leader of a nation. Because of this it is more reasonable that Dan and Naphtali carried the message for the family. Ultimately, we do not know for sure.

The message was complicated for Joseph. To our knowledge, it had never been shared with Joseph by Jacob. It may have been absolutely true that Jacob said this to his eleven sons. On the other hand, it was not beyond the capabilities of the brothers to fabricate a plan to fit their best interests. They had done this before. Though Joseph had no interest in punishing his brothers, still he had to wonder if they were involved in their old games again. I do not know where this message originated. It can be an honest report. On the basis of past history, I would suspect that the message was invented by Jacob's sons.

Verse 17 is apparently what Jacob told his sons to say to Joseph after the funeral.

> *"This is what you are to say to Joseph: 'I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.' Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father." When their message came to him, Joseph wept. Genesis 50:17*

Jacob requested that Joseph "forgive." The word "'forgive" is "nasa" (נָשָׂא). It means "to lift," "to forgive." It describes the removing of responsibility from a guilty person the way a man would remove the yoke from an ox. There are two parts to this message:

First, Jacob evaluated the way his sons had treated Joseph. Jacob described their wrong doing in two ways:

a. "**Forgive your brothers sins.**" - The word "sins" is "pesha" (פֶּשַׁע) and describes "a sin," "a revolt" or "rebellion." The intent of this word, however, is an evil deed that is intended as a way to rebel against power and authority. This word was never used to describe inadvertent wrong-doing. Jacob identified the fact that the brothers were guilty of the most terrible form of wrong doing.

b. "**The wrongs they committed in treating you so badly**." - Speaking more carefully, one might translate the words in this way, "And their sin, for the evil they did to you." The word Jacob used for "sin" is "khatawaw" (חַטָּאָה). It represents the same idea as the Greek word which means to "miss the mark." It can refer to "habitual sinfulness," "an offender." There is a subtle hint here that Jacob was not referring to a single event, but rather to a habitual way of life which these men followed in their dealings with their despised brother, Joseph.

The word "evil," is 'rah" (רָע) and stands for a lesser form of offense, affliction, wretchedness. it is sometimes described as "vexing." - being a constant source of irritation and disturbance. it is no less wrong, just different in its disturbing expression.

The second part of Jacob's message was a request - "Now forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father." The word "forgive" is "nasa" (נָשָׂא), as used before in this verse. Jacob was saying, "Remove the guilt from your brothers as though they never put you in a pit or sold you into slavery." Jacob again used the word "sin," "pesha" (פֶּשַׁע) and describes a serious revolt against authority.

When Jacob made this request for Joseph's forgiveness, notice how Jacob identified his sons - "The servants of the God of your father." This is strange. Jacob had just admitted their blatant sins and then identifies his sons as "the servants of the God of your father." The word Jacob used for "God" is "el" (אֵל). It places an emphasis on strength which is goodness. It is strength which accompanies greatness. It is most often used of God.

Did we miss something? Did the author tell us about some monumental reform on the part of Joseph's brothers? Have we been too harsh with Joseph's brothers who sold him into slavery and did not appear to feel too badly about it until Joseph identified himself and they realized he was in a position of sweet revenge? I think not! It appears that this request, whether designed by Jacob or fabricated by his sons, was intended to touch the heart of Joseph.

The message was designed to make it impossible for Joseph to punish his brothers if he wanted to do so. As I said earlier, there are two parts to Jacob's message.

If Joseph punished his brothers, he must turn a callused heart against the request of his father whom he loved so dearly. As the heir in his father's family, it was his responsibility to carry out his father's wishes - "forgive your brother's sins."

Again, even if Joseph wanted to punish his deceptive, conniving brothers, Jacob made it impossible for Joseph to do so. By referring to Leah's sons as, "servants of the God of your father," Jacob put Joseph in a bind, whether he intended to or not. As the ruler of Egypt and the heir of his father's family, Joseph had every right and authority to punish his brothers. Jacob referred to these guilty men as "servants of the God of your father." In so doing, if Joseph gave his brothers the punishment they deserved, he would be taking a stand against God. This was not a thing Joseph would be apt to do. That, of course, was exactly what this request was designed to accomplish.

There is another point. Until now, there has never been any hint or indication that Joseph had told his father the truth about his disappearance. It now appears that if Joseph did not tell Jacob what the sons of Leah had done, then certainly the brothers were forced to do so out of their driving fear of brutal reprisal.

The tragedy of this whole request was that Joseph had no desire to do anything of the kind. Observe Joseph's response to the request, "When their message came to him, Joseph wept." The word "wept" is "bakah" (בָּכָה) and means "to weep," "to bemoan," "to lament." This is an extremely violent form of sorrow. It is exactly the same word that was used in Genesis 45:2, when Joseph fled the room after eating with his brothers and wept uncontrollably in his inner chamber.

In verse 18, there is yet another tense moment for the brothers:

> *His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. "We are your slaves," they said. Genesis 50:18*

We need to review the situation. Joseph's brothers were frightened. They sent an emissary/emissaries to present Jacob's request on behalf of the brothers. Joseph did not reply, but he wept. At this point, the brothers chose to go to Joseph in person and cast themselves on his mercy. The question arises, Why did they go to Joseph when they had just sent an emissary? There are several possibilities:

- They may have interpreted Joseph's crying as the painful memory of what the brothers had done to him. That being the case, they would feel that they must go to him immediately lest the danger to them become even greater.
- It could be the second stage of their original design. In this scenario, they would send an emissary to find out how angry Joseph really was. Then, when Joseph had been exposed to the idea for a while, they would go to him personally.
- They may have interpreted Joseph's crying to mean that he felt no ill-will against them. Thus, they would feel safe to enter into his presence.

We can not say which it was, but previous actions cause one to regard them with suspicion and choose the second possibility.

When the brothers "threw themselves down before him," they made a symbolic gesture. To prostrate yourself before someone was to place yourself under their lordship. They became your master. The brothers gave a second symbol of their intentions. They said, "We are your slaves." No one became a slave out of desire. It was always a secondary motive - it is better to be a slave than to be killed. It appears that this was their motive in this instance.

You will remember that in Genesis 37:5-11, we observed that Joseph had a dream about this very situation. Though this dream dramatically increased the problems he had with his brothers, now in the closing part of the book, the vision comes true.

Joseph replied to these surprising gestures in verse 19:

> *But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God?" Genesis 50:19*

Joseph started his response with words of assurance, "Don't be afraid." Going back to verse 18, it is clear that their motive was fear. Joseph said, "Don't be afraid," because he could see that they were afraid. Joseph was assuring his brothers, again, that they had nothing to fear.

Joseph continued his comforting with a question, "Am I in the place of God?" The explicit answer to his question was "no!" The import of Joseph's question is clear - pun-

ishment is a divine prerogative. This question suggests some information that identifies Joseph 's thinking:

- Joseph knew that if there was any punishing to be done, God would do it.
- Joseph knew that if he judged and punished his brothers, he would be usurping a divine authority.

Joseph understood his relationship with God very well. He never forgot it.

He continued his comforting description of their situation with frank honesty:

> *"You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives." Genesis 50:20*

His statement, "You intended to harm me..." is about as blunt as one can make it. He confronted them directly with their evil intent. Logically speaking, this would be followed by judgment and punishment, or at least reprisal. Joseph understood the divine process and determined his actions in accordance with it.

Joseph turned blunt honesty into comforting understanding when he said, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good, to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives." There is a serious contrast in this sentence. On the one hand, there is the desire of the brothers to do harm to Joseph - to kill him in a cistern or sell him into slavery where he had little hope of living more than a year or two. On the other hand, there is the divine desire to transform the brother's evil intent into a blessing that would save the lives of these very guilty men. It is one thing for a power to thwart and overcome an evil design. It takes a greater power and super-human wisdom to transform an evil design in such a way that it works out to be a blessing, a life-saving experience for the very people who designed it to accomplish evil. As you can see, in explaining to his brothers what God had done, Joseph also gave us a superlative glimpse of God. Unlike people, God used His power to extend mercy to the guilty in a miraculous way. Joseph used this marvelous understanding in an attempt to comfort his guilt ridden brothers.

In the following verse, Joseph built upon the beautiful understanding of God he had just shared with his brothers.

> *"So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children." And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them. Genesis 50:21*

Joseph began with the words, "so then." This tells us that a conclusion is coming. In effect, Joseph was saying, "because God took your evil intent and changed it into a life-saving experience, you have no need to be afraid." As evidence of his sincerity, Joseph continued by giving them a promise, "I will provide for you and your children." This is more than just a reassuring promise. Remember that Joseph was the heir in the family. Now that Jacob was dead, the care of his brothers and all their families was his unique responsibility. This was not new. He had cared for his family for the past 17 years. Up until now, though he provided all the care, Jacob was officially responsible for them. Now, both the care and the responsibility were his. He was reassuring them that he would not forget it.

The close of the verse holds some surprising information. Joseph went out of his way to reassure his family of their safety:

- When the one/ones sent to Joseph, to bear the request of Jacob, came to him, he did not explode with anger, but wept like one in mourning.
- He explained that God had transformed their evil intent into the salvation of Jacob's lineage.
- He told them they did not need to be afraid.
- He told them that he had taken seriously his responsibility as the heir of the family.
- With many other words he comforted and reassured them.

In spite of all this, still Joseph continued to speak kindly and reassuringly to them because it was necessary. These brothers were really tense with guilt-ridden fear.

Genesis 50:22-26 - Joseph died - "Take Me Back to Canaan"

The author dealt with this closing paragraph in somewhat of a summary manner. He made no effort to apprise us of the time involved in this paragraph. He simply stated what happened.

> *Joseph stayed in Egypt, along with all his father's family. He lived a hundred and ten years. Genesis 50:22*

It appears that the author said that Joseph not only lived in the land during the balance of his life, but he apparently remained in power and favor with the Pharaoh. This was a great accomplishment for a Jew in Egypt. The text does not indicate how long Joseph remained in power. He probably did not continue to rule until he was 110 year of age. We assume that for two reasons:

- People did not usually live that long.
- A person probably would not be able to carry the full responsibility of ruling such a vast empire at that age.

We are certain that Joseph served at least 26 years before his father died: This is the way we account for that information:

• Joseph served for seven years of the good harvests	7 years
• Joseph's brothers came in the second year of the drought	2 years
• Jacob died after being in the land of Egypt 17 years	17 years
Total	26 years

We can be certain that he enjoyed the favor of Pharaoh as long as he served. If he retired before his death, he did so with the blessing of Pharaoh. It is thought by some that Joseph did retire some years before his death. Pharaoh's son supposedly succeeded him. According to Exodus 1:8, it was only after Joseph was dead for some years that a new Pharaoh came to power. This ruler was not sympathetic toward Joseph and his family.

On a number of occasions, we have discussed the ages indicated for different people in the text. Again, we cannot be sure just how long Joseph's 110 year life span would be by our reckoning.

Whether in the office or retired, Joseph remained in Egypt long after it was necessary because of the drought. The reason for this is not clear. It would be appropriate to assume that Joseph had a sense of loyalty to Pharaoh. The text, however, does not say one way or the other. It just says that Joseph stayed in Egypt. Observe, also, that Joseph's brothers

also remained in Egypt apparently for decades after the famine had ended and life returned to normal in the whole region. The purpose for this, of course, is not clear.

Verse 23 continues the sentence from verse 22.

and saw the third generation of Ephraim's children. Also the children of Makir son of Manasseh were placed at birth on Joseph's knees. Genesis 50:23

This means that Joseph saw his great, great, grandchildren. This means that both Ephraim and Manasseh had to be married at least by the time Joseph was 60 years of age. The text mentions Ephraim first because Jacob, in his prophetic blessing upon Joseph's sons, placed Ephraim in the place of the heir of the family, ahead of Manasseh. Nevertheless, eastern custom would require that Manasseh had to be married before Ephraim could be married.

To say that Joseph saw the third generation of Ephraim's children meant more than living long enough to see the children. The father of the family considered his children's children as his own.

When a child was born, it was presented to the father/grandfather. In this case it was Joseph. If the father/grandfather allowed the child to be placed upon his lap, it meant that the child was accepted into the family. The women of the family would all breathe a sigh of relief. If the father/grandfather accepted the child, he would then give the child a name. This choice was often, if not usually, prompted by the father.

In this instance, Joseph participated in the reception and naming of his great, great grandchildren. This was quite an honor and was really unusual.

The time came, however, when Joseph was about to die:

Then Joseph said to his brothers, "I am about to die. But God will surely come to your aid and take you up out of this land to the land he promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." Genesis 50:24

There is an interesting piece of information hidden in this verse.

Observe that Joseph was about to die and he called his brothers to give them instructions. The interesting information is this: Joseph was the eleventh son of Jacob. Only Benjamin was younger than Joseph. In spite of this, Joseph gave his brothers instructions concerning his death. This means that his brothers who were much older than he was, were expected to succeed him by decades. In part, this is surprising because Joseph was the righteous one in the family. They were supposed to live the longest and richest lives. This did not happen and the author gives no hint as to the reason for it.

Having told his brothers that he was going to die, Joseph turned his attention to his responsibility as Jacob's heir - the care of the family. Observe that Joseph did not say that the brother who succeeded him as heir, probably Judah, would take care of every need. Joseph said, "... But God will surely come to your aid and take you up out of this land to the land he promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." Joseph had absolute confidence that God would keep His word, no matter where they were or what happened. The sons of Jacob had thrived very well for several decades in Egypt. Nevertheless, ultimately God was going to take them home.

Verse 25 can be a bit deceptive.

And Joseph made the sons of Israel swear an oath and said, "God will surely come to your aid, and then you must carry my bones up from this place." Genesis 50:25

It sounds as though Joseph stated the terms of the oath and the brothers agreed. It was far more than that. These people took an oath very seriously. When Joseph stated his terms for the oath, we can be certain that there were repeated calls for clarification, and if necessary, calls for amendments and modification. In this instance, however, after the brothers agreed to the oath, they would all participate in a festive meal and drink wine together. These were the signs that sealed the oath/covenant between Joseph and his brothers. Joseph could now die without wondering whether or not his brothers would keep their promise. They would rather die than break an oath taken in this manner.

The terms of the oath were simple. It was made up of two parts:

"God will surely come to your aid." - This was very important. It means that as long as God is faithful, you must fulfill your oath to me as you have sworn. Joseph left them absolutely no hope of being able to violate this covenant at any possible future date.

"Then you must carry my bones up from this place." This was Joseph's expression of confidence that in His own good time, God would return the lineage of Jacob to Canaan, the land of Promise. Now the text does not say that they were to take his bones back to Canaan. They were to take his bones "up out of this place." It can be safely assumed that as a Jew his deepest desire would be that his bones be returned to Canaan.

Observe that the final verse in the book took a very dramatic turn.

> *So Joseph died at the age of a hundred and ten. And after they embalmed him, he was placed in a coffin in Egypt. Genesis 50:26*

The tone and direction of this story has changed dramatically. Joseph died at the age of 110 years.

Joseph was embalmed. We are again faced with the same question we considered at the death of Jacob, "Why would Joseph, a faithful Jew, and servant of God, want to be embalmed?" Jews did not embalm and never did. The Egyptians embalmed as a part of their preparation of a royal body for the return of the spirit to the body after death. There are at least two reasons why they would embalm Joseph's body:

- Joseph was not the Pharaoh, but he was the second ruler of Egypt. As such, he would be treated as royalty. He would have to observe the royal custom of embalming or risk offending both the Pharaoh and the entire court. They would care nothing for the fact that the Jews did not embalm their dead. It was the royal custom and it must be observed. This would be impossible to explain to the court or to the people of Egypt.
- The closing remark in the book gives us a second hint. Notice what the author wrote, "He was placed in a coffin in Egypt." Were the brothers unsuccessful in getting permission to take Joseph's body back to Canaan as they took Jacob? Were they unwilling to take Joseph's body back as they took Jacob? Did Joseph indicate that he wanted them to just place his body in a coffin in Egypt until all Israel returned to Canaan? The truth is that we do not know. One possible reason for the embalming was that Joseph made them promise to take his body back to Canaan. Because they did not go immediately, they may have embalmed the body against the time when they would take him back to Canaan. Could they have placed the body in a grave and then take the bones back when they left Egypt? We honestly do not know.

It appears to me that they could not get permission to take Joseph's body back to Canaan when he died, as they had taken Jacob's body. Beyond this, we are dealing with conjecture.

On this unusual note, the book of Genesis comes to a close. No closing remark; no summary. Just the statement that Joseph was in a coffin in Egypt. It seems more than a little strange that the author ends the book on a note such as this. We will speak to this issue at length in the chapter which follows.

Conclusion

It was important that Jacob be buried in Canaan because God had given a promise concerning the land and God could be depended upon to be faithful to that promise. By the same token, it was important for Jacob to be buried not just in Canaan, but at the cave of Machpelah because this stressed the continuity of the family and thus the ongoing nature of God's covenant with their ancestors. Again, it is a focus on the faithfulness of God.

There is a serious contrast between Genesis 50:1-14 and 50:15-21. Genesis 50:1-14 stresses God's faithfulness in two ways. Genesis 50:15-21, on the other hand, emphasizes the fear of mistrust and reprisal. This of course existed only in their minds, but it was just as real as if it were true.

In the closing paragraph, Joseph stressed his faithfulness to Pharaoh by staying in Egypt until his death. Joseph emphasized his faithfulness to God by demanding that his brothers take an oath to take him up out of Egypt when they left. Even in this, there is an emphasis on the faithfulness of God.

Throughout the chapter, in a number of ways, the author focused our attention on the power and faithfulness of God. In view of how faithful God was demonstrated to be, what will we expect Him to be? What will we expect God to do in our lives? What risks will it call upon us to make?

Not for sale or resale

A REVIEW OF CHAPTERS 26 - 50

The introduction to this second part of the study includes a chart which summarized each chapter of Genesis 26-50 in a few words. We would like to review this chart in order to point out some of the primary teachings about God which the author stressed in each chapter. The **Glimpses of God** which the author has shared with us need to be highlighted.

Chapter 26 - Isaac Deceived Abimelech

God is merciful and generous. Isaac was merciful to Abimelech's abusiveness and selfishness. On that same day, God gave Isaac and his people water in their new well. There is, also, an expression of God's power. Despite his past conduct, Isaac was open to God who blessed and used him.

Esau, on the other hand, was not open to God. It is not surprising that Esau is mentioned in only 2 verses while 33 verses describe Isaac's new relationship with God.

The picture of God focuses upon His mercy expressed in power.

Chapter 27 - Jacob Deceived Isaac, Fled Esau

There are many messages in this chapter. The overarching message, however, is a picture of God. This is a picture of God's mercy. Isaac had stooped to deception in the previous chapter. It is not surprising that Jacob followed in his father's footsteps. In spite of this, God watched over Isaac and provided a way of escape for Jacob.

Chapter 28 - Jacob's Vision at Bethel

In the vision, in this chapter, the author presented a picture of God as unswervingly faithful. Only with this in mind was Jacob able to place himself in God's care. Faithfulness expresses itself in forgiveness and restoration.

Chapter 29 - Laban Tricked Jacob into Marrying Leah

In the midst of the humiliation of Leah, God had mercy upon her and gave her the blessing of children. This seemed to be her only redeeming factor. The contrast in striking. Laban and Jacob were busy deceiving each other, trying to do each other harm. God, however, was merciful to Leah.

Chapter 30 - Leah vs. Rachel; Laban vs. Jacob

This is a chapter bristling with struggles. Look at the list:

- Leah against Rachel
- Laban against Jacob
- Jehovah against the idols of Laban

In the midst of all this conflict, God was presented as the victor. Observe the chapter again. God used these pictures of struggle to accomplish His goals. This is an exciting picture of God's power.

Chapter 31 - Jacob Fled from Laban

Out of the mix of two selfish men who deserved each other, God gave superlative evidence of His mercy. The greater the selfishness of both Jacob and Laban, the clearer the picture of God's greatness and mercy .

Chapter 32 - Jacob Wrestled with an Angel

This is a beautiful picture of God as He transformed a life. God changelessly revitalized and molded the life of Jacob into His likeness. There is mercy in God's determination to change our weakness rather than to destroy us in our error.

Chapter 33 - Jacob Met Esau

God moved subtly through this chapter. God spoke to Esau lest he take revenge against Jacob. God, in His sovereign power, moved Jacob from being a deceiver to a man of forthright courage.

Chapter 34 - The Seduction of Dinah

God is not mentioned in this chapter. In view of the content, that is not surprising.

Even in the debauchery of this picture of Jacob's sons, a picture of God is implied. In reverse fashion, there is a picture of God's flawless integrity. He would not be involved in their dishonest negotiations and covenants. God is faithful to His word, even when His people are not.

Chapter 35 - The Death of Isaac

The glimpses of God, in Genesis 35, come through the meaning of His names.

God is Elohim - the Eternal, merciful God.

God is El Bethel - House of the Mighty, Almighty God

God is El Shaddai - The All powerful, Almighty God.

In all His power, God is changeless.

Chapter 36 - The Lineage of Esau

God's names, deeds or people are not mentioned in this chapter. It is not surprising. Esau and his lineage had no positive relationship with God. It could be anticipated that they are barely mentioned other than this lineage.

Still there is a glimpse of God here. Even though they are the epitome of disobedience, still God includes them in the record. This is mercy. The relationship is non-existent. This highlights the holiness of God.

Chapter 37 - Joseph Sold into Slavery

The picture of God in this chapter can only be seen in a review of the balance of the book. Joseph was obedient. Despite the appearance that Joseph was abandoned, God was ultimately faithful to him.

Chapter 38 - Tamar Exposed Judah

This is another chapter where God is not mentioned. Even in the silence, there is a picture of God. In the lust, unfaithfulness, deceit and usury of this passage, God is obvious by His silence.

This is a picture of God's purity and holiness. God is not present. He is not a participant in the extremes of human selfishness and sin. God is holy.

Chapter 39 - Joseph and Potiphar's Wife

It is painful to read this chapter, yet it contains some beautiful glimpses of God.

God is present and powerful even when it appears He has forgotten His own.

God works for our good even when it appears He is absent.

God is with us, especially when we feel alone and abandoned.

God is merciful - He will bless even the ungodly because of His servants.

This chapter stresses the fact that God is faithful despite appearances.

Chapter 40 - Joseph Interpreted the Dreams of the Cup Bearer and Baker

There is a serious contrast in this chapter. God sovereignly spoke through His servant Joseph while the Egyptian leaders were helpless. In the midst of people who knew no kindness, God showed kindness and mercy as He spoke through Joseph. As you look at the whole story of Joseph, you can see that there is evidence of God's faithfulness throughout the chapter.

The main picture of God, in this chapter, is His faithfulness.

Chapter 41 - Joseph Interprets Pharaoh's Dreams

This chapter also contains a strong contrast. The wise men of Egypt were helpless to interpret the dreams as Pharaoh demanded. God not only revealed the dreams to Joseph, but also controlled the details of history. God is pictured as all powerful, greater than nature or nations. In the overall view of the story of Joseph, there is a picture of the undaunted faithfulness of God.

Clearly the major picture of God, in chapter 41, is as the Sovereign who controls history.

Chapter 42 - Brothers First Trip to Egypt for Grain

In this chapter, the author paints six word pictures of God. He points out that God is faithful to His word. God is merciful. God is a merciful judge. He is a loving God. God forgives. God provides for the needs of His people. Throughout the chapter, the emphasis is on the fact that God is merciful, even when people reject Him in disobedience.

Chapter 43 - Dinner for Twelve Brothers

The author presents a contrast with the idols of Egypt in this chapter. He presents God as being with His people. He is greater than all gods. He blesses His people. Above all, God is holy.

The strategic quality of God, in this chapter, is His holiness.

Chapter 44 - Joseph Planted a Cup in Benjamin's Bag

God is mentioned only once in the chapter. When they felt trapped, Judah assumed that God had uncovered their guilt concerning Joseph. This implies the omniscience of God. The whole experience stresses the fact that they saw God as the judge who let no evil go unpunished.

Chapter 45 - Joseph Revealed Himself; Invited Family to Goshen

There is drama and intense emotion here. Through all the tension two messages are thrust to the surface. God is merciful, even to the rebellious and selfish. There is an overpowering picture of God as being so sovereign that He can take the evil designs of wretched men and use them to accomplish His will - both in protecting his faithful servant and in showing mercy to the disobedient.

Chapter 46 - Joseph Welcomed His Family into Goshen

Throughout the chapter, the spotlight is on Joseph, but it gives us some beautiful pictures of God as well. God provides for His people even when they are cold in their relationship with Him. God shows His love toward all His people even in their disobedience. God is merciful to the rebellious as well as to the faithful in their abuse. He hears the cry of His people when they pray. There is an ongoing picture of God's sovereign use of events - Good and evil - to accomplish His merciful designs. The mercy of God is evident in all of the glimpses of His nature and character.

Chapter 47 - Joseph Kept Egypt Alive; Grain for Animals and Land

Permeating this chapter is a picture of God displaying His providence enabling Jacob to survive and prosper. God was faithful to Joseph through all the abuse he took, when it appeared God had abandoned him. Jacob knew God was faithful concerning the land of Canaan and so he insisted on being buried there.

This is a beautiful picture of God's faithfulness both to Joseph in his righteousness and to his family in their rebellion and guilt.

Chapter 48 - Israel Blessed Joseph's Sons

There is a picture here of God's mercy when he gave sons to Joseph, even in a strange land.

The overarching picture of God, however, is that He is faithful. Jacob knew God would be faithful and give them the land. God had faithfully provided for Jacob's need on every occasion. God promised to bring Israel back to the land and He did. God charged His angels to protect Israel and it was done. This is what the faithfulness of God is like.

Chapter 49 - Israel Blessed His Sons.

Three truths emerge repeatedly throughout this chapter.

Our previous conduct determines our future.

God is all powerful - four different expressions

The Justice of God expressed in mercy

Pervading these images of God is God's irresistible power displayed in merciful justice.

Chapter 50 - Joseph Died - Covenant - Take Me To Canaan

There is a clear picture of the faithfulness of God which permeates this entire chapter. God is powerful This could be frightening, except that this power is used to demonstrate His faithfulness to His people.

THE CONCLUSION OF THE BOOK OF GENESIS

Throughout the study of Genesis, we have repeatedly suggested that the author has used the seven major stories of the lives of people and events to help us understand something of the person and character of god.

The story of Creation - People have become embroiled in many serious discussions and even controversies over the creation story. As you read the story of creation, the important message is, God did it. The details of how God did it or when it happened are vague, even missing. The important thing is that God created. The author used the name for God "Elohim" in the creation story. This name focuses upon God's power and mercy. It takes unimaginable power to create such a universe as ours from nothing. Did you ever think of creation as a merciful act of God?

The Story of the Fall - Though the author used the name for God "Elohim" when speaking of creation, he used the name "Jehovah" when speaking of the fall. The name "Jehovah" focuses attention upon the eternal nature of God and is used repeatedly in situations where God's judgment is being described. You will also find the name "Elohim" in the story of the Fall because even in His judgment, God is merciful. When you speak of the justice of God, you immediately highlight the purity and holiness of God. Whatever else the author shows us, in the story of the fall, He is pictured as Holy.

The Story of the Flood - Again, the name for God most often used here is "Jehovah." This is a strong picture of the justice of the Holy God visited upon human beings. As in the previous section, the name "Jehovah Elohim" "Lord God" appears. It is a way of describing the merciful judge. This is the magnificent glimpse of God we see in the seemingly tragic story of the flood.

The Story of Abraham - If you look carefully at the story of Abraham, you will see a pattern repeated several times. God promised to take Abraham to a land which He did not identify. God did it. God promised to give the land to Abraham and his lineage. He did it. God promised to give Abraham a son and an uncountable lineage. God did it! God protected Abraham even in his disobedience. This is mercy. God provided for Abraham's every need, all his life. The glimpse of God which shines vividly here is His faithfulness. He is merciful, provident, powerfully protective, but in it all, He is faithful.

The Story of Isaac - In the story of Isaac, a theme rises to the surface again and again. God promised that Abraham would have a son by Sarah and Isaac was born. When Isaac questioned Abraham about the sacrifice, he answered that God would provide. The ram caught by his horns in the thicket attested evidence of Abraham's confidence in God. When Abraham would not allow Isaac to leave the land to get his bride, it was his certainty of the faithfulness of God. When Isaac blessed his sons, it was evidence of his certainty that God would keep His word. When Rebekah did not bear a son for many years, Isaac demonstrated a confidence that God had promised a lineage and He would not fail.

Throughout the Scriptures, there is reference to "the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." This focuses attention on "Elohim" the Majestic God of mercy who was faithful to Abraham, who was faithful to Isaac and Jacob and would never cease to be faithful to us.

The Story of Jacob - There are many pictures of God in the story of Jacob. God protected Jacob when his sons dealt foolishly with their neighbors. God provided for Jacob,

through Joseph, when draught devastated the whole area. The most prominent picture of God is when He, "Elohim," "the God of Mercy," forgave and restored Jacob at Bethel and when he met his brother Esau. Forgiveness is that characteristic of a pure and holy God which enables Him to accept sinful, rebellious mankind as though he were as pure as God.

The non-story of Esau - Esau was pleased to find ways to disobey God and devastate his parents. Esau's future would be fraught with pain and devastation. It is not accidental that other than a damaging list of his lineage, Esau is almost totally ignored in the book of Genesis despite the fact that he was the first-born. Even in this non-story, the Holiness of God is highlighted in a marvelous way.

The non-story of Judah and His Sons - It is significant that God is not mentioned in the non-story of Judah's dealings with Tamar. In the whole scenario, God is only obvious when he struck Judah's sons Er and Onan dead because of their evil and despicable lives. There is a vivid picture of the purity and holiness of God in these events. God was so righteous that he demanded of Himself that He punish evil wherever it was found.

The Story of Joseph - The early parts of the life of Joseph cause one to wonder about the faithfulness of God. Where is the faithfulness of God when Joseph was placed in a cistern? When he was sold as a slave? When he was falsely accused and thrown into prison? When he was forgotten by the man he had helped? Where was God's faithfulness?

It was evident when his father made him his heir. It was obvious when he gained favor with Potiphar? It was also evident when God enabled Joseph to interpret Pharaoh's dream and thus become Viceroy of the land of Egypt where Jews were despised. It was even evident when God enabled Joseph to be in a place to provide food, during a famine, for idolatrous Egyptians and unworthy sons of Jacob.

Like a good novel, the book of Genesis moved toward an intense climax. That climax is found in Genesis chapter 50.

> *You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. Genesis 50:20*

The book of Genesis climaxed when Joseph pointed out the power of God. He is so powerfully sovereign that He takes evil intentions of the rebellious and use them so that evil designs accomplish divine objectives. These became a life preserving blessing to the very ones who wanted them to be destructive. That is ultimate sovereignty.

There are many, many glimpses of God which surface in chapter after chapter of Genesis. These pictures of God reach their climax when God faithfully shows Himself sovereign over the evil intent of unrighteous men. That is, indeed, who God is.

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