

# ***The First Book of Moses Called GENESIS***

## **INTRODUCTION**

**1. Title.** The Jews designate the book of Genesis according to its word in the Hebrew text, *bereshith*, “in the beginning.” The Jewish Talmud, however, calls it the “Book of Creation of the World.” The name Genesis, meaning “origin” or “source,” has been adopted by English translations from the LXX, where this term was first used to indicate the contents of the book. Its subtitle, “The First Book of Moses,” was not a part of the original Hebrew text, but was added centuries later.

**2. Authorship.** Jews and Christians alike have considered Moses, the great lawgiver and leader of the Hebrews at the time of the Exodus, the author of the book of Genesis. This conviction was challenged by pagan opponents a few times in the early Christian period but was never seriously doubted by any Christian or Jew up to about middle of the 18th century. Beginning more than two centuries ago, traditional beliefs and opinions in every field of human thinking were questioned. Men were led to make discoveries in unknown realms and to create inventions which changed much of this world’s way of life. However, the same spirit of inquiry led men of a critical nature to question the authenticity of the Scriptures as the basis of the Christian belief.

The book of Genesis was the first book subjected to a critical examination in this modern age, and that examination started the era of higher criticism of the Bible. In 1753, a French court physician, Jean Astruc, published a book, *Conjectures*, in which he contended that the different names of the Godhead occurring in Genesis show that the book is a collection of various source materials. Astruc retained Moses as the collector of these sources and compiler of the book, but his followers soon disposed of Moses as the editor of Genesis. Critical-minded theologians have worked for more than two centuries to separate the supposed sources of Genesis and assign them to different authors, or at least to periods in which they were supposedly composed, gathered, changed, edited, and finally put together in one book. Adhering to these critical views, the scholars agreed on one great principle; namely, that the book consists of many documents of different value, authorship, and time of origin. However, they differ widely in their opinions concerning which parts are to be attributed to a certain period and which to another. The great variance in views of the different critical schools shows how unsound the foundation of their hypotheses is. The fallacy of many critical arguments has been revealed by the archeological discoveries of the last hundred years. Critics have had to change their theories and statements continually. Nevertheless many of them retain their rejection of a Mosaic authorship of Genesis for various reasons, of which a few will be enumerated here.

- a. The use of three different names of God, with one name apparently preferred in a certain section and a different name in another, allegedly shows that more than one author is responsible for the composition of the book. Hence, some critical scholars have held that those sections where the name *Yahweh* (Heb. *YHWH* or *JHWH*), “Jehovah,” is frequently used were written by an author they call the Jahvist, abbreviated J; sections using principally the name *’Elohim*, “God,” by a man they designate as the Elohist, abbreviated E. Other ancient authors who supposedly worked on Genesis were a priestly writer (P), an editor or redactor (R), and others.

- b. The many repetitions of stories contained in the book show, according to critical scholars, that parallel sources were used and crudely blended together into one narrative by a later editor, who was unable to hide the fact that he had used material of various origins.
- c. Conditions reflected in the stories of Genesis allegedly do not fit into the periods described, but into much later times.
- d. Place names of a much later period are given to localities when their earlier names had been different.
- e. The traditions about the Creation, the Flood, and the patriarchs as they existed in ancient Babylon are so similar to the Biblical record of them that most modern theologians assert the Hebrew writers borrowed these stories from the Babylonians during the Exile and edited them in a monotheistic style to make them inoffensive to their Hebrew readers.

The conservative Christian cannot agree with these views for the following reasons:

- a. He sees that the sacred names for God, Lord, and Jehovah are used more or less indiscriminately throughout the Hebrew Bible and do not indicate different authors, as the critics maintain. The LXX and the most ancient Hebrew Bible manuscripts, including the recently discovered Isaiah scroll, show that the name "God" found in a certain passage in one copy is given in another manuscript as "Lord" or "Jehovah," and vice versa.
- b. Repetitions frequently found in narratives are no sure indication of different sources for a given literary work. The defenders of the unity of the Mosaic books have shown by many non-Biblical examples that similar repetitions are found in various ancient literary works of one and the same author, and also in modern works.
- c. An increased knowledge of ancient history and conditions has revealed that the author of Genesis was well informed about the times he describes, and that the account of the patriarchs fits exactly into the setting of their time.
- d. Place names have been modernized in certain cases by copyists to enable their readers to follow the narrative.
- e. The fact that the Babylonians had traditions to some extent similar to the Hebrew records is no proof that one nation borrowed from the other, but finds its explanation in a common origin for both records. The inspired book of Genesis conveys divinely imparted information in an elevated and pure form, whereas the Babylonian records narrate the same events in a debased pagan setting.

It is not the purpose of this introduction to refute the many claims of the higher critics made in support of their theories. It is more important to note the evidence for Mosaic authorship.

The author of Exodus must have been the author of Genesis, because the second book of the Pentateuch is a continuation of the first, and evidently manifests the same spirit and intention. Inasmuch as the authorship of the book of Exodus is clearly attested by Christ Himself, who called it the "Book of Moses," (Mark 12:26), the preceding volume, Genesis, must also have been written by Moses. The use of Egyptian words and expressions and the minute acquaintance with Egyptian life and manners displayed in the history of Joseph harmonize with the education and experience of Moses. Although the evidence in favor of a Mosaic origin of Genesis is less explicit and direct than that for the subsequent books of the Pentateuch, the linguistic peculiarities common to all five books

of Moses mark it as work of one author, and the testimony of the New Testament indicates that he wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

The testimony of Jesus Christ, who quoted from several texts in the book of Genesis, is a clear indication that He considered the book as part of Holy Scripture. In quoting Gen. 1:27 and 2:24 Jesus used the introductory formula, "Have ye not read" (Matt. 19:4, 5), indicating that these quotations contained truth that was still binding and valid. The context of the narrative (Mark 10:2–9) relating Jesus' dispute with the Pharisees about the divine sanction of divorce makes it clear that He attributed to Moses the quotations taken from Genesis. When His antagonists asked Him whether they had a right to divorce their wives, Jesus parried with the question, "What did *Moses* command you?" In their reply the Pharisees referred to a provision made by Moses, found in Deut. 24:1–4, a passage from the fifth book of the Pentateuch. To this Christ replied that Moses had given them this precept because of the hardness of their heart, but that the earlier provisions had been different, and supported His statement by two other quotations from Moses (Gen. 1:27; 2:24).

On several other occasions Christ alluded to events described only in the book of Genesis, revealing that he considered it an accurate historical record (see Luke 17:26–29; John 8:37; etc.).

The numerous quotations from Genesis that are found in the writings of the apostles show clearly that they were convinced that Moses wrote the book and that it was inspired (see Rom. 4:17; Gal. 3:8; 4:30; Heb. 4:4; James 2:23).

In view of this evidence the Christian may confidently believe that Moses was the author of the book of Genesis. Ellen G. White says of Moses' sojourn in Midian: "Here, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he wrote the book of Genesis" (PP 251).

**3. Historical Setting.** The book of Genesis was written about 1,500 years before Christ (GC v), while the Hebrews were in bondage in Egypt. It contains a sketch of this world's history covering many centuries. The early chapters of Genesis cannot be placed in a historical setting, as we ordinarily think of history. We have no history of the antediluvian world, except that written by Moses. We have no archeological records, only the mute and often obscure testimony of the fossils.

After the Flood the case is different. The archeologist's spade has brought to light many records of the people, their customs, and forms of government during the period covered in the later chapters of Genesis. The times of Abraham, for example, can now be known fairly well; and the history of Egypt during the period of Israel's bondage can be reconstructed rather accurately. During this era, from Abraham to the Exodus, high civilizations flourished, particularly in the Mesopotamian valley and along the banks of the Nile. To the north the Hittites were growing in power. In Palestine dwelt warlike peoples under the leadership of petty kings. Gross customs reflected the dark paganism of all these peoples.

Strong racial ties connected the patriarchs of Genesis with the Semitic tribes of Lower and Upper Mesopotamia. The role of the patriarchs in some of the great events of that early time, such as the battle of the kings in the vale of Siddim (ch. 14), the destruction of the cities of the plain (chs. 18, 19), and the preservation of the Egyptian population during an extraordinary famine (ch. 41) are described in detail. The men of Genesis are met as shepherds and warriors, as city dwellers and nomads, as statesmen and fugitives. The stories about their experiences bring the readers of the book in contact with some of

the great nations of hoary antiquity as well as with some of the less prominent peoples with whom the Hebrews had contact from time to time.

The great civilizations that had risen in Egypt as well as in Mesopotamia are not described in Genesis, but their existence is strongly felt in the experiences of the patriarchs. The people of God did not live in splendid isolation in a political or social vacuum. They were part of a society of nations, and their civilization and culture did not differ markedly from those of the surrounding peoples, except as their religion created a difference. Being the most important remnants of the true worshipers of Jehovah, they were therefore the men who formed the center of the inspired author's world. This obvious observation leads naturally to the question: What was Moses' main purpose in writing the book?

**4. Theme.** Every attentive student of Genesis is aware of the main theme of the book, first, the narration of God's dealings with the faithful few who loved and served Him, and, second, the depth of depravity into which those who had left God and His precepts fell. The book of Genesis is the first permanently recorded divine revelation accorded men.

The book also has doctrinal importance. It records the creation of this world and all its living creatures, the entrance of sin, and God's promise of salvation. It teaches that man is a free moral agent, the possessor of a free will, and that the transgression of the law of God is the source of all human woe. It gives instruction concerning the observance of the holy Sabbath as a day of rest and worship, the sanctity of marriage and the establishment of the home, the reward for obedience, and the punishment for sin.

The book is written in an interesting style and appeals to the imagination of the young. Its elevated moral themes are food for the mature, and its teachings are instructive for all. This is the book of Genesis, whose study no Christian can afford to neglect and whose shining heroes every child of God may imitate.

#### **5. Outline.**

- I. From the Creation of the World to Abraham, 1:1 to 11:26.
  - A. The creation of heaven and earth, 1:1 to 2:25.
    1. The six days of creation, 1:1–31.
    2. The institution of the Sabbath, 2:1–3.
    3. Details of man's creation and of the Garden in Eden, 2:4–25.
  - B. The history of the Fall and its immediate results, 3:1 to 5:32.
    1. The temptation and Fall, 3:1–8.
    2. The expulsion from the garden, 3:9–24.
    3. Cain and Abel, 4:1–15.
    4. The Cainites, 4:16–24.
    5. The generations from Adam to Noah, 4:25 to 5:32.
  - C. The Deluge, 6:1 to 9:17.
    1. The degeneracy of the antediluvians, 6:1–13.
    2. The building of the ark, 6:14–22.
    3. The narrative of the Flood, 7:1 to 8:14.
    5. The Noachic covenant, 8:15 to 9:17.
  - D. From Noah to Abraham, 9:18 to 11:26.
    1. The destinies of Noah's sons, 9:18–29.
    2. The table of nations, 10:1–32.

3. The confusion of tongues at Babel, 11:1–9.
4. The generations from Shem to Abraham, 11:10–26.
- II. The Patriarchs Abraham and Isaac, 11:27 to 26:35.
  - A. Abram, 11:27 to 16:16.
    1. Call and journey to Canaan, 11:27 to 12:9.
    2. Egyptian experience, 12:10–20.
    3. Separation from Lot, 13:1–18.
    4. Rescue a Lot, meeting with Melchizedek, 14:1–24.
    5. Covenant with God, 15:1–21.
    6. Marriage with Hagar, birth of Ishmael, 16:1–16.
  - B. Abraham, 17:1 to 25:18.
    1. Renewal of covenant, Abram becomes Abraham, circumcision introduced, 17:1–27.
    2. Abraham and the angels, destruction of Sodom and its neighboring cities, 18:1 to 19:38.
    3. Experiences at Gerar, birth of Isaac, expulsion of Ishmael, 20:1 to 21:34.
    4. Abraham's supreme test, 22:1–24.
    5. Sarah's death and burial, 23:1–20.
    6. Isaac's marriage to Rebekah, 24:1–67.
    7. Abraham's descendants, 25:1–18.
  - C. Isaac, 25:19 to 26:35.
    1. Isaac's sons, 25:19–34.
    2. Isaac and Abimelech of Gerar, 26:1–35.
- III. The Patriarch Jacob, 27:1 to 36:43.
  - A. Jacob, the supplanter, 27:1 to 31:55.
    1. Jacob receives a blessing by deception, 27:1–46.
    2. Jacob's flight and the vision at Bethel, 28:1–22.
    3. Jacob works for his wives and rears a family, 29:1 to 30:43.
    4. Jacob's flight from Laban, 31:1–55.
  - B. Israel, a prince with God, 32:1 to 36:43.
    1. Jacob returns to Canaan, the Peniel experience, 32:1 to 33:20.
    2. Disgrace at Shechem, domestic troubles, 34:1 to 35:29.
    3. Esau's descendants, 36:1–43.
- IV. Joseph, a Savior, 37:1 to 50:26.
  - A. Joseph and his brethren, 37:1–36.
  - B. Judah's fall, 38:1–30.
  - C. Joseph's stand for principle, 39:1 to 40:23.
  - D. Joseph becomes the savior of Egypt, 41:1–57.
  - E. Joseph and his brethren, 42:1 to 45:28.
  - F. Jacob goes to Egypt, 46:1 to 47:31.
  - G. Jacob's blessings, 48:1 to 49:33.
  - H. The death of Jacob and of Joseph, 50:1–26.

## CHAPTER 1

1 *The creation of heaven and earth, 3 of the light, 6 of the firmament, 9 of the earth separated from the waters, 11 and made fruitful, 14 of the sun, moon, and stars, 20 of fish and fowl, 24 of beasts and cattle, 26 of man in the image of God. 29 Also the appointment of food.*

**1. In the beginning.** These words remind us of the fact that everything human has a beginning. He alone who sits enthroned the sovereign Lord of time, is without beginning or end. The opening words of Scripture thus draw a striking contrast between all that is human, temporal, and finite, and that which is divine, eternal, and infinite. Reminding us of our human limitations, these words point us to Him who is ever the same, and whose years have no end (Heb. 1:10–12; Ps. 90:2, 10). Our finite minds cannot think of “the beginning” without thinking of God, for He “is the beginning” (Col. 1:18; cf. John 1:1–3). Wisdom, and all other good things, have their beginning with Him (Ps. 111:10; James 1:17). And if we are ever again to resemble our Maker, our lives and all our plans must have a new beginning in Him (Gen. 1:26, 27; cf. John 3:5; 1 John 3:1–3). It is our privilege to enjoy the confident assurance that “he which hath begun a good work” in us “will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:6). He is “the author and finisher of our faith” (Heb. 12:2). Let us never forget the sublime fact implicit in these words—“in the beginning God.”

This first verse of Holy Writ brings into sharp focus one of the age-old controversies between Bible believing Christians on the one hand and skeptics, atheists, and various shades of materialists on the other. The latter, who seek in different ways and in different degrees to explain the universe without God, contend that matter/energy is eternal. If this be true, and if matter has the power to evolve, first into the simplest forms of life and then into the more complex, until man is reached, God is indeed unnecessary.

Genesis 1:1 affirms that God is before all else and that He is the one and only cause of all else. This verse is the foundation of all right thinking in regard to the material world. Here is set forth the impressive truth that “in the formation of our world, God was not indebted to pre-existing matter” (8T 258).

Pantheism, the ancient heresy that robs God of personality by diffusing Him throughout all the universe, and thus makes Him synonymous with the totality of creation, is also exposed and refuted by Gen. 1:1. There is no basis for the doctrine of pantheism when one believes that God lived serene and supreme before there was a creation and thus stands above and apart from that which He has created.

No declaration could be more appropriate as an introduction to Holy Writ. At the outset the reader is introduced to an Omnipotent Being, possessed of personality, will, and purpose, who, existing before all else and thus dependent on nought else, exercised His divine will and “created the heaven and the earth.”

No discussion of secondary questions regarding the mystery of a divine creation, either as to time or method, should be allowed to blur the fact that the real dividing line between a true and a false belief on the subject of God and the origin of our earth is acceptance or rejection of the truth set forth in this verse.

Right here a word of caution should be said. For long centuries theologians have speculated on the word “beginning,” hoping to discover more of God’s mysterious ways than infinite wisdom has seen fit to reveal. See, for example, the discussion of the false ruin and restoration theory of creation in the Additional Note at the close of this chapter. But all speculation is idle. We know nothing of the method of creation beyond the terse Mosaic declaration, “God said,” “and it was so,” which is the mysterious and majestic overtone of the creation anthem. To set down as the basis of our reasoning that God must have done thus and so in creating the world, else nature’s laws would have been violated, is to darken counsel with words and to give aid and comfort to the skeptic, who has ever

insisted that the whole Mosaic record is incredible because it allegedly violates the laws of nature. Why should we attempt to be wise above that which is written?

Very particularly, nothing is gained by speculating as to when the matter constituting our planet was brought into existence. On the time aspect of the creation of our earth and all upon it, Genesis makes two statements: (1) "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" (v. 1). (2) "And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made" (ch. 2:2). Related scriptures add nothing to what is set forth in these two texts regarding the time involved in creation. To the question: When did God create "the heaven and the earth"? we can only answer, "In the beginning." And to the question: When did God complete His work? we can only answer, "On the seventh day God ended his work" (ch. 2:2), "for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day" (Ex. 20:11).

These remarks regarding the creation account are made, not in an attempt to close the discussion, but as a confession that we are unprepared to speak with certainty beyond what is clearly revealed. The very fact that so much rests upon the creation record—even the whole edifice of Scripture—prompts the devout and prudent Bible student to conform his declarations to the explicit words of Holy Writ. Indeed, when the broad fields of speculation tempt him to roam afar in uncharted areas of time and space, he cannot do better than to meet the temptation with the simple rejoinder, "It is written." There is always safety within the protecting bounds of Scriptural quotation marks.

**God created.** The verb "to create" is from the Heb., *bara'* which in the form here used describes an activity of God, never of men. God creates "the wind" (Amos 4:13), "a clean heart" (Ps. 51:10), and "new heavens and a new earth" (Isa. 65:17). The Hebrew words that we translate "to make," *asah*, "to form," *yašar*, and others, frequently (but not exclusively) used in connection with human activity, imply pre-existing matter. All three words are employed in describing the creation of man. The very first words of the Bible point to the fact that the creation bears the imprint of God's own activity. The opening page of Holy Writ makes the reader acquainted with a God to whom all things animate and inanimate owe their very existence (see Heb. 11:3). The "earth" here mentioned is manifestly not the dry land, which was not separated from the waters till the third day, but our whole planet.

**2. Without form, and void.** More exactly, "waste and void," *tohu wabohu*. This signifies a state of wasteness and emptiness, but without implying that the earth was once perfect and then was made waste or desolate.

When the words *tohu wabohu* appear together in other passages, such as Isa. 34:11; Jer. 4:23, they seem to be borrowed from this text, but *tohu* alone is frequently employed as synonymous with nonexistence, or nothingness (Isa. 40:17, 23; 49:4). Job 26:7 demonstrates the correct meaning of this word. The second half of this passage states that God "hath stretched out the earth upon nothing," and the first half has the parallel "he stretcheth out the north over *tuho* [the emptiness]." This text in Job shows clearly the meaning of *tuho* in Gen. 1:2, in which this and the synonymous word *bohu* indicate that the earth was shapeless and lifeless. Its elements were all mingled together, completely unorganized and inanimate.

***Darkness was upon the face of the deep.*** The “deep,” from a root “to roar,” “to rage,” is frequently applied to the raging waters, the roaring waves, or the flood, and hence the depths of the sea (Ps. 42:7; Ex. 15:5; Deut. 8:7; Job 28:14; 38:16). “Deep” is an old word, and is here used like a proper name. The Babylonians, who retained some vague memory of the true creation story for many centuries, actually personified this word, *tehom*, and applied it in their mythology to a deity, *Tiamat*, out of whose corpse they believed the earth was created. The Biblical record shows that originally there was no light on earth and that the surface matter was in a fluid state, because “the face of the deep” stands parallel to “the face of the waters” in this verse.

***The Spirit of God moved.*** “Spirit,” *ruach*. In harmony with Scriptural usage, the Spirit of God is the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Godhead. From this place onward, throughout the whole Scripture, the Spirit of God has the role of the divine agent of God in all creative acts, whether of the earth, of nature, of the church, of the new life, or of the new man. See on v. 26 for a comment on Christ’s relationship to creation.

The word here rendered “moved” is *merachepeth*, which cannot rightly be translated “brooded,” although it has this meaning in Syriac, a post-Biblical Aramaic dialect. The word occurs but twice elsewhere in the OT. It appears in Jer. 23:9, where it has the meaning “to tremble,” “to shake,” whereas in Deut. 32:11 it is used to describe the fluttering of an eagle over its young. The eagle does not brood over the living young but hovers watchfully and protectingly over them.

The work of God’s Spirit must have some connection with the activity that was presently to be initiated, an activity bringing order out of chaos. The Spirit of God was already present, ready to act as soon as the order should be given. The Holy Spirit has always been doing this very work. This divine Agent has ever been present to assist in the work of creation and redemption, to reprove and strengthen wayward souls, to comfort the sorrowing, and to present the believer’s prayers in an acceptable form to God.

**3. *And God said.*** The record of each of the six creation days opens with this announcement. “He spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast” (Ps. 33:9), declares the psalmist, and the apostle says that we understand through faith “that the worlds were framed by the word of God” (Heb. 11:3). The phrase “God said” has offended some as making God too much like a human being. But how could the inspired writer have conveyed to finite minds the act of creation carried out by the infinite God except by using terms that mortal man can understand? The fact that the utterances of God are repeatedly connected with activities performed by God (vs. 7, 16, 21, 27) indicates convincingly that a revelation of God’s creative power is being expressed in human language.

***Let there be light.*** Without light there could be no life; and as the Creator began the work of bringing order from chaos and of introducing various forms of plant and animal life upon the earth, it was essential that there be light. Light is a visible form of energy, which by its action on plants transforms inorganic elements and compounds into food for both man and beast and controls many other natural processes necessary to life.

Light has ever been a symbol of the divine presence. As physical light is essential to physical life, so divine light is necessary if rational beings are to have moral and spiritual life. “God is light” (1 John 1:5); and to those in whose hearts the work of recreating the

divine likeness is going on apace, He comes again today bidding the shadows of sin, uncertainty, and discouragement flee, saying, "Let there be light."

**4. God saw.** This expression, repeated six times (vs. 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31), conveys in human language an activity of God—the evaluation of each single act of creation as meeting completely the plan and will of its Maker. As we, by beholding and examining the products of our efforts, are prepared to declare that they meet our plans and purpose, so God declares, after every creative act, that His products agree completely with His plan.

**God divided the light from the darkness.** At the outset only darkness existed on this formless earth. A change took place with the entrance of light. Now darkness and light exist side by side, but separate from each other.

**5. Called the light Day.** Names are given to the light and the darkness. The giving of a name was always an important act in antiquity. Names had their meaning and were carefully chosen. God later commissioned Adam to give names to the animals. He sometimes changed His servants' names to make them agree with their life experience or character. He instructed the earthly parents of His Son concerning the name they should give to the Saviour. During the creation week we find God giving names even to the lifeless products of His creative power.

**The evening and the morning were the first day.** Literally "evening was, morning was, day one." Thus the cryptic description of the first momentous day of God's creation week closes. Many and diversified explanations of this statement have been given. It indicates clearly the duration of each of the seven parts of the creation week, and is repeated five more times in this chapter (vs. 8, 13, 19, 23, 31). Some have thought creative act lasted one night, from the evening to the morning; and others, that every day began with the morning, although the Inspired Record states plainly that the evening preceded the morning.

Many scholars have taken this expression to mean a long, indefinite period of time, believing that some of the divine activities of the following days, as for instance the creation of the plants and animals, could not have been accomplished within a literal day. They think they find a justification for this interpretation in the words of Peter, "one day is with the Lord as a thousand years" (2 Peter 3:8). That this text cannot be used to ascertain the length of the creation days is obvious when one reads the rest of the verse, "and a thousand years as one day." The context of Peter's words makes it clear that he wishes to stress the timelessness of God. The Creator can do in a day the work of a thousand years, and a period of a thousand years, a long time for those waiting for God's judgments to be fulfilled, may be considered by Him as only one day. Psalms 90:4 conveys the same thought.

The literal statement "evening *was* [with the following hours of the night], and morning *was* [with the succeeding hours of the day], day one" is clearly a description of an astronomical day, that is, a day of 24 hours' duration. It is the equivalent of the later Hebrew compound "evening-morning" of Dan. 8:14, which the KJV has translated "days," here meaning prophetic days, and of Paul's Greek word, *nuchthemeron*, translated "a night and a day" (2 Cor. 11:25). Thus the Hebrews, who were never in doubt about the meaning of this expression, began the day with sunset and ended it with the following sunset (Lev. 23:32; Deut. 16:6). Furthermore, the language of the fourth commandment leaves no shadow of doubt that the evening and morning of the creation

record are the component sections of an earthly day. This commandment, referring in unmistakable words to the week of creation, declares, "For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day" (Ex. 20:11).

The tenacity with which so many commentators cling to the idea that the days of creation were long periods of time, even thousands of years, largely finds its explanation in the fact that they attempt to make the inspired creation record agree with the theory of evolution. Geologists and biologists have taught men to believe that this earth's early history covers millions of years, in which the geological formations were slowly taking shape and living species were evolving. Throughout its sacred pages the Bible contradicts this evolution theory. The belief in a divine and instantaneous creation as the result of words spoken by God stands in complete opposition to the theory held by the majority of scientists and many theologians today that the world and all upon it came into being through a slow process of evolution lasting for untold ages.

Another reason why many commentators declare that the days of creation were long periods of time is that they reject the seventh-day Sabbath. A famous commentary thus expresses this thought: "The duration of the seventh day of necessity determines the length of the other six. . . . God's sabbatic rest is understood by the best interpreters of Scripture to have continued from creation's close until the present hour; so that consistency demands the previous six days to be considered as not of short, but of indefinite, duration" (*Pulpit*). This kind of reasoning moves in a circle. Because the seventh-day Sabbath, so clearly defined in Holy Scripture as a weekly recurring day of rest, is rejected as such, the seventh day of the creation week is declared to have lasted to the present time. On the basis of this un-Scriptural explanation the duration of all other creation days is also expanded. Sound Scriptural interpretation has no sympathy with this kind of reasoning, but insists on giving a literal meaning to the text, following the example of the divine Expounder of the Word, who parried every attack of the adversary by declaring, "It is written" (Matt. 4:4, 7, 10).

The Scriptures speak clearly and plainly of seven days of creation (Ex. 20:11) and not of periods of undefined duration. We are therefore bound to declare emphatically that the first day of creation, indicated by the expression in Hebrew, "evening was, morning was, day one," was a 24-hour day.

**6. *A firmament.*** Or, "an expanse." The work of the second creation day consisted in the formation of the firmament. The great mass of primeval "waters" was divided into two separate bodies. The "waters which were above the firmament" (v. 7) are generally considered by commentators to be water vapor. The climatic conditions of the originally perfect earth were different from those existing today.

Explorations carried out in the far north have proved that luxurious tropical forests once covered those land areas that are now buried under eternal ice and snow. It is generally conceded that pleasant climatic conditions prevailed during this earth's early history. Unknown were the extremes of cold and heat that can make life unpleasant in most regions of the world and virtually impossible in some.

**8. *God called the firmament Heaven.*** The product of the creative power of God on the second day of the creation week received a name, even as the light of the first day had received one. In the Hebrew as well as in the modern translation the word "heaven" is the name given both to the abode of God and to the firmament. In this verse "heaven" refers

to the atmospheric heavens that appear to the human eye as a canopy, or dome, vaulting our earth, and generally called sky.

No life is possible without air. Plants need it as well as living creatures. Without the atmosphere our earth would be lifeless like the moon, tremendously hot in that part which is exposed to the sun and extremely cold in other sections. Not one sprout of plant life would be found anywhere, and no creature could exist for any length of time. Are we grateful for this God-given atmosphere?

**9. *Let the waters.*** The third creative act, performed during the first part of the third day, was a separation of the water from the dry land. The inspired pen of the psalmist describes this event in the following picturesque and poetical terms: "The waters stood above the mountains. At thy rebuke they fled; at the sound of thy thunder they took to flight. The mountains rose, the valleys sank down to the place which thou didst appoint for them. Thou didst set a bound which they should not pass" (Ps. 104:6–9, RSV). The gathering of the waters into one place implies no more than that they were, from this day forward, to be collected into "one place," and restrained within bounds in a place by themselves, so as to admit the exposure of the earth's soil. It must have been a grand spectacle to any heavenly observer to see hills rise up out of the water that had so completely covered the face of the earth. Where there had been water only as far as the eye could see, great land areas suddenly rose up and gave to this earth an entirely new appearance.

**10. *God saw that it was good.*** God's eye rested, now, with pleasure and satisfaction on the finished product of the third day of creation. "It was good." That primeval dry land would scarcely have seemed good to us. It was a world of verdureless valleys and hills and plains, upheaved from beneath the waters. Nowhere was there even a blade of grass or a clinging lichen. Yet it seemed good to its Maker, who could see it in relation to the uses for which He had made it, and as a fit preparatory step to the new wonders He was going to introduce.

**11. *Let the earth bring forth.*** After the separation of dry land from the water, another divine order was given on that third day: vegetation was summoned into existence. Some have considered the first of the three terms employed in the divine command a general term for plants, including the second and the third. However, it is preferable to take them as distinct classes.

***Grass.*** Heb., *deshe'*, "to be green," "to grow green." "to sprout." This word designates green sprouts and tender herbs—the various kinds of plants that supply food for the animals. "Grass" is probably used here as a synonym of the word "herb," *'ešeb*, when the latter appears without the qualifying expression "yielding seed" (see v. 30; Ps. 23:2).

***The herb yielding seed.*** "Herb," *'ešeb*, is the more mature herbage, in which the seed is the most striking characteristic, providing one of the two kinds of food designated by God to be consumed by human beings. (v. 29).

***The fruit tree.*** Three characteristics of fruit-bearing trees are here noted: (1) the bearing of fruit, (2) the enclosing of seed within the fruit, and (3) the bearing of this fruit "upon" or above the earth. These trees were to provide man with another source of food (v. 29).

**12. The earth brought forth.** The vegetation of the third day sprang from the soil. This does not mean that the power to produce life-containing plants was in the soil. The idea of spontaneous generation is as alien to Scripture as it is to science.

**After his kind.** This expression occurs ten times in the first chapter of Genesis, and altogether 30 times in the books of Moses, especially in Gen. 1, 6, and 7; in Lev. 11; and in Deut. 14. Reference is to kinds of animals and plants, not to their reproductive behavior. It is, however, a fact of nature that living things do reproduce offspring that resemble their parents. Variations within certain limits are possible, but those limits fall far short of creating distinctly new kinds of plants and animals. See Gen. 6:20; 7:14; Lev. 11:14–16, 29; Deut. 14:13–15.

**13.** See on v. 5.

**14. Let there be lights.** “Lights,” *me’oroth*, is not the same as “light,” *’or*, of vs. 3 and 4; it means sources of light, light holders, luminaries. The expression that they are set in the firmament, or expanse of heaven, is chosen because it is there that the earthly inhabitant sees them.

**To divide the day from the night.** To regulate and continue from that time forward the difference between light and darkness, a difference that had existed ever since God decreed light on the first day.

**For signs.** These celestial bodies marked special acts of God’s favor or displeasure as in Joshua’s (Joshua 10:12, 13), and Hezekiah’s times (2 Kings 20:11), and on the crucifixion day (Matt. 27:45). “Falling stars” served as one of the signs of Christ’s second coming (Matt. 24:29).

Some have mistakenly thought that the celestial bodies were designed also to determine the individual destinies of men. Astrologers have appealed to v. 14 to justify their practice. However, the Bible so vigorously opposes any form of divination and fortunetelling that the thought has to be emphatically rejected that God appointed the sun, moon, and stars to serve astrologers as guides in predicting human affairs and destinies. Jeremiah warns the Hebrews not to be afraid of the signs of heaven, before which the heathen tremble in vain terror (Jer. 10:2); and Isaiah speaks with taunting irony against the astrologers, stargazers, and foretellers, on whose counsel it is folly and wickedness to rely (Isa. 47:13, 14). Although the superstition of reading the destiny of man in the stars never took root among the ancient Israelites, they did not have enough moral strength to resist in general the example of star worship of their pagan neighbors (Jer. 19:13; Eze. 8:16; Zeph. 1:5).

**For seasons.** Yearly returning festival periods and other definite times were to be regulated by the movement of the celestial bodies (Ps. 104:19; Zech. 8:19). These bodies have, moreover, a definite periodic influence upon agriculture, navigation, and other human occupations, as well as upon the course of animal and vegetable life, as for instance the breeding time of animals and the migration of birds (Jer. 8:7).

**For days, and years.** The days and years are fixed by the movement of the earth in relation to the sun, which in conjunction with that of the moon has provided men of all ages with the basis for calendars—lunar, solar, or a combination of both.

**15. For lights.** Not to introduce light for the first time to this world, for God decreed light on the first day, but to serve as a permanent arrangement for the distribution of light for this world.

**16. He made the stars also.** The words, “he made,” have been supplied. As to the origin of the stars two principal views have been set forth: (1) The stars were brought into existence during creation week, along with the sun and moon. (2) The “stars,” though created earlier, are here mentioned, in passing, by Moses, inasmuch as he is discussing the luminaries of the heavens. The first view necessitates the conclusion that prior to creation week the vast universe was an empty void. This conclusion seems unwarranted.

However, on this as on many other cryptic declarations of Scripture regarding God’s mysterious acts, we should be slow to dogmatize. We should not forget that the primary truth Moses sought to present in regard to the origin of the sun, moon, and stars is that all are the result of God’s creative power. Here is a further refutation of the ancient but ever-recurring heresy of the eternity of matter.

**18. It was good.** Unlike our present earth, which has changed much as the result of the introduction of sin, the celestial bodies have not suffered from the results of man’s transgression, and reflect their Creator’s power. It is a universally known fact that the laws of the universe are faithfully obeyed by all celestial bodies. Astronomers and navigators are sure that no deviations from established rules occur in the astronomical world. They know that these heavenly bodies will not disappoint them, that they can be trusted because of their continual obedience to the laws laid down for them.

**20. Let the waters.** We have here the populating of the water and the air by the creation of marine and winged creatures. The original may be translated, “Let the waters bring forth abundantly living creature that moveth,” rendering more clearly in English the Hebrew phrase that means literally, “Let the waters swarm with swarms.” The verb here translated “to swarm” is also used with the meaning “to multiply abundantly.” The term applies not only to fishes but to all water animals, from the greatest to the least, and also to reptiles.

**Creature that hath life.** The original of this phrase, *nephesh chayyah*, makes a clear distinction between the animals and the vegetation created two days earlier. It is true that plants have life as do animals and possess certain functions that resemble those of animals, but the fact remains that a marked difference exists between the plant and animal worlds. The animals are in possession of organs that allow them to make decisions, to move about in search of food, and to feel pain, joy, or sorrow, to a greater or less degree.

Hence they can be called creatures, a word that cannot be applied to plants. This must be the meaning of the much-discussed Hebrew word *nephesh*, translated rightly “creature” in this verse, a term which attributes to the animal a higher form of life than to the plant, which is not a *nephesh*. The early translators correctly understood that the term cannot mean “soul” in this passage, and rendered it in a way that correctly conveys the thought of the inspired author.

**Fowl that may fly.** The waters were to produce the water animals but not the birds, as the KJV appears to indicate. Chapter 2:19 states that “every fowl of the air” was formed by God “out of the ground.” The correct rendering of the Hebrew text of ch. 1:20, “and let fowl fly above the earth,” disposes of this seeming difficulty. The word “fowl,” literally “winged beings,” should rather read “birds.” Both domestic and wild birds are included.

**21. God created great whales.** For the second time the word “created,” *bara’*, is used in this chapter to indicate the introduction of something entirely new, the creation of living creatures. In carrying out His word, God created the great sea animals, *tanninim*. The translation “whales” is too limited in scope. The word has different meanings, like “serpent” (Ex. 7:9, 10, 12) and “dragon” (Isa. 51:9; Eze. 29:3), but must mean “sea monster” in this passage and in Ps. 148:7.

**Moveth.** The verb “to move,” *ramaś*, is especially descriptive of creeping animals (Gen. 9:2), either on land (Gen. 7:14) or in the water (Ps. 69:34), though here it clearly signifies aquatic creatures.

**After their kind.** As in the case of the plants created on the third day, the statement is made that the fish as well as the birds were created “after their kind,” explicitly indicating that the distinct kinds of animals we see were established at creation and not through a process of development as evolutionists maintain (see on v. 12).

Why birds and fish were created on the same day is not to be explained by any supposed similarity between the air and the water as Luther, Calvin, and others thought. Again, it is not stated that only a single pair was created of each kind; on the contrary, the words, “Let the waters swarm with living creatures,” seem to indicate that the animals were created, not only in a rich variety of kinds, but in large numbers of individuals. The fact that but one human being was created at first, by no means warrants the conclusion that the animals were created singly also.

**God saw that it was good.** The earth must have appeared most pleasing to the Creator when He beheld it at the end of this fifth day. Not only verdant hills, sparkling streams, and blue lakes, but living creatures, moving, swimming, and flying, gave to this world for the first time the quality of life it had not possessed before. Here were creatures that could even sing the praises of their Creator, who revealed some measure of understanding, by finding the right kind of food (Matt. 6:26), by building nests as shelters (Matt. 8:20), and by knowing their times of migration (Jer. 8:7).

The mighty works of God performed on the previous days were truly wonderful, but nature received an ornament on the fifth day. Without the vegetation created on the third day the world would present an extremely uninviting appearance. Much more would it be devoid of attraction and cheerfulness if the myriads of living beings with which it is populated were absent. Every one of these small or large creatures should teach us a lesson concerning the marvelous handiwork of the great God, to whom, as the author and preserver of all life, we owe adoration. These creatures should give us a wholesome respect for life, which we cannot impart but should carefully protect and not destroy.

**22. God blessed them.** The fifth day’s work not only was pronounced to be good by the Creator but received a blessing, which was given neither to the inanimate products of God’s creation nor to the plants. This benediction, which focuses on their propagation and increase, “be fruitful, and multiply,” became a standard formula of blessing (chs. 35:11; 48:4).

**24. The living creature.** Like the third day, the sixth is distinguished by a double creative act, the production of the land animals and the creation of man. After the sea and air were filled with living creatures, *nephesh chayyah* (see v. 20), the word of God went forth to the earth, to produce living beings after their kind. These are divided into three classes:

**Cattle.** From *behemah*, derived from the root *baham*, “to be dumb,” meaning “dumb animal.” The word generally denotes the larger domesticated quadrupeds (see Gen. 47:18; Ex. 13:12; etc.), but occasionally the larger land animals as a whole (Prov. 30:30; Eccl. 3:19; etc.).

**Creeping thing.** From *remeś*, which denotes the smaller animals that move either without feet, or with feet that are scarcely perceptible, such as worms, insects, and reptiles. Here the land *remeś* are meant, the *remeś* of the sea having been created on the previous day.

**Beast of the earth.** From *chayetho ’ereš*. This old and unusual Hebrew term denotes the freely roving wild animals.

**25. The beast of the earth.** The order of creation of living creatures here given differs from that of v. 24, the last group of the previous verse being the first one here enumerated. This is a well-known arrangement in Hebrew speech called “inverted parallelism” (see Gen. 10:1, 2, 6, 21; Prov. 14:16, 17).

**After his kind.** The statement refers to all three classes of living creatures, each of which has its distinct kinds. These inspired words refute the evolution theory, which declares that higher forms of life developed from lower ones and which suggests that it may yet be possible to produce living matter out of inanimate earth. Although scientific study confirms the Biblical declaration that all animate organisms are made out of the earth, containing nothing else in elements than what the earth possesses, scientists have never been able to produce from lifeless matter one single cell that was able to live and reproduce its kind.

**God saw that it was good.** With the usual word of approbation the short record of the creation of all land animals closes, and the author hastens to the account of the creation of man, in which the work of creation culminates.

**26. Let us make man.** The Sacred Record proclaims at the very outset the preeminence of man above all the other creatures of the earth. The plural “us” was regarded by the early church theologians almost unanimously as indicative of the three persons of the Godhead. The word “us” requires the presence of at least two persons counseling together. The statements that man *was to be made* in “our” image and *was made* in “God’s” image leads to the conclusion that those counseling must both be persons of the same Godhead. This truth, implied in the OT, in various passages such as the one discussed here, and Gen. 3:22; 11:7; Dan. 7:9, 10, 13, 14; etc., is fully and clearly revealed in the NT, where we are told in unmistakable terms that Christ, the second person of the Godhead, called God by the Father Himself (Heb. 1:8), was associated with His Father in the work of creation. Texts like John 1:1–3, 14; 1 Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:16, 17; Heb. 1:2 teach us not only that God the Father created all things through His Son but also that all life is preserved by Christ.

Even though it is true that this full light of truth did not shine upon these OT texts previous to the revelations contained in the NT, and that distinct understanding of the different persons of the Godhead was not so readily discernible from the OT passages alone, the initial evidence of the existence of Christ at the time of the creation as colaborer with His Father is present on the first page of the Bible. These texts offer no difficulties for those who believe in the inspiration of the OT as well as the NT, in view of the fact that one part explains the other and that both fit harmoniously together, like

the stones of a beautiful mosaic. Not only do vs. 26 and 27 contain hints of the activity of Christ as the second person of the Godhead in this creation work, but v. 2 mentions the Holy Spirit as collaborating in the same work. We are therefore justified in declaring that the first evidence for the sublime mystery of the Godhead is found on the first page of the Bible, a mystery that is placed in clearer light as the pen of inspiration of the different authors of the Bible books was moved to reveal this truth more fully.

The word “man” is *'adam* in Hebrew, the very word God employed in naming the father of the human race (ch. 5:2). The meaning of this word has been variously explained. It is descriptive of either his color, from *'adam*, “to be red”; or his appearance, from an Arabic root which signifies “to shine,” thus making Adam “the brilliant one”; or his nature as God’s image, from *dam*, “likeness”; or, and most probably, his origin, “the ground,” from *'adamah*, “the one of the soil.”

***In our image.*** “Man was to bear God’s image, both in outward resemblance and in character” (PP 45). That image was most evident in terms of his spiritual nature. He became a “living soul,” or rather living being, endowed with a free will, a self-conscious personality.

This nature reflected the divine holiness of its Maker until sin shattered the divine likeness. It is only through Christ, the brightness of the glory of God and the “express image of his person” (Heb. 1:3), that our nature is transformed into the image of God again (Col. 3:10; Eph. 4:24).

***And let them have dominion.*** The relationship of man to the rest of the creation was to be one of rulership. The use of the plural “them” shows that God planned from the very beginning to create more than one individual. By transferring to Adam ruling power over “all the earth,” God planned to make man His representative, or viceroy, over this planet. That the beast of the field is not mentioned has been taken by some commentators as an indication that the animals that are now wild were not subjected to Adam. This opinion is untenable. The plants are also missing in the enumeration of created works subjected to Adam, although no one will deny that man has had the right to rule over the vegetation to the present day and that the plants must have been included in the phrase “all the earth.” This phrase, in fact, covers everything on this earth not mentioned by name, including “the beasts of the field” (Ps. 8:6–8). However, God limited man’s supremacy to this earth, not transferring to Adam rulership over the celestial bodies.

***27. So God created man.*** The account of the accomplishment of the divine purpose is expressed in a form of Hebrew poetry, common in all poetic books of the Hebrew Bible, in which the thought expressed in the first part of a stanza is repeated with slight variations in words but not in meaning in the second or even in the third part of the stanza, as in our verse:

“So God created man in his own image,  
in the image of God created he him;  
male and female created he them.”

Moses, who has given us other samples of his poetic ability (see Ex. 15; Deut. 32, 33; Ps. 90), was the first of all the inspired writers who told of God’s wondrous works in words of poetry. When he had reached the point in his record that told of the creation of man, the crown of God’s work on this earth, he left the ordinary narrative style and employed poetry.

***In his own image.*** Noteworthy is the use of the singular, “his.” The plural of v. 26 reveals that the Deity possesses plurality in unity, whereas v. 27 emphasizes that the plurality of God does not negate God’s unity.

***Male and female.*** A new element is introduced in the information given about the creation of man by mentioning differences in sex. The two words “male” and “female” are translations of Hebrew adjectives that indicate the sex of the two individuals. The blessing of fertility pronounced over the animals (v. 22) implies that they must have been created likewise with sexual differences, but this fact is not mentioned. Probably a special reason existed for mentioning it in connection with the creation of man. That reason may spring from the fact that only in man does the duality of sex find its expression in the institution of holy wedlock. This verse prepares us for the revelation concerning God’s plan for the creation of the family that is presented in ch. 2.

***28. And God blessed them.*** The blessings of God conferred upon the living creatures the day before were repeated at the end of the sixth day with special additions appropriate to man. God blessed “them” not “him,” indicating that the creation of Eve must have occurred before the sixth day had passed by and that the blessings and responsibilities conferred on them were to be jointly shared by both in equal manner.

***God said unto them.*** A difference exists between the introductions to the blessings of vs. 22 and 28 that is worth noticing. The blessing for the animals was pronounced regarding them, “God blessed them, saying,” whereas the blessing for the human race was expressed “unto them.” As intelligent beings they were able to listen to God and to receive communications. This verse contains the first revelation of God to man.

***Be fruitful.*** The Creator’s benediction had respect, in the first instance, to the propagation and perpetuation of the species, a blessing that has never been rescinded by God and that is the source of hundreds of millions of human beings who now fill all continents of this world. The divine commission has been understood by various commentators to indicate that the reproduction of human beings should not continue endlessly, but was to cease when the earth was filled with human beings and their animal subjects.

The word translated “replenish” does not support the false doctrine that at some remote time in the past this world was depopulated, and that Gen. 1 is the record of its restoration. “Replenish the earth” may be accurately translated, “Fill the earth” (RSV). See note at end of chapter.

***Subdue it.*** This revelation also contains instruction concerning man’s duty and destiny, to rule over the earthly creation works, a commission expressed almost in the same words as those of the divine council recorded in v. 26. The only difference is the additional phrase, “subdue it,” granting man the right to utilize for his necessities the vast resources of the earth, by agricultural and mining operations, by geographical research, scientific discovery, and mechanical invention.

***29. Every herb.*** Provision for the sustenance of the newly appointed monarch and his subjects is next made. We learn from the divine record that man was to eat of the products of both field and tree, in other words of grain, nuts, and fruit; the animals, to eat of “every green herb,” vegetables, or green plants, and grass.

The wording of this regulation reveals that it was not the will of God that man should slaughter animals for food, or that animals should prey upon one another; consequently, the violent and often painful destruction of life by man and animals is a result of the entry

of sin into the world. It was not till after the Flood that God gave man permission to eat of the flesh of animals (see ch. 9:3). Even ancient pagan legends speak of a golden age of innocence, when man abstained from killing animals (Ovid *Met.* I. 103-106). That no animal of any kind ate flesh at the first may be inferred from the prophetic announcements in Isa. 11:6–9; 65:25, of the new earth state, where the cessation of sin and the complete transformation of the world into the kingdom of God are accompanied by the cessation of slaughter of any of God’s creatures.

The clear teaching of Scripture that death entered the world through sin shows clearly that God originally intended that neither man nor animals should take life in order to provide themselves with food.

All arguments based on the premise that it is necessary to kill animals to check their excessive increase are of doubtful value. It is futile to speculate on what would have happened to this world if animals and human beings had multiplied unchecked in perpetuity. God certainly had made His plans to meet changing conditions as they would arise. These plans have not been revealed to us, because sin entered the world before the need arose to check an excessive reproduction (see v. 28).

**31. Behold, it was very good.** The creation of man and his installation as ruler on the earth brought the creation of all earthly things to a close. According to the record God had frequently reviewed His work and pronounced it good (vs. 4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25). The survey undertaken at the end of the sixth day embraced all works completed during the previous days, “and, behold, it was very good.” Everything was perfect in its kind; every creature met the goal appointed by the Creator, and was equipped to accomplish the purpose for which it was created. The application of the term “good” to everything God had made, and the repetition of the word with the emphasis “very” at the close of creation, with man as its crown and glory, indicate that nothing imperfect had come forth from God’s hand. This expression of admiration entirely excludes the possibility that any imperfection in the creation was responsible for the weakness demonstrated by Adam and Eve during the hour of temptation.

### ADDITIONAL NOTE ON CHAPTER 1

The opening verse of Gen. 1 has been the subject of much discussion in theological circles throughout the Christian Era. Some have held that the verse refers to a creation of this physical world and all life upon it at a moment of time long before the seven days of creation week.

This view is known as the ruin and restoration theory. It has been held for centuries by speculative theologians who have read into the Hebrew expression *tohu wabohu*, “without form, and void” (v. 2), the idea that a time interval—one of great duration, in fact—separates v. 1 from v. 2. *Tohu wabohu* has been made to read, “the earth was *caused* to be without form and void.” Upon this reading of the text they rest the view that the world was created perfect at some moment in the remote past (v. 1), but that an appalling cataclysm obliterated every trace of life upon it and reduced its surface to a state that might be described as “without form, and void.” Many who hold to this view believe that there were repeated creations, each followed by a worldwide cataclysm. Finally, after untold aeons, God proceeded once more to bring order out of the chaos and to fill the earth with life, as recorded in vs. 2–31.

More than a century ago various Protestant divines took strong hold of this view, thinking they found in it a means of harmonizing the Mosaic account of creation with the idea then being advanced by certain scientific men, that the earth had passed through long ages of geological change. This view is popular among certain Fundamentalists. According to the view, the stratified layers of rock that compose much of the earth's surface were deposited during the course of the supposed cataclysms, and the fossils buried in them are presumed to be the remains of life that existed on this earth prior to that time.

Others find in the theory an argument to support the idea that when God did His creative work recorded in vs. 2-31, He was indebted to pre-existing matter. Thus they would limit His power by minimizing, if not denying, the fact that He brought matter into existence, and "that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear" (Heb. 11:3). Various aspects of the theory have been reflected in a number of modern Bible translations.

The "restitution" view must be rejected in its entirety because: (1) The Hebrew words *tohu wabohu* do not carry the idea of being *laid* waste, but describe rather an unorganized and lifeless *state* of matter. The interpretation given to these words is therefore wholly unwarranted. (2) The Scriptures plainly teach that God's work of creation was "finished from the foundation of the world" (Heb. 4:3). (3) The view implies the blasphemous doctrine that God's previous attempts at creation, very particularly of man, were imperfect and unsuccessful, because of the operation of forces over which He had only limited control. (4) Followed through to its logical conclusion, the view really denies the inspiration and authority of the Scriptures as a whole, by limiting the Creator to the use of pre-existing matter in the work of creation week and subjecting Him to the laws of nature. (5) The idea of successive creations and catastrophes prior to the events of creation week has in its support not one shred of valid evidence, either from science or from the Inspired Word. It is unadulterated speculation. (6) Incidentally, it might be added that the origin and development of this view are tainted with the pagan philosophical speculations of various heretical sects and tinctured with the rationalistic concepts of naturalism and evolution.

### ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

1-31PP 44-51, 111-116; SR 20-23

1 Ed 134; ML 107; 8T 258

2 CT 530; Ed 134; GC 658

2, 3 COL 415; PK 717

3 GC 211; ML 138

5 Ed 129

11, 12 COL 80; Ed 109; PP 44; TM 243

26 AH 25; CH 19; CS 17; EW 145; MM 221; SR 20; Te 41

26, 27 CH 108; PP 44; Te 11

27 CD 45; CT 11, 32, 61, 67, 434, 438; Ed 15, 17, 20, 130; GC 467; MH 163, 415; ML 126; PK 186; PP 45, 595; Te 91, 276; 2T 347; 3T 50, 139, 568; 4T 91, 247, 327, 416, 438, 456, 522; 5T 311; 6T 127; 8T 263, 327

28 AH 26; PK 682; PP 50

29 CD 81, 92, 310, 322, 373, 380, 395, 396, 401; CH 115, 450; MH 296; ML 132; MM 8, 267, 277; Te 160; 3T 50, 63

## CHAPTER 2

1 *The first sabbath.* 4 *The manner of the creation.* 8 *The planting of the garden of Eden,* 10 *and the river thereof.* 17 *The tree of knowledge only forbidden.* 19, 20 *The naming of the creatures.* 21 *The making of woman, and institution of marriage.*

**1. *Were finished.*** The first three verses of the second chapter, and half of v. 4, are actually an unbroken continuation of the creation narrative of the first chapter. Verse 1, in solemn retrospect, links the work of the preceding six days with the Sabbath rest that followed. When God “ended his work” He left no unfinished business (see Heb. 4:3). The word “host,” *šaba’*, here denotes all created things.

**2. *On the seventh day.*** Various attempts have been made to solve the seeming difficulty between v. 1 and v. 2, the one stating that God’s work was finished on the sixth day, and the other on the seventh day. The LXX, Samaritan, and Syriac versions have chosen the easiest way to solve the problem, by substituting for the word “seventh” of the Hebrew text, where it is first used, the word “sixth.” Some commentators agree with this change, thinking that the word “seventh” of the Hebrew text is a copyist’s error. In doing so, however, they transgress one of their own basic rules of textual criticism, that the more difficult of two possible readings is usually the original one. “Ended,” *yekal*. Some scholars, beginning with Calvin, have translated *yekal* as “had finished,” which is grammatically possible. Another interpretation considers the creation work finished only after the institution of the Sabbath day. The completion consisted negatively in the cessation of the work of creation, and positively in the blessing and sanctifying of the seventh day. The cessation itself formed part of the completion of the work.

***He rested.*** The verb “rested,” *shabath*, means literally “to cease” from labor or activity (see Gen. 8:22; Job 32:1; etc.). As a human artificer completes his work when he has brought it up to his ideal, and thus ceases to work upon it, so in an infinitely higher sense God completed the creation of the world by ceasing to produce anything new, and then “rested.” God did not rest because He needed it (see Isa. 40:28). Therefore God’s rest was the result of neither exhaustion nor fatigue, but a cessation from previous occupation.

Because the expected phrase “evening was, morning was, the seventh day,” does not appear in the Sacred Book, some Bible expositors have claimed that the period of resting did not continue for only 24 hours, like each of the preceding six days, but began at the close of the sixth creation day and is still going on. But this verse refutes such a view. This is not the only text of Scripture that impresses the unbiased reader with the fact that the resting of God took place only during the seventh day, for the Decalogue itself states plainly that God, having worked six days, rested on the seventh day of creation week (Ex. 20:11).

The six creation days, according to the words of the text, were earthly days of ordinary duration. In the absence of any clear light to the contrary, we must understand the seventh in the same way; and that all the more, because in every passage in which it is mentioned as the foundation of the earthly Sabbath, it is regarded as an ordinary day (Ex. 20:11; 31:17).

**3. *God blessed the seventh day.*** An explanation of the meaning and importance of this day of rest is added. Here the Sacred Record closely relates the weekly Sabbath to

God's work of creation and His resting on the seventh day, just as the fourth commandment does. The blessing on the seventh day implied that it was thereby declared to be a special object of divine favor and a day that would bring blessing to His creatures.

**And sanctified it.** The act of sanctification consisted in a declaration that the day was holy, or set apart for holy purposes. As afterward Mt. Sinai was sanctified (Ex. 19:23), or, for the time being, invested with sacredness as the residence of God, and Aaron and his sons were sanctified, or consecrated, to the priestly office (Ex. 29:44), and the year of jubilee was sanctified, or devoted, to the purpose of religion (Lev. 25:10), so here the seventh day was sanctified, and as such proclaimed to be a holy day. This act of blessing the seventh day and declaring it holy was done in the interest of the human race, for whose benefit the Sabbath day was instituted. The weekly seventh-day Sabbath has frequently been considered an institution of the Jewish dispensation, but the Inspired Record declares that it was instituted more than two millenniums before the first Israelite (a descendant of Jacob-Israel) was born. We have, furthermore, the word of Jesus declaring, "The sabbath was made for man" (Mark 2:27), which indicates clearly that this institution was not ordained for the Jews only but for all mankind as well.

**Because that in it he had rested.** God could have had no higher reason for enjoining upon man rest on the seventh day than that by so resting man might enjoy the opportunity of reflecting upon the love and goodness of his Creator, and so become like Him. As God worked through six days and rested on the seventh, so man should toil through six days and rest on the seventh. This weekly Sabbath is a divine institution given to man by God, the Creator, and its observance is required by God, the Lawgiver. For man, therefore, to withhold any part or all of this holy time is to be guilty of disobedience against God and robbery of God as the original proprietor of man's powers and of his time. As an institution of God's appointing, the Sabbath deserves our honor and esteem. Neglect to render this, God counts a sin.

The Sabbath calls for abstention from common bodily labor and for the devotion of mind and heart to holy things. The Israelites were admonished to use it for holy convocations (Lev. 23:3). The Gospels attest that it was so used by Christ and the apostles (Luke 4:16; Acts 17:2; 18:4; etc.), and that it should continue to be observed by Christians after the completion of Christ's earthly ministry (Matt. 24:20).

The fact that the Sabbath will still be celebrated in the new earth as a day of worship (Isa. 66:23) is a clear indication that God never intended to have its observance transferred to another day. The weekly Sabbath day is the memorial of creation, reminding man each week of God's creative power and of how much he owes to a merciful Creator and Provider. A rejection of the Sabbath is a rejection of the Creator, and opens wide the door for all manner of false theories. "It is a constant witness to His existence and a reminder of His greatness, His wisdom, and His love. Had the Sabbath always been sacredly observed, there could never have been an atheist or an idolater" (PP 336).

**4. These are the generations.** The word "generations," *toledoth*, is usually used in reference to a man's family history, that is, to the birth of his sons (see chs. 5:1; 6:9; 11:10; etc.). Here occurs the only instance where this word is used of other than human relationships, that is, of "the heavens and of the earth," a phrase that is reminiscent of chs. 1:1 and 2:1. One commentator suggests that "generations" refers properly to "the history or account of their production." *The Jewish Encyclopedia* says with reference to this

word: “The process of creation of heavens and earth is viewed in ch. 2:4 as a genealogical history” (art. “Generation”). “Each day was called a generation, because that in it God generated, or produced, some new portion of His work” (PP 112).

**When they were created.** Thus closes the creation narrative that began with Gen. 1:1, These words have been interpreted in various ways. They are a translation from *behibare’am*, which should not be translated “after they were created,” as has sometimes been done. Meaning literally, “in their creation,” the whole clause, “these are the generations,” etc., is best rendered, “This is the history of the origin of the heavens and the earth as they were created.”

**In the day.** These words introduce the account of Gen. 2. Many commentators are inclined to consider chs. 2:4 to 3:24 as a second and different creation record originating from another pen at a later time than that of chs. 1:1 to 2:4. Regarding this untenable theory see the Introduction to Genesis. A study of the contents makes it clear that ch. 2 can in no sense be considered another version of the creation narrative of the preceding chapter. Its purpose is to place Adam and Eve at home in the Garden of Eden, and this it does by providing additional information, most of which does not properly belong with the creation story as such. It is descriptive of the Eden home *after* it had been created. Without this information, not only would our account of this earth in its Edenic state be sadly incomplete, but the events of Gen. 3—the Fall of man—would hardly be intelligible. This chapter (Gen. 2) includes further details on the creation of man, a description of his Eden home, the test of his allegiance to God, or moral right to his home, the test of his intelligence, or mental qualifications for ruling over the created works of God, and circumstances surrounding the establishment of the first home.

**5. Every plant.** Verses 4–6 anticipate the creation of man in v. 7 by describing briefly the appearance of the surface of the earth, particularly with respect to vegetation, just prior to the time when he was brought into being upon the sixth day of creation week. Here was Paradise, perfect except for the presence of someone “to till the ground.” All nature, vibrant as it were with expectancy, awaits the appearance of its king, just as the members of a symphony orchestra, instruments all in tune, await the coming of their conductor.

**6. A mist.** The Hebrew word translated “mist,” *’ed*, is of somewhat doubtful meaning, because outside of this text it occurs only in Job 36:27. Scholars have compared it with the Assyrian *edû*, “flood,” and applied this meaning to the two Biblical passages where it occurs. But the word “flood” does not fit the context of either of these texts, whereas the word “mist” or “vapor” makes good sense in both instances. Ancient translations usually rendered the word “spring,” which rendering reveals that they did not understand it. The improbability that one spring could have watered the earth plainly shows that “spring” cannot be the right translation of *’ed*. “Mist” seems to be the best translation, and in this instance we may think of “mist” as synonymous with “dew” (PP 96).

The fact that the people of Noah’s time scoffed at the idea that rain from heaven could bring destruction to this earth in the Deluge, and that Noah is praised for believing “things not seen as yet” (Heb. 11:7), indicates that rain was unknown to the antediluvians (see PP 96, 97). Only Noah’s eye of faith could picture water falling from heaven and drowning all living beings who would not seek refuge in the ark he built. The fact that the rainbow was instituted after the Flood (Gen. 9:13–16), and seems not to have existed

earlier, lends additional weight to the observation that rain had been unknown prior to that event.

**7. God formed man.** Additional important details about Adam's creation are given. We are allowed to peer, as it were, into the workshop of God and to watch His hand performing the mysterious act of creation. The word "to form," *yašar*, implies an act of molding and fashioning into a form corresponding in design and appearance to the divine plan. The word is used in describing the activity of the potter (Isa. 29:16; 49:5; etc.), of the goldsmith fashioning idols (Isa. 44:9; Hab. 2:18), and of God, who fashions various things, among others, the light (Isa. 45:7), the human eye (Ps. 94:9), the heart (Ps. 33:15), and the seasons (Ps. 74:17).

**Of the dust of the ground.** That man is composed of materials derived from the ground, the elements of the earth, is confirmed by science. Decomposition of the human body after death bears witness to the same fact. The major elements making up the human body are oxygen, carbon, hydrogen, and nitrogen. Many others exist in smaller proportions. How true that man was made of "the dust of the ground," and also that he shall "return to the earth" whence he was taken (Eccl. 12:7).

**The breath of life.** "Breath," *neshamah*. From the Source of all life the life-giving principle entered the lifeless body of Adam. The agency by which the spark of life was transferred to his body is said to be the "breath" of God. The same thought appears in Job 33:4, "The breath [*neshamah*] of the almighty hath given me life." Imparted to man, the "breath" is equivalent to his life; it is life itself (Isa. 2:22). At death there is "no breath [*neshamah*, life] left in him" (1 Kings 17:17). This "breath of life" in man differs in no way from the "breath of life" in animals, for all receive their life from God (Gen. 7:21, 22; Eccl. 3:19). It cannot therefore be the mind or intelligence.

**A living soul.** When the lifeless form of man was infused with this divine "breath," *neshamah*, of life, man became a living "soul," *nephesh*. The word *nephesh* has a variety of meanings: (1) breath (Job 41:21), (2) life (1 Kings 17:21; 2 Sam. 18:13; etc.), (3) heart as the seat of affections (Gen. 34:3; S. of Sol. 1:7; etc.), (4) living being (Gen. 12:5; 36:6; Lev. 4:2; etc.), and (5) for emphasizing the personal pronouns (Ps. 3:2; 1 Sam. 18:1; etc.). Note that the *nephesh* is made by God (Jer. 38:16), and can die (Judges 16:30), be killed (Num. 31:19), be eaten (metaphorically, Eze. 22:25), be redeemed (Ps. 34:22), and be refreshed (Ps. 19:7, Heb.). None of this applies to the spirit, *ruach*, indicating clearly the great difference between the two terms. It is obvious from the above survey that the translation "soul" given by the KJV to the *nephesh* of ch. 2:7 is not appropriate, if the commonly used expression "immortal soul" be implied. Although popular, this concept is completely foreign to the Bible. This passage may rightly be translated: "Man became a living being" (RSV). When "soul" is considered synonymous with "being," we gain the Scriptural meaning of *nephesh* in this text.

**8. God planted a garden.** The location of Eden is unknown. The Flood so altered the original physical features of the earth as to make present identification of former localities impossible. We commonly refer to this garden as "Paradise," a word of Persian origin meaning "park." The Hebrew word for paradise, *pardes*, occurs a few times in the

OT (Neh. 2:8; Eccl. 2:5; S. of Sol. 4:13), but in reference to trees rather than as a name for the Garden in Eden. The word “paradise,” Greek *paradeisos*, was originally applied to the home of our first parents by the translators of the LXX.

**9. Every tree.** In the preparation of man’s wonderful abode attention was given to ornamentation as well as to utility. Every species of vegetation that could minister to his needs and his pleasure was provided. Flowers, trees, and shrubs regaled his senses with their fragrance, delighted his eye with their exquisite form and enchanting color, and pleased his palate with their luscious fruit. For all time, Eden became man’s highest concept of earthly excellence.

**The tree of life also.** The sequence in which these words appear, as if they were an afterthought, seems strange to us in a modern language. This has led some critical scholars to claim that the last half of v. 9 is either a later addition or a corruption of the original. But this arrangement, which seems unusual when translated into English, is common in Hebrew. It provides no excuse whatever for doubting the purity of the text as we have it. For example, ch. 12:17 reads literally, “The Lord plagued Pharaoh with great plagues, and his house.” Other examples of the same sentence structure, though not so recognizable in the English version, may be found in Gen. 28:14; Num. 13:23; Deut. 7:14.

In eating of the tree of life Adam and Eve were to have the opportunity of expressing their faith in God as the sustainer of life, just as by keeping the Sabbath they demonstrated faith in and allegiance to their Creator. To this end God had endowed the tree with supernatural virtue. Its fruit being an antidote for death and its leaves for the sustaining of life and immortality, men would continue to live just so long as they should eat of it (8T 288; PP 60).

One of the trees was called the tree of “life,” literally, “the life,” *hachayyim*. The fact that this word is plural in form is explained by recognizing it as a plural of abstraction, the definite article indicating that this tree had something to do with “the” life as such, that is, that life would be obtained or preserved through the use of its fruit. However, the other trees of the garden being “good for food” were also destined to sustain life. If one tree is distinguished from the others by the extraordinary name “tree of life,” its fruit must have had the purpose of sustaining life in a way differing from and exceeding in value that of the other trees. The statement that the eating of the fruit of this tree would enable man to “live for ever” (ch. 3:22) shows that the value of this tree was entirely different from that of the many other useful trees of the garden.

The name of the second tree can more accurately be translated “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” “The” before the word “knowledge” signifies that the tree could not provide any and every kind of knowledge, but only a certain sad knowledge of “evil” in contrast with “good.”

The names of these trees are important. In both cases the word “tree” is connected with abstract terms, life and knowledge. This provides no reason for declaring that these two trees did not exist, but attributes to them, rather, spiritual implications. Although the “ark of the covenant” was a real piece of temple furniture, it too received a name that had religious import. The blood of atonement spilled by the Saviour on our behalf was also a very real substance. The two trees must likewise be considered as actual trees that had significant purposes to fulfill, these physical and moral purposes being indicated by their names.

**10. A river.** Much scholarly effort has been put forth in an endeavor to clarify vs. 10–14, but a satisfactory explanation will probably never be found, because the surface of the earth after the Flood bore little resemblance to what it had been before. A catastrophe of such magnitude as to elevate lofty mountain ranges and to form the vast areas of ocean could hardly have left such lesser surface features as rivers untouched. We therefore cannot hope to identify antediluvian geographical terms with present-day surface features of the earth, except as Inspiration may do so for us (see PP 105-108).

**11. Pison.** The name of the first river, Pison, is unknown from any non-Biblical sources, and even in the Bible itself this river is nowhere else mentioned. The opinions of scholars identifying this river with the Indus or Ganges in India, the Nile in Egypt, or rivers in Anatolia are of no value.

**Havilah, where there is gold.** In other texts where the same proper name appears, it refers to postdiluvian times. These texts are thus of no help in locating the “Havilah” of ch. 2:11.

**12. There is bdellium.** According to Pliny, bdellium was the transparent and odoriferous resin of a tree native to Arabia, India, Persia, and Babylonia. Whether this was the same as the bdellium of antediluvian days, we do not know.

**The onyx stone.** This must be one of the precious or semiprecious stones, probably of a red color. The ancient versions vary in their translations between the onyx, sardonyx, sardius, and beryl; hence, it is not certain that the translation “onyx” is correct.

**13. Gihon.** See on v. 10 in comment on this and v. 14.

**15. To dress and to keep it.** God, having prepared an abode for man, whom He had created, placed him in this garden home with the definite commission “to dress and to keep it.” This command teaches us that the perfection in which all creation came forth from God’s hands did not exclude the need of cultivation, that is, of human labor. Man had to use his physical and mental faculties to preserve the garden in the same perfect state in which he had received it. The fact that physical labor will be a delightful feature of life in the new earth (Isa. 65:21–23) indicates that work was not intended to be a curse.

The commission given to Adam “to keep” the garden may perhaps be a veiled hint that dangers threatened to wrest it from him should he not be watchful. The verb “to keep,” *shamar*, means “to guard,” “to watch,” “to preserve,” “to observe,” and “to hold fast.” It is certainly unreasonable to think that Adam was asked to guard the garden against attacks of wild beasts, as some commentators have interpreted this text. No enmity existed on earth before the Fall, either among the animals themselves or between man and beast. Fear and enmity are the results of sin. But another and very real danger threatened to snatch from man his rulership over the earth and his possession of the garden. On the other hand, “to keep” the garden may simply be synonymous with “to dress” it.

We have the assurance that God does nothing affecting man without first informing him with regard to His intentions (Amos 3:7). If God, who does only that which is beneficial for man, deems it necessary to inform us of His purposes, it is certain that He must have kept Adam informed of the danger threatening this earth (PP 36, 52, 53).

**16. Of every tree of the garden.** The commandment related in these verses presupposes that man understood the language God spoke and the distinction between “thou shalt” and “thou shalt not.” The command begins positively, granting permission to eat freely from all the trees of the garden—with the exception of one. The right to free

enjoyment of all the other trees is made emphatic by the intensive idiom “eating thou shalt eat,” *'akol to'kel*; to a divine prohibition there is even a positive aspect.

**17. *The tree of the knowledge of good and evil.*** So much the more precise, therefore, is the limitation of this freedom. Man was not to eat from the one tree bearing the name “tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (see on v. 9). It is futile to speculate what kind of fruit it may have borne, inasmuch as this has not been revealed. The very presence of this tree in the garden revealed that man was a free moral agent. Man’s service was not forced; he might either obey or disobey. The decision was his.

The fruit itself was harmless (Ed 25). But God’s explicit commandment to refrain from eating it set this tree apart as the testing ground of man’s loyalty and obedience. As a moral being, man had God’s law written upon his conscience. But, as if to clarify the principles of that law by applying it to a specific situation, and thus to make a fair test of man’s allegiance to his Maker, an injunction was laid upon him. God was the real owner of all things, even of those that Adam held in trust, and this gave Him the right to reserve any part of the creation for Himself. It would not have been unreasonable for Him to reserve a great share of this earth for Himself and to allow Adam the use of only a small portion of it. But no, man could use freely of everything that was in the garden—except one tree. No other purpose, evidently, was to be served by refraining from eating the fruit of this tree than to give clear proof of allegiance to God.

***In the day that thou eatest thereof.*** The prohibition was accompanied by a severe penalty for transgression, namely, death. Some have thought that the wording of the penalty required its execution upon the very day when the command was violated. They see a serious discrepancy between the announcement and its fulfillment. However, the divine pronouncement, “In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die,” literally, “dying thou shalt die,” means that upon the day of transgression sentence would be pronounced. Man would pass from the status of conditional immortality to that of unconditional mortality. Just as prior to his fall Adam could be certain of immortality, vouchsafed to him by the tree of life, so now, subsequent to that catastrophe, his mortality was just as certain. This, more than immediacy of physical death, is what the language implies. God required of man that he make a choice of principles. He was to accept the will of God and subject himself to it, confident that he would fare well as a result, or he would by his own choice sever connection with God and become, presumably, independent of Him. But separation from the Source of life could inevitably bring only death. The same principles are still valid. Punishment and death are the certain results of man’s free choice to indulge in rebellion against God.

**18. *An help meet for him.*** Appropriate, that is, to his needs; to complement him. Animals had been created in swarms or in groups, but man as a solitary individual. However, it was not God’s purpose for him to be alone for long. Loneliness would be detrimental to man’s well-being, and God would therefore make a companion for him.

**19. *Every beast of the field.*** The thought expressed by some Bible expositors, that God made several unsuccessful attempts to provide man with a companion by creating various animals, is a misapprehension of the purpose of this part of the narrative. It is not the time, but simply the fact, of the creation of the animals that Moses records. The Hebrew verb form rendered “formed” in the KJV may correctly be translated “had formed,” thus referring back to the creative acts of the fifth and early sixth days. The first

part of the verse, then, is given by way of providing a preface to that which immediately follows.

**Brought them unto Adam.** Adam was to study these animals and to engage in the important exercise of giving appropriate names to them, for which task he would require an understanding of them and their habits. This would qualify him or, perhaps, prove him qualified to rule over them. At the same time he would become aware of the family life they enjoyed and so of his own lack of companionship. Recognizing also that God had created him infinitely higher than the animals, he would realize that he could not choose a companion from them. If the formation of woman was to meet fully the purpose of the Creator, Adam must come to sense his own incompleteness and to feel his need of companionship—that “it was not good,” in other words, that he should remain alone.

**20. Adam gave names to all cattle.** It is evident that man was created with the faculty of speech. This ability Adam now employed to express the observations made in his study of the animals. He was introduced thus to the natural sciences, and by naming the animals began his dominion over them. Cattle may be mentioned first because they were to stand nearer to man in their future relations than other animals. The birds, which man loves so much and of which some species were to become most helpful to him, are given second place in the enumeration. It is impossible to discover what these names were, inasmuch as it is not known what language Adam and the antediluvian world spoke.

**Not found an help meet.** Adam’s study of the animal creation supplied him with considerable knowledge, but did not satisfy his longing for companionship with another being, his equal. This fact indicates the equal partnership that the woman should enjoy with the man. No real companion could be found for Adam among creatures inferior to him.

**21. A deep sleep.** God, planning to create Adam’s companion from his body, caused him to fall into a deep sleep that may be compared to unconsciousness under anesthetic. And surgery indeed it was that God performed on Adam during his sleep, taking out one of his ribs and filling its place with flesh. The Hebrew word *šelaʿ*, meaning elsewhere in the Bible “side,” “door leaf,” “wing” (of a building), and “panel” (of a wall covering), has here the meaning “rib.” This traditional translation, taken over in modern Bibles from the LXX and the Vulgate, has more recently been proved correct from cuneiform records. In the Assyrian language, which was closely related to Hebrew, the word for rib was *šêlu*.

**22. Made her a woman.** Moses had a ready command of the Hebrew language and knew how to use it to impress his readers. To describe the creative activity of God, he employed in the narrative in ch. 1 the verbs “to create” (ch. 1:27), “to make” (ch. 1:26), and “to form” (ch. 2:7). Now he adds to these more or less synonymous terms the verb “to build.” Each of these has its own distinct shade of meaning. Adam’s rib formed the basic material from which his companion was “built.” The woman was formed for inseparable unity and fellowship of life with the man, and the mode of her creation was to lay the actual foundation for the moral ordinance of marriage. She was “to stand by his side as an equal, to be loved and protected by him” (PP 46). Marriage is a type of the fellowship of love and life that exists between the Lord and His church (Eph. 5:32).

**Brought her unto the man.** God Himself solemnized the first marriage. After making the woman He led her to Adam, who by that time must have awakened from his deep sleep. As Adam was the “son of God” (Luke 3:38), so Eve could properly be called the daughter of God; and as her Father, God led her to Adam and presented her to him. The

marriage covenant, therefore, is appropriately called the covenant of God (Prov. 2:17), a name implying His authorship of that sacred institution.

**23. This is now bone of my bones.** Adam, recognizing in her the desired companion, welcomed her joyfully as his bride and expressed his joy in a poetic exclamation. The words, “this is now,” reflect his pleasant surprise as he saw in the woman the fulfillment of his heart’s desire. His thrice-repeated “this” (as in the Hebrew) vividly points to her upon whom, in joyful astonishment, his eye now rested with the intense thrill of first love. Instinctively, or as the result of divine instruction, he recognized in her part of his own being. He was henceforth to love her as his own body, for in loving her he loves himself. The apostle Paul stresses this truth (Eph. 5:28).

**She shall be called Woman.** The name Adam gave his newly created companion reflected the manner of her creation. The Hebrew word *’ishshah*, “woman,” is formed of the word *’ish*, “man,” with the feminine ending. The English word “woman” (Anglo-Saxon, wife-man) is similarly related to the word “man.” The same is true in various other languages.

**24. Leave his father and his mother.** The words of this verse cannot be regarded as a prophetic utterance of Adam, but rather as the words of God Himself. They are part of the declaration made by God at the marriage ceremony (see Matt. 19:4, 5; MB 99). These words express the deepest physical and spiritual unity of man and woman, and hold up monogamy before the world as the form of marriage ordained by God. These words do not recommend a forsaking of filial duty and respect toward father and mother, but refer primarily to the fact that a man’s wife is to be first in his affections and that his first duty is toward her. His love for her is to exceed, though certainly not to supersede, a very proper love for his parents.

**They shall be one flesh.** The unity of husband and wife is expressed in unmistakable words, existing as they do in a unity of bodies, a community of interests, and a reciprocity of affections. It is a significant fact that Christ uses this very passage in His strong condemnation of divorce (Matt. 19:5).

**25. They were both naked.** Adam and Eve had no need of material clothing, for about them the Creator had placed a robe of light, a robe symbolic of His own righteous character, which was reflected perfectly in them. When the moral image of their Maker is again reflected in His earthly sons and daughters, He will return to claim them as His own (see Rev. 7:9; 19:8; COL 69, 310). This white robe of innocence is the garment with which the saved of earth will be clad as they enter the gates of Paradise.

## ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

1-25PP 45-51

1 DA 769

1-3GC 455; PK 180; PP 47, 336; 9T 212

2 GC 453; ML 140

2, 3 EW 217; GC 52; MM 215; PP 111; SR 145; 8T 197

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<sup>1</sup>Nichol, F. D. (1978). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary : The Holy Bible with exegetical and expository comment*. Commentary Reference Series (Ge 1:1). Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association.

3 DA 281; MB 99; 4T 147, 247  
 4 PP 112  
 6 PP 96; SR 66  
 7 MH 415; PP 56; 2T 300; 8T 264  
 8 AH 27; ML 136; PP 46; SR 58; 3T 77, 153  
 8, 9 Ed 20  
 8-17MYP 364  
 9 AH 27; Ed 23; PP 47, 48, 84; 6T 368; 8T 288  
 15 AH 27; CD 396; CT 147; Ed 21; FE 314, 327, 419, 512; LS 355; MH 261; ML 112; PP  
 47, 50; SR 24; 1T 568; 3T 77, 153; 4T 410  
 16 3T 50  
 16, 17 CH 108; Ed 23; 3T 72; 4T 11  
 17 CS 65; CT 12; EW 125, 147; GC 532; MH 449; PP 48, 53, 60; SR 24; 2T 561; 5T 365;  
 6T 386  
 18 AH 25; PP 56  
 18-20PP 46  
 19, 20 PP 51  
 21-23PP 56  
 22 AH 99; 3T 484  
 23 MB 99  
 23-25COL 310; FE 141  
 24 AH 25, 341; MB 99; PP 46  
 25 PP 445; SR 38

### CHAPTER 3

1 *The serpent deceiveth Eve.* 6 *Man's shameful fall.* 9 *God arraigneth them.* 14 *The serpent is cursed.* 15 *The promised seed.* 16 *The punishment of mankind.* 21 *Their first clothing.* 22 *Their casting out of paradise.*

**1. The serpent.** With the serpent a new figure appears in the narrative, one that exercised a tremendous influence on the subsequent history of the world. Moses turns from his description of the perfect conditions in Paradise to the history of the Fall, by which this earth was transformed from a world of happiness, love, and perfection to one of sorrow, hatred, and wickedness. Moses leaves unmentioned the blissful period in Eden, time spent in complete happiness, in the study of natural history, in tending the garden as God had ordained, and in daily communion with the Creator in the cool hours of eventime (Gen. 3:8).

**More subtil than any beast.** The serpent is introduced as a creature more subtle than other animals. The word "subtil," *arum*, is used in the Bible a few times to indicate an unfavorable tendency of character (Job 5:12; 15:5), with the connotation of being "clever" or "cunning," but usually in the favorable sense of being prudent (see Prov. 12:16, 23; 13:16; 14:8, 15, 18; 22:3; 27:12). The latter, favorable meaning would seem preferable here because the serpent was one of the created beings God had pronounced "good," even "very good" (Gen. 1:25, 31). The evil character of serpents today is a result of the Fall and subsequent curse, and not a trait of that animal when it was created.

The objection that the serpent was not a real animal, but a supernatural being, hardly needs any serious refutation in view of the explicit statement that it was, indeed, an animal. However, the whole Scripture makes it abundantly plain that the serpent itself

was not responsible for man's fall, but rather Satan (see John 8:44; 2 Cor. 11:3, 14; Rom. 16:20). Nevertheless, Satan is in a figurative sense occasionally called a serpent because he used the serpent as a medium in his attempt to deceive man (see Rev. 12:9; 20:2).

The fall of Lucifer, who had been foremost among the angels of heaven (Isa. 14:12, 13; Eze. 28:13–15), obviously preceded the Fall of man (see PP 36). God, who daily conversed with man in the garden, had not left him ignorant of events in heaven, but had acquainted him with the apostasy of Satan and other angels, for whose coming Adam was to be on guard. Adam and Eve may have expected to see Satan appear as an angel, and felt prepared to meet him as such and to reject his enticements. But, instead, he spoke to her through the serpent, and took her by surprise. This, however, in no wise excuses our first mother, though it is true that she was thereby deceived (see 1 Tim. 2:14; 2 Cor. 11:3).

The trial of our first parents was permitted as a test of their loyalty and love. This test was essential to their spiritual development, to the formation of character. Eternal happiness would have been the result for them if they had come out of the test unscathed. Inasmuch as God did not wish them to be tempted above their ability to withstand (1 Cor. 10:13), He did not allow Satan to approach them in the likeness of God, or at any other place than this one tree (1 SP 34). Satan, therefore, came in the form of a creature, not only far inferior to God, but far below man himself. Adam and Eve, in allowing Satan, through the medium of a mere animal, to persuade them to break the commandment of God, were doubly without excuse.

***He said unto the woman.*** Using the serpent as his medium, Satan found a time when he could address the woman alone. It is always easier to persuade an individual to do wrong when he is detached from protective surroundings. Had Eve remained with her husband, his presence would have been a protection to her, and the story would doubtless have had a different ending.

***Yea, hath God said.*** Satan addressed her with a question that looked innocent but was full of cunning. It has been debated whether the question should be translated (1) "Has God really said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" meaning, "Are there any trees in the garden of which you may not eat?" or (2) "Ye shall not eat of any tree of the garden." The Hebrew allows both translations, and possesses therefore a certain ambiguity. Satan intended that his words should be indefinite and ambiguous. His purpose was obvious. He wished to sow doubt in the heart of the woman concerning the real phraseology and the exact meaning of the divine commandment, especially concerning the reasonableness and justice of such a command.

***2. We may eat of the fruit.*** Eve evidently understood the question in the second sense discussed above, and instead of turning away and fleeing to her husband, showed signs of wavering and doubt, and a readiness to discuss the subject further with the serpent.

God declared, "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." Eve changed this to, "lest ye die." For the full certainty of the death penalty following a transgression of the command, the woman declared that death *might* follow such an act. The word "lest," *pen*, implies inner alarm at the thought of playing with something that might prove fatal, concealed under an assumed cynical attitude toward the idea that such a thing could ever really happen. The doubt and hesitancy in Eve's language, reflecting that of the serpent, make the motive to obedience predominantly one of the fear of death rather than of inherent love toward her beneficent Creator. Another symptom of awakening doubt in

the absolute justice of God's injunction is the fact that Eve did not mention the name of the tree, which was certainly known to her. By speaking of this tree in general terms of locality as the one being "in the midst of the garden," she placed it almost in the same class with the other trees of her garden home.

**4. *Ye shall not surely die.*** If Satan's first question was intended to arouse doubt, as indeed it was, the statement with which he followed it up had the deceptive appearance of an authoritative declaration. But therein truth was most cleverly mixed with falsehood. This assertion contradicted God's explicit command in the most emphatic manner of which Hebrew is capable, and which may be rendered, "Ye will positively not die." Satan challenged the truthfulness of God's word by an unconcealed lie, for which reason Christ was right in calling him the father of lies (John 8:44).

**5. *Your eyes shall be opened.*** Satan proceeded to give a plausible reason for God's prohibition. He charged God with: (1) Envy of His creatures' happiness. Satan said in effect, "Depend upon it, it is not through any fear of your dying from its fruit that the tree has been prohibited, but through fear of your becoming rivals of your Master Himself." (2) Falsehood. Satan charged that God lied when He said death would follow the eating of the fruit. God's requirements were placed in the most heinous and reprehensible light. By mixing truth with falsehood Satan tried to confuse the mind of Eve, in order to make it difficult for her to distinguish between God's words and his. The expression "in the day ye eat thereof" sounded similar to what God had spoken (ch. 2:17), as did also the phrase "knowing good and evil." The promise, "Your eyes shall be opened," implied a present limitation of sight that could be removed by following the serpent's advice.

***Ye shall be as gods.*** The same word translated in the KJV "gods," *'elohim*, is rendered "God" in vs. 1, 3, and 5. The translators of the KJV here followed the LXX and the Vulgate. The correct rendering is, "Ye shall be as God." This reveals most sharply the blasphemous nature of Satan's words (see Isa. 14:12-14) and the full gravity of his deception.

**6. *When the woman saw.*** After doubt and unbelief in God's word had been awakened in the woman, the tree seemed vastly different to her. Three times mention is made of how charming it was; it appealed to her taste, to her eye, and to her longing for increased wisdom. Looking at the tree in this way, with a desire to partake of its fruit, was a concession to Satan's inducements. She was already guilty in her mind of transgressing the divine command, "Thou shalt not covet" (Ex. 20:17). The act of taking the fruit and eating it was but the natural result of entering thus upon the path of transgression.

***She took of the fruit.*** Having coveted that to which she had no right, the woman proceeded to transgress one commandment after another. She next stole God's property, violating the eighth commandment (Ex. 20:15). By eating the forbidden fruit and giving it to her husband she also transgressed the sixth commandment (Ex. 20:13). She then broke the first commandment (Ex. 20:3), because she placed Satan before God in her esteem, and obeyed him rather than her Creator.

***Gave also unto her husband.*** Observing that she did not die immediately, a fact which seemed to confirm the seducer's definite assertion, "Ye shall not die," Eve experienced a deceptive sense of elation. She wanted her husband to share the feeling with her. This is the first time the Sacred Record calls Adam "her husband." But instead of being a "help meet" for him she became the agent of his destruction. The statement that "she gave also to her husband with her," does not imply that he had been with her all

the time, standing mute at the scene of temptation. Instead, she gave him of the fruit upon rejoining him that he might eat it “with her” and thus share its presumed benefits.

***He did eat.*** Before he ate, a conversation between Adam and his wife must have taken place. Should he follow his wife in her path of sin and disobedience or give her up, trusting that God would somehow restore his shattered happiness? The fact that she had not died as the result of eating the fruit, and that no apparent harm had come her to her, did not deceive Adam. “Adam was not deceived, but the woman” (1 Tim. 2:14). But his wife’s power of persuasion, coupled with his own love for her, induced him to share the consequences of her fall, whatever they might be. Fateful decision! Instead of waiting until he should have the opportunity of discussing the whole tragic matter with God, he took his fate into his own hands. Adam’s fall is the more tragic because he did not doubt God, nor was he deceived like Eve; he acted in the certain expectation that God’s terrible threat would come true.

Deplorable as was Eve’s transgression and fraught as it was with potential woe for the human family, her choice did not necessarily involve the race in the penalty for her transgression. It was the deliberate choice of Adam, in the full understanding of an express command of God—rather than hers—that made sin and death the inevitable lot of mankind. Eve was deceived; Adam was not (see Rom. 5:12, 14; 1 Cor. 15:21; 1 Tim. 2:14; 2 Cor. 11:3). Had Adam remained loyal to God in spite of Eve’s disloyalty, divine wisdom would yet have solved the dilemma for him and averted disaster for the race (PP 56).

**7. *The eyes of them both were opened.*** What irony lies in these words, which record the fulfillment of Satan’s ambiguous promise! The eyes of their intellect were open—they realized that they were no longer innocent. Their physical eyes were open—they saw that they were naked.

***And made themselves aprons.*** Standing ashamed in each other’s presence, they sought to evade the disgrace of their nakedness. Their fig-leaf aprons were a pitiful substitute for the radiant garments of innocence they had forfeited. Conscience was at work. That this feeling of shame had its root not in sensuality but in the consciousness of guilt before God is evident from the fact that they hid themselves from Him.

The only ancient inscription that shows some resemblance to the story of the Fall of man as told in the Bible is a Sumero-Akkadian bilingual poem which says, “The maiden ate that which was forbidden, the maiden, the mother of sin, committed evil, the mother of sin had a painful experience” (A. Jeremias, *Das Alte Testament im Lichte des alten Orients* [Leipzig, 1930], p. 99).

**8. *The voice of the Lord.*** The periodical visits of God toward the close of day, when quiet evening zephyrs refreshed the garden, had always been occasions of delight for the happy pair. But the sound of God’s approach was now a source of alarm. Both felt that they dared by no means meet their Creator. The reason for their fear was neither humility nor modesty but a profound sense of guilt.

**9. *Where art thou?*** Adam, who had always welcomed the divine approach, was now in hiding. He could not, however, be hidden from God, who called to Adam, not as if ignorant of his hiding place, but to bring him to confession. Adam sought to hide the sin behind its consequences, his disobedience behind his sense of shame, by proposing to God that he had hidden himself through embarrassment at his nakedness. His consciousness of the effects of sin was keener than of the sin itself. Here we witness for

the first time the confusion between sin and punishment, which is characteristic of man in his fallen state. The results of sin are sensed and detested more than the sin itself.

**12. *The woman whom thou gavest.*** God put forth a question that revealed His knowledge of Adam's transgression and was designed to awaken within him a conviction of sin. Adam's reply was a devious and evasive apology for his embarrassment that amounted to an accusation of God. Thus had Adam's character changed in the short interval since he entered the pathway of disobedience. The man who had cherished his wife so dearly that he intentionally violated God's command in order that he might not be separated from her, now speaks of her with cold and callous antipathy as "the woman whom thou gavest to be with me." His words resemble those of Jacob's sons who spoke to their father about Joseph as "thy son" (Gen. 37:32; cf. Luke 15:30). One of the bitter fruits of sin is a hardness of heart, "without natural affection" (Rom. 1:31). Adam's insinuation that God was to blame for his sad plight in being bound to such a weak and seductive creature sinks to the very depths of ingratitude.

**13. *The serpent beguiled me.*** The woman also had an answer ready, blaming the serpent for deceiving her. Neither Adam nor his wife denied the facts, but each sought to escape blame by incriminating someone else. Neither gave evidence of contrition. One noteworthy difference, however, exists between their confessions. The woman protested that she had been deceived; Adam tacitly admitted his act had been deliberate, in full knowledge of its consequences.

**14. *Thou art cursed.*** The curse of sin rests not alone on the serpent but on all the animal creation, though it was to bear a greater curse than its fellows. Formerly the most clever and beautiful of creatures, the serpent was now deprived of wings and doomed henceforth to crawl in the dust.

It should not be supposed that unreasoning brutes were thus made objects of the anger of a vengeful God. This curse was for Adam's benefit, as one means of impressing him with the far-reaching consequences of sin. It must have brought intense suffering to his own heart as he beheld these creatures, whose protector he was supposed to be, bearing the results of his sin (PP 68). Upon the serpent, which had become for all time the symbol of evil, the curse fell more heavily—not so much that it might suffer as that it might also be for a man a symbol of the results of sin. Little wonder that most human beings feel revulsion and dread in the presence of a serpent.

***Dust shalt thou eat.*** The fact that serpents actually do not eat dust has caused critical commentators to declare that ancient people erred, thinking that this animal, creeping always on its belly and living even in deserts where scarcely any food is available, fed on dust. This misconception influenced the author of Genesis, they say, to formulate the curse pronounced over the serpent so as to harmonize with this commonly held belief. Conservative scholars have more or less unsuccessfully tried to show that the serpent eats some dust when it eats its food. But is the same not true of many animals that pick up their food from the ground? This problem disappears when we view the phrase "dust shalt thou eat" as figurative. It was used in this sense by ancient peoples, as their literature and letters, recently recovered, reveal. The pagan myth of Ishtar's descent to the nether world says of cursed people that "dust is their fare and clay their food." Among the curses pronounced on enemies the wish is repeated over and over again that they shall have to eat dust. In the old Welsh battle hymn, "March of the Men of Harlech," the taunt is hurled at their enemies, "They shall bite the ground." In this light the expression, "Dust

shalt thou eat all the days of thy life,” means simply, “Thou shalt be the most cursed of all creatures.”

**15. I will put enmity.** Here the Lord turns from addressing the literal serpent who spoke to Eve, to pronounce judgment on the old serpent the devil. This judgment, expressed in prophetic language, has ever been understood by the Christian church as a prediction of the coming of the Deliverer. Even though this interpretation is unquestionably correct, it may be pointed out that the prophecy is also true literally—there is mortal enmity between the serpent and man wherever the two meet.

**Between thy seed and her seed.** Reference is made to the age-long struggle between Satan’s “seed” or followers (John 8:44; Acts 13:10; 1 John 3:10) and the woman’s seed. The Lord Jesus Christ is styled by pre-eminence “the seed” (Rev. 12:1–5; cf. Gal. 3:16, 19); it was He who came “to destroy the works of the devil” (Heb. 2:14; 1 John 3:8).

**It shall bruise thy head.** “Bruise,” *shuph*. This word means “to crush” or “to lie in wait for.” It is evident that crushing the head is far more serious than crushing the heel. It is important to notice that although the enmity foretold is to be between the seed of the woman and that of the serpent, it is the head of the serpent and not its seed that is to be crushed. In retaliation, the serpent will have been able to do no more than to bruise the heel of the woman’s seed.

The “seed” is put in the singular, indicating, not that a multitude of descendants of the woman jointly shall be engaged in crushing the serpent’s head, but rather that a single individual will accomplish this. These observations clearly show that in this pronouncement is compressed the record of the great controversy between Christ and Satan, a battle that began in heaven (Rev. 12:7–9), was continued on earth, where Christ again defeated him (Heb. 2:14), and will terminate finally with Satan’s destruction at the end of the millennium (Rev. 20:10). Christ did not emerge from this battle unscathed. The nail marks in His hands and feet and the scar in His side will be eternal reminders of the fierce strife in which the serpent bruised the woman’s seed (John 20:25; Zech. 13:6; EW 53).

This pronouncement must have brought great comfort to the two dismayed offenders standing before God, from whose precepts they had departed. Adam, viceroy of God on earth so long as he remained loyal, had, by transferring his loyalty from God to the serpent, ceded his authority to Satan. That Satan was fully aware of his usurped “rights” over this earth, gained by Adam’s submission, is clear from his statement to Christ on the mount of temptation (Luke 4:5, 6). Adam began to realize the extent of his loss, that from ruler over this world he had become a slave of Satan. Nevertheless, before hearing his own sentence pronounced, the healing balm of hope was applied to his shattered soul. To her whom he had blamed for his fall he was now to look for deliverance—for the promised seed, in whom would be power to vanquish the archenemy of God and man.

How kind was God! Divine justice required that sin should meet its penalty, but divine mercy had already found a way to redeem the fallen human race—by the voluntary sacrifice of the Son of God (1 Peter 1:20; Eph. 3:11; 2 Tim. 1:9; Rev. 13:8). God instituted the ritual of sacrifice by way of providing man with a visual aid, that he might be led to understand something of the price that must be paid to make atonement for his sin. The innocent lamb had to give its lifeblood for that of man, and its skin to cover the sinner’s nakedness, in order that man might thus ever be symbolically reminded of the Son of God, who would have to lay down His life to atone for man’s transgression and

whose righteousness alone would be sufficient to cover him. We do not know how clear Adam's understanding of the plan of redemption was, but we can be certain that enough was revealed to be an assurance to him that sin would not last forever, that the Redeemer would be born of the woman's seed, that the lost rulership would be regained, and that the happiness of Eden would be restored. From first to last the gospel of salvation is the central theme of the Scriptures.

**16. *I will greatly multiply thy sorrow.*** The phrase "thy sorrow and thy conception" is generally considered to be a literary form in which two similar phrases express a single idea. The phrase could thus read "the sorrow of thy conception." At the very first, man had been commanded, "Be fruitful and multiply" (ch. 1:28).

Repeated conception was therefore intended to be a blessing, not a curse. But the entrance of sin meant that henceforth pregnancy would be accompanied by pain.

***In sorrow.*** Indeed, the pains of childbirth were to be so intense that in Scripture they are symbolic of the most severe anguish of body and mind (see Micah 4:9, 10; 1 Thess. 5:3; John 16:21; Rev. 12:2).

***Thy desire shall be thy husband.*** The Hebrew word *shuq*, "desire," means "to run after, to have a violent craving for a thing," indicating the strongest possible desire for it. Though oppressed by man and tortured by the pains of childbirth, the woman would still feel an intense desire for her husband. Commentators have been divided in their opinion as to whether this is part of the punishment. It seems reasonable to conclude that this "desire" was given to alleviate the sorrows of womanhood and to bind the hearts of husband and wife ever more closely together.

***He shall rule over thee.*** The woman had broken her divinely appointed relationship with the man. Instead of being a help "meet" for him she had become his seducer. Therefore her status of equality with man was forfeited; he was to "rule over" her as lord and master. A wife is described in Scripture as being "possessed" by her lord. Among most non-Christian peoples woman has been subjected throughout the ages to degradation and virtual slavery. Among the Hebrews, however, the condition of woman was one of distinct subordination though not of oppression or slavery. Christianity has placed woman on the same platform as man as regards the blessings of the gospel (Gal. 3:28). Although the husband is to be head of the household, Christian principles will lead a man and his wife into an experience of real partnership, where each is so devoted to the happiness and well-being of the other that it never occurs to either to attempt to "rule" over the other (see Col. 3:18, 19).

**17. *Because thou hast hearkened.*** For the first time the noun "Adam" is used as a proper name without the article, a fact that is not apparent in the KJV, where *ha'adam*, in chs. 2:19, 23; 3:8, 9, is translated as a personal name, although the article in each instance indicates that the word is used in the sense of "the man." Before passing sentence God explained why it was necessary and appropriate. Adam had acted in accord with Eve's persuasive arguments, setting her word above that of God. He had thus withdrawn his supreme affection and allegiance from God, and so had forfeited the blessings of life, and even life itself. Having exalted his will above the will of God, Adam must learn that independence from God does not mean a more exalted sphere of existence but separation from the Source of life. Death would therefore show him the worthlessness of his own nature.

***Cursed is the ground.*** It should be noticed again that God did not curse either Adam or his wife. Curses were pronounced only upon the serpent and the ground. But “cursed is the ground for *thy sake*,” God said to Adam.

***In sorrow shalt thou eat.*** The same word that had been used to express the sufferings associated with childbearing is now used to inform Adam of the difficulties to be encountered in eking out a meager living from the cursed ground. So long as he lived there would be no hope of relief from this condition. The expression “all the days of thy life” is the first indication that death would surely come, though the event might for a time be postponed.

***18. Thorns also and thistles.*** Prior to the Fall, only plants that were either useful for food or beautiful to the eye grew from the earth; now it was to produce “thorns and thistles” also (6T 186). The increased labor necessary to the cultivation of the soil would increase the misery of man’s existence. He was to learn by bitter experience that life independent of God can at best be one of sorrow and affliction.

***The herb.*** See on ch. 1:11, 29. The divine punishment provided also a partial change in diet. We evidently are to conclude that the quantity and quality of grains and nuts and fruits originally given to man were, as a result of the curse, reduced to such an extent that man would be required to look to the herbs for a portion of his daily food. This change may also have been due in part to the loss of certain elements from the tree of life, to a change in climate, and perhaps most of all to man’s sentence to hard labor in the process of earning a livelihood.

***19. In the sweat of thy face.*** The arduous toil that was to add to man’s burdensome life is now vividly expressed. This refers specifically to the husbandman, who must live by forcing from a reluctant earth food for himself and his family, but it applies equally to all other vocations. Since Adam’s fall human achievement may be realized only through toil. Nevertheless, it should be recognized that this punishment was indeed a blessing in disguise for sinful beings. When a man works he is far less likely to sin than when he spends his days in idleness. Toil and labor develop character and teach man humility and cooperation with God. This is one reason why the Christian church has generally found its most loyal adherents and supporters among the laboring class. Work, even when arduous, should not be despised; “a blessing is in it.”

***Till thou return unto the ground.*** The Lord informed Adam that the grave was his certain destination. Man thus understood that the plan of redemption (v. 15) would not prevent the loss of his present life, but it did offer assurance of a new life. With the change in Adam’s nature from conditional immortality to mortality began the fulfillment of the dire prediction, “In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.” Unless in mercy man had been granted a day of grace, death would have occurred instantaneously. Divine justice required man’s life; divine mercy afforded man an opportunity to regain it.

***20. Adam called his wife’s name Eve.*** This verse is not a disturbing interpolation in the context of the story of the Fall and its consequences, as some commentators maintain. It shows that Adam believed the promise with regard to the woman’s seed and manifested this faith in the name that he now gave to his wife.

Eve, *chawwah*. *Chawwah* means “life,” and is here translated *Zoe* by the LXX. It is an old Semitic form, found also in old Phoenician inscriptions, but was no longer used in the Hebrew language at the time the Bible was written. This has been suggested as indicating that Adam spoke an old Semitic language. If Moses had used a contemporary

Hebrew equivalent, he would have written the woman's name *chayyah* instead of *chawwah*, but by giving the name in an unusual archaic form he shows that his knowledge goes back into the remote past. In ch. 4:1 *chawwah* was roughly transliterated *Eua* by the LXX, whence comes our English "Eve."

***She was the mother.*** Adam gave the name "the living one" to his wife in faith, seeing in her the "mother of all living" at a time when his death sentence had just been pronounced. Also, he looked beyond the grave and saw in the seed promised to his wife the One who would restore to him and his descendants the immortality they had forfeited that day. Instead of calling her in gloom and despair—as could be expected under the circumstances—"the mother of all doomed," he fastened his eye in faith upon his Judge, and, before she even gave birth to her first-born, called her, hopefully, "the living one." Faith was indeed to him "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1).

***21. Coates of skins.*** Before expelling Adam and Eve from the garden, God provided them with more durable clothing, suitable for the hard labor that lay ahead and as protection against the extremes of heat and cold that followed the Fall (PP 61). Also the skins were a constant reminder of their lost innocence, of death as the wages of sin, and of the promised Lamb of God, who would by His own vicarious death take away the sins of the world. He who had been commissioned protector of the animal creation now unhappily found himself taking the life of one of them. They must die that he might live.

The sacrificial service, though not specifically mentioned here, was instituted at this time (PP 68; cf. DA 28). The story of Cain's and Abel's sacrifices related in the next chapter shows that the first sons of Adam and Eve were well acquainted with this ritual. If God had not issued definite regulations concerning sacrifices, His approval of Abel's offering and His disapproval of Cain's would have been arbitrary. That Cain did not accuse God of partiality is evidence that he as well as his brother knew what was required. The universality of animal sacrifices in ancient times points to a common origin of this practice.

***22. As one of us.*** Man had learned of his punishment and the plan of redemption, and had been provided clothing. By disobedience he had learned the difference between good and evil, whereas God had intended him to gain this knowledge through voluntary cooperation with the divine will. Satan's promise that man would become "like God" was fulfilled only in that man now knew something of the results of sin.

***Put forth his hand.*** It was now necessary to prevent man from continuing to partake of the fruit of the tree of life lest he become an immortal sinner (PP 60). Through sin man had fallen under the power of death. Thus the fruit that produced immortality could now do him only harm. Immortality in a state of sin, and thus of endless misery, was not the life for which God designed man. Denying man access to this life-giving tree was an act of divine mercy which Adam may not have fully appreciated at that time, but for which he will be grateful in the world to come. There he will eat forevermore from the long-lost tree of life (Rev. 22:2, 14). By partaking of the emblems of Christ's sacrifice, we have the privilege of eating by faith of the fruit of that tree today, and of looking forward with confidence to the time when we may pluck and eat its fruit with all the redeemed in the Paradise of God (8T 288).

**24. He drove out the man.** In sending Adam forth from Eden to earn a living by the sweat of his brow, God performed what must have been to Him, as well as to Adam, a sad duty. Even with the primeval forests cleared away, there would ever be a perpetual struggle against weeds, insects, and wild beasts.

**Cherubims.** The origin of the name “cherubim” is not clear, but the word *cherub* is probably related to the Assyrian word *karâbu*, “to bless,” or “to pray.” The Bible represents cherubim as belonging to the class of beings we call angels, especially those close to God and His throne (Eze. 9:3; 10:4; Ps. 99:1). For this reason cherubic figures were to be upon the ark and the curtains of the tabernacle (Ex. 25:18; 26:1, 31), and were afterward engraved upon the walls and doors of the Temple (1 Kings 6:29, 32, 35).

A memory of heavenly beings guarding the way to the tree of life is perhaps retained in the old Mesopotamian epic of Gilgamesh, who went out in search of the “herb of life,” or immortality. Of the place where the “herb of life” was to be found, the epic reports that “scorpion men guard its gate, whose terror is fearful, whose beholding is death; their awesome glory throws down mountains.” Assyrian palaces were guarded by great winged colossi called *kârîbu*, half bull and half man, perhaps a pagan corruption of the record of the God-appointed guardians of Paradise. In Egyptian temples are found numerous representations of cherubim, creatures similar to human beings, with their wings spread protectingly over the shrine of deity.

**A flaming sword.** Light has ever been a symbol of the divine presence. As such, the Shekinah glory of God appeared between the two cherubim, one on either side of the mercy seat covering the ark of the covenant in the holy of holies (see Ex. 25:22; Isa. 37:16; DA 464; PP 349; GC 24). The phrase “a flaming sword” is a rather inexact translation of the Hebrew, which reads literally “a glittering of the sword.” There was no literal sword guarding the gate of Paradise. There was, rather, what appeared to be the scintillating reflection of light from a sword “turned every way” with great rapidity—flashing shafts of light radiating from an intensely brilliant center. Furthermore, the form of the Hebrew verb *mithhappeketh*, rendered in the KJV “turned every way,” really means “turning itself every way.” This verb form is used exclusively to express intensive, reflexive action, and requires in this instance the conclusion that the “sword” appeared to whirl itself about. This radiant, living light was none other than the Shekinah glory, the manifestation of the divine presence. Before it, for centuries, those loyal to God gathered to worship Him (PP 62, 83, 84).

### ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

1-24PP 52-62; SR 32-41

1 DA 118; GC 505, 531; PP 53; SR 32; 5T 384, 504, 698

1-5CH 108, 109; GC 554; PP 54; 5T 503

1-8CT 12; MH 427

2-5GC 532; SR 33

3 Te 283

3-5Ed 24

4 Ev 598; EW 218; GC 533, 538; PP 96; SL 49; SR 388; 1T 301, 342 344; 3T 72; 4T 146

4, 5 COL 108; GC 561; PP 685; SR 398

4-61T 565; 3T 455; 4T 248

5 CT 361;] Ed 25; FE 437; GC 532, 538; PK 178; SR 395; 1T 551; 5T 625, 702, 738

5, 6 3T 139  
6 CD 145; CH 108, 111, 409; DA 116; Ed 25; Ev 610; EW 125, 147, 218; FE 446, 471;  
GC 532; GW 260; MB 83; ML 323; MM 93; MYP 69; Te 13, 15, 20, 273; 2T 561; 3T  
72, 161, 324, 483, 486, 491, 542, 561; 4T 311, 573; 5T 504; 6T 163; 8T 288, 290  
7 COL 311, 312; MH 462; ML 311; PP 45, 57  
8 SC 19  
8-2PP 57  
9-14SR 39  
12, 13 SC 45; 5T 638  
13-16PP 58  
15 AA 222; DA 31, 52, 103, 115, 578, 663; Ed 27; EW 178; GC 505, 507; PK 681, 685,  
701, 702; PP 65, 77, 370; Te 275, 284; 3T 526; 4T 594, 595; 9T 283  
16 PP 58; 3T 484  
17 SC 9  
17, 18 COL 289; Ed 101; MH 296; 8T 256  
17-19Ed 26; PP 50, 59; SR 40  
18, 19 FE 513; 9T 283  
19 AH 27; CT 274; FE 314, 326; GC 532, 533; PP 478; 2T 529; 5T 181  
21 PP 61; SR 46  
22, 23 TM 133  
23 ML 168; SR 46  
23, 24 Ed 25; EW 51, 218  
24 EW 126, 148; GC 511, 534; PP 60, 62, 83, 84; SR 388; TM 134; 6T 19; 8T 288

## CHAPTER 4

1 *The birth, trade, and religion of Cain and Abel.* 8 *The murder of Abel.* 11 *The curse of Cain.* 17 *Enoch the first city.* 19 *Lamech and his two wives.* 25 *The birth of Seth,* 26 *and Enos.*

**1. *I have gotten a man from the Lord.*** The Hebrew reads literally, “I have gotten a man, the Lord.” When Eve held her first-born in her arms she apparently remembered the divine promise of ch. 3:15, and entertaining the hope that he was to be the promised Deliverer, named him *Qayin*, “gotten” (DA 31). Forlorn hope! Her eager longing for the speedy fulfillment of the gospel promise was doomed to meet the most heartbreaking disappointment. Little did she realize that this very child would become the world’s first murderer.

**2. *His brother Abel.*** The absence of the usual expression “and she conceived,” and the use of the peculiar phraseology “she again bare,” literally, “she continued to give birth,” have suggested to some commentators that Abel was Cain’s twin brother. This may be true but is not necessarily implied by the text. Abel’s name means “vanity” or “nothingness.” It reflects the fact that either a mother’s hopes had already met with disappointment in her elder son or that Abel personified for her the miseries of human life. In this chapter Abel is seven times called Cain’s brother, seeming to emphasize the heinousness of Cain’s sin.

***A keeper of sheep.*** There is no reason for finding in the professions chosen by the two men an intimation of difference in moral character, although these choices were probably determined by their talents and tastes.

**3. *In process of time.*** Literally, “at the end of days.” This denotes the passing of a considerable, indefinite period of time, and may indicate the harvest season. To understand it as meaning the end of a week or a year, as has been done by some commentators, hardly seems warranted in this instance, since there is no particular reason why either should be mentioned here. The word *yamim*, “days,” is, however, used in a number of instances where the context makes it clear that a year is meant. In such cases it has been translated “year” (see Ex. 13:10; Num. 9:22; 1 Sam. 2:19; 27:7; 2 Chron. 21:19; etc.).

***An offering unto the Lord.*** “Offering,” *minchah*. *Minchah* is used in the Levitical laws for the bloodless thank offering, consisting of flour and oil, or flour prepared with frankincense (Lev. 2:1, 4, 14, 15). Here, however, the word has a wider meaning and includes both meal offerings and animals sacrifices, because it is used as a designation not only for Cain’s bloodless offering but also for Abel’s sacrifice (see v. 4). It is not stated that either Cain or Abel built an altar for their offerings, but obviously they must have done so (see PP 71). The next time the offering of a sacrifice is reported in the Bible, its altar is mentioned (Gen. 8:20). The system of sacrificial offerings had been introduced by God at the time man was expelled from the garden (PP 68, 71). The following verses make it plain that Cain knew he was doing wrong in bringing the kind of gift he offered to God. He had been taught that the blood of the Son of God would atone for his sins. By following the divinely instituted rule of sacrificing a lamb for his sins, he would show allegiance to God, who had ordained the sacrificial system, and express faith in the plan of redemption (Heb. 11:4). The universal prevalence of sacrifices among ancient peoples points to a divine precept rather than to human invention as their origin (see DA 28).

What was it that made Cain’s offering unacceptable to God? He acknowledged, in part, grudgingly, the claims of God upon him. But a secret spirit of resentment and rebellion prompted him to meet the claims of God in a way of his own choosing rather than to follow precisely the plan ordained by God. Ostensibly he complied, but the manner of his compliance revealed a defiant spirit. Cain proposed to justify himself by his own works, to earn salvation by his own merits. Refusing to recognize himself a sinner in need of a savior, he offered a gift that expressed no penitence for sin—a bloodless offering. And “without shedding of blood is no remission,” for “it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul” (Heb. 9:22; Lev. 17:11; PP 71, 72).

Cain recognized the existence of God and His power to give or to withhold earthly blessings. Feeling it advantageous to live on good terms with Deity, Cain considered it expedient to appease and avert divine wrath by a gift, even though it be offered grudgingly. He failed to realize that partial, formal compliance with the explicit requirements of God could not earn His favor as a substitute for true obedience and contrition of heart. We today do well to examine our hearts lest we, like Cain, be found offering to God valueless and unacceptable gifts.

**4. *The firstlings of his flock.*** The word “firstlings” indicates that Abel brought of the first-born of his flock (see Ex. 13:12). The sacrificial ordinance as set forth by Moses required the sprinkling of the blood of first-born animals upon the altar and the burning of their fat in the fire (Num. 18:17). Abel’s offering was a demonstration of faith (Heb. 11:4). Cain’s offering, in contrast, was an attempt to earn salvation by works. With Abel,

faith in the plan of salvation and in the atoning sacrifice of Christ revealed itself in unquestioning obedience.

**Had respect. Sha'ah**, “to consider graciously.” Though the manner of God’s acceptance of Abel’s offering is not here revealed, it consisted in the appearance of heavenly fire to consume the sacrifice, as often in later times (see Lev. 9:24; Judges 6:21; 1 Kings 18:38; 1 Chron. 21:26; 2 Chron. 7:1; PP 71). It is noteworthy that God’s acceptance of Abel’s sacrifice betokened the acceptance of his person; in the narrative, in fact, mention of the acceptance of Abel himself precedes mention of the acceptance of his offering. This is an indication that God was not so interested in the sacrifice as in the one who brought it.

**5. Unto Cain and to his offering.** Cain noticed that absence of any visible sign of God’s pleasure and acceptance of his offering. A deeply burning anger was the result. The Hebrew phrase here used can be translated literally, “It burned with Cain exceedingly.” He felt fierce resentment against his brother and toward God. There was apparently no sorrow for sin, no spirit of self-examination, no prayer for light or pardon. Cain’s behavior is a typical example of a stubborn and unrepentant sinner whose heart does not melt under correction and reproof but becomes even more hard and rebellious. No attempt was made by Cain to hide feelings of disappointment, dissatisfaction, and anger. His face bespoke his resentment.

**6. Why art thou wroth?** Here it is evident, as in vs. 14 and 16, that God did not cease making personal contact with men at the time He expelled them from the garden. The rejection of Cain’s offering did not necessarily mean the rejection of Cain himself. In mercy and patience God was ready to give him another chance. Though clearly manifesting His displeasure by rejecting the offering, God appeared to the sinner and reasoned with him in an attempt to persuade him of the error of his way and the unreasonableness of his anger. God spoke to Cain as to a willful child, to draw out into the open that which was lurking like a wild beast before the door of his heart. The question Why was designed to lead Cain to acknowledge the baselessness of his anger. For the rejection of his offering there must be a valid reason, which he should discover and eliminate.

**7. If thou doest well.** This verse presents certain linguistic difficulties that have led some modern commentators to think that a copyist’s error has changed the Hebrew text. That the translators of the LXX found its meaning obscure even in their time is apparent from their garbled translation of it. The rabbis tried to explain it in the sense that Cain’s offering was rejected because he did not follow precisely the rules of Levitical ritual. But the obvious contrast between the results of “doing well” and those of “not doing well” precludes such an explanation. The first clause reads literally, “Is there not lifting up if thou doest well?” What will be lifted up? The burden of guilt or the countenance? The expression “to lift up one’s face” for “to be joyful or innocent” is common in Hebrew (Job 11:15; 22:26; 2 Sam. 2:22), and probably appears here in an abbreviated form as a complement to the preceding statement that Cain’s countenance had fallen (v. 6). God wished Cain to understand that if he would mend his ways and live according to the divine precepts, there would be no more reason for God to show His displeasure and no more reason for Cain to show a disappointed and angry face. However, if Cain would not change, but would continue in the pathway of evil, sin would overwhelm him. The phrase “sin lieth at the door” (like a wild beast) is probably a proverbial one (see 1 Peter 5:8).

**Sin.** Some have suggested that the Hebrew word here translated “sin,” *chatta’th*, should be rendered “sin offering,” as it is in nearly half the passages where it occurs in the OT (see for example Ex. 30:10; Lev. 4:32; Num. 7:16, 22; etc.; cf. Hosea 4:8; Heb. 9:28; 2 Cor. 5:21). God would then be saying to Cain, “If you were innocent, your [bloodless] offering would be acceptable as a thank offering, would it not? And when you have sinned, is there not a sin offering ready at hand?” One difficulty in rendering *chatta’th* as “sin offering” should be pointed out. *Chatta’th*, is feminine, whereas the participle *robeṣ*, “lieth,” is masculine. It should be feminine if it is to agree with *chatta’th*, its subject. This difference suggests that Moses was personifying “sin” as a wild beast crouching at the door, and so deliberately chose to make *robeṣ* agree with the masculine wild beast of his figure of speech rather than with the subject in its literal sense as “sin” or “sin offering.”

**Unto thee shall be his desire.** This cannot refer to Abel as having a “desire” toward his elder brother in the same sense as Eve toward her husband (see ch. 3:16), that is, to accept his supremacy. Such an explanation would seem to be at variance with the context and with divine principles. If sin is personified as a wild beast lying in wait for Cain, it would be appropriate to continue the comparison by translating, as does the RSV, “its desire is for you, but you must master it.”

**8. Cain talked with Abel.** The subject of Cain’s talk with his brother is not stated. The RSV, following the Samaritan Version and the LXX, has added the words, “Let us go out into the field.” This clause appears to be a copyist’s addition, though the context makes it entirely possible that the original read thus. It is improbable that Cain told Abel what God had just said to him, but he may have tried to argue with his brother, accusing God of unrighteousness in His dealings with him.

**When they were in the field.** Cain’s “works were evil and his brother’s righteous” (1 John 3:12). That is why Cain killed his brother. Enmity between good and evil, predicted by God before the expulsion from the garden, was seen now for the first time in its most horrible form. Twice in this verse the words “his brother” are added to the name of Abel to bring out clearly the horror of Cain’s sin. In him the seed of the woman had already become the seed of the serpent. Cain’s crime revealed the true nature of Satan as “a murderer from the beginning” (John 8:44). Already there had sprung up that contrast of two distinct “seeds” within the human race, a contrast that runs through the entire history of mankind.

**9. Where is Abel thy brother?** As with Adam and Eve, God now sought after Cain, to present his transgression to him in its true light, to stir up his guilty conscience to repentance, and to create in him a new heart. As God had come to Cain’s parents with a question, so He now came to Cain. The results, however, were vastly different; Cain boldly denied his guilt. Disobedience had led to murder; to murder he now added falsehood and defiance, blindly thinking to hide his crime from God.

**10. What hast thou done?** The tactful, indirect approach having proved unavailing, God proceeded to charge Cain with his crime. The question “What hast thou done?” implied perfect knowledge of the facts.

**The voice of thy brother’s blood.** The trembling murderer found an all-seeing and all-knowing God reading his naked soul. How could He who notes the sparrow’s fall, He

who is the author of life, be deaf to the silent cry of the first martyr (see Ps. 116:15)? Blood is life, and as such is precious to the great Giver of life (Gen. 9:4).

Against all the inhumanity of man toward his fellow men down through the intervening ages, the cry of Abel ascends to God (Heb. 11:4). Abel met his death at the hand of a near kinsman. Similarly, Jesus, coming to this earth as a kinsman to the human race, was rejected and sent to His death by His brethren.

**11. Now art thou cursed.** A divine curse had already been visited upon the serpent and the ground (ch. 3:14, 17); now for the first time it falls on man. The Hebrew phrase rendered in the KJV, thou art “cursed from the earth,” may with equal accuracy be translated as a comparative, “Thou art more cursed than the earth.” Some commentators have understood this text to mean that Cain was banished to a less fertile region. The context (vs. 12, 14) seems to favor this explanation, or perhaps the idea that because Cain had misused the fruits of the ground God would no longer permit him to gain his livelihood by tilling the soil. A wanderer in the earth (vs. 14, 16), whether shepherd or nomad, cannot be a successful farmer.

**12. It shall not henceforth yield.** Cain was doomed to a life of perpetual wandering in order to secure food for himself, his family, and his beasts. Having been compelled to drink innocent blood, the earth rebelled, as it were, against the murderer; and when he should till it, it would withhold its strength. Cain was to have but little reward for his labor. Similarly, at a later time, the land of Canaan is said to have “spued out” the Canaanites on account of their abominations (Lev. 18:28).

**13. Greater than I can bear.** The divine sentence turned Cain’s truculence into despair. Though Cain deserved the death penalty, a merciful and patient God gave him further opportunity for repentance and conversion. But instead of repenting, Cain complained of his punishment as being more severe than he deserved. No word of sorrow came from his lips, not even a recognition of guilt or of shame, nothing but the sad resignation of a criminal who realizes he is powerless to escape the penalty he so justly deserves.

**14. Thou hast driven me out.** Cain knew that he was to be cut off, not only from the blessings of the earth, but, by his own choice, from all contract with God as well.

**Every one that findeth me.** Cain despaired of his own life, in fear that the curse of God meant the withdrawal of divine restraint from those who might seek to avenge Abel’s blood. A guilty conscience warned him that he deserved to die and that henceforth his own life was in danger. But the death penalty, his due, was commuted to banishment for life. Instead of being imprisoned he was to be shut out from every happy, normal association with his fellow men, and, by his own choice, from God. He who had taken his brother’s life saw in his fellow creatures his own prospective executioners.

**15. Therefore.** It is not entirely clear what antecedent idea is intended by this word. The RSV, following the LXX, the Syriac, and the Vulgate, renders it, “Not so!” In other words, to Cain’s declaration, “Every one that findeth me shall slay me,” God replied, “Not so!”

**Sevenfold.** This implies a most severe penalty upon anyone murdering Cain (see Lev. 26:18, 21, 24, 28; Ps. 79:12; Prov. 6:31). Special protection was granted him in harmony with the principle, “Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord” (Rom. 12:19). The tares must grow together with the wheat; the fruits of sin must be permitted to reach

maturity, in order that the character of its seed may be manifest. The lives of Cain and his descendants were to be exhibits of the outworking of sin in rational beings (PP 78).

**A mark.** Some commentators have seen in this mark an outward sign attached to Cain's person, whereas others believe that he received a sign from God as a divine pledge that nothing would endanger his life. Whatever it was, it was not a sign of God's forgiveness but only of temporal protection.

**16. Cain went out.** He felt neither remorse nor repentance, but only the heavy burden of God's displeasure. He left the divine presence, probably never to return, and began his life as a wanderer in the land of Nod, to the east of Eden. This antediluvian land, whose name means "wandering," "flight," or "exile," became the home of the godless descendants of Cain.

**17. Cain knew his wife.** The sudden mention of Cain's wife creates no problem. Chapter 5:4 states that Adam "begat sons and daughters" besides the three sons whose names are given. The earliest inhabitants of earth had no other choice than to marry their brothers and sisters in order to fulfill the divine command, "Be fruitful and multiply" (see Acts 17:26). That the custom long remained in vogue is seen in Abraham's marriage to his half sister Sarah. Such marriages were later prohibited (see Lev. 18:6–17).

**She conceived, and bare Enoch.** That God did not withhold offspring from the disobedient and reprobate Cain is another evidence of His merciful character (Ps. 145:9; Matt. 5:45). The name "Enoch" may mean "dedication" or "consecration" it may also mean "initiation." Perhaps the name Cain gave his son indicated his intention to begin living his life as he pleased. Luther thought the mother may have selected the name Enoch, thereby expressing hope that the child might be an augury of blessing for their saddened home.

**He builded a city.** Literally, "he began to build." This was probably no more than an attempt to erect a fortified camp for his family as a more or less permanent place of abode. This suggests that Cain may not have had much confidence in God's assurance of protection. It is possible also that his attempt to found a city may have been dictated by a desire to bid defiance to the curse that doomed him to a wandering life.

It is worthy of note that the world's first "city" was founded by the world's first murderer, a perversely impenitent individual whose life, wholly and hopelessly dedicated to evil, was spent in defiance of God. God's plan that man should live amid nature and behold in it the Creator's might and power was in this way thwarted. Many present-day evils are the direct result of the unnatural gathering together of human beings into great cities, where man's worst instincts bear rule, and vice of every type flourishes.

**The name of the city.** In naming this city after his son Enoch, "dedication" or "initiation," Cain apparently consecrated it to the realization of his sinful ambitions.

**18. Unto Enoch was born Irad.** Of the following generations only names are mentioned. The names resemble those of some of Seth's descendants, as for instance Irad and Jared, Mehujael and Mahalaleel, Methusael and Methuselah, Cain and Cainan, but the names of Enoch and Lamech occur in both families. Critical scholars have considered this as proof that the two genealogical tables are simply different forms of one original legend. However, similarity in names in no way implies identity of persons. For instance, the name Korah appears in the families of Levi (Ex. 6:24) and Esau (Gen. 36:5), and Enoch is the name not only of Cain's son and one of Seth's pious descendants but also of the eldest son of Reuben (ch. 46:9), and of a son of Midian (ch. 25:4). The character of

Enoch the son of Cain is in such distinct contrast to that of Enoch in the line of Seth as to preclude identifying the two as one individual.

As to the other pairs of names, similarity is only superficial. The names in Hebrew, as in English, are not identical either in spelling or in meaning. For example, Irad has been translated as “townsman” or “ornament of a city,” Jared as “descent.” Mehujael may mean either “smitten of God” or “destroyed of God”; Mahalaleel, “praise of God.” Methusael has the meaning “man of God” or “man of prayer”; Methuselah, “man of growth.” The meaning of Lamech is not known.

**19. Lamech took unto him two wives.** Lamech was the first to pervert marriage as ordained by God into the lust of the eye and the lust of the flesh, without even the pretext that the first wife had no children. Polygamy was a new evil that held its ground for long centuries. The names of Lamech’s wives are suggestive of sensual attraction, Adah meaning “adornment” and Zillah either “shadow” or “tinkling.”

**20. Adah bare Jabal.** The names of Adah’s two sons occur nowhere else in the Bible. Their meaning is not clear. Jabal may mean “sprout,” “leader,” or “stream”; Jubal, a “joyful sound” or a “channel.” These names may indicate their particular abilities. The first was a typical nomadic herdsman. Meaning literally “possession,” the word “cattle” signifies the wealth of the nomads, which consisted of sheep and other domesticated animals.

**21. Such as handle the harp and organ.** “Harp,” *kinnor*. The world’s first musical instrument, the “harp,” is mentioned 42 times in the OT (see Ps. 33:2; etc.). The word *kinnor* is always translated in the KJV “harp,” though it is actually a lyre. Many ancient pictures of this instrument from Egypt, Palestine, and Mesopotamia bring us a clear idea of what the *kinnor* was like. These pictures represent the instrument as consisting of a sounding board across which strings are stretched. In the earliest instruments the strings run parallel, but in later models they diverge as they extend outward.

The origin of the word translated in the KJV “organ,” in the RV “pipe,” and identified by some with the bagpipe, is not so certain as that of the lyre. Whatever the correct explanation of the name may be, all modern scholars agree that the instrument was a flute. This instrument is still played by the shepherds throughout the Near East.

**22. Tubal-cain.** Although “Tubal” appears frequently as a personal name in the OT (Gen. 10:2; Isa. 66:19; Eze. 27:13; etc.), its meaning is obscure. The word “cain” may have been added later, perhaps to identify him as a Cainite.

**An instructor of every artificer.** The Hebrew word translated “instructor” in the KJV means literally “hammerer,” “whetter,” or “forger,” and refers to early work in bronze and iron, which was more a process of hammering than of smelting. Doubt has been expressed that iron was known as early as Genesis implies. However, recent discoveries made in Egypt and Mesopotamia have shown that iron objects were produced in the earliest historical periods of which we have record. The first iron objects were meteoric, their high percentage of nickel precluding terrestrial origin. Objects made of meteoric iron must have been produced by hammering rather than by smelting, again confirming the Biblical record. Though early man did not have bronze and iron in large quantities, there is no reason to doubt the accuracy of the Bible statement that antediluvian man knew how to use these metals. Copper, bronze, and iron objects (ornaments, tools,

weapons, vessels, etc.) from very early levels of civilization are being found in increasing numbers.

**Naamah.** Why Tubal-cain's sister should be specifically mentioned is unknown. Jewish tradition made her Noah's wife. Her name, meaning "the beautiful" or "the pleasant one," reflects the worldly mind of the Cainites, who looked for beauty rather than for character as the chief attraction in women.

**23. I have slain a man.** Lamech's words, in Hebrew poetic form, have aptly been called the "Song of Lamech." So far as is known this "song" constitutes the world's first poetic composition. The exact meaning of his somewhat cryptic words is difficult to ascertain. Origen wrote two books concerning the "song" and then pronounced it beyond explanation. The Hebrew words employed permit the explanation that Lamech had slain one or two men for wounds they had inflicted upon him, with the implication that he would be ready to commit such acts again should the necessity arise. His threatened revenge, however, is ambiguous, and leaves room for more than one interpretation. The RSV reads: "I have slain a man for wounding me."

**25. Seth.** After having reported the development of the ungodly family of Cain, the author returns to Adam and Eve and recounts briefly the history of those who were loyal to God. Shortly after Abel's death a third son was born, to whom his mother gave the name Seth, *Sheth*, the "appointed one," the "compensation" or "substitute" for Abel. Eve, seeing that her godly son was dead and recognizing that God's words concerning the promised seed could not find their fulfillment in cursed Cain, expressed her faith that the promised Deliverer would come through Seth. Her faith was rewarded, for the descendants of Seth obeyed the Lord.

**26. Enos.** In his time a more formal worship was begun. Man had of course called upon the Lord before Enos' birth, but as time went on a more pronounced distinction arose between those who worshiped the Lord and those who defied Him. The expression "to call upon the name of the Lord" is used frequently in the OT to indicate, as it does here, public worship (Ps. 79:6; 116:17; Jer. 10:25; Zeph. 3:9).

### ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

1-15PP 71-80; SR 52-56

1-5PP 71, 364

3 GW 156, 162; 4T 395, 609

3, 4 COL 152; PP 84

3-8Ev 598; TM 77

4 6T 392

5 PP 73

6, 7 PP 74

8 DA 618; MB 50, 54; PP 77

9 ChS 13; CS 52; FE 50; ML 59; Te 41; WM 220; 1T 113, 149, 368, 480, 535; 2T 33, 228; 4T 69, 648; 5T 459, 531, 569, 611

9-12PP 77; SR 54

10 MH 340; Te 41; 5T 451

15 EW 213; PP 325

16 PP 62

16, 17 PP 81

19 SR 76

23, 24 PP 81  
25 SR 57  
25, 26 PP 80

## CHAPTER 5

1 *The genealogy, age, and death of the patriarchs from Adam unto Noah.* 24 *The godliness and translation of Enoch.*

**1. This is the book.** A period of about 1,500 years is covered in the list of generations presented in this chapter. Only the names of the principal patriarchs, their age at the birth of their first-born sons, and their total age are given. In somewhat monotonous outline we see them being born, growing up to manhood, marrying wives, begetting children, and then dying, without leaving to posterity more than their names to remember. Only two, Enoch and Noah, surpass the others in excellence and piety. Enoch was the first sinner, saved by grace, to be honored with translation; Noah was the only family head to survive the Flood.

This chapter contains a family register like others incorporated at different places into the OT narrative. The expression, “the book of the generations of” someone, is a technical term for a genealogical list (see Matt. 1:1). The word “book,” *sepher*, is used in the OT to refer to a complete scroll (Jer. 36:2, 8) or for a single leaf of a scroll (Deut. 24:1).

**2. Called their name Adam.** The dignity of their being created in God’s likeness, their distinction in sex, and their divine benediction are described briefly. The only new information is the name given them by God—“man,” *’adam*. From this text it is clear that the name Adam was originally generic, inclusive of both the man and the woman, and equivalent to our word *mankind*.

**3. In his own likeness.** Though Seth was not Adam’s first-born son, he was the one through whom the godly line was to be perpetuated. Adam’s career after the Fall is summarized in three short verses that serve as a pattern for subsequent biographies.

**5. All the days that Adam lived.** The remarkable longevity of the antediluvian race has been the target of much criticism. Some have declared that the figures are the product of a mythical age or the result of faulty transmission of the text. Others have suggested that they do not represent individuals but dynasties, or that they were not years but shorter periods, perhaps months. All such considerations must be rejected as doing violence to a literal interpretation of the text and to its inspired origin. We must accept these figures as historical and accurate. The longevity of the antediluvian race may be attributed to the following causes: (1) the original vitality with which mankind was endowed at creation, (2) superior piety and intelligence, (3) the residual effect of the fruit of the tree of life, (4) the superior quality of available food, and (5) divine grace in postponing the execution of the penalty of sin. Adam lived to see eight successive generations reach maturity. Inasmuch as his life spanned more than half the time to the Flood, it is apparent that many could hear from his own lips the story of creation, of Eden, of the Fall, and of the plan of redemption as it had been revealed to him.

**And he died.** With these somber words ends Adam’s short biography. The monotonous repetition of this statement at the close of each biography—except that of Enoch—affirms the dominion of death (Rom. 5:12). It reveals that the sentence of death

was not a vain threat. Death is a persistent reminder of the nature and results of disobedience.

Biographies of the succeeding patriarchs follow the pattern of Adam's life story and do not call for individual explanation (see on ch. 4:17, 18 for an explanation of some of the names).

**22. Enoch walked with God.** Enoch's most exceptional life called for very special attention. Twice it is stated that "he walked with God." This expression is used also of Noah (ch. 6:9), and is found, in similar words, in other passages (see Gen. 17:1; Deut. 13:4; Ps. 116:9; Micah 6:8; Eph. 5:1, 2). It portrays a life of singularly elevated piety, not merely the constant realization of the divine presence or even a continued effort at holy obedience, but maintenance of the most intimate relations with God. Enoch's life was most evidently in complete and beautiful harmony with the divine will.

**After he begat Methuselah.** The statement that "he walked with God" after Methuselah's birth does not imply that he had been a godless person before and only now experienced conversion. He belonged to the faithful race and doubtless had served God loyally during the first 65 years of his life. But with the arrival of a son to grace his home he understood through experience the depth of a father's love and the confidence of a helpless baby. As never before he was drawn to God, his own heavenly Father, and eventually qualified for translation. His walk with God consisted not only in the contemplation of God but also in active ministry on behalf of his fellow men. He looked forward to the second Advent of Christ, earnestly and solemnly warning the sinners around him of the terrible doom that awaited the ungodly (Jude 14, 15).

**Three hundred years.** Enoch's constant faithfulness manifested over a period of 300 years speaks encouragement to those Christians who seem to find it difficult to "walk with God" for even one day.

**And begat sons and daughters.** According to the Inspired Record, Enoch begat sons and daughters during this life of exceptional piety. Here is undeniable evidence that the state of matrimony is in accord with the most strict life of holiness.

**24. He was not; for God took him.** The most significant event of the antediluvian era, an event that filled the faithful with hope and joy, the translation of Enoch, is related by Moses in these few simple words. Enoch was translated "that he should not see death" (Heb. 11:5). This meaning is implicit in the word *laqach*, "he [God] took away," a word that is never used to denote death. Modern Christian usage of the expression as a euphemism for death is without Scriptural authority. The word is used, however, in connection with Elijah's translation (2 Kings 2:3, 5, 9, 10). The LXX renders it "for God translated him," an expression taken over literally in Heb. 11:5. So far as we know, Enoch was the only antediluvian believer not to see death. As a paragon of virtue, Enoch, "the seventh from Adam," stands in sharp contrast to the seventh generation of the Cainite line, Lamech, who added the crime of murder to the vice of polygamy (Jude 14; cf. Gen. 4:16-19).

Enoch's departure was witnessed by some of both the righteous and the wicked (see PP 88). The translation of Enoch was designed by God, not only to reward the piety of a godly man, but to demonstrate the certainty of God's promised deliverance from sin and death. The memory of this remarkable event has survived in Jewish tradition (Ecclesiasticus 44:16), in the Christian record (Heb. 11:5; Jude 14), and even in heathen fables. The Apocryphal *Book of Enoch* describes the patriarch as exhorting his son and all

his contemporaries, and warning them of coming judgment. The Jewish *Book of Jubilee* says that he was carried into Paradise, where he wrote down the judgment of all men. Arabic legends have made him the inventor of writing and arithmetic. His departure must have made a tremendous impression upon his contemporaries, if we are to judge by the extent to which the story of Enoch has come down to later generations. Enoch's exemplary life with its glorious climax testifies in our day of the possibility of living in a wicked world without being "of it."

**25. Methuselah.** Enoch's short earthly life of only 365 years was followed by that of his son Methuselah, who lived for 969 years, to within the year of the Flood. The meaning of his name is uncertain. Commentators have explained it variously as "man of military weapons," "man of sending forth," or "man of growth." The meaning of the name of his son Lamech is even more obscure.

**29. Noah.** In the hope that his first-born might be the promised seed, the redeemer for whose coming the faithful longingly waited, Lamech called him Noah, "rest," saying, "this same one shall comfort us." The name "Noah," *nuach*, "to rest," and the word "to comfort," *nacham*, both point back to a common root meaning "to sigh," "to breathe," "to rest," and "to lie down." Lamech was a godly man who followed in the footsteps of his exemplary grandfather Enoch and his pious, long-lived father Methuselah.

**Our work.** Lamech apparently felt the burden of tilling the ground that God had cursed and looked forward in faith to the time when the existing misery and corruption would cease and redemption from the curse would come. His hope that this might be realized in his son was not fulfilled, at least in the way he expected. Nevertheless, Noah was destined to proclaim a bold warning against evil and to play an important role by becoming the progenitor of all who have lived since his time.

**32. Noah was five hundred years old.** In Hebrew this expression reads literally, "Noah was a son of 500 years," meaning that he was in his 500th year. Now "son of a year" means, strictly speaking, within the first year of life (Ex. 12:5). This fact, an important point in Hebrew chronological language, becomes even more clear from a comparison of the 6th and 11th verses of ch. 7. Although both verses speak of the beginning of the Flood, one of them declares Noah to be 600 years old, and the other says that the event occurred in Noah's 600th year. Consequently the former verse, "Noah was a son of 600 years," means that he was "in his 600th year," and not in his 601st year as we would naturally conclude.

Not one of the preceding patriarchs waited so many years before the birth of his offspring as did Noah; half a millennium passed before his own home was blessed by the arrival of a son (see p. 183). This genealogy breaks off with Noah, mentioning only the birth of his sons. The mention of all three sons foreshadows their importance in repopulating the earth after the Flood.

**Noah begat Shem, Ham, and Japheth.** Another principle of Hebrew genealogy must be explained in this connection. From the sequence of the names of Noah's sons given here and elsewhere the impression may be gained that Shem was the oldest and Japheth the youngest of Noah's three sons. That this is incorrect can be seen from a comparison of this text with certain others. Noah's sons were not triplets (see chs. 9:24; 10:21). According to ch. 9:24 Ham was the youngest of the brothers. Chapter 10:21, furthermore, refers either to Shem or to Japheth as "the elder" of the two, although the ambiguous Hebrew grammatical construction does not make it clear which of the two was older.

From ch. 11:10 we learn that Shem was 100 years old two years after the Flood, when his father would be about 602 years of age; the age of Noah at Shem's birth must then have been 502 years—not 500 as might be inferred from ch. 5:32. But one of the three, the eldest, was born in Noah's 500th year (ch. 5:32). These texts lead to the conclusion that actually Japheth was the eldest son of Noah, being born when his father was 500 years old, and that Shem and Ham followed in that order. The KJV translation of ch. 10:21 is therefore the correct one, rather than that of the RSV, according to which Shem would have been the eldest son. The last part of ch. 5:32 would therefore be stated more accurately, "And Noah began to beget Japheth, Shem, and Ham."

Shem is mentioned as the first of the three sons because of his importance as the progenitor of the postdiluvian patriarchal line from which the chosen people of God, together with the promised seed, should spring. Ham is mentioned next as the forefather of races with whom the OT readers of Moses' time, and later, had much more contact than with the descendants of Japheth, who inhabited more remote regions. The same principle is repeated in Abraham's case, where he, the youngest of Terah's sons, is mentioned first (ch. 11:27) on account of his greater importance to those for whom the record was written.

By reducing the ages of Jared, Methuselah, and Lamech at the birth of their first-born sons, the Samaritan Pentateuch leaves only 1,307 years between creation and the Flood, instead of 1,656 years as in the Hebrew text and English translations based upon it.

But the LXX, in contrast, presents a much longer period before the Flood. It does this by assigning to some of the patriarchs, at the oldest son's birth, an age 100 years higher than does the Hebrew text. Therefore it arrives at a total of 2,242 or 2,262 years (the various MSS show a discrepancy between 167 and 187 for Methuselah's age at the birth of Lamech).

Josephus, whose figures are practically identical with those of the LXX, presumably derived them from that version, which was current in his day. Josephus gives Methuselah's age as 187.

If the Septuagint figure 187 for Lamech is to be taken as a correction of an earlier 167, it can be easily accounted for (see p. 180).

Many readers are not aware of those differences in the ancient lists, because the KJV and practically all other Protestant translations into English are based on the Hebrew text.

### THE CHRONOLOGY OF GENESIS 5

	Hebrew		Samaritan		LXX		Josephus	
	Age at son's birth	Age at death	Age at son's birth	Age at death	Age at son's birth	Age at death	Age at son's birth	Age at death
Adam	130	930	130	930	230	930	230	930
Seth	105	912	105	912	205	912	205	912
Enos	90	905	90	905	190	905	190	905
Cainan	70	910	70	910	170	910	170	910
Mahalaleel	65	895	65	895	165	895	165	895
Jared	162	962	62	847	162	962	162	962
Enoch	65	365	65	365	165	365	165	365
Methuselah	187	969	67	720	167*	969	187	969
Lamech	182	777	53	653	188	753	182	777

Noah	500	950	500	950	500	950	500	950
Noah's age at Flood	600		600		600		600	

It is interesting to note that, just as the list in Gen. 5 records ten long-lived generations before the Flood, similarly the ancient Mesopotamian traditions also point to precisely ten generations before the Flood and to the longevity of the race during that era. The Babylonian list opens with the remark that “sovereignty descended from heaven,” and gives *Alulim*, meaning “man,” as the progenitor of the human race (cf. Heb. *'adam*, “man”). There are no other similarities between the two lists, however, either in the names or in time periods.

### ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

1-32CH 19; PP 80-89; 3T 139

1, 3 PP 80

3-8SR 57

5 PP 82

5, 8 3T 138

18-24SR 57

21, 22 GW 51; PP 84

21-248T 305, 329, 331

22 CT 487; Ev 78, 681; ML 8, 14, 98, 255; MM 124, 276; PP 92; SC 103; 2T 121; 3T 543; 4T 616; 5T 113, 535, 596

24 Ed 127; EW 40; GC 299; GW 254; MB 54; ML 341; PK 486; PP 87; SC 103; SR 59; TM 338, 388; 6T 392; 7T 155

### CHAPTER 6

1 *The wickedness of the world, which provoked God's wrath, and caused the flood, 8 Noah findeth grace.* 14 *The order, form, and end of the ark.*

**1. And it came to pass.** This expression does not imply that the conditions here described arose subsequent to events recorded in previous chapters. The author is simply pointing to the state of society in the days of Noah, when ten generations of increasing corruption reached a climax.

**Men began to multiply.** The human race increased rapidly not only in wickedness but in numbers as well. Among the manifold dangers for pious Sethites were the beautiful daughters of unbelievers. Wives were taken not because of their virtue but for beauty's sake, with the result that godlessness and wickedness made heavy inroads among Seth's descendants.

**2. The sons of God.** This phrase has been interpreted in various ways. Ancient Jewish commentators, the early church Fathers, and many modern expositors have thought these “sons” to be angels, comparing them with the “sons of God” of Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7. This view must be rejected, because punishment soon to be meted out was for the sins of human beings (see v. 3), and not of angels. Further, angels do not marry (Matt. 22:30). The “sons of God” were none other than the descendants of Seth, and the “daughters of men,” of the godless Cainites (PP 81). God later spoke of Israel as His “firstborn son” (Ex. 4:22), and Moses called the people of Israel “children of the Lord your God” (Deut. 14:1).

***They took them wives.*** These unholy alliances between Sethites and Cainites were responsible for the rapid increase of wickedness among the former. God has ever warned His followers not to marry unbelievers, because of the great danger to which the believer is thus exposed and to which he usually succumbs (Deut. 7:3, 4; Joshua 23:12, 13; Ezra 9:2; Neh. 13:25; 2 Cor. 6:14, 15). But the Sethites did not heed the warnings they surely must have received. Guided by sense attractions, they were not content with the beautiful daughters of the godly race, and often preferred Cainite brides. Moreover, the prevalence of polygamy seems to be suggested by the plural expression used, they took “wives.”

**3. *My spirit shall not always strive.*** The fact that this statement follows immediately after the reference to these unsanctified marriages would suggest that God’s displeasure was most particularly displayed toward this evil practice. Captive to their passions, they were no longer subject to God’s Spirit. The word “strive” in the Hebrew means “to rule,” and “to judge,” as corollary to ruling. These words indicate that the Holy Spirit could continue working but a little longer, and would then be withdrawn from the unregenerate and unrepentant of the human race. Even God’s long-suffering must end. Peter refers to the work of the Spirit on the hearts of the antediluvians, saying that the Spirit of Christ preached to these prisoners of Satan (1 Peter 3:18–20).

***For that he also is flesh.*** This expression may also be translated, “in their going astray man is flesh,” from *shagag*, “to wander,” “to go astray.” By following after the lusts of the flesh, says God, men have surrendered themselves to its desires to the extent that they are no longer responsive to the control of the Holy Spirit. Insensibility to divine influence is complete; hence, the Spirit of God is to be withdrawn. There is no further use in “striving” to restrain or improve them.

***His days.*** This divine prediction cannot mean that man’s life span would henceforth be restricted to 120 years. (Compare ages of men after the Flood.) They predict, rather, that God’s patience would come to an end and probation close within the period of time here specified. In the meantime, divine mercy lingered.

Christ compared God’s dealings with the antediluvians to His work for the human race at the end of time (Matt. 24:37–39). Under similar circumstances God may be expected to work in similar ways. However, attempts to determine the time of Christ’s coming on the basis of this are wholly invalid. We are now living on borrowed time, knowing that the destruction of the world will soon occur (see 2 Peter 3:3–7). We know also that God’s Spirit will not endlessly strive with men who do not choose to heed His warnings and prepare for that great event.

**4. *There were giants in the earth.*** These “giants,” *nephilim*, were not the product of mixed marriages, as some have suggested. The LXX translated *nephilim* by *gigantes*, from which the English “giant” is derived. In Num. 13:33 the Israelites reported that they felt like mere grasshoppers in the sight of the *nephilim*, which the KJV translates “giants.” There is reason to believe that this Hebrew word may come from the root *naphal*, and that the *nephilim* were “violent” ones, or terrorists, rather than physical “giants.” Since in those days the entire human race was of great stature, it must be that character rather than height is designated. The antediluvians generally possessed great physical and mental strength. These individuals, renowned for wisdom and skill,

persistently devoted their intellectual and physical powers to the gratification of their own pride and passions and to the oppression of their fellow men (PP 80, 84, 90).

**5. God.** To be consistent, the KJV should read “Lord” instead of “God,” as in the Hebrew the word *Yahweh*, Jehovah, is used. Apparently, KJV translators were influenced by the LXX, which reads, the “Lord God.”

**The wickedness of man was great.** Human language could hardly provide a more forceful picture of human depravity. There was no more good left in man; he was “rotten to the core.” His “every imagination” was evil. The word “imagination,” from *yesser*, means “device” or “formation,” and is derived from the verb “to fashion,” “to form,” *yašar*. Therefore “imagination” refers to evil thoughts as the product of an evil heart. Christ said, “Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts,” and observed that they in turn produce “murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies” (Matt. 15:19). The heart was popularly considered the center of the higher powers of the mind—the conscience and the will. A contaminated “heart” sooner or later infects the entire life.

**Continually.** Literally “every day” or “all day long.” This brings the sorry description of antediluvian wickedness to a climax. If this is not total depravity, how could human language express it? Here we find evil supreme in the heart, in the “imagination,” or thoughts, and in the actions. With very few exceptions, there was nothing but evil, not temporarily but always, not in the case of merely a few individuals but in society as a whole. This came about because men were “willingly ignorant” of God’s word (2 Peter 3:5).

**6. It repented the Lord.** The force of the words “it repented” the Lord, may be gathered from the explanatory statement “it grieved him” to His heart. This shows that the repentance of God does not presuppose lack of foresight on His part or any variableness in His nature or purpose. In this sense God never repents of anything (1 Sam. 15:29). The “repentance” of God is an expression referring to the pain of divine love occasioned by the sinfulness of man. It presents the truth that God, in consistency with His immutability, assumes a changed position in respect to changed man. The mention of divine grief at man’s depraved state is a touching indication that God did not hate man. Human sin fills the divine heart with deep-felt grief and pity. It excites all the fathomless ocean of sympathy for sinning men of which infinite love is capable. Nonetheless, it moves Him also to judicial retribution (see Jer. 18:6–10; PP 630).

**7. I will destroy man.** The Hebrew expression here translated “I will destroy” means literally “I will wipe off” or “blot out” or “erase” (see Ex. 32:32, 33; Isa. 43:25). Its use in this passage, describing the extinction of the human race in general, by a devastating flood, is most appropriate.

**8. Noah found grace.** In these words mercy is seen in the midst of wrath. By them God pledged the preservation and restoration of humanity. The word “grace” occurs here for the first time in Scripture, and clearly has the same meaning as in the NT references, where the merciful, unmerited favor of God exercised toward undeserving sinners is described. How deeply God loved man even in his fallen state can be observed from a number of factors. He gave them a gospel of mercy, in the promise of the woman’s seed; a ministry of mercy, by raising up and maintaining a succession of pious men to preach the gospel and warn them against the ways of sin; a spirit of mercy to strive and plead with them; a providence of mercy, by measuring out to them a long probationary period

of time; an additional grant of mercy, a reprieve of 120 years; and finally an example of mercy, by saving the righteous when all others were destroyed. This ancient example of grace and mercy is a source of assurance and hope for believers who live at the end of time, a time that Christ Himself compared to Noah's age (see Matt. 24:37–39). His loyal followers can rest assured that God will accept them as He accepted Noah, will likewise preserve them amid the evil of this day, and provide for their safety in the coming judgment.

**9. Noah was a just man.** A new subtitle introduces Noah's history and that of the Flood. The author presents, first, the reasons why Noah had found grace in God's sight and was spared during the coming destruction. It was not some divine whim that made him the recipient of God's favor, but a life that was in harmony with God's will. Noah is characterized by three expressions, each one placing him in a most favorable light in contrast with his contemporaries. He was a "just man." The word "just" does not imply spotless innocence, but uprightness, honesty, virtue. It is noteworthy that he is not merely called "just," but a "just man." To live an exemplary life in Noah's time required a man who could stand fearlessly and steadfastly against evil inducements, subtle temptations, and vile mockery. He was no weakling, void of judgment or will power; he was a "man," strong of conviction, straight in thinking and action.

**Perfect in his generations.** The second attribute points to Noah as being "blameless in his generation," RSV. This does not mean that he lived in a state of sinlessness, but rather of moral integrity. It refers not only to Noah's lifetime of piety but also to the constancy of his religion amid the miasma of iniquity in which he lived. To be sure, he was of pure descent, and in that respect also distinct from his contemporaries, many of whom were the offspring of promiscuous marriages between the godly and the ungodly.

**Noah walked with God.** Third, Noah's life resembled that of his pious ancestor Enoch (see ch. 5:22, 24), who had been translated to eternal glory only 69 years before Noah's birth. During his own childhood, when Enoch's translation was still vivid in the memory of the older generation, Noah must have heard much of that godly man's life.

But the fact that Noah is thus described does not imply that by his own efforts he had attained unto righteousness. Like all others who are true children of God, he was saved by faith in God (see Heb. 11:7).

**10. Noah begat three sons.** See on ch. 5:32.

**11. The earth also was corrupt.** The sinful condition of antediluvian man is represented as corrupting the whole earth. Elsewhere the term "corruption" is applied to idolatry, the sin of perverting and depraving the worship of God (Ex. 32:7; Deut. 32:5; Judges 2:19; 2 Chron. 27:2). They practiced evil publicly, flagrantly, as the expression "before God" implies.

**12. God looked upon the earth.** Conditions on this earth became the subject of God's special investigation. Inspiration thus assures man that the coming judgment was not an ill-considered and arbitrary act of Deity. This investigation revealed that there no longer existed a distinction between the God-defying Cainites and God-fearing Sethites. With very few exceptions "all flesh" was corrupt.

**13. The end of all flesh.** Having concluded that sin could be checked by no other means than the annihilation of the race (save for one family), God announced His plan to Noah. The preceding notices of divine intent to destroy this earth (vs. 3, 7) are presumably the record of words God uttered in heavenly council, rather than to any

human ear. Here, however, a communication was made directly to Noah. This probably took place 120 years before the Flood, as suggested in v. 3. God wished to give men the opportunity to mend their evil ways, should they so desire, and accordingly commissioned Noah, a “preacher of righteousness” (2 Peter 2:5), to give this message of warning. This was in itself a manifestation of mercy, based upon the divine principle of not acting before men have been advised of what to expect in case of continued sin (Amos 3:7).

***The earth is filled with violence.*** God’s introductory words must have been shocking to Noah, but the reason for His fateful decision follows. Instead of filling the earth with a people who would attempt to live according to God’s will, man had “filled the earth with violence.”

***I will destroy them with the earth.*** Note that God did not announce His intention to destroy man “from” or “on” the earth but “with” it. Though the earth as such can suffer no penal destruction, it must share in man’s destruction, because, as his dwelling place and the scene of his criminal acts, it is one with him. This does not mean, of course, the annihilation of our planet, but rather the utter desolation of its surface.

**14. *Make thee an ark.*** Provision must be made to save Noah and his family, hence the command to build a ship. The Hebrew word translated “ark” is from an Egyptian term designating large seaworthy ships used for the transport of obelisks, and also processional barks for carrying sacred statues on the Nile.

***Gopher wood.*** The Hebrew word *gopher* is from the ancient Sumerian *giparu*, a tree not yet definitely identified. The ancient Egyptians built their big ships of cedar, and therefore commentators have suggested that *gopher* wood may have been timber from coniferous trees such as cedar or cypress. Their resinous quality would make them ideal for such use. Ellen G. White states that the timber Noah used was cypress (PP 95).

***Rooms shalt thou make.*** The ark was to be divided into cells, literally “nests,” needed especially for the many animals, and to be caulked within and without. The word translated “pitch” is of Babylonian origin, and designates both pitch and bitumen. Since ancient times such materials have been found in Mesopotamia and used for caulking ships (see on ch. 2:12).

**15. *This is the fashion.*** The ship was to be built according to exact divine instructions. Its dimensions as given to Noah show the vessel to be of extraordinary size. Had it not been for these detailed instructions from God, Noah, a man of no previous experience in ship construction or sailing, could never have built it. The largest ancient vessel now known was an Egyptian ship up to 130 cubits long and 40 cubits wide. The ark of Noah was almost three times as long. If the cubit of 20.6 in. is meant (cf. Deut. 3:11), the length of the ark would have been 515 ft., its width 86 ft., and its height 52 ft. It has been generally assumed that the ark was in the form of a chest or box rather than that of a ship, but this is nowhere stated in the Sacred Text. Because of the lack of precise information in regard to the form of the ship, it seems futile to compute the exact cubical contents of Noah’s ark. It is clear, however, from the given description, that it was a vessel of formidable dimensions, with ample space for the animals housed within and for a year’s food for all.

**16. *A window.*** Certain Hebrew words and the grammatical construction employed in this verse are the occasion of difficulty in ascertaining what Moses meant. The word

translated “window,” *sohar*, may mean either “light,” “light opening,” or “roof.” The translation “roof,” as in the RSV, seems to rest on stronger evidence than the translation “window.” The fact that Noah could not see the surface of the earth until the *sohar* was opened (see ch. 8:6) seems to favor this view. Whatever it may mean, light was admitted from the top (see PP 95).

***In a cubit shalt thou finish it above.*** This sentence is difficult to interpret. If the word *sohar* means a “light opening,” the sentence may refer to a kind of lattice-work one cubit high surrounding the upper part of the ark to admit light. If *sohar* means “roof,” it may have practically the same meaning, namely that there was one cubit between the roof and the upper edge of the walls.

**17. I, even I.** The repeated and emphatic “I” is a clear indication that the coming catastrophe was a divine visitation and not a natural occurrence.

***A flood of waters.*** The word “flood,” *mabbul*, is used throughout the OT only for the Flood of Noah, with the possible exception of Ps. 29:10. *Mabbul* may be derived from an Assyrian root meaning “to destroy.” The Hebrew construction of the phrase “a flood of waters” would permit the reading, “a destruction, [even] waters.” This passage is the first intimation of the means of destruction to be used.

**18. I establish my covenant.** The first recorded agreement between God and Noah (see on ch. 15:9–17 for the procedure followed in effecting a covenant). By concluding a covenant with Noah, God strengthened that righteous man’s confidence in the surety of the divine watchcare. Whatever might occur, Noah knew that he and his family would be saved.

***And thy sons.*** These promises included even Noah’s unborn sons and their wives, because at the time Noah was still childless, although already 480 years of age (see on ch. 5:32). Not one of Noah’s ancestors had waited so long for offspring, and he may have given up the hope of being blessed with children. On many occasions God prepared His chosen agents for times of crisis by leading them through long periods of disappointment, that they might learn patience and trust in Him. This very experience came to the parents of Isaac, Samuel, and John the Baptist. The commission to build the ark, then, included indirect assurance that in preserving life, the family line of Noah would not become extinct. The birth of his sons would then be to Noah a sign of the equal certainty of the coming deluge. In faith he went forward, believing “things not seen as yet” (Heb. 11:7).

**19. Of every living thing.** Animal life, as well as human, was to be preserved through Noah’s faith. Commentators have seen a contradiction between the command to provide for “two of every sort” and the order given later to take seven of certain kinds (ch. 7:2). The first order was meant to inform Noah concerning the provisions that must be made to save the animal world from complete annihilation, and a pair of each would be essential for reproduction. That is all God intended on this occasion.

**21. Food.** Food for Noah’s family and fodder for the animals would have to be gathered in sufficient quantity to last for more than a year. It had to be not only harvested but stored away in the ark. The talent of a wise organizer was needed to accomplish all this work in an efficient way. Noah had to be not only a shipbuilder and a preacher but a farmer and provider as well.

**22. Thus did Noah.** The record of instruction given Noah closes with the observation that he had done everything God had asked him to do. He showed no hesitancy in obeying God. His association with relatives, who had become like the cursed Cainites, in no way influenced him. His education, at the hands of devout parents and grandparents, had prepared Noah for implicit faith in God and obedience to His instructions.

This short verse covers 120 years of faithful service. Some of those who believed Noah's message, like his grandfather Methuselah, died before the dread event took place. He lived out the message he preached, and those who knew him best, his own family, could not avoid his holy influence. His sons not only believed what he preached but actively participated in preparations for that awful event foretold before their birth.

Noah's experience sets a noble example for Christians who know they are living in the time of the end and are preparing themselves for translation. Their greatest missionary work is to be done in the home.

### ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

1-22PP 90-98; SR 62-64

2 PP 81, 338; SR 62; 5T 93

3 FE 504; GC 338; LS 208; PP 92, 102; 4T 308

5 CH 109; CS 205; DA 633; Ev 567; FE 221, 421; GC 543; MYP 456; PP 79, 91; Te 281

5, 6 SR 62

5-7PP 325

5-8GC 431

7 PK 297; PP 91, 92; SR 58

9 PP 363

11 GC 543; PP 91; Te 25

11-13CH 109

12, 13 PP 363

12-16PP 92

13 FE 504

13, 14 GC 338

14-16PP 92

17, 18 SR 146

18 PP 363

### CHAPTER 7

1 *Noah, with his family, and the living creatures, enter into the ark.* 17 *The beginning, increase, and continuance of the flood.*

**1. Come thou.** For 120 years God has continued long-suffering beyond measure (1 Peter 3:20), and Noah's life and labor had "condemned the world" (Heb. 11:7). But human beings carelessly and indifferently hastened onward to their doom. In saving one family and destroying all others God was not arbitrary. Noah alone had qualified for admission to the new earth that was to follow purification of the earth by water.

**2. Of every clean beast.** Instruction to take more clean than unclean animals with him into the ark presupposes that Noah knew how to distinguish between the two classes. It is clear that this distinction did not originate with Moses. It reached back to the very earliest times, to divine instructions concerning sacrifices—for which only clean animals might be used (see ch. 8:20).

Since ancient times the number of clean animals to be taken into the ark has been the subject of dispute among Bible translators and commentators. The Hebrew text, reading literally, “Thou shalt take to thee seven seven, a male with his female,” can be understood as meaning “seven pairs” or “seven of each kind” of animal. The LXX, Vulgate, and many ancient and modern scholars favor the translation “seven pairs,” whereas certain church Fathers, the Reformers, and in fact some scholars in all ages, have expressed themselves in favor of “seven individuals.” Whatever the exact explanation may be, it is obvious that more clean animals were to find room in the ark than unclean. Foreseeing the need for emergency food after the Flood had destroyed all vegetation, God knew man would need to eat, temporarily, the flesh of clean animals. Furthermore, they were needed for sacrificial purposes. For these obvious reasons God made provision to preserve enough clean animals that they might not become extinct. That in His first instructions to Noah (ch. 6:19) God made no distinction between clean and unclean animals can be explained by the fact that at that time, 120 years before the Flood, such minute instructions were not necessary (see on v. 9).

**5. *All that the Lord commanded him.*** As Noah had fulfilled all commands of God during the previous 120 years (see ch. 6:22), so he acted in like manner during the last hours before the Flood came. How much he must have suffered as he saw the multitude of human beings with whom he had lived for six centuries, indifferently and carelessly drifting to their doom! Knowing that all of them were to die at the end of one week, and seeing them carouse as if nothing would happen (Matt. 24:37–39), he must have redoubled his final efforts to warn and invite them to enter the ark with him. But all was to no avail.

**6. *Noah was six hundred years old.*** See on ch. 5:32.

**7. *Noah went in.*** That Noah did not wait until the last day prior to the Flood to enter the ark is obvious from a comparison of vs. 7 and 10. Moved with fear and impelled by faith, Noah and his family lost no time in obeying the command to enter the ship of refuge. Peter tells us that only eight persons were saved from the Flood (1 Peter 3:20); whence it is obvious that Noah and his three sons each had but one wife. Polygamy, common among the Cainites, was not yet practiced by the followers of the true God.

**9. *There went in two and two.*** In obedience to a mysterious impulse, animals of all kinds moved into the ark. Nothing less than divine power could have effected such a timely and orderly entrance into the huge vessel. What a vivid warning this must have been for the ungodly who witnessed it! Here were domesticated and wild beasts, creeping and flying animals, all making their way into the ark, apparently of their own volition. What a contrast—dumb brutes obedient to their Creator, and intelligent beings refusing to heed His warning call of mercy! If anything could do so, this should have made an impression upon the sinners; but they had hardened their hearts so long that even this miracle left them unimpressed.

**11. *Six hundredth year.*** The first of many exact chronological statements in the OT. So careful a statement as to the exact day, month, and year of the Flood stands in sharp contrast to the legendary accounts of ancient pagan peoples concerning the activity of their gods in relation to this world.

***The fountains of the great deep.*** This earth, which had never before experienced rain (see on Gen. 2:6), was suddenly flooded by huge masses of water. A heavy and incessant rain set in. Simultaneously the crust of the earth was broken open, with the result that

masses of water from beneath the surface of the earth gushed forth to work havoc and completely to inundate the once-dry land.

**16. *The Lord shut him in.*** This statement emphasizes the miraculous nature of events during the week immediately preceding the Flood. This divine act signified also that the time of grace for the fallen race had reached its end. As in the days of Noah the door of mercy closed a short time prior to the day of God's visitation, so in these last days God's people are to be warned, "Shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself" (Isa. 26:20, 21; Matt. 24:37-39; 2 Peter 3:6, 7).

**17. *The waters increased.*** The tremendous extent and intensity of the Flood is well expressed by a graphic series of verbs and adverbs: the waters "increased" (v. 17), "prevailed" and "increased greatly" (v. 18), "prevailed exceedingly" (v. 19), and even "prevailed" 15 cubits (about 26 ft.) above the mountains (v. 20). The description is simple, majestic, and vivid. An immeasurable volume of water covered the whole earth. The universal extent of the Flood could hardly have been expressed in more forceful words than these.

This description renders utterly foolish and impossible the view set forth by some that the Flood was a local affair in the Mesopotamian valley. Deposits of silt uncovered by archeologists at Ur of the Chaldees, for example, cannot by any stretch of the imagination be made to answer to the Genesis account of the Deluge (PP 107, 108).

Everywhere over the surface of the earth we find fossil remains of plants and animals obviously deposited by water. These deposits extend, in certain localities, to depths of at least three miles, but the average depth is somewhat over half a mile. The universal distribution of these remains and the depth of their burial testify unmistakably to both the worldwide extent and the terrific violence of the Noachian Deluge.

The universality of this catastrophe is also attested by the Flood legends preserved among the people of nearly every race on the face of the earth. Most complete among these accounts is that of the ancient Babylonians, who settled in close proximity to the place where the ark rested after the Flood and whence the human race again began to spread abroad. The Epic of Gilgamesh bears many conclusive similarities to that of Genesis, and yet differs from it in such a way as to prove it a corrupted version of the same story. A comparison of the two accounts presents impressive evidence of the inspiration of the Genesis narrative.

The ark is mentioned twice in vs. 17 and 18 as being "borne" or "lifted up." That it "went" with safety "upon the face of the waters" provides all future generations with assurance of God's ability to save those who trust and obey Him. The very elements loosed to destroy the wicked, safely bore up the faithful family of Noah. God is never at a loss for means to save His own. At the same time it is His will that man should exercise to the full the intelligence and strength God has given him. God miraculously preserved the ark, but He had Noah build it.

**21. *All flesh died.*** The word "all" is thrice used, and accompanied by a detailed list of the different forms of life, "fowl," "cattle," "beasts," "creeping things," and "man." Now, to make it still more emphatic, "every" is used twice.

**24. *The waters prevailed.*** That the 150 days include the 40 days of vs. 4, 12, 17, and so must be counted from the beginning of that period, is seen from v. 11, and ch. 8:4, where it is said that the ark rested on the mountains of Ararat on the 17th day of the 7th

month, exactly 5 months after the beginning of the rain. The reckoning is in terms of 30-day months.

### ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

1-24PP 97-105; SR 65-69

1 DA 634; EW 284; FE 504; PP 98, 117; SR 65, 76, 408

2, 3 PP 97

4 SR 65

9, 10 PP 98

10 SR 65

11 AA 572; PP 99, 104

11, 12 EW 284

11-24Ed 129

13 FE 504

16 PP 98; SR 65

18, 19 CD 49

20 PP 105

23 PP 112

### CHAPTER 8

1 *The waters asswage.* 4 *The ark resteth on Ararat.* 7 *The raven and the dove.* 15 *Noah, being commanded,* 18 *goeth forth of the ark.* 20 *He buildeth an altar, and offereth sacrifice,* 21 *which God accepteth, and promiseth to curse the earth no more.*

**1. God remembered Noah.** This verse does not imply that God had forgotten Noah for a time. It is an expression indicating divine solicitude and grace. A touching indication of the tenderness of God toward His creatures is found in the statement that God also remembered, with Noah, all other living things. He who proclaimed that although five sparrows are “sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God” (Luke 12:6, 7; cf. Matt. 10:29–31; 6:26), will remember His faithful children, who “are of more value than many sparrows.”

**4. Ararat.** All Bible expositors agree that the mountainous land of Armenia is meant, though it is uncertain just what part of the Ararat range is indicated. Rumors to the effect that the remains of Noah’s ark have been discovered have not yet been substantiated. The traditional location, modern Mt. Ararat, has two peaks, one 16,945 ft., the other 12,287 ft. high. Among the Persians these twin peaks are known as *Koh-i-nuh*, “the mountain of Noah.” Here was an ideal location for the ark to rest while the waters subsided, and from which the survivors of the Flood might spread to every land (see on ch. 7:24).

**5. The waters decreased.** The waters diminished gradually for two and one-half months after the ark rested upon the mountains of Ararat.

**7. He sent forth a raven.** Forty days after the appearance of the mountaintops, Noah became anxious to know the extent to which the waters had dried up, and whether it was safe for him to leave the ark. As the waters had abated, the ark had already found safety from the tempests in a sheltered spot high in the mountains. From such a position it was difficult to ascertain the extent to which the waters had receded in the lower valleys. A raven was therefore dispatched, that Noah might observe from its behavior something of the condition of the earth. Not able to find a resting place, the raven flew about over the surface of the waters, returning from time to time to the ark (PP 105).

**8. He sent forth a dove.** Although it is not stated how long Noah waited before making another trial, the expression “and he stayed yet other seven days” (v. 10) indicates that the first period of waiting had also been of the same duration. A week later the dove remained away all day, but returned in the evening with an olive leaf apparently from a tree that had survived the flood. In Hebrew the expression “plucked off” clearly indicates that the leaf had not been found floating upon the surface of the water. Noah recognized the olive leaf as evidence that the earth must be nearly dry, and that he might soon leave the ark. A week later the dove did not return, evidence that conditions were sufficiently normal to permit it to remain outside the ark. How joyous must Noah’s feelings have been!

**13. The covering of the ark.** An additional period of waiting is indicated, after which Noah felt the time had come to investigate for himself. Inasmuch as little could be seen through the lattice openings below the roof of the ark, he removed a portion of the roof. The word “covering,” *mikseh*, is used in the OT to designate the roof of the tabernacle (Ex. 26:14), and also slip covers for the furniture of the sanctuary while it was being transported (Num. 4:10–12). Since these coverings were made of skins, it is possible that the covering of the ark may have been also (see on ch. 6:16).

**14. In the second month.** To Noah the ground appeared sufficiently dry. But God had closed the door of the ark, and Noah awaited God’s instruction as to when he was to leave it. Altogether he waited 57 days longer before the waters were completely dried up and God could give the desired permission.

If we assume a 30-day month throughout (see on ch. 7:24), a ship’s log for the ark during the Flood would read as follows:

	<i>Month</i>	<i>Day</i>	<i>Year</i>
Noah enters the ark. 7:4, 7, 10. .....	2	10	600
Beginning of the Flood. 7:11. .....	2	17	600
Rain and prevailing wa- ters (first 40 days of Flood). 7:4, 12, 17. to..	3	27	600
“Waters prevailed” (110 additional days). 7:24. to.....	7	17	600
The ark rests on the mountains of Ararat. 8:4.	7	17	600

..... The mountains seen. 8:5....	10	1	600
The raven released (40 days later). 8:6.	11	11	600
..... The dove released (first time). 8:8; PP 105.	11	18	600
..... The dove released (sec- ond time). 8:10.	11	25	600
..... The dove released (third time). 8:12.	12	2	600
..... Covering of the ark re- moved; waters dried. 8:13.	1	1	601
..... Noah leaves the ark. 8:14- 16.....	2	27	601

A period of exactly five months elapsed from the beginning of the Flood to the time the ark rested on the mountains of Ararat (ch. 7:11; 8:4). This is also given as 150 days (ch. 7:24), thus indicating that the 5 months contained 30 days each. It is uncertain, however, whether the year of Noah's time was lunar or solar, and whether it began in the spring or in the autumn.

The ark is proof of the goodness of God and the obedient faith of Noah. The ark was a refuge in time of peril, a home for the homeless, and a temple where the godly family of Noah worshiped. It bore them safely from the old world to the new, from an environment of vice and sin to an earth purified from sin. The ark was God's appointed place of salvation, and outside of it there was no safety. And as it was in the days of Noah, so will it be when this present age is brought to an abrupt close at the coming of the Son of man (see Matt. 24:37). Those who wish to be saved must avail themselves of the provision God has made for their salvation.

**16. Go forth.** Noah had learned to trust in God and to wait patiently during his 120 years of preaching and building the ark. That long period of active labor was followed by more than a year in the ark. During the first weeks and months he had experienced incessant rain, raging tempest, and tremendous upheavals of the earth, which seemed ready to destroy his frail bark. Later, as the ark rested on the mountains of Ararat, there began a tedious time of waiting, which lasted for more than seven months. How often

Noah might have felt that God had forgotten the lonely ark and its inmates on that high mountaintop. Happy twin virtues—faith and patience! With what eager joy Noah must have listened once more to the voice of God, bidding him go forth.

**17. *That they may breed abundantly.*** This statement has been viewed by some commentators as implying that God had restrained the reproductive power of the animals during the year they spent in the cramped quarters of the ark. Now the original blessing upon animals to multiply and fill the earth (ch. 1:22) is repeated.

**18. *Noah went forth.*** As an angel descended from heaven and swung open the door that had been closed a year earlier by similar means, Noah and his family came forth. The animals followed Noah's example, leaving the ark in orderly fashion, each after its own kind. This instinct to associate with other members of their own kind is generally characteristic of the animal world to the present day.

**20. *Noah builded an altar.*** Noah's first act upon leaving the ark was one of worship. The sacrifices offered by Noah were not only an expression of gratitude for preservation but also a new pledge of his faith in the Saviour—typified by every sacrificial animal. In the offering "of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl" Noah gave evidence both of gratitude and of generosity. Although this passage is the first one in Scripture to mention the building of an altar, it should not be thought that altars were not in use prior to the Flood. The word "burnt offerings," *'oloth*, is not the same as that used to describe Abel's sacrifice. It is derived from a verb meaning "to rise up," and suggests, not the elevation of the gift upon the altar, but the ascent of the smoke of the burnt offering toward heaven (see Judges 13:20; 20:40; Jer. 48:15; Amos 4:10).

**21. *The Lord smelled a sweet savour.*** God's satisfaction with Noah's conduct and His acceptance of Noah's gift are presented in very human language. The divine response to Noah's devoted worship was a resolve that the earth would never again be destroyed by a flood. This promise was not communicated to Noah until a little later (see ch. 9:8–17). The words "I will not again curse the ground" did not remove the curse of ch. 3:17. They simply refer to the fact that a universal catastrophe such as the Deluge would not overtake the human race again. Localized floods were not included.

***The imagination of man's heart.*** Some commentators have seen a contradiction between this verse and ch. 6:5–7. God had ordained the Flood because "every imagination of the thoughts" of man's heart was "only evil continually," and here, for the very same reason, He promised never to send another. It must be that in the first case "imagination" refers to a fixed pattern of thought as translated into action (ch. 6:5), and that here it refers to man's inherent tendencies. The KJV marginal reading, "though," instead of "for," is probably correct.

**22. *While the earth remaineth.*** Man's ordinary seasonal pursuits had been completely and universally interrupted by the Flood. God now assured Noah that not only would there never be another flood but also no other comparable interruption of the seasonal cycle would occur. Seasons had been ordained at creation (Gen. 1:14); these were to continue.

The most remarkable account of the Deluge outside of the Bible occurs in the ancient Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh. Although that section of the epic which deals with the Flood exhibits surprising similarities to the Genesis record, differences between the two accounts constitute convincing evidence of the inspiration and accuracy of the Biblical record. Polytheism and other heathen religious ideas give the Epic of Gilgamesh a

definitely pagan flavor. Although similar Flood stories persist today among all branches of the human race, it is only natural to find the Babylonian account more nearly accurate than the others because of the proximity of Babylon to the mountains of Ararat. For further information on the Epic of Gilgamesh, see "Archeology and the Recovery of Ancient History," pp. 115-117.

## ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

4, 6-11, 13, 15-20 PP 105

21 PP 106

22 COL 65; Ed 105; PP 106

## CHAPTER 9

1 *God blesseth Noah.* 4 *Blood and murder are forbidden.* 8 *God's covenant,* 13 *signified by the rainbow.* 18 *Noah replenisheth the world,* 20 *planteth a vineyard,* 21 *is drunken, and mocked of his son,* 25 *curseth Canaan,* 26 *blesseth Shem,* 27 *prayeth for Japheth,* 29 *and dieth.*

**1. God blessed Noah and his sons.** Noah and his family received a blessing that was similar to the one pronounced upon Adam and Eve after their creation (ch. 1:28). As Adam had been the progenitor of all members of the human race, Noah became the progenitor of all human beings after the Flood. The blessing consisted in both instances of a divine commission to "be fruitful" and to fill the earth. One part of the previous blessing, however, was absent from the new one, namely, the charge to "subdue it," the earth. This omission doubtless reflects the fact that the world dominion assigned to man at the time of creation had been forfeited by sin. Sin had disturbed the relationship that originally existed between man and the animals, and they were, to a certain extent at least, released from subjection to him.

**2. The fear of you.** Inasmuch as sin with its consequences had loosened the bond of voluntary subjection on the part of the animals to the will of man, it was only by force that henceforth he could rule over them, through that "fear" which God now instilled in the animal creation. Nature had become estranged from man.

The fear that all land, air, and water animals were to have, would not exclude their occasional rebellion against man's dominion over them. They would sometimes rise and destroy man. Indeed, God used them, at times, to administer divine justice (see Ex. 8:6, 17, 24; 2 Kings 2:24). However, the normal condition of the lower creatures was to become one of instinctive dread of man, which causes them rather to avoid him than to seek his presence. It is a fact that animals retreat wherever human civilization advances. Even ferocious wild beasts, unless provoked, usually avoid man and flee from him rather than attack him.

**Into your hand are they delivered.** This divine pronouncement has found its fulfillment in the domestication of certain animals whose help man needs, in the taming of wild animals by man's superior will power, and in the successful reduction to impotency of harmful creatures by his inventiveness and ingenuity.

**3. Meat for you.** Not that man then first began to eat animal flesh, but only that God for the first time authorized, or rather allowed, him to do what the Flood had made a necessity. The wicked antediluvians were flesh eaters (CH 109). But it was not the original will of the Creator that His creatures should consume one another. He had given man plants for food (ch. 1:29). With the temporary destruction of all plant life during the Flood and the exhaustion of the food supplies that were taken into the ark, an emergency

arose that God met by giving permission to eat the flesh of animals. Furthermore, the eating of flesh food would shorten men's sinful lives (CD 373).

This permission did not imply an unrestrained and unlimited eating of every kind of animal. The phrase, "moving thing that liveth," clearly excludes the eating of carcasses of animals that had died or been killed by other beasts, which the Mosaic law later specifically forbade (Ex. 22:31; Lev. 22:8). Though the distinction between clean and unclean animals in regard to food is not made here, it does not follow that it was unknown to Noah. That Noah was acquainted with this distinction is clear from the previous command to bring more clean than unclean beasts into the ark (Gen. 7:2), and by the fact that he offered only clean animals as his burnt offering (ch. 8:20).

This distinction must have been known to early man so well that it was not necessary for God to draw Noah's special attention to it. It was only when this distinction had been lost through the centuries of man's estrangement from God that new and written directives were issued regarding clean and unclean animals (see Lev. 11; Deut. 14). The immutability of God's character (James 1:17) precludes the possibility of construing this passage as permission to slaughter and eat all creatures. Animals that were unclean for one purpose could not have been clean for another.

***Even as the green herb.*** This implies the newness of the permission to eat flesh food, in addition to the vegetables and fruits that had originally been destined to be man's food. Not only was the temporary absence of plant life, as a result of the Flood, the reason for God's permission to man to supplement his vegetarian diet with meat, but probably also the fact that the Flood had so thoroughly changed this earth's outward form and diminished its fertility that in some lands, such as the far north, it would not produce sufficient vegetarian food to sustain the human race.

***4. Flesh with the life thereof.*** The prohibition applies to the eating of flesh with blood in it, whether of living animals, as had been the barbarous custom of some pagan tribes in the past, or of slaughtered animals from which the blood had not been properly drained. This prohibition was, among other things, a safeguard against cruelty and a reminder of the sacrifice of animals, in which blood, as the bearer of life, was held sacred. God foresaw that man, easily falling victim to superstitious beliefs, would think that, in partaking of the life-bearing fluid of animals, his own life power would be either strengthened or prolonged. For these and probably other reasons not now clear to us, the eating of flesh with the blood in it was irrevocably prohibited. The apostles considered this prohibition still binding in the Christian Era. They especially drew the attention of Gentile Christian believers to it, because these new believers, before their conversion, had been accustomed to the eating of flesh with blood in it (Acts 15:20, 29).

"Life," *nephesh* (see on Gen. 2:7). To translate it "soul," as some have done, obscures the true meaning (see Lev. 17:11). Blood is vital to life. If the circulation of blood to any part of the body is cut off, that part dies. A complete loss of blood inevitably brings death. This being true, the Hebrew word *nephesh*, standing parallel to "blood" in this text, should be rendered "life," as in the KJV.

***5. Your blood of your lives.*** The two possessive pronouns "your" emphasize the value of man's life, *nephesh*, in the sight of Heaven. God would personally concern Himself with avenging the shedding of human blood, as is implied by the words, "will I require," literally, "search after," with a view to punishment.

***At the hand of every beast.*** The life of man was made secure against animals as well as against other men by a solemn proclamation of the sanctity of human life. The statute that a beast which slew a man should be destroyed was later incorporated into the Mosaic code (Ex. 21:28–32). This command was not given by way of punishing the murderous beast, which is not under moral law and so cannot sin, but for the safety of men.

***At the hand of man.*** This warning is directed against suicide and homicide. God requires the man who takes his own life as well as the one who takes the life of his fellow man to give an account of his act. The commandment, “Thou shalt not kill,” is so wide in its implications that every kind of shortening or taking of life is prohibited. Man cannot give life and has therefore no right to take it, unless required to do so by a divine command. No one in possession of his mental and moral faculties, and thus responsible for his acts, can escape God’s retribution, not even the man who lays hand on himself. At the resurrection every individual will have to appear before the judgment seat of God to receive his reward (Rom. 14:10; 2 Cor. 5:10).

**6. *Whoso sheddeth man’s blood.*** God would avenge or inflict punishment for every murder, not directly, however, as He did in the case of Cain, but indirectly, by placing in the hand of man judicial power. The word “sheddeth” implies willful murder and not an accidental taking of life, manslaughter, for which the law made other provisions than those mentioned here (Num. 35:11). The divine injunction endows temporal government with judicial power, and places in its hand the sword. God took care to erect a barrier against the supremacy of evil, and thus laid the foundation for an orderly civil development of humanity.

7. See on v. 1.

**9. *I establish my covenant.*** To give Noah and his sons a firm assurance of the prosperous continuance of the human race, God established a covenant with them and their descendants and confirmed it with a visible sign. The covenant contemplated all subsequent posterity in its provisions, and, along with the human family, the entire animal creation.

**10. *All that go out of the ark.*** This passage does not imply, as some expositors have explained it, that certain animals had survived the Flood without having been in the ark, and that therefore there was only a partial inundation of the earth. Inasmuch as this view squarely contradicts clear statements that all land and air animals that had not found a haven of refuge in the ark had been destroyed (chs. 6:17; 7:4, 21–23), another explanation must be found. The preposition “to,” in the phrase “to every beast,” is here more appropriately rendered “of” or “with regard to” (see ch. 20:13, “of me”). The RSV, following the LXX, renders it thus: “Every beast of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark.”

**11. *Neither shall all flesh be cut off.*** This “covenant” contained but one provision and assumed the form of a divine promise. Regions might be devastated and animals and men swept away by the hundreds or thousands, but never again would there be a universal destruction of the earth by a flood. However, this promise does not imply that God is bound never to destroy the world again by another means than water. His declared plan to put an end to all wickedness at the close of this world’s history by a great destructive fire (2 Peter 3:7, 10, 11; Rev. 20:9; etc.) in no way contradicts the promise.

**12. *This is the token.*** This token God deemed necessary in order to give His creatures faith in His promises, it being an instance of His condescension to the weakness of man.

Man looks for signs (Matt. 24:3; 1 Cor. 1:22), and God in His mercy and goodness has provided them, within limits, although He wants His followers to retain their faith even when no signs guide them, and to believe without visible evidence (John 20:29).

**13. I do set my bow.** The establishment of the rainbow as a covenant sign of the promise that there would never be another flood, presupposes that it appeared then for the first time in the clouds of heaven. This is one more indication that no rain had fallen before the Flood. The rainbow is produced by the refraction and reflection of the sun's light through the ball-shaped raindrops on which the rays fall.

**15. I will remember my covenant.** The rainbow, a natural physical phenomenon, was a fitting symbol of God's promise never to destroy the earth again by a flood. Inasmuch as the climatic conditions of the earth would be completely different after the Flood, and rains would in most parts of the world take the place of the former beneficent dew to moisten the soil, something was needed to quiet men's fears each time rain began to fall. The spiritual mind can see in natural phenomena God's revelations of Himself (see Rom. 1:20). Thus the rainbow is evidence to the believer that the rain will bring blessing and not universal destruction.

John saw in vision a rainbow surrounding the throne of God (Rev. 4:3). Man looks on the bow to recall the promise of God, but God Himself looks upon it to remember and fulfill His promise. In the bow man's faith and trust meet God's faithfulness and immutability.

The beams of holy light streaming forth from the Sun of Righteousness (Mal. 4:2), as seen by the eye of faith through the prism of life's experiences, reveal the beauty of the righteous character of Jesus Christ. The eternal covenant between Father and Son (Zech. 6:13) assures to every humble, faithful son and daughter of God the privilege of beholding in Jesus the One altogether lovely, and, beholding Him, of being changed into His very likeness.

**17. This is the token.** This covenant between God and Noah brought to a conclusion the events connected with the greatest catastrophe this earth has ever experienced. The earth, once beautiful and perfect, offered a picture of utter desolation as far as the eye could reach. Man had received a lesson concerning the awful results of sin. The unfallen worlds had seen the fearful end to which man comes when he follows the bidding of Satan.

A new beginning was to be made. Inasmuch as only faithful and obedient members of the antediluvian human family had survived the Flood, there was reason to hope that the future would present a happier picture than the past. After having been saved by God's grace from the greatest imaginable cataclysm, the descendants of Noah might be expected to apply for all future ages the lessons learned from the Flood.

**18. The sons of Noah.** His three sons, mentioned repeatedly in previous passages (chs. 5:32; 6:10; 7:13), are again mentioned as the heads of the nations into which the human family developed. Their names are explained in connection with the table of nations, ch. 10.

**Ham is the father of Canaan.** Ham's son Canaan is mentioned here in prospective allusion to what follows. Furthermore, it must have been the purpose of Moses to direct the attention of the Hebrews of his time to the unsavory event described in the next verses, in order that they might understand better why the Canaanites, whom they soon

would meet, were so deeply degraded and morally corrupt. The root of their depravity was found in their early ancestor Ham, “the father of Canaan.”

**19. *Of them was the whole earth overspread.*** This passage declares in terse but unmistakable words that all later inhabitants of this globe are descendants of Noah’s three sons. Even if we are not able to trace every nation and tribe back to one of the heads of families enumerated in the following chapter, this text states emphatically that the whole earth was populated by Noah’s descendants. The view that certain races had been spared by the Flood in remote regions of this world, and had no direct relationship with Noah’s sons, is un-Scriptural.

**20. *Noah began to be an husbandman.*** The text does not necessarily imply that Noah had not been a husbandman before the Flood, but that he began the new era as, literally, “man of the ground.” Although Noah had received license to slaughter animals and eat their meat, he felt that it was nevertheless necessary at once to till the ground and obtain food from it.

***He planted a vineyard.*** The statement does not imply that Noah planted nothing else than a vineyard. The vineyard is mentioned to explain the following events, but not to exclude his tilling the ground for other purposes. Armenia, the country in which the ark settled down, was, in antiquity, known as a country of vineyards, as the Greek soldier-historian Xenophon testifies. The cultivation of the vine was common to the whole ancient Near East, and can be traced back to the earliest times.

Noah did nothing wrong in planting a vineyard. The vine is one of the noble plants of God’s creation. Christ used it to illustrate His relationship to the church (John 15), and honored its fruit by drinking of it the last night of His earthly ministry (Matt. 26:27–29). Grape juice is highly beneficial to the human body, as long as it is unfermented.

**21. *Wine.*** Heb. *yayin*, the juice of the grape. In most if not all instances the Scripture context indicates a fermented—and therefore intoxicating—drink. As a result of Noah’s use of this beverage he became “drunken.” Since drunkenness had been one of the sins of the antediluvian era, we must assume that Noah was acquainted with the evils of drinking alcoholic beverages. The record of Noah’s sin testifies to the impartiality of the Scriptures, which record the faults of great men as well as their virtues.

Neither age nor previous spiritual victories are a guarantee against defeat in the hour of temptation. Who would have thought that a man who had walked with God for centuries, and had withstood the temptations of multitudes, should fall alone? One heedless hour may stain the purest life and undo much of the good that has been done in the course of years.

***He was uncovered.*** “Wine is a mocker” (Prov. 20:1), and may deceive the wisest of men if they are not watchful. Drunkenness deforms and degrades the temple of the Holy Spirit, which we are, weakens moral principle and thus exposes a man to countless evils. He loses control both of physical and of mental faculties. Noah’s intemperance brought shame to a respectable old man, and subjected one who was wise and good to derision and scorn.

**22. *The nakedness of his father.*** That Ham is again called the father of Canaan seems to imply that both father and son had similar unholy inclinations that revealed themselves, not only in the incident described here, but later in the religious practices of a whole nation. Furthermore, it shows that the event took place some time after the Flood, when Canaan, the fourth son of Ham (ch. 10:6), was already born. The sin of Ham was

not an unintentional transgression. He may have seen his father's shameful condition accidentally, but instead of being filled with sorrow over his father's folly, he rejoiced in what he saw and found delight in publishing it.

**23. *Shem and Japheth took a garment.*** Ham's two older brothers did not share his perverted feelings. Adam also had had two well-disciplined sons, Abel and Seth, and one child of sin, Cain. Although all had received the same parental love and training, sin manifested itself much more markedly in one than in the others. Now the same spirit of depravity breaks forth in one of Noah's children, while the older sons, reared in the same home and under the same conditions as Ham, show an admirable spirit of decency and self-control. As the evil trends of criminal Cain were perpetuated in his descendants, Ham's degraded nature revealed itself further in his offspring.

**24. *Noah awoke.*** When Noah regained consciousness and reason he learned of what had happened during his sleep, probably by making inquiry as to the reason for the garment covering him. His "younger son," literally, "his son, the little one," meaning "the youngest son," refers to Ham (see on ch. 5:32).

**25. *Cursed be Canaan.*** The curse being pronounced on Canaan, Ham's fourth son, rather than on the perpetrator of the crime himself, has been taken by many commentators as evidence that Canaan had really been the culprit and not Ham, and that he is meant in v. 24 as the youngest member of the Noachic family. The church Father Origen mentions the tradition that Canaan first saw the shame of his grandfather, and told it to his father. It is not impossible that Canaan had shared in his father's evil deed.

Noah's curse does not seem to have been pronounced resentment, but rather as a prophecy. The prophecy does not fix Canaan in particular or Ham's sons in general in the bonds of an iron destiny. It is merely a prediction of what God foresaw and announced through Noah. Presumably Canaan already walked in the sins of his father, and those sins became such a strong feature in the national character of Canaan's descendants that God later ordered their destruction.

***A servant of servants.*** Shem has subdued Japheth, and Japheth has subdued Shem, but Ham has never subdued either.

**26. *Blessed be the Lord God of Shem.*** In contrast with the curse, the blessings upon Shem and Japheth are introduced with a fresh "And he said." After the statement of each blessing comes the announcement of Canaan's servitude, like a minor refrain. Instead of wishing good to Shem, Noah praises the God of Shem, namely, Jehovah, as Moses did in the case of Gad (Deut. 33:20). By having Jehovah as his God, Shem would be the recipient and heir of all the blessings of salvation that Jehovah bestows upon His faithful ones.

**27. *God shall enlarge Japheth.*** By a play on Japheth's name, Noah sums up his blessing for this son in the word "enlarge," *pathach*. By this, Noah indicated the remarkable dispersion and prosperity of the Japhethic nations.

***He shall dwell in the tents of Shem.*** The personal pronoun "he" refers to Japheth and not to God, although some ancient and modern Bible commentators have understood it thus. The meaning of the utterance may have been twofold, inasmuch as Japheth's descendants in the course of time took away many of the Shemite lands, and dwelt in them, and because the Japhethites were to participate in the saving blessings of the Shemites. When the gospel was preached in Greek, a Japhethic language, Shem's descendant Israel, though subdued by Japhethic Rome, became the spiritual conqueror of

the Japhethites and thus, figuratively, received them into his tents. All who are saved are a part of spiritual Israel and go into the holy city through gates bearing the names of the 12 tribes of Israel (Gal. 3:29; Rev. 21:12).

Prophecies such as this do not determine the fate of individuals within the group concerned, either for salvation or for condemnation. The Canaanite Rahab and the Jebusite Araunah were received into the fellowship of God's chosen people, and the Canaanite woman was aided by the Lord because of her faith (Matt. 1:5; 2 Sam. 24:18; Matt. 15:22–28). But the hardened Pharisees and scribes had woes pronounced upon them, and Israel was rejected because of unbelief (Matt. 23:13; Rom. 11:17–20).

**29. *All the days of Noah.*** The history of Noah ends with a well-known formula from ch. 5, suggesting that the stories contained in chs. 6–9 belong to Noah's history. Although Noah was a righteous man and walked with God, he did not attain to the spiritual stature of his great-grandfather Enoch. Having witnessed the growth and spread of a new generation and seen how rapidly it followed the wicked inclinations of its evil heart, he died.

## ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

1 8T 213  
2, 3 PP 107  
3, 4 CD 373  
4 CD 393  
6 PP 516  
11-14SR 70  
11-16PP 106  
16 Ed 115; SR 70; TM 157  
21-23, 25-27PP 117

## CHAPTER 10

1 *The generations of Noah.* 2 *The sons of Japheth.* 6 *The sons of Ham.* 8 *Nimrod the first monarch.* 21 *The sons of Shem.*

**1. *These are the generations.*** The authenticity of Gen. 10 has been challenged by Bible critics, who brand it either a late document based on faulty information or perhaps a sheer invention. Recent discoveries, however, attest its validity. Without Gen. 10 our knowledge of the origin and interrelationship of the various races would be far less complete than it is. This chapter confirms the words of Paul at Athens, that God “hath made of one blood all nations” (Acts 17:26).

***The sons of Noah.*** The expression, “These are the generations,” appears frequently in Genesis (see Gen 6:9; 11:10; 25:12, 19; etc.), usually as a title for genealogical information. Noah's sons are not listed according to age, but according to their relative importance to the Hebrews (see on ch. 5:32). All three sons were born prior to the Flood. Shem means “name” or “fame,” Ham, “warmth,” and Japheth, either “beauty” or “expansion.” The latter meaning for Japheth seems preferable in view of the blessing pronounced upon him by his father (see ch. 9:27). These names probably reflect the feelings of Noah when they were born. The birth of Shem assured Noah of “fame”; there was a particularly “warm” place in his heart for Ham; in Japheth he saw the growth of his family. The names also suggest prophetic foresight. Shem was famed as progenitor of Abraham and thus of the Messiah; Ham's nature was hot, unbridled, and sensual; Japheth's descendants are dispersed over several continents. But it is not alone in the

names Noah gave his sons that the spirit of inspiration was revealed; it is reflected, as well, in the blessings and the curse pronounced over them (see ch. 9:25–27). The name of Ham appears often as a Jewish name today, in the form of Chaim.

***Unto them were sons born.*** The marked blessing of God upon the survivors of the Flood resulted in the rapid multiplication of the human race (see ch. 9:1; 10:32). The sequence in which the names of Noah's sons are considered is in harmony with a Hebrew literary device known as "inverted parallelism." After giving their names in the customary order, "Shem, Ham, and Japheth," Moses lists the descendants of Japheth first and those of Shem last. Another instance of this device occurs in Matt. 25:2–4.

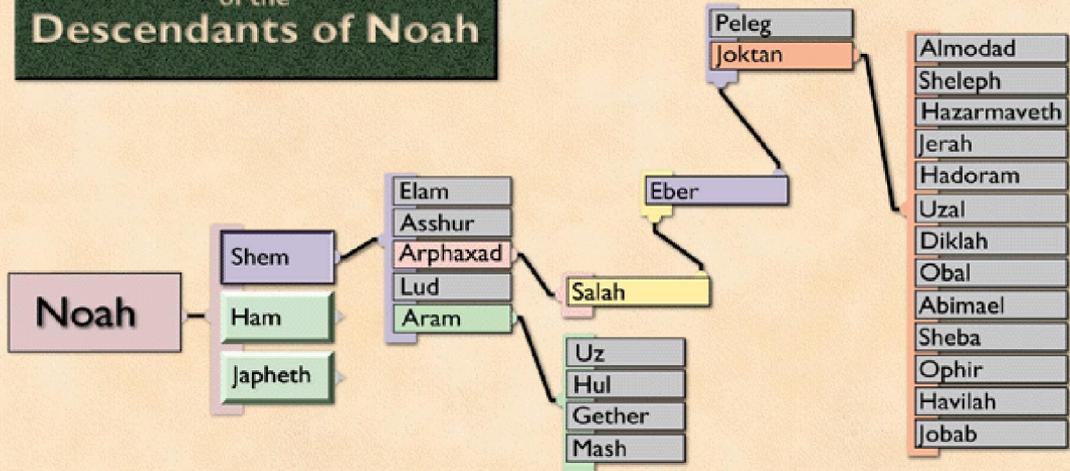
**2. *The sons of Japheth; Gomer.*** Gomer was the ancestor of a people known in Assyrian inscriptions as *Gamir* or *Gimirrai*. They are the Cimmerians of ancient Greek literature, and belong to the Indo-European family of nations. According to the Greek author Homer, the Cimmerians lived in Northern Europe. They appeared in the northern provinces of the Assyrian Empire at the time of Sargon II, during the 8th century B.C. They invaded ancient Armenia, but were pushed westward by the Assyrians. An old Assyrian letter comments that none of their interpreters knew the language of the people of Gomer. The Cimmerians overthrew, in turn, the Phrygian and Lydian kingdoms of Asia Minor, but were gradually absorbed by the peoples of Anatolia. Poets of the time speak of the terror inspired in men's hearts by the Cimmerians. In testimony of their power, a great part of Anatolia once bore the name Gomer. The ancients spoke of the "Cimmerian Bosporos," and the Armenians still call part of their country Gamir. It is thought that the Crimea bears their name to the present day.

***Magog.*** The identification of this name is difficult. In Eze. 38, 39 Gog, a king of Magog, appears as a cruel enemy of God's people. From him may have come the barbaric tribe of Gogaia named in a letter from a 15th-century Babylonian king to an Egyptian Pharaoh. This tribe is assumed to have lived somewhere north of the Black Sea, probably in proximity to the descendants of Gomer, a brother of Magog.

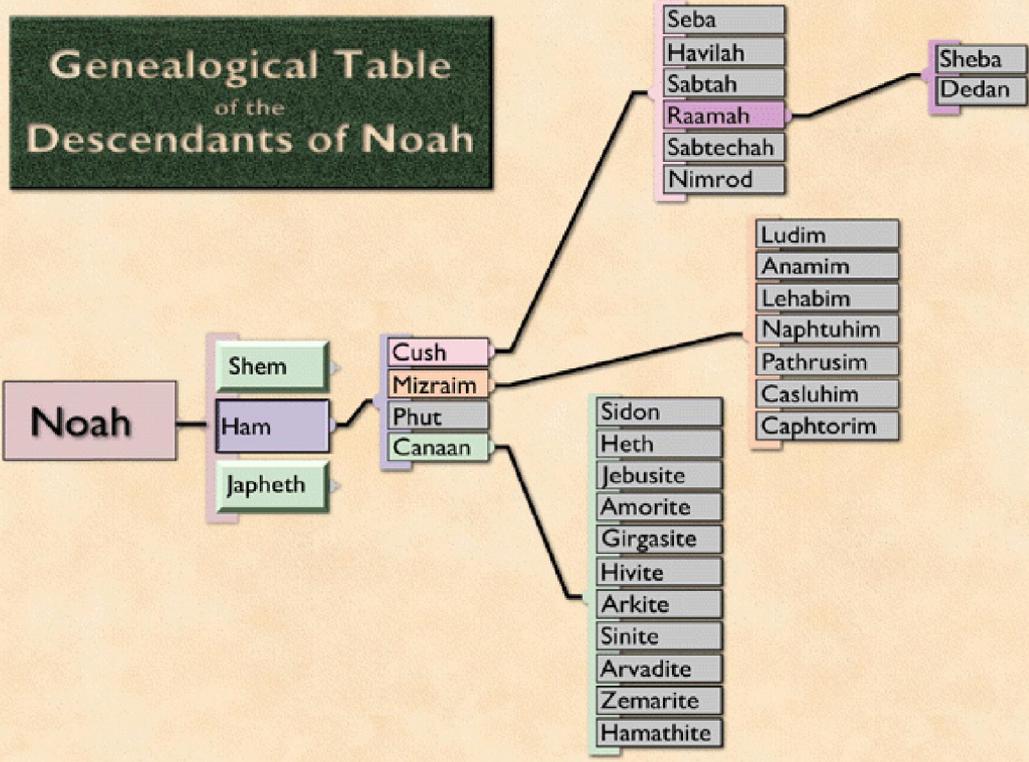
***Madai.*** The Medes, or Madai, appear for the first time in Assyrian inscriptions of the 9th century B.C. as a people who lived on the high Iranian plateau to the east of Assyria. After playing a minor role in the history of the ancient world, they appear suddenly in the 7th century B.C. as a powerful nation under King Cyaxares, when in conjunction with the Babylonians they overthrew the Assyrian Empire. When the two allies divided up the shattered empire, the Medes received the northern provinces up to the river Halys in Asia Minor, governing their vast domain from Ecbatana, the Biblical Achmetha (see Ezra 6:2). Cyaxares' son Astyages was defeated and deposed by the Persian ruler Cyrus, who consolidated the kingdoms of Media and Persia and then overthrew Babylon. For the first time in history world supremacy thus fell into the hands of an Indo-European race.

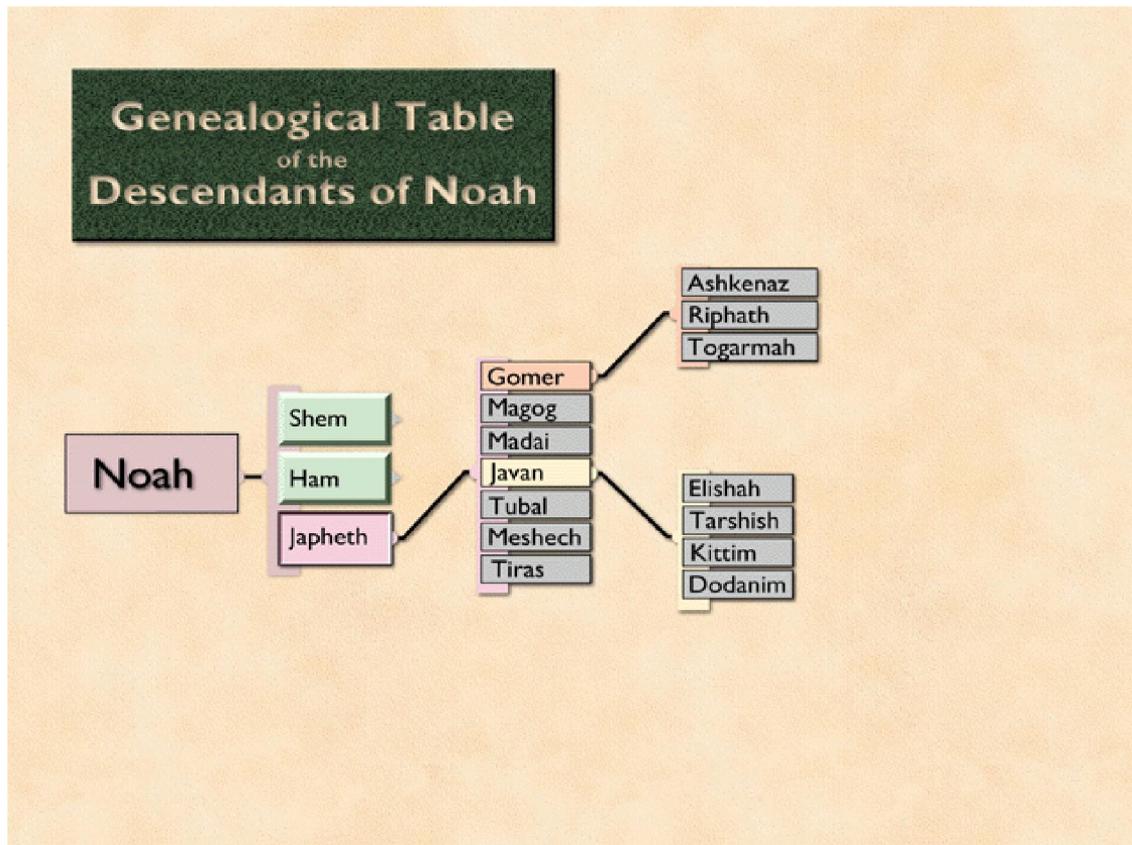
***Javan.*** The Greeks, or Ionians, descended from Javan. The early Ionians are first mentioned in Hittite records as the inhabitants of the western coastal regions of Asia Minor. This was in the middle of the second millennium B.C., about the time Moses wrote Genesis. In Assyrian inscriptions they are called *Jamnai*.

# Genealogical Table of the Descendants of Noah



**Genealogical Table**  
of the  
**Descendants of Noah**





**Tubal.** The *Tibarenians* of Herodotus and the *Tabalaeans* of Assyrian cuneiform sources are to be identified with the descendants of Tubal. Tubal is mentioned in inscriptions of the 12th century B.C. as being allied with *Muski* (Meshech) and *Kaski* in an attempt to conquer northeastern Mesopotamia. Shalmaneser III refers to *Tabal* as a country for the first time in the 9th century B.C., whereas inscriptions a century later locate the Tabalaeans as settlers in the Anti-Taurus Mountains of southern Cappadocia. They were later pushed into Armenia, where Greek authors of the classical period came in contact with them.

## **Geographical Distribution of the Sons of Noah**



The three sons of Noah migrated to different areas. The Semites occupied the Tigris-Euphrates valley and most of Arabia; the Japhethites moved north, around the Black Sea, and even west to Spain; the Hamites went south into lower Asia Minor, coastal Syria and Palestine, and the Red Sea coast of Arabia, but principally into Africa.

**Meshech.** Probably ancestor of the *Moschoi* of Greek classical writers, the *Mushku* of Assyrian inscriptions. These inscriptions represent *Tabal* and *Mushku* as allies, as in Eze. 38. The *Mushku* appear in the northern part of Mesopotamia for the first time during the reign of Tiglath-pileser I, about 1100 B.C. A little later they settled in Phrygia, and from thence, under their king Mita, made war on Sargon II, in the 8th century. In his struggle against the Assyrians the last king of Carchemish tried in vain to get help from Mita, king of Meshech. After ruling over northern Anatolia for a time the *Mushku* lost it, first to the Cimmerians and then to the Lydians.

**Tiras.** Probably ancestor of the *Tursēnoi*. This people, named after Tiras, lived on the west coast of Asia Minor, where they were notorious as pirates. Related probably to the

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<sup>2</sup>Nichol, F. D. (1978). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary : The Holy Bible with exegetical and expository comment*. Commentary Reference Series (Ge 1:1). Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association.

Italian *Tyrsenians*, they appear in Egyptian inscriptions of the late 13th century B.C.

under the name *Turusha*. They played a leading role among the migrating coastal peoples of the pre-Hellenic period.

**3. *The sons of Gomer; Ashkenaz.*** First son of Gomer, son of Japheth, Ashkenaz was ancestor of the Indo-European people, the *Ashkuza*, who lived southeast of Lake Urmiah in the time of Esarhaddon, 7th century B.C. The Ashkenian Lake of Phrygia is named for them. Esarhaddon gave his daughter to the *Ashkuza* king Bartatua as wife, upon being assured by his sun god that Bartatua would remain loyal to Assyria. Hence we find the *Ashkuza* joining forces with the Assyrians against the *Cimmerians* and the Medes. Madyes, Bartatua's son, tried unsuccessfully to aid the Assyrians when Nineveh was besieged by the Medes and Babylonians. Upon the fall of Assyria the *Ashkuza* became subject to the Medes. Together with the Indo-European kingdoms of Ararat, Minni, and Media, they are called up by Jeremiah to destroy Babylon (Jer. 51:27).

***Riphath.*** Because of his relationship to Gomer, Ashkenaz, and Togarmah, Riphath was probably the progenitor of another Indo-European tribe of Cappadocia. His name, however, has not yet been found in ancient inscriptions. Josephus identifies his descendants with the Paphlagonians, who lived west of the lower Halys in Asia Minor and whose capital was Sinope.

***Togarmah.*** Ancestor of the *Tagarma* or *Tagarama*, mentioned in Hittite records of the 14th century B.C. They are the *Tilgarimmu* of Assyrian inscriptions, which locate them in the northern Taurus Mountains. Sennacherib, Sargon's son, mentions them with the *Chilakki*, who lived on the Halys in Asia Minor. Both Assyrian kings claim to have conquered their country. Ezekiel states (Eze. 27:14) that mules and horses were brought from their land to the markets of Phoenicia. Togarmah appears in Eze. 38:6 among the allies of Magog. The Armenians trace their genealogy back to Haik, the son of *Torgom*, and seem therefore to be descendants of Togarmah.

**4. *The sons of Javan; Elishah.*** Since Tyre imported its purple cloth from the "isles of Elishah" (Eze. 27:7), probably the islands of Sicily and Sardinia, it would seem likely that the descendants of Javan's son Elishah should be sought in that region. It is known that Sicily and Sardinia were colonized by Greeks; thus the inhabitants of Sardinia and Sicily were the "sons" of mainland Greece just as Elishah was the son of Javan, progenitor of the Greeks. The similarity of the name Elishah to that part of Greece called Aeolis or Elis and to the name by which the Greeks called their country, "Hellas," seems to connect Elishah, originally, with mainland Greece.

***Tarshish.*** This name appears frequently in the Bible. According to Isa. 66:19 and Ps. 72:10, Tarshish was a land "afar off." It had good trade relations with Tyre, which imported silver, iron, tin, and lead from thence (Eze. 27:12). Jonah intended to escape to Tarshish when the Lord sent him to Nineveh (Jonah 1:3). It was, presumably, the remote Phoenician colony in the mining district of southern Spain, the *Tartessus* of the Greeks and Romans, in the area of the middle and lower *Baetis* (now Guadalquivir) River. "Tarshish," meaning "smelter" or "refinery," was probably the name of several different

places with which the Phoenicians and, at times, the Hebrews, carried on a trade in metals, in “ships of Tarshish” (Ps. 48:7; see on 1 Kings 10:22).

**Kittim.** Many commentators have identified Kittim with Cyprus because a capital of Cyprus was named Kition. This would agree with Isa. 23:1, 12, which speaks of Chittim as being not far from Tyre and Sidon. In Jer. 2:10 and Dan. 11:30 the name Chittim denotes Greeks in general. But its earlier meaning, as in Isaiah, seems to be more circumscribed. It is, therefore, safe to identify Kittim either with Cyprus or with other islands in the vicinity of Greece.

**Dodanim.** If this spelling is correct, the Greek *Dardanians*, along the northwestern coast of Asia Minor, must be meant. The LXX, however, reads *Rodioi*. The parallel list of 1 Chron. 1:7 reads *Rodanim* in Hebrew, which the KJV translators changed to Dodanim, to agree with the Hebrew spelling in ch. 10:4. The letters *d* and *r* in Hebrew are so similar that a scribe may easily have mistaken the *r* for a *d* in this verse. If *Rodanim* was indeed the original spelling of the name, Greeks on the island of Rhodes are probably meant.

**5. The isles of the Gentiles.** Javan’s descendants, the various Greek tribes mentioned in the preceding verse—the people of Greece and islands adjacent to it, of Sicily, Sardinia, Spain, and Cyprus—went forth to settle the islands and coastal regions of the Mediterranean. This verse indicates that the names given designate only main tribal groups. Apparently, further branching out had occurred by the time of Moses. When Genesis was written the populations of the central and western Mediterranean were subdivided into many different groups, all probably descended from Javan, the fourth son of Japheth.

**6. The sons of Ham; Cush.** The Hebrew people were more intimately associated with the Hamitic races than with the descendants of Japheth. Cush, or Kush, is ancient Ethiopia, which was in classical times called Nubia. It was not Abyssinia, but included a part of Egypt and a part of the Sudan, extending from the first cataract of the Nile, at Aswan, as far south as Khartoum. In Egyptian inscriptions this land is called *Kash*, in Assyrian cuneiform texts, *Kusu*. Cush, however, included not only African Nubia but also the western part of Arabia bordering on the Red Sea. Some of the sons of Cush are known to have settled there. Zerah, the Cushite of 2 Chron. 14:9, and the Cushites of Isa. 45:14, mentioned with the Sabeans as men of stature, are thought to be western Arabians. About the time of Hezekiah, Judah was in contact with the African Cush, or Ethiopia, which is mentioned frequently in the later books of the OT (see 2 Kings 19:9; Esther 1:1; 8:9; Ps. 68:31; etc.).

**Mizraim.** The Egyptians were descendants of Ham’s second son. The origin of the Hebrew name Mizraim is obscure. Although this word is virtually the same in the Assyrian, Babylonian, Arabian, and Turkish languages as in the Hebrew, a similar native name has never been found in Egyptian inscriptions. The Egyptians called their country either the “Black Land,” designating the fertile strip of soil bordering on both banks of the river Nile in contrast with the desert “Red Land,” or they spoke of it as the “Two Lands,” reflecting an earlier historical division of the country into two separate kingdoms. Whether the word Mizraim, with its Hebrew dual ending, may be a reflection

of the expression “Two Lands” is a disputed subject among scholars. Modern Egyptians use the name *Misr* and the adjective *Misri* in referring to Egypt.

**Phut.** Phut has traditionally been identified as the progenitor of the Libyans. This tradition goes back to the time of the LXX, which translated *Phut* as “Libya.” This identification is probably wrong. Ancient Egyptian inscriptions mention an African land by the name of *Punt*, *Putā* in Babylonian texts, to which from early times Egypt sent expeditions to obtain myrrh trees, leopard skins, ebony, ivory, and other exotic products. *Punt*, therefore, was probably the African coast of Somaliland and Eritrea and the Phut, or Put, of this text.

**Canaan.** Hieroglyphic and cuneiform inscriptions of the second millennium B.C. locate Canaan as the region bordering the Mediterranean on the west, Lebanon on the north, and Egypt on the south. It is, furthermore, a collective name for the indigenous population of Palestine, Phoenicia, and the Hittite city states of northern Syria. The Phoenicians and their colonists the Carthaginians of Northern Africa referred to themselves as Canaanites, on their coins, until Roman times (see v. 15). Though Canaan was the son of Ham, the Canaanitic language was Semitic—as the writing of the Canaanites clearly reveals. It seems that they accepted the Semitic language at a very early stage of their history. This was apparently true of the Egyptians also, for their language is strongly Semitic. In fact, the ancient Egyptians, whose Hamitic relationship no scholar will dispute, took over so many Semitic elements into their language that some scholars have classified ancient Egyptian as Semitic. The geographic proximity of the Canaanites to the Semitic nations of the Near East may have been responsible for their acceptance of the Semitic language. Babylonian culture, language, and script were taken over by virtually all peoples who lived between the Euphrates and Egypt, as the Amarna Letters of the 14th century B.C. indicate. On the Amarna Letters, see p. 106.

That a language spoken by a people is not always a clear indication of the race to which they belong is evident from numerous ancient and modern examples. The Arabic conquest of the whole Mediterranean region made Arabic the spoken and written language of Semitic and non-Semitic populations alike, from the Atlantic coast to the Indus.

**7. The sons of Cush; Seba.** The Jewish historian Josephus identifies Seba with the Nubian kingdom of Meroë an African land situated between the Blue Nile and Atbara rivers. This view may have been correct at the time of Josephus, since the Ethiopians had by then migrated to Africa from southern Arabia. However, Seba was a tribe, originally at least, in the southern part of Arabia. In Ps. 72:10 the most remote nations of Solomon’s time are pictured paying Solomon homage—Seba far to the south, Tarshish to the west, and Sheba to the east. In Isa. 43:3 Seba is referred to as being in close proximity to Cush. Isaiah 45:14 emphasizes the great stature of its people.

**Havilah.** Aside from the Bible itself Havilah is not mentioned. Various Biblical statements indicate that it was an Arabic tribe not far from Palestine. Genesis 25:18 places Edom’s eastern border at Havilah, which was also the eastern limit of Saul’s campaign against the Amalekites (see 1 Sam. 15:7). For the antediluvian Havilah see on Gen. 2:11.

**Sabtah.** Some commentators have identified Sabtah with Sabota, the capital city of the south Arabic country of Hadhramaut. Others think it was the same as Ptolemy's *Saphtha* on the Persian Gulf. Definite identification is impossible.

**Raamah.** Inasmuch as the Arabic tribes of Sheba and Dedan were originally located in southwestern Arabia, it is likely that the people of Raamah lived in the same region. Ezekiel mentions Raamah with Sheba, as trading incense, precious stones, and gold in the market places of Tyre. It is probably the tribe of the *Rhammanites*, located by the Roman geographer Strabo in southwestern Arabia. They are also referred to in a famous Arabian inscription that ascribes praise to the local deity for saving the Minaeans from attacks of Sheba and Haulan, on the way from Ma'in to Raamah.

**Sabtechah.** Nothing further is known of this son or his descendants. Some have sought to identify their home with Samudake on the Persian Gulf. This is very doubtful, because the Cushite Arabians all seem to have settled in the western part of Arabia.

**Sheba.** The Sabaeans, descendants of Sheba, are well known both from the Bible and from other sources. In OT times Sheba appears as a wealthy trading nation. It is generally held that it was this country whose queen paid a state visit to Solomon. Later the Sabaeans became the most important people of southern Arabia, in the country now called Yemen. A wealth of inscriptions, the majority as yet unpublished, bears witness to their religion, their history, and the high level of their culture. Through the building of large dams and an extensive irrigation system the Sabaeans greatly increased the fertility and wealth of their country, to the extent that it became known in classical times as *Arabia Felix*, "Happy Arabia." The neglect and eventual destruction of these dams brought the gradual eclipse of the Sabaeans nation.

**Dedan.** This grandson of Cush became the ancestor of a South Arabic tribe of which nothing more is known. This tribe must not be confused with that descended from a grandson of Abraham by Keturah that lived at the southern border of Edom in northwestern Arabia (Gen. 25:3; 1 Chron. 1:32; Isa. 21:13; Jer. 25:23; 49:8; Eze. 25:13; 27:15, 20; 38:13).

**8. Cush begat Nimrod.** Although Nimrod's name is yet to be found in Babylonian records, Arabs still connect some ancient sites with his name. Birs-Nimrud, for instance, is their name for the ruins of Borsippa; and Nimrud, of Calah. These names must rest on very old traditions, and cannot be attributed to the influence of the Koran alone. So far as currently available historical evidence goes, the earliest inhabitants of Mesopotamia were not Semitic but Sumerian. Little is known as to the origin of the Sumerians. The fact that Nimrod, a Hamite, founded the first city states of Mesopotamia suggests that the Sumerians were possibly Hamitic.

**A mighty one.** This expression denotes a person renowned for bold and daring deeds. It may also include the connotation of "tyrant."

**9. Before the Lord.** The LXX renders this phrase "against the Lord." Although the hunter Nimrod acted in defiance of God, his mighty deeds made him famous among his contemporaries, and in future generations as well. Babylonian legends about Gilgamesh, who appears frequently on Babylonian reliefs and cylinder seals and in literary documents, may possibly refer to Nimrod. Gilgamesh is usually shown killing lions or other wild beasts with his bare hands. The fact that Nimrod was a Hamite may be the reason why the Babylonians, descendants of Shem, credited his famous deeds to one of their own hunters and purposely forgot his name.

**10. The beginning of his kingdom.** This may mean either his first kingdom or the beginning of his sovereignty. Nimrod appears in the register of nations as the author of imperialism. Under him society passed from the patriarchal form to the monarchical. He is the first man mentioned in the Bible as the head of a kingdom.

**Babel.** Nimrod's first kingdom was Babylon. Having the idea that their city was the earthly reflection of the heavenly dwelling place of their god, the Babylonians gave it the name *Bab-ilu*, "the gate of god" (see on ch. 11:9). Babylonian legends equate the founding of the city with the creation of the world. No doubt with this in mind Sargon, an early Semitic king of Mesopotamia, took sacred soil from Babylon for the founding of another city modeled after it. Even in the later period of Assyrian supremacy Babylon did not lose its significance as the center of Mesopotamian culture. Its greatest fame and glory, however, came in the time of Nebuchadnezzar, who made of it the world's first metropolis. After its destruction by the Persian king Xerxes, Babylon lay partly in ruins (see on Isa. 13:19).

**Erech.** The Babylonian *Uruk*, modern *Warka*. Recent excavations prove this to be one of the oldest cities in existence. The earliest written documents ever to be discovered were found there. Uruk was known to the Babylonians as the vicinity where the mighty deeds of Gilgamesh were performed, a fact which seems to support the suggestion that the Gilgamesh legends were reminiscences of Nimrod's early accomplishments.

**Accad.** The seat of the early kings Sargon and Naram-Sin (p. 135). The ruins of this city have not been located, but must be in the neighborhood of Babylon. The ancient Semitic population of Lower Mesopotamia came to be called Accadian, and the Babylonian and Assyrian languages are now referred to, collectively, by the same term.

**Calneh.** Though Calneh has not yet been identified with certainty, it was probably the same as Nippur, the present Niffer. A large percentage of the known Sumerian texts have been found at this site. It was called by the Sumerians *Enlil-ki*, "the city of [the god] Enlil." The Babylonians reversed the sequence of the two elements of this name and referred to the city, in their oldest inscriptions, as *Ki-Enlil*, later *Ki-Illina*. This may have given rise to the Hebrew "Calneh." Next to Babylon, Nippur was the most sacred city of Lower Mesopotamia and boasted important temples. From earliest times to the late Persian period, the city was a center of culture and extensive trade.

**Shinar.** The afore-mentioned cities lay in the land of Shinar, the term generally used in the OT for Babylonia, comprising Sumer in the south as well as Accad in the north (see Gen. 11:2; 14:1, 9; Joshua 7:21, Heb., "a garment of Shinar"; Isa. 11:11; Zech. 5:11; Dan. 1:2). The name is still somewhat obscure. It was formerly thought to have been derived from the word *Sumer*, the ancient Sumeria, which lay in the southernmost part of Mesopotamia. More likely, however, it is from *Shanhara* of certain cuneiform texts, a land whose exact location has not been determined. Some texts seem to indicate that *Shanhara* was in northern Mesopotamia rather than in the south. Although it is certain that Shinar is Babylonia, the origin of the term is not yet clear.

**11. Out of that land went forth Asshur.** Even though this translation is possible, the sentence construction in Hebrew favors that given by the RSV, which retains Nimrod as the subject and reads, "From that land he went into Assyria." In Micah 5:6 Assyria is called "the land of Nimrod." Nimrod's move into Assyria and his renewed building

activity there constituted an extension of his empire in a northerly direction. What Assyria lacked in geographical size it made up in political power later in its history.

**Nineveh.** For centuries Nineveh was famous as the capital of Assyria. The Assyrians themselves called it *Ninua*, apparently dedicating it to the Babylonian goddess *Nina*.

This points to Babylon as Nimrod's previous home and agrees with the Biblical report that he, the first king of Babylon, was also founder of Nineveh. Excavations have shown that Nineveh was one of the oldest cities of Upper Mesopotamia. Lying at the intersection of busy international trade routes, Nineveh early became an important commercial center. It changed hands repeatedly during the second millennium B.C., belonging in turn to the Babylonians, Hittites, and Mitannians before being brought under Assyrian control in the 14th century B.C. Later, as capital of the Assyrian Empire, it was embellished with magnificent palaces and temples and strongly fortified. In 612 B.C. the city was destroyed by the Medes and Babylonians, and has since then remained a heap of ruins. In its famous library, established by Ashurbanipal, have been found thousands of baked clay tablets containing invaluable historical, religious, and business documents and letters. Above all others, this discovery has enriched our knowledge of ancient Assyria and Babylonia.

**Rehoboth.** Literally, the "wide places" or "streets of the city." This probably designates Rêbit-Ninâ a suburb of Nineveh mentioned in certain cuneiform texts. Its exact location, however, is still uncertain. Some scholars think it to have been northeast of Nineveh; others, across the river Tigris on the site of modern Mosul.

**Calah.** The ancient Assyrian city of *Kalhu*, which lies at the confluence of the Great Zab and Tigris rivers, about 20 miles south of Nineveh. Its present name, *Nimrud*, perpetuates the memory of its founder. Magnificent palaces were once the pride of this city, which served intermittently as the capital of the Assyrian Empire. In its extensive ruins have been preserved huge stone monuments and some of the finest examples of Assyrian sculpture. The Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III, on which appears the earliest pictorial representation of an Israelite king and other Hebrews, was found in one of its palaces. The inscription on the obelisk records the payment of tribute by King Jehu of Israel in 841 B.C.

**12. Resen.** The Bible places Resen between Nineveh and Calah, but its exact site is yet to be discovered.

**13. Mizraim begat Ludim.** Moses proceeds to the descendants of Ham's second son, Mizraim, whose name was later given to Egypt. Some commentators assume a scribal error to be responsible for a supposed change from Lubim, the Libyans, to the Ludim, or Lydians. But the name appears in different books of the Bible (1 Chron. 1:11; Isa. 66:19; Jer. 46:9; Eze. 27:10; 30:5); therefore it is impossible to see mistakes in all passages where Ludim, or Lud, occurs. In some of these passages Ludim and Lubim are both mentioned as being distinct and separate peoples. Moreover, the LXX translated Ludim as "Lydians." This makes plausible an identification with the Lydians of Asia Minor, who must have migrated from Northern Africa to Anatolia at an early stage in their history. They appeared in the plain of Sardis in western Asia Minor before the middle of the second millennium B.C. and gradually spread over half of the country, to the great river Halys. During the Hittite supremacy Lydia was subject to them, but again became a strong, independent kingdom after the collapse of the Hittite Empire in the 13th century B.C. Cyrus conquered Lydia in the 6th century B.C. and incorporated it into the Persian

Empire. Its former capital, Sardis, however, remained an important city for many centuries. It was still a flourishing metropolis in the early Christian period, when John wrote his letter to the church there (Rev. 3:1–6).

If, however, the Biblical Ludim are not the historical Lydians, they must have lived somewhere in Northern Africa, in proximity to most of the other descendants of Mizraim. If this be so, we cannot identify the Ludim, for mention is not made of such a people in any ancient record but the Bible.

**Anamim.** Perhaps the Anamim lived in the great oasis of Egypt called *Kenemet* (the *k* sound is frequently represented in Hebrew by the consonant ‘*ayin*, with which the name ‘*Anamim* begins). But in 1920 Albright, from Assyrian *Anami*, made a different identification: Cyrene.

**Lehabim.** Presumably the Libyans (called in Egyptian inscriptions *Rbw*, probably pronounced *Lebu*), attested by very early records as representing the tribes bordering on Egypt to the northwest. Eventually they occupied most of Northern Africa. Apparently in the Bible they are also called “Lubim” (see 2 Chron. 12:3; 16:8; Dan. 11:43; Nahum 3:9). The identification of the Lehabim with the Libyans would constitute one more argument against seeing in the previously discussed Ludim a mistake for Lubim.

**Naphtuhim.** The identity of this people is uncertain. Perhaps the best suggestion is that it refers to Egyptians of the Nile Delta. In Egyptian inscriptions these people were called *Na-patûh*, which may be the same as the Biblical Naphtuhim.

**14. Pathrusim.** The Pathrusim were probably the inhabitants of Upper Egypt. In Isa. 11:11 Pathros is listed between Cush (Nubia) and Mizraim (Egypt). The name *Pathros* is the Hebrew rendering of the Egyptian *Pa-ta-res*, written in Assyrian inscriptions *Paturisi*, and meaning “the southland.” Ezekiel 29:14 points to Pathros as the original homeland of the Egyptians. This agrees with their own ancient tradition that the first king Menes, the one who united the nation, came from the old upper Egyptian city of This.

**Casluhim.** Not yet identified. Whether they may have been the inhabitants of the area bordering on the Mediterranean west of Egypt is uncertain.

**Philistim.** Because Amos 9:7 declares that the Philistines came from Caphtor, most commentators think that the word “Caphtorim” should be placed before the phrase “out of whom came Philistim.” Inasmuch as Casluh and Caphtor were sons of the same father, some of the Philistine tribes may have originated from Casluh, others from his brother Caphtor. The Philistines who came into Palestine from Crete by way of Asia Minor and Syria may have had their original home in Northern Africa. As inhabitants of the coastal region of southern Palestine they played an important role in Hebrew history. The Philistines are mentioned frequently not only in the Bible but also in Egyptian records as *Prst* (probably pronounced *Puresati*). Egyptian reliefs picture their features, dress, and modes of traveling and fighting, thus supplementing information about them given in the Bible. They are also mentioned in cuneiform inscriptions under the name *Palastu*. The Greeks called the land of Philista *Palaistinē* and applied that name to the whole country,

which has been known ever since as Palestine (see Isa. 14:29, where *Peleshet* is translated “Palestine”).

**Caphthorim.** This people is mentioned also in Deut. 2:23, Jer. 47:4, and Amos 9:7. Egyptian inscriptions of the second millennium B.C. definitely apply the name *Keftiu* to the first inhabitants of Crete, and also in a wider sense to the coastland peoples of Asia Minor and Greece. This usage of *Keftiu* suggests Crete and migrations to surrounding coastal regions, which would include Syria and Palestine. The Philistines were remnants of these so-called “peoples of the sea.”

**15. Canaan.** For some unknown reason Moses omits the enumeration of the descendants of Ham’s third son Phut, and proceeds to Canaan, youngest of the four brothers. The land of Canaan was strategically located on the important “bridge” between Asia and Africa, between the two great river cultures of antiquity, in Mesopotamia and Egypt. The Biblical Canaan was Palestine west of the Jordan, extending north into present Lebanon and Syria.

**Sidon his firstborn.** The seaport Sidon, known as “great Zidon” at the time of the Hebrew conquest (Joshua 11:8), named in Egyptian hieroglyphic and Mesopotamian cuneiform texts, was the most powerful of the Phoenician city-states from the earliest times. Many Phoenicians then called themselves Sidonians even when they were actually citizens of neighboring cities.

The Sidonians occupied Cyprus and founded colonies in Cilicia and Caria in Asia Minor, on various Greek islands, on Crete, and on the coasts of the Black Sea.

Leadership among the cities of Phoenicia passed from Sidon to its sister city Tyre about 1100 B.C. The Phoenicians were friendly to David and Solomon and to the northern kingdom of Israel as well, but exercised an evil religious influence upon the latter. Esarhaddon claimed to have conquered the island city of Tyre, but Nebuchadnezzar, after capturing mainland Tyre, failed to take the island city after a siege lasting 13 years. As a result Sidon once more played an important role, during the Persian period, but was completely destroyed by Artaxerxes III in 351 B.C. The same fate befell Tyre a few years later, when Alexander took it in 332 B.C., so bringing to a close the long and glorious history of the Phoenician city-states.

**Heth.** Ancestor of the Hittites, called *Kheta* by the Egyptians and *Hatti* in cuneiform texts. The Hittites, with their capital in central Asia Minor, grew into a strong empire in the 17th century B.C. They gained control over much of Asia Minor and Syria, and in extending southward came into conflict with Egypt. This centralized Hittite Empire was later destroyed by the “People of the Sea” and dissolved into many Syrian city-states. The Assyrians called Syria the country of the Hittites. Hittite texts, in both cuneiform and hieroglyphic forms of an Indo-European language, have given us rich information on the history, laws, and culture of this nation. Probably, however, the descendants of Heth were the earlier “proto-Hittites,” whose language was called Hattili (see p. 137).

**16. The Jebusite.** These inhabitants of pre-Israelitic Jerusalem seem to have been only a small and unimportant tribe, since they are never mentioned outside of the Bible and are confined to Jerusalem in the OT records (see Gen. 15:21; Num. 13:29; Judges 19:10, 11; etc.). Solomon made the remnants of the Jebusites serfs of the crown (1 Kings 9:20).

**The Amorite.** A powerful group of peoples found from the border of Egypt to Babylonia during the patriarchal age. They were the founders of the First Dynasty of Babylon, of which Hammurabi, the great Babylonian lawgiver, was the most famous king. The available evidence shows that they infiltrated Mesopotamia, Syria, and Palestine in the early part of the second millennium B.C., and replaced the existing ruling classes in those countries. At the time when the Hebrews invaded the country only remnants of the formerly powerful Amorite populations were encountered (Num. 21:21).

**The Girgasite.** Mentioned only in the Bible, this people was an indigenous Canaanite tribe of Palestine (Joshua 24:11).

**17. The Hivite.** Though mentioned 25 times in various OT passages, the Hivites were nevertheless an obscure Canaanite tribe. Some hold that the name Hivite should read "Horite" (Hurrian), as the LXX has it twice, with a change of only one letter in Hebrew. (See pp. 425, 138.)

**The Arkite.** This people inhabited the Phoenician seaport of Irkata, situated about 16 mi. northeast of Tripoli in the foothills of Lebanon. Pharaoh Thutmose III conquered the whole region during the 15th century B.C. It remained in Egyptian possession for at least 100 years, as the Amarna Letters of the 14th century indicate. King Tiglath-pileser III of Assyria mentions the city as one that paid tribute to him in the 8th century.

**The Sinite.** This group lived in and about the city of Siannu, which Tiglath-pileser III mentions, together with other tributary Phoenician vassals, in the 8th century B.C. Its exact location is still unknown.

**18. The Arvadite.** The Arvadites inhabited the ancient city of Arvad, built on an island off the northern coast of Phoenicia. The city appears repeatedly in ancient records of Babylonia, Palestine, and Egypt. Inscriptions of about 1100 B.C. say that Tiglath-pileser I sailed for a whale hunt with the ships of Arvad. The mentioning of the whale as occurring in the Mediterranean Sea during the second millennium B.C. is significant in connection with the story of Jonah, and with the mention of great sea monsters in Ps. 104:26. Ezekiel 27:8, 11 mentions the Arvadites as mariners and brave warriors.

**The Zemarite.** Also a Phoenician people. *Simirra* occurs in Assyrian, Palestinian, and Egyptian documents as a wealthy city of merchants. The Egyptian Pharaohs Thutmose III and Seti I conquered the city for Egypt in the 15th and 14th centuries B.C., but during the period of the Assyrian supremacy Simirra, like other Phoenician cities, became tributary to Tiglath-pileser III and his successors.

**The Hamathite.** Hamath was a famous ancient city situated on the principal river of Syria, the Orontes. It is mentioned in Egyptian as well as in Assyrian documents. Tiglath-pileser III subjugated it, but it soon regained its independence and joined other enemies of Assyria in a long but unsuccessful struggle against that empire.

**19. The border of the Canaanites.** Not all the borders of the Canaanite area are here given. Only cities at the southern limit of the eastern border are mentioned. (For a more complete discussion of the geographical location of these cities, see on ch. 14:3.) Although the eastern and northern borders are not specifically mentioned, it may safely be assumed that the northern Arabian Desert in the east and the Syrian city of Hamath on the Orontes (see v. 18) in the north marked the limits of the Canaanite area. The Canaanites were scattered all along the Phoenician and Palestinian coasts.

**21. The children of Eber.** After enumerating the descendants of Japheth and Ham, Moses next lists those of Shem. His first statement concerns the Hebrews, who as

descendants of Eber (ch. 11:16–26), were Shemites (or Semites). Recent discoveries make it evident that the *Habiru* mentioned in Babylonian, Assyrian, Hittite, Syrian, Canaanite, and Egyptian inscriptions were to be found among all of these nations during the second millennium B.C., and that they were apparently related to the Hebrews. There is reason to assume that the *Habiru* were descendants of Eber as the Hebrews were; also, ancient sources occasionally refer to the Hebrews as *Habiru*. But it is certain that not all the *Habiru* mentioned in non-Biblical documents were Hebrews. The exceptionally wide dispersion of the *Habiru* throughout many countries of the ancient world may have led Moses to make the unusual statement that Shem was “the father of all the children of Eber.”

***The brother of Japheth the elder.*** In Hebrew this phrase permits a translation making Japheth the elder brother of Shem, as the KJV renders it, or Shem “the elder brother of Japheth,” as in the RSV. The KJV is correct (see on ch. 5:32).

**22. *The children of Shem; Elam.*** This verse leads the reader to the home of the Semites, Mesopotamia and eastern Arabia. Elam was the region bordering on the lower Tigris in the west and on Media in the northeast. Elam’s ancient capital, Susa, the Biblical Shushan (Dan. 8:2), became, in later times, one of the capitals of the Persian Empire (see, for example, Esther 1:2). Excavations at Susa have brought to light numerous documents written in cuneiform script that allows us to reconstruct their history and religion. Elam’s descendants, Semites, settled very early in that area, but they evidently mingled with others, for their language as known from cuneiform records was not Semitic. It belonged to the Asianic-Armenoid group of languages. The relationship of the later Elamites with other known nations, however, is obscure.

***Asshur.*** Assyria occupied the central part of the Tigris valley, extending in the north to the mountains of Armenia and in the east to the Median plateau. The name of Shem’s son Asshur was in turn taken over by the chief god of the Assyrians, by the oldest capital of the country, Assur, now Kalah-Shergat, and by the nation itself. Assyria appears in historical records from the beginning of the second millennium B.C. until its destruction by the Medes and Babylonians in the latter part of the 7th century. During its most powerful period Assyria was the scourge of all nations. Its cruelty toward conquered foes has never been surpassed. The kingdom of Israel was destroyed by the Assyrians, and the southern kingdom of Judah itself barely escaped.

***Arphaxad.*** Identified by some commentators with Arrapha, the region between Media and Assyria. It is more likely the ancient country of Arrapachitis, between Lakes Urmia and Van. It was probably named after Arphaxad (Heb. *Arpachshad*).

***Lud.*** Distinct from the Ludim mentioned in v. 13. Lud can be identified with the country of *Lubdi*, which appears in the ancient records as a region lying between the upper Euphrates and Tigris rivers.

***Aram.*** Ancestor of the Aramaeans. In the early second millennium B.C. this people occupied the northwestern portion of Mesopotamia, but they spread southward in later times.

The Aramaeans in the north were never united as a nation, but were divided into many small tribes and city-states. The strongest of the Aramaean states, Damascus, was finally conquered by Tiglath-pileser III in 732 B.C. This event marks the end of the

political history of the Aramaeans, but by no means the end of their cultural influence upon surrounding nations. They were scattered far and wide among the ancient peoples and passed their language and script on to them. As a result the Aramaic language became, within a very short time, a universal vehicle of communication from the border of India in the east to the Aegean Sea in the west, and from the Caucasus in the north to Ethiopia in the south. For centuries Aramaic remained the most widely used language in the Near East, and was the common tongue of the Jews in Jesus' day.

Either Aramaean in origin or closely related were the Chaldeans, a south Babylonian tribe living in an area around "Ur of the Chaldees," who fought the Assyrians, held the throne of Babylon several times in the 8th century B.C. and later founded the great neo-Babylonian dynasty of Nebuchadnezzar II, conqueror of Jerusalem.

**23. *The children of Aram; Uz.*** The name Uz was borne not only by Aram's eldest son but also by the first son of Nahor (ch. 22:21, KJV, "Huz"), and by a grandson of Seir, the ancestor of the Horites. It is therefore difficult to limit Uz to a well-defined region. For the same reason it is not possible to determine Job's location as an inhabitant of the land Uz (Job 1:1), nor to identify *Sasi*, the prince of Uz, mentioned by the Assyrian king Shalmaneser III. Nothing is known of the Aramaic tribes of Hul, Gether, and Mash.

**24. *Arphaxad begat Salah.*** Inasmuch as the line from Arphaxad to Abraham is considered more in detail in ch. 11, Moses says little about it here. He follows it, however, through the first several generations in order to show the descent of the Joktan Arabs, who were cousins of the Hebrews through their common ancestor, Eber.

***Eber.*** On Eber's possible connection with the *Habiru* of non-Biblical sources, see on v. 21.

**25. *Peleg.*** *Peleg* means "division." He was the first-born son of Eber and one of the ancestors of Abraham. Although the text speaks literally of a splitting up of the "earth," it is more likely that the word "earth" signifies its people, as in chs. 9:19 and 11:1. Moses probably anticipates the events described in the next chapter, the confusion of tongues and the resulting dispersion of peoples. His remarks made in ch. 10:5, 20, and 31 about the diversity of tongues are to be understood in the same way. If the confusion of tongues took place about the time of Peleg's birth, we can easily understand why he received the name Peleg, "division." "In his days was the earth divided."

***Joktan.*** Peleg's brother Joktan was the ancestor of an important group, the Joktan Arabs. The descent of the western, or Cushite, Arabs is given in v. 7, whereas the genealogy of the Arab descendants of Abraham is given in later chapters of Genesis. A third group of Arabs, described here, seems to have settled in the central, eastern, and southeastern parts of Arabia. Much less is known about them than about the other two Arabian groups.

**26. *Almodad, and Sheleph.*** The name Almodad has not yet been found in non-Biblical sources; hence no identification beyond the brief information in this text is possible. Sheleph may have been an Arabic people, the *Salapenes*, mentioned by Ptolemy.

***Hazarmaveth.*** The Hadramaut of the south Arabic inscriptions, a country rich in incense, myrrh, and aloes. Its ancient population was devoted to the worship of the moon god Sin and his messenger Hol. Nothing is known of the Arabian tribe of Jerah.

**27. Hadoram.** The south Arabian tribe of the Adramites. Uzal may have been in Yemen. Diklah is still unidentified.

**28. Sheba.** As already noticed in connection with the explanation of the Cushite Sheba of southern Arabia (v. 7), the Joktanite Sabaeans are probably north Arabians of this name. They are mentioned in the inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III and Sargon II (8th century B.C.) as allies of the *Aribi*. Nothing is known of Obal and Abimael.

**29. Ophir.** Designates both a people and a land. Although mentioned frequently in the OT, its precise location is still unknown. Inasmuch as it took Solomon's ships three years to complete a voyage from the Red Sea port of Ezion-Geber (1 Kings 9:28; 10:11, 22; etc.), Ophir must have been a rather distant land. Scholars have identified it with a southeastern region of Arabia, with a strip on the eastern coast of the Persian Gulf called *Apir* by the Elamites, or with India. The products imported from Ophir, gold, silver, ivory, apes, and peacocks, may favor an identification with India rather than with Arabia. If Ophir was in India, it is hard to explain why all the other identifiable descendants of Joktan migrated eastward to the subcontinent of India after Genesis was written, because Moses places all the descendants of Joktan within definite geographical limits (see v. 30). According to another explanation, Ophir of the table of nations was in Arabia, whereas that of Solomon's expeditions was in India. The latest available evidence, however, based on Egyptian inscriptions, seems to identify Ophir with Punt, which is understood to be the region of Somaliland in East Africa.

**Havilah, and Jobab.** Neither has as yet been identified.

**30. Their dwelling.** The places mentioned cannot be identified with certainty. Meshah is perhaps *Mesene* at the northwestern end of the Persian Gulf, and Sephar is possibly the city *Saprapha* of Ptolemy and Pliny, now Dofar, on the southeastern coast of Arabia. A high mountain standing in the immediate neighborhood of Dofar, which corresponds to the "mount of the east" mentioned by the Inspired Record, seems to favor this identification.

**31. The sons of Shem.** The enumeration of Shem's descendants is concluded in words similar to those of Japheth and Ham in vs. 5 and 20. There is no doubt that the names given in this table of nations refer primarily to tribes and peoples, and but indirectly to individuals.

**32. These are the families.** The detailed discussion of the names, their identification, and other information about the nations mentioned point to the Biblical table of nations as an ancient and reliable document. Many of the names appear in non-Biblical sources of the first half of the second millennium B.C., some as early as 2000 B.C., or perhaps even earlier. Ancient records being fragmentary, some nations appear only in records of a comparatively late date. The Medes, for instance, do not appear in secular documents earlier than the 9th century B.C. This does not mean that such nations did not exist in earlier times, but rather that records by them or about them have not been found. Some, like the Joktan Arabs, may have had little contact with the nations whose records we do possess. The continuous discovery of ancient historical source material may be expected to shed further light on Gen. 10.

This table proclaims the unity of the human race, declaring that all have descended from a common source. Diverse as they now are in their geographical location, their physical appearance, or their national peculiarities, all can trace their origin back to Noah

and his three sons. This list condemns all theories that would trace mankind back to different original parents. The list, furthermore, constitutes evidence supporting the account of the dispersion of races as being due to the confusion of tongues described in the next chapter. Moses (Deut. 32:8) and Paul (Acts 17:26) both affirm that the allocation of territory was made by God.

## ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

1 PP 117  
10 8T 213

### CHAPTER 11

1 *One language in the world.* 3 *The building of Babel.* 5 *The confusion of tongues.* 10 *The generations of Shem.* 27 *The generations of Terah the father of Abram.* 31 *Terah goeth from Ur to Haran.*

**1. *One language.*** Literally, “one lip and one kind of words,” indicating not only one language understood by all but the absence of differences in dialect as well. Pronunciation and vocabulary were the same among all men. Unity of language goes with unity of descent, and a common language does much to promote unity of thought and action. Modern research in comparative grammar has demonstrated conclusively that all known languages are related and that they have descended from one common original. The question as to whether any known language resembles that original speech cannot be answered. It is possible, even probable, that one of the Semitic tongues, such as Hebrew or Aramaic, is similar to the language men spoke before the confusion of tongues. Personal names of the period preceding the confusion of tongues, as far as they can be interpreted, make sense only if considered to be originally Semitic. The record containing these names, the book of Genesis, is written in Hebrew, a Semitic tongue, by a Semite author, and for Semitic readers. It is therefore possible, although unlikely, that Moses translated these names from an original language unknown to his readers, into Hebrew names that would have meaning for them.

**2. *As they journeyed.*** As indicated by the verb “journeyed,” literally, “to pull out,” like the pegs of a tent, men lived a nomadic life for a time after the Flood. The mountainous region of Ararat was not well adapted to agricultural pursuits. Furthermore, those who forsook God resented the silent witness of the holy lives of those who were loyal to Him. Accordingly, there occurred a separation of the evil from among the good, with those who defied God leaving the mountains (PP 118).

***From the east.*** The KJV translation “from the east,” for *miqqedem*, is misleading. The same Hebrew expression is translated “eastward” in ch. 2:8 and “east” in ch. 13:11. To reach the land of Shinar, Babylonia, from the mountains of Ararat, the direction of travel would of necessity be southeasterly, not “from the east” in a westerly direction.

***They found a plain.*** That is, a wide, open land. In antiquity the southern Mesopotamian lowland, often called “Shinar” in the Bible (see on ch. 10:10), was a well-watered, fertile region. The oldest known civilization, that of the Sumerians, thrived here. The spade of the archeologist reveals this land to have been densely populated in earliest historical times. This fact agrees with Genesis as to the locality in which a permanent settlement was first attempted. Excavations have shown, furthermore, that the earliest population of Lower Mesopotamia possessed a high culture. The Sumerians invented the art of writing on clay tablets, built well-constructed houses, and were masters in the production of jewelry, tools, and household utensils.

**3. *Let us make brick.*** The plain of Babylonia, alluvial in formation, lacked stone of any kind but had an ample supply of clay for making brick. Lower Mesopotamia has as a result always been a land of brick buildings, in contrast to Assyria, where stone is plentiful. Most bricks, in ancient as in modern times, were sun dried, but bricks for public buildings were baked in the fire to make them more durable. This process was employed by the earliest settlers in Mesopotamia, as the Bible and the spade both testify.

***Brick for stone.*** Writing for the Hebrews in Egypt, a land of majestic stone monuments and public buildings, Moses explains that in Babylonia brick was used because of the lack of stone. This detail, like many others, attests the historical and geographical accuracy of the Genesis narrative.

***Slime had they for mortar.*** Another exact detail concerning Babylonian methods of construction. The Hebrew word here translated “slime” means, more accurately, asphalt or bitumen. Mesopotamia abounds in oil and related products, and asphalt wells existed in the vicinity of Babylon as well as in other parts of the country. Having discovered the durable quality of asphalt, early Babylonian builders used it extensively in the erection of buildings. Asphalt binds the bricks together so well that it is difficult to save any of them when a building is demolished. In fact, it is almost impossible to detach bricks from ancient ruins in whose construction asphalt was used.

**4. *Let us build us a city.*** Cain had built the first city (ch. 4:17), in an attempt, perhaps, to avoid the nomadic life God had marked out for him. God’s original plan called for men to spread over the face of the earth and to cultivate the soil (see ch. 1:28). The building of cities represented opposition to this plan. The concentration of human beings has always encouraged laziness, immorality, and other vices. Cities have ever been hotbeds of crime, for in such an environment Satan finds less resistance to his attacks than in smaller communities where people live in close touch with nature. God had told Noah to replenish, or fill, the earth (ch. 9:1). In fear of unknown or suspected dangers, however, men wanted to build a city, in the hope of finding security through the works of their hands. They chose to forget that true security comes only in trusting and obeying God. The rapidly increasing descendants of Noah must have departed very soon from the worship of the true God. In the fear that their evil ways would again invite catastrophe, they sought protection.

***A tower.*** This would give inhabitants of the city the desired feeling of security. Such a citadel would protect them against attack, and enable them, they believed, to escape another flood—which God had promised should never be. The Flood had covered the highest mountains of the antediluvian world, but had not reached “unto heaven.” If, therefore, a structure higher than the mountains could be erected, men reasoned, they would be safe whatever God might do. Archeological excavations reveal that the earliest inhabitants of Lower Mesopotamia erected many towerlike temples dedicated to the worship of various idol deities.

***Let us make us a name.*** The Tower of Babel was to have been a monument to the superior wisdom and skill of its builders. To establish a “name,” or reputation, for themselves, men have been willing to endure hardship, danger, and privation. The desire for renown was apparently one of the impelling motives for building the tower, and pride in such a structure would, in turn, tend to maintain unity in the accomplishment of other unsanctified schemes. According to the divine purpose, men were to have preserved unity through the bond of true religion. When idolatry and polytheism broke this inner spiritual

bond, they lost not only unity of religion but also the spirit of brotherhood. A project such as the tower, to preserve by outward means the inward unity which had been lost, could never succeed. Obviously, only those who had forsaken God took part in these activities.

**5. *The Lord came down.*** This coming down is not the same as at Sinai, where the Lord revealed His presence by a visible symbol (see Ex. 19:20; 34:5; Num. 11:25; etc.). It is simply a description in human language of the fact that men's doings are never hidden from God. When men would build up toward heaven and exalt themselves, God came down to investigate and defeat their impious plans.

***Builded.*** The perfect form of the Hebrew verb here translated "builded" implies that construction was progressing rapidly toward completion. The term "children of men," literally "sons of the man," is so general in its sweep as to suggest that all, or at least a majority, of those who no longer served God took part in the project.

**6. *This they begin to do.*** The Tower of Babel represented doubt of God's word and defiance of His will. It was designed as monument to apostasy and as a citadel of rebellion against Him. This was but the first step in an evil master plan to control the world. Prompt and decisive action was called for, to warn men of God's displeasure and to frustrate their wicked schemes. That men may be assured that God is not arbitrary in His dealings and does not act on sudden impulse, He is represented as taking counsel with Himself. The reason for His intervention is clearly stated.

Except for the restraining power of God exercised from time to time in the course of history, the evil designs of men would be carried forward to success, and society would become wholly corrupt. The comparative order in society today is due to the restraining power of God. Satan's power is definitely limited (see Job 1:12; 2:6; Rev. 7:1).

**7. *Let us go down.*** The use of the pronoun "us" indicates the participation of at least two persons of the Godhead (see Gen. 1:26).

***Confound their language.*** God did not wish again to destroy man. Wickedness had not as yet reached the limits to which it had gone before the Flood, and God determined to check it before it should again reach that point. By confusing their language and thus forcing them to separate, God designed to forestall future united action. Each of the groups might yet pursue an evil course, but the division of society into many groups would prevent concerted opposition to God. Upon repeated occasions since the dispersion of the races at Babel, ambitious men have sought, unsuccessfully, to contravene the divine decree of separation. Ingenious leaders have succeeded, at times, in forcing the nations into an artificial unity. But with the establishment of God's glorious kingdom the nations of the saved will be truly united and speak one language.

***Not understand one another's speech.*** Not that one man could not understand any of his fellow men, as such a situation would render the existence of society impossible. There were to be various tribal groups, each of which was to have its own speech. Such is the origin of the world's great variety of languages and dialects, which now number approximately 3,000.

The division of languages, though an obstacle to human schemes for political and economic cooperation, was not to be an obstacle to the triumph of the cause of God. The gift of tongues at Pentecost was to be one means of overcoming this difficulty (see Acts 2:5-12). National differences do not prevent either unity of faith and action on the part of God's children or the advancement of His eternal purpose. God's Word has been made available to the nations in their own tongue, and brethren of like faith, though separated

by racial and linguistic differences, are nevertheless bound together in their love for Jesus and their devotion to truth. The brotherhood of faith unites them more firmly than could the possession of a common language. In the unity of the church the world is to see convincing evidence of the purity and power of its message (see John 17:21).

**8. *Scattered them abroad*** What men had not been willing to do voluntarily and under favorable circumstances, they were now compelled to do because of necessity. Inability to understand one another's speech led to misunderstanding, distrust, and division. Those who could understand one another formed a small community of their own. This verse indicates that the builders of Babel were scattered far and wide, with the result that soon thereafter representatives of the human family were to be found in most parts of the world. Evidence from many lands testifies to the presence of human beings within a comparatively short time after the Flood. Archeological discoveries point to the Mesopotamian valley as the first locality to develop a distinct civilization. Similar civilizations sprang up soon afterward in Egypt, Palestine, Syria, Anatolia, India, China, and elsewhere. All available evidence supports the cryptic saying of Holy Writ that "the Lord scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth."

***They left off to build.*** The tower that was to rise to heaven to rise to heaven was never completed. However, it is evident from the Bible and from history that the local population subsequently completed the work of building the city.

**9. *Babel.*** By a play on words the Hebrew linked the name of the city, Babel, with the Hebrew verb *balal*, "to confuse." It would have been a strange procedure, however, for the Babylonians to derive a name for their city from a Hebrew word. Ancient Babylonian texts interpret *Bab-ilu* or *Bab-ilanu* as meaning "port of god" or "gateway of the gods." It is, however, possible that this meaning was secondary, and that the name was originally from the Babylonian verb *babalu*, meaning "to scatter," or "to disappear." Perhaps the Babylonians were not particularly proud of a name that reminded them of the inglorious climax of earlier plans for the city, and so invented an explanation that made it appear to be a compound of the names *bab*, "port," and *ilu*, "god" (see on ch. 10:10).

Most modern commentators explain the story of the building of the tower and the subsequent confusion of tongues either as an outright legend or as a gross exaggeration of some tragedy that occurred during the construction of Babylon's historical temple tower, called a ziggurat. Contrary to what many popular works on Biblical archeology have stated, archeologists have found no evidence that the Tower of Babel ever existed. The very fragmentary tablet K3657 of the British Museum, which has frequently been quoted as referring to the story of the building of the Tower of Babel and the confusion of tongues, actually makes no references at all to this event, as subsequent studies and a better understanding of this text have shown. One who believes only those Bible stories that are corroborated by outside evidence will refuse to believe the story of Gen. 11. However, he who believes the Bible to be the inspired word of God will accept this narrative, along with all other Bible narratives, as authentic.

The passion of Mesopotamian peoples for building lofty towers did not cease with the first unsuccessful attempt to erect one that would "reach unto heaven." Throughout antiquity they continued building temple towers, or ziggurats. Several such ruins are still standing. The best preserved one is at Ur, Abraham's early home.

The exact location of the original tower is unknown. Probably the later temple tower of Babylon replaced it. An old Jewish tradition, probably based mistakenly on a 7th-century ruin, located the Tower of Babel at Borsippa, a city 9 mi. southwest of Babylon. An imposing ruin 156 feet high is all that remains of an ancient tower in Borsippa which once consisted of seven steps surmounted by a temple. Inscriptions by Nebuchadnezzar found under the foundations of the building state that he completed the building of this tower, the erection of which a former king had begun. The Jewish historian Josephus attributes the tower to Nimrod, a tradition that has been perpetuated by the local population in their name for it, *Birs-Nimrud*. Like all Babylonian edifices, this tower was built of brick and bitumen, and the ruins show the marks of numerous bolts of lightning which struck it in ages past. This application of heat has welded the uppermost bricks and asphalt together in a solid mass. Travelers have for centuries described the effects of heavenly fire upon the tower, usually with reference to the events described in Gen. 11.

It should not be forgotten, however, that the tower of Borsippa was not built earlier than the 7th century B.C., by Ashurbanipal and Nebuchadnezzar. Whatever the location of the first Tower of Babel may have been, all traces of the original structure have vanished.

It is more probable that the ancient Tower of Babel was on the site of the temple tower of the city of Babylon, which once stood in the Marduk temple area on the eastern bank of the Euphrates. Babylonian traditions claimed that its foundation had been laid in very early times. Several kings restored the tower during the course of its history, Nebuchadnezzar being the last to do so. This tower is described in detail by the Greek historian Herodotus, and also by a Babylonian cuneiform text, as having had 7 steps and a total height of 250 ft. The Persian king Xerxes destroyed it completely, along with the city of Babylon, in 478 B.C. Planning to rebuild the tower, Alexander the Great had the debris cleared away, but he died before his plan could be carried out. Nothing whatever remains of the highest and most famous temple tower of ancient Mesopotamian, save the foundation stones and the lowest steps of its old stairway. The fact that since Xerxes' time nothing could be seen of this tower, whereas the one in neighboring Borsippa remained standing, may be the reason that Jews and Christians alike connected the story of Gen. 11 with the ruins of Borsippa.

**10. The generations of Shem.** The usual title for a genealogy (see chs. 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; etc.). Moses now returns to the line of Shem, his discussion of which was interrupted by the account of the confusion of tongues. But vs. 10–26 do not form a continuation of the table of nations of ch. 10; they present the genealogy of the patriarchal line from Shem to Abraham. Chapter 10 sets forth the racial relationship of the various tribes and nations and their common descent from Noah, whereas ch. 11:10–26 presents the exact descent of God's chosen people through the many intervening generations. This is a continuation of the list of generations from Adam to Noah as given in ch. 5. The first four descendants of Shem, already enumerated in the Shemite part of the table of nations, are repeated here to show the direct descent of the Terahites through Peleg.

**Shem was an hundred years old.** This statement shows that Shem was two years younger than Japheth (see on ch. 5:32).

The list doubtless presents personal, not tribal, names; for it gives the exact age of each man at the birth of the son through whom the line continues, and his length of life thereafter. Although names such as Arphaxad or Eber are also tribal names, as in ch. 10:21, 22, that does not contradict the fact that the men here named were real individuals.

**11. *Shem lived after he begat Arphaxad.*** Inasmuch as the formula used by Moses in vs. 10 and 11 is a pattern for the brief biographical sketches that follow, it is not necessary to comment in detail on vs. 12–26. A notable difference between the formula used here and one of ch. 5 is the omission of the total age of each person listed in ch. 11. Nothing is lost, however, because in each case the total age can easily be computed by adding the years of a man's age at the birth of the son to the remaining years of his life. Moses' reason for making this difference between the style of the two lists is not known.

**12. *Arphaxad.*** See on ch. 10:22. Prior to the Flood the average age of paternity had been 117 years (the lowest 65, the highest 187 years), but thereafter it decreased to 30-35 years, reaching unusual heights only in the cases of Terah and Abraham.

The same decrease is seen in the total ages of men after the Flood. Although Noah himself reached the antediluvian age of 950 years, Shem's age was only 600 and that of his son Arphaxad but 438 years. In succeeding generations the process continued, so that Nahor, the grandfather of Abraham, lived to be only 148 years of age. This greatly abbreviated life span may have been due partly to climatic changes. More important still was the change in diet from vegetarian to one including the flesh of animals (PP 107; CD 391). With each succeeding generation the human race was further and further removed from the vigorous physical heritage of Adam and from the invigorating fruit of the tree of life.

**13. *Salah.*** "The one sent forth." This is a Semitic name, used also among the Phoenician colonists of Carthage in Northern Africa.

**14. *Eber.*** "The one who passes over." Inasmuch as Eber's descendants were to cross the Euphrates and migrate toward Syria and Palestine, this name may indicate prophetic insight on the part of his parents (see on ch. 10:21).

**16. *Peleg.*** Meaning "division" (see on ch. 10:25).

**18. *Reu.*** Meaning "friend" or "friendship." It is possibly an abbreviation of Reuel, "friend of God," the name of several Bible characters (Gen. 36:4; Ex. 2:18; Num. 2:14).

**20. *Serug.*** May mean "the one interlaced," "the entangled one," or "vine branch." Which meaning was intended is uncertain.

**22. *Nahor.*** "The snorter." Perhaps there may have been some impediment in his speech.

**24. *Terah.*** Without meaning in Hebrew, but in the related Ugaritic language, "bridegroom."

**26. *Terah lived seventy years.*** This text seems to imply that Abram, Nahor, and Haran were triplets, born when their father Terah was 70 years old. That such was not the case is evident from the following considerations. Terah died in Haran at the age of 205 years (ch. 11:32). Abram journeyed to Canaan at the age of 75 (ch. 12:4). Abram's call to leave Haran came after his father's death, as explicitly stated in Acts 7:4.

Abram cannot then have been older than 75 at the death of his father, and Terah was at least 130 years old when Abram was born. Therefore, ch. 11:26 means that Terah began to beget sons when he was seventy years old. Youngest of the three sons, Abram is mentioned first because of his importance as ancestor of the Hebrews. Although it is not certain which of the two remaining sons of Terah, Nahor or Haran, was the elder, the fact that Nahor married Haran's daughter (ch. 11:29) may point to Haran as Nahor's senior (cf. on ch. 5:32).

**Abram.** “Father of elevation” or “exalted father,” pointing to his honored position as ancestor of God’s chosen people. His name was later changed by God to Abraham (ch. 17:5). The name appears in Egyptian records as that of an Amorite ruler of a Palestinian city at the very time Abram lived. It appears also in a contemporary cuneiform document from Babylonia, showing that the name was not uncommon.

**Nahor.** This son of Terah was named after his grandfather.

**Haran.** This name has no meaning in Hebrew. It is similar to Haran, *Charan*, the city where Terah settled. The name of the city, related to an Assyrian root word meaning “highway,” may indicate its location astride one of the principal trade routes between Mesopotamia and the Mediterranean.

As with the antediluvian chronology, the Samaritan Pentateuch and the LXX credit patriarchs from the Flood to the birth of Abram with considerably longer lives than do the Hebrew text and English translations based upon it (see on ch. 5:32). Whereas the KJV has 352 years between the Flood and Abram’s birth, the Same LXX, 1,132 or 1,232 (according to variant readings; see p. 180).

The LXX insertion of Cainan between Arphaxad and Salah may, however, be justified. In this the LXX is confirmed by Luke, who also lists Cainan in this position (Luke 3:35, 36). In spite of apparent disagreement between Moses (and 1 Chron. 1:24) on the one hand and Luke and the LXX on the other, no real difficulty exists. The Scriptures contain numerous and striking instances of the omission of names from genealogical lists. In tracing his own ancestry back to Aaron, Ezra for instance, omits at least six names (see Ezra 7:1–5; cf. 1 Chron. 6:3–15).

Centuries later Matthew’s genealogy of Jesus omits four kings of Judah, and possibly other ancestors of our Lord (see on Matt. 1:8, 17). Moses’ possible omission of Cainan from the list of Gen. 11:10–26 should not therefore be considered an inaccuracy, but rather an example of what was a common practice among Hebrew writers.

Whatever may be the case, the list as given by Moses must be considered at least fairly complete. Ellen G. White refers (PP 125) to an “unbroken line” of righteous men—from Adam to Shem—who passed down the knowledge of God that Abram inherited. This has been taken by some to imply that Abram must have been instructed by Shem personally; if so, then Abram was born some years before Shem’s death, which is dated 500 years after the Flood.

### THE CHRONOLOGY OF GENESIS 11

	Hebrew		Samaritan		LXX		Josephus
	Age at son’s birth	Rest of years	Age at son’s birth	Rest of years	Age at son’s birth	Rest of years	Age at son’s birth
Shem (Age 2 yrs. after the Flood)	100	500	100	500	100	500	(omits)
phaxad	35	403	135	303	135	430*	135
inan					130	330	
lah	30	403	130	303	130	330	130

er	34	430	134	270	134	370*	134
leg	30	209	130	109	130	209	130
u	32	207	132	107	132	207	130
rug	30	200	130	100	130	200	132
hor	29	119	79	69	179*	129*	120
rah	70	135	70	75	70	135	
Terah (at Abram's birth)	130	75	70	135	130	75	70

Those who arrive at this conclusion from the above passage infer that it upholds the Hebrew against both the Samaritan and LXX chronologies of the period, and renders impossible any considerable number of omissions from Moses' genealogical list. Until more definite information becomes available the chronology of events prior to the birth of Abram should be considered approximate. With the advent of the patriarch Abram we reach a more solid foundation on which to build a chronology.

**27. Terah.** Up to this point Moses has narrated the history of all mankind. Henceforth the inspired record concerns itself almost exclusively with the history of but one family, the chosen people of God. Throughout the remainder of the OT attention is generally given to other nations only as they come in contact with God's people.

**Haran begat Lot.** Lot, "the concealed one." Lot is introduced because of the role he is to play as Abram's companion in the land of Canaan and as ancestor of the Moabites and Ammonites.

**28. Haran died before his father.** Literally, "in the face of his father," meaning "while his father was still alive," or, "in the presence of his father." This is the first mention (though not necessarily the first case) of a son having died before his father.

**Ur of the Chaldees.** As shown by literary documents and recent excavations, the city of Haran's nativity had a long and glorious history. The ruins of Ur have long been known under the modern name *Tell el-Muqayyar*, which is situated about halfway between Baghdad and the Persian Gulf. Between 1922 and 1934 a joint British-American expedition carried out what have proved to be among the most fruitful of all Mesopotamian excavations. Royal tombs of an early dynasty gave up their fabulous store of treasures. The well-preserved ruins of houses, temples, and a temple tower have provided a wealth of material from which we may reconstruct the checkered history of this city which played so important a role from the dawn of history to the time of the Persian Empire. At the beginning of the second millennium B.C., when Abram lived there, the city possessed an exceptionally high culture. Houses were well constructed, and usually two stories high. Rooms on the ground floor were grouped around a central courtyard, and a staircase led up to the second story. The city had an efficient sewage system, which is more than some cities in that country can boast even today. In the schools of Ur reading, writing, arithmetic, and geography were taught, as the many school exercises that have been recovered make evident. In the OT this city is usually called "Ur of the Chaldees," an expression that has not yet been found in the cuneiform texts of Mesopotamia. There it is simply called "Ur." It is, however, known that the region of Ur was later inhabited by Aramaic Chaldean tribes, who may have come

somewhat earlier (see on ch. 10:22). These tribes were closely related to the family of Terah, and both were descendants of Arphaxad. The memory of this relationship was kept alive by referring back to the original family home as Ur in Chaldea, or “Ur of the Chaldees.”

The advanced cultural level of Ur in Abram’s time puts to silence the sneers of those who would stigmatize Abram as an ignorant nomad. His youth was spent in a highly cultured and sophisticated city as the son of one of its wealthy citizens, and without doubt he was a well-educated man.

Abram must, as well, have been acquainted with the religious life of Ur, which, as excavations have shown, was polytheistic. Joshua states that Terah, Abram’s father, had served other gods in Ur (Joshua 24:2). We are led to assume that Terah’s other sons did likewise, for Rachel, Jacob’s wife, stole idols from her father, Laban, who was a grandson of Abram’s brother Nahor (Gen. 31:19). It is a miracle that Abram remained untouched by the pagan influences surrounding him.

**29. Abram and Nahor took them wives.** Nahor’s wife, Milcah, was a daughter of his brother Haran and therefore his own niece. Abram’s wife, Sarai, was his half sister, a daughter of Terah by another wife than Abram’s mother (see ch. 20:12). Marriage with a half sister, and with other close relatives, was afterward forbidden by the Mosaic civil code, though apparently still permitted in Abram’s time (see Lev. 18:6, 9, 14).

**Iscah.** It is not clear why Iscah, another daughter of Haran, is mentioned here. Following an old Jewish tradition, some commentators have seen the name as another name of Sarai, Abram’s wife. Others think she was the wife of Lot. There is no factual basis for any such suppositions.

**30. Sarai was barren.** This statement seems to imply a contrast with Milcah, Sarai’s sister-in-law (see ch. 24:24), and foreshadows the great importance of Sarai’s childlessness in the trial of Abram’s faith.

**31. They went forth.** The Scriptures make it clear that Abram was the one to whom God revealed Himself in Ur of the Chaldees, and not to Terah, as might be inferred from this passage (PP 127). Stephen told his hearers that Abram had left “Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran,” in response to an explicit command addressed to him personally of God (Acts 7:2, 3). God later reminded Abram that He had brought him out of Ur of the Chaldees (Gen. 15:7), not out of Haran (see also Neh. 9:7). We conclude that Abram’s call occurred in two stages. The first call, when he lived at Ur, was to leave his ancestral tribe, but the second, at Haran, was to forsake his immediate relatives, even his father’s house (see Gen. 12:1). When the first call came to Abram, he obeyed immediately and left the old environment to find a new home in the country God promised to provide for him. He must have had considerable influence over his father, Terah, his brother Nahor, and his nephew Lot, because they all chose to accompany him. Nahor is not mentioned as one of those who left Ur with Terah and Abram, but if he did not go at this time he must have followed a little later (see ch. 24:10). Although Abram was the one to whom the call came at Ur, he still lived under his father’s roof and would look to his father to take the initiative should he be willing to do so. Terah evidently consented and, as head of the house, led out in making the move. Oriental propriety would require that Terah be given credit for acting as head of his house. It would seem most inappropriate to say that Abram took his father Terah.

***To go into the land of Canaan.*** This indicates that Canaan was their destination from the very beginning. There were two possible routes of travel from Ur in southern Mesopotamia to Canaan. One route lay directly across the great Arabian Desert, but a large caravan of flocks, herds, and many servants could not possibly traverse such terrain. The other route lay up the Euphrates, across the narrow desert of northern Syria, and then through the Orontes valley southward into Canaan. This was obviously the way by which they must travel.

***They came unto Haran.*** Haran is situated on the Balikh river in northern Mesopotamia, halfway between Ur and Canaan. The reason for this interruption of the journey is not given, but it may have been occasioned by the attractiveness of the region, or more likely by the advancing age and feebleness of Terah. For the greater part of the family Haran became a permanent place of abode, which implies, perhaps, that the attractiveness of the region may have led to the original decision to stop there. The Balikh and Chabur valleys contain fertile pastureland. It is possible that the whole region was sparsely populated, and seemed to offer fine possibilities for increasing the wealth of the family before they proceeded on to Canaan. Whatever the reason may have been, Terah and his family camped at a place they called Haran, perhaps in honor of their son, and brother, who had died in Ur. Because of a slight difference between the Hebrew spelling of the name of Terah's son *Haran* and that of the city *Charan* the relationship of the two is uncertain.

Evidence of how strongly the Terahites took root in their new home is plainly seen in the fact that several of their family names remained attached to cities of the region for centuries, and in some instances for millenniums. Haran, an important city during the second and first millenniums B.C., may have been named in honor of Haran, as suggested above. Peleg's memory lived on in the name of the city *Paliga*, at the mouth of the Chabur River. Nahor gave his name to Nahor's city (ch. 24:10, the later *Til-Nahiri*, near Haran. Serug's name is reflected in the neighboring town of *Sarugi*, and the site *Til-shaturahi* on the Balikh River may perpetuate the name of Terah. These place names are clear evidence of the fact that the family of Terah occupied this region in ancient times.

**32. *Terah died in Haran.*** How long Terah lived in Haran is not indicated. In view of Abram's proverbial readiness to obey God, it seems most unlikely that he would have remained in Haran for many years, knowing that the Lord wanted him to go to Canaan, except on account of his father's age or illness. It is more likely that Terah halted for a season at the Balikh River to restore his wasted powers, than that the attractiveness of the region led him to forget his objective. Filial piety, under such circumstances, would keep Abram watching solicitously over his father. All would thus have remained in Haran in anticipation of resuming their journey upon Terah's recuperation. When he died Abram and Lot went forward with their original plan, but other members of the family were bewitched by the fertility of the region and were unwilling to leave.

Terah, like Moses some centuries later, failed to enter the Land of Promise. We are forcibly reminded of our pilgrim state by the fact that many of God's faithful ones die on their way to the heavenly Canaan. The seriousness of Terah's death, however, was as nothing in comparison to Nahor's decision to remain in Haran. He and his family voluntarily separated themselves from God's promises by refusing to accompany Abram

to the Promised Land. As a result, they and their descendants finally vanish from the stage of history, while Abram and his posterity remain for centuries the recipients of God's special favor and the channel of His blessing for the world.

### ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

1-9PP 117-124; SR 72-75

2, 4 PP 118; 8T 213

5 PP 123; 8T 214

5-7PP 119

8 PP 120

9 8T 215

28 3T 138

31 PP 127

3

### CHAPTER 12

1 *God calleth Abram, and blesseth him with a promise of Christ. 4 He departeth with Lot from Haran. 6 He journeyeth through Canaan, 7 which is promised him in a vision. 10 He is driven by a famine into Egypt. 11 Fear maketh him feign his wife to be his sister. 14 Pharaoh, having taken her from him, by plagues is compelled to restore her.*

**1. Get thee out.** Henceforward Abram is the hero of the Genesis narrative. This is the first recorded divine revelation to Abram, although it is known from Acts 7:2 that God had appeared to him at least once previously. The word of Jehovah begins with a command, continues with a promise, and ends with a blessing. These three significant aspects characterize every manifestation of God to man. The promises of God are fulfilled and His blessings received only as His commands are obeyed. Men are usually desirous of sharing God's blessings and realizing His promises without cooperating with His requirements.

The Lord's call required Abram to make a complete break with the past. He not only had to leave the land of the two rivers, Mesopotamia, in which Ur as well as Haran was situated, but also had to give up family ties and even his father's house, never to return to those of his own blood and race. It was a severe test. Haran and Ur shared the same civilization and standards of living. All this would change immediately when he should leave the land of the two rivers and cross over to Syria and Palestine. Instead of fertile grazing lands he would find a heavily wooded and mountainous country. Instead of living among related and highly civilized peoples, he would be sojourning among tribes of a materially lower culture and an especially degraded religion.

It certainly must not have been easy for Abram to sever all ties with his beloved homeland, a land in which he had spent all of his life and which was hallowed by many tender associations. A youth may leave his native land with little regret, but to a man 75 years of age such a decision is not easy.

**A land that I will shew thee.** Genesis 11:31 indicates that Abram's original destination had been Canaan. Obviously, God must have specified Canaan as the land toward which he should direct his steps. Upon this occasion (ch. 12:1) Canaan is not

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<sup>3</sup>Nichol, F. D. (1978). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary : The Holy Bible with exegetical and expository comment*. Commentary Reference Series (Ge 9:19). Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association.

mentioned, but it is clear that Abram knew Canaan to be the place where God wanted him to go. He set out with Canaan in mind (v. 5). Paul's statement in Heb. 11:8 that Abram "went out, not knowing whither he went" apparently refers to the fact that henceforth he would have no certain dwelling place, but was to be a pilgrim and a stranger (see Heb. 11:9; 4T 523). Henceforth God would guide him day by day, and he would never know long in advance what the future might bring.

**2. *Make of thee a great nation.*** Abram's compensation for leaving family and homeland behind is announced. Abram no doubt wondered how this promise would meet its fulfillment, in view of the fact that he was childless, and not a young man. God could not mean that Abram's servants, the shepherds and overseers of his flocks, would constitute the promised nation. How did Abram understand the word "great"? Did it imply numerical strength, or influence, or greatness in spiritual things? Only the eye of faith, fixed upon the promises of God, could penetrate the future and behold things that the natural eye could not see.

***I will bless thee.*** This promise included both temporal and spiritual blessings, particularly the latter. Paul clearly includes justification by faith among the blessings that rested on Abram (Gal. 3:8).

***Make thy name great.*** True greatness was to result from compliance with God's commands and cooperation with His divine purpose. The builders of Babel had thought to make themselves "a name" by defying God, and yet not one of their names has survived. Abram, on the other hand, was simply to follow where God should lead, in order to win fame. The name Abram is common as a personal name even today, and untold millions of Jews, Mohammedans, and Christians have acclaimed him in times past, and still look back to him, as their spiritual ancestor.

**3. *I will bless.*** Such an assurance was the highest pledge of friendship and favor God could bestow upon Abram. God considered as done to Himself the insults and wrongs done to His friend and promised to make common cause with him, to share his friends and to treat his enemies as if they were His own. Abram was "the Friend of God" (James 2:23).

***All families of the earth.*** The Hebrew word here translated "earth," "*adamah*," means, essentially, "ground," or "soil." All nations and all ages are included. It was the "ground" that had been cursed after the Fall (Gen. 3:17), the same ground out of which man had originally been made. That curse had come because of the unfaithfulness of one man (Rom. 5:12), and now all families of the "ground" were to receive blessing through the obedience of one who was found faithful. As his spiritual offspring, Christians today share in the blessing imparted to Abram (Gal. 3:8, 29). The blessing vouchsafed to him would finally unite divided families on earth, and change the dread curse pronounced upon the ground because of sin into a blessing for all men. All further promises to the patriarchs and to Israel either clarified or amplified the promise of salvation offered the entire human race in the first promise made to Abram.

**4. *So Abram departed.*** Abram cheerfully followed the Lord's call, without arguing and without mentioning conditions under which he would obey. He simply "departed."

***Lot went with him.*** Of all the relatives of Abram only Lot and his family were willing to continue on to the Promised Land. Peter refers to him as "just Lot," and a "righteous man" (2 Peter 2:7, 8). His desire to obey God as his uncle did made him willing, for the

time at least, to share the hardships of the journey and the uncertainties of an insecure future.

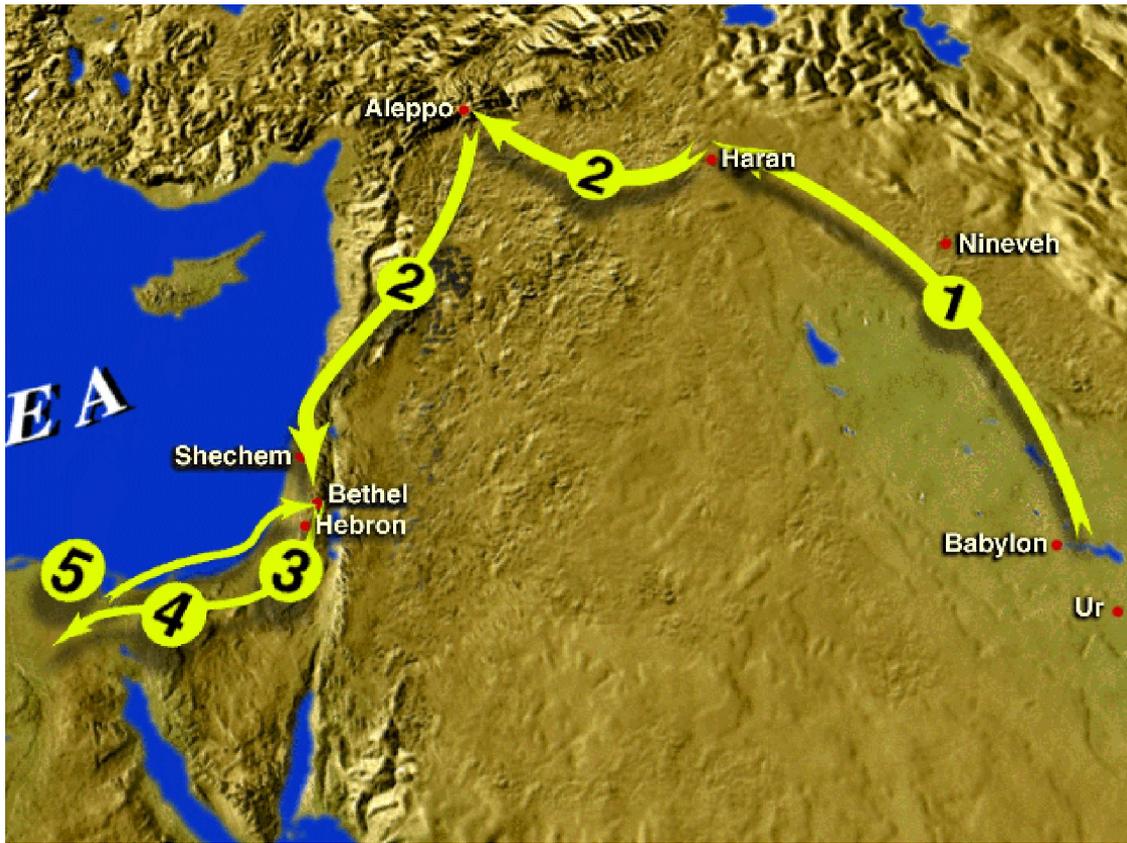
***Seventy and five years old.*** The giving of Abram's age indicates that his departure for Canaan marked the beginning of a new and important era. He was already advanced in years when called upon to adapt himself to life in a new country, to its climate, and to the strange customs of a foreign people.

***5. All their substance.*** Abram's and Lot's wealth consisted chiefly in large herds of cattle and flocks of sheep. Abram was a prosperous man (ch. 13:2), but his prosperity in no way proved to be a hindrance to his religious life. Although it is true that wealth often makes it more difficult for its possessors to qualify for the kingdom of God, it is by no means a fatal handicap (see Matt. 19:23–26). When a person of means considers himself a steward of God, and uses the wealth entrusted to him to the honor of God and to the advancement of His kingdom, wealth is a blessing and not a curse.

***Souls.*** Heb. *nephesh*. The RSV here uses the word "persons." Included in this company were some converts to the true God (PP 127). These converts attached themselves to the household of Abram and became his retainers. Both Abram and Lot are mentioned as possessing herdsmen (Gen. 13:7). That Abram could later rescue Lot with the help of 318 armed and trained retainers (see ch. 14:14) clarifies still further the fact that these "souls" were the members of his household (see on ch. 14:14).

***Into the land of Canaan.*** The land of Canaan includes not only Palestine but also Phoenicia and southern Syria (see on ch. 10:19). Egyptian and north Syrian inscriptions of the second millennium B.C. use the term Canaan in this sense. Inasmuch as Abram was to settle in the southern part of Canaan—Shechem, Hebron, Gerar—the journey took him about 450 mi. from Haran. Owing to the fact that topographical features leave but few alternate possibilities, his route of travel may be traced rather exactly. Leaving the region of Haran, the great caravan must have moved slowly southward along the Balikh River until it reached the Euphrates, which it followed upstream for some 60 mi. From this point 80 mi. of desert must be crossed in order to reach the north Syrian river Orontes. The great oasis of Aleppo lies halfway between the Euphrates and the Orontes, and was probably used by Abram on his journey to give rest and drink to the weary animals and men. Reaching the Orontes, he presumably followed it upstream to the south, leading the great caravan through the Syrian plain, called *Beqa* today, which lies between the Lebanon and the Anti-Lebanon mountains. Passing the watershed whence the Orontes flows north and the Litani south, the latter was followed until the caravan reached Galilee with its rugged, hilly terrain.

## **Abram's Journeys**



**6. Abram passed through the land.** Palestine was heavily wooded at that time. Its roads are described in ancient Egyptian documents as being a nightmare to travelers. Progress of the caravan may have been very slow, in view of the great number of animals and people accompanying the patriarch. The journey was probably broken by frequent pauses for rest. Having crossed Galilee, the wanderers came to the plain of Esdraelon, in which there were already several powerful Canaanite cities, such as Megiddo and Taanach. Then they crossed the Carmel ridge and entered the hilly country that would later belong to Ephraim, and here made their first prolonged halt. This was probably done because the Lord told Abram (v. 7) that he had reached the end of his journey and was now in the land that had been promised him.

**Sichem.** This city is called Shechem elsewhere in the OT (Gen. 35:4; etc.). Situated at the eastern entrance to a narrow valley flanked by the mountains Ebal and Gerizim, it occupied a strategically important place. It is a deserted site today, called *Balatah*, close to Nablus. Excavations and documentary evidence prove that Shechem was a flourishing and fortified city early in the second millennium B.C., when Abram camped in its vicinity. One of the earliest Egyptian military expeditions into Palestine of which a clear record has been preserved was directed against this very city. The stele of an Egyptian warrior who served under King Sen-Usert III (1878-1840 B.C.) of the Twelfth Dynasty describes a campaign against *Sekemem*, the Egyptian name for Sichem or Shechem, and relates that the native Asiatics were defeated. At the time Abram entered the country of Canaan, Egypt exerted a great influence over its Canaanite neighbors. Though Egypt did not actually exercise political control over Canaan, the latter country was economically

dependent upon Egypt, which had royal representatives in its principal cities. These commissioners guarded Egypt's economic interests and played the role of advisers to the local Canaanite rulers. Such was the political situation Abram found in Canaan.

**The plain of Moreh.** The word "plain" is not an accurate rendering of the Heb. *'elon*, literally, "a great tree." RSV says "oak." The word is presumably used here in a generic and collective sense, and may or may not refer to one particular tree. It has been suggested that a grove of oaks is meant. This view is supported by a later reference Moses makes to the same locality, using the plural form of *'elon*, "trees" (KJV, "plains"), clearly indicating that Moreh possessed more than one such tree (Deut. 11:30). The grove itself has not been identified, but must have been in the immediate vicinity of Shechem, as this text and Deut. 11:29, 30 indicate.

Moreh means "teacher." The ancient Jewish translators of the LXX rendered it by the Greek word *hupselen*, "lofty." Commentators have attempted to explain the name Moreh as an indication that Abram understood he was to be "taught" there by God, or that the grove belonged to a teacher of fame.

**The Canaanite.** If Abram had expected to be led into an unpopulated land whose pastures he would not have to share with others, he was mistaken. For this reason, perhaps, the statement is added, "the Canaanite was then in the land." Finding himself an alien amidst a strange people, Abram could not regard the land as his own and actually take possession of it (see Heb. 11:9, 13). This he could do only by faith.

**7. The Lord appeared.** This is the third divine revelation accorded Abram, the first one in Canaan. Its purpose was to comfort him and to inspire him anew with confidence and courage. After a long and arduous journey Abram arrived in the land promised as a home for him and his posterity, only to find it occupied by Canaanites. A message confirming the promises made at Ur and Haran would bring assurance that possession of the land would come in God's own time and way.

**Unto thy seed.** The entire message consists of only five words in Hebrew, eight in the KJV. Although one of the shortest of divine revelations, it was nevertheless of great importance to Abram, now an alien in a strange country. Its brevity was in no way proportionate to its importance and value. It called for faith to believe that the Canaanites in their strongly fortified cities should be dispossessed and their country given to a childless old man. The apparent improbability of the realization of such a promise rendered it a strong test of the patriarch's faith.

**An altar.** The soil hallowed by the presence of God, Abram dedicated as a place of worship to Him. The altar erected and sacrifices offered bore witness to the God of heaven, and silently protested against the idolatry round about. Abram thus publicly pledged allegiance to the true God. As the lord of a large household, he sensed also a responsibility toward his servants, to impress upon them a more perfect knowledge of the God he served (ch. 18:19). The sacrifice testified of Abram's belief in the death of the Son of God as an atonement for sin.

**8. Beth-el.** In need of fresh pastureland, Abram moved from the vicinity of Shechem to the east of Bethel, 20 mi. farther to the south. Abram pitched his tent on one of the hilltops between the cities of Bethel and Ai. The city is here referred to by the name it bore in later times. It was still called Luz in Abram's time (see ch. 28:19). This Canaanite city, now called *Beitin*, lies about 10 mi. north of Jerusalem. It played an important role

in Jacob's life (ch. 28:19; 35:1), and was one of the first cities of Canaan conquered by Joshua. During the period of the divided kingdom, one of the two idolatrous cult places of Israel was situated there (1 Kings 12:28, 29). Scholars have identified the present *Et-Tell* with Ai, because of the similarity of names, Ai being the Hebrew name for "ruin," whereas *Tell* is the Arabic name for a ruined site. This identification is, however, questionable.

***He builded an altar.*** Abram erected an altar, wherever he pitched his tent (see Gen. 12:7; 13:18), and conducted public worship for the members of his household and for pagans living nearby. Although the service was presumably simple, consisting essentially in prayer, the offering of a sacrificial animal, and doubtless an evangelistic appeal, the great number of retainers whom Abram had led to a knowledge of Jehovah must have made these occasions impressive (see ch. 14:14; 18:19). Many keep their faith secret, afraid to confess it, but not Abram. Wherever he went he confessed the One whom he trusted and obeyed. His altars dotting the Palestinian countryside became memorials to the one true God. The Canaanites, whose iniquity was not yet full (ch. 15:16), were thus made acquainted with the Creator of the universe, and by Abram's precept and example were called upon to discard their idols and worship Him. The world's first foreign missionary, Abram journeyed tirelessly through Palestine and preached God wherever he pitched his tent. Isaac and Jacob were also called of God to spend their lives in this land. Although these men were not always shining examples of truth, the Canaanites could not but see the difference between their own way of life and that of the Hebrews. When the time of their judgment should come they could not deny that God had provided them every opportunity to learn of Him.

***9. Toward the south.*** Bethel was not to be Abram's permanent home. He proceeded toward the "south," *Negeb*, which retains this name to the present day. The *Negeb* was and still is a semiarid country lying to the south and southwest of the mountains, which in later times belonged to Judah. Since ancient times Beersheba, situated at the crossroads of several caravan routes, has been its chief city. Abram perhaps felt that the mountainous parts of Canaan, which were already occupied by the Canaanites, could not provide sufficient pasture for his own great flocks and those of Lot. With its sparse population and wide and open grazing land, the *Negeb* seemed to him more suitable.

***10. There was a famine.*** Abram had scarcely passed through the Promised Land when a severe famine compelled him to leave it. Canaan, though naturally fertile, was subject to visitations of drought, especially in those years when the November and December rains, on which the country depended, either failed or were scanty (Gen. 26:1; 41:56; 1 Kings 17:1; Haggai 1:10, 11). The occurrence of this famine just at the time of Abram's entering the land was an additional trial of his faith. It was to teach him lessons of submission, faith, and patience. He was to realize that even in the Promised Land food and blessings come from the Lord alone.

***Abram went down into Egypt.*** Being in the south of Canaan, Abram found it natural to turn to Egypt, the country of plenty, to find sustenance. Although Egypt itself occasionally suffered from famine, because of failure of the Nile to overflow, it was known to surrounding countries as a haven of refuge in times of need. Ancient Egyptian records repeatedly mention the fact that Asiatics entered the country to feed their starving

flocks. At times these visitors would remain in the country and become a menace to the natives. Amenemhet I (1991-1962 B.C.), first king of the Twelfth Dynasty, walled off his eastern frontier with the avowed purpose “not to allow the Asiatics to go down into Egypt, that they may beg for water after [their] customary manner so as to give their cattle to drink.” A later document, the report of a frontier official of the time of the Hebrew judges, mentions that Bedouins of Edom had been allowed to enter Egypt to keep themselves and their cattle alive.

The most famous record of a visit of Asiatics to Egypt at the time of Abram is a tomb painting for a nobleman under King Sen-Usert II (1897-1879 B.C.). It depicts the arrival of 37 Semitic Bedouins who had come to trade cosmetics with the Egyptians, and shows their features, colorful garments, weapons, and musical instruments. This unusual document is an important contribution to our understanding of Abram’s time. No modern artist preparing pictures of the patriarchal age can afford to neglect this contemporary painting of Abram’s time. This documentary evidence about Asiatics entering Egypt for trading purposes or to acquire food in times of want makes it easy to visualize Abram going down to the valley of the Nile to keep his herds and flocks alive (see p. 160).

**12. *This is his wife.*** Abram was to discover in Egypt that human cunning is worthless and that deliverance from fear and perplexity comes only from the Lord (Ps. 105:14, 15). Approaching Egypt Abram feared for his life on account of the beauty of Sarai, his wife. Since she was his half sister, he felt justified in asking her to pass herself off as his sister (see Gen. 20:12). The conduct of the Canaanites, as seen later in the case of the men of Sodom (ch. 19:4–11), is evidence that he had reason for his anxiety. His experience in Egypt shows even more clearly that, from a human point of view, his fears were well founded. But the precaution he took did not spring from faith. How could he expect to retain her as his wife when she herself had denied her marital status? How could he think to protect her more effectively as his sister than as his wife? His clever plan brought upon him the very thing he feared and hoped to avoid, even though as her alleged brother he was treated well by Pharaoh and given cattle and slaves as a token of royal pleasure and friendship (see on ch. 20:13–16). It is often thus with our supposedly “clever” schemes.

**14. *She was very fair.*** How could Sarai at the age of 65 have been as attractive as this incident suggests? It should be remembered that in Abram’s time the life span was twice what it is now, and Sarai, who died at the age of 127 (ch. 23:1), was therefore in middle age. The Pharaohs are known to have fancied the fairer complexion of foreign women, and to have secured Libyan, Hittite, Mesopotamian, and Palestinian girls for the royal harem.

**15. *Pharaoh’s house.*** The word “Pharaoh,” an Egyptian term literally meaning “great house,” was not originally a royal title but a term denoting the palace. During the Eighteenth Dynasty, under whose kings Moses wrote the book of Genesis, it became a term of respect designating the king. Similarly, the Sultan was called the Sublime Porte. Also, the President of the United States is sometimes referred to impersonally and indirectly as “the White House.” In later times the proper name of the king was added to his title, the earliest example of this use in the Bible occurring in the 10th century B.C. (see 2 Kings 23:29, “Pharaoh-nechoh”).

**16. *He had sheep.*** Of the domestic animals here mentioned, only the camel was still uncommon at this time. It was not entirely unknown, however, as a number of figurines of laden camels found in tombs of the third and second millenniums B.C. prove. The

horse had not yet been introduced into Egypt, and is not mentioned. Archeology points to the Asiatic Hyksos, who ruled in Egypt more than a century, as introducing the horse and chariot. Moses' mention of horses in Joseph's time and not in Abram's time is evidence of his accurate knowledge of Egypt.

**17. The Lord plagued Pharaoh.** Man's extremity is God's opportunity. Though Abram had failed God, God intervened on his behalf. What the nature of these plagues was cannot be determined, but they were obviously of such a nature as to protect Sarai from dishonor and to convince Pharaoh that he should restore her to Abram. Sarai herself may have revealed her actual marital status, or God may have spoken directly to Pharaoh as He did later to Abimelech (see ch. 20:3).

This experience should have taught Abram to trust in God rather than in his own clever devices. It seems strange, however, to find him a little later making the same mistake, and even more strange to find his son Isaac trying the same artifice (see chs. 20:2; 26:7). That God should rescue his servants from circumstances of their own contriving is evidence of His mercy and love. Those who profess faith in Him may at times act unworthily of their calling, yet God often teaches their opponents to respect them. The Lord remains faithful toward His children even in their hours of unfaithfulness (see 2 Tim. 2:13). But, to act deliberately, in the anticipation that God will save us from untoward results, is presumption. To a temptation such as this Christ replied, "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God" (Matt. 4:7).

**18. Pharaoh called Abram.** Pharaoh's words of reproof imply that he would not have taken Sarai had he known her to be another man's wife. His intentions were above reproach; his arrangements for making her his wife were entirely legitimate. Sarai had been taken to court in preparation for the wedding, but had not yet joined the king. And Abram, on his part, had accepted the customary dowry and other gifts in token of the king's favor.

**19. Take her, and go.** Recognizing that the plagues had come upon him because of God's displeasure, the monarch did not dare to deal harshly with Abram, but sought, rather, to mitigate the anger of God by providing him a safe-conduct from the country. The graciousness of Pharaoh and the mercy of God had humbled him, and in silence he acknowledged his guilt. What dishonor comes to the cause of God when His representatives, as the result of ill-advised and disgraceful courses of action, bring upon themselves well-earned reproof from men of the world!

### ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

1-20PP 125-131

1 COL 36; FE 286, 505; GW 112; PP 126; 4T 523

1, 2 PP 368

2 COL 286; MB 69; MH 405; PK 15, 703; PP 129

2, 3 DA 27; PK 368; PP 125

3 PK 683

4-6PP 127

6, 7 PP 128

7, 8 ML 33, 35; 5T 320

10 PP 129

11-17PP 130

13 PP 147

## CHAPTER 13

1 *Abram and Lot return out of Egypt. 7 By disagreement they part asunder. 10 Lot goeth to wicked Sodom. 14 God reneweth the promise to Abram. 18 He removeth to Hebron, and there buildeth an altar.*

**1. Abram went up out of Egypt.** It was in the mercy of God that Abram returned safely from Egypt with his wife, his family, and his possessions. The mention of Lot as returning with Abram prepares the reader for the succeeding account of relations between Lot and his uncle. Their immediate destination was the Palestinian southland, the *Negeb* which extends from Kadesh-barnea in the south to the area north of Beersheba, its chief city (see ch. 12:9).

**2. Abram was very rich.** The word here translated “rich” literally means “heavy” or “weighty,” used in the sense of being “loaded” with possessions. A wealthy man before he went to Egypt, Abram came back greatly increased in goods, owing to the generosity of Pharaoh. For the first time the Bible mentions silver and gold as precious metals, and their possession as making a man wealthy. Abram may have had silver when he left Mesopotamia, a country rich in this metal; but the gold probably came to him in Egypt, the richest gold-mining country of antiquity. About the middle of the second millennium B.C. Asiatic rulers begged for gold in almost every letter they wrote to the Pharaohs. It was commonly believed that “gold was as plentiful in Egypt as stones.” The tombs of some Phoenician rulers of Byblos, discovered in the 1920’s, contained many precious gifts from Egyptian kings of the 19th and 18th centuries B.C. Beautiful vessels, boxes, ornaments, and other luxury objects may have been included in the present Abram received from Pharaoh.

**3. To Beth-el.** Traversing the southland, Abram retraced his steps to the vicinity of Bethel, where he had camped previously. The word here translated “journeys” means “stations,” or places where he pitched his tent. This indicates, not a direct, continuous journey from Egypt through the southland to Bethel, but a trek made in gradual stages from one pastureland to another, in the general direction of Bethel (see ch. 12:8).

**4. The place of the altar.** Moses emphasizes Abram’s return to a place in which he had previously conducted public worship. Bethel was dear to his heart because of the sacred memory of communion he there had enjoyed with the Lord. Perhaps, also, he expected to find ready ears and willing hearts among the people of the vicinity, who must have remembered his earlier sojourn there. The site of each encampment of Abram was marked by an altar at which roving Canaanites learned of the true God and where, after Abram had moved on, they returned to worship Him (PP 128). An important point to consider in choosing a home is “the place of the altar.”

**6. Their substance was great.** The uncle’s prosperity overflowed upon his nephew. Lot, the only other member of Terah’s family who had obeyed God’s command to go to Canaan, shared in the blessing promised Abram. Inasmuch as the land was already occupied by the Canaanites, and the mountains of Canaan were heavily wooded, as ancient records show, there was scant permanent grazing land for the large flocks and herds of the newcomers.

**7. Strife.** The scarcity of available pastureland, and sometimes of water as well, resulted in strife between Abram’s shepherds and those of Lot. Each group naturally wanted to see his master’s possessions prosper.

***The Canaanite and the Perizzite.*** The Perizzites are mentioned, together with the Canaanites, in other passages (see Gen. 34:30; Judges 1:4, 5), and are frequently enumerated with the various other tribes that occupied Canaan in patriarchal times (Gen. 15:19–21; Ex. 3:8, 17; 23:23; etc.). Many commentators have thought the Perizzites to be village dwellers (Heb. *perazi*, “the inhabitants of the open land,” Esther 9:19), in contrast to the Canaanites who dwelt in walled cities. The relationship of the Perizzites to other nations of Palestine is uncertain, inasmuch as they do not appear either in the table of nations of ch. 10 or in non-Biblical sources.

**8. *Let there be no strife.*** The quarrels of the shepherds were probably reflected in Lot’s attitude and conduct. Anxious to avert discord and enmity between himself and his nephew, Abram proposed the separation of their flocks and herds as a solution to the difficulty. In view of the fact that Lot was his junior, and that the entire country had been promised to Abram, his dealings with Lot reflect a truly generous spirit. The nobility of soul revealed upon this occasion stands forth in sharp contrast to the weakness of character he had so recently exhibited in Egypt. Abram proved himself to be a man of peace.

***We be brethren.*** Abram recognized the pernicious influence that hatred and strife between himself and Lot would have upon the surrounding nations. Nothing would have more effectively thwarted God’s plan to evangelize the nations of Canaan than continuous discord between the two families. Although Abram was the elder of the two, he took no advantage of his seniority of age and position to make preferential claims. His reference to himself and Lot as “brethren” was meant to assure his nephew equality of position and treatment. He sought to dispense any doubt Lot may have had regarding the honesty of his uncle’s intentions.

**9. *Is not the whole land before thee?*** Though appointed heir to the entire country, Abram manifested true humility by subordinating his own interests to those of Lot and so permitting him to take as much of the land as he wanted. Abram waived his own rights for the sake of peace, but in so doing earned our highest respect. He displayed a generosity of spirit, a nobility of mind, a character worthy of emulation. To do otherwise than he did would have been to follow the selfish principles that usually govern men in their dealings with one another. But a spiritual man lives according to higher principles and looks beyond the temporary advantages of this world to eternal gains. This Abram did by defeating Satan’s purpose to create discord and strife between him and his nephew.

**10. *All the plain of Jordan.*** Less noble than his uncle, Lot proceeded immediately to take advantage of the offer. In his mind he surveyed the country as far as he knew it. He had noticed that the plain of the Jordan, called in ancient times the *Kikkar*, today *el-Ghor*, was well watered. Lot, a citizen of Mesopotamia, where rivers and canals imparted great fertility to the land, could not have failed to compare his former homeland with the mountainous and seemingly less fertile country to which he had come. Abram had induced him to come to Canaan, he reasoned, and accordingly should see to it that he was comfortably settled.

Western Palestine does not possess any rivers worth the name. The only river of importance is the Jordan, and most of its tributaries flow from the east. With its source in the Anti-Lebanon Mountains, the Jordan runs through what was once Lake Huleh in

Upper Galilee, some 7 ft. above sea level. Falling then rapidly in altitude, it enters the Sea of Galilee 10 mi. south of Lake Huleh, 685 ft. below sea level. Leaving the Sea of Galilee, the Jordan flows for 65 mi., as the crow flies, to the Dead Sea. But in that distance it meanders 200 mi., entering the Dead Sea at an altitude of 1,275 ft. below sea level. Lying deeply embedded between the mountains of western Palestine and the high plateau of Transjordan, the whole valley of the Jordan has a tropical climate all the year round with a corresponding fertility.

**Sodom and Gomorrah.** For the first time the two wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah are linked with Lot's fortunes. These cities seem to have been situated to the south of the Dead Sea, which in the time of Abram was much smaller than now (see chs. 14:3 and 19:24, 25). Hence the valley in which these cities lay is probably included by Moses in the expression the "plain of the Jordan," called in v. 12 simply the "plain."

**As the garden of the Lord.** The fertile Jordan valley, with its tropical vegetation, seemed to compare favorably with what Moses had heard of the long-lost Paradise, and with the fertile Nile delta, which Lot and Abram had recently left.

**11. Lot chose.** Allured by its beauty and fertility and heedless of other considerations, Lot chose the Jordan valley as his future place of abode. Impelled by selfishness and guided only by his own inclinations and the prospect of temporal advantage, Lot made the fateful decision of his life. This decision led him through a series of unfortunate experiences which imperiled his life, his soul, and his family. Leaving Abram at Bethel, Lot and his family departed eastward.

**12. Pitched his tent toward Sodom.** Desirous of settling in the immediate neighborhood of the cities of the Jordan valley, in whose wealth he hoped to share, Lot stands in marked contrast to his uncle, who remained a wanderer throughout life (see Heb. 11:9). The experience of Lot is a lesson for the Christian who is tempted to choose earthly associates and temporal gain in exchange for eternal happiness. First he "beheld," and then he "chose." Leaving the Jordan valley, north of the Dead Sea, he pitched his tent toward Sodom, then moved into the city (see Gen. 14:12; 19:1). Though he himself was righteous, his fateful decision meant the loss of almost everything he held dear (PP 168).

**13. The men of Sodom.** It is clear that the men Lot chose for neighbors were already wicked when Lot made his home among them. The greatest depravity is often found among people situated in the most fertile lands and enjoying the advantages of an advanced civilization. Such is the ingratitude of human nature that where the gifts of God are most abundantly lavished, there men forget Him first (see Hosea 4:7; 10:1). It is one of the moral dangers of prosperity that men become so satisfied with the things of this present world that they feel no need of God.

**14. Lift up now thine eyes.** This is the fourth occasion on which the patriarch was addressed directly by God. Each of these occasions marked a crisis in his life. Evidently approving the separation of Lot from Abram, God again bade Abram survey the country, all of which would eventually belong to him and his posterity. The divine command, "Lift up now thine eyes," must have reminded Abram of Lot, who had recently "lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan" (v. 10). Although Lot had chosen that portion which appeared to be the most favorable part of the land, Abram was told that in time it would all belong to his descendants.

**15. For ever.** The promise of God is immutable. As the seed of Abram were to exist before God forever, so Canaan was ever to be their homeland. This promise, originally

made with respect to the literal descendants of Abram, is vouchsafed in turn to his true spiritual posterity, of the household of faith (see Gal. 3:29). This promise, therefore, did not preclude the expulsion of the unbelieving seed from the land of Canaan.

**16. *As the dust of the earth.*** This is a repetition of the previous promise that Abram should be the father of “a great nation” (ch. 12:2). The promise is expressed in the colorful imagery of the Orient, now comparing Abram’s seed to the innumerable dust of the earth, as at a later time to the stars of heaven (ch. 15:5).

**18. *The plain of Mamre.*** Obeying God’s directions, Abram set forth once more. If he believed the word of God literally, this journey took him gradually through the length and breadth of the land. Abram finally pitched his tent at a grove near Hebron. The Hebrew word *’elone*, translated “plain” in the KJV, should be rendered “oaks” (see on ch. 12:6). Here it is used in the plural and clearly indicates the presence of a number of large trees. This grove belonged to an Amorite chieftain, Mamre, who later became the friend and ally of Abram (ch. 14:13, 24).

***Which is in Hebron.*** The city of Hebron lies 22 mi. south of Jerusalem, on the way to Beersheba. It is a city of great antiquity, having been built seven years before Zoan (Tanis) in Egypt (Num. 13:22). Since the date of the foundation of the Egyptian Tanis is not known, this chronological statement from the book of Numbers is unfortunately without meaning for us. The name Hebron was used at a later period. In the time of the patriarchs it was known as Kirjath-arba, or the city of Arba (see Gen. 23:2; Joshua 14:15). This is one of several instances in which Bible writers favored contemporary names in order to make the story more intelligible for their readers.

***An altar unto the Lord.*** As earlier at Shechem (Gen. 12:7) and at Bethel (ch. 12:8), Abram again set up an altar. Each memorial to the true God expressed gratitude for His mercies and loyalty to His principles. That Abram’s Amorite and Hittite neighbors became his friends (chs. 14:13, 24; 23:7–17) may have been due to his wholesome influence upon them. Perhaps, also, they appreciated to some extent at least the fact that God’s blessing rested upon him, and felt they might share it with him (see ch. 12:3). There must have awakened in their hearts the conviction that the God Abram worshiped and served was indeed the true God, Creator of heaven and earth. Abram’s witness by precept and example was certainly not without results (PP 128).

## ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

1-18PP 132-134

8-11ML 192

10 PK 229; PP 156, 174

10, 11 4T 110

10-13PP 133

12 Ev 78; MYP 419; PK 229

14-16SR 76

## CHAPTER 14

1 *The battle of four kings against five.* 12 *Lot is taken prisoner.* 14 *Abram rescueth him.* 18 *Melchizedek blesseth Abram.* 20 *Abram giveth him tithe.* 22 *The rest of the spoil, his partners having had their portions, he restoreth to the king of Sodom.*

**1. *It came to pass.*** The attitude of the scholarly world toward this chapter has been divided. Some have accepted it as a reliable ancient document based on historical facts. Others have considered it a story fabricated by a late Jewish writer with the purpose of

glorifying the patriarch Abram. However, discoveries have shown that the setting, language, and proper names fit exactly into the early second millennium B.C., thus strengthening materially the position of those who believe in the historicity of the chapter. It is still impossible, however, to identify any of the kings listed with persons mentioned in non-Biblical sources, since very little is known of the political history of this period.

*Amraphel king of Shinar.* This king has customarily been identified with Hammurabi, the sixth and greatest king of the First Dynasty of Babylon. Wherever Shinar is mentioned in the OT record it is used as a designation for Babylonia (see on ch. 10:10), a fact that would seem to suggest that Amraphel was a king of Babylonia.

However, it is also possible to see in this Shinar the *Shanḫara* of cuneiform sources, which was in northwestern Mesopotamia. It seems, furthermore, chronologically impossible to identify Hammurabi with Amraphel. Although some scholars hold to the older dating of Hammurabi's reign, the more recent view is that he ruled in either the 18th or 17th century B.C., which would place him more than a hundred years later than Abram. Linguistic identification of Amraphel with Hammurabi is also not without difficulties. Since about 1930 three more kings named Hammurabi have come to light, who lived in the same period: one of Ugarit, one of Aleppo, and another of an unidentified city. It is evident, therefore, that definite identification cannot as yet be made.

## **Campaign of Chedorlaomer and the Kings of the East**



**Arioch king of Ellasar.** The name *Arriwuk* (Arioch) is attested in cuneiform texts as that of a son of King Zimrilim of the Mesopotamian city Mari, in the 18th century B.C. Though this is not the same individual as the king of Ellasar, the occurrence of the name Arioch in records from the post-Abramic period indicates that the story fits appropriately into that age. It is tempting to identify Ellasar with the city Larsa in Lower Mesopotamia. This has often been attempted in the past, but definite evidence is lacking.

**Chedorlaomer king of Elam.** A good Elamite name meaning “servant of [the goddess] *Lagamar*.” The names of several Elamite kings begin with the word *kudur*, “servant,” such as *Kudur–Mabuk*, *Kudur–Nachunte*, and *Kudur–Ellil*. The second part of Chedorlaomer is the Hebrew transliteration of the name of the Elamite goddess *Lagamar*. However, no Elamite king by the name *Kudur–Lagamar* is so far known from non-Biblical sources.

**Tidal king of nations.** Several Hittite kings bore this name, in the form of *Tudhalia*, but it is uncertain whether this particular king appears in any record outside of the Bible.

Although it is impossible to identify the four kings with certainty, the occurrence of all their names in the period in which Abram lived shows clearly that the account of ch. 14 is historical, not legendary.

**2. Bera king of Sodom.** There is less reason to expect to find the names of the city kings of the Jordan valley in non-Biblical documents than those of the great nations of the time. The four names given are, however, Palestinian and can be explained as such. In

Arabic, Bera would mean “victor”; Birsha, “long man”; Shinab, “[the moon-god] Sin is father”; and Shemeber, “mighty of fame.”

**3. *The vale of Siddim.*** According to this text the valley of Siddim is to be identified with all or part of what is known in later times as the Salt Sea or Dead Sea. The northern two thirds of the present-day Dead Sea is very deep (500-1,128 ft.), and must have existed already in Abram’s time. The southern part is shallow, its depth nowhere exceeding 15 ft. Submerged trees show that this part of the Dead Sea was dry land in comparatively recent times. It is therefore reasonable to locate the “vale of Siddim” in the southern part of the Dead Sea, which became submerged in the course of time as the waters of the sea rose. It was rising gradually in modern times until irrigation shrank the Jordan inflow and lowered the amount reaching the Dead Sea. Since a number of streams flow into the southern portion of the sea in a region that is still very fertile, it is reasonable to assume that the whole valley now forming the southernmost part of the Dead Sea was once that exceptionally fertile plain that the Bible compares with Paradise and the Nile valley (ch. 13:10). In this region, then, the cities of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim, and Zoar were presumably situated.

**4. *Twelve years they served Chedorlaomer.*** Chedorlaomer was leader of the coalition of kings. It is shown that Elam was a great Mesopotamian power at the time of Abram. In alliance with other Asiatic rulers, Elam may have undertaken this western campaign in order to reopen its caravan route to the Red Sea. Inasmuch as western Palestine was under Egyptian influence, it was only natural for Asiatic powers to seek control of its trade routes. That more nations had been tributary to Chedorlaomer than the five city-states of Siddim is apparent from the following verses. Taxation may have been heavy, and when the various peoples had somewhat recovered from the previous campaign, they rebelled and ceased sending tribute annually to Mesopotamia.

**5. *In the fourteenth year.*** The revolt brought a punitive expedition by which it was hoped that the former situation might be restored. It is not necessary to presume that all the rulers named in v. 1 were personally present in the campaign. Ancient Oriental rulers always speak as if they had directed and won every battle singlehanded.

***The Rephaims.*** The first battle took place in Bashan at the city Ashteroth Karnaim, the modern *Sheikh Sa’ad*, about 22 mi. east of the Sea of Galilee. The Rephaim are frequently mentioned in early books of the Bible as one of the ancient peoples living mostly in trans-Jordan (cf. Deut. 2:11, margin; 3:11, 13; etc.).

***The Zuzims.*** Neither this people nor the locality is mentioned anywhere else in the Bible, and therefore cannot be identified, unless they were the Zamzummim of Deut. 2:20, who were later replaced by the Ammonites.

***The Emims.*** The people who preceded the Moabites east of the Dead Sea and were displaced by them were called Emims (Deut. 2:10, 11). Shaveh Kiriathaim means the high plateau of Kiriathaim, the latter word being the name of a city which lay on a northern tributary of the river Arnon and was later assigned to the tribe of Reuben (Joshua 13:19).

**6. *The Horites.*** Proceeding southward, the victorious forces smote Horites, or Hurrians, who lived in the mountainous region south of the Dead Sea later taken over by the Edomites (Deut. 2:22). They pursued the defeated peoples as far as the desert of Paran, in the northern part of the Sinai Peninsula.

**7. *En-mishpat, which is Kadesh.*** This passage mentions for the first time a desert oasis destined to play an important role in the history of the Israelites during their 40 years of wandering. Its full name was Kadesh-barnea (see Num. 32:8). The earlier name En-mishpat means “Spring of Judgment.”

***The Amalekites, and also the Amorites.*** The Amalekites, desert tribes that roamed in the regions south of Palestine, were the next objective of the victorious forces, as were also the Amorites living west of the Dead Sea. Hazezon-tamar is identified in 2 Chron. 20:2 with En-gedi.

**8. *The king of Sodom.*** The next encounter took place to the southeast of Engedi, in the valley which is now covered by the southern part of the Dead Sea (see on v. 3). The five city-states joined forces and fought against the armies of the four northeastern kings.

**10. *Slimepits.*** This battlefield had apparently been chosen by the five local kings in order that they might profit by their knowledge of the geographical peculiarities of the region. Open asphalt wells are characteristic of Mesopotamia, but are nowhere found in Palestine or trans-Jordan today. In the southern part of the Dead Sea, however, considerable quantities of asphalt still rise to the surface and float on the water, one more proof that the “vale of Siddim” is now covered by the waters of the Dead Sea. The erupting asphalt, already a phenomenon in classical times, as Josephus, Strabo, Diodorus, and Tacitus testify, gave to the Dead Sea the name Lake Asphaltitis.

***The kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled.*** Their last attempt to resist the victorious forces of the great powers failed, as had all preceding ones, and the kings “fled, and fell there.” This latter phrase cannot mean that all the kings were killed, because v. 17 shows that at least the king of Sodom survived the battle. It simply designates their utter defeat.

**12. *They took Lot.*** The defeated cities were spoiled and their surviving inhabitants were carried away into captivity. Among them was Lot, with his family and all his possessions (see v. 16). This passage re-emphasizes the unfortunate results of Lot’s foolish choice (ch. 13:12, 13).

**13. *Told Abram the Hebrew.*** A fugitive, probably one of Lot’s servants, arrived at Abram’s dwelling near Hebron with a report of what had happened. Here for the first time Abram is called “the Hebrew,” designating him a descendant of Eber. Eber’s descendants were to be found all over the ancient Orient in the second millennium B.C., and were called *Habiru* in cuneiform inscriptions and *‘Apiru* in Egyptian texts. As a descendant of Eber, Abram may have been known to the Amorites and Canaanites of Palestine as “the Hebrew.”

***Confederate with Abram.*** The three Amorite brothers mentioned in this text as confederates of Abram were probably tribal heads. Abram had concluded with them a treaty of mutual assistance, as is seen from the designation they receive here, literally, “men of Abram’s covenant,” and from the fact that they aided Abram in his raid to rescue Lot.

**14. *His trained servants.*** Abram is the only patriarch to appear in the role of military leader. He lost no time in making preparations to rescue his nephew, but set out in pursuit immediately, with his own retainers and those of his Amorite friends (v. 24). The Hebrew word here translated “trained servants” occurs nowhere else in the Bible, but is identified in a letter from Taanach in the 15th century B.C. as a Canaanite word meaning “retainers.” Born in Abram’s house, his 318 “trained servants” could be trusted. This suggests that Abram possessed more than 318 male servants, if those obtained during his

recent sojourn in Egypt (ch. 12:16; 16:1) are not included (see PP 141). How many followers and servants of Abram's three friends followed him on his rescue mission is unknown, but they probably constituted a substantial addition to his army. The idea that Abram's forces could defeat so powerful an enemy has often been the target of criticism. History records, however, many examples of great armies being defeated by smaller forces. Furthermore, ancient armies were very small by modern standards. At the battle at Megiddo in the 15th century B.C. Thutmose III killed 83 enemies and took 340 captives, and considered this a great victory. The Tell el 'Amarna Letters of 14th-century Palestine speak of armed forces of 40 to 50, sometimes of only 10 to 20 men, with which Palestinian city kings successfully defended their cities. For a consideration of the Tell el 'Amarna Letters, see p. 106. These documents have added much to our knowledge of 14th-century Palestine.

***Pursued them unto Dan.*** This later name is here substituted, as in similar instances already noted, for its older name Laish (see Joshua 19:47, also on Gen. 47:11). The city of Laish lay at the foot of Mt. Hermon, about 10 mi. north of Lake Huleh, and formed in later times the northernmost border of Israel. The expression "from Dan even to Beer-sheba" designated the limits of Canaan (see 2 Sam. 17:11; etc.). The victorious army of the Mesopotamia kings, being on its homeward march, was already well on its way, and Abram had to traverse all of Palestine before he overtook it.

***15. Smote them.*** In a false sense of security the undefeated Mesopotamian army had relaxed its vigilance. Approaching the enemy, Abram divided his forces into several groups and surprised them by a night attack. As Abram's raiders fell upon the enemy's camp from different directions, so much confusion resulted that the powerful Mesopotamian army fled, leaving all the spoil and captives behind.

***Pursued them unto Hobah.*** Hobah has not been definitely identified, but Damascus lies some 40 mi. northeast of Dan. Abram pursued the fleeing enemies far enough to prevent them from regrouping their forces and turning again to attack him. His victory was complete.

***16. He brought back all.*** Though apparently possessing military genius, Abram certainly did not set out in pursuit of the professional armies of the conquering kings without first placing himself under the direction and protection of God. His fearless faith and unselfish spirit were amply rewarded. Whether Paul included Abram when he spoke of heroes of faith who "waxed valiant in fight" (Heb. 11:34) is not certain.

***17. The king of Sodom.*** Bera, who had escaped from the battle in the vale of Siddim, received word of Abram's victory and went forth to meet him upon his return. The meeting took place in a valley anciently known as Shaveh, but in later times "the king's dale." This seems to be "the king's dale" of 2 Sam. 18:18, and if so, is possibly to be identified with the Kidron valley (PP 703), later called the valley of Jehoshaphat. This valley lies at the foot of Mt. Zion, where David's palace was later built.

***18. Melchizedek.*** The priest-king of Salem joins the king of Sodom in welcoming Abram. In the days of Abram, Jerusalem was known as Salem, or Shalem, "peace," or "security" (see Ps. 76:2). The city of Jerusalem is first attested in Egyptian records of the 19th century B.C., and was then ruled by Amorite kings. Jerusalem means "city of peace," and Melchizedek, "my king is righteous" or "King of righteousness," as the name is interpreted in, Heb. 7:2. While Sodom's king came to meet Abram with the purpose of

obtaining the release of his subjects (Gen. 14:21), Melchizedek came to bless the victorious commander.

**Bread and wine.** These were the chief products of Canaan. The purpose of Melchizedek's meeting Abram with bread and wine has been the subject of much speculation. Some have thought that these were presented to Abram and his soldiers as refreshments, others consider them symbolic of the transfer of the soil of Canaan to the patriarch. Most likely they were simply a token of gratitude to Abram for recovering peace, freedom, and prosperity to the land.

**He was the priest.** The occurrence of the term "priest," here used for the first time, implies the existence of a regularly constituted form of sacrificial worship.

**The most high God.** Hebrew 'El-'Elyon, this name for God occurs only here and in v. 22. The first part of this word, 'El, from the same root as 'Elohim, signifies the "Strong One." It is seldom applied to God without some qualifying attribute, as in 'El-Shaddai, "God Almighty," or 'Eloe-Yisra'el, "God of Israel." The second term, 'Elyon, occurring frequently in the OT (Num. 24:16; Deut. 32:8; 2 Sam. 22:14; etc.), describes God as "the Highest," "the Exalted," "the Supreme One." It is surprising indeed to find among the wicked Canaanites and Amorites of Abram's time a local ruler who was not only loyal to the true god but also officiated in a priestly capacity (cf. Ex. 2:16). It shows that God still had His faithful ones scattered here and there. Although in the minority, God's true servants had by no means vanished from the face of the earth. God has never been without faithful witnesses, however dark the period or however wicked its people.

Bible commentators have speculated much about the person of Melchizedek, a priest-king who appears suddenly in the Biblical narrative only to disappear again into the impenetrable obscurity of ancient history. Such speculation is almost entirely without value. "Melchizedek was not Christ" (EGW, RH, Feb. 18, 1890), but his work prefigured that of Christ (Ps. 110:4; Heb. 6:20 to 7:21; DA 578). His unexpected appearance makes him in a certain sense a timeless figure, and his priesthood a type of the priesthood of Jesus Christ.

**19. And he blessed him.** In pronouncing the blessing of "the most high God" upon Abram, Melchizedek acts in the role of a true priest (see on v. 20). The blessing itself is clothed in poetical language and consists of two parallelisms.

**20. Tithes of all.** That Abram, and not Melchizedek, was the tithepayer is clearly stated in Heb. 7:4. Giving the tenth of the booty taken from the enemy was an acknowledgment of the divine priesthood of Melchizedek, and proves that Abram was well acquainted with the sacred institution of tithe paying.

This is the first mention of tithing, repeatedly recognized throughout both the OT and the NT as a divine requirement (see Gen. 28:22; Lev. 27:30-33; Num. 18:21-28; Neh. 13:12; Matt. 23:23; Heb. 7:8). That Abram paid tithe shows clearly that this institution was not later, temporary expedient to provide for the sacrificial services, but that it was a divinely instituted practice from the earliest times. By returning to God one tenth of his income the believer recognizes God's ownership over all his property. Abram, of whom God testified that he had kept His commandments, statutes, and laws (Gen. 26:5), performed all his religious duties conscientiously. One of them was to return to God a tenth of his increase. In this act the father of the faithful set an example for all those who desire to serve God and share in the divine blessing. As in days of old, God's promises

for faithfulness in tithe paying are still valid (see Mal. 3:10). God is still ready to fulfill His promises and richly bless those who, like Abram, return to him a faithful tithe of their increase.

**21. *The king of Sodom.*** Though arriving first (v. 17), the king of Sodom appears to have deferred to the greater personage, Melchizedek, and to have witnessed the interview between him and Abram. Now, he advanced with his request for the release of his subjects, who, according to the rules of ancient warfare, had become the property of Abram and his allies.

**22. *I have lift up mine hand.*** Abram made his statement with uplifted hand, the sign of an oath, a common form of swearing (see Deut. 32:40; Eze. 20:5, 6; Dan. 12:7; Rev. 10:5; 6). Thus doing, he called upon the same “most high God,” in whose name Melchizedek had blessed him, so indicating that the God of Melchizedek, the possessor of heaven and earth, was his God also (see v. 19).

**23. *I will not take any thing.*** Abram, so generous in dealing with his nephew (ch. 13:8, 9), exhibited the same spirit of generosity toward the king of a wicked city. He returned not only all the men, women, and children whom he had rescued, but also all the spoil of war which was in his hand. Though not averse to accepting presents from heathen monarchs (ch. 12:16), the patriarch could not, in marked contrast to Lot, consent to share in the wealth of the impious Sodomites. The only thing Abram could not return was that portion of the spoil his retainers had used as food and what belonged to his confederates.

When Abram refused for himself the spoils offered by the king of Sodom, he demonstrated a loftier hope than that which motivates the children of this world. He was ready to give up his own rights, without hindering others in the realization of theirs. He permitted his own young men to take their subsistence, and his allies their portion. They would receive only what was their due. But Abram, on his part, was not mindful of these things. He stood upon a higher plane, looking for “a better country, that is, an heavenly” (Heb. 11:16), and could afford to think lightly of every earthly good. Though in the world, his hopes and desires were not of it. Children of faith are marked by a certain greatness of mind and purpose that enables them to live above the world.

### ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

1-24PP 134-136

13-17PP 135

17-24PP 136

18 DA 578

18-20PP 136, 703; 3T 393

19 3T 57

19, 20 MM 216; PP 157

20 CS 66; PP 525

21 PP 135

22, 23 PP 136

### CHAPTER 15

1 *God encourageth Abram.* 2 *Abram complaineth for want of an heir.* 4 *God promiseth him a son, and a multiplying of his seed.* 6 *Abram is justified by faith.* 7 *Caanan is promised again, and confirmed by a sign,* 12 *and a vision.*

**1. The word of the Lord.** This new revelation of the Lord differs from previous ones, both in form and in substance, and constitutes another distinct turning point in Abram's life. The remarkable phrase "the word of the Lord [*Yahweh*, Jehovah]," afterward so common in the Scriptures (Ex. 9:20; Num. 3:16; Deut. 34:5; 1 Sam. 3:1; Jer. 1:4, 11; etc.), is used here for the first time. This phrase, inseparably connected with the work of prophets, is most fitting for this divine revelation to Abram (see Gen. 15:4, 5, 13–16, 18–21), the more so since God Himself refers to Abram as a prophet (ch. 20:7).

**In a vision.** Though this is not the first vision recorded in the Bible, the word "vision" is here used for the first time. The revelations of God occurred in different ways, whether to patriarchs, prophets, evangelists, or apostles: (1) By the personal manifestation of the second person of the Godhead, afterward incarnate for the salvation of mankind, for example, Deut. 34:10. (2) By an audible voice, sometimes accompanied by the appearance of symbols, as at Jesus' baptism, in Matt. 3:16, 17. (3) By the ministry of angels appearing as human beings and performing miracles to accredit their mission, as to Samson's mother, in Judges 13:3–7. (4) By the powerful agency of the Spirit of God upon the mind, imparting to it a clear conception and strong persuasion of the truth of the things perceived, as with Paul, in Acts 20:23. (5) By dreams, as in Jacob's experience, in Gen. 28:11–15. (6) By visions occurring by either day or night, as in the instance discussed here or that of Balaam, in Num. 24:4, 16. The last two were the more common forms God used to communicate His will to men. This accords with the divine pronouncement, "If there be a prophet among you, I the Lord will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream" (Num. 12:6).

**Fear not.** These reassuring words were designed to set Abram's mind at ease. The Mesopotamian kings might return to avenge their defeat, or the heathen Canaanites, already jealous of his growing power, might attack. But God promised to be his "shield," the symbol of protection in ancient warfare (see Ps. 3:3), and his "reward." Abram had experienced both during the preceding military expedition, for God had protected him in battle and rewarded him with victory. He must believe that God would continue to do for him what He had done in the past.

**2. I go childless.** Abram's fear was not so much due to possible military reprisals as to the fact that he was still without an heir. From more immediate problems his mind reverted to the divine promise that had brought him to Canaan in the first place. How could God's promise come true that he, childless as he was, should become the ancestor of a great nation? The combination, Lord God, '*Adonai Yahweh*,' occurs here for the first time. Recognizing in God his Lord, Ruler, and Monarch, Abram addresses Him as '*Adonai*,' "my Lord," and adds to it the divine personal name Jehovah.

**The steward of my house.** Mesopotamian records, particularly from the city of Nuzi in patriarchal times, have shed a welcome light on this hitherto obscure passage. These records show that wealthy but childless couples might adopt one of their slaves to become the heir to all their property, and also to care for them in old age. The rights and duties connected with adoption were written, sealed, and then signed by several witnesses as well as by both parties to the agreement. Abram feared that no other course was left to him than to follow the common practice of the time and adopt his most trusted servant, Eliezer of Damascus, as his legal son and heir. This thought is expressed first in the Hebrew phrase which the KJV translates "steward of my house," literally "the son of the

possession of my house,” meaning “the one who shall be heir of my house.” The same thought is clearly repeated in the words, “Lo, one born in my house is mine heir” (v. 3). All the longings, sufferings, and disappointments of the years of Abram’s married life are expressed in this lamentation, that not one born of him, but only one born in his house would be his heir. Eliezer, born in Abram’s household and brought up as were all of Abram’s servants, in the fear of the Lord, was not only a trusted slave but a worthy follower of the faithful patriarch. He was “a man of piety, experience, and sound judgment” (PP 172).

**5. Look now toward heaven.** This shows that the vision was given to Abram at night. Still in vision, the patriarch was led out into the open and bidden to lift his eyes to the starry sky and count—if he could—its myriad glittering orbs, if he would know the number of his seed.

**6. He believed in the Lord.** Paul used this text as the cornerstone on which he erected the doctrine of justification by faith (Rom. 4:3; Gal. 3:6). Although the possibility that Abram would have children had decreased since God’s first promise, as his age increased, he did not hesitate to take God’s word that it would be so. The Hebrew verbal form, translated “he believed,” *he’emin*, is from the same root as the word *amen*, with which we emphasize our desire that God may hear and fulfill our prayers. This verb expresses complete trust in the power and promises of God. The particular form of the verb here used expresses, furthermore, that this was not just Abram’s historical experience at the moment, but an abiding character trait as well. He kept on believing.

Abram’s faith and childlike trust in God did not make him “righteous”; rather, the Lord, “counted it to him for righteousness.” For the first time these important concepts, faith and justification, are brought together. It is obvious that Abram had no “righteousness” until it was credited to him by God. And if he had none, no man has ever had. Abram was a sinner and needed redemption, as does every other human being; but when righteousness was imputed to him, mercy and grace were also extended, effecting the pardon of his sin and bringing the rewards of righteousness. Here for the first time the full importance of faith is brought to view. Here also, for the first time, imputed righteousness is mentioned. From this point onward both fundamental concepts run through the Holy Scriptures, to find exhaustive and masterful treatment by the pen of the apostle Paul (see Rom. 4).

**7. I am the Lord.** Between vs. 6 and 7 there must have been an interval of indeterminate length. The new revelation takes place during the day, apparently toward the end of the day (vs. 12 and 17), whereas the previous vision had taken place during the night (v. 5). This may have occurred the following day, or possibly later. The initial circumstances of the new revelation are not described.

**To give thee this land.** For the third time God assures Abram that he is to possess the entire land of Canaan (see ch. 12:7; 13:14, 15). But his status had not changed in the least since he first entered Canaan. At intervals God repeated the promise, and Abram accepted it without ever seeing a visible sign of its fulfillment. He was still the homeless wanderer he had been when he arrived from Mesopotamia, and was still childless. It is only natural that questions arose in his mind.

**8. Whereby shall I know?** This request for a sign may be compared with the requests of Gideon (Judges 6:17, 36–40) and Hezekiah (2 Kings 20:8). Abram’s question was not a symptom of unbelief or doubt, but the expression of heartfelt longing to see the

promises of God fulfilled. Later, Zacharias, in unbelief, asked for a sign (Luke 1:18, 20), but Mary put a similar question to the angel in faith, humbly yearning for further assurance (Luke 1:34, 35). God, who sees the heart and answers accordingly, recognized the right of his faithful servant Abram to seek for faith's full assurance.

**9. Take me an heifer.** God condescended to enter into a solemn covenant with Abram, in a form customary among the ancients. The expression "to conclude" or "to make" a covenant (v. 18), literally, "to cut" a covenant, was derived from the practice here described. The animals Abram was directed to use were precisely those later prescribed as sacrificial beasts by Moses (see Ex. 29:15; Num. 15:27; 19:2; Deut. 21:3; Lev. 1:14). The requirement that the quadrupeds were to be "three years old" specifies mature animals.

**10. Divided them in the midst.** Each of the three animals was slaughtered and divided, and the two halves placed one against the other, with a space between. The birds were killed, but not divided. One was probably laid on one side, and the other opposite it. Those entering into the covenant were to walk between the divided pieces, symbolically vowing perpetual obedience to the provisions thus solemnly agreed upon. The lives of the animals pledged the lives of those participating in the covenant. This practice remained in force for many centuries, for we find it practiced in Jeremiah's time (Jer. 34:18, 19).

**11. The fowls came down.** This was, of course, a real occurrence and not merely a vision or dream. The reality of Abram's fulfilling the divine directives is implied by the fact that he had to drive away birds of prey that tried to feed on the carcasses. If they are not prevented from doing so, vultures and other birds, in Oriental lands, begin to consume fallen animals immediately upon their death, usually picking their bones clean within a matter of minutes. Abram reverently walked between the severed parts of the sacrifice, according to custom, yet there was no visible evidence that God on His part accepted the obligations of the covenant. This was to come later (v. 17). But until then Abram felt it his duty to protect the carcasses from being torn to pieces and devoured (PP 137).

**12. A deep sleep.** Whether Abram's sleep was the natural result of weariness from the day's work or a sleep induced by God is not stated. The Hebrew word translated "deep sleep" is also used in ch. 2:21 for the unconscious state God caused to fall upon Adam when He created Eve. In 1 Sam. 26:12 this same "deep sleep" is said to be "from the Lord." The use of this particular word, together with the fact that God appeared to Abram while he thus slept, seems to support the view that the sleep was supernaturally induced.

**Great darkness.** The meaning of this horror which came over Abram is not given. It may have been designed by God to impress him with the affliction his posterity was to suffer.

**13. Know of a surety.** This dream—or perhaps it was a vision—clarified for Abram the promises previously made to him. Additional information now revealed made it clear that immediate possession of Canaan could not be expected. But the certainty of the promises is stated in the strongest possible language of which Hebrew is capable. The phrase may be rendered literally, "knowing thou shalt know." Abram may have wondered many times how much longer he would have to remain a stranger in the Land of Promise, and how he would ever realize the fulfillment of God's promises. This revelation left no uncertainty as to the fact that he would remain a wanderer as long as he lived, as would his unborn descendants for four generations. The land of their sojourn is not mentioned in

the vision, but its fulfillment made clear that both Canaan and Egypt were included. Canaan being economically dependent upon Egypt during the days of Abram and Isaac, and politically dependent as well under the Hyksos kings in Jacob's and Joseph's time, it is not strange to find both lands included in the singular "a land."

**Serve them.** How strange it must have seemed to Abram that his seed, concerning whom such wonderful promises had been made, were to serve those in whose midst they should live. This prophecy was fulfilled in due time. Jacob, his grandson, became a servant for 20 years to Laban (ch. 31:41). Joseph, his great-grandson, was even sold as a slave, and later imprisoned (see chs. 39:1; 40:4). Finally, all the descendants of Israel were made slaves in Egypt (Ex. 1:13, 14).

**They shall afflict them.** Israel's sojourn was to include not only servitude but affliction—persecution—as well. The sequence of pronouns seems rather ambiguous to the English reader, but is not so to one acquainted with Hebrew. According to the rule of inverted parallelism, in which the last member of a pair comes first when the parallelism is next mentioned, the pronoun "they" in the expression "they shall afflict them" refers back to the "them" of "shall serve them" (see on Gen. 10:1, 2).

The fulfillment of this prophecy may be traced in practically every generation for four centuries. Abram's son Isaac was "persecuted" by Ishmael (Gal. 4:29; cf. Gen. 21:9). Jacob fled for his life from Esau (Gen. 27:41–43) and later from Laban (ch. 31:2, 21, 29). Joseph was sold by his own brothers as a slave and later unjustly thrown in jail (chs. 37:28; 39:20). The children of Israel, finally, were sorely "afflicted" by the Egyptians after Joseph's death (Ex. 1:8, 12).

**Four hundred years.** The questions to be answered are: (1) Is this the time of affliction or the time of sojourning, or both? (2) How are these 400 years related to the 430 of Ex. 12:40, 41 and Gal. 3:16, 17? The first question hinges upon a solution to the second.

The statement in Ex. 12:40, that "the sojourning of the children of Israel, who dwelt in Egypt, was four hundred and thirty years," seems to imply that the Hebrews actually spent 430 years there, from Jacob's entry to the Exodus. That this cannot be the meaning is evident from Gal. 3:16, 17, where it is stated that the law was promulgated at Sinai 430 years after the covenant between God and Abram. If Paul refers to the first promise made to Abram in Haran (Gen. 12:1–3), the 430 years began when Abram was 75 years old (ch. 12:4). The 400 years of affliction would then begin 30 years later, when Abram was 105 and his son Isaac 5 years old (ch. 21:5). This would be about the time Ishmael, who "was born after the flesh persecuted him [Isaac] that was born after the Spirit" (Gal. 4:29; Gen. 21:9–11).

The exact time from the call of Abram to Jacob's entry into Egypt was 215 years (see Gen. 21:5; 25:26; 47:9), which would leave 215 years of the 430 as the actual time the Hebrews spent there. For this reason the 430 years of Ex. 12:40 must include the sojourn in Canaan as well as that in Egypt, from Abram's call to the Exodus. The LXX renders Ex. 12:40 thus: "And the sojourning of the children of Israel, while they sojourned in the land of Egypt and the land of Chanaan, was four hundred and thirty years." As already pointed out, the land of Canaan was so dependent upon Egypt during the patriarchal period that Egyptian kings actually considered it theirs and referred to it as such. During the Eighteenth Dynasty, whose kings controlled both Palestine and Syria, Moses could appropriately include Canaan in the term Egypt as used in Ex. 12:40.

***That nation.*** Without revealing the name of the nation referred to, the prophecy points to the time of the plagues that came upon Egypt (see Ex. 6:6).

***Come out with great substance.*** This promise was remarkably fulfilled in the miraculous deliverance of the Hebrews from bondage, and in the immense wealth they carried with them (Ex. 12:36).

**15. *Go to thy fathers.*** Most commentators explain this text as implying the immortality of the soul and its disembodied existence in some haven of departed souls. Such an interpretation, however, ignores a common Hebrew figure of speech and forces a literal meaning from figurative words. To “go to” one’s fathers (Gen. 15:15), to be “gathered to” one’s people (ch. 25:8, 17) or to one’s fathers (Judges 2:10), and to sleep with one’s fathers (2 Kings 10:35) are common Hebrew euphemisms meaning simply “to die.” To imply from these expressions the immortality of the soul apart from the body is to assume to be true that which the Scriptures elsewhere specifically deny (see, for example, Ps. 146:4; Eccl. 9:5, 6; etc.). Abram eventually died, and will not receive the promise until the heroes of all ages are rewarded for their faith (see Heb. 11:10, 13, 39, 40; 1 Thess. 4:16, 17; Matt. 16:27; Col. 3:3, 4).

***Be buried.*** This emphasizes the view just expressed, that Abram was not promised that his soul would wing its flight to heaven or to any other place. He would be buried as his ancestors had been. They were resting in their graves; Abram would join them there. Nevertheless, God comforted him with the assurance of a peaceful old age. Abram lived to be 175 years old (Gen. 25:7, 8).

**16. *In the fourth generation.*** Commentators who apply the 400 years of v. 13 to the actual time the Hebrews spent in Egypt find a grave difficulty here. They must assume that the four generations averaged exactly 100 years each. This is contrary to available evidence. However, since the 400 years of v. 13 must refer to the time from Abram to the Exodus (see on v. 13), and the actual time of Israel’s stay in Egypt was only some 215 years, no discrepancy exists between this prediction and its fulfillment. Caleb belonged to the fourth generation from Judah (1 Chron. 2:3–5, 18), and Moses, from Levi (Ex. 6:16–20). Attempts to determine the length of a “generation” on the basis of Gen. 15:13, 16 are unjustified, and the results quite sure to be misleading. However ever this may be, one “generation,” or group of people, went into Egypt, two dwelt there, and a fourth came out.

***The iniquity of the Amorites.*** There were two fundamental reasons for the apparent delay in the fulfillment of the divine promise. In the first place, it would take time for Abram’s seed to multiply to the point of being able to take over the country. In the second place, divine love and justice claimed for the Amorites an extension of their day of grace, lest they or others should charge God with unfairness and partiality when the time should come to destroy them and take over their country. In other words, the Hebrews were not ready to possess the land, nor was God ready to dispossess the Amorites.

There is a fixed degree of iniquity beyond which nations may not go without incurring the judgments of God. The depth of depravity and moral degeneration to which the peoples of Canaan had sunk by the time of Moses is revealed by their mythological literature, recently discovered. They describe their gods as blood-thirsty and cruel beings, killing and deceiving each other, and immoral beyond imagination. As were the antediluvians and the men of Sodom, the men of Canaan, like their gods, were controlled

by the basest passions. We find them sacrificing their children, worshiping serpents, and practicing immoral rituals in their temples. Their sanctuaries housed professional prostitutes of both sexes. The Amorites, most powerful of several Canaanite tribes, here stand for all the inhabitants of Canaan (see Joshua 24:15; Judges 6:10; etc.).

**17. A burning lamp.** The final phase of the divine revelation was designed to impress Abram with the surety of God's promises. A "smoking furnace" or "burning lamp," symbols of the divine presence, passed between the severed carcasses, as Abram himself had done earlier, by daylight. That this was not merely a vision is evident from the fact that the animals were totally consumed (PP 137). By this visible token God confirmed His covenant with Abram, who thus for the first time beheld the sacred symbol of the divine presence.

**18. This land.** God herewith reaffirms His promise concerning possession of the land of Canaan. For the first time the precise geographical limits of the Promised Land are indicated. For practical purposes these limits were realized during the reigns of David and Solomon (see 1 Kings 4:21; 2 Chron. 9:26).

**19. The Kenites.** The ten tribes listed do not include all the Canaanites. The number is perhaps symbolic of universality. The Kenites were in the mountainous parts of southwestern Palestine, near the Amalekites (Num. 24:20, 21; 1 Sam. 15:6; etc.). Their origin is not certain. At some time they may have intermarried with the Midianites, for Hobab, Moses' brother-in-law, is called a Kenite (Judges 1:16; 4:11) and also a Midianite (Num. 10:29). They may have been a subfamily of the Midianites.

**The Kenizzites.** Not yet identified. Some think them to have been descendants of Esau's grandson Kenaz (Gen. 36:15). If this be so, their mention here as a tribe would of necessity be prophetic, for Esau, a grandson of Abram, was not yet born. This suggestion hardly seems acceptable.

**The Kadmonities.** Not mentioned elsewhere. Their origin cannot be determined. Their name, meaning "easterners," points to the eastern regions of Canaan as their abode.

**20. The Hittites.** See on ch. 10:15.

**The Perizzites.** See on ch. 13:7.

**The Rephaims.** See on ch. 14:5.

**21. The Amorites.** For these and other tribal groups mentioned in v. 21, see on ch. 10:15, 16.

## ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

1-21PP 136-137; SR 75-76

1 GC 86; MB 57; 3T 434; 6T 312; 7T 287; 9T 152

1, 3 SR 76

1-3PP 136

5 SR 75, 77

6 PP 370

12 PP 137

12-14SR 75

13 FE 287

13, 14 PP 282; SR 120

14 DA 32

16 PP 232, 434; 5T 208

18 PP 137, 716

## CHAPTER 16

1 *Sarai, being barren, giveth Hagar to Abram.* 4 *Hagar, being afflicted for despising her mistress, runneth away.* 7 *An angel sendeth her back to submit herself,* 11 *and telleth her of her child.* 15 *Ishmael is born.*

**1. An handmaid.** Notwithstanding all the promises of God, the fact remained that Abram was still without a child ten years after the first promise had been made to him (v. 3). Hagar, an Egyptian servant of Sarai, is introduced. Since the Egyptians were a powerful nation in Abram's time, it is most singular to find an Egyptian servant in a Palestinian household. Hagar was probably the personal attendant given to Sarai when she was taken to Pharaoh (see ch. 12:15, 16). That she was still in Abram's house tends to show that Pharaoh had not taken back the gifts he had given Abram.

**Hagar.** This is not an Egyptian name. Her original name is not given. The name Hagar, meaning "flight" in Arabic, may have been given to her after her flight from her mistress.

**2. Go in unto my maid.** Faithlessly concluding that there was no hope of her bearing children, Sarai decided to follow the practice of her native country in order to provide an heir for the family. The legal codes of Mesopotamia recognized the practice whereby a childless wife might give one of her slaves to her husband and obtain children by means of her, and determined precisely the rights of such offspring. Regulations were needed particularly in the case of a first wife who would bear children after the servant had done so, or when a servant would become overbearing after being honored by giving birth to an heir (see the code of Hammurabi, sections 144-146, 170, 171).

**Abram hearkened.** Faith may be genuine and yet prove to be weak in moments of stress and perplexity. A vigorous faith will cling to the promise, and to that alone, trusting entirely to God for its accomplishment. Such was Abram's faith, except upon three or four brief occasions, throughout a long and eventful life. God had no need of Abram's devices for the accomplishment of His promise. Trust and obedience alone were required. In complying with Sarai's rash suggestion, Abram followed in the footsteps of Adam. In both instances the result was suffering and disappointment, and the imagined blessing proved to be a curse. By listening to Sarai's suggestion Abram created for himself difficulties far reaching in their consequences. There ensued domestic trouble and heartache, and hatred between the future offspring of both wives. Again, in the present day, how bitterly the modern representatives of Sarai's and Hagar's descendants, the Jews and the Arabs, have contended for the possession of the Holy Land!

**3. Ten years.** The faith of Abram and Sarai, which had remained constant for ten years, now gave way. This comment is introduced probably to account for their impatience at the delay in the arrival of an heir. Little did Abram realize that the delay was divinely appointed to test his faith and to develop his character.

**4. Her mistress was despised.** Barrenness among the Hebrews was ever regarded as a dishonor and a reproach (Gen. 30:1, 23; Lev. 20:20; see on Luke 1:25), whereas fecundity was considered a special mark of divine favor (see Gen. 21:6; 24:60; Ex. 23:26;

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<sup>4</sup>Nichol, F. D. (1978). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary : The Holy Bible with exegetical and expository comment*. Commentary Reference Series (Ge 12:1). Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association.

etc.). That the Egyptian maid, honored by admission to the rank of a wife (v. 3), should forget her privileged status and become haughty, was precisely the conduct that might have been expected. She would not assent to the plan of her mistress; why should her child be passed off as Sarai's son? The maid who had served Sarai so faithfully through the years as to be considered eligible to become Abram's wife began to despise her whom she had honored heretofore. Homes where the divinely approved marriage status is interfered with are homes where heartache, jealousy, and bitter strife prevail. Abram's home was no exception, and the harmony of earlier times was transformed into discord.

**5. *My wrong be upon thee.*** Sarai uses the language of passionate irritation, indicating regret for her previous decision and the intention to blame her husband for the act and for its bitter consequences. She even makes an irreverent use of the name of Jehovah, invoking His judgment upon Abram.

**6. *Do to her as it pleaseth thee.*** Section 146 of the ancient Mesopotamian code of Hammurabi says that "if later that female slave has claimed equality with her mistress because she bore children, her mistress may not sell her; she may mark her with the slave-mark and count her among the slaves." This law permitted the humiliation of an overbearing slave-concubine, but also laid certain restrictions upon her owner. Abram, a Mesopotamian by birth and education, was certainly well acquainted with the laws and customs of his homeland, and complied therefore with the law, which allowed his wife to humiliate Hagar but not to sell her. Abram's conciliatory disposition is also apparent from the permission he gave Sarai. He suppressed his own feelings in order to restore harmony to the troubled home. On the other hand, he exhibited weakness in yielding to Sarai's passionate purpose to inflict unjustifiable punishment on the future mother of his child.

***Sarai dealt hardly with her.*** When Sarai restored her to the status of a slave, as the civil law of that time permitted, and even took recourse to corporal punishment as the Hebrew term "dealt hardly" implies, Hagar left the home of Abram and fled. If the slave was legally at fault in running away, her mistress was certainly liable to censure.

**7. *The angel of the Lord.*** Although most conservative expositors have here recognized the second person of the Godhead, it is far from certain that He appeared in person. Angels were frequently used to transmit divine messages to men, and this "angel of the Lord" may have been understood by Hagar either to be Jehovah Himself (v. 13), or perhaps simply a representative of Jehovah. Ellen G. White speaks of him simply as "an angel" (PP 145, 152). God Himself repeatedly appeared to Abram (Acts 7:2; Gen. 12:1; 13:14; 15:1; 17:1; 18:1; 21:12). Only once was an angel commissioned to speak to him (Gen. 22:11, 15). The account here closely resembles that of the visit of the angel, but differs greatly from those of God Himself.

***In the way to Shur.*** Hagar was on the way to her native Egypt, and had almost reached the Egyptian border (see Gen. 25:18; 1 Sam. 15:7). "The fountain" implies a particular, well-known spring.

**9. *Submit thyself.*** The Hebrew verb translated "submit" is another form of the verb rendered "dealt hardly" in v. 6. Hagar was to return and submit meekly to Sarai, however, no matter how unkindly Sarai might treat her.

God did not condone Sarai's harshness toward Hagar. He will punish those who misuse their authority, but He rarely entrusts this duty to those who are suffering under

harsh and unjust treatment. Meekness is a trait of character God looks for in His children (see Eph. 6:5; Col. 3:22; 1 Peter 2:18–23).

**10. *I will multiply thy seed.*** God recognized the difficult circumstances in which Hagar found herself, and for which she was not primarily to blame. Hagar honored the true God, and He would not abandon her in her extremity. The promise He there made to her, a slave, is without parallel. This promise greatly comforted Hagar. Although her son was not to be the son of the divine plan, he would nevertheless share in the promise made to Abram. God had promised to multiply Abram's seed, without limiting it to the offspring of Sarai. Therefore He would abide by His promise to the very letter, but reserve the spiritual blessing for the seed originally intended by the promise, that is, Isaac (see Gal. 4:23–30; Rom. 9:7, 8).

**11. *Ishmael.*** This is the first time God named an unborn child (see Gen. 17:19; Luke 1:13, 31). He thus manifested to Hagar His interest in her and her offspring. The name of the child, Ishmael, "God shall hear," was to remind her of God's merciful interposition, and to remind Ishmael that he was an object of God's gracious providence.

**12. *He will be a wild man.*** Literally, "a wild ass of a man," as in the RSV. This figure of speech referring to the onager, a wild and untamable animal that roams at will in the desert, aptly depicts the Bedouin's love of freedom as he rides, hardy and frugal, reveling in the varied beauty of nature and despising town life. A highly poetic description of the wild ass appears in Job 39:5–8.

***His hand will be against every man.*** An accurate description of the Arabs, many of whom claim Ishmael as their father. Powerful nations have attempted to conquer Arabia, and subject it to their will, but none have met permanent success. The Arabs have maintained their independence, and God has preserved them as a lasting monument to His providential care. They stand today an incontestable argument to the truth of this divine prediction.

**13. *Thou God seest me.*** This experience convinced Hagar that God had spoken to her. Apparently believing that death must come to one who sees God (Ex. 20:19; 33:20), she was astonished to have seen Him and yet remain alive. Therefore she called Him "God of seeing," for He not only had seen her and come to her in her affliction but had also permitted her to see Him and live.

**14. *Beer-lahai-roi.*** Thenceforth the well was known by a name meaning "well of the living One seeing me." For generations Arabs refreshing themselves at this well were reminded that God here revealed Himself to their ancestor.

***Between Kadesh and Bered.*** The location of the well, mentioned also in chs. 24:62 and 25:11, has been lost. Inasmuch as Bered is also unknown, all that can be said is that the well must have been west of Kadesh in the southwestern part of Canaan, on the way to Egypt. Some scholars have identified it with the well *Ain Kadesh*, which the Arabs call *Moilahi Hagar*.

**15. *Hagar bare Abram a son.*** In compliance with the divine order given to Hagar, Abram named his son Ishmael. For 13 years Abram seems to have remained under the illusion that Ishmael was the promised seed. When Abram was 99 the will of God was more clearly unfolded to him (see ch. 17:1, 18).

## ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

3 PP 174

6, 8-11PP 145

12 AH 226; PP 174

13 EW 112; FE 348; ML 291; 5T 558, 627

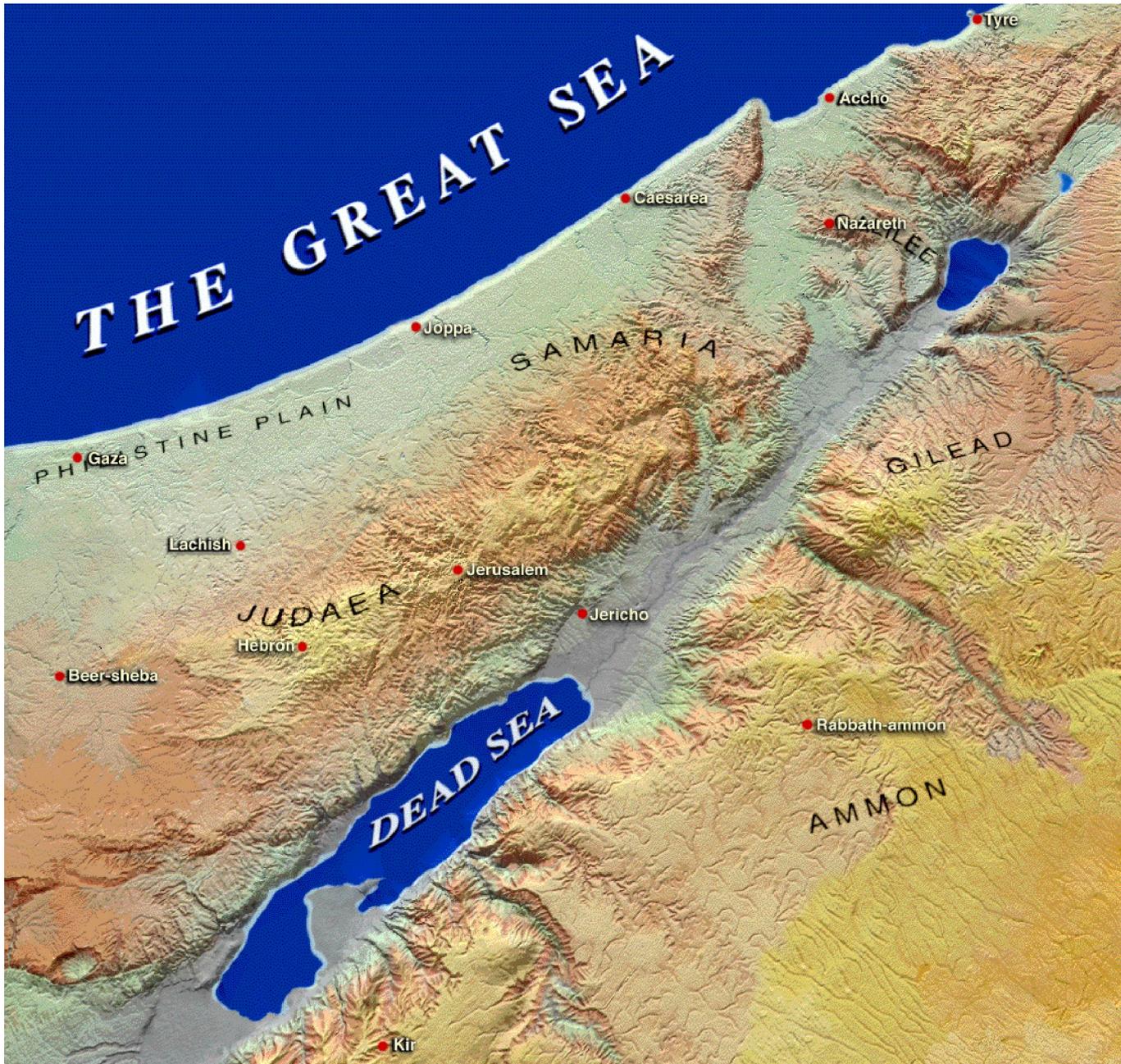
## CHAPTER 17

1 *God reneweth the covenant.* 5 *Abram his name is changed in token of a greater blessing.*  
10 *Circumcision is instituted.* 15 *Sarai her name is changed, and she blessed.* 17 *Isaac is promised.* 23 *Abraham and Ishmael are circumcised.*

**1. And when Abram was ninety years old and nine.** Thirteen years had elapsed since the birth of Ishmael (ch. 16:16) before God again revealed Himself to Abram. During the previous 11 years God had appeared to him at least 4 times (see ch. 12:1, 7; 13:14; 15:1). The long delay on the part of God to appear again to Abram was probably not without purpose. It was perhaps intended as a remedial penalty for Abram's impatience in not waiting for God to work things out in His own good time and way.

***I am the Almighty God.*** This name of God, *'El-Shaddai*, is found only in the books of Genesis and Job, 6 times in the former and 31 times in the latter. This is one of many indications that the author of both books was one and the same person. The origin and meaning of the word *Shaddai* are uncertain, but the KJV translation, "almighty," is in all probability the most nearly correct one (Isa. 13:6; Joel 1:15). This name was well chosen in view of the new promise God was about to make to Abram. Twenty-four years had passed since his entry into the land of Canaan (see Gen. 12:4). During the first ten years God had repeatedly promised Abram a child, until he took things into his own hands, married Hagar, and begot Ishmael. Since Ishmael's birth there is no record of any further divine revelations having been received, and Abram seems to have thought that Ishmael was the fulfillment of God's promises (see vs. 17, 18). Ready now to renew His promise to Abram, God found him somewhat skeptical. For this reason God introduced Himself as "the Almighty God," for whom nothing, however difficult it might appear to men, would be impossible.

## Relief Map of Palestine



***Walk before me.*** For 13 years Abram had not fully walked “before” God; hence the command to do so. Abram was to walk as if in God’s very presence, conscious of divine inspection and solicitous for His approval—not behind Him, as if sensible of his shortcomings and desirous of avoiding observation. There is a marked difference between the expression used to designate Enoch’s (ch. 5:24) and Noah’s (ch. 6:9) lives, and this command. Of the two earlier patriarchs it was said that they walked “with God,” while Abram is asked to walk “before” Him. This suggests a less-complete degree of fellowship, and may have implied God’s displeasure with Abram’s lack of faith in marrying Hagar.

***Be thou perfect.*** Just as righteousness received in faith (justification) was necessary to the establishment of the covenant, so a blameless walk before God (sanctification) was necessary to its maintenance. This exhortation may perhaps have been a veiled reference to the fact that Abram's past life had not been entirely blameless. God wished Abram to understand that the ultimate realization of the divine promise required him to measure up more completely to God's exalted standard of purity and holiness (see Matt. 5:8, 48). Abram was called to a higher experience than he had known heretofore.

***2. My covenant.*** This does not intimate a new covenant, but rather that the covenant concluded some 14 years earlier (ch. 15) was about to be carried out.

***3. Abram fell on his face.*** Abram, who may have wondered during the many years of silence whether God would ever reveal Himself again, fell down in reverential awe. This attitude in worship was common in ancient times, and was even a posture showing respect for human beings (see Gen. 17:17; 24:52; Num. 16:22; Mark 14:35).

***4. As for me.*** God refers to Himself at the beginning of the sentence by way of emphasis. The expression is equivalent to saying, "So far as I am concerned I," or, "I for my part," hold myself bound to the covenant of many years ago.

***A father of many nations.*** This prediction was to have a twofold fulfillment. In the first place, it pointed to the numerous tribes that would trace their genealogy back to Abram. The Ishmaelite Arabs, the Midianites, and other Arabic tribes descending from Keturah (see ch. 25:1–4), and the Edomites—as well as the Israelites—all were the offspring of Abram. In a wider sense, however, this promise pointed to the innumerable spiritual descendants who would claim Abram as their father (Gal. 3:29).

***5. Thy name shall be Abraham.*** Abram was the first of several men whose names God changed. Names were of much greater importance to the ancients than they are to us. All Semitic names have meanings, and usually consist of a phrase or sentence that expresses a wish, or perhaps gratitude, on the part of the parent. In view of the importance people themselves attached to names, God changed the names of certain men to make them harmonize with their experiences, past or future. Abram, meaning "exalted father," does not appear in this form elsewhere in the Bible, but is found under the form Abiram, meaning "my father is exalted" (see Num. 16:1; 1 Kings 16:34). That the name Abraham is only an extended form of Abram, as some commentators maintain, is unlikely in view of the explanation given in this verse. With our present knowledge of the various Semitic languages current in Abraham's time, however, it is not easy to explain the name Abraham. It is still best to take recourse to the Arabic word *ruham*, as several generations of Bible expositors have done. The word *ruham* means "great number," and may have existed in ancient Hebrew, though it does not occur in Hebrew literature available today. The name Abraham would accordingly be translated "father of a great number," which agrees with the explanation God gave to the patriarch after changing his name, "a father of many nations have I made thee."

***7. I will establish my covenant.*** The terms and benefits of this covenant relate not only to Abraham as an individual but to all his descendants as well, both literal and spiritual. The promise here made to Abraham refers specifically to Christ (Gal. 3:16; Acts 2:30), and through Him, according to Paul, all Christians are to share in it (Gal. 3:29; Acts 16:31). A correct understanding of the terms of this covenant will go far toward maintaining a right relationship between God and the believer today.

***An everlasting covenant.*** The word translated “everlasting” does not by any means always indicate an endless period (see on Ex. 21:6). “Everlasting” as used in the Bible generally denotes circumstances or conditions that are to persist so long as the object to which they apply can, by virtue of its inherent nature, be affected by them. This is clear from such expressions as let the king “live for ever” (1 Kings 1:31; Neh. 2:3; etc.), which simply expresses the wish that the king may enjoy a long life. Inasmuch as all followers of Christ—the spiritual seed of Abraham—are heirs to the glorious covenant promises (Gal. 3:7, 27–29), the “everlasting covenant” must remain in effect as long as the plan of salvation is operative. The provisions of God’s covenant with Abraham are thus available throughout all generations.

***To be a God.*** This promise comprehends all the blessings of salvation and is a clear indication of the spiritual character of the Abrahamic covenant. God gives Himself to the one who enters into the covenant relationship, and in so doing bestows upon him all the privileges, the joys, and the glorious hope that come with kinship to God. He who thus becomes a son or a daughter of God can desire nothing more to make him happy, either in this life or in the life to come. It is as if God had said to Abraham, “Whatever I am or have, or whatever I can do, I will be and do for you and for your seed. All my boundless resources shall be employed for your protection, your consolation, and your salvation” (see Rom. 8:32). Blessed indeed are those whose God is Jehovah (Ps. 144:15). Under the terms of the everlasting covenant, God and the believer each gives himself without reservation to the other.

**8. *All the land of Canaan.*** To those far-reaching promises of a spiritual nature was added once more the assurance that the whole land of Canaan was to belong to Abraham and to his posterity. This promise had been made repeatedly in the past (see chs. 12:7; 13:15; 15:7, 18–21). Upon this occasion he was told that the promise would remain in force forever, meaning that his literal descendants were to possess the land so long as they should comply with the conditions of the covenant, and that his faithful children, both literal and spiritual, would eventually inherit the heavenly Canaan forever and ever.

**10. *Every man child.*** In the Hebrew this is much more of a command than the English rendering implies. Literally, “Circumcise among you every male.” The rite of circumcision is here introduced as an obligation in connection with the covenant. It was to be the sign of the covenant with literal Israel as baptism is for spiritual Israel (see Gen. 17:11; Col. 2:11, 12; Titus 3:5; 1 Peter 3:21). The one was related to physical birth; the other accompanies the spiritual rebirth.

**11. *Ye shall circumcise.*** From ancient times various suggestions have been made in explanation of this rite. The Alexandrian philosopher Philo, a Jew, believed it was ordained by God merely to promote physical cleanliness; others saw in it a protest against certain idolatrous rites practiced by the Egyptians and other heathen nations. Calvin believed it to mean a symbolic putting away of the fifth of the flesh, and so of sin in general. The following points, however, may be noted with reference to the importance of circumcision. It was destined: (1) to distinguish the seed of Abraham from the Gentiles (Eph. 2:11), (2) to perpetuate the memory of the Jehovah’s covenant (Gen. 17:11), (3) to foster the cultivation of moral purity (Deut. 10:16), (4) to represent righteousness by faith (Rom. 4:11), (5) to symbolize circumcision of the heart (Rom. 2:29), and (6) to foreshadow the Christian rite of baptism (Col. 2:11, 12).

The Hebrews were not alone in ancient times in their practice of circumcision. For example, there are records of the custom among the early Egyptians and various Semitic peoples.

It has been practiced in differing forms and administered to persons of varying ages or classes, and has survived into modern times among some African tribes, the Arabs, and other Moslem peoples, and scattered groups such as the Pacific islanders.

***A token of the covenant.*** God has appointed signs and memorials of various significant events. The Sabbath was instituted as a memorial of creation; circumcision, of the Abrahamic covenant; baptism, of Christ's death and resurrection; and the Lord's Supper, of Christ's vicarious sacrifice. Outward signs may teach spiritual truths, thus becoming God's appointed channels of spiritual blessing. Thus they may serve as perpetual reminders of God's grace and of our own duty and responsibility.

***12. Every man child.*** Abraham was given specific instructions as to who should participate in the rite of circumcision, and when it was to be administered. These regulations were later incorporated into the law of Moses (Lev. 12:3; Luke 2:21). No male member of Hebrew society, whether free or slave, was exempted. Circumcision, the token of God's covenant with Abraham, became a sign to Israel that they were God's people, and every male Israelite, therefore, received that sign. With the rejection of literal Israel as God's chosen people, circumcision ceased to have significance as a religious rite (Acts 15:5, 10, 19, 20, 24, 28, 29; Gal. 2:3–5; 5:2–6; Rom. 2:28, 29).

***14. Be cut off.*** This judgment is repeated in the Mosaic legislation, for various infractions of its provisions (see Ex. 12:15, 19; Lev. 17:4, 10; Num. 15:30; 19:13). The personal experience of Moses indicates the solemn importance God attached to the performance of this rite (Ex. 4:24–26). Whether the sentence was to be carried out at the hands of the congregation, the civil magistrates, or God Himself is not explicitly stated. That the expulsion from one's people was in certain cases followed by the death penalty (see Ex. 31:14) does not prove that capital punishment invariably accompanied such a sentence (see Ex. 12:19; Lev. 7:20, 21; Num. 19:13). However this may have been, an uncircumcised Hebrew, whether child or adult, would forfeit his social, political, and religious standing as a Hebrew (see on Ex. 12:15).

***15. Sarah shall her name be.*** This is the first time Abraham's wife Sarai was mentioned by name in any divine communication with him. No great difference exists between the two names Sarai and Sarah. Sarai, meaning "my princess," became simply Sarah, "a princess." Formerly she had been Abraham's princess, but henceforth she was to be recognized as the princess and progenitor of an entire nation. She would belong to her descendants as well as to Abraham.

***16. A son also of her.*** After the many years of waiting Abraham was given definite instructions to the effect that the promised seed would be Sarah's child and not the child of Hagar (see Gal. 4:22–31).

***Kings of people shall be of her.*** This refers primarily to David and his successors upon the throne of Judah, but includes as well the royalty of Edom. God assures Abraham that notwithstanding the perversity of men, who so often in their haste hinder Him, His purpose will prevail (see Isa. 46:10, 11; 55:10, 11).

***17. Abraham fell upon his face.*** That Abraham fell once more upon his face indicates that he had risen since prostrating himself at the beginning of this revelation (see v. 3).

**And laughed.** Commentators vary in their opinion as to whether Abraham's laughter was the expression of joy or of doubt. Although it would be more pleasing to agree with those who advocate the former, on the basis of Rom. 4:19, 20, the context seems to favor the latter. Paul's statement in Romans would then apply to Abraham's state of mind after being convinced of the reality of the promise. The questions asked by Abraham, probably in his heart rather than spoken audibly, "Shall a child be born unto him that is an hundred years old," and, "Shall Sarah, that is ninety years old, bear?" do not leave the impression of being spoken in joy. They seem to express doubt. Perhaps Abraham's laughter may also have reflected his embarrassment in finding that the divine promise regarding Sarah ignored his plans for Ishmael (see Gen. 17:18). Those who find it difficult to think of doubt in the heart of Abraham, the great hero of faith, should consider the events recorded in chs. 12:11–13 and 16:2–4. Note also Sarah's laughter in ch. 18:12–15, which shows that she still doubted, even after Abraham had believed (see ch. 21:6, 9; also on ch. 17:19).

**18. That Ishmael might live before thee!** This plea suggests that ever since the birth of Ishmael, Abraham had clung tenaciously to the hope that this son might be the promised heir. Blind to the possibility of Sarah's presenting him with a son, at her advanced age, Abraham intercedes on behalf of Ishmael. Abraham would be content to accept him, the son of his own devising, in lieu even of the one to be born of Sarah. Furthermore, it would save him the embarrassment of giving up his publicly announced plan for Ishmael to be his heir (see PP 146).

**19. Call his name Isaac.** "Indeed"—unquestionably—Sarah would become a mother; there was no reason to doubt. The name God selected for Sarah's promised son, Isaac, means "he laughs." This may be a reference to Abraham's laughter, the lasting reminder of a weak moment of doubt. More likely, however, it reflects the joy Abraham would experience with the birth of the son of promise. He might laugh now in doubt, but then he would rejoice indeed, when faith should meet reality (see Gen. 21:6, 7; Isa. 54:1; Gal. 4:27). The names of both Isaac and Ishmael were selected prior to birth, and the names of Abram and Sarai were changed because a new experience was in store for them.

**20. As for Ishmael.** God reassured Abraham that the special promises made to Isaac would not contravene those made to Ishmael's mother at the well in the wilderness (ch. 16:10). The names of the 12 sons of Ishmael are given in ch. 25:12–16. Like the 12 sons of Jacob, each of them became the father of a tribe (see on ch. 25:13–16).

**21. With Isaac.** Repeating the statement of v. 19, God assured Abraham that Isaac, not Ishmael, was to be the son of the covenant. While Ishmael should share generally in the blessings promised to Abraham, the offspring of Isaac would become sufficiently numerous to possess the land of Canaan. Specifically, the covenant, with all its material and spiritual blessings, was to Sarah's son, Isaac, and to his posterity. The later history of the two sons fully justifies God's selection of the one and rejection of the other. Even though Hagar had come to believe in the true God, the influence of her earlier Egyptian training proved to be decisive in the life of Ishmael and his sons, for his descendants became pagans.

**At this set time.** A time limit is now attached to the promise of a son. No longer could there be room for uncertainty. After waiting nearly 25 years since the first promise, and having shown faith and doubt in the past, Abraham learned that the time of waiting was soon to end.

**22. God went up.** This statement indicates that the revelation of God had been a visible one. We have no idea of the form under which Abraham saw God.

**23. Abraham took Ishmael.** Obeying God, Abraham circumcised all male members of his large household, including Ishmael. Because Ishmael was 13 years old when circumcised (v. 25), the Arabs even now defer this rite to a much later period than do the Jews, generally from the age of 5 to 13 and frequently not before the 13th year.

### ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

1-16PP 137-138

1 PP 137, 370

1, 2 SR 146

4 PP 137

5 PP 138

7 PP 370; SR 78, 146

10 PP 138, 363; SR 148

10, 11 SR 146

16 PP 138, 146

18 SR 78

18-20PP 146

19 SR 78

### CHAPTER 18

1 *Abraham entertaineth three angels. 9 Sarah is reprov'd for laughing at the strange promise. 17 The destruction of Sodom is revealed to Abraham. 23 Abraham maketh intercession for the men thereof.*

**1. The Lord appeared unto him.** This must have occurred but a short time after the experience of ch. 17, since both events took place approximately one year prior to Isaac's birth (see chs. 17:21; 18:10, 14). For the "plains of Mamre," meaning the grove of Mamre near Hebron, see on ch. 13:18.

Throughout the narrative of the 18th chapter, note that whereas Moses consistently refers to Abraham's divine visitor as "LORD" (KJV), *Yahweh*, "Jehovah," Abraham always addresses Him as "Lord," 'Adonai, "Sir" (see on v. 3).

**The heat of the day.** This expression probably designates noontime (see 1 Sam. 11:11), and the "cool of the day," literally, the "wind" of the day (Gen. 3:8), refers to late afternoon or evening. The usual Hebrew term for noon is *shohorayim* (ch. 43:16), a dual form meaning literally, the time of "double," that is, "greatest" light. A poetical expression refers to noon as, literally, "the height of the day" (Prov. 4:18), because the sun has then reached the zenith. We speak of "high noon." Upon this occasion Abraham had perhaps dined and was resting, for upon the arrival of his visitors it was necessary to begin preparations for their entertainment.

**2. Three men stood by him.** Thus opens the account of the Lord's sixth appearance to Abraham (see on ch. 17:1). Some expositors have taken the three "men" to be the three persons of the Godhead. This view seems unwarranted, since two of the three are referred to as angels (Gen. 19:1, 15; Heb. 13:2), and as men (Gen. 19:10, 12, 16). It seems best, therefore, to see in the three "men" the Lord and two angels.

**When he saw them.** Abraham was not yet aware of their identity. He saw only three travel-weary strangers looking for rest and food. With true Oriental courtesy he ran

toward them to offer the facilities of his home, bowing down before them in harmony with Eastern custom. This form of greeting in no way indicates that Abraham recognized Jehovah as one of the three. He did the same in the presence of his Hittite neighbors (ch. 23:7, 12). Similarly, Jacob bowed down before Esau (ch. 33:3), Joseph before his father (ch. 48:12), Solomon before his mother (1 Kings 2:19), and the sons of the prophets before Elisha (2 Kings 2:15).

**3. My Lord.** That Abraham directed his invitation to one of the strangers has been taken by some expositors as an indication that he already recognized Jehovah as one of them. It is probable that one of the three excelled the others in appearance or that one stepped forward as spokesman for the group, with the result that Abraham directed his remarks to that one. It should be noted, furthermore, that the Hebrew word here translated “Lord” is not the sacred *Yahweh*, but *’adonai*, equivalent, to “sir,” a respectful form of salutation.

**If now I have found favour.** This expression was frequently used by one person in talking to another of higher rank, or to one whom he desired particularly to honor. It does not imply that Abraham had recognized one of the men to be God. Laban thus addressed Jacob (ch. 30:27), Jacob, Esau (chs. 32:5; 33:8, 10, 15), Shechem, Jacob (ch. 34:11), the Egyptians, Joseph (ch. 47:25), and Jacob, Joseph (ch. 47:29). Many other examples show this to have been a common formula.

**Pass not away.** With typical Oriental charm and hospitality Abraham invited the strangers to pause long enough to refresh themselves. Abraham was apparently one of those who “entertained angels unawares” (Heb. 13:2). This experience shows that Abraham habitually practiced hospitality toward strangers. Although these persons were at first entirely unknown to him, his greeting was as respectful as if a messenger had arrived in advance to announce their identity and their intention of paying him a visit. Those who hold themselves in readiness to show kindness to strangers and travelers may unexpectedly be favored with the presence of guests in whose power it is to confer special blessing (see Luke 24:29).

**4. Wash your feet.** Abraham first mentioned water to wash the feet of the tired travelers, a necessary aspect of hospitality in some Eastern countries to the present day. While they rested under a tree he would prepare a meal for them. After this they could depart in peace and continue their journey.

**6. Make ready quickly.** Like a Bedouin sheik of the present day, Abraham directed his wife to take three “measures,” *se’im* (or about 20 qts.), of fine meal and bake cakes. The baking was done upon hot stones. The “butter” was curded milk, considered a delicacy in many Oriental lands even today. The menu listed in this and the next two verses provided a bountiful and satisfying meal. Abraham gave them the best he had.

**8. They did eat.** Abraham’s heavenly visitors actually ate the food he had prepared for them, as Christ in His risen and glorified form later did to prove the reality of His resurrection (Luke 24:21–43). The acceptance of Abraham’s hospitality on the part of Christ and the angels was perhaps to prove to Abraham that their visit to his tent at Mamre was not a dream or a vision but a genuine experience.

**9. Where is Sarah?** Abraham stood (v. 8), and waited upon them while they ate. Having eaten, they asked for Sarah. Such a request was decidedly out of keeping with Oriental custom; strangers should neither know nor use a wife’s given name. Their knowledge of her name probably suggested to Abraham that his guests were more than

men, and their request implied that their visit had to do with her. The ensuing conversation made their identity clear, and from the promise now repeated, Abraham certainly recognized the One who had appeared to him five times previously. This was the first occasion on which Sarah had personally witnessed one of the divine manifestations accorded her husband. Abraham already knew and believed (Rom. 4:19, 20). From these facts, and from Gen. 18:9–15, it appears that this visit was designed to prepare Sarah for the supreme experience of her life—the birth of her first and only son.

**10. *The time of life.*** This may indicate a year, as implied by Rom. 9:9 and so rendered in the LXX, or it may perhaps refer to the normal period of pregnancy, nine months. In either case, Sarah was to give birth to a son by that time.

***Sarah heard it.*** Sarah was standing behind the tent curtains, as has been the custom of Arab women since ancient times. Forbidden to mingle freely with menfolk, including male guests, especially if they are strangers, but nevertheless intensely interested in their conversations, Bedouin women, now as then, are usually to be found close to the opening of the tent but just out of view. Although they themselves cannot be seen, they usually hear everything spoken by visitors and observe them closely. The mention of her name must have surprised Sarah as well as Abraham. With what intense fascination and rapt attention she must have followed the announcement that she was to have a son.

**11. *Abraham and Sarah were old.*** Like Abraham at the previous revelation, Sarah could not now believe that the promise made would ever come true. For 25 years she had heard it reiterated, but to her the days had been prolonged beyond credibility, and each of Abraham's visions in turn had apparently failed. As a result of the previous revelation (ch. 17) Abraham's doubt had been turned to faith, and on this occasion there is no evidence of doubt on his part, as Paul pointedly observes (see Rom. 4:19, 20).

**12. *Sarah laughed.*** On the occasion of the previous divine revelation Abraham had laughed (see on ch. 17:17). Now Sarah laughed, probably expressing bitterness at her lot and incredulity that circumstances should ever be otherwise. By a half-sarcastic, half-wistful laugh she gave expression to the thought, "That is too good to be true!" (see Eze. 12:22–28).

***My Lord.*** In contrast to Sarah's obvious faults, her deferential submission to Abraham is praiseworthy. Even when talking to herself she referred to him as "my lord," for which the NT commends her as an example of Christian wifely virtue (1 Peter 3:6).

**14. *Is any thing too hard?*** The veil of anonymity was now thrown completely aside, and the speaker unmistakably identified Himself as the Lord. It is interesting to note that although this divine appearance was perhaps intended more for Sarah's benefit than for Abraham's, since he already knew and believed, the Lord did not address Sarah directly until she had first spoken to Him. Instead of speaking to Sarah, He asked Abraham whether anything could be too difficult for the Lord. It was primarily to correct Sarah's unbelief and to strengthen her faith that God spoke thus. Where human wisdom and strength fail, and where nature, enfeebled, lacks ability to act, there God still has full sway and brings things to pass according to the counsels of His own divine will. In fact, He often permits circumstances to reach an impasse so that human impotence may stand forth in striking contrast to His omnipotence.

**15. *Sarah denied.*** Sarah's denial shows that her laugh and remark of v. 12 were scarcely audible, if even that, and that she did not think either had been heard. Now she spoke directly to the strangers, either remaining behind the tent curtains or stepping out

into the open. Fear of offending the guests and of having her secret feelings revealed led to denial. The sudden consciousness of detection forced her into a moment of confusion from which she sought escape by the route of falsehood.

***Thou didst laugh.*** With terse directness resembling that with which He had addressed the first culprits in Eden, God solemnly and unequivocally declared her denial to be false. The subsequent silence of Sarah is evidence of conviction, whereas her eventual conception of Isaac implies repentance and forgiveness.

***16. The men rose up.*** Rested and refreshed, the three heavenly visitants were ready to continue their journey. Their destination is now mentioned for the first time. If Sodom and its sister cities were in the valley that now forms the southern part of the Dead Sea (see on ch. 14:3), they were about 25 mi. from Hebron—a good day’s journey. Inasmuch as Abraham’s guests had arrived at noon, and no doubt spent several hours with him, their departure probably took place in the late afternoon.

***Abraham went with them.*** In accordance with an old custom of friendship continued throughout NT times (Rom. 15:24; 1 Cor. 16:11; Acts 20:38; 3 John 6), Abraham accompanied his guests for a short distance. In Oriental lands it is still customary upon the departure of guests to escort them on their way, the distance indicating the degree of respect and honor the host wishes to show them. An old tradition claims that Abraham went as far as Caphar-Barucha, a mountain spot approximately 4 or 5 mi. by road east-northeast of Hebron, whence one may see the Dead Sea. From this point, perhaps, Abraham and his guests beheld the prosperous cities of the plain.

***17. Shall I hide from Abraham?*** Abraham is called in the Scriptures the friend of God (2 Chron. 20:7; Isa. 41:8). Since he stood so high in the divine favor and fellowship, God saw fit to impart to him a more intimate knowledge of His works and ways. Similarly, He has entrusted messages to the prophets, concerning whom He says that they stand in His counsel, or “secret” (Jer. 23:18–22; Amos 3:7). It is particularly with reference to acts of judgment upon the earth that the Lord speaks thus.

***18. A great and mighty nation.*** Referring to the first promises ever made to Abraham (ch. 12:2), God explains why it is fitting and proper to inform him as to the judgment about to be visited upon the cities of the plain. Theoretically, at least, all the land belonged to Abraham. If God, as senior partner to the covenant, proposed to take action affecting a certain part of it, Abraham as a proved and reliable junior partner should be informed thereof. It was essential, in fact, that Abraham should understand and approve of the action about to be taken, since it involved Lot and his family, some of whom were soon to lose their lives as a result.

***19. For I know him.*** Abraham could be trusted; he would not betray God. Happy tribute to the aging patriarch! The intelligent discharge of his divinely appointed task required that he share in a knowledge of God’s purposes. Abraham’s posterity must also understand, lest they share the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah. It was to be his duty to pass on to future generations what he knew of God’s dealings with the human race. God’s moral and ceremonial laws were also part of the sacred heritage he was to transmit to future generations. Abraham not only prayed with and before his family, but interceded for them as priest, a practice followed by other patriarchs and holy men of old (see Job 1:5). As a prophet he instructed his family in both the theory and the practice of religion, with emphasis on the practical virtues. He taught his family not only to know these things

but to do them as well. A benevolent husband, father, and supervisor, he gave positive direction to the social and religious life of his vast family.

God could trust Abraham, for he would “command” his family, not by dictatorial methods, but by clear precept and consistent example. In training children, every word, look, and act has its effect. In many homes, there is little training by way of either instruction or example. Parents are held accountable for the sacred trust of children and should therefore combine firmness with love, as did Abraham. This task of training up children in the way they should go cannot be delegated to another, custodian or teacher, without grave danger of loss. The influence of godly teachers should not be expected to supplant, but rather to supplement, home training. Each has its place, and is incomplete without the help of the other to aid and reinforce it.

**20. *They cry of Sodom and Gomorrah.*** This refers to the exceeding wickedness that prevailed in the cities of the plain (see ch. 13:13). The limit of God’s patience and long-suffering had now been reached. Though the ways of the people of the plain had long been evil, God gave them a period of grace during which He had not left Himself without witnesses. Lot’s righteous life provided them with an example of how they should live, but this had no influence upon them (see 2 Peter 2:7, 8). Their previous dealings with Abraham had placed them in contact with the true God (see Gen. 14:22). But all was to no avail. Their wickedness, which was “very grievous,” literally, “very heavy,” cried to heaven for punishment. The world in our day has nearly reached the same depth of evil (see Luke 17:28–32; 5T 208).

**21. *I will go down now, and see.*** This does not imply that God was not completely informed as to what was going on at Sodom (see ch. 13:13). As at the building of the Tower of Babel (see ch. 11:5), God safeguarded man’s concept of divine justice by making it clear to Abraham that the decision to destroy Sodom was not arbitrary, but based on necessity. Therefore no discrepancy exists between God’s announcement of His intent to investigate Sodom personally and the certainty of judgment already implied in v. 17.

**22. *Abraham stood yet.*** Two of Abraham’s heavenly visitors now left him and descended to the plain (see ch. 19:1). The Lord, however, remained behind to converse further with Abraham.

**23. *Abraham drew near.*** This expression seems to indicate more than a mere physical approach to the Lord. The Hebrew word translated “drew near” is sometimes used to indicate a reaching out of the mind and heart toward God in contrition and worship (Ex. 30:20; Isa. 29:13; Jer. 30:21). The same thought is similarly expressed in the NT (see Heb. 4:16; 10:22; James 4:8).

***Wilt thou also destroy?*** This personal concern for his fellow men is one of the sublime traits of Abraham’s character. His intercession on their behalf is one of several similar situations recorded in Scripture (see Ex. 32:11–32; Job 42:10; Eze. 14:14; Dan. 9:3–19; Luke 23:34; Acts 7:60). Abraham was moved not only by his concern for Lot but still more by a deep sense of compassion toward the inhabitants of Sodom, with many of whom he had become personally acquainted upon the occasion of their rescue from the hands of the Mesopotamian kings. Abraham must have had reason to believe that some of the inhabitants of the plain had been influenced favorably by his earlier ministry on their behalf. Though Lot is obviously not forgotten, his name is never mentioned. Abraham’s

compassion was probably heightened and intensified by the memory of his own need of forgiving grace on previous occasions.

This question presupposes that God had, according to the resolution of Gen. 18:17, explained to the patriarch His intention to destroy the cities of the plain. Abraham's objective was not simply the preservation of any godly remnant that might be found within the doomed cities, but an extended period of probation for their entire population. Realizing it to be a settled fact, however, that the wealthy but wicked cities of the plain were to be destroyed, Abraham proceeded with bold humility to inquire whether the Lord had considered the fate of the righteous in the general overthrow of the wicked. Here Abraham's appeal was to God's gracious mercy.

**25. *Shall not the Judge?*** God alone is the Judge of all men. Addressing Him thus, Abraham gives evidence that he knew the One before whom he stood to be the Supreme Being. Now he appealed, not to God's grace and pardon, but to His absolute judicial equity. This principle had been demonstrated by God in His extension of probation for the Amorites another 400 years. Their iniquity was "not yet full" (ch. 15:16). When God consented to spare Sodom if only ten righteous men could be found within its gates, He followed the same principle.

**26. *I will spare.*** God accepted the stipulation proposed by Abraham, not as an act of justice, but as an exercise of mercy. Justice required the preservation of the righteous, but mercy alone could spare the wicked. Presumably, also, the presence of a group of 50 righteous persons would offer hope for the conversion of others. God entered into Abraham's reasoning and showed Himself willing to grant mercy to those who did not deserve it, for the sake of "fifty righteous."

**27. *But dust and ashes.*** In this expression, '*aphar wa'epher*, Abraham uses two Hebrew words similar in sound and related in meaning. These words reveal the profound humility of soul he felt in the presence of God. He realized all too well his lowly origin, and the fact that he was destined to return to the substance from which he had been taken (see ch. 3:7, 19).

**28. *Peradventure.*** The patriarch presented his case with adroit Oriental tact. His first hypothetical estimate of the number of pious Sodomites was designedly high enough to elicit a favorable response. Realizing, however, that this number was probably too high, he again showed rare diplomacy. Instead of pleading for the city's safety on the basis of 45 just persons, he protested the thought that it might be destroyed on account of the lack of 5. Encouraged by the continued gracious response of God, he grew bolder, gradually diminishing the number of righteous persons which, in his opinion, should be sufficient to save the city.

Abraham did not request the unconditional sparing of the city, but only its preservation on certain conditions. It would be rash to speculate as to what would have happened had he continued, and reduced the number to less than ten. Perhaps Abraham felt safe in letting the number stand there; besides Lot, his wife, and two daughters at home, were there not Lot's married daughters and their families also (see ch. 19:14, 15)? Starting out with a number he deemed likely to elicit a favorable response, it is probable that Abraham originally intended to decrease it so long as there appeared to be hope of securing such a response. And divine mercy met Abraham's intercession without hesitation.

**33. Abraham returned.** Every man who truly loves God will love his neighbor also, and will sacrifice, if necessary, to promote his neighbor's well-being. We cannot prevent men from sinning against God, but we can intercede for them and plead with them. God is well pleased with such intercession, because it reflects His own great heart of love. How much the energetic prayer of righteous man often avails! When Abraham drew near to God in love and faith, humbly interceding for sinners, God drew near to him in mercy, graciously acceding to each request. The same experience awaits those today who follow in the footsteps of the father of the faithful.

### ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

1-33PP 138-144

1-7ML 192

1-8PP 138; 6T 341

2, 8 GC 631

17 PP 139

18 PK 368

19 AA 133; AH 184, 317; CSW 50; Ed 187; FE 286; MH 390; ML 124; PP 140, 142, 144, 575; Te 290; TM 342; IT 118, 218, 405; 5T 214, 424, 494, 499, 547; 7T 91, 148, 196, 211; 8T 189; 9T 283

20 Ev 25; PP 139

21, 25, 27 PP 139

32 5T 714

### CHAPTER 19

1 *Lot entertaineth two angels.* 4 *The vicious Sodomites are stricken with blindness.* 12 *Lot is sent for safety into the mountains.* 18 *He obtaineth leave to go into Zoar.* 24 *Sodom and Gomorrah are destroyed.* 26 *Lot's wife is a pillar of salt.* 30 *Lot dwelleth in a cave.* 31 *The incestuous original of Moab and Ammon.*

**1. Two angels.** The Hebrew reads literally, "there came the two angels," indicating that they were the same two who had visited Abraham earlier that afternoon (see ch. 18:22). Although it is not stated that their arrival at Sodom occurred the same day they left Abraham, it is so implied here and in v. 27. The distance from Hebron to Sodom was at least 25 mi., over mountainous territory, and the journey would take at least 7 or 8 hours. Since the angels left Abraham in the late afternoon, they could not have reached Sodom before nightfall by ordinary means of travel.

**Lot sat in the gate.** Lot, who first pitched his tent toward Sodom (ch. 13:12), had in the meantime built himself a house within its walls. In ancient Oriental cities public life centered at the city gate. Markets were held there (2 Kings 7:1; Neh. 13:19) and the court sat there (Deut. 21:19; 22:15; 25:7; Joshua 20:4; Ruth 4:1; etc.). David sat in the gate to show himself to the people (2 Sam. 19:8), the events of the day were discussed there (Ps. 69:12; Prov. 31:31), and public announcements were made there (Prov. 1:21; 8:3). Why Lot was sitting in the gate is not stated. That he was on the outlook for travelers on whom to bestow hospitality and whom he might protect from the Sodomites, is certain. The explanation that he had been promoted to the office and dignity of judge, though not a necessary inference from Gen. 19:9, is not at all unlikely, particularly in view of his relation to Abraham, who had once saved the whole city from slavery.

**Lot seeing them rose up.** Recognizing the men to be strangers, Lot, like his uncle Abraham, immediately offered them the hospitality of his own home. Not only did he

greet them as Abraham had done, but his offer was expressed in words similar to those of his uncle (see ch. 18:2–5).

**2. *We will abide in the street.*** The angels had accepted Abraham's offer immediately, but appeared reluctant to accept Lot's. They were testing the sincerity of Lot, proving whether his invitation was merely a hollow form or the earnest desire of his heart. Ancient records reveal that travelers often spent nights in the open (see ch. 28:11). Except for the men of Sodom it would probably not have been a real hardship to do so there, since the cities of the plain were in a semitropical climate. Lot's consideration for others proved to be the means of his own salvation; he manifested a spirit in striking contrast to the men of Sodom (see Matt. 25:34–40).

**3. *He pressed upon them greatly.*** Knowing Lot to be a righteous man, but not being willing at that time to reveal their own identity, the angels consented to take shelter under his hospitable roof. Many centuries later Christ similarly concealed his identity on the way to Emmaus, but yielded finally to the urging of the two disciples (Luke 24:28–30).

**4. *All the people.*** This phrase probably signifies a large concourse of men generally representative of all social groups (PP 159).

**5. *Where are the men?*** The wickedness of the men of Sodom was clearly demonstrated by their action here (see chs. 13:13; 18:21). News of the arrival of two strangers had spread quickly. The men of the city gathered around Lot's house, intending to violate the Oriental right of hospitality in order to satisfy their unnatural lusts. On the meaning of "to know" see ch. 4:1. The term is used here in reference to the abominably immoral practice Paul describes in Rom. 1:27, known as sodomy. According to archeological evidence this sin, punishable by death under the law of Moses (Lev. 18:22, 29), was prevalent among the Canaanites. Moses' emphasis on the fact that both old and young were at the door of Lot's house shows clearly how justified God was in bringing destruction on these cities (see Gen. 6:5, 11).

**7. *Do not so wickedly.*** Lot left the house, carefully locking the door behind him to prevent the mob from entering, and made an earnest attempt to turn his fellow citizens from their evil purpose.

**8. *I have two daughters.*** Seeing that no words could change their minds, he made an extreme proposal to save his visitors from dishonor. His belief in the solemn duty of hospitality, so highly regarded among Eastern nations, explains, though it does not justify, his decision. He who had taken a stranger under his protection and care was bound to defend him even at the expense of his own life. In some Near Eastern countries the duty of hospitality is still regarded in this light. Only to an Oriental mind, perhaps, would the obligation of a host toward his guests seem to justify, or at least excuse, Lot's conduct on this occasion. The purity of his two daughters in a city like Sodom is evidence of the great care with which Lot had brought them up, and proves that the offer was not lightly made. The natural concern of Orientals to protect their female relatives was demonstrated upon one occasion by Jacob's sons (see ch. 34). The fact that such a rash proposal was made at all proves that Lot had exhausted every conceivable means of averting the evil, and was beside himself. He knew full well the wickedness of his fellow citizens (2 Peter 2:7, 8).

**9. *And he will needs be a judge.*** Lot's attempt to frustrate their evil purpose served only to enrage the Sodomites. They would not have anyone telling them what they should do, particularly a foreigner. If Lot had been appointed a judge, as has been suggested (see

v. 1), they felt it was high time to get rid of him. It would seem from their language that either as a judge or as a private citizen he had admonished them to amend their evil ways. In their unreasoning rage they therefore threatened to deal with Lot in a more fearful way than they had planned to do with his guests, should he presume to stand longer in their way. It was only the restraining power of God, together, perhaps, with their momentary hesitancy to lay hands on a man whose righteous example had stirred a faint feeling of respect in their debased minds, that prevented the mob from tearing him to pieces on the spot.

**11. *Blindness.*** God permitted Lot to make an attempt to change the wicked design of the Sodomites in order that he might be impressed with the degree of their depravity. When his extreme efforts proved unavailing the heavenly visitors stepped in to protect both him and themselves from harm. The Hebrew word here translated “blindness” is used but once elsewhere in the OT (see 2 Kings 6:18–20). In both instances it denotes a supernatural form of blindness. It may not have been total, and perhaps involved only a temporary loss of clear vision that bewildered the mind. That they “wearing themselves to find the door” implies mental as well as visual confusion. Had they been struck totally blind in the usual sense of the word it seems unlikely that they would have persisted in their evil purpose.

**12. *Hast thou here any besides?*** By now Lot must have become aware of the supernatural nature of his visitors. It was time for them to acquaint him with the purpose of their mission, and they proceeded to tell him in the plainest possible language of the impending utter destruction of the city. Although Lot’s married children seem to have adopted the life of the people of Sodom, the angels were willing to save them for Lot’s sake should they be willing to leave the city. Though they shared in the sins of Sodom, nothing but their own choice would render their destruction with it inevitable.

**14. *Lot went out.*** That sons and daughters are not mentioned again does not prove that Lot had only sons-in-law, nor that these so-called sons-in-law were young men betrothed to the two daughters yet living in his home. Lot believed the angels and put forth an earnest effort to persuade his children to seek safety by leaving the city, but they only ridiculed the idea that God would destroy it.

**15. *Arise.*** Apparently Lot had warned his children during the night, and when the sun was about to rise the heavenly angels urged him to flee without delay, with his wife and two daughters. The phrase, “which are here,” implies that Lot had others not “here,” who were unwilling to leave.

**16. *While he lingered.*** Lot and his wife believed but found it difficult to leave all their possessions behind. In momentary confusion and bewilderment Lot lingered, undecided as to what he should carry with him as he fled. The angels, who manifested no concern over Lot’s possessions, therefore pulled the four of them away by force, “the Lord being merciful unto him.” Such is the weakness of human nature that even a good man may become so infatuated with the world that he cannot tear himself from it. He is like the wanderer in a snowstorm who, feeling a fatal numbness creeping up his frozen limbs, is tempted to surrender to what he knows to be the sleep of death. He needs someone to rouse him up and urge him on to a place safety.

**17. *Escape for thy life.*** The One with whom Abraham had interceded the day before now joins the angels, outside the city walls, and adds imperative urgency to their warning. The need for Christ Himself to join the angels in their appeal to Lot suggests

that he and his wife were even yet hesitant about leaving everything behind. Could the destruction not be postponed until they should have opportunity to remove their possessions? Given time, they might even persuade others to accompany them. Why such haste? But Christ appears and commands, "Escape for the life" (PP 160; cf. chs. 18:21, 32; 19:22).

**Look not behind thee.** Inasmuch as there was barely time enough to escape the fire so soon to descend, further delay could not be permitted. If Lot's request for time had been granted, he would have found it increasingly difficult to part with the accumulated fortune of a lifetime as the days went on. He might even have decided to remain. His only safety lay in an immediate and complete break with those things that bound his heart to Sodom. So it is with us today.

**Escape to the mountain.** The plain, which had once been so attractive for its beauty and fertility, had become the most dangerous place on earth, and must be abandoned. How fateful had been Lot's decision to make this region his place of abode (see ch. 13:11)! He was not to find refuge in the hills (see Ps. 121:1). Here, among the rocks and clefts of the mountains, he would be safe from the lake of fire into which the fair plain was soon to be transformed.

**18. Not so, my Lord.** Instead of cooperating cheerfully with God's plan for the preservation of his life, Lot presumed upon God's great mercy. Referring to the supposed impossibility of escaping to the mountains, he begged for permission to take refuge in the small neighboring city of Bela (ch. 14:2), afterward called Zoar, "little," on this account. Lot was still reluctant to leave the ease and luxury of city life for what seemed to him a precarious and uncertain existence.

**22. Zoar.** The fact that Lot had to flee again, into a cave (v. 30), can be taken to indicate that Zoar also was later destroyed. Most authorities assume that it lies under the Dead Sea. If so, it may be near the town later called Zoara by Eusebius and placed at the southeast corner of the Dead Sea on the sixth-century A.D. mosaic map at Medeba (now Madeba).

**24. Brimstone and fire.** The judgment announced by the angels came suddenly and unexpectedly (see Luke 17:28, 29). Though only Sodom and Gomorrah are mentioned here, it is clear that the other cities of the plain, Adamah and Zeboim, were also destroyed (see Deut. 29:23; Hosea 11:8; Jude 7). Only the little town of Bela, or Zoar, was spared, and that but briefly (see Gen. 19:30; PP 167).

The phrase "brimstone and fire" is a common Hebrew idiom for "burning brimstone," sulphur. The miracles by which God has from time to time intervened in the ordinary process of nature generally consist in the use of existing natural forces and elements in an unusual manner. Even today the southern region of the Dead Sea is rich in asphalt (see on ch. 14:3, 10). from rock crevices in the area. Asphalt rising to the surface of the southern part of the Dead Sea gave to it the name Lake Asphaltitis in classical times. Massive lumps of asphalt floating on the surface are often of sufficient size to support several persons. Asphalt, sulphur, and other combustible materials have been reclaimed and exported from this region for years. Neighboring Arabs use the asphalt for protection against garden pests and for medicinal purposes. Whatever the means employed to set the cities afire, the holocaust was beyond question miraculous, for destruction came at the precise time appointed by God.

For centuries the seared landscape of this region remained a mute testimony to the great catastrophe that had turned its fertile plain into a scene of utter desolation. Moses referred to it as an example of what the land of Israel would become as the result of disobedience (Deut. 29:21–24). Classical writers eloquently describe the southern Dead Sea region as a burned-out land of rugged terrain, scorched rocks, and ashen soil. They mention also the ruined sites of ancient cities (Diodorus ii. 48. 7-9; Strabo *Geography* xvi. 2. 42-44; Josephus *Wars* iv. 8. 4; Tacitus *Histories* v. 6. 7). In Bible times, what is now the southern arm of the Dead Sea was dry land. In more recent years the level of the sea, which has no outlet, has risen and covered most of the region. Dead trees still protrude from this section of the sea like a ghost forest.

Some scholars have tried to identify the doomed cities with ruins discovered at *Teleilat el-Ghassul* on the northern shore of the Dead Sea. The weight of evidence, however, points to the southern reaches of the sea as the location of the great catastrophe. That awful event has lived on in the traditions of the region to the present day. It is reflected, for instance, in the Arabic name for the Dead Sea, *Bahr Lut*, “Lake of Lot,” and of the mountain range bordering on the southwestern shore of the Lake, *Jebel Usdum*, “Mount Sodom.”

**25. *He overthrew those cities.*** This expression is suggestive of an earthquake, but is also used to describe cities destroyed by enemy action so thorough as to leave them like Sodom and Gomorrah (see 2 Sam. 10:3; Isa. 13:19). Repeated reference is made to this catastrophe throughout the OT (Deut. 29:23; Isa. 1:9; Jer. 49:18; 50:40; Amos 4:11; etc.). They serve as an example of final judgment by fire on all the wicked (2 Peter 2:6; Jude 7).

**26. *His wife looked back.*** The angels had led all four of them out of the doomed city and given them explicit instructions as to what to do and what to avoid doing, if they would save their lives. But merely to escape from the city was not sufficient; continued compliance with instructions was necessary. Lot’s wife looked back to the city, where her home and possessions and some of her children were. She now refused to give them up. Her obdurate heart has made her memory a perpetual warning to those who would like to be saved but who are content with halfway measures, who seem to forsake the world, but whose hearts are still in it. Not enduring unto the end, they cannot be saved (see Matt. 24:13; Phil. 1:6). It is well not to forget the solemn admonition of our Lord, “Remember Lot’s wife” (Luke 17:32). Greater firmness on Lot’s part in heeding the angel’s command would have meant her salvation (PP 160, 161). The angels had forced her to leave the city, but they could not effect her salvation against her will. She was naturally an irreligious person, probably a native of Canaan (PP 174). She chose to die rather than to leave Sodom. We lament her fate; let us profit by her example.

***Pillar of salt.*** It cannot be said how long the salt pillar containing her body remained visible. In some places the southwestern shore of the Dead Sea is lined with salt rock formations, some of them roughly resembling human figures. Travelers have called one or another of them “Lot’s wife.” But to attempt thus to identify any of these would be folly.

**27. *Early in the morning.*** Anxious to learn the result of his intercession the day before, Abraham returned to the spot northeast of Hebron where he and the Lord had

parted. How great must have been his disappointment when he saw the entire plain aflame and its smoke billowing toward heaven.

**29. *God remembered Abraham.*** Unable to save the cities for which Abraham had pleaded, the Lord nevertheless rewarded his intercessory prayer by sparing those who were willing to leave. For Abraham's sake, as here stated, salvation was offered to the family of Lot.

**30. *Lot went up out of Zoar.*** Panic-stricken, Lot soon left Zoar, fearful that it too would share the fate of its four sister cities (PP 167).

**36. *With child by their father.*** In this action Lot's daughters revealed the evil influence of Sodom. They had grown to womanhood in a country where drunkenness and all forms of immorality were rampant; consequently, their judgment was dull and their conscience numb. Lot had been able to protect his daughters from becoming victims of the Sodomites (see v. 8), but he had not been as successful in fixing the principles of right in their hearts. They are more to be pitied than blamed, for Lot himself shared in their sin. He was responsible for the circumstances that led up to it, as he was also for drinking the wine they set before him (see on ch. 9:21). The price Lot paid for a few years in Sodom was the loss of his entire family. The vile and idolatrous Moabites and Ammonites were his only posterity.

**37. *Moab.*** Ancestor of the Moabites. His name probably means "of my father," as the LXX renders it. Although cousins of the Israelites, the Moabites were ever their enemies. Originally they inhabited the country between the Arnon and the Zered, east of the Dead Sea. From the time of David to that of Ahab they were temporarily tributary to their western neighbors, but regained independence under their king Mesha (2 Kings 3:4, 5), who extended his territory northward.

**38. *Ben-ammi.*** The name of the ancestor of the Ammonites probably means "son of my people." By this his mother expressed the fact that his father and mother were of one family stock. Her son was in reality her own half brother, but his ancestors were hers as well. The Ammonites became nomads and lived in the eastern part of the region lying between the Jabbok and the Arnon. The name of their stronghold, Rabbath Ammon, is perpetuated in the name Amman, present capital of the Kingdom of Jordan.

The story of Lot and his family is tragic. A blot lies on his memory to all generations. His sin was forgiven, but the evil of years devoted to pleasure and profit lived after him for generations (PP 168).

### ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

1-38PP 156-170

1 GC 632; PP 158

1-36T 342

2 DA 500; PP 158

3-5, 7, 10, 11PP 159

13 PP 159; 4T 110

14 DA 634; PP 160; 4T 110; 5T 234

15, 16 PP 160; 4T 111

16 GC 431

17 PP 160, 166, 167; TM 446; 5T 233; 8T 16, 36

18, 19 4T 111

19-22PP 161

23 PP 162  
24 CD 60; CH 110; 9T 43  
24, 25 PP 162  
24-28MYP 419  
26 PP 161; 4T 111  
30-38PP 167  
5

## CHAPTER 20

1 *Abraham sojourneth at Gerar, 2 denieth his wife, and loseth her. 3 Abimelech is reproveth for her in a dream. 9 He rebuketh Abraham, 14 restoreth Sarah, 16 and reproveth her. 17 He is healed by Abraham's prayer.*

**1. Abraham journeyed from thence.** No reason is given for Abraham's departure from the grove of Mamre near Hebron (chs. 13:18; 14:13; 18:1) for the southland, the *Negeb* (see on ch. 13:1). It is likely that God directed his footsteps thither, either in the pursuance of his pilgrim life or that he might be a witness to the inhabitants of the region. Again, his flocks may have required fresh grazing land, or political changes may have disturbed the peace and security of the country. While Abraham's early confederates at Hebron, Mamre, Eshcol, and Aner, were Amorites (see ch. 14:13), the Hittites were apparently in control of the region some years later (see ch. 23:3). Critics have declared it impossible for the Hittites to have reached southern Palestine as early as the 19th century B.C., but more recent discoveries prove this to have been so. Some perhaps reached Hebron and expelled the Amorites. If so, Abraham may have moved to the *Negeb* to avoid the unsettled conditions of the transition period. Whatever may have led him to the southland, he made it his home for about 20 years.

**Kadesh and Shur.** Kadesh-barnea was about 80 mi. southwest of Hebron, and Shur lay to the west of Kadesh, not far from Egypt (see ch. 16:7). The word "dwelled" seems to indicate that Abraham spent some time in this region, a stay which must have awakened sacred memories in Hagar's heart (see ch. 16:7-14).

**Gerar.** Since the southern *Negeb* was a semidesert region, its pasturelands may have in time proved inadequate. This area, which had but few oases, was later called the "wilderness of Zin." Turning northward again, Abraham made his temporary abode at Gerar, which lay in a very fertile valley to the south of Gaza. Huge grain silos of the Persian period uncovered in the great mound of Gerar show that it was then the center of a grain-producing area. Though evidence is lacking, the city may have been equally important in earlier times.

**2. She is my sister.** Although Abraham lived in peace and security wherever he had previously pitched his tent in the land of Canaan, he seems to have mistrusted the king of Gerar, a Philistine prince (see on ch. 21:32). It is paradoxical to find one who had defeated the combined expeditionary forces of four Mesopotamian powers suddenly cowering in mortal fear before a single city prince. It is even more puzzling to discover Abraham, that paragon of faith, abruptly reverting to the very ruse that had brought him

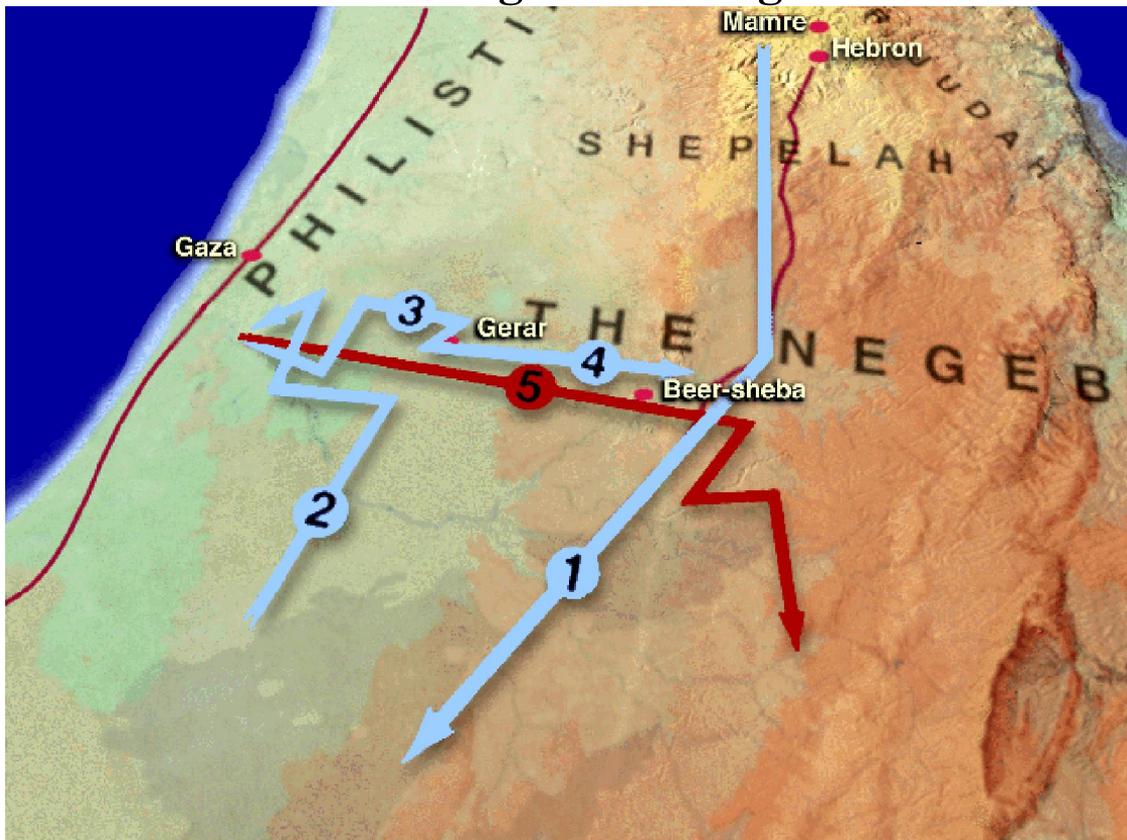
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<sup>5</sup>Nichol, F. D. (1978). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary : The Holy Bible with exegetical and expository comment*. Commentary Reference Series (Ge 16:1). Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association.

so much embarrassment and anxiety in Egypt (see ch. 12:10–20). After the many evidences of the power and protection of God he had witnessed, another dismal failure of faith such as this is strange indeed. Some 20 years had passed since that former mistake, and it may be that time had erased the impression then made.

**Abimelech.** The name Abimelech, “my father the king,” may in reality have been a Philistine title like that of Pharaoh in Egypt, instead of a proper name. The king of Gerar in Isaac’s time is called Abimelech (ch. 26:8), as is also King Achish of Gath in David’s time (1 Sam. 21:10; cf. Ps. 34, title). The ruler of Gerar seems to have taken into his harem all the unmarried women of this domain who captured his fancy. Even more so than 25 years earlier, it seems strange that Sarah, at the age of 90, was still so attractive as to be desired by a Palestinian prince. To be sure, nearly 40 years of her life still remained. Abimelech may also have intended this marriage to seal an alliance between himself and Abraham. He apparently felt the presence of Abraham a benefit to him (see ch. 20:15).

## Abraham’s Wanderings in the Negeb



**3. A dream.** The dream was God’s usual mode of revealing Himself to the heathen, as He did to Pharaoh (ch. 41:1) and to Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 4:5). To the patriarchs and prophets God gave visions, though He sometimes spoke to them in dreams also.

**Thou art but a dead man.** Literally, “you are about to die.” Abimelech contracted the malady that had fallen upon his house (see v. 17).

**4. Not come near her.** Abimelech was prevented from dishonoring Sarah by the peculiar disease that had overtaken him, but concerning whose nature little is revealed.

This statement was made to avoid the possibility that Isaac, soon to be born, might be considered a child of Abimelech rather than of Abraham.

**Lord, wilt thou slay?** In ancient times dreams were considered as of divine origin, and Abimelech therefore believed that the one who appeared to him was a divine being. The authority with which the one addressing him spoke was obviously superior even to his own, as king.

**6. The integrity of thy heart.** Abimelech had inadvertently wronged an ambassador of the heavenly King. It would seem that this heathen ruler must have been a man of principle, for his conscience was obviously clear in the matter. This fact indicates that the Philistines were at this time by no means as degenerate as the men of Sodom. Perhaps the same might also be said of other peoples of Canaan. Their iniquity was “not yet full” (ch. 15:16).

**7. He is a prophet.** This is the first occurrence of the term “prophet,” *nabi*. It is derived from the root word *naba*, which means “to proclaim,” “to call out,” “to declare.” As used in the Bible, the word “prophet,” *nabi*, therefore describes one who proclaims divine messages. These may relate to the past, the present, or the future, and may consist of description, exhortation, instruction, consolation, or prediction. The term conveys, furthermore, the idea of being an intermediary. The English word “prophet” comes from the Greek *prophetes*, a combination of the preposition *pro*, “for,” or “on behalf of,” with the verb *phemi*, “to speak.” He speaks *for* someone. He may speak to man on behalf of God, or vice versa. It seems clear from v. 7 that Abraham was here spoken of as a prophet in the latter sense; he was to pray to God on behalf of Abimelech.

The fact that the term *nabi* is first used here does not preclude belief that the Spirit of prophecy was found among men from the very beginning (Gen. 9:25–27; Acts 3:21; Jude 14, 15). The charge that the use of this term in the books of Moses proves that they cannot be older than the time of Samuel, before which a prophet was called a “seer” (1 Sam. 9:9), is likewise invalid. As used by Moses the term usually applies to a recipient of divine revelations. During the period of the judges the term “seer,” *ro’eh*, appears to have come into use and to have held its ground until the time of Samuel, when the older term in turn replaced it.

**He shall pray for thee.** The value of intercessory prayer is stated forcefully in James 5:16. The promise to Abimelech that he would regain his health through the intercession of Abraham supports the principle that a righteous man may become the channel through which divine blessing can flow to others (see Acts 9:17, 18). It is the purpose of God to direct to His human representatives those who are susceptible to truth.

**8. Abimelech ... called all his servants.** The Hebrew word here translated “servants” includes officials of all ranks. They too were vitally concerned with the situation, and were no doubt with the situation, and were no doubt looking to their king for a solution to the problem.

**9. Abimelech called Abraham.** The earlier rebuke administered by Pharaoh (ch. 12:18, 19) was even more justified now. Abimelech’s words of censure must have been most humiliating. He who had been commissioned to represent, by precept and example, the true God to the people of Canaan was now the deserving recipient of reproof from one of their pagan rulers. His misconduct not only had marred the happiness of his own

home but had also become the occasion of suffering to the people whose hospitality he enjoyed.

**12. *She is my sister.*** Abraham defended his conduct on the assumption that there was no “fear of God” in Gerar, and that consequently his life was in danger (see ch. 12:4–13). Furthermore, he justified the subterfuge by the excuse that Sarah was indeed his “sister”—his half sister—as well as his wife. He sought to make it appear that he had not deviated from the strict letter of truth. But his failure to tell the whole truth made him a deceiver. On marriage between brothers and sisters, see on ch. 4:17.

**13. *At every place.*** This was not the first occasion on which Abraham had passed Sarah off as his sister. It would almost seem to have been his usual practice, but that heretofore Egypt had been the only place where the ruse caused trouble. Years of success in employing the same deception, since that bitter experience with Pharaoh, had made Abraham forgetful of its lesson of strict rectitude (see Eccl. 8:11). Perhaps the comparative ease with God had rescued him from serious difficulty also tended to make him less cautious.

The secluded life of women, typical in the East, made it relatively easy for Abraham to follow the practice he did. Spending much of their time in the tents, beyond the gaze of curious eyes, few men ever even so much as saw them (see Gen. 18:9). Abimelech’s contact with her must have been accidental, possibly at an unguarded moment when she was away from home, such as drawing water at a public well (see ch. 34:1–4). However that may be, the time for the birth of the promised seed was rapidly approaching (see ch. 21:1), and Satan took advantage of Abraham’s weakness to thwart the divine plan (see on Gen. 12:12–20; cf. Rev. 12:1–4).

**14. *Abimelech took sheep.*** Abimelech’s gifts were similar to Pharaoh’s (ch. 12:16), but were given with a different motive. Pharaoh’s gifts were “for the sake of Sarah,” as a dowry, while those of Abimelech were intended to avoid Abraham’s displeasure for the wrong he had suffered.

**15. *My land is before thee.*** This seemingly generous offer is precisely the opposite of Pharaoh’s request under similar circumstances (see ch. 12:19, 20). Abimelech sought to make it clear to Abraham that he had intended no wrong and wanted to live on good terms with this wealthy prince from Mesopotamia. Knowing of Abraham’s rescue of the men of Sodom some years earlier, Abimelech may also for that reason have feared reprisal for his deed.

**16. *A thousand pieces of silver.*** Although neither the word “pieces” nor the word “shekel” is in the Hebrew text, the latter word is undoubtedly the correct complement of the word “thousand.” Coined money did not exist in pre-Persian times. Precious metals were cast into bricks and evaluated according to weight. Since the weight of the shekel varied widely in different localities and at different times, it is difficult to estimate its present monetary value. A weight found in the ruins of Tell Beit Mirsim in Palestine gives a shekel of .402 oz. av. (11.4 gr.), one from Ugarit in Syria .335 oz. (9.5 gr.), whereas the Egyptian and Babylonian shekel varies from .31 to .345 oz. (8.8 to 9.8 gr.). If we take a shekel of 11.4 grams (.4 oz. av.) for a “piece of silver,” a thousand would weigh about 25 lb. av. Inasmuch as the buying power of money was much higher then than it is now, this figure should be increased considerably if it is to represent a true picture of the value of this gift. Abimelech probably used the expression “thy brother” in irony, as if he were saying “this ‘brother’ of yours.”

***He is to thee a covering of the eyes.*** The meaning of the Hebrew statement thus translated is obscure. If literal, the “covering” would be a veil for the protection of the face; if figurative, it would be a gift intended to placate ill will. The Hebrew word translated “he” in the KJV, indicating Abraham, could be just as well translated “it,” referring to the gift. If the word refers to Abraham, Abimelech would mean either that he was herewith returning Sarah to Abraham’s protection, or that Abraham should take better care of her in the future. If, on the other hand, it refers to the gift, Abimelech would be saying, “Please accept my gift as evidence of your innocence, and also as a token of my desire to do right by you.” Three details of the context imply that this expression refers to the gift rather than to Abraham: (1) Abimelech desired the friendship of Abraham (see on v. 15). (2) The gift is the center of attention in the preceding statement. (3) The “covering” was to constitute evidence to her companions and to all others that the wrong had been righted and the case settled.

***All that are with thee.*** Perhaps this refers to Sarah’s handmaids, who may have been with her at the time of the incident. “With all other” may refer to other members of Abraham’s large household, or may include all who might learn of it. See also the following paragraph. This suggests too that the “covering” may have been intended, in part at least, to save her “face” before the other members of her household, a most important consideration among Orientals.

***Thus she was reproved.*** This expression in the Hebrew confronts us with two problems. (1) Some ancient versions omit the word “thus,” Heb. “and,” and combine this expression with the preceding phrase, “and with all other.” (2) Whether the original Hebrew read “she” or “you” is uncertain. The vowel pointing which makes the difference was added by the Masoretes several centuries after Christ. If the Masoretes were correct, then Sarah was “reproved” by Abimelech as being primarily to blame for the unfortunate situation. If, however, the Masoretes made the wrong choice, as some ancient versions imply, and if the preceding phrase, “and with all other,” is to be connected with “she was reproved,” the two together would read as follows: “and in all respects thou art justified,” or, “before every one you are righted,” as in the RSV. This rendering would agree more exactly with the context. The word translated “umpire” in Job 9:33, margin, is from the same root as the word here rendered “reproved.”

**17. *God healed Abimelech.*** Had restitution not been made, death would have been the result (see vs. 3, 7). The Hebrew word translated “maidservants” refers to female slaves of the royal harem. A different word is employed in v. 14 to describe the “womenservants” included in the king’s gift to Abraham.

**18. *Closed up.*** From an Oriental point of view, according to which the bearing of children was esteemed as perhaps the greatest of all blessings, there could be no greater calamity than barrenness. To be childless was a reproach (Gen. 30:23; Luke 1:25; etc.). Furthermore if no more children were to be born to the wives of the family of Abimelech, the family would eventually die out.

## CHAPTER 21

1 *Isaac is born.* 4 *He is circumcised.* 6 *Sarah’s joy.* 9 *Hagar and Ishmael are cast forth.* 15 *Hagar in distress.* 17 *The angel comforteth her.* 22 *Abimelech’s covenant with Abraham at Beer-sheba.*

**1. *The Lord visited Sarah.*** This divine act of grace is called a “visit” of the Lord. The verb here translated “to visit,” when used of a “visit” of the Lord, may refer either to His

coming in judgment to punish men (Isa. 24:21; Jer. 9:25; Hosea 12:3; etc.) or, as here, to favor them (Gen. 50:24; Ruth 1:6; 1 Sam. 2:21).

The birth of Isaac was contrary to the usual course of nature (Gal. 4:23; Heb. 11:11). From time to time in God's dealings with the chosen people He gave them miraculous evidences of His divine power and leadership in order to inspire them with confidence in Him (see John 15:11). These miracles reached a climax in the great miracle of all time—the incarnation, perfect life, vicarious death, glorious resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ (1 Tim. 3:16).

**2. At the set time.** Like many of God's promises, this one was fulfilled precisely on time (see chs. 17:21; 18:10, 14). The coming of the Flood, the deliverance from Egypt, the birth of the Messiah, along with various events foretold by Daniel and John, were in fulfillment of time prophecies (Gen. 6:3; Ex. 12:41; Dan. 9:25; Gal. 4:4). Of the repeated promises made to Abraham of the birth of a son, only those immediately prior to that event made specific mention of the time of the event. At first Abraham was informed only that he would have a son. Later he was told that Sarah would give birth to that son, and only at the very last was he told *when* the son would be born.

**3. Isaac.** God had already selected a name for the child (ch. 17:19). Isaac's name, meaning "he laughs," was to be a perpetual reminder of the glad occasion when faith became reality (see Gen. 17:17; 18:12; 21:6; Ps. 126:2). The birth of Samuel and that of John the Baptist, both under similar circumstances, also brought great joy (1 Sam. 2:1; Luke 1:58).

**4. Abraham circumcised his son.** A year earlier Abraham and Ishmael, together with all male members of the household, had been circumcised. The sign of the covenant was now bestowed upon Isaac, the son of the covenant (see on ch. 17:10-14, 23).

**5. Abraham was an hundred years old.** Exactly 25 years had passed by since the first promise of a son (ch. 12:1-4). Whether Isaac was born at Gerar or Beersheba is not clear (see ch. 20:15; 21:31).

**6. God hath made me to laugh.** Sarah's laughter a year previously had reflected cynicism and incredulity, but now she laughed for joy. The steadfastness of Abraham and Sarah through what seemed to them long, dark years of disappointment and delay, was now rewarded. To them the birth of Isaac meant the dawn of a new day (see Ps. 30:5). It was the "earnest," or token, that the promise in its entirety—the coming of the Messiah, the gospel to all nations, and the eternal home in Canaan—would eventually be realized (Gen. 22:18; Gal. 3:16; Heb. 11:9, 10). Repeated reference is made to this glad event by Bible writers (see Isa. 54:1; 51:2, 3; Gal. 4:22-28). Like Sarah, "Jerusalem which is above," "the mother of us all," rejoices as children of faith are born to her today (Isa. 66:10; Luke 15:10).

**8. And was weaned.** Among Orientals weaning took place later than it does in Western lands. According to 2 Macc. 7:27, Jewish mothers nursed their children for three years (see also 2 Chron. 31:16). Samuel appears to have been brought to the sanctuary as soon after he had been weaned as he was able to minister before the Lord (1 Sam. 1:22-28). It is an Oriental custom to celebrate the weaning of a child by a ritual feast, at which he is expected to eat a meal of solid food for the first time. This marks the close of infancy.

**9. Mocking.** Some commentators translate the Hebrew word *mešacheq*, KJV "mocking," as "playing," and conclude that Sarah's declaration in the following verse

was the result of jealousy. They think she could not endure the thought of Ishmael's sharing in Abraham's inheritance. Others explain this text in the light of Paul's explanation that Ishmael was expelled from his father's home for persecuting Isaac (Gal. 4:29, 30).

The verb *mešacheq*, "mocking," is from the same root word as Isaac, "to laugh." Here used in the intensive form, however, it expresses something more than simple laughter—rather, ridicule. Lot seemed to his sons-in-law "as one that mocked," or made fun of their good judgment; he seemed to be joking (Gen. 19:14). The same word is used of Joseph, who, Potiphar's wife said, had come "to mock us," that is, to make sport of her husband's generosity toward him (ch. 39:14–17). The revelry of the Israelites before the golden calf is also described by the same verb, translated rather inappropriately in the KJV as "to play" (Ex. 32:6). The Philistines called for blind Samson "to make sport" for them (Judges 16:25). The only instance in which the word is used in a favorable sense occurs in Gen. 26:8, where it describes Isaac's caressing of Rebekah. According to the majority of instances in which the intensive form of this verb is used, then, Ishmael was "always mocking," or taunting, Isaac.

Ishmael was 14 years older than Isaac, and therefore about 17 when Isaac was weaned (see ch. 16:3; 21:5). He had no doubt ever considered himself the eldest son and heir of Abraham. The birth of Isaac, however, and the weaning feast made it apparent that Sarah's son was to replace him, and as a result his jealousy was aroused. Little wonder that Ishmael taunted Isaac on being the younger, and consequently ineligible to the rights and privileges of the birthright.

**10. Cast out this bondwoman.** Sarah's words, reflecting jealousy and contempt, hardly seem appropriate for one who had suggested Hagar's marriage to Abraham in the first place (ch. 16:2, 3). Sarah referred to Hagar as a slave and to Ishmael as the son of a slave. Of course, Sarah had the right to demand that the status of her own son be legally clarified, that no question might arise after Abraham's death. Sarah therefore called upon her husband to send Hagar away and to disown Ishmael.

**11. Grievous in Abraham's sight.** To Sarah, Hagar and Ishmael were intruders, the one a low-caste Egyptian, an alien slave, the other a half-breed youth who would always be causing trouble. Abraham, quite naturally, did not share these feelings. He did not question Isaac's prerogatives as the promised heir, but Ishmael was also his son. For years he had thought him to be the heir rather than Isaac. Ishmael was his own flesh and blood, and he loved this lad who had been his only son for 14 years. To Abraham, it seemed impossible to comply with Sarah's wish.

**12. Harken unto her voice.** From a human point of view it seems strange that God should approve of Sarah's somewhat selfish request. Although God was ready to bless Ishmael (see chs. 16:10; 21:13), and did not directly censure Abraham on account of Hagar, yet He never recognized Abraham's marriage to her. To God, she was ever the "bondwoman," not his wife. Ishmael's incessant "mocking" (see on v. 9) made it apparent that he would continue to disturb the peace and harmony of the household during Abraham's lifetime, and that upon Abraham's death he would probably press his claim to the birthright by force. It was now clear that Ishmael could no longer remain in the home without danger to God's plan for Isaac. Abraham had not sought God's advice in taking Hagar, and that hasty act now made necessary the expulsion of a son whom he dearly loved. At the same time, God comforted Abraham with the assurance that Ishmael,

as his offspring, would also share in some of the promise made to him and would become a great nation.

**14. Bread, and a bottle.** The word “bread” in Hebrew is a collective term for all kinds of food. The “bottle,” a goat’s skin, must have held sufficient water to last from one well to the next. Upon her previous flight Hagar seems to have set out for her home in Egypt (ch. 16:7), and perhaps intended to do so now. Abraham’s generous nature and his love for Ishmael certainly led him to make adequate provision for their journey. It seems that an emergency arose later only because they had missed their way and were wandering aimlessly about in the wilderness until their water was spent. This is implied by the word “wandered,” from a Hebrew verb that means “to err,” “to wander,” “to go astray” (see Ps. 119:176; Isa. 53:6). It was not in the purpose of God for Hagar and Ishmael to return to Egypt, for His promise concerning the boy could not be fulfilled there. The wandering in the desert was apparently a providence of God for (see Acts 17:26).

**And the child.** This phrase suggests that Hagar had to carry Ishmael as well as the food and water. The fact that Ishmael was now about 17 years old (see on Gen. 21:8, 9) makes it clear that Hagar could not have carried him. The text must therefore mean that Abraham placed some of the provisions upon Hagar’s shoulder and some upon Ishmael’s.

The expulsion of one of his sons must have meant intense suffering for Abraham (see v. 11). But, mindful of his own responsibility for the situation that had developed, he resigned himself to the revealed will of God in the matter. The fate of Hagar and Ishmael seems harsh in the extreme, but this they had made inevitable by their attitude toward Isaac. Had they been willing to accept a subordinate role, they might perhaps have remained in Abraham’s home until Ishmael was grown. Then Ishmael might have gone forth, married, and with a share of his father’s wealth. How often an ill-considered course of action means not only the forfeit of blessings it is our privilege to enjoy but needless suffering as well (see Jer. 5:25).

**The wilderness of Beer-sheba.** Beer-sheba, the major city of the northern *Negeb*, the semiarid southland, was the center of various caravan roads leading from trans-Jordan to the coast and from Palestine to Egypt. The wilderness was south of the city.

**15. She cast the child.** As noted previously, Ishmael was no longer an infant but a grown lad. The word translated “child” is sometimes rendered “young man” (see Gen. 4:23; 1 Kings 12:10). The word “cast,” although seeming to suggest rough treatment, must be understood as in Matt. 15:30, where the sick were “cast” at Jesus’ feet to be healed. This implies only that they were committed to His solicitous care. Hagar committed Ishmael to the shade of the tree, the only available means of relieving his pain. In translating the Hebrew “cast” into Greek, the LXX uses the same word as does Matthew. Though despairing of his life, the mother took care that he should at least breathe out his life in the shade; it was all she could do for him.

**16. A good way off.** Her leaving of Ishmael suggests that thirst had made him delirious. Her immediate presence could only add to her own suffering without alleviating his.

**17. God heard the voice of the lad.** The Hebrew word here translated “voice” may mean either audible or inarticulate words uttered in prayer or in despair, or may refer only to his groaning and heavy breathing. The same Hebrew word is also used to describe the roll of thunder, the rustling of leaves, the bleating of lambs, and the blast of a trumpet

(see Ex. 20:18; 1 Sam. 15:14; 2 Sam. 5:24). Whatever it was, God heard, and sent His angel to Hagar with words of encouragement and a remedy for the lad's pain.

**19. *God opened her eyes.*** Hagar was directed to a well of water in the immediate vicinity, one that had been there all the time. Divine power did not produce clear water, but clear vision. The desert wells of Palestine were artificially enlarged holes in the ground where the water of natural springs collected, whose openings were concealed by stones to prevent stray animals from falling in. Hagar was simply unaware of the existence of this particular well until providentially directed to it.

**20. *Became an archer.*** Under the continued watchcare of God, Ishmael grew up to be a hunter, thus providing for his own and his mother's needs.

**21. *The wilderness of Paran.*** This wilderness region lies between the Gulf of 'Aqaba and the Gulf of Suez, to the south of Kadesh-barnea. Though Hagar probably revisited her native land to procure a wife for her son, she returned to the desert country of southern Canaan. God Himself probably directed her to the wilderness of Paran in order that there Ishmael might be free from the corruption of Egypt. The northern part of this region, furthermore, was included in the land promised to Abraham. Perhaps it was with this in mind that Hagar chose to make it their home.

**22. *At the time.*** This may refer to the events of the preceding chapter, to the expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael, or to the latter's marriage.

***God is with thee.*** Having witnessed the blessing of heaven upon Abraham, first in Gerar and then at Beersheba, Abimelech considered it advantageous to conclude a covenant with him. Closer association with so prosperous a man might benefit him also. At first considering himself the superior of Abraham, Abimelech now recognized that Abraham was infinitely superior to him. For this purpose Abimelech and his army commander Phichol went to Beersheba to conclude a treaty with him. Phichol may be a Hebrew name meaning "the mouth of all," the one who as commander gave orders to Abimelech's army, or it may be a Philistine name of unknown derivation.

The fact that God is with a man cannot long remain unknown to others. The evident blessing of God upon His loyal representatives produces respect for them in the minds of those who witness their lives. About the humblest Christian is an atmosphere of dignity and power.

**25. *Abraham reproved Abimelech.*** Before concluding the proposed treaty, however, Abraham protested the unprovoked expropriation of one of his wells by Abimelech's men. Though not specifically so stated, the well was returned at this time to Abraham's ownership (vs. 28–30).

**27. *Made a covenant.*** Wherever he went, Abraham followed the sound policy of living at peace with his neighbors (see Jer. 29:7; Rom. 12:18). He had formed a league with Amorite chiefs, Mamre, Aner, and Eshcol, at Hebron (Gen. 14:13). He had placed the king of Sodom under obligation to him by his generosity (ch. 14:23). Now he was ready to conclude a treaty of friendship with a Philistine king. The sheep and oxen here mentioned were probably not a gift to Abimelech, but rather were the animals necessary to the ceremonial conclusion of the covenant (see on ch. 15:9–17). The verb here translated "made" is the same as in ch. 15:18, and means, literally, "to cut." It refers to the dividing of the covenant animals, between whose parts those participating must walk. This custom was common among Semitic peoples, and was practiced even in Jeremiah's time (Jer. 34:18, 19). Abraham and Abimelech must have followed it here.

**28. Seven ewe lambs.** These lambs were not used in connection with the ratification of the covenant. They were either a good-will gift, or payment for the well, which, although dug by Abraham, was apparently on Abimelech's territory. Abimelech's acceptance of the lambs was to "be a witness" (v. 30) to Abraham's rights at the well in question.

**31. Beer-sheba.** In memory of the pact of friendship, Abraham called the place Beersheba, meaning either the "well of swearing" or the "well of seven." It is not known whether the number seven entered into the ancient covenant ceremony. In ancient Hebrew the two words "seven" and "swearing," at least as written, were identical. That Abraham gave "seven" lambs to Abimelech as witnesses of his oath may point to the words "seven," *sheba*, as having some connection with the act of swearing, *shaba*. However, since this is the only Biblical occasion upon which a gift of seven animals was made in confirmation of an oath, we cannot be certain as to the validity of this suggestion.

Anciently, Beersheba was the southern-most city of the land of Canaan. The expression "from Dan even to Beer-sheba" (Judges 20:1; 2 Sam. 24:2; etc.) or "from Beer-sheba even to Dan" (1 Chron. 21:2) stood for the entire country. Beersheba has been inhabited without interruption since the days of Abraham, and has retained its ancient name to the present day. It belongs to the state of Israel and has grown vastly in a few decades, having in 1972 a population of about 84,000.

**32. Land of the Philistines.** The statement that Abimelech and Phichol "returned into the land of the Philistines" after concluding a treaty with Abraham at Beersheba implies that the area around this city was outside the recognized boundaries of Philistia. At the same time it was probably under the control of the prince of Gerar in Abraham's time; otherwise it is unlikely that the question over ownership of the well would have arisen.

This is the first Biblical mention of the "land of the Philistines." Most modern commentators have seen in this statement the historical mistake of a late author, claiming as they do that the Philistines did not enter Palestine prior to the late 13th century B.C., long after Abraham's time. There is, however, no reason to doubt the presence of Philistines in Palestine during the patriarchal period. They are mentioned in documents of the north Syrian coastal city of Ugarit before the 15th century B.C. That Egyptian sources mention the Philistines about the year 1200 B.C. for the first time does not prove their nonsettlement of Palestine prior to that time. It shows only that they did not play so prominent a role as they did later in the time of Ramses III, when they and other "peoples of the sea" were so numerous as to threaten for a time to overrun Egypt (see Ex. 13:17).

**33. Abraham planted a grove.** The word "grove," reminiscent of the idolatrous cult places of Palestine (Deut. 16:21; Judges 6:26; etc.), seems to imply that Abraham planted a similar sacred grove which he dedicated to the true God. But the translation "grove," from *'eshel*, is erroneous. The word *'eshel*, found in similar forms in southern Arabic, Egyptian, Assyrian, and Aramaic, denotes a variety of tamarisk, a shrublike tree native to semiarid regions like the *Negeb*. It is slow of growth but long of life. Abraham probably planted this particular tree for no other purpose than to serve as a memorial of the transaction concerning the well. Commemorative trees are often planted today.

**Called there on the name of the Lord.** As elsewhere, Abraham here conducted public worship (see Gen. 12:7, 8; 13:4, 18). The object of his worship was "the everlasting

God,” literally, “the God of eternity,” in contrast to the heathen deities, which are but the creatures of those who worship them (Hosea 8:6) Abraham worshipped the everlasting Witness of treaties, the eternal Source of the blessings that attended him throughout life, and the immortal Father who never fails His children.

**34. Sojourned in the Philistines’ land.** This seems to contradict the implication of v. 32 that Beersheba did not belong to the land of Philistia. Apparently, either (1) Philistia had no fixed boundary on its desert side, and Beersheba may have been claimed by Abimelech, or (2) Beersheba was situated on the border of Philistia, and Abraham must often have pastured his flocks across the border.

### ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

1-14PP 146-147; SR 79-80

2, 3, 9-14PP 146

10 SR 79

12 PP 151

33 8T 270

### CHAPTER 22

1 *Abraham is tempted to offer Isaac.* 3 *He giveth proof of his faith and obedience.* 11 *The angel stayeth him.* 13 *Isaac is exchanged with a ram.* 14 *The place is called Jehovah-jireh.* 15 *Abraham is blessed again.* 20 *The generation of Nahor unto Rebekah.*

**1. After these things.** About 17 tranquil years are passed over in silence. Isaac was now a young man of 20 (see on ch. 21:14; PP 147). It was, as well, 17 years since Abraham had received his last recorded message from God. Suddenly, there came a new revelation, proposing the greatest test that could come to a human being.

**God did tempt Abraham.** The KJV translators have rendered the Hebrew word *nissah*, “tempt,” in various ways: (1) When one man tests or proves another. The queen of Sheba came to Solomon “to prove him with hard questions” designed to reveal whether his wisdom was as great as it was reputed to be (1 Kings 10:1). (2) When God tries, tests, or proves a man (Ex. 16:4; Deut. 8:2, 16; 13:3; 2 Chron. 32:31). (3) When a man puts God to the test by trying to compel Him to act in accordance with his own proposals. This is presumption, as distinct from faith (Ex. 17:2, 7; Num. 14:22; Isa. 7:12). Inasmuch as the word “tempt” is now generally used to imply evil intent, the word “test” would be preferable here. God never “tempts” any man (James 1:13).

**Behold, here I am.** This vision, which came to Abraham at night (PP 147), was the eighth occasion on which God spoke to Abraham (Acts 7:2; Gen. 12:1; 13:14; 15:1; 17:1; 18:1; 21:12). Previous experiences had taught Abraham to recognize God’s voice immediately, and he was ready to answer. This brief introductory conversation consists of but two words in Hebrew, and in this respect differs from similar occasions in the past.

**2. Take now thy son.** If these words were spoken slowly, as is probable, Abraham must have felt, in sequence, pride, fear, and awe. Repetition was calculated by God to arouse parental affection and to prepare Abraham for the severe test soon to follow. In calling Isaac, Abraham’s “only son,” God implied that he alone was considered a legitimate heir to the promise. This contrasts with the expression of ch. 21:12, 13, where God calls Ishmael “the son of the bondwoman.”

**The land of Moriah.** The name Moriah appears but twice in the Bible, here and in 2 Chron. 3:1. According to the latter text Solomon built his temple on Mt. Moriah, to the north of David’s city and to the west of the Kidron valley. The land of Moriah must

therefore have been the mountainous country round about Jerusalem. The name seems to have been rather uncommon.

**Offer him.** The sacrifice of human beings, particularly of infants, was common in ancient times. Both the Bible and archeology affirm that the Canaanites practiced such rites. The idea of sacrificing one's first-born to the deity was therefore nothing strange to Abraham. While God explicitly prohibited such sacrifices (Lev. 18:21), it is not certain that Abraham was clear as to this. Indeed, only on the assumption that he did not understand this divine ban can we explain his failure to protest God's command to offer up his son.

**3. Early in the morning.** Abraham seems to have been in the habit of rising early (see chs. 19:27; 21:14). He was a man of action, and now that God had spoken, his only thought was immediate obedience. Anyway, how could he sleep with the weight of this message upon his mind? How impossible it all seemed! What doubts must have tortured his mind! Not trusting himself should he presume to delay, and fearing also the possible opposition and interference of Sarah, he determined to set out immediately for the designated mountain.

In the supreme test of a long, eventful life Abraham obeyed without raising a single question, without offering a single objection, and without seeking human counsel. Where principle is involved, the mature Christian asks no more than a clear perception of duty. His cooperation springs from a heart overflowing with love and devotion. He lives as in the very presence of God, with no human considerations to dim his apprehension of truth and duty. Yet, upon this occasion, what a struggle must have taken place in the heart of the "friend of God," not as to whether he would obey, but rather for divine assurance that his senses and reason were not deceiving him.

**Saddled his ass.** The series of terse statements in this verse admirably reflect the calm deliberation and unflinching heroism with which the patriarch proceeded to carry out the divine command. His calm voice and steady hands in no way betrayed the inner emotion of a broken and bleeding heart. Everything needed for the long journey was quickly prepared in a matter-of-fact way. There was no trace of past moments of weakness. As a noble hero of faith, his training complete, Abraham responded immediately when called upon to meet his supreme hour of test. This was the climax of his spiritual experience. He serenely rose to a height never surpassed by mortal man, and qualified for the honor of being called "father of the faithful."

**4. On the third day.** Two days of travel brought the travelers—Abraham, Isaac, and two servants—into the land of Moriah. Two sleepless nights had been spent in prayer. Arising early on the morning of the third day, Abraham beheld the divinely appointed sign, a cloud of glory, indicating the mountain on which the sacrifice was to be made (PP 151).

**5. Abide ye here.** The solemn duty Abraham was about to perform seemed to him too sacred for other human eyes and ears. None but God could understand. For two days he had concealed his thoughts and emotions. Isaac was to be the first to know, and the only one to share with him this hour of passion and pathos.

**I and the lad.** Each of the three verbs of the sequence thus introduced contains the pronoun "we." The English translation does not reflect the prophetic faith implicit in the Hebrew. Literally, Abraham said to his two servants, "I and the youth, we will go yonder, and we will worship, and we will come again." Though he did not understand God's

purpose, he did believe that God would raise Isaac from the dead (Heb. 11:19). Had not God promised, without qualification, that Isaac was to be his heir (Gen. 21:12)? Abraham did not anticipate being spared the gruesome act of slaying his own son, but believed that Isaac would be restored to him. Accordingly, he spoke in faith when he said, “We will come again.” Only by faith was it possible not to expect to return alone, to report to the men that with his own hands he had taken the life of his son and offered him to God (see PP 151, 152). The height of his spiritual experience is evident, not only in his unwavering obedience, but also in his unflinching faith in God’s unfailing promises.

**6. They went.** Father and son began the ascent in silence, Abraham in meditation and prayer, and Isaac pondering over his father’s unwonted reticence as to the nature and purpose of their journey. Alone with his father, solitude invited Isaac to give expression to his bewilderment over the absence of a lamb.

## Abraham’s Journey to Mount Moriah



Abraham lived at Beersheba, close to Abimelech. It is thought that he journeyed to Mt. Moriah by the route through the Shephelah rather than through the mountains of Judah, from which he had earlier withdrawn, for that road was easier to travel and bordered the plain of the Philistines, with whom he was friendly.

**7. My father.** This expression of endearment must have lacerated Abraham's heart. As used by Isaac, a well-bred young man of a cultured Semitic family, this form of address signified his desire to ask a question. No well-trained son would presume to ask questions or make statements in the presence of his parents without first receiving permission to do so. Abraham gave this permission by replying, "Here am I, my son."

**Where is the lamb?** This point-blank question expressed no more than innocent wonder. Nothing in the narrative suggests that Isaac in the least surmised that he was to substitute for the missing lamb. His question was asked in all simplicity of mind, without suspicion or undue inquisitiveness.

**8. God will provide.** Abraham's reply constitutes a prophetic utterance from the heights of heroic faith to which his soul had risen. By inspiration it pointed both to the ram of v. 13 and to the Lamb of God, which at the moment were equally beyond his ken. Except for the conviction that he was doing the will of God and that his "only son" would be restored to him, Abraham's agony at the thought of parting from Isaac would have been beyond endurance. Albeit, the boy's question must have pierced the father's heart. Would Isaac understand?

**9. Abraham built an altar.** Reaching the spot where in later centuries the Temple stood, father and son reared an altar. Salem, the city of Melchizedek, was scarcely more than a stone's throw to the south. But a little farther, to the northwest, was the hill later known as Golgotha.

**Bound Isaac.** When all was complete, and nothing remained save the placing of the sacrifice upon the altar, Abraham tremblingly told Isaac all that God had revealed to him, and probably added to that his own faith in Isaac's restoration. It is difficult to imagine the mingled feelings that must have surged through Isaac's breast—amazement, terror, submission, and finally faith and trust. If such were the will of God, he would count it an honor to yield his life in sacrifice. A young man of 20, he might easily have resisted; instead, he encouraged his father in the final moments preceding the climax. That Isaac understood and shared his father's faith was a noble tribute to the careful training he had received through childhood and youth. Isaac became thus a fitting type of the Son of God, who yielded to the will of His Father (Matt. 26:39). In each case the father gave up his only son.

**10. Took the knife.** Having laid the bound victim upon the wood, Abraham was ready for the last act, the slaying of his son and setting fire to the pile of wood. As a type of the perfect Lamb of God, Isaac offered no resistance and voiced no complaint (see Isa. 53:7).

**11. The angel of the Lord called.** Whereas in the past God had spoken directly to Abraham, He now sent His angel (see Acts 7:2; Gen. 12:1; 13:14; 15:1; 17:1; 18:1; 21:12; PP 152).

**12. Lay not thine hand.** The patriarch had amply demonstrated his faith and obedience and had fully satisfied the requirements of his God. Jehovah did not desire the death of Isaac; in fact, He was not interested in any sacrificial offerings as such. But He

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<sup>6</sup>Nichol, F. D. (1978). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary : The Holy Bible with exegetical and expository comment*. Commentary Reference Series (Ge 1:1). Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association.

has ever desired the willing obedience of His servants (1 Sam. 15:22; Hosea 6:6). So far as the will and purpose of father and son could go, the sacrifice was complete. God accepted the devotion of their hearts as a gift far more acceptable in His sight, and took the will for the deed (Heb. 11:17). The heavenly voice also testifies to God's rejection of human sacrifices (see Deut. 12:31; 2 Kings 17:17; 2 Chron. 28:3; Jer. 19:5; Eze. 16:20, 21). The assertions of Bible critics to the effect that the Hebrews, as a part of their regular order of service, practiced the rite of human sacrifice, so common among the Canaanites and other peoples of antiquity, is without foundation. True, in periods of apostasy the Jews did practice this rite, but this was in direct violation of God's command (see Ps. 106:37, 38; Isa. 57:5; etc.).

**13. Abraham went and took the ram.** Discovering the ram and accepting its presence as a further token of the providence of God, Abraham did not need to await instructions from God as to what to do with it. Here was the lamb that Abraham had said God would provide (v. 8). The wood, the fire, and the knife had not been brought, nor the altar erected, in vain.

**14. Jehovah-jireh.** Remembering now his own prophetic words to Isaac, Abraham named the spot Jehovah-jireh, "Jehovah will provide." This name, Moses adds, gave birth to the proverb, "In the Mount of Jehovah it shall be seen [literally, "provided"]." The meaning of this proverb is somewhat obscure. The word here translated "seen" is the same as that rendered "provide" in v. 8. The proverb is obviously reminiscent of Abraham's expression of faith that in the amount divinely appointed, God Himself would provide a means of salvation. This proverb constituted an expression of the Messianic hope, whether or not such a meaning was entirely clear to those quoting it. Upon this sacred spot, in the holy of holies of Solomon's Temple, the Shekinah glory of God later took up its abode. Hard by this mount occurred the rejection by the Jewish leaders of the true Lamb of God.

**15. The angel of the Lord.** After the ram had been offered, the angel spoke again. Prior to the experience recorded in ch. 22 God had communicated with Abraham seven times (see on v. 1). This is the last recorded divine revelation to Abraham. God accepted his loyalty and obedience and reaffirmed the promises made so often in the past.

**16. By myself have I sworn.** The purpose of an oath is to provide confirmation of what has been stated. Men call upon God to witness their integrity. Since there is none higher than God (Heb. 6:13), He swears by Himself (see Isa. 45:23; Jer. 22:5; 49:13; etc.). In thus committing Himself, God, for man's sake, follows a custom familiar to men, to convince them of the dependability of His promises.

**17. Possess the gate of his enemies.** Here alone among the promises given to Abraham is reference made to the "enemies" over whom his seed should triumph. This is probably a prediction that his descendants would be victorious over their enemies in the future conquest of Canaan. It may include, as well, the triumph of truth over pagan religious systems, that is, the conversion of the heathen through the missionary labor of the spiritual children of Abraham.

**20. It was told Abraham.** Some unidentified messenger came to Beersheba with news from Abraham's brother Nahor in Haran. This news takes the form of a brief table of Nahor's descendants. It is included here by way of showing the descent of Rebekah, soon to become Isaac's wife.

**Milcah.** This daughter of Haran, who had married her uncle Nahor (ch. 11:29), had given birth to eight sons, named in the following verses. It is not implied that Milcah had but recently begun to bear children (see on ch. 11:30), but that many years had passed since Abraham last heard from Nahor's family.

**21. Huz his firstborn.** This name appears also in the list of Aram's sons (ch. 10:23). Two distinct individuals are indicated.

**Buz his brother.** With Dedan and Teman, Buz is mentioned as an Arabian tribe (Jer. 25:23). Elihu was a "Buzite" (Job 32:2, 6). The land of *Bâzu*, in the Assyrian inscriptions of Esarhaddon, seems to have been the area inhabited by this tribe. Whether the tribe of Buz descended from Nahor's son Buz is uncertain.

**Kemuel.** Not mentioned elsewhere in the Bible. There was, however, an Ephramite chieftain by this name at the time of the Exodus, and also a Levite of David's time (Num. 34:24).

**The father of Aram.** This grandson of Nahor is not the ancestor of the Aramaeans (see ch. 10:22). He may, however, have been named in honor of Aram the son of Shem.

**23. Bethuel begat Rebekah.** Nothing is known of the other sons of Nahor except Bethuel, his youngest. Bethuel is important as the father of Laban and Rebekah (see chs. 24:15, 24, 47, 50; 25:20; 28:2, 5). The name Bethuel, literally, "dwelling of God," may indicate that he was a pious man. The omission of Laban's name from this list suggests that he was not yet born.

**24. Thahash, and Maachah.** Of Tebah and Gaham nothing is known except their names. Thahash may have given his name to the *Tachsi* region of the Lebanon, mentioned in the Amarna Letters, and Maachah to a region at the foot of Hermon (see 2 Sam. 10:6, 8; 1 Chron. 19:7; etc.).

That three of Terah's descendants, Nahor, Ishmael, and Jacob, should each have 12 sons has been pronounced by critical scholars an artificially contrived symmetry. But the critics do not explain why important men like Abraham and Isaac did not have 12 sons also.

## ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

1-19PP 147-155; SR 80-83

1, 2 PP 147

2 DA 468; PP 148; SR 80; 4T 144, 253

2-121T 454

3 4T 144, 253

3, 4 PP 151

3-63T 368

5-8PP 152

7 3T 368

7, 8 DA 112; PP 155; SR 82

8 DA 469

9 GC 18; PK 37; 3T 368

9, 10 PP 152

10, 11 3T 368

11, 12 PP 152; SR 82

12 DA 469; PP 155; 1T 351; 3T 368; 4T 18, 145

13 SR 83  
13-18PP 153  
15-18SR 83  
16 1T 203  
16-18GC 18; PK 37  
18 AA 222; PK 368; PP 370  
19 3T 368

## CHAPTER 23

1 *The age and death of Sarah.* 3 *The purchase of Machpelah,* 19 *where Sarah was buried.*

**1. *The life of Sarah.*** As the mother of all believers (Isa. 51:2; 1 Peter 3:6) Sarah is the only woman whose age at death is mentioned in Scripture. Isaac was 37 years old at the time of her death (Gen. 17:1, 17; 21:5).

**2. *Kirjath-arba.*** Abraham had moved back to his former place of abode, near Hebron (chs. 13:18; 18:1). Having lived for almost 40 years in the land of the Philistines (chs. 20:1; 21:31–34; 22:19), he now returned to Canaan proper, a fact Moses specifically notes. Kirjath-arba (Joshua 14:15; 15:13; 21:11), meaning “city of Arba,” was named for one of the giant Anakim, who apparently founded it. The name Hebron was given to the city at a later time.

***Mourn for Sarah.*** Seemingly the only burial rite observed by Abraham. This probably refers to formal mourning—sitting on the ground and weeping in the presence of the dead. Mourning later developed into an elaborate ritual, including such ceremonies as rending the garments, shaving the head, wearing sackcloth, and covering the head with dust and ashes (2 Sam. 3:31; Job 1:20; 2:12).

**3. *Spake unto the sons of Heth.*** The inhabitants of the region are here called the sons of Heth, or Hittites (v. 10). During Abraham’s first period of residence the Amorites had been in possession of Hebron (see on ch. 20:1). Critical objection to the presence of Hittites in southern Palestine at this early period is not confirmed by the latest archeological findings.

In fact it is in the light of the Hittite laws that some details connected with this story can best be explained. (See vs. 11, 17, and M. R. Lehmann in *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, 129 [Feb., 1953], pp. 15-18.

**4. *I am a stranger.*** Abraham’s courteous approach to the Hittites, the “people of the land,” is noteworthy (vs. 7, 12, 13). He frankly admitted his status as a sojourner and made no claim to any of the land by right (see Heb. 11:13). God had promised him all of Canaan. With hundreds of retainers he had defeated the allied expeditionary force from Mesopotamia (Gen. 14). These very Hittites recognized him as a “mighty prince” (ch. 23:6). Yet, in humility, Abraham did not present his neighbors with a demand; he requested permission to secure title to a piece of land, not by right, but as a favor and for a price.

***A buryingplace.*** This is the first grave mentioned in Scripture. Cremation was practiced by many pagan nations of antiquity, but the Hebrews preferred interment. The desire to be buried on one’s own land is common to people of all ages, races, and levels of culture.

**6. *Thou are a mighty prince.*** The Hittites replied obligingly to Abraham’s request, reflecting his courtesy. Declining to accept his own appraisal of his status among them, “a stranger,” they acknowledged him as a “mighty prince.” Literally, “prince of God,”

which according to a familiar Hebrew idiom may legitimately be translated “mighty prince,” as in the KJV. In Hebrew, similarly, the “great mountains” of Ps. 36:6 are literally the “mountains of God,” and the “goodly cedars” of Ps. 80:10, the “cedars of God.” In designating Abraham as “a mighty prince,” the Hittites voiced their recognition of Abraham as a man whom God had favored.

***None of us shall withhold.*** They heartily approved of Abraham’s request. To begin with they offered to make their own burial grounds available to him—a truly courteous gesture.

**7. *Abraham stood up.*** Oriental courtesy, tact, and bargaining procedure are obvious in the arrangements between Abraham and the sons of Heth. Abraham expressed his appreciation by bowing, a common Oriental gesture of gratitude. Meeting no opposition to his rather vague suggestion, Abraham next advanced a concrete proposal.

**8. *Intreat for me.*** In typical Oriental fashion, Abraham did not direct his petition to Ephron himself, but requested the elders of the city to use their influence in securing the desired property. They were to be his go-betweens in conducting the transaction. Such a procedure would result in concluding the agreement with greater dispatch, and would also avoid misunderstandings that might otherwise arise. The good name of the entire community would ensure a fair deal, and would protect both Abraham and Ephron from criticism.

**9. *Machpelah.*** This name has been explained in various ways. Some have taken it as a proper name, others as descriptive of some peculiarity of the cave. It is from the root *kaphal* “to double,” suggesting that it may have been a double cave, or perhaps one with two entrances. The first interpretation seems preferable. In this cave were deposited, successively, the remains of Sarah, Abraham, Isaac, Rebekah, Leah, and Jacob. (chs. 25:9; 49:31; 50:13). Rachel alone, of the great patriarchal family, was absent (ch. 35:19). Machpelah has been identified with two caves, one above the other, beneath a Mohammedan mosque on a slope near Hebron. Access was forbidden for centuries, but an exception was made in 1882 for the future George V of England and his brother. Since the first world war several Christians have had the opportunity of visiting the upper cave, which contains stone markers bearing the names of Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Rebekah, and Leah. These slabs are supposed to mark their actual tombs, in the rock-hewn cave below. Whether this very ancient tradition agrees with the facts cannot be determined until scientific study is permitted in the lower cave.

**11. *The field give I thee.*** All such transactions were made at the city gate (see Gen. 34:20; Ruth 4:1). Ephron, who was obviously one of the nobility present, and was now mentioned by name, spoke. He offered Abraham the field containing the cave, ostensibly as an outright gift. This offer follows a good Eastern custom that has been kept alive in some places to the present day. Everyone knew, of course, that this offer was not meant seriously. Ephron was unwilling to sell the cave without the field.

The reason for Ephron’s eagerness to sell the whole property and not simply part of it, lies in the Hittite laws (Nos. 46, 47), which allow a release of feudal service only if a whole field is sold, but not if it is disposed of in pieces. Hence, if Abraham had bought only the cave Ephron’s tax burden would not have been lightened, whereas Abraham’s eventual purchase of the whole property transferred Ephron’s feudal obligations to the purchaser Abraham.

***I will give thee money.*** Recognizing in Ephron's answer his willingness to let him have the cave if he would purchase the field containing it, Abraham bowed again in gratitude. He, of course, declined to accept Ephron's property as a gift, but asked the price by stating his desire to pay for it.

**15. *Four hundred shekels.*** About \$116 (see on ch. 20:16). Ephron now named his price, implying that it was a mere trifle for a rich man like Abraham. Although the price appears most reasonable in terms of modern values, in the time of Abraham it must have seemed exorbitant. Babylonian records reveal that average fields were then sold at 4 shekels an acre, and the most fertile gardens at 40 shekels an acre. According to the Babylonian standard Abraham should have been able to buy a field of 100 acres for his money. Though we do not know how large Ephron's field was, Moses seems to leave the impression that Ephron took advantage of Abraham's predicament to make a good profit for himself. Otherwise Ephron would not have offered Abraham the field in addition to the cave (see on v. 11).

**16. *Abraham weighed.*** Desiring to avoid any feelings of enmity, Abraham as a Semite at the mercy of the Hittites, paid without question rather than bargain over the price. Then as now such a procedure was customary throughout the Orient, and Ephron undoubtedly expected Abraham to do accordingly. As a "mighty prince," a wealthy nomad chief, Abraham may have felt that bargaining was beneath his dignity, or, perhaps, he deliberately chose to avoid a reputation for sharp dealing. He paid in full on the spot, according to customary commercial standards, as the phrase, "current money with the merchant," indicates.

**17. *The field.*** Some stipulations of the contract, no doubt found in even greater detail in a written deed, are here given. Numerous such contracts of that time from Abraham's old home, Ur, and elsewhere in Mesopotamia, present a clear picture of the form of such a contract. Abraham's title deed no doubt contained an exact description of the property and its location, and listed the trees and other accessory items on it, in this case including the cave. If, for instance, the trees had not been specifically included, Ephron could have specifically included, Ephron could have claimed the harvest from them every year.

This is once more an interesting detail proving that Hittites were involved in the transaction, since the listing of the exact number of trees at each real estate sale is a characteristic trait in Hittite business documents.

***Before Mamre.*** That is, "to the east of Mamre" (RSV).

**19. *Abraham buried Sarah.*** The cave was situated near Mamre, where Abraham had lived before the birth of Isaac. In sight of the grove that had been their home for so many years, where they had shared their joys and their sorrows, their disappointments and their hopes, Abraham laid his beloved wife to rest.

***Before Mamre.*** The Hebrew expression here translated "before" is at times to be understood as "to the east of." In giving directions a Hebrew customarily thought of himself as facing the east, which was thus "before" him (see Zech. 14:8; Joel 2:20; Deut. 11:24). Mamre was not another name for Hebron, but was simply in that vicinity (see Gen. 13:18).

***In the land of Canaan.*** To emphasize, as in v. 2, that Sarah found her last resting place in a piece of ground belonging to Abraham in the promised land of Canaan.

## ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

## CHAPTER 24

1 *Abraham sweareth his servant.* 10 *The servant's journey:* 12 *His prayer:* 14 *His sign.* 15 *Rebekah meeteth him,* 18 *fulfilleth his sign,* 22 *receiveth jewels,* 23 *sheweth her kindred,* 25 *and inviteth him home.* 26 *The servant blesseth God.* 29 *Laban entertaineth him.* 34 *The servant sheweth his message.* 50 *Laban and Bethuel approve it.* 58 *Rebekah consenteth to go.* 62 *Isaac meeteth her.*

**1. Abraham was old.** The events narrated in this chapter took place 3 years after Sarah's death (ch. 23:1), since Sarah was 90 years old at the birth of Isaac, and Isaac was 40 at the time of his marriage with Rebekah (ch. 25:20). Abraham was about 140 years of age at the time (ch. 17:17).

**2. Eldest servant.** The most trusted servant of Abraham's house was Eliezer (PP 173), who half a century previously had been tentatively selected by Abraham as his prospective heir (ch. 15:2). He was now summoned by Abraham for a most important mission.

**Thy hand under my thigh.** This ancient ceremony accompanying a solemn oath is mentioned again only in ch. 47:29. In both instances the circumstances suggest a promise to deal faithfully after the death of the one to whom the promise was made, that is, with his posterity. The death of the one would not release the other from his oath.

Explanations of the custom vary somewhat among commentators. As the source of posterity (see Gen. 35:11; 46:26; Ex. 1:5), the word "thigh" or "loins" (same word in the Hebrew) has been considered as pointing to Abraham's future descendants, in particular to Christ, the promised Seed. If so, the oath was, as it were, sworn by, in particular to Christ, the promised Seed. If so, the oath was, at it were, sworn by, or in the name of, the One that was to come. Other interpreters have considered the thigh as symbolic of lordship or authority, and the placing of the hand beneath it an oath of allegiance to a superior.

**3. Take a wife.** Although Abraham was to live another 35 years (cf. ch. 25:7, 20), he seems to have felt rather feeble at this time (v. 1). The authority given Eliezer in the selection of a wife implies a commendable submissiveness on the part of Isaac, who was already 40 years of age. In ancient times, as in the Orient today, parents selected marriage partners and made wedding arrangements for their children. This in no way implied that the wishes of the young people themselves were ignored (see vs. 58, 67; PP 171). The long delay in planning for Isaac's marriage was probably due to Abraham's desire to avoid taking a Canaanite wife for him, and to the fact that heretofore he had not found it convenient to arrange for one from Haran (see vs. 3–6). The death of Sarah had perhaps added a sense of urgency to the matter.

**Of the Canaanites.** Aware of the growing licentiousness and idolatry of the Canaanites, and of their impending doom, Abraham desired to preserve the purity of the promised seed. His own experience with Hagar, and the experiences of Lot and Ishmael, had taught him the danger of alliances with people of heathen background (PP 174). Furthermore, God had already forbidden intermarriage with the Canaanites, a prohibition later incorporated into the Mosaic legislation (Ex. 34:16; Deut. 7:3).

**4. Unto my country.** Not to Ur of the Chaldees but to Haran, both of which were in Mesopotamia. Though not free from idolatry, Abraham's relatives there preserved to some extent the knowledge and worship of the true God (see Gen. 31:19; Joshua 24:2; PP

171). Therefore a daughter-in-law from among them seemed far preferable to one from among the degraded Canaanites.

**6. *Bring not my son thither.*** Abraham solemnly charged Eliezer not to permit Isaac to go to Mesopotamia. He left that neither he nor his son was at liberty to return, even for a visit. This, together with his advanced age (v. 1), probably influenced him not to return in person to obtain a wife for his son.

**7. *He shall send his angel.*** This tender expression of confidence in divine guidance reveals Abraham's abiding conviction that he and his affairs were under the direction and protection of God. The same assurance of divine leadership given to Eliezer was afterward promised the people of Israel (Ex. 23:20) and the Christian church (Heb. 1:14).

**8. *Thou shalt be clear.*** In view of the sacred and binding nature of his oath, Eliezer felt justifiable concern as to his responsibility in case no woman would return with him to Canaan. Abraham assured Eliezer that God, who had led thus far, could be counted on not to desert him now. Eliezer could set out confident in the successful conclusion of his mission. But if for any reason the contrary should prove true, he was to consider himself free from further obligation with respect to the oath, except that under no circumstance was Isaac to be permitted to go to Mesopotamia to seek a wife. Abraham no doubt feared that Isaac might be tempted to remain in Mesopotamia, and so thwart the divine purpose.

## Eliezer's Journey, Beersheba to Haran, to Obtain a Wife for Isaac



**10. *Ten camels.*** On the use of domesticated camels in Abraham's time, see on ch. 12:16. Abraham left the entire planning and execution of this mission to the discretion of

his trusted servant Eliezer. The statement that “all the goods of his master were in his hand” shows him to have been a man of experience and sound judgment. He had now been with Abraham for more than half a century (see chs. 15:2; 16:3).

***Went to Mesopotamia.*** The Hebrew term here translated Mesopotamia is *'Aram-naharayim*, literally, “Aram of the two rivers.” This land, where the Mitanni flourished at the time of Moses, was called *naharina* by the Egyptians. It is in northern Mesopotamia between the upper Euphrates and Chabur rivers.

***The city of Nahor.*** Until about 1930 this was thought to be only another name for Haran (see chs. 27:43; 28:10). However, cuneiform tablets of the 18th century B.C., brought to light in Mari, an Amorite city on the central Euphrates, mention *Til-Nahiri*, “the city of Nahor,” as a town of the Haran region. The “city of Nahor” was therefore not Haran itself, but a separate settlement founded by Nahor and called after him (see on ch. 11:31).

***11. The time that women go out.*** Nothing is said about the journey itself, which must have taken many days, and Moses continues the narrative when Eliezer reaches his destination. The caravan of ten camels had arrived at the well outside the town of Nahor, and they knelt down to rest and to await a drink. From remote antiquity it was the Oriental custom for women to draw water and to carry it home, in either jars or skins (Ex. 2:16; 1 Sam. 9:11). Eliezer considered such an occasion a good opportunity to observe the marriageable young women of the city and to decide upon a suitable wife for his master’s son.

***12. O Lord God.*** Brought up in the religion of his master and being himself a firm believer in the true God, Eliezer silently prayed for wisdom, guidance, and success. This praying servant is a cheering example of the fruits of Abraham’s devoted care for the souls of his household (ch. 18:19). This, the first recorded prayer in the Bible, is expressive of childlike faith. Eliezer was well aware of the great responsibility which was his, of returning with a woman who would bring blessing and not a curse upon Abraham’s house, one who would be a helpmeet for her husband rather than a contributor to his downfall. He therefore asked for a sign to guide him in his choice. Since it was no easy task to draw water sufficient for ten thirsty camels, the proposal posed a real test of character. Eliezer wished to be sure that the woman he would escort back to Abraham was naturally friendly, ready to help, and able to work.

***15. Rebekah came.*** Not by accident but by providence, his prayer was answered before it had been completed. This was not the only occasion upon which God’s answer came so promptly (Dan. 9:23; Isa. 65:24). He is always ready to hear a sincere prayer uttered in faith. The meaning of Rebekah’s name is obscure. Concerning her relationship, see on Gen. 22:23.

***Her pitcher upon her shoulder.*** It is the habit among some Eastern peoples to carry water jars on their heads, but Palestinian and Syrian women do so upon their shoulders.

***16. Very fair.*** Moses acquaints his readers with Rebekah immediately upon her appearance in the narrative. Like Sarah (ch. 12:11) and Rachel (ch. 29:17), Rebekah was very attractive. Her virginity is also emphasized, by repetition. This was truly an important virtue for her who should become the mother of an entire nation.

***She went down to the well.*** The well was a natural spring, as the Hebrew word *‘ayin* indicates. Springs were usually to be found in a *wadi*, the dry bed of a seasonal stream, whereas towns were built on mounds. People therefore of necessity went “down” to the source of water supply.

***19. Water for thy camels also.*** Rebekah, who had been asked only for a drink of water for a weary traveler, immediately manifested her kindly disposition. Her offer to draw water for the camels was voluntary and not a requirement of custom. It demonstrated a genuine desire to help those who were in need of assistance. It should not be forgotten, however, that her kindness was utilized in the providence of God as evidence that He had chosen her to be Isaac’s wife. Her offer could be the full answer to Eliezer’s prayer only if it came as a natural reflection of character.

***21. Wondering at her.*** Eliezer was so fascinated by Rebekah’s unaffected willingness to be of help that he allowed her to draw water for his ten camels without so much as offering assistance (see Gen. 29:10; Ex. 2:17). He was startled by the precision and dispatch with which Providence had answered his prayer for guidance. Momentarily he hesitated; could it be true? Thus the disciples wondered when Peter, after his release from prison by an angel, stood suddenly before them. Though engaged in prayer for his safety, it was difficult for them, to accept the answer when it came (Acts 12:12–17).

***22. A golden earring.*** This present, it should be noted, was not her dowry but a token of Eliezer’s gratitude. Though suspecting that she was to become Isaac’s wife, Eliezer did not as yet even know her name, much less her family relationship to Abraham. The word translated “earring,” “jewel for the forehead,” is from the Heb. *nezem*, a ring for the nose. Since ancient times Bedouin women have worn nose rings, either in the cartilage of one side or in the central wall of the nose (see Isa. 3:21; Eze. 16:11, 12). Among Bedouins the nose ring is still the customary engagement gift. The golden ring probably weighed about one fifth of an ounce, and the two golden bracelets 4 or 5 oz. At the current price for gold their combined value would be about \$169. Little wonder that Laban was surprised (v. 30)!

***25. Room to lodge in.*** Eliezer was convinced that the young woman whose acquaintance he had made in so remarkable a way was the one chosen by God to accompany him back to Canaan. Hospitality seems to have been the common practice at Rebekah’s home; otherwise she would not have felt at liberty to invite a stranger to stay with them.

***26. Bowed down his head.*** The faithful servant of Abraham was one of those happy individuals who not only pray for help but also express gratitude upon receiving it. He gave God the glory for the success that had attended his mission. Eliezer is a noteworthy example of the value of family worship. Abraham had never considered his religion to be merely a personal possession, but had lived it, taught it (ch. 18:19), and made his vast family participants in the requirements and privileges of the divine covenant (ch. 17:23). They had come to believe in the true God and to imitate Abraham’s example of faithful devotion to Him. Eliezer’s two prayers at the well of Nahor’s city emphasize the value of missionary work in the home.

***28. Her mother’s house.*** Several explanations have been given to account for Rebekah’s going to “her mother’s house” rather than to her father’s: (1) Her mother was head of the family. This cannot be correct, because the men of the family decided the

question (vs. 31, 50–59). (2) Her father, Bethuel, was dead, and the person by that name in v. 50 was a younger brother. (3) In many Oriental countries the women have separate quarters, and Rebekah naturally went there first to tell of her experience. (4) The expression “mother’s house” really means “grandmother’s house,” according to a common Semitic custom by which a grandmother may be called mother. Since Rebekah’s grandmother Milcah is mentioned repeatedly (vs. 15, 24, 47), whereas her mother is not mentioned at all, the latter may have been dead. Thus Rebekah may have resided with her grandmother Milcah, who, being a widow, kept a separate household. The third suggestion appears to offer the best explanation.

**29. Laban.** The “blond one,” probably Rebekah’s younger brother (see on ch. 22:23). His somewhat inglorious character, evident later in his dealings with Jacob, is reflected in the fact that upon seeing the rich gifts his sister had received he ran out immediately to meet Eliezer.

**31. Thou blessed of the Lord.** Though an idolater (ch. 31:30), Laban also knew and cherished the worship of Jehovah (PP 171). Rebekah’s account of her providential encounter with Eliezer at the well no doubt reminded the brothers of Abraham’s divinely appointed migration to Canaan and reports of his success there.

**33. I will not eat.** Oriental politeness would normally postpone the transaction of business until after the meal (see Homer *Odyssey*. iii. 69). Eliezer, however, felt his errand to be so pressing that he could not pause even to eat so long as the matter continued to weigh upon his heart and its outcome remained uncertain. His diligence, here manifested, testifies to the fact that Abraham’s trust in him was fully justified.

**49. Tell me.** After recounting the story of his master’s prosperity, of the birth of Isaac, of his own oath to seek a wife for Isaac among his master’s relatives, and of the providential way in which he had been led to Rebekah’s home, Eliezer, with solemn earnestness, pressed for an immediate decision.

**50. Proceedeth from the Lord.** In harmony with normal Oriental custom, Laban and Bethuel must approve of Rebekah’s proposed marriage to Isaac. Since the Lord had already decided the matter, however, they had no alternative but to concur. So far as they were concerned, Jehovah’s decision was not subject to further debate on their part, and Eliezer was free to take Rebekah to Canaan.

**52. Worshipped the Lord.** This is Eliezer’s third prayer during his brief stay at the city of Nahor (see vs. 12, 26). It seems that every incident of life was to him an occasion for prayer, either for guidance or for thanksgiving. Others can well trust a man who in his turn trusts God. How much more successful we would be in all our temporal affairs if we, like Eliezer, would recognize God in everything we do!

**54. Send me away.** Eliezer was impatient to complete his mission by reporting its success to Abraham, lest delay should become a cause of concern to him. As might be expected, Rebekah’s relatives were disturbed at the thought of so sudden a separation from her. Their concern was for adequate time to prepare for her departure, and also that they might bid her an appropriate farewell. According to Oriental custom this would no doubt include several days of feasting and merrymaking.

**56. Hinder me not.** Eliezer’s insistence and their consideration for Rebekah led Laban to put the decision up to her. Would she be willing to forgo the pleasure of a few more days in her girlhood home, in order to please her husband-to-be, and his father? Her

ready and willing response reflects maturity of judgment, an unselfish spirit, and recognition that henceforth her first duty was to be toward her husband.

**60. *Be thou the mother.*** Rebekah's family invoked upon her the blessings promised by God to Abraham. A numerous posterity is still considered by Orientals to be the greatest of blessings, and was the main object of their wish for her. For the expressed desire that her seed should possess the gate of their enemies, see on ch. 22:17.

**62. *Isaac came from the way.*** As with the journey to Mesopotamia, nothing is said of the return trip to Canaan. Moses passes immediately to the scene of welcome to her future home. This event occurred at the well Hagar had named Lahai-roi (ch. 16:14), in the *Negeb* to the south of Beersheba (see on ch. 12:9). Since Sarah's death, which had occurred at Hebron (ch. 23:2), Abraham had apparently once more changed his place of abode.

**63. *Went out to meditate.*** The exact meaning of the Hebrew word *śuach*, translated "meditate" in the KJV (margin, "to pray") and the RSV, is not certain. The idea of meditation is found in the oldest non-Semitic versions of this text, the LXX and the Vulgate. The oldest Semitic versions, the Samaritan Pentateuch and the Targum of Onkelos, render it "to pray." This was adopted by the great Hebrew grammarian Kimchi of the Middle Ages, the Reformer Luther, and certain other expositors. The fact that Rebekah became a comfort to Isaac while he was still mourning the death of his mother (v. 67) has led some commentators to explain the word *śuach* as meaning "to lament." The precise meaning of this word being as yet uncertain, it would seem best to accept for the time being that of the oldest available translations, as the KJV and RSV have done. Isaac may have been meditating upon, or praying for, Eliezer's safe return with his bride-to-be. He was, to be sure, anticipating their imminent return from Mesopotamia. His future happiness would depend in large measure upon the kind of wife Eliezer should bring back with him. Appropriate indeed it would be for Isaac to kneel and pray for the blessing of God upon his new home! Those husbands and wives whose union comes in answer to prayer will prove to be the greatest blessing to each other.

**65. *She took a veil.*** Rebekah was eager with anticipation to greet Isaac, but the custom of her country did not allow the groom to see his bride's face until the marriage had been concluded (see ch. 29:23, 25). Her modesty, furthermore, was revealed in yet another way. To meet her future husband for the first time she chose to descend from the camel to the ground.

**66. *Told Isaac.*** Although nothing is said of Abraham, he doubtless received his daughter-in-law in the most gracious manner and with many benedictions. The account of Eliezer's finding of Rebekah must have afforded him much satisfaction. It is easy to think of this occasion being solemnized by Abraham in a thanksgiving service.

**67. *Into his mother Sarah's tent.*** Perhaps that same day, or the day following, Isaac led Rebekah into his mother's tent. Empty for three years, it now became quarters for Rebekah and her maids. This implies that Rebekah took the important place of Sarah in the household of Abraham. Isaac's marriage ceremony itself probably consisted of a simple declaration, before witnesses, of his intention to take Rebekah as his wife (cf. Ruth 4:10–13).

***And he loved her.*** Isaac had every reason to love Rebekah. She was not only most beautiful (v. 16) but of a kind, cheerful, and considerate disposition. She seems to have

been, generally speaking, a paragon of feminine virtue (see Prov. 31:10–31; 1 Peter 3:1–6; Titus 2:3–5). Isaac’s careful training and submissive spirit have already been noted (see on ch. 22:9). Their home must have been a very happy one.

### ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

1-67PP 171-176; SR 84-86  
2-9PP 172  
10 PP 188  
10-21PP 172  
22-24, 26-51PP 173  
35 CS 139  
49-52SR 85  
58 PP 173; SR 85  
63-67PP 173  
67 PP 175

### CHAPTER 25

1 *The sons of Abraham by Keturah.* 5 *The division of his goods.* 7 *His age, and death.* 9 *His burial.* 12 *The generations of Ishmael.* 17 *His age, and death.* 19 *Isaac prayeth for Rebekah, being barren.* 22 *The children strive in her womb.* 24 *The birth of Esau and Jacob.* 27 *Their difference.* 29 *Esau selleth his birthright.*

**1. *Again Abraham took a wife.*** Though Abraham’s loneliness following the death of Sarah had impressed upon him an awareness of his own advancing age (see on ch. 24:1), he still enjoyed remarkable physical and mental strength and lived for 38 years after her death. Isaac’s marriage may have left Abraham even more lonely than before and led him to take another wife to make his last years happy ones. That this new wife, Keturah, meaning “incense,” is called a concubine, like Hagar (v. 6), does not imply that he had married her while Sarah was still alive, though this is not impossible. The context conveys the impression that Abraham’s marriage to Keturah occurred after Sarah’s death.

**2. *She bare.*** Abraham was 137 years of age at the death of Sarah, and 140 at the marriage of Isaac. He who blessed the aged patriarch with a son at the century mark of life now granted him the joy of additional sons and daughters. Nothing could make the sunset hours of life brighter for the Oriental heart than to be surrounded by a large and happy family. With one exception the Keturah sons of Abraham, as far as can be identified, settled in Arabia. Like Ishmael, they migrated to the south and east of the *Negeb*.

***Zimran.*** Possibly meaning “antelope,” and tentatively identified with the Arabian town of *Zambran*, between Mecca and Medina.

***Jokshan, and Medan, and Midian.*** Though nothing is known concerning the first two sons, other than their names, the tribe of Midian appears often, both in the Bible and in inscriptions. This tribe settled in the northern part of the Sinai peninsula and in northwestern Arabia across the Gulf of Aqaba. Moses later found refuge among them, in the house of Jethro, who worshiped the true God (Ex. 2:15; 3:1; 18:1–6). During the time of the Judges the Midianites repeatedly attacked the people of Israel (Judges 6 to 8).

***Ishbak and Shuah.*** Ishbak may be identified with the people of *Jasbuqu*, mentioned in cuneiform inscriptions. Shuah seems to have been the ancestor of a tribe to which Bildad, one of Job’s friends, belonged (Job 2:11; 8:1; etc.). If this is correct, the tribe of

Shuah settled down in northern Mesopotamia instead of in Arabia with the other sons of Keturah. The cuneiform texts mention a land *Sûchu*, south of Carchemish on the Euphrates.

**3. *Sheba, and Dedan.*** The descendants of Jokshan, Sheba, and Dedan, cannot be identified with the southern Arabic tribes of the same names, mentioned in ch. 10:7 as coming from Ham. It is inconceivable that Moses should have attributed the origin of these tribes to the Hamite Cush in one text and to the Shemite Abraham in another. Their identification is uncertain.

***Asshurim.*** This tribe is mentioned in a Minaean inscription of northwestern Arabia. Of the other two Dedan tribes, the Letushim and Leummim, nothing is known.

**4. *The sons of Midian.*** Ephah, Midian's son, apparently gave his name to the Arabic tribe appearing in cuneiform inscriptions under the name *Chajapâ*. The other sons have not yet been identified.

**6. *Sent them away.*** Toward the close of his life Abraham appointed Isaac his legal heir (see ch. 15:4) and bequeathed to him most of his property. To the sons of Hagar and Keturah he gave token gifts. In view of Abraham's great wealth and hundreds of servants (see chs. 13:2; 14:14), he was in a position to give each of these seven sons a number of servants and some of his flocks without perceptibly diminishing Isaac's inheritance. Presumably, each son received sufficient for a good start in life. Sending these other sons "eastward" while he lived was a precaution against strife after his death, particularly in respect to the right Isaac to the land of Canaan.

**8. *Gave up the ghost.*** Literally, "he expired." The RSV translation, "breathed his last," is preferable (see v. 17; ch. 35:29).

***Gathered to his people.*** See on ch. 15:15.

**9. *Isaac and Ishmael buried him.*** As the chief heir of Abraham, Isaac is mentioned first. That Ishmael, Isaac's older half brother, participated in the last rites for their father is evidence of a reconciliation between them (see also ch. 35:29). The sons of Keturah are not mentioned, their distant habitat, perhaps, making it impossible for them to arrive in time for the funeral at Hebron.

**11. *Isaac dwelt by the well Lahai-roi.*** God honored Isaac as Abraham's heir, and repeated to him the promises and blessings vouchsafed to Abraham. For a time after Abraham's death Isaac continued to reside at Lahai-roi, where his father's last years had been spent and where he had met Rebekah for the first time (ch. 24:62). It was now 35 years since that memorable event in his life, and his own sons, Jacob and Esau, were 15 years of age (see v. 26).

**12. *The generations of Ishmael.*** A new section begins, in which Moses traces briefly the family and fortunes of Abraham's eldest son before proceeding with his main theme, the line of Isaac.

**13. *The names of the sons.*** That the sons of Ishmael gave their names to tribal divisions and geographical localities is clear from v. 16. Some are either mentioned again in the Bible or are found as place names in northern Arabia. The following can be identified:

***Nebajoth; and Kedar.*** These are mentioned also together in Isa. 60:7. Kedar alone appears in several Bible passages, Isa. 21:16 and Eze. 27:21 designating his posterity as an Arabic tribe.

**Adbeel.** Mentioned elsewhere only 1 Chron. 1:29. This may be *Idibi-il*, mentioned in cuneiform inscriptions of the Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser III as a tribe near the border of Egypt.

**14. Mishma.** Identified with the Arabic tribe *Isamme'*, of the inscriptions of the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal.

**Dumah.** Probably a north Arabian oasis mentioned repeatedly in ancient texts. Its modern name is *El Djouf*.

**Massa** has been identified with a tribe of northern Arabia, called *Mas'u* in the cuneiform inscriptions of Mesopotamia.

**15. Hadar.** The best Hebrew manuscripts read *Hadad*, found in cuneiform inscriptions of *Chudadu*. In Hebrew the letters equivalent to "r" and "d" are very similar, and one may easily be mistaken for the other.

**Tema.** Mentioned also in Job 6:19; Isa. 21:14; and Jer. 25:23. This is the modern Teima in northwestern Arabia. In ancient times it was an important trade center, and became for some years the residence of the Babylonian king Nabonidus, father of Belshazzar.

**Jetur, Naphish.** Found in 1 Chron. 5:19 fighting the trans-Jordanian tribes of Gad, Manasseh, and Reuben. It is probable that the name Ituraea mentioned in Luke 3:1 as a region south of Mt. Hermon was derived from Jetur.

**16. Castles.** Literally, "encampments."

**17. The life of Ishmael.** Ishmael's long life was doubtless due to the vigor he inherited from his father, Abraham. On the expressions "gave up the ghost" and "was gathered unto his people" see respectively on v. 8 and ch. 15:15.

**18. From Havilah unto Shur.** The location of Havilah is uncertain (see on ch. 2:11). For this reason the eastern extent of the Ishmaelite dominion in Arabia cannot be determined. Its western border was Shur (chs. 16:7; 20:1), not far from the land of Egypt.

**As thou goest toward Assyria.** This does not mean that the Ishmaelite domain extended as far as Assyria, in Mesopotamia, but rather its extension in a general northerly direction. The Ishmaelites therefore bordered on Egypt in the west and Havilah to the southeast and extended some distance northward into the north Arabian Desert.

**He died in the presence of all his brethren.** *Naphal*, "to fall," here translated "died," may also mean "to encamp," as an army (Judges 7:12, 13), and "to divide," as an inheritance (Ps. 78:55). The expression, "He died in the presence of all his brethren," should be translated in harmony with the prediction of ch. 16:12, "he settled over against [close by] all his people" (RSV).

**19. The generations of Isaac.** Moses returns to the main theme of his narrative, the history of the chosen people. Some events described in the succeeding verses occurred during the lifetime of Abraham. Since Abraham lived to be 175 years of age (ch. 25:7), and was 100 at the birth of Isaac (ch. 21:5), he must have been 160 years old at the birth of Esau and Jacob (ch. 25:26), who were therefore 15 years old at his death. Ishmael's death, at the age of 137 (v. 17), occurred much later, when Jacob and Esau were 63. Ishmael was 14 years older than Isaac (ch. 16:16), and was therefore 74 years old when Isaac's two sons were born. Chronologically out of place, the new section finds its logical

place here in the narrative because it is Moses' purpose to present Esau and Jacob's life story without a break.

**20. *The Syrian.*** "Syrian," more accurately, "Aramaeans," according to the Hebrew. Bethuel, a grandson of Terah (ch. 22:20–23), was, like Abraham, a descendant of Shem's son Arphaxad (ch. 11:10–27) and not of Shem's son Aram, ancestor of the Aramaeans (see on ch. 10:22). He is called "Aramaeans" here merely because Terah's family had settled in Aramaic territory, and was gradually absorbed by the Aramaeans. Moses refers to both Bethuel and Laban as Aramaeans.

***Padan-aram.*** The location of "Padan-aram" is not clear. It occurs only in Genesis (chs. 28:2, 5–7; 31:18; etc.), and has been explained as designating a region that constituted part of 'Aram–naharayim (see on ch. 24:10). Again, it may refer to Haran, inasmuch as *Padan* and *Haran* have similar meanings in the Assyrian language.

**21. *Isaac intreated the Lord.*** Like his father, Isaac was to learn that children of the promise were not to be simply the fruit of nature, but manifestly the gift of grace as well. When Isaac and Rebekah had been married for 19 years (vs. 20, 26), and were still childless, Isaac made the matter a subject of prayer. He chose to rely upon the mercies of God rather than to trust his own clever devices, as had Abraham (ch. 16:3). His confidence in God was not exercised in vain, nor did he have long to wait before faith became fact.

**22. *The children struggled.*** Rebekah became apprehensive, both for her own and for her children's safety. Perplexed, she went to the Lord for an explanation. Various ancient and modern commentators notwithstanding, this does not necessarily imply the use of an intermediary, much less the need of one. Melchizedek, Abraham, and Isaac have been suggested as the ones to whom she may have gone. Most likely, she simply went to the Lord in prayer. Why should it seem strange for her to talk to God personally? He is no respecter of persons.

**23. *Two nations.*** An angel revealed to Rebekah something of the future of the two sons soon to be born (PP 177). Already, it seemed, they were struggling for the supremacy. The angel's prediction was fulfilled in the later history of Esau's and Jacob's descendants, the Edomites and the Israelites. These two brother nations were ever enemies, Israel usually proving to be the stronger of the two. David subjugated the Edomites (2 Sam. 8:14; 1 Kings 11:16), and King Amaziah later defeated them (2 Kings 14:7; 2 Chron. 25:11, 12). The Hasmonaean king John Hyrcanus I finally brought their independence to an end in the year 126 B.C., when he forced them to accept the rite of circumcision and the law of Moses, and to submit to a Jewish governor. God's insight into the respective characters of Esau and Jacob and His foresight into their future made possible His selection of Jacob as inheritor of the birthright and progenitor of Christ even before his birth (Rom. 8:29; 9:10–14).

**25. *Red.*** Heb. *'admoni*, probably the root from which the name Edom was derived (see also v. 30). The same Hebrew word is used to describe David's appearance (1 Sam. 16:12; 17:42). It is similar in meaning to the Latin *Rufus* the name assigned to two men of NT times (Mark 15:21; Rom. 16:13). Esau's excessive growth of hair, known medically as hypertrichosis, already noticeable at birth, later became the most significant feature of his physical appearance.

***They called his name Esau.*** Both parents agreed upon the appropriateness of this name. The context has led some scholars to suggest its derivation from an unknown root signifying “to be covered with hair.” Its meaning, however, cannot be determined from available information.

***26. His name was called Jacob.*** The Hebrew word for “heel,” *‘aqeb*, is related to the verb *‘aqab*, “to take by the heel,” figuratively, “to deceive.” The personal name Jacob, meaning “he grasps the heel” or “he deceives,” was therefore most appropriate. It was not only reminiscent of the incident at his birth, but prophetic of his character and destiny. On the age of Isaac at the time of the birth of his two sons, see on vs. 19-21.

***27. Esau was a cunning hunter.*** As the two boys grew up a great difference in character became evident. Esau displayed a rough, capricious disposition, and reveled in the wild, adventurous life of field and forest (see ch. 27:3).

***Jacob was a plain man.*** The Hebrew word *tam*, here translated “plain,” suggests an amiable, pious, and cultured personality. The duties and responsibilities of settled family life, so monotonous and irritating to Esau, came naturally to Jacob, “a plain man, dwelling in tents.” Whereas Esau never outgrew the physical and emotional restlessness of adolescence, Jacob developed the stability of character and soundness of judgment that should come with maturity.

***28. Isaac loved Esau.*** Isaac’s blind partiality for his first-born, irrespective of the son’s character qualifications for family leadership, brought division into the family. As a result, wrong, misery, and injustice marked relations between the brothers and their posterity for centuries. Isaac’s preference for Esau seems to have been based, in part at least, on his love for venison. The extent to which the patriarch let his love and his sense of justice and piety be controlled by his appetite is surprising and disappointing. His experience is, furthermore, a warning to us. To prefer one child above another inevitably creates jealousy, division, bitterness, and misery.

***29. Sod pottage.*** The difference in character between the two brothers was soon apparent in a singular situation, one which proved to be a turning point in their lives. Jacob had cooked a meal of lentils (v. 34). Red lentils are to the present day a favorite food in Palestine, where they are prepared with onions, garlic, rice, and olive oil. Occasionally, meat is added also.

***30. Feed me.*** The word translated “feed” occurs only in this passage, and means “to eat greedily” or “to devour.”

***Therefore was his name called Edom.*** From *’adom*, “red.” There is no discrepancy in ascribing his name both to his red complexion (v. 25) and to the color of the lentils. The name was thus doubly appropriate. The Arabs are still fond of giving surnames such as this to famous persons. The Edomites are mentioned more frequently in Egyptian and Assyrian inscriptions than are the Israelites. In Egypt the name Edom appears as *Idwm*, and in cuneiform texts as *Udûmu*.

***31. Sell me this day thy birthright.*** Jacob knew of the angel’s prophecy concerning himself and his brother, made prior to their birth (see v. 23; PP 178). Now he took advantage of what appeared to him to be a fair, though unusual, opportunity. Under the Mosaic legislation the privileges of the first-born were: (1) succession to the official authority of the father, (2) the inheritance of a double portion of the father’s property, (3)

the privilege of becoming the family priest (see Ex. 22:29; Num. 8:14–17; Deut. 21:17). To the descendants of Abraham the birthright also implied: (1) succession to the promise of the earthly Canaan and other covenant blessings, (2) the honor of being a progenitor of the promised Seed.

Jacob's proposal was unscrupulous and contemptible. It reveals, as well, a spirit of impatience, and a lack of confidence in the overruling providence of God, similar to that manifested by Abraham in his marriage to Hagar (Gen. 16:3). Jacob's conditions of sale were exacting, selfish, and base. The theory that the end justifies the means does not have the approval of Heaven (see Matt. 4:3, 4; DA 121, 122). God could not approve the act, but He did overrule it to the eventual accomplishment of His purpose.

**32. *At the point to die.*** The KJV leaves the impression that Esau meant, "I shall die of hunger if I do not get food immediately. In that case my birthright would be of no profit to me. It is therefore better for me to get food and live on without a birthright than to die now while I am in possession of it." Many commentators have followed this line of reasoning. Another explanation understands this expression to mean, "Earlier or later I must die anyway, and then it will not matter whether I possess the birthright or not." The latter interpretation seems more plausible in the light of the words of v. 34, that he "despised his birthright." Being indifferent about the blessings that were to be his, Esau regarded them lightly and was therefore unworthy of them (PP 181).

**33. *Swear to me.*** Jacob's conduct in this transaction is difficult to defend. His attitude and words reveal premeditation (PP 179). It is a dangerous and sometimes fatal mistake to anticipate and run ahead of Providence, which in due time and without human conniving will accomplish the divine purpose.

**34. *Despised his birthright.*** To Esau the only thing of value was the momentary satisfaction of appetite; future spiritual blessings seemed remote and unreal. In this he showed himself to be a "profane [irreligious] person" (Heb. 12:16), insensible to spiritual things. He cared for nothing but the gratification of sensual desire. Like the dumb brute, he based his decisions only on sense considerations of the moment. The extent to which a person is willing to sacrifice present desires for future good is an accurate measure of emotional and spiritual maturity. On this basis, only the Christian can ever become fully mature, for he alone is ready and willing to forfeit all this life has to offer in order that he may be accounted worthy of the life to come (see 2 Cor. 4:17, 18; Phil. 3:7–15; Acts 20:24; Luke 20:34, 35; Heb. 11:10). The trifling way in which Esau sold his birthright for a dish of lentils demonstrated his unfitness to become heir to the gracious promises of God. While Jacob's conduct cannot be condoned, that of Esau is deserving of the most severe condemnation. Jacob repented and was forgiven; Esau was beyond forgiveness, because his repentance consisted only of regret for the results of his rash act, not for the act itself (Heb. 12:16, 17; PP 181).

## ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

19-34PP 177-179; SR 87

23 PP 181, 196; SR 88

28 PP 177

29-33CH 110

29-342T 38

32 PP 179

34 PP 179, 208

## CHAPTER 26

1 *Isaac because of famine went to Gerar.* 2 *God instructeth, and blesseth him.* 7 *He is reproved by Abimelech for denying his wife.* 12 *He groweth rich.* 18 *He diggeth Esek, Sitnah, and Rehoboth.* 26 *Abimelech maketh a covenant with him at Beer-sheba.* 34 *Esau's wives.*

**1. *There was a famine.*** A famine similar to that which occurred in the time of Abraham (see ch. 12:10). The more fertile region of Gerar was not affected by drought, as was the semiarid *Negeb*. On the presence of Philistines in Canaan at this time, see on ch. 21:32. Whether Abimelech and Phichol (Gen. 26:26) are the same individuals as those mentioned in chs. 20:2 and 21:22, or simply titles meaning, respectively, “king” and “army commander,” is not known, more probably the latter (see on chs. 20:2; 21:22).

**2. *The Lord appeared unto him.*** This is the first recorded divine revelation accorded Isaac. Several promises made earlier to Abraham were now repeated to Isaac (see chs. 12:3; 15:5; 22:17, 18).

**5. *Abraham obeyed.*** The obedience of the father is here given as the reason for the blessings that would come upon the son. It is also an implied promise that similar action on Isaac's part would bring similar results. James explains that Abraham's faith, for which he was rightly praised by Paul (Rom. 4:1–5), was perfected by his obedience (James 2:21–23). Neither trust nor obedience is complete without the other.

***My voice.*** Whenever God spoke, Abraham always obeyed without delay (Gen. 12:1–4; 22:1–3).

***My commandments.*** “Commandments” refers to precepts given by God (1 Sam. 13:13; 1 Kings 13:21), by a father (Prov. 4:1, 4; 6:20), by a king (1 Kings 2:43; 2 Kings 18:36), or by a teacher (Prov. 2:1; 7:1, 2). Such a precept, to walk perfectly before God, had been enjoined upon Abraham at the age of 99 (Gen. 17:1).

***My statutes.*** This refers to divine laws, ceremonial (Ex. 13:10; Num. 9:14; etc.) as well as moral (Deut. 4:5, 8, 14; 6:24; etc.).

***My laws.*** Ethical instructions as well as ceremonial and spiritual precepts (Job 22:22; Isa. 8:16, 20.)

This verse includes most of the Hebrew words that refer to divine laws or commandments. Abraham diligently observed them all, whether they came directly from God or whether they had been handed down from past generations. He purposed in his heart to obey God implicitly; where he failed, he approached God with the sacrifice of contrition upon the altar of his heart (see Heb. 7:25; 8:1–4). He left his native land, he offered his son, he carried out the rite of circumcision, he paid tithe. The same must certainly have been true with regard to phases of God's law not specifically mentioned in connection with his life story. God's own testimony, here given, makes it certain, for instance, that Abraham was faithful in Sabbath observance, as he was in other matters, such as tithe paying.

**7. *She is my sister.*** As Abraham had declared his wife to be his sister (chs. 12:11, 12; 20:2, 11), so also did Isaac; but the manner in which God protected Rebekah was very

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<sup>7</sup>Nichol, F. D. (1978). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary : The Holy Bible with exegetical and expository comment*. Commentary Reference Series (Ge 20:1). Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association.

different from that in which Sarah was preserved. No one so much as touched her. This experience and one other (ch. 25:28) are the only recorded instances in the life of Isaac of deviation from strict rectitude. Ashamed of his own conduct, Abraham may not have warned Isaac by a narration of his own failures in this respect. More likely, however, Abraham had told Isaac but, as so often happens, Isaac had to learn the lesson for himself through bitter experience. How often the sins of parents are perpetuated in their children! But hereditary weaknesses never free the children from personal accountability for their own mistakes. (see Eze. 18:20).

**12. An hundredfold.** Although the patriarchs lived, generally speaking, a seminomadic life, their habits differed considerably from those of present-day Bedouins. The latter neither till the land nor own great herds and flocks as the patriarchs did. Although the Gerar valley is exceptionally fertile, a hundredfold increase in the yield of grain is about the maximum for Palestine, where it is normally thirtyfold to fiftyfold (see Matt. 13:23). The special blessing of God rested upon Isaac.

**15. All the wells.** Isaac's increased wealth and influence aroused the envy of the Philistines, and they sought to do him injury. The wells rendered useless by the Philistines, the king of Gerar had solemnly guaranteed to Abraham in perpetuity (see ch. 21:25–32). The accessibility of wells is most important in the southern desert country of Palestine, and without them a herdsman must seek pasture elsewhere.

**17. Isaac departed thence.** As was becoming a saint, Isaac did not strive, but moved his encampment to the east of the city, though still in the same valley from which Gerar took its name.

**22. He removed from thence.** A peace-loving man, Isaac did not wish to get into trouble over the wells his men dug, and moved on each time his rights were contested. The third new well seems to have been sufficiently far from the Philistines that they left him in peace there, for which reason he named it Rehoboth, "wide spaces." This spring has been identified with the present *er-Ruchebeh*, 20 mi. southwest of Beersheba in the *Wadi Ruchebeh*, which perpetuates today the name it received from Isaac.

**23. He went up from thence.** For some unexplained reason Isaac moved on northward after a time and settled at Beersheba, where Abraham once lived (chs. 21:33; 22:19). Here Jehovah appeared to Isaac by night and renewed the covenant promise.

**26. Abimelech went to him.** Upon the occasion of the former treaty Isaac was about three years of age (ch. 21:8, 22; see also on ch. 21:8). The second treaty came approximately 97 years later (chs. 25:26; 26:34). It is probable, therefore, that the Abimelech of ch. 26:26 is not the individual mentioned in ch. 21:22. When a man's ways are pleasing to God, even his enemies will be at peace with him (Prov. 16:7). The new king of Gerar now proposed a treaty that was in reality a renewal of the original treaty between Abraham and an earlier king of Gerar. In spite of the injustice Isaac had suffered at their hands, he, as a peace-loving man, was happy to conclude a new pact of friendship with Abimelech. One can only wonder how Isaac felt as Abimelech brazenly boasted of his own erstwhile fairness and honesty. The fact that there had been no violence when Abimelech's servants ruined several wells and robbed Isaac of at least two others was due solely to Isaac's peaceful retreat. Though Isaac could not forget these bitter experiences, he did not mention them. His was a great heart, a magnanimous spirit. Though not mentioned here, animals were presumably slaughtered and the usual ceremonies observed (see on ch. 21:27).

**33. He called it Shebah.** Isaac's servants informed him of their success in opening a new well that very day, and to it he gave the name of Shebah, meaning "oath," in commemoration of the treaty with Abimelech. The statement, "therefore the name of the city is called Beer-sheba," does not discredit the fact that Abraham had already given that very name to the place (ch. 21:31). There was now an added reason for perpetuating the name assigned the spot a century earlier. As the treaty between Abimelech and Isaac was but a renewal of that earlier treaty, so the name Shebah given by Isaac to the new well was a reaffirmation of the earlier name, Beersheba.

**34. Esau was forty years old.** To Isaac's difficulties with the Philistines a domestic cross was now added, one which caused him deep and lasting sorrow. Esau, who had already demonstrated his indifference toward religious principles, saw no reason for counseling with his parents in regard to the choice of a wife or for going to the trouble of arranging for one from among his relatives in Mesopotamia. When he was 40 years of age, and his father 100 (ch. 25:26), he married two Hittite women, simultaneously or nearly so. In so doing he openly defied the principles of parental guidance, of nonintermarriage with the heathen, and of monogamy.

The names of Esau's wives, as well as those of their fathers, are Semitic. Judith means "the praised one," Beeri, "my well," Bashemath, "fragrance," and Elon, "the strong one." These names suggest that the two Hittite families involved must have lived in Canaan for some time and had adopted the language of the Canaanites. On the presence of Hittites in southern Palestine at this early period, see on ch. 20:1.

**35. Which were a grief of mind.** These two women, as the Hebrew clearly indicates, became literally, "a bitterness of spirit" to Esau's parents. Their perverse and evil ways, their idolatrous religion, and their unspiritual and frivolous disposition brought heartache to Isaac and Rebekah. This sad world knows no greater grief than that which children can bring.

## ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

3 1T 203

5 PP 140, 154, 363, 370; SR 146

24 2T 271

34, 35 PP 179

## CHAPTER 27

1 *Isaac sendeth Esau for venison. 6 Rebekah instructeth Jacob to obtain the blessing. 15 Jacob under the person of Esau obtaineth it. 30 Esau bringeth venison. 33 Isaac trembleth. 34 Esau complaineth, and by importunity obtaineth a blessing. 41 He threateneth Jacob. 42 Rebekah disappointeth it.*

**1. When Isaac was old.** From the following considerations, Isaac must have been about 137 years of age when the incident narrated in this chapter took place. Esau was already married (v. 46). This occurred when Isaac was 100 years old (see chs. 26:34; 25:26). But, as will be seen, the events recorded here must have occurred at a much later time even than that. Jacob was 130 years old when he went down to Egypt (ch. 47:9), and his son Joseph 39. This is clear from the fact that the latter was 30 years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh (ch. 41:46), and that since that time 7 abundant and 2 lean years had passed (chs. 41:54; 45:6). These 9 years must be added to the 30, making Joseph 39 years of age. Jacob was consequently 91 years old when Joseph was born. This had taken place at the end of 14 years of Jacob's service in Laban's house (chs. 29:18,

27; 30:25); therefore Jacob was 77 years old when he fled to Haran. Since Jacob's flight probably followed soon after the events of this chapter, and since his father Isaac was 60 years old when Jacob was born (ch. 25:26), Isaac's age in ch. 27 must have been about 137 years. Isaac lived for another 43 years, to the ripe age of 180 (ch. 35:28).

**4. *That my soul may bless thee.*** Since his half brother Ishmael, 14 years his senior (chs. 16:16; 21:5), had died at the age of 137 years (ch. 25:17), his own increasing infirmities of age may have suggested the thought of approaching death. Without regard to God's instructions with reference to the two children before their birth, and without taking notice of Esau's barter of his birthright and his Canaanite marriages, Isaac apparently persisted in his preference for Esau. This preference being strengthened by his taste for game (ch. 25:28), it was natural that he should call for "venison" to celebrate the occasion.

**5. *Rebekah heard.*** What motives impelled her to this course of action? It seemed to her that God's choice of Jacob was about to be thwarted. Isaac's intention was clear, and it was contrary to God's revealed will. Apparently she concluded that neither reason nor argument would change his mind. Feeling that God desperately needed her help, Rebekah took matters into her own hands. She resorted to one wrong in the hope of righting another. To her the crisis seemed real and urgent. Isaac, supposing he was on his deathbed, had determined to transfer the birthright to Esau. By dispatching Esau to the field for game, he had initiated the process of transfer, which, when complete, would be irrevocable. What should she do? It was in her power to prevent what appeared to be an irrevocable wrong. This was her last chance to act, and should she let it slip, all hope would be gone. To refrain from action when it was in her power to remedy the situation, and simply trust God to work things out in His own good way and time, seemed impossible. By such a process of rationalization she sought to convince herself that any means to secure the desired end was justified. Was she not helping God to bring about His own clearly expressed purpose? And if in so doing she should commit sin, would God not be obliged to forgive her? When men set their hearts upon a course of action not in accord with the strictest standard of right, their foolish hearts grow dark. White looks black, and wrong looks right. And whenever what God has clearly said to be all wrong appears to be all right, the hypnotic power of the tempter is complete (Gen. 3:6; Rom. 1:21, 22; Isa. 5:20; Micah 3:2).

**12. *A curse upon me.*** Rebekah silenced Jacob's fear of the curse his father might pronounce on him should his deception be discovered; she would accept the curse herself. She was as set in her way as Isaac was in his. Bent upon securing that which seemed of supreme value, and which was about to elude her grasp, she would count the cost later—not now. For the present, only one thing mattered. She was so certain of the success of her stratagem as to have no fear whatever of the possibility of a curse.

**14. *He went.*** Jacob acceded to her plan and fetched the goats. These were not the common European variety, whose skins would be quite unsuitable for any such deception. They were the camel goats of the Orient, whose black, silklike hair was sometimes used as a substitute for human hair.

Jacob's objection makes it clear that he was not so much concerned with the wrong of the act as with the risk of discovery. Degenerate human nature is less concerned with sin than with its results. Only the Spirit of Christ can impart to man a contrite, repentant heart, bold to do right and willing to trust God for the results of such a course of action

(see 2 Cor. 7:10; Micah 6:8). For years Jacob had schemed to obtain the coveted blessing, and now that it was about to slip from his grasp, but little persuasion on Rebekah's part was necessary to transform his hesitancy into active cooperation. His own unsanctified desires made him an easy victim to the wiles of the tempter.

**19. *I am Esau.*** The task of convincing his father was by no means easy or certain of success. Having announced his arrival, Jacob was confronted with several embarrassing questions. One deception after another was necessary to the accomplishment of his objective. He declared himself to be Esau and the kid's meat to be venison, and attributed his speedy return to the presumed blessing of God.

**24. *Art thou my very son Esau?*** Isaac's sense of touch must have been seriously affected by his infirmity or by his age. On the other hand, his sense of hearing was more acute, and made him suspicious of Jacob's voice. But the scent of field and forest upon Esau's garments (v. 15) seemed to confirm the touch of his son's hairy hands. Finally, the fragrant aroma of "savory meat" (v. 9) whetted his appetite, and he dismissed his fears. He could not see; but touch, taste, and smell prevailed over hearing. The original mistake that had led to this deception was Isaac's own. Furthermore, he had deliberately gone forward with his plan to invest Esau with the birthright in the face of a divine command to the contrary, and God therefore permitted him to be deceived (see 1 Sam. 28:6; 1 Kings 14:1-6; Acts 5:1-11).

**27. *And blessed him.*** The blessing itself, as with all such pronouncements (see Gen. 49; Deut. 33), is in Hebrew poetic style. This consists of parallel clauses whose diction and grammar are peculiar to poetry. The scent of field and forest upon the clothing Jacob wore suggested to the patriarch's mind a picture of his son's future prosperity. Isaac seemed to see him in possession of the Promised Land and in the full enjoyment of its accompanying blessings. Special mention is made of the "dew of heaven" because in Eastern countries, where there is so little rain, the dew is indispensable to the growth of the fruits of the earth. It is often mentioned as a source of blessing (Deut. 33:13, 28; Hosea 14:5; Zech. 8:12).

**29. *Let people serve thee.*** Jacob was to be pre-eminent, not only over his brethren, in the wider sense of all his relatives, but over foreign peoples as well. This blessing envisions the concept of universal dominion, which was indeed God's original plan for Israel (see Deut. 4:6; 28:10; 2 Chron. 9:22, 23; Ps. 126:3; Zech. 2:11; 8:22, 23; 14:16; COL 289, 290).

**32. *Who art thou?*** Jacob had scarcely received the blessing and left his father when Esau returned. The shock must have been crushing to Isaac. But, he apparently saw in the incident the intervention of Providence and concluded that any further attempt on his part to act contrary to God's will would be futile. He knew he could not; therefore he would neither withdraw the blessing from Jacob nor seek to inflict a curse upon him. Isaac must have realized his own responsibility for the sad situation; why should he blame Jacob? As Esau had acted independently of his parents in the selection of a wife, so Isaac had acted independently of God in attempting to select his heir. Like Balaam, Isaac found himself powerless to turn away the blessing of God from one destined to receive it (see Num. 22:35; 23:8, 11, 12).

**36. *Is not he rightly named Jacob?*** As to the meaning of Jacob's name see on ch. 25:26. Esau complained bitterly that Jacob had now deceived him twice. True, he, Esau,

had sold his birthright to Jacob; but now, too late, he recognized his folly. Jacob's taking advantage of him he now saw to be what it truly was—robbery.

**38. *But one blessing, my father?*** To be sure, God has unlimited blessings that He is ready to bestow with a lavish hand. Had Esau realized that his defective character disqualified him from receiving the blessing, and that it could be his only through a reversal of attitude, the blessings of God to Abraham and Isaac might have been his also (see Jer. 18:7–12). But it was not with this in mind that Esau spoke. He coveted the blessing without any intention of accepting the obligations that went with it. Like the elder son in the parable of the prodigal, he was jealously unwilling that favor should be shown his younger brother (Luke 15:29).

***Esau lifted up his voice, and wept.*** In response to Esau's further entreaty, "Hast thou not reserved a blessing for me?" Isaac repeated in substance the blessing pronounced upon Jacob, and told Esau that he could do nothing further for him. When even his father, his best friend, seemed to turn against him, Esau awoke, finally, to the awful realization of his utter rejection by God. His tears expressed sorrow for his loss, but not for the conduct which had made that loss inevitable. His tears were ineffectual because he was no longer capable of true repentance (see Heb. 12:17). Like an impassable chasm, his imperfect character stood between him and the realization of that which now seemed to him of incomparable value (see Jer. 8:20; Luke 16:26; COL 271).

**39. *His father answered.*** Moved by the pathetic lament of his beloved son Esau, Isaac complied with his impassioned appeal. Once more Isaac spoke, perhaps by inspiration, this time of the future lot of Esau. This pronouncement, however, is not called a "blessing." Actually it was a modified curse.

***Thy dwelling.*** Literally, "Thy dwelling shall be [from, *min*] the fatness of the earth, and of [from] the dew of heaven." According to the KJV, Esau's "blessing" appears to be, substantially, a repetition of the temporal blessing given to Jacob. There are, to be sure, certain important variations, such as the omission of "plenty of corn and wine," and of the name of God.

The KJV translation is grammatically possible. However, the preposition "of," *min*, also means "way from." Isaac's meaning would then be, "Thy dwelling shall be away from the fatness of the earth, and away from the dew of heaven," meaning that in contrast to the land of Canaan, the home of the Edomites would be an infertile region. Such a rendering is not only in accord with the Hebrew construction but is decidedly more appropriate to the context and to the facts of history: (1) It is an apt description of the dreariness and desertlike character of Idumaea, the home of Esau's descendants. (2) It agrees with Isaac's statement that every blessing had already been bestowed upon Jacob and avoids having him reverse himself (vs. 33, 37). (3) It explains the play upon the words "fatness" and "dew," here descriptive of a state of affairs precisely the opposite to that declared to be the lot of Jacob (v. 28). This interpretation, it is true, treats the preposition *min* of v. 39 differently from that of v. 28. The different phraseology of the two verses, however, suggests that in v. 39 Isaac is making a clever play on words. The fact that Isaac here does not mention the name of God may indicate that this pronouncement was made on his own authority and not by inspiration—as was that addressed to Jacob.

**40. *By thy sword.*** The mode of life and occupation of the Edomites were well adapted to their country. This prediction found its fulfillment in the fierce and warlike disposition of the Edomites, who gained their sustenance by hunting and controlling forcefully the trade routes.

***Serve thy brother.*** The promise to Esau envisioned a perpetual, and not altogether unsuccessful, struggle for freedom from Jacob. This was a repetition of the divine prediction made prior to their birth (ch. 25:23). The history of Edom is largely a reiteration of servitude to Israel, revolt from Israel, and reconquest by Israel. After a long period of independence to start with, the Edomites were defeated by Saul (1 Sam. 14:47) and later subjugated by David (2 Sam. 8:14). In spite of an attempted revolt under Solomon (1 Kings 11:14–22), they remained subject to the kingdom of Judah until the time of Joram, when they rebelled (2 Kings 8:20–22). They were subdued again by Amaziah (2 Kings 14:7–10; 2 Chron. 25:11–14), and remained in subjection under Uzziah and Jotham (2 Kings 14:22; 2 Chron. 26:2). (The control of Elath, at the head of the Gulf of Aqaba, was tantamount to the control of all Edom.) It was not till the reign of Ahaz that the Edomites permanently shook off the yoke of the kings of Judah (2 Kings 16:6; 2 Chron. 28:16, 17). At length, however, they were completely conquered by John Hyrcanus, about 126 B.C., compelled to accept circumcision, and merged into the Jewish state (Josephus *Antiquities* xiii. 9. 1; xv. 7. 9). At a still later period, through Antipater and Herod, an Idumaean dynasty ruled Judea, with the blessing of Rome.

The predictions of Isaac concerning his two sons were thus accurately fulfilled (Heb. 11:20). The blessing upon each son constituted a prophecy. Though Isaac was deceived when he spoke concerning Jacob, what he said was nevertheless inspired, and Jacob remained blessed (Gen. 27:33). That this was so does not indicate divine approval upon the act of deception, for God is not dependent upon artifice to accomplish His will. God did not ordain the act of deception, He overruled it. The blessing came to Jacob, not because of deception, but in spite of it.

Parents and sons were all in the wrong, and each in his own way suffered as a result. The perpetrators of deception were forthwith and forever separated. Rebekah was obliged to send her beloved son forth from his father's house to a foreign land, never to see him again. Jacob suffered for his sin against brother and father by 20 years of exile, during which he was himself repeatedly deceived and disappointed. Furthermore, he went forth from home utterly destitute. Isaac, by the success of Jacob's stratagem, was chastened for persisting in his preference for Esau in spite of the revealed will of Jehovah. He was to be separated from the son he had passed by, and to have ever before him the ungodly example of the son he had cherished so blindly. For his contempt of God and religious things, Esau forfeited forever the privileges of family leadership due the first-born. And through all the counterplay of human plans and passions the purpose of God was accomplished.

**41. *The days of mourning.*** Esau's despair soon changed into mortal hatred for his brother, but out of respect for his father he decided to spare him the sorrow and shame of the intended act of fratricide. Thinking that his father's illness would end in early death, he postponed his planned act of murder. He could not know, of course, that his father would recover and live 43 years longer.

**43. *Flee thou to Laban.*** Perhaps Esau was generally popular among the retainers of Isaac. There were others who shared a knowledge of his plot. When Rebekah was

informed by one of these of Esau's intention, she advised Jacob to go into voluntary exile for "some days," thinking that the vacillating disposition of Esau would bring a change of heart. Furthermore, by flight Jacob would be tacitly admitting his mistake and would leave Esau, apparently, in possession of his father's property at the time of Isaac's supposed imminent decease.

**45. *Why should I be deprived?*** If Esau should kill Jacob, then the latter's nearest relative was obliged by custom to kill Esau. Perhaps Esau reasoned that his own personal popularity in camp would protect him from such an eventuality, particularly after the death of his father.

**46. *I am weary.*** In order to obtain Isaac's consent to her plan without wounding his heart by telling him of Esau's murderous intentions, she based her proposal upon an entirely different and legitimate reason. Isaac readily consented, for he, like Rebekah, was grieved by Esau's wives (ch. 26:35).

### ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

1-46PP 179-183; SR 88-89

1-4PP 179

6 SR 88

6-8, 30PP 180

31-34PP 181

34 SC 26

34-41CH 110

36 Ed 147; PP 181

41-43Ed 147; PP 183, 237; SR 89

### CHAPTER 28

1 *Isaac blesseth Jacob, and sendeth him to Padan-aram, 6 Esau marrieth Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael.* 10 *The vision of Jacob's ladder.* 18 *The stone of Beth-el.* 20 *Jacob's vow.*

**1. *Isaac called Jacob.*** Assenting to Rebekah's proposal, Isaac took the initiative in sending Jacob to Padan-aram (see on ch. 25:20). Whether or not he knew of Esau's plot, Isaac doubtless realized that it would be wise for Jacob and Esau to be separated until tension at home should lessen.

**4. *The blessing of Abraham.*** The official family line was to be perpetuated through Jacob. Consequently, the blessings repeatedly promised to Abraham were now committed to Jacob (see chs. 17:2-8; 22:16-18). He left home burdened with guilt, but also with his father's blessing.

**5. *The Syrian.*** See on ch. 25:20. Moses deliberately places Jacob's name before that of Esau, inasmuch as Jacob is now in possession not only of the birthright but also of Abraham's blessing.

**9. *Then went Esau unto Ishmael.*** In the blessing of Jacob by Isaac and Jacob's commission to take a wife from among their relatives in Mesopotamia, Esau perceived the deep-rooted displeasure his parents felt toward his Hittite wives. No doubt with the intention of pleasing his parents, he went to fetch a wife from the family of his grandfather Abraham, as Jacob was instructed to do from the family of his maternal uncle, Laban. Mahalath, or Bashemath (ch. 36:3), whom he took to wife, was related to Isaac as Jacob's wife Rachel was to his mother Rebekah. Esau married his father's niece;

Jacob, his mother's. Esau's going "unto Ishmael" must mean going "to the family of Ishmael," for Ishmael died about 14 years prior to this time (see on chs. 25:19; 27:1).

**10. *Jacob went out from Beer-sheba.*** Jacob set out in obedience to his mother's wish and his father's command (see Prov. 1:8). Although 77 years of age (see on Gen. 27:1), he still respected his parents and submitted to their authority. His filial example may well be emulated by every worthy son, wherever such conduct does not conflict with allegiance to God (Prov. 6:20; Mal. 1:6; Eph. 6:1–3).

***Toward Haran.*** The famous city on the Balikh River in northern Mesopotamia was Jacob's destination. This was the region where Terah had settled after his migration from Ur (Gen. 11:31). Upon Eliezer's visit nearly a century earlier (PP 188), Bethuel's family, including Laban, were living at the "city of Nahor," which was not far from Haran (see on ch. 24:10). This indicates a move from Nahor's city to Haran after Rebekah left her parental home. Rebekah's advice to Jacob to go directly to Haran rather than to Nahor's city (ch. 27:43) shows that it was known in Beersheba that Laban's family had made this move.

**11. *A certain place.*** At the close of the second day Jacob reached the vicinity of the city of Luz (v. 19), some 50 mi. to the north of Beersheba. He chose not to spend the night within the city itself for fear of the Canaanites. Hatred for them, suggested by Josephus as the reason for Jacob's not entering the city, is probably of less importance (*Antiquities* i. 19. 1).

***His pillows.*** Literally, "the region of his head" or "the place where the head is." Jacob therefore took a stone and put it "under his head" or "as a headrest." A pillow in our sense of the word seems to have been unknown to the ancients. In many Oriental lands people used headrests made of wood, clay, stone, or metal, and still do. Many ancient examples of these have been preserved in Egypt. Since they were all made of hard material, it was unnecessary for a traveler to carry a pillow with him. A smooth stone would suffice. It was therefore no hardship for Jacob to sleep with his head on a stone. The stone is mentioned here in anticipation of the use made of it later on in the narrative (v. 22).

**12. *He dreamed.*** As Jacob lay there, weary, lonely, and sad, his heart turned in prayer to God (PP 183). Such was the mental background of his dream. Only after two long days, during which he had opportunity to reflect upon his course of action and to realize his own helplessness, did God appear to him. In the providence of God, delay is often the means used to purify the soul and lead a man to cast himself without reserve upon God's mercy and grace (see DA 200, 380-382). The ladder was a visible symbol of the real and uninterrupted fellowship between God in heaven and His people upon earth. The angels ascend to present men's needs before God, and descend with promises of divine assistance and protection. The ladder appeared to rest upon the earth, where Jacob lay, alone, destitute, and forsaken by men. Above, in heaven, stood Jehovah. Proclaiming Himself to Jacob as the God of his fathers, He not only confirmed to him all the promises made to his fathers—the possession of Canaan, a numerous offspring, and blessing to all men (see chs. 12:2, 3; 13:14–17; 15:5, 7, 16; 17:2–6, 16; 17:8; 18:18; 22:17, 18; 26:3, 4, 24)—but vouchsafed to him protection on his journey and a safe return home. Since the fulfillment of this promise to Jacob was still afar off, God added the firm assurance, "I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of."

**16. The Lord is in this place.** Jacob's statement is not evidence, as some commentators suggest, that Jacob conceived of God as appearing only at certain consecrated places, and that he had chanced upon one of these. It is, rather, an expression of his surprise and joy upon finding that whereas he had imagined himself alone, he was in reality in the very company of God. Jacob's statement was, in a certain sense, a self-accusation. He admitted that lack of faith had occasioned his thoughts of discouragement. It was when he felt most forsaken that he found God nearer and more real to him than ever before.

**17. How dreadful is this place!** Those accorded the privilege of a revelation of God find in their hearts a sense of profound awe. To Isaiah came a conviction of guilt, so intense that he feared for his life (Isa. 6:5). A similar experience now brought to Jacob a keen realization of his unworthy and sinful state. But despite his alarm, he knew the place to be "the house of God," *Beth-'Elohim*, a house of peace and safety.

**18. Took the stone.** The stone that had been his pillow became a monument to commemorate the revelation he had received from God. He poured oil upon it to consecrate it as a memorial to the mercy there revealed to him (see Ex. 30:26–30). This "pillar" was in no sense made an object of worship. Pillar worship did exist among the Canaanites, but was strictly forbidden by God (see Lev. 26:1; Deut. 16:22). Later, however, the Israelites violated this divine prohibition, and set up pillars ("images") as cult objects (see 1 Kings 14:23; 2 Kings 18:4; 23:14; 2 Chron. 14:3; 31:1; Hosea 10:1, 2; Micah 5:13). This does not mean, however, that every pillar set up had such a significance, as the following examples show. Jacob erected another pillar to commemorate his treaty with Laban (Gen. 31:45), and still another served to mark the grave of Rachel (ch. 35:20). Absalom later erected one to perpetuate his memory (2 Sam. 18:18).

**19. Beth-el.** By translation, "House of God." This name was later applied to the nearby city, then known as Luz. That the name Bethel was at first applied only to the place where Jacob's memorial stood and not to Luz is apparent from Joshua 16:2, where the two places are clearly differentiated. In other passages, however, Bethel is used as the modern name of the ancient city of Luz (see Gen. 35:6; Joshua 18:13; Judges 1:23). This change of name was not made until the Israelites occupied the city. It retains this name today in its Arabic form, *Beitân*.

**20. Jacob vowed a vow.** This is the first recorded vow. By taking a vow a man binds himself to do certain things in a specified way. Since the fulfillment of Jacob's vow depended upon God's power, and because it was made to God, it took the form of a prayer. It was not made in a mercenary spirit, but in gratitude, humility, and confidence.

**If God.** This expression in no way implies doubt in Jacob's mind as to whether God would fulfill His promises, or that Jacob was proposing terms to God. He took the Lord at His word. Since He had graciously promised to be with him and to bless him, he on his part would be faithful to God (see PP 187, 188). In profound appreciation, Jacob's thoughts turned to tangible ways in which his devotion might be expressed.

**Bread to eat.** Jacob, who had not hesitated to use the most despicable means in an endeavor to secure for himself the larger share of the inheritance, now humbly asked nothing more than protection, food, clothing, and a peaceful return to his father's house. He would be happy for the bare necessities of life. Gone was his desire for wealth,

luxury, honor, and power. What a lesson in humility, and how thoroughly Jacob had learned it!

**21. *Then shall.*** He had thought of God as the God of his fathers. To be sure, he had long ago taken Jehovah to be his God. But whereas in the past he had depended to a great extent on the security of his father's home, circumstances had now made necessary a much more personal and real reliance upon God for all that he had casually taken for granted thus far through life. It was not a matter of coming to God for the first time, but of a more intimate, mature, and understanding fellowship with Him.

From this time forward Jacob gave evidence of loyalty of loyalty to God. He yielded himself to divine control and rendered God the homage of a grateful and loving heart. What progress he made during the 20 years between Bethel and Peniel! Grace reigned within, but there was conflict as well. His tendencies to evil remained active, and occasionally he yielded all too readily to them. But right principles steadily gained control of his life, and he returned to Canaan with mature trust in God. Under the patient discipline administered by God, he gained steadily in faith until, from the great crisis of his life at Mahanaim and Peniel, he emerged "a prince with God."

**22. *This stone.*** Jacob declared his intention to erect upon this spot an altar for the celebration of divine worship. This resolution he carried out several years after returning safely to the land of his birth (see ch. 35:1, 15).

***The tenth.*** Abraham and Jacob both understood and practiced the payment of tithe (see ch. 14:20). Jacob's words imply that this had not been his habit in the past. Perhaps he had little to call his own. Perhaps his grasping spirit had led him to be careless in tithing what was his. However that may be, he vowed henceforth faithfully to pay a tenth, not to earn the favor of Heaven, but in humble and grateful recognition of the pardon and favor of God. He made his promise emphatic, saying, "I will surely give," literally, "giving I will give." In other words, he would keep on giving it. Judging by his future life of faithfulness and devotion to God, there is no reason to doubt that his vow was faithfully kept. That God blessed Jacob so abundantly in later years is evidence of faithfulness in this respect (see Mal. 3:8–11). He who for 77 years seems not to have been a faithful tithepayer left Canaan a poor fugitive, with nothing but a staff in his hand, but returned 20 years later with much cattle, flocks, servants, and a great family.

Every Christian may learn from Jacob's experience a vital lesson. In time of crisis and calamity he should consider whether heavenly blessings have perhaps been withheld because of unfaithfulness in tithe paying (see Haggai 1:6–11). Jacob's experience testifies that it is never too late to make a new start in this direction, not, to be sure, as a means of earning God's favor, but as a token of love and devotion to Him. The blessings of Heaven may then descend upon the sincere believer as they did in Jacob's case. The grand objective of all God's dealings with man is the development of a character that will reflect that of his Creator.

## ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

1-22PP 183-188

2 PP 183

10-17MH 436

11, 12 PP 183

12 AA 153, 512; DA 206, 311; FE 86, 270; GC 19; ML 156; PP 568; 3T 64; 4T 465; 5T 539; 6T 93; 8T 130

12-14SC 22  
13-15PP 184; 4T 466  
16 MH 226; 4T 466; 7T 193  
16, 17 Ed 243; GW 179; LS 311; PK 49  
16-22PP 187  
17 ML 286; MYP 265; PP 252; 5T 491; 6T 363  
18 4T 466  
20-224T 464  
22 Ed 138; PP 188, 525; 3T 393

## CHAPTER 29

1 *Jacob cometh to the well of Haran. 9 He taketh acquaintance of Rachel. 13 Laban entertaineth him. 18 Jacob covenanteth for Rachel. 23 He is deceived with Leah. 28 He marrieth also Rachel, and serveth for her seven years more. 32 Leah beareth Reuben, 33 Simeon, 34 Levi, 35 and Judah.*

**1. Jacob went on his journey.** Literally, “Jacob lifted up his feet and went.” This implies cheerfulness and reflects the state of mind in which the experience of the preceding night had left him. Thus strengthened in spirit Jacob proceeded on his journey to “the land of the people of the east,” which in this case refers to Upper Mesopotamia east of the Euphrates River. The term also included the upper Arabian Desert. In the Bible the peoples “of the east” are those dwelling in Mesopotamia or in the desert in its immediate vicinity. The Hebrews seem to have been content with approximate expressions of direction. “East” could mean any direction between northeast and southeast.

**2. A well.** After a journey of some 450 mi., which would require about 3 weeks, Jacob reached the vicinity of Haran (v. 4). The remark that the stone upon the well’s mouth was large does not mean that the united strength of all the shepherds was required to roll it away, for Jacob did so alone (v. 10). It suggests, rather, an agreement among the shepherds to water their flocks together. The scene at the well is so thoroughly in harmony with the customs of the East, both ancient and modern, that the similarity of this narrative to the one described in ch. 24:11 is by no means strange. Moreover, this well was constructed differently from the one where Eliezer met Rebekah. There the water was drawn at once from an open well and poured into troughs placed ready for the cattle, as at most wells in the East today, whereas here the well was closed with a stone and no mention is made of the need of pitchers and troughs.

**4. Whence be ye?** Jacob’s question implies that the well was not situated in the immediate neighborhood of Haran. Learning that they were from Haran, he inquired about “Laban the son [descendant] of Nahor.” Laban was actually Nahor’s grandson (ch. 24:15, 29). The shepherds, whose answers had thus far been brief, since Jacob was a stranger, spoke of the imminent arrival of Rachel. The name Rachel means “sheep” or “ewe.”

**9. Rachel came.** Apparently it was not the custom for young women to be kept at home until the time of their marriage approached. Nor was it beneath the dignity of girls from wealthy families to carry water from the well, as Rebekah did, or to tend sheep, as Rachel did in this instance. Honest labor, far from being a discredit, is an honor to both high and low. Every son and daughter should learn that work is not humiliating, but that it is a privilege to contribute to the needs of the family.

**11. Jacob kissed Rachel.** The fact that Rachel did not resent Jacob's conduct as an undue liberty suggests that he had already made his identity known to her. The first words of v. 12 could as well be rendered "Jacob *had* told Rachel," a translation the Hebrew construction permits.

**12. Her father's brother.** As Lot is called Abraham's brother, though in reality his nephew (chs. 13:8; 14:14, 16), so Jacob refers to himself as Laban's brother. Apparently in cases where accuracy was not important the word "brother" was employed to indicate a close relative.

**13. He told Laban.** Laban now responded to the coming of a near relative much as he had upon the arrival of Eliezer 97 years previously (ch. 24:30, 31). The same cordiality and hospitality are again in evidence. "All these things" probably refers to what his mother had instructed him to say in order to attest his relationship, and in regard to the cause and objectives of his exile from home. Had he not told the truth, how could he have explained his apparent poverty? Why should he, the son of wealthy parents, reach Haran on foot and without either gifts or servants? How different had been the arrival of Abraham's servant in the long ago!

**15. What shall thy wages be?** Having been a guest in his uncle's home for one month (v. 14), during which he seems to have rendered himself useful to the household, Laban recognized in Jacob a valuable assistant. Of an obviously covetous disposition, Laban purposed to exploit Jacob's skill and diligence to his own advantage. But lest Jacob discern his motives, Laban carefully concealed his selfishness under the semblance of justice and kindness. To preclude all possible claims on the part of his nephew, he proposed to pay him as he would an ordinary servant.

**17. Leah was tender eyed.** The Hebrew word *rak*, here translated "tender" by the KJV, has usually been understood to mean "weak" or "dull." Ever since the LXX employed this translation most commentators and translators have followed it. The word *rak* also means "delicate," "gentle," "soft," and "flattering," and may perhaps mean that her eyes looked the precise opposite of what most commentators have thought. However, the fact that Jacob was not attracted to Leah would indicate more of a contrast between the two sisters than this latter suggestion implies. Perhaps Leah's eyes, and her personality as well, lacked the brilliance and lustrous warmth the Oriental admires. The RSV renders the word as "weak."

**18. Seven years for Rachel.** Jacob, deeply in love with Rachel, was immediately ready to come to terms with his uncle. Jacob's proposal was based partly on the fact that he was not in a position to pay the usual dowry and partly on his knowledge that the situation at home would make necessary a rather prolonged stay with Laban. Laban's assent is to be explained solely on the ground of greed, which became more apparent as time went on.

**20. The love he had to her.** Jacob gave evidence of his devoted affection for Rachel, not alone by his willingness to serve seven years for her, but even more by the spirit in which he worked for his avaricious uncle. Many as were the days that must pass before Rachel should become his bride, they were rendered happy by his love for her. The words used by Moses to express the depth of Jacob's love breathe pure affection and tender devotion.

**21. Give me my wife.** It is an interesting comment on Laban that Jacob found it necessary to remind him of the expiration of the seven years. A great marriage feast,

probably lasting an entire week (v. 27), was prepared, according to the usual custom. Laban's deception of Jacob was possible because of the custom of veiling the bride and bringing her to the bridegroom "in the evening." Although girls usually had little choice in the selection of their husbands, Leah's consent was necessary to the success of this base proposal. She must herself have loved Jacob, to approve and cooperate in the plan to wrong both her sister and her future husband by marrying one who neither sought nor loved her.

## Jacob's Wanderings in His Flight and Reconciliation with Esau



Laban's duplicity resulted in lifelong rivalry between the two sisters (see ch. 30:14–16).

**24. *Zilpah.*** Laban fulfilled an Oriental custom (see ch. 24:59) when he gave his servant girl Zilpah to his daughter as her personal attendant. The meaning of her name may be "short nose."

**25. *What is this?*** Next morning Jacob, the master deceiver, awoke to find himself the victim of deceit. Inexorable justice had repaid him double for his double-dealing. In self-defense Laban pleaded an imaginary requirement of local social custom. Had this actually been the custom in Haran, as it was in some other ancient countries, he should have told Jacob of it when the latter proposed working for Rachel. Jacob's vow to God at Bethel, however, and his longing for Rachel led him to stay by Laban rather than repudiate the marriage as he might have done.

**27. Fulfil her week.** Wedding feasts customarily lasted one week (see Judges 14:12), and Jacob was to have Rachel also at the close of Leah's marital festivities (Gen. 29:28–30). Laban was no doubt anxious to preserve his good name by keeping his fraud from the public eye, in view of the fact that all the men of the city were his guests at the celebration (see v. 22). His behavior reveals nothing but one mean motive after another. Though he attached little value to his daughter's affections and happiness, he had a keen appreciation of Jacob's qualities as a shepherd. Out of necessity Jacob agreed to the proposal. Laban thus received 14 years of service instead of 7, and at the same time relieved himself of liability to support Leah, who might otherwise have been difficult to marry off.

**28. He gave him Rachel.** It is plain that Jacob did not serve another seven years before Rachel became his wife. This occurred at the close of Leah's festal week. Jacob's act of bigamy must not be judged by a later provision in the Mosaic law that prohibited marriage with two sisters concurrently (Lev. 18:18). At the same time Jacob's double marriage cannot be justified on the ground that the blessing of God eventually made it the means of multiplying Jacob's seed and so fulfilling His promise. God simply overruled the errors of men; even these could not thwart His purpose (see Ps. 76:10). The bigamy that had been occasioned by Laban's deception and Jacob's affection brought friction and regret to the homes of both men. In this school of affliction Jacob learned that "the way of transgressors is hard" (Prov. 13:15). The jealousy and misery attending this marriage are a commentary on Moses' specific injunction against a man's marrying two sisters concurrently (Lev. 18:18).

**Bilhah.** As with Leah, a maid was also given Rachel. The meaning of her name may have been "terror," but this is uncertain.

**30. He loved.** Leah, a party to Laban's cruel fraud, was unsuccessful in winning her husband's affections. The result was a home where envy, jealousy, and contention prevailed. For years Jacob had worked and waited patiently for the day when he would have a happy home with his beloved Rachel, only to find himself burdened with two quarrelsome wives (see ch. 30:1, 2, 8, 15). How different had been the early years of the married life of his father Isaac, upon whose home no shadow of polygamy, with its baleful consequences, rested (ch. 24:67). The sad experience of Jacob shows the wisdom of Abraham in forbidding the return of Isaac to Mesopotamia (ch. 24:6).

**31. Leah was hated.** Taken together, vs. 20, 30, 31, and 34 clarify the meaning of the word here translated "hated." It need indicate nothing more than a less intense degree of love. The record of Jacob's relations with Leah proves that he did not "hate" her in the sense that word generally conveys to us today. He simply felt and showed less affection for her than he did for her sister. The statement, "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated" (Mal. 1:2, 3; Rom. 9:13), must be understood in the same way. God felt and manifested a greater degree of affection for Jacob and his posterity than He did for Esau and his descendants. God chose the one to be His special channel of blessing to the world in preference to the other, not on an arbitrary basis, but because of character (see Deut. 7:6–8).

**He opened her womb.** As Jehovah had visited Sarah (Gen. 21:1) and had been entreated for Rebekah (ch. 25:21), He interposed now in favor of Leah. By blessing Leah with children, while Rachel was permitted to remain barren for a time, God sought to foster love in Jacob's heart for Leah. Thus a certain equality was established, for while

Jacob loved Rachel for what she personally meant to him, he was led to appreciate Leah also.

**32. Reuben.** Each of the sons of Jacob received a name signifying his mother's thoughts and emotions at the time of his birth. In one way or another these names all reflect the rivalry of the two sisters. Each name is related in sound to certain key words in the accompanying statement made by the mother. Thus, the first syllable of Reuben, which means "see, a son," is from *ra'ah*, "to see," used in her remark, "the Lord hath *looked* upon my affliction." To Leah, her first child was evidence of Jehovah's compassion, and well might she expect him to be the means by which she could win Jacob's affection. In the first flush of maternal joy she was confident that Jacob's heart would now turn to her.

**33. Simeon.** The birth of Reuben, apparently, did not fully meet Leah's expectations with regard to Jacob. Her second son, born approximately a year later, she named Simeon, "hearing." Perhaps, at last, God had *heard* how much she was hated.

**34. Levi.** The third of Leah's sons, born in rapid succession, was named Levi, "attachment," in the hope that this time her husband would truly become *attached* to her. In an Oriental harem it is the mother of the male child destined to become the heir who is most honored. Leah could not understand why Jacob did not turn his affections from her barren sister Rachel to her.

**35. Judah.** The birth of Leah's fourth son caused her to exclaim, "Now will I praise Jehovah," as if she knew by intuition that he was to be the ancestor of the kings of Israel, and of the Messiah. Thus she called him Judah, "the praised one." Leah's joy was complete.

**Left bearing.** Temporarily, that is, Jacob, in spite of himself, could not now help appreciating Leah as the mother of four sons, even though he did not love her so much as a wife. Lest Leah be unduly elated by her and good fortune, or forget that it was God who had blessed her, and lest Rachel be discouraged beyond measure, God again intervened. Perhaps a certain equilibrium of affection had been achieved.

Leah must have been a pious woman, a devoted wife, and a faithful mother. According to the Sacred Record she mentioned the name of Jehovah in connection with the birth of three of her first four sons. Although from an idolatrous family, she must have accepted the religion of her husband and become a sincere believer in Jehovah. In contrast, Rachel's conversion seems at first to have accomplished little more than a superficial change. While outwardly she too had accepted her husband's religion, her heart remained attached to the old family idols, or she may have taken them in an attempt to secure the family inheritance (ch. 31:19). Upon various occasions her conduct stands in sharp contrast to that of Leah, and seems to reflect a spirit far more selfish (see ch. 30:1-3, 8, 15). There can be no doubt that Leah's excellence of character as well as her sincerity and piety eventually brought a change in Jacob's attitude toward her (see chs. 31:4, 14; 49:31).

## ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

1-30PP 188-190

1, 10-14PP 188

18 SR 89

18-20PP 188, 237

25-30PP 189, 237; SR 89

## CHAPTER 30

1 *Rachel, in grief for her barrenness, giveth Bilhah her maid unto Jacob. 5 She beareth Dan and Naphtali. 9 Leah giveth Zilpah her maid, who beareth Gad and Asher. 14 Reuben findeth mandrakes, with which Leah buyeth her husband of Rachel. 17 Leah beareth Issachar, Zebulun, and Dinah. 22 Rachel beareth Joseph. 25 Jacob desireth to depart. 27 Laban stayeth him on a new covenant. 37 Jacob's policy, whereby he became rich.*

**1. Give me children.** Leah's success as a mother aroused Rachel's jealousy beyond the point of endurance. Now, envy is "rotteness of the bones" (Prov. 14:30), and "jealousy is cruel as the grave" (S. of Sol. 8:6). Though Rachel enjoyed the greater share of her husband's affection, she could not be content so long as her sister surpassed her in what was, to an Oriental, most important of all the duties of a wife—motherhood. Sarah had been married at least 25 years when Isaac was born. Rebekah had vainly waited 20 years for a child, when she and Isaac turned to God in prayer. But waiting in the face of competition made Rachel jealously impatient relatively soon after her marriage, and in bitterness of spirit she censured Jacob.

**2. Am I in God's stead?** Jacob's passionate displeasure was naturally aroused by his favorite wife's unseemly words. He refused to take the blame for a situation only God could change. Rachel well knew that God alone could remove sterility (v. 6), but to this fact her jealousy of Leah appears for the moment to have blinded her. Jacob's reply also manifests a certain lack of spirituality. Why did he not suggest to his disappointed and embittered wife that they seek help in prayer, as his parents had done before he himself was born? Instead of doing this he assented to a proposal that was nothing more than a sinful expedient.

**3. Behold my maid Bilhah.** Rachel's proposal, which Jacob accepted and carried out, was as sinful as that of Sarah (ch. 16:2), but without Sarah's excuse, since there was now no question as to an heir for Jacob. If such a reason had, indeed, existed, it would not have justified the act, which even in the case of Abraham had been so clearly condemned.

**She shall bear upon my knees.** This statement has been considered by many commentators as a Hebrew idiom expressing adoption (see ch. 50:23). It is possible that the expression originated in an ancient Oriental custom, whereby, at the birth of a child that was to be adopted, the one adopting the child would receive it as his own. Rachel probably had one of these customs in mind and planned to receive the baby from birth as her own.

**4. Jacob went in unto her.** Jacob's laxity in marriage began with polygamy and ended in concubinage. Though God overruled this for the development of the seed of Israel, He did not thereby place His approval on such a custom.

**6. Dan.** Rachel, who had considered her sterility an injustice in view of Leah's fecundity, looked upon the birth of Dan as divine vindication of her conduct. She clearly stated, this conviction when she said, "God has *judged* me" or "has procured for me *justice*," for which reason she called him Dan, "judge." Her statement, "and hath also heard my voice," means either that she had prayed about the matter or that she considered Dan's birth as God's reply to her bitter complaints (v. 1).

**8. Naphtali.** After Dan's birth Jacob either considered Bilhah as one of his legitimate wives or followed a renewed suggestion of Rachel to procure another son for her by her maid. At the birth of Bilhah's second son, whom Rachel considered hers by proxy, she

stated that she had “*wrestled* with Great *wrestlings*,” literally, with “*wrestlings of ’Elohim* [God],” with her sister and had been successful. Hence she called him Naphtali, “my wrestling.”

**9. *When Leah saw.*** Leah, accustomed to bearing a son each year, became impatient when it seemed she was to bear no more. That Rachel had obtained sons by her maid did not disturb Leah so long as there was prospect of her having sons of her own, but now she became the victim of envy, as her sister had been before. The means employed by Rachel to retain Jacob’s favor made Leah jealous, and jealousy drove her to the employment of the same means Rachel had used. However, Leah seems to have been conscious that she was pursuing a device of her own heart, since she made no reference to God in her statements at the birth of Zilpah’s two sons.

As for Jacob, it is surprising how easily he consented to the devious suggestions of his wives in order to increase their offspring. If he had felt some excuse for taking Bilhah in order to satisfy his beloved Rachel, who had no children of her own, by what excuse could he have quieted his conscience in regard to the proposal of Leah, who already had four sons? Having entered the path of wrongdoing, he seems neither to have seen the wrong of his conduct nor to have thought of its possible consequences. On the other hand, it must be admitted that in so doing he followed a common custom of his day. From the law code of Hammurabi and other cuneiform documents we know that such a practice was legally and socially acceptable, particularly when sterility prevented childbearing. The existence of this custom is probably the main reason that neither Abraham nor Jacob saw any great mistake in taking their servants as concubines.

**11. *Gad.*** The KJV translation of Leah’s exclamation at the birth of Zilpah’s son, “A troop cometh,” is based on Jewish tradition of the post-Biblical era. Actually, the expression means, “in good fortune,” as the LXX and Vulgate have it. Thus Leah called Zilpah’s son, God, “good fortune.”

**13. *Asher.*** Zilpah’s second son was named Asher, “the happy one,” or “bringer of happiness.” She said literally, “to my *happiness*, for daughters call me happy,” that is, as a mother of many children. In statements she made upon the birth of three of her own first four sons, Leah had recognized Jehovah (ch. 29:32, 33, 35). Now, with those born to her maid, she seems not to think of God. They were the successful and welcome result of her own clever devising.

**14. *Mandrakes.*** In Upper Mesopotamia the wheat harvest comes in May and June. The mandrake is an herb of the belladonna family with white and reddish blossoms. Its yellowish, odoriferous fruit is about the size and shape of a small apple. Today, as in ancient times, the fruit has been considered by people of the Near East as promoting fertility. Women of the Orient still make a philter of mandrakes, which was thought to stimulate sensual desire and to aid conception.

**15. *Is it a small matter?*** Rachel, apparently, desired the mandrakes as a means of removing her sterility. Leah was indignant at the very thought of parting with something that might increase her sister’s prospects of securing more of Jacob’s love than she already had. Rachel it seems, perhaps in contrast to Leah, had more faith in mandrakes than in God’s power. Eventually, however, she learned to trust in God rather than in mandrakes (see Gen. 30:22; Ps. 127:3).

**18. *Issachar.*** “God hearkened unto Leah” (v. 17), to show that it was not from such natural means as mandrakes, but from God, the Author of life, that life comes. Leah

thought she saw in the birth of her fifth son a divine *reward* for having given her maid to her husband, apparently considering the action that had sprung from jealousy an evidence of self-denial. The name Issachar contains the idea of “reward,” but whether it means “there is a reward” or, according to a rabbinical tradition, “he bears a reward,” is not certain. Note that it was Leah, not Moses, who saw in Issachar’s birth a “reward” for sinful action.

**20. Zebulun.** In naming her sixth son Zebulun, “dwelling,” Leah expressed her hope that now Jacob would prefer her to her barren sister. She was bidding for the first place in his affections, bidding for him to “dwell” with her in the honored relationship of first wife.

**21. Dinah.** The name means “vindication.” She was not the only daughter of Jacob (chs. 37:35; 46:7) and is probably mentioned here in anticipation of the account of her misfortune in ch. 34. The word “afterwards” indicates that some time had passed since the birth of Zebulun. Dinah was Jacob’s only daughter when he returned to Canaan (see on ch. 34:1).

**22. God remembered Rachel.** It seems that Rachel eventually took her problem to the Lord in prayer. Her petition was heard, and faith obtained what impatience and unbelief had heretofore prevented.

**23. My reproach.** In the Ancient Orient a barren woman was not pitied but despised, and childlessness was considered a shame and a curse. This explains why women like Rebekah, Rachel, and Hannah felt it so keenly when they found themselves without children. Among the Jews, barrenness was considered as justifying divorce, polygamy, or concubinage.

**24. Joseph.** Meaning either “he takes away,” in allusion to the *removal* of her reproach, or “he shall add,” in anticipation of another son whom she hoped God would *add* to this first one. The removal of the reproach implied this possibility.

**25. It came to pass.** Upon the birth of Joseph, Jacob sought Laban’s permission to return to Canaan. According to vs. 25–28, it seems that Joseph was born at the end of Jacob’s 14th year of service for Laban, 7 years after his marriage (see ch. 29:21–28). Whether the 11 sons Jacob now had were all born during the 7 years intervening between his marriage and the close of this 14 years of service with Laban, or whether some of them were born during the 6 remaining years of the 20 he spent there (ch. 31:38), is not entirely clear.

The order in which Jacob’s sons are here listed does not necessarily represent the precise chronological order of their birth, but it seems to be based on their maternal parentage. Moses lists four for Leah, then two each for Bilhah, Zilpah, and again Leah, and one for Rachel—in these five groups. No two lists of Jacob’s sons recorded in the OT give them in precisely the same order (see Gen. 46:8–25; 49:3–27; Ex. 1:1–4; Num. 1:5–15; 1 Chron. 2:1, 2; etc.), and therefore it is impossible to discover any consistent pattern of birth sequence.

It would seem more than passing strange for 11 sons and 1 daughter (Gen. 29:32 to 30:24) to have been during Jacob’s first 7 years of married life, and none during the remaining 6 years he served with Laban. If, however, that be the case, then Leah bore seven children in seven years, with a distinct interval of time during which she bore no children (chs. 29:35; 30:9). If, during this interval, the four children of Bilhah and Zilpah were born in sequence, seven years would obviously be far too short. Except for the fact

that Leah's six sons are separated into two groups, it might be thought that Moses' order here was based strictly on maternal parentage. Since this is obviously not the case, it would seem that the five groups are arranged in the order of the birth of the first son of each group, and that there is probably some overlapping between any two consecutive groups. This suggestion seems to accord best with the context and with known facts. Accordingly, the birth of Dan would be found to precede that of all the sons listed subsequent to him, but not necessarily to follow that of Judah. The same, in principle, would be true for Gad, Issachar, and Joseph. Close overlapping such as this would make possible the birth of the 11 sons within a 7-year period. But even if the principle of overlapping be accepted, there is no reason for requiring that all 11 be born during that 7 years; some may have come during the final 6 years of Jacob's sojourn with Laban. The latter possibility, in fact, seems more likely, for, even granting the possibility of overlapping during the seven years, the rapid succession in which the births must then have come would be extremely close even according to Oriental standards.

**28. *Appoint me thy wages.*** Inasmuch as the second period of seven years terminated about the time of Joseph's birth, Jacob requested Laban's permission to return to Canaan (v. 25). Laban, however, was ill-disposed to lose so valuable a man, and yet was at a loss for a stratagem by which to keep him longer. The fact that he invited Jacob to state his wages did not prevent him from changing them ten times during the six years (ch. 31:7). Back of Laban was the evil one, intent upon thwarting God's plan by preventing, if possible, Jacob's return to the Land of Promise.

**31. *If thou wilt do this thing.*** When Laban repeated his offer, evincing his seriousness in making it, Jacob proposed terms on which he would be willing to stay. His proposal was based on the fact that in the Near East goats, as a rule, are black or dark brown, rarely white or spotted with white, and that sheep are for the most part white, seldom black or speckled. Inasmuch as Jacob's proposal involved but a small part of Laban's flocks and herds, Laban hastened to approve of the plan (v. 34). Jacob offered, furthermore, to begin separating them "that day," so that Laban might be able to see just what the results were likely to be.

The further course of the narrative shows that more was involved in the agreement between Jacob and Laban. Either Moses chose to mention only the basic principle of the agreement, and so omitted the fact that the separation was to be repeated at regular intervals, or this point was not mentioned at first, but rather taken for granted by both parties. Either way, Jacob proceeded accordingly, to which even Laban, notwithstanding his frequent alterations in the contract, does not appear to have taken exception (ch. 31:7, 8, 41).

**34. *According to thy word.*** Laban cheerfully accepted the proposal, but did not leave Jacob to make the selection (vs. 34–36). He undertook that himself, probably to make certain that it was done according to his interpretation of the agreement. He then gave the off-color sheep and goats to his own sons (here mentioned for the first time) to tend, and left Jacob in charge of only the pure-color animals of the flock. Finally, Laban "set three days' journey betwixt himself and Jacob," namely, between the flock to be tended by himself through his sons and that to be tended by Jacob, in order to prevent breeding between the two flocks.

**37. *Jacob took him rods.*** The narrative of vs. 37–40 appears on the surface to contradict known laws of genetics, and is sometimes cited as proof that the Bible is

unscientific. However, a careful study of the context and a comparison of the narrative with known facts relating to the laws of genetics reveals what took place and vindicates in a truly remarkable way the inspiration of the Scriptures. For a detailed, scientific discussion of the subject, see F. L. Marsh, *Studies in Creationism*, pp. 367-374.

Thinking to safeguard his own interests in the bargain proposed by Jacob, Laban immediately separated flocks and herds (v. 36), a fact which indicates that Laban also knew something of the laws of heredity. He placed all the off-color sheep, goats, and cattle under the care of his own sons, intending thereby to remove them from Jacob's charge and thus avoid the possibility of breeding these off-color characteristics back into what, visibly at least, was pure stock. What Laban did not know was that some of the apparently purebred animals might still carry recessive color characteristics that could be transmitted to their offspring. Laban thought he had outwitted Jacob by the shrewd device of separating the flocks.

Jacob, for his part, had no doubt been counting on selective breeding, concerning which he must have known at least as much as Laban did. This procedure would have been entirely legitimate according to a strict interpretation of the contract. The distinction Jacob made between strong and weak cattle (v. 41) is evidence that observation had taught him something of the laws of heredity. Now that Laban had separated all the off-color animals Jacob was probably at a loss to know what to do, for it is apparent that he knew no more about the transmission of recessive characteristics than did Laban. Trusting to his own supposed cleverness and to the application of the ancient and still popular superstition that offspring may be marked in a way corresponding to sights or fears experienced by the mother during the prenatal period, he set up the procedure explained in these verses. Says F. L. Marsh:

“All marking of the offspring such as that which Jacob thought he was accomplishing in Laban's flocks, is completely impossible. . . . In the placenta and umbilical cord, which constitute the only connection between the mother and the fetus, there are *no nerves*. . . . Thus absolutely *no* mechanism exists whereby the mother can mark her offspring in the way that Jacob thought he was accomplishing the marking” (*Studies in Creationism*, pp. 368, 369. Italics in the original).

A further apparent difficulty lies in the fact that Jacob's method seems to have proved method eminently successful (v. 43; ch. 31:7-9). Lest Jacob, however, credit his own ingenuity and superstition, God revealed to him in a dream how the recessive, off-color characteristics were transmitted through apparently pure-color parents to their offspring (ch. 31:10-12). What the angel told Jacob in a dream could only apply to the flocks and herds under Jacob's care, for all off-color animals had previously been removed by Laban (ch. 30:35, 36). To the operation of this law of genetics God added His special blessing, for recessive characteristics would not normally show up in so marked a manner as is indicated in v. 43. In so doing, He may perhaps have utilized principles of genetics at present only imperfectly understood.

This revelation of a law of genetics not discovered and understood by scientists until a few decades ago attests the scientific accuracy and divine inspiration of the Scriptures. Professor Marsh closes his discussion of the subject by saying:

“The Scriptures teach that such markings among domestic stock *are the result of hereditary factors in both parents working according to Mendelian principles and are not due to maternal impressions*. A fair reading of the text thus shows that that incident in the

Scriptures, which is so often cited as proof that the Bible is a book of fables, is in actuality one of the important reasons for believing that it is indeed an inspired volume” (*ibid.*, p. 374. Italics in the original).

In passing, it may be observed that the Hebrew word translated “hazel” in the KJV should be rendered “almond,” and the “chestnut tree” as “plane tree.” The Oriental plane tree belongs to the maple family.

**41. *The stronger cattle.*** The ancient Jewish rabbis understood this passage as meaning that Jacob practiced his trick during the spring breeding season only, since the ancients considered animals conceived in the spring and born in the autumn stronger than those conceived in the autumn and born in the spring. Modern commentators are inclined, however, to apply it to the early- and late-born lambs of the same season, since early-spring lambs are more valuable than those born later in the season. According to this opinion, Jacob did not conduct his experiments with the second litter of cattle, because he knew they would be weaker, but with the early, stronger litter. Whatever method Jacob used, he did so to strengthen and increase his own flocks, obviously at the expense of weakening and diminishing Laban’s.

**43. *The man increased exceedingly.*** The story of Jacob’s relations with Laban is one in which cunning and skill are matched against avarice and foul play. Cunning, which applies superior knowledge, is often the weapon of the weak against the strong. Men who are grasping and treacherous but lacking in wisdom are often outwitted by men of equally devious but more clever ways. Justice was on Jacob’s side. He was simply taking advantage of his new position to offset the disadvantage under which he had labored for 14 years. However, he was lacking in strict honesty and integrity. That openness and simplicity of character people expect to find in a righteous man were lacking. Jacob’s plan was most successful, to be sure, but does not commend itself as one that a servant of Jehovah would be expected to follow. Jacob erred, furthermore, in relying more upon his own craft to secure the divine blessing promised him than upon the power and providence of God. For his part, Jacob, however, attributed his success to the power of God (ch. 31:9).

## ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

25-27, 30PP 192

41 PP 237

43 PP 192

### CHAPTER 31

1 *Jacob upon displeasure departeth secretly.* 19 *Rachel stealeth her father’s images.* 22 *Laban pursueth after him,* 26 *and complaineth of the wrong.* 34 *Rachel’s policy to hide the images.* 36 *Jacob’s complaint of Laban.* 43 *The covenant of Laban and Jacob at Galeed.*

**1. *The words of Laban’s sons.*** The claim of Laban’s sons was obviously exaggerated, since Laban still had flocks when Jacob left him (v. 19). Laban’s sons hinted that Jacob had secured his wealth by fraud, though they did not openly accuse him of that crime. They could not prove that he had in any way violated any provision of the agreement between him and their father, though they were sure he must have done so.

**2. *The countenance of Laban.*** What Jacob overheard was confirmed by what he observed in Laban’s attitude. As a result of the fact that nothing Laban did seemed to hinder in the least Jacob’s rapid increase in wealth, even the pretense of friendliness that

had marked their relations in the past had now changed to overt antagonism. In the providence of God, Laban's attitude became the means of bringing about Jacob's return to the land of his birth. Jacob's conviction that the time had come to return to the land of his fathers was confirmed by a direct message from God.

**4. Called Rachel and Leah.** At some distance from home with the flocks, Jacob called his wives to the field for greater secrecy in planning their departure. Had this been done at home, members of Laban's household might have overheard their conversation and reported to Laban in time for him to return and prevent their leaving. Despite all their precautions, word reached Laban the third day (vs. 19, 22). It seems that some change had taken place in the supervision of the flocks and herds, for Jacob was now in charge of his own (see ch. 30:35, 36), or at least had access to them. Likely, it was Laban's absence, shearing his own sheep, that made possible Jacob's escape with all his property, an event that would obviously have been impossible otherwise (vs. 1, 29). Perhaps Jacob was simultaneously shearing his own sheep, and sent for his wives and all their belongings, to erect tents on the spot under the pretext of festivities usually held upon such occasions. Thus he prepared the way for a departure that would not arouse suspicion in advance.

**7. Changed my wages.** "Ten" may not have been meant literally. It was used, perhaps, simply as a round number to indicate very frequent change, much as we would say "a dozen times" (cf. Dan. 1:20). Laban apparently made repeated attempts to limit the original agreement by changing its provisions. That Jacob passed over in silence his own stratagem and attributed to God's blessing all that he secured by craft implies consciousness that the means employed were not completely honest.

**9. God hath taken away.** Jacob felt, perhaps, that had it not been God's will to bless him, his own efforts would not have succeeded. Therefore, and not without reason, he deemed it right to attribute his increased wealth to God's benevolent care. It is certain that he felt his own devices and the blessing of God not to be mutually exclusive.

**11. Spake ... in a dream.** It is uncertain whether this dream came separately from the brief revelation of v. 3, or whether it is a more complete account of that divine communication. Some commentators suggest that it came at the very beginning of Jacob's last six-year term of service. Some think that it was only an ordinary dream Jacob connected with the one he had received at Bethel, and now related in order to impress his wives. This view is untenable because of the biological accuracy of the information revealed in it, information which was contrary to Jacob's own superstitious beliefs (see on ch. 30:37-42).

**14. Rachel and Leah answered.** The fact that the two sisters were in perfect agreement in regard to their father's conduct, in spite of their own mutual jealousies, is clear evidence of the validity of their complaints. Laban's heartless cruelty and insatiable greed were obviously so pronounced that even his own daughters eventually rose in protest. They complained that in spite of being freeborn, legitimate children, no inheritance had been given them, and they had been sold like slaves. Apparently, all of Laban's property had been transferred to his sons, for his daughters received none of it.

**16. All the riches.** Rachel and Leah recognized the hand of God in their husband's remarkable prosperity. Regrettable as their alienation from their father may be, his severity and meanness made such a reaction understandable if not inevitable. On the other hand, they felt bound to their husband, the father of their children, in a close and

tender union. Their lives and fortunes were now completely identified with his. For the first time the two sisters are presented as united in opinion. That Rachel had but recently become the mother of a son herself may have eased the tension and jealousy that had existed between them during the first years of their married life.

**19. *Laban went to shear his sheep.*** The RSV translation, “had gone,” is preferable to that of the KJV, “went,” for Laban had probably left home before Jacob called his wives to the field, and not after their decision to leave Haran. The fact that Rachel was able to steal her father’s images suggests Laban’s absence from home at the time of her own departure. Jacob knew that his father-in-law would be detained several days by the task of shearing his sheep and the festivities commonly connected with it (see 1 Sam. 25:4, 11; 2 Sam. 13:23), to which friends were often invited. Whether Jacob had not been invited, or had declined Laban’s invitation, owing to the dissension existing between them, is uncertain. But it did afford him an excellent opportunity to escape unhindered.

***Rachel had stolen the images.*** These “images,” *teraphim* (see Judges 17:5; 18:14; etc.), were usually small (v. 34) human figurines, occasionally larger, often made of wood (1 Sam. 19:13-16). Near Eastern excavations have brought them to light in profuse numbers, made of wood, clay, and precious metals. Some represent male gods, but the majority are figurines of female deities 2 to 3 in. in length. They were used as household gods or were carried on the body as protective charms. Since most of them represent nude goddesses whose sexual features are accentuated, they were probably thought to promote fertility. This may be the reason Rachel especially cherished them. Cuneiform texts from Nuzi in Mesopotamia reveal that the household gods were inherited by adopted sons only when no actual sons were present at the father’s death. If a man had sons, his gods could not go to his daughters. Rachel therefore had no right to her father’s household gods, as Jacob frankly admitted (Gen. 31:32). Documents found at Nuzi, in Mesopotamia, indicate that in the patriarchal age the possession of the family’s household gods, such as Laban had, guaranteed to their holder the title to his father’s properties (*ANET* 219, 220). This was probably the chief reason why Laban was so eager to retrieve them (see vs. 30, 33–35).

**20. *Jacob stole away.*** Literally, he “deceived the heart of Laban the Aramaean,” or he “outwitted Laban” (RSV). For the expression “the Syrian,” meaning the Aramaean, see on ch. 25:20.

**21. *Passed over the river.*** The Euphrates, pre-eminently *the* river of Bible times (1 Kings 4:21; Ezra 4:10, 16). How Jacob succeeded in crossing the Euphrates with his flocks, particularly in the springtime (Gen. 31:19), is not known. There are, of course, fords at various places along the river in this vicinity. Jacob’s immediate destination, Gilead, was the mountainous region south of the Yarmuk River. Gilead is mentioned here in view of the fact that Laban overtook him there. The name Gilead (Galeed) was given it by Jacob upon that occasion (v. 47). Its former name is unknown.

**23. *Pursued after him.*** Since Laban received word two or three days after Jacob’s flight (v. 22), and overtook him after a pursuit of seven days, it appears that the two met nine or ten days after Jacob’s departure from the vicinity of Haran. The mountains of Gilead lie more than 275 mi. from Haran, a distance that can be covered by fast camels in 7 days, the time required by Laban. But it would be impossible to drive the flocks and herds such a distance in that length of time, since they could cover no more than 9 or 10 mi. a day. Apparently Laban did not pursue the fugitives immediately upon receiving

word of their flight. He knew that Jacob could make but slow progress (ch. 33:13, 14), and that he himself need therefore be in no haste. Since Rachel had taken her father's household gods, her departure must have been from Haran, where her father's home was situated (ch. 29:4, 5). The fact that Laban knew his idols had been stolen suggests that he must have returned home before pursuing Jacob. He may have finished the shearing of his sheep, concluded the accompanying festivities, and arranged for the care of the flocks Jacob had forsaken before leaving Haran. The time that elapsed between his receiving word of Jacob's flight and his own departure may easily have been 30 days or more.

**24. *God came to Laban.*** In a most unexpected way God fulfilled the promise given to Jacob 20 years earlier (ch. 28:15, 20, 21). It is unusual that God should have revealed Himself to an idolater thus in a dream. Laban, who had become acquainted with Abraham's religion through his grandfather Nahor, through Abraham's servant Eliezer (ch. 24:31, brGE 24:50>50), and more recently through his long association with his own nephew, recognized the true God as the speaker in his dream the night previous to his overtaking Jacob (v. 29).

***Good or bad.*** This expression, literally "from good to bad," is proverbial (Gen. 24:50; 2 Sam. 13:22). Laban was not to compel Jacob to return, either by force or by making further attractive inducements.

**27. *Wherefore didst thou flee.*** Overtaking Jacob, Laban assumed the role of a good-natured but grievously wronged and deeply hurt father. Did Jacob not realize how easily Laban could compel him to return to Haran? That Laban was talking with him at all instead of treating him as he presumably deserved, Jacob owed solely to the intervention of the God of his fathers the previous night. But why should Jacob's ardent longing to return to his father lead him to steal his father-in-law's gods? This was Laban's only legitimate complaint, a polished shaft aimed to hit hard and well. Perhaps Jacob had urged his father-in-law to discard his heathen gods, pointing out that idols were of no avail, and to accept the true religion. And now it seemed that he himself must have gained so much confidence in Laban's family gods as to be unwilling to leave Haran without them! Or did Laban fear that Jacob was thereby attempting to secure the rest of his property (see on v. 19)?

**32. *Let him not live.*** In defense of his secret and hasty departure Jacob pleaded fear, an honest and forthright confession. As for the charge of theft, Jacob voluntarily submitted to the provisions of Mesopotamian law. This provided the death penalty for certain kinds of theft, including that of sacred objects (Code of Hammurabi, sec. 6).

***Before our brethren.*** This was a reference to Laban's relatives (v. 23), Jacob's brothers by marriage.

**33. *The two maidservants' tents.*** This passage affords an interesting glimpse into the custom of the time whereby not only husbands and wives but each individual wife and concubine possessed a separate tent.

**34. *The camel's furniture.*** To judge from its modern counterpart, a woman's riding saddle was probably made of wickerwork and resembled a basket or cradle. There was a carpet upon the floor, and it was protected against wind, rain, and sun by means of a canopy and curtains. Light was admitted by openings in the sides. In covering her theft by subtlety and deception Rachel proved herself a true daughter of Laban. How little an imprint had the religion of her husband made upon her character! To be sure, of course, he was hardly a paragon of virtue himself.

**35. *I cannot rise up.*** Oriental custom and politeness required children of every age and rank to rise up in the presence of their parents (Lev. 19:32; 1 Kings 2:19). Rachel's excuse was therefore hardly in order.

***The custom of women.*** A periphrasis for the menses (cf. ch. 18:11), which under the later Mosaic legislation incurred ceremonial uncleanness (Lev. 15:19). That this particular statute was in force prior to the Mosaic law, at least among the Aramaeans, may be inferred from this passage. That Laban did not require Rachel to stand so that he might search "the camel's furniture" may have been due to fear of defilement.

***Found not the images.*** Thrice repeated, this phrase emphasizes the thoroughness of Laban's search and Rachel's success in hiding the stolen objects.

**36. *Jacob was wroth.*** Laban knew that his family gods had disappeared when Jacob left; of this he was positive. In spite of the dream of the night before, it may be that he was still scheming to put Jacob on the defensive. The latter had voluntarily agreed to surrender to Laban anyone found guilty (v. 32). Perhaps Laban hoped to fix upon him responsibility for the deed, either directly or indirectly, and so pressed his case, if he might thereby yet secure Jacob's return. Laban seems to have been aware that guilt on Jacob's part would have removed him from the protecting hand of God. With the complete collapse of Laban's charges, Jacob, no longer on the defensive, now pressed his case against a meek and subdued Laban. His service for Laban was above criticism, a fact which even Laban himself did not presume to deny (v. 43).

**39. *Of my hand.*** Jacob had a legal basis for complaint against Laban, for charging him with the loss of animals to wild beasts and to thieves. This practice was contrary to the ancient laws of Mesopotamia, for, as the Code of Hammurabi (sec. 267) shows, a shepherd was to repay only such losses as were incurred through his own neglect.

**42. *The fear of Isaac.*** It seems strange that Jacob mentioned this in addition to the "God of Abraham," since both expressions apparently refer to the same Being. This may have been due to the fact that Abraham's religious experience was not nearly so real to him as that of his father Isaac. Abraham had long been dead, whereas Isaac was yet living and practicing "the fear" of God. It seems that here the word "fear" is used as an alternate name for Jehovah, and should be rendered "Fear," as in the RSV. The use of this expression here and in v. 53 suggests the deep impression made upon Jacob by the devotion with which Isaac practiced his religion.

***Rebuke thee yesternight.*** Jacob pointed out that by the warning given Laban in the dream of the previous night, God had already pronounced sentence upon the matter at issue between them. Though he did not say so, Jacob may have read into the divine intervention on his behalf God's approval for all he had done to increase his possessions. Perhaps he reasoned that since on his own part he had only met cunning with cunning and deceit with deceit, Laban had no right to punish him or to expect compensation. Extenuation of Jacob's conduct may be found in the heartless treatment accorded him by his father-in-law, but the fact that God protected him against revenge did not vindicate his course of action (Prov. 20:22; Rom. 12:17; 1 Thess. 5:15).

**43. *These children.*** Laban tacitly acknowledged the truth of Jacob's words and admitted that he had no just ground for complaint. He could do nothing but accept the existing situation and the inevitable separation it entailed. Nevertheless, his haughty spirit broke forth once more as he laid claim to all of Jacob's possessions. Not one word of recognition or appreciation came from the lips of Laban for Jacob's 20 years of diligent

labor. Instead, he assumed the role of a greathearted and noble benefactor, who would never think of treating his own kin with less than magnanimity.

**44. *Let us make a covenant.*** With this in mind, Laban proposed a formal treaty of friendship. This may have been prompted also by the fear that Jacob might seek reconciliation with Esau and return to take revenge (v. 52). It is not necessary to assume with some commentators that v. 44 is incomplete in its present form, and that the antecedent of “it” was either the proposed memorial, or God, whose presence was assumed. “It” may just as well refer to “the covenant,” perhaps made up—as was common in Mesopotamia—in the form of a cuneiform tablet, sealed and signed by the two parties and their relatives.

**45. *A pillar.*** Jacob evinced his assent to Laban’s proposal by proceeding at once to erect a stone memorial similar to the one at Bethel (ch. 28:18). Both groups joined, also, in gathering stones to be used as a table for the covenant meal.

**47. *Jacob called it Galeed.*** Both names, one Aramaic and the other Hebrew, have practically the same meaning, a “heap of witness.” That the earliest known non-Biblical Aramaic inscriptions do not reach back to the time of Jacob, but date from a later period, does not prove the nonexistence of Aramaic in the 17th century B.C. The earliest non-Biblical evidence for the existence of such a language consists of certain Aramaic words found in the alphabetic cuneiform tablets of ancient Ugarit in Syria, dating from the 15th century B.C. Our Bible, therefore, contains the earliest attested Aramaic words known. Each of the two men gave to this memorial a name in his own language, the two being identical in meaning. Inasmuch as the region later became a possession of Israel, the Hebrew name Gilead (Galeed) was applied to it. This includes not only the vicinity of Mt. Gilead itself but all of the mountainous uplands east of the Jordan between the Yarmuk and Jabbok rivers.

**49. *Mizpah.*** The site also received another name, Mizpah, meaning “watchtower.” It became, somewhat later, the site of a town that derived its name from the “pile of witness” erected by Laban and his relatives (Judges 10:17; 11:11, 29, 34). This town was at one time the residence of the judge Jephthah (Judges 11:34).

***The Lord watch.*** That Laban called on Jehovah, the heavenly watchman, to protect his daughters, does not prove that he accepted Jehovah as the representative of his rights. With his tribal concept of deity, Laban was willing to concede the power of Jacob’s God, at least in Canaan if not in Haran. What else could he do, particularly after the dream of the night before? Perhaps, also, he said this with the thought that Jehovah alone could bind the conscience of Jacob.

**50. *If thou shalt afflict.*** In spite of his selfish disposition, Laban’s paternal instinct made him jealous for the welfare of his daughters and solicitous of their future. This seems a little strange in the light of Laban’s own conduct (v. 15); he himself had been the cause of Jacob’s polygamy. But that, as it were, was all within the family. And if Jacob should take other wives, the affection and inheritance that would fall to his own daughters and to their children would thereby be diminished. Laban remained possessive to the very end.

**51. *This heap.*** Should either of them in the future think to take revenge upon the other, this monument was to be reminder of their pact of friendship. As upon this occasion hostile intent had been subdued, so in the future, memory of the event was to deter any possible punitive expedition. From Laban’s point of view he was making a

great sacrifice in permitting Jacob to escape unscathed, for Jacob's rapidly increasing wealth and power, together with a possible reconciliation with Esau, made any future prospect of overpowering Jacob dim indeed. Laban, it seems, was eager to impress Jacob with his own magnanimous spirit.

**53. *The God of their father.*** It is known from Joshua 24:2 and from the existence of idols in Laban's house (Gen. 31:30, 35), that Abraham's relatives in Mesopotamia worshiped other gods. This might seem to indicate that "the God of Nahor" could not be Jehovah. But it is known also that Nahor "cherished the knowledge and worship of the true God" (PP 171) along with his idolatry. The verb "judge" is in the plural, in seeming support of the view that Laban was speaking of two distinct gods. However, the LXX, the Peshitto, and the Vulgate render "judge" in the singular, recognizing the God of Abraham and the God of Nahor as one. It would seem that Laban was seeking to bring about unity between himself and Jacob, now that separation was inevitable, by calling attention to the fact that their grandfathers, Abraham and Nahor, and great-grandfather Terah worshiped the same God.

***The fear of ... Isaac.*** See on v. 42. Perhaps Moses added this expression to make it clear that Jacob "swore" by Jehovah and not by any of the gods of Nahor.

**54. *Jacob offered sacrifice.*** It seems that only Jacob participated in the sacrificial rites he considered essential to the ratification of the covenant. Laban was only an observer, but took part again in the ceremonial feast Jacob prepared.

**55. *Kissed his sons and his daughters.*** It does not appear that Laban kissed Jacob on taking his final leave, as he had done upon meeting him the first time (ch. 29:13). Though Laban and Jacob parted reconciled to each other, and not as enemies, they were not exactly the best of friends.

***And blessed them.*** Laban, whose better nature appears to have prevailed as a result of the covenant, or perhaps of the feast, or of the contemplated parting with his daughters, poured out his feelings in a farewell blessing upon them. Thus Laban disappears from the Scripture narrative. With this, all contact between the family in Canaan and relatives in Mesopotamia ceases.

## ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

1-55PP 190-194

1, 2 PP 192

1-3SR 90

3 PP 193

4-7SR 90

7 PP 190

15 PP 189

19-23, 26, 27, 29PP 193

29 SR 91

38-40PP 190

39 SR 91

40 DA 479

41, 42 SR 91

42, 44 PP 193

44-46SR 92

49, 51-53PP 194; SR 92

## CHAPTER 32

1 *Jacob's vision at Mahanaim.* 3 *His message to Esau.* 6 *He is afraid of Esau's coming.* 9 *He prayeth for deliverance.* 13 *He sendeth a present to Esau.* 24 *He wrestleth with an angel at Peniel, where he is called Israel.* 31 *He halteth.*

**2. Mahanaim.** Meaning “double camp,” or “double host,” in reference to two bands of angels, one advancing before him and one following behind. Their appearance must have reminded Jacob of the vision of the ladder at Bethel, on his flight from Canaan. Then, angels ascending and descending had represented to him the divine protection and assistance that were to be his upon his journey and during his sojourn in a foreign land. Now the angelic host again brought assurance of divine help, this time in anticipation of his dreaded meeting with Esau, and also as a renewal of the promise to bring him back in safety to his native land. Inasmuch as Jacob saw the angels while traveling, they cannot have appeared to him in a dream. The manner of revelation, however, is not clear.

A distinguished city was later founded near the place where the angels appeared (Joshua 13:26, 30; 21:38; 2 Sam. 2:8, 12, 29). Some have identified it with the present *Machnâ*, some 12 mi. northwest of *Djerash*, the ancient *Gerasa*.

**4. My lord Esau.** From Mahanaim, Jacob sent messengers to his brother, Esau. After Jacob's flight from Beersheba, Esau seems to have moved temporarily to the southeast, to the land of Seir, or Edom, whose original inhabitants, the Horites, he later dispossessed. The messengers were to draw a clear distinction between “my lord Esau” and “thy servant Jacob.” Their task was to conciliate Esau, chiefly by emphasis on Jacob's humility—tacit admission of his wrong—and on the fact that Jacob relinquished all claims to the inheritance. By pointing out that he was returning with great wealth, Jacob was not boasting but rather making it clear to Esau that he returned with no desire to share in the patrimony. Being himself in the wrong, Jacob realized that the first step toward reconciliation must be made by him. With this in mind, he added to his message an expression of hope that Esau would forgive and accept him on friendly terms.

**6. He cometh to meet thee.** That Esau was attended by 400 armed followers is evidence that he had become a powerful chieftain. Perhaps he had already begun to live by the sword (ch. 27:40).

If Esau's enmity toward his brother had softened during the years, it seems that he never mentioned the fact to his parents, with the result that Rebekah had been unable to fulfill her promise of sending for Jacob (ch. 27:45). The latter's uncertainty as to his brother's state of mind, and anxiety occasioned by the report of the messengers, alarmed him in the extreme. Esau's reason for going to meet Jacob with such a company was, first, to impress Jacob with due respect for his superior power, second, to ensure a satisfactory understanding, and third, to use force if necessary to safeguard his own interests. He was prepared, in other words, for any eventuality.

**7. He divided the people.** Fearing the worst, Jacob divided his large family and numerous flocks into two camps. It is easy to blame Jacob for a lack of faith and trust in God. However, his considered behavior under such adverse circumstances is a demonstration of sound judgment. Completely defenseless, he would not even make a show of force.

**9. God of my father Abraham.** Remarkable for its simplicity and energy, this model prayer gives expression to all that is essential in such a petition: (1) True humility, (2) a

recognition of God's mercy, (3) a plea for protection from imminent danger, (4) the repetition of past promises, (5) appreciation for past providences.

**10. I passed over this Jordan.** Jacob seems to have been close to the place where he had crossed the Jordan on his flight 20 years before. The striking contrast between his previous poverty and present prosperity he accepts as a token of God's blessing and the fulfillment of His promise at Bethel. Then he had crossed empty-handed, save for the blessing of his father and the promise of God. Now, 20 years later, he was returning to the land of his nativity with a large family and great possessions. Either of the "two bands" (v. 7) would have been sufficient to make him a prosperous man.

**11. The mother with the children.** Literally, "the mother upon the children." The picture is of a mother who casts herself upon her children to protect them with her own body from the killer. Jacob knew that if provoked, his brother would not hesitate to slay them one and all. He feared for the worst.

**12. As the sand.** This was the sense, though not the exact wording, of the Bethel promise (ch. 28:14), which had compared the number of Jacob's descendants to the dust of the ground. Before that, Abraham's promised seed had been compared to the dust of the earth (ch. 13:16), to the stars of heaven (ch. 15:5), and to the sand upon the seashore (ch. 22:17).

**13. He lodged there.** Although trusting in the Lord for protection, Jacob neglected no means of reconciliation with his brother. Pitching camp for the night in the place where he had received tidings of Esau's approach, he selected a respectable present consisting of more than 550 head of sheep and cattle. These he sent forward in several droves to meet Esau, as a "present" from his "servant" Jacob. The assortment of animals selected was representative of the usual possessions of a nomad (see Job 1:3; 42:12). The proportion of male to female animals was probably based on what experience had shown to be desirable for breeding purposes.

**16. Every drove by themselves.** The division of Jacob's gift of appeasement into several separate droves, which followed one another at intervals, was designed to have a cumulative effect and therefore be more impressive. Each drove was in itself a valuable gift.

**23. Sent them over the brook.** Earlier in the day Jacob had sent forward his gift to Esau. As night drew on he sent all that he had, family and possessions, over the Jabbok, desiring to spend the night alone in prayer. The Jabbok, today called *Nahr ez-Zerqa*, "the blue river," is an eastern tributary of the Jordan. Flowing through a deep canyon, it enters the larger stream some 25 mi. north of the Dead Sea.

**24. Jacob was left alone.** Jacob had remained on the northern bank of the river in order that he might be alone to seek God in prayer. In the present situation his usual cleverness was of no avail. God alone could be of help to mitigate Esau's anger and to save Jacob and his family.

**There wrestled a man.** That Jacob's antagonist was neither a human being nor an ordinary angel is to be inferred from the fact that Jacob spoke of Him as God (v. 30). The prophet Hosea also refers to Him both as God and as an Angel (Hosea 12:3, 4). This celestial visitor was none other than Christ (PP 197). Such an appearance of Christ in human form is neither strange nor unique (Gen. 18:1). On the "time of Jacob's trouble," see on Jer. 30:7.

**25. *The hollow of his thigh.*** The unknown wrestler used only the strength of a human being in his struggle with Jacob. Thinking his assailant a mortal enemy, Jacob fought as if for his life. But, as dawn approached, a single touch of more than human strength sufficed to cripple Jacob, and he became aware of the fact that his antagonist was more than human.

**26. *Let me go.*** The Angel sought to withdraw before daybreak, but gave no reason for wishing to do so. Commentators have suggested a desire on His part either to prevent others from witnessing the scene or perhaps to prevent Jacob from seeing Him.

***I will not let thee go.*** The crippling touch and the divine voice had convinced Jacob that the One with whom he had thus wrestled for hours was a messenger from heaven. Having for hours sought desperately for divine help, Jacob felt he could not afford to let Him go without first receiving assurance of the pardon and protection for which he longed. This he asked as an outright gift, realizing that he had nothing to offer God in return. He proposed no bargain; his desperate situation was his only plea. The help he needed could come only from God. For the first time in his life he knew his own resources to be inadequate. From his birth, when he had caught his brother by the heel, to his last years in Haran, when he had outwitted his uncle Laban (Hosea 12:3, 4), Jacob had approached the solution of life's problems by questionable methods of his own devising. He was now a changed man. Whereas in the past he had relied upon his own wisdom and strength, he had now learned to trust wholly in God.

**28. *Thy name shall be called.*** The great spiritual change that had come over Jacob was now symbolized by a change of name indicating the nature of his new relationship to God. The names of Abram and Sarai had likewise been changed (see ch. 17:5, 15); and from that time forward the Scriptures always call them by their new names. But in the subsequent history of Jacob his old and new names are used more or less interchangeably. Jacob's new name, Israel, became the name of the nation that sprang from his body. For him, the change of name, like his change of character, was far more significant than that of his grandparents. It represented his transformation from a "deceiver" of men to a "victor of God." The new name, ostensibly a token of physical victory, was to be a perpetual reminder of the completed spiritual renovation that had taken place.

***No more Jacob.*** For the meaning of the name Jacob as "heel catcher" or "deceiver," see on ch. 25:26.

***But Israel.*** A combination of *yisra[h]*, "he fights" or "he rules," from *śarah*, "to fight" or "to rule," and *'El*, "God." Without the accompanying interpretation given by God Himself, the name might be translated "God fights" or "God rules." But the meaning as intended and explained by God is, "he fights with God," or "he prevails over God," or "he rules with God."

The honored name Israel was henceforth to memorialize this night of struggle. As applied to the descendants of Jacob, it implied the transformation of character God sought for in them and their destined role of ruling with God. The name was transferred first to his literal descendants and later to his spiritual posterity, who also were to be victors as he had been (John 1:47; Rom. 9:6).

***Power with God and with men.*** Literally, "contended [*śaritha*, also from *śarah*] with God and with men." This obviously refers to Jacob's nocturnal wrestling with God and to

his protracted struggles with Esau and Laban. From all these he had finally emerged victorious. This was particularly true of his experience the night before, from which he emerged a new man, a victor over deceit, dishonesty, and self-confidence. He was a changed man (see 1 Sam. 10:6, 9).

**29. Thy name.** Perhaps the knowledge that he had met the Lord and talked with Him face to face would either have frightened Jacob or led to such personal elation as to overshadow the far more important lesson he was to learn from this experience. The parting blessing of the Angel was to suffice.

**30. Peniel.** As Jacob had given the name Bethel to the place where he saw God in a dream (ch. 28:19), and Mahanaim to the spot where a host of angels appeared to him on the way (ch. 32:2), he now memorialized the spot of his personal encounter with God by a name meaning the “face of God.” The fact that he had seen God face to face and yet lived was indeed a miracle (see Ex. 33:20; Judges 6:22; 13:22; Isa. 6:5).

**My life is preserved.** That is, “I am preserved, and shall be preserved.” These words echo Jacob’s new-found new-found faith. Whatever might befall him, so long as it be within the will of God, he was confident that a divine hand would preserve him from all evil. Even the things that seemed, at the time they occurred, to be against him, proved to be providential (ch. 42:36). Peniel was the turning point of Jacob’s life.

**31. Penuel.** Some expositors have suggested that Penuel was the original name of the place, and that Jacob changed it by the alteration of one vowel to Peniel. More likely, however, Penuel is an old form of the same word. The name appears again in Judges 8:8, 9, 17; 1 Kings 12:25, and also in an Egyptian list of Palestinian city names. Its exact location has not been definitely determined. Some scholars have identified it with the *Tulul edh-Dhahab*, on the Jabbok, 7 mi. east of the Jordan. Others seek it somewhat farther to the east.

**He halted.** Like Paul, who centuries later bore a “thorn” in his flesh (2 Cor. 12:7), Jacob departed from the scene of the supreme experience of his life bearing a memorial of his conflict and victory there. Though physically lame, probably for the remainder of his life, in Jacob’s unfettered soul he enjoyed the richest blessings of God. Every fight leaves its scars. Like Jacob, every faithful believer, in passing through his own Peniel experience, may expect to bear some reminder of his intense struggle against self, with its inherited tendencies and evil inclinations. Even our Lord Jesus Christ bears the signs of the fierce conflict through which He passed while on earth, and these He will continue to bear for all eternity. Ours will vanish and be forgotten (2 Cor. 4:17; Isa. 65:17). Whereas our scars are the result of our struggle against self, the nailprints in the hands of Christ came through conflict on our behalf with the powers of darkness.

**32. The sinew which shrank.** The meaning of the Hebrew word translated “shrank” is unknown. The rendering of the KJV is based on the LXX, *enarkesen*, “became feeble,” “became numb,” or “was dislocated.” Perhaps it should be translated “hip,” with the phrase reading, “the sinew of the hip.” Orthodox Jews refrain from eating this portion of any animals used for food, but how this part of Jacob’s anatomy came to be identified as the “sinew” that “shrank,” is uncertain. Though not mentioned elsewhere in the OT, the Jewish Talmud definitely regards this custom as a law whose violation is to be punished with several stripes (*Tract Cholin, Mishna, 7*). Since Jews in ancient times did not distinguish clearly just what “sinew” was meant, it is understood today as applying to the interior cord and nerve of the hindquarter of animals killed for food.

The narrative of vs. 24–32 contains three points of special interest to every Jew. It explains why he is called an Israelite, and traces this name to a distant ancestor who wrestled with God that he might obtain it. It points with interest to an otherwise insignificant village, Peniel, where the event took place. Finally, it explains the origin of the custom of not eating the sinew designated, but rather of regarding it with awe.

### ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

1-32PP 195-203; SR 92-99

2 PP 195; SR 92

4-7PP 196

6, 7 SR 92

8-12SR 93

9-11PP 196

10 SR 97

18, 19 PP 196

23 GC 616

24 EW 284; GC 157, 616; MB 25; SR 407

24, 25 PP 197; SR 94

24-28COL 175; PP 208

25 GC 617; MB 25, 97, 206

26 CSW 116; CT 498; DA 198; FE 232; GC 157, 617, 620; GW 255; MB 25, 206; MM 203; PP 197, 202; Te 243; 1T 144, 151; 4T 444, 537

26-28SR 95

28 FE 232; GC 617; MB 207; PP 198; 4T 528

28, 29 Ed 147

29, 30 SR 95

30 DA 107; GC 622; 4T 444

31 MB 97

### CHAPTER 33

1 *The kindness of Jacob and Esau at their meeting. 17 Jacob cometh to Succoth. 18 At Shalem he buyeth a field, and buildeth an altar called El-elohe-Israel.*

**He divided the children.** The reason for this measure is not clear. Jacob either put Rachel and Joseph at the rear for reasons of security, or to introduce his favorite wife and her son to Esau last. Again, it may be that social custom prescribed such an arrangement. The previous division of the caravan into two camps (ch. 32:7, 8) may have been abandoned as unnecessary after his experience the preceding night (see on ch. 32:30). Or it may be that the “people” mentioned in ch. 32:7, 8 were the servants and shepherds and not his wives and children, whom he kept with himself. The immediate family would thus be joined to one of the two bands, or may have been separate from both.

**3. Bowed himself.** This Oriental custom is attested in the Amarna Letters of the 14th century B.C., in which Palestinian princes wrote an Egyptian king that they fell down before Pharaoh’s feet, either “seven times,” or “seven times and another seven times,” or possibly “seven times seven times.” Seven bows before a superior seem to have been considered a sign of perfect humility and unqualified submission. By this manifestation of deference, Jacob hoped to win the heart of his brother. It represented complete abandonment of any claim to special privileges previously secured by treachery.

**4. Esau embraced him.** At the sight of his twin brother, Esau was carried away by natural feelings of brotherly affection. Even if there had still been malice in Esau's heart, it was overcome by Jacob's humility. Realizing that he had nothing to fear from Jacob, he allowed free rein to the natural emotions of his heart.

**5. Saw the women and the children.** During the silent embrace of the long-separated brothers, Jacob's 4 wives and 12 children had come near.

**8. All this drove.** Though he knew quite well the purpose of the several droves (ch. 32:18), Esau nevertheless inquired concerning them. With obvious Oriental courtesy, he refused to accept them until urgently persuaded to do so. The "roving life" which so well suited his nature had procured for him such wealth and power that his own earthly possessions were no doubt equal to those of his brother. Esau was friendly enough toward Jacob, but there was nothing in his manner comparable to the humility of his brother. Jacob addressed Esau as "my lord," while Esau answered him as "my brother."

**10. I have seen thy face.** Esau's friendly greeting called to mind the divine promise so recently accorded Jacob, and in Esau's face he could read its gracious fulfillment. These words of Jacob reflect his profound gratitude for the obvious Presence that attended him on his way (see ch. 32:30). How happy the man who recognized Providence at his side day by day (Job 33:26; Ps. 11:7)!

**11. My blessing.** These words were well chosen and forceful. Can they have been an allusion to the blessing Jacob had snatched from Esau 20 years before? It was most important to Jacob that Esau accept his present, for in so doing Esau, according to the custom of the time, would express his acceptance of that which the present represented—the apology of Jacob. In the Orient a present received by a superior assures to the giver the friendship and assistance of the recipient. If it is rejected, he has everything to fear.

**12. Let us go.** Esau assumed that Jacob would proceed immediately to Hebron (ch. 35:27), the abode of their father Isaac, and proposed to accompany Jacob on his way. But Jacob politely declined both this offer and the escort later suggested. The latter was unnecessary; the former would mean an intolerably slow pace for Esau. This refusal did not spring from any feeling of distrust; the reasons given were no mere pretext. He needed no military guard, for he knew that he was defended by the hosts of God, and he could not travel as fast as Esau would want to go. Furthermore, he would be free to camp wherever he might choose and remain there until ready to move on. He would thus enjoy complete freedom of action.

**14. Until I come.** Not that Jacob intended to go directly to Seir, but rather an expression of his desire to see Esau again and to continue on friendly terms with him. Certainly this was not a willful deception for the purpose of getting rid of Esau. Jacob's destination was not the land of Seir, but Canaan, probably Hebron, where his father Isaac then lived. Thence he may have thought of paying Esau a visit, but whether he ever did so we do not know. The brothers next met, as friends, at their father's funeral (ch. 35:29).

**17. Succoth.** Meaning "booths" or "folds" made of twigs woven together. Succoth, in the valley of the Jordan (Joshua 13:27), was later allotted to the tribe of Gad. It has been tentatively identified with the hill *Deir'alla*, near the mouth of the river Jabbok.

How long Jacob remained in Succoth is not known. The fact that he erected a "house," which none of the earlier patriarchs seem to have done, suggests that he must have lived there for several years. His reasons for doing so are likewise unknown to us. Good pasture and a sparse population may have influenced him in this decision.

Commissioned by God to return to the land of his fathers (ch. 31:3), Jacob most likely found an early opportunity to visit his aged father. At that time he may also have paid a visit to his brother in Seir, as he had promised.

**18. *Jacob came to Shalem.*** In considering *shalem* a place name the KJV follows the LXX, the Vulgate, and other later versions. The word is, however, an adverb signifying “peacefully” or “safely,” and is equivalent to the phrase “in peace” of ch. 28:21, to which it seems to be an allusion. What Jacob had requested as he made his vow at Bethel 20 years before was now fulfilled (PP 204). He had returned to the land of his nativity.

***A city of Shechem.*** If *shalem* is taken as the name of a place, then Shechem would refer to the person of v. 19 and ch. 34:2, the son of Hamor the Hivite. But if *shalem* means “whole,” or “safe and sound,” the clause should be rendered, “Jacob came safely [safe and sound] to the city of Shechem.” It is not necessary to assume that Shechem received its name from Shechem, the son of Hamor, since it was already in existence as a town in Abraham’s time (ch. 12:6). An Egyptian inscription describes a military campaign against the city in the 19th century B.C. It is more likely that Shechem, the son of Hamor, was named after the city.

**19. *Shechem.*** Hamor is here referred to as Shechem’s father in anticipation of subsequent events involving both of them. It was on the “parcel of a field” purchased from the Shechemites that Jacob dug the well where the memorable conversation took place between Jesus and the Samaritan woman (John 4:6).

***An hundred pieces of money.*** The *qešitah* is a monetary unit mentioned elsewhere only in Joshua 24:32 and Job 42:11. Apparently, it fell into disuse soon after the conquest of Canaan by the Israelites, for it is never mentioned in the later books of the Bible. Some commentators have suggested that it may have had the value of ten shekels, but this is only a guess. Its value is unknown.

By this purchase Jacob demonstrated his faith in the promise that Canaan was to be his home. Appropriately, this piece of land later fell to the lot of the descendants of his favorite son, Joseph, whose bones were buried here (Joshua 24:32). According to tradition, this piece of land was on the plain that extends from the southeastern opening of the valley of Shechem. Here Jacob’s well (John 4:6) is still pointed out, and Joseph’s tomb a little to the north of it. The latter structure is of Mohammedan origin, as are the traditions concerning it.

**20. *An altar.*** Like his father Abraham, Jacob here erected his own first altar upon entering the land of Canaan (ch. 12:7). It was probably with that former altar in mind that Jacob selected this site.

***El-elohe-Israel.*** It has been suggested that this name means “[dedicated] to the God of Israel,” taking the first two letters of the Hebrew to be the preposition *’al*, “to.” Since ancient times, however, it has been interpreted, “The [mighty] God, [is] the God of Israel.” This would set the altar apart as a memorial to the mercy and the prospering hand of the Lord in returning him safely to the land of his fathers after more than 20 years’ absence.

## ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

4 PP 198  
11 SR 97  
13, 14 MH 374  
14 1T 388  
16 PP 207  
18-20PP 204

## CHAPTER 34

1 *Dinah is ravished by Shechem. 4 He sueth to marry her. 13 The sons of Jacob offer the condition of circumcision to the Shechemites. 20 Hamor and Shechem persuade them to accept it. 25 The sons of Jacob upon that advantage slay them, 27 and spoil their city. 30 Jacob reproveth Simeon and Levi.*

**1. Dinah.** Dinah, as yet the only daughter of Jacob (PP 204), could not have been more than five or six years old when the family left Haran, since she was not born until after Leah's sixth son (ch. 30:21). She had possibly reached the age of 14 or 15 when the sordid event described in this chapter took place. It is apparent, therefore, that some eight or more years had passed since Jacob's return to Canaan (see on ch. 33:17). If the events narrated in chapters 34 to 37 are presented in chronological order, as they seem to be, Dinah cannot have been much older than 15 at the time, because Joseph, who was about the same age as Dinah (ch. 30:21–24), was only 17 when sold into slavery by his brothers (ch. 37:2). The fact that she went out unaccompanied would seem to indicate that she was still regarded at home as a child.

**The daughters of the land.** The Jewish historian Josephus mentions an old tradition to the effect that the Shechemites were engaged in festivities (*Antiquities* i. 21. 1), and that Dinah wanted to join the girls of Shechem in their round of pleasure. The language implies the paying of a friendly visit, possibly even that Dinah was in the habit of associating with the girls of Shechem.

There is ever great danger in idle association with people of the world. Dinah was curious to know the ways and customs of the surrounding people. This led to unguarded intimacy with them and ended in her disgrace. Her danger came from seeking to be free from parental control and supervision, and from disregarding the admonition to remain separate from idolaters and their evil habits. "Bad company ruins good morals" (1 Cor. 15:33, RSV). The inhabitants of Canaan were to the family of Jacob what the present world is to the Christian. What is called "seeing life" may prove, in many cases, to be flirting with death. Familiarity with sin blunts the senses and increases the danger of temptation.

**2. Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite.** The Hivites were a Canaanite tribe (see ch. 10:17). From what we know of Canaanite morals, Shechem's conduct was by no means unusual, and Dinah paid in full the penalty for her unwise independence in associating with worldly youth.

**3. Spake kindly unto the damsel.** Literally, "he spoke to the heart for the maiden," that is, he sought to console her for what had happened and to win her affections. It seems that although Dinah had intentionally gone to the city alone, she did not consent to all that happened there. She was now in the house of the Shechem, where she was found when Simeon and Levi sacked the city a few days later (v. 26).

**5. Jacob heard.** Information concerning Dinah's experience must have reached her father indirectly, since she herself remained in Shechem's house (v. 26).

**Held his peace.** Jacob's silence was probably due to a combination of sorrow, caution, and perplexity. He had learned to be prudent rather than to act upon impulse. The seriousness of the predicament was certain to affect the interests of the entire household, and called for united counsel and decision. To refuse the marriage proposal would be to incur the illwill of the Shechemites; to accept it would be an open violation of the principle of nonassociation with the heathen (see chs. 24:3, 6; 26:35). Yet Dinah was with Shechem, and how was he to secure her return? Had Jacob foreseen the tragic course of action some of his sons were to pursue upon learning of the affair, he would probably have taken things into his own hands and acted at once. As it was, however, he did better in thus "ruling his spirit" than did his sons when they took the city (Prov. 16:32).

**7. The men were grieved.** Literally, "made themselves furious." The second expression, "they were very wroth," reads literally, "it burned to them greatly." Their passionate anger was beyond control (cf. 1 Sam. 15:11; 2 Sam. 19:43). How the men must have felt can be understood from the fact that modern Arabs feel more dishonored by the seduction of a sister than by the infidelity of a wife. A man, they say, may divorce his wife, and she is then no longer his, but a sister or daughter ever remains a sister or daughter.

It was therefore proper that they should be grieved and only natural that they should be angry. Their own honor was bound up with that of their sister. They were not so much concerned, however, with the sin committed against God as with the shame that had come upon their family. In this attitude toward the affair lay the source of their great mistake in dealing with it (Gen. 49:7).

**Wrought folly.** "To work folly" became a standing phrase for crimes involving honor, especially for the sins of the flesh (Deut. 22:21; Judges 20:10; 2 Sam. 13:2; etc.), but for others also (Joshua 7:15).

**In Israel.** The name Israel is here applied for the first time to Jacob's household. Later it became the unusual designation for the nation. Some commentators, pointing out that the sons of Jacob were not called either Israel or Israelites until long afterward, think the phrase "in Israel" should be translated "against Israel." This is grammatically permissible, and would imply that the affair was a crime against Jacob, who had become Israel, "a prince of God."

**8. Hamor communed.** Hamor, Shechem's father, had come to ask Jacob for his daughter (v. 6), but since Jacob's sons reached home at the same time (v. 7), he spoke to them also. The father and brothers of a maiden were considered her legal guardians (see ch. 24:50).

**9. Make ye marriages.** The absence of any apology for Shechem's seduction of Dinah is no indication of her consent, but rather of the low moral standards of the Canaanite prince. He saw in such conduct no particular wrong, at least when his son was willing to marry the girl he had seduced.

**10. Dwell with us.** Hamor proposed a policy of intermarriage between Jacob's family and the Shechemites. He was ready, also, to make concessions in regard to the lease of land so that the newcomers might live, move about, and trade freely in the region. Various friendly overtures were made, both by the father as a politician, in favor of intermarriage between the families in general, and by the son as a lover, that he might obtain the girl. To their pagan minds, an exclusive policy in this respect was unthinkable. In the unbelieving spirit of the world they sought to break down what they considered a

narrow attitude. The inducements they offered would, under similar circumstances, appeal to them, and all too often such prospects entice the professed people of God into bartering away their sacred scruples.

**13. *This sons of Jacob.*** Attractive as the offers of the prince of Shechem were, they were declined by Jacob's sons, who now took the initiative in discussing their sister's proposed marriage (see ch. 24:50). To accept the proposals would have been to violate the sacred principles of their call as a family and to sacrifice the promises of God for worldly gain.

**15. *In this will we consent.*** Their rejection of Hamor's proposal was right, to be sure, but their procedure was just as certainly wrong. In plotting murder under the protecting cloak of religious scruples, Jacob's sons were guilty of hypocrisy and cruelty. Their hypocrisy consisted in professing to accept the proposition of Hamor when they had no intention of doing so, on condition that the Shechemites accept the seal of God's holy covenant. They knew that if the Shechemites should submit to circumcision it would be a mere form on their part. Their proposal was, finally, conceived in a spirit of cruel revenge.

In later years submission to the rite of circumcision by a non-Jew was considered as indicating acceptance of the Jewish faith and as bringing its recipient under the bond of the covenant, that is, it legally made over a Gentile into a Jew (see Acts 15:5; Gal. 6:12). If acceptance of the sign of the covenant on the part of the Shechemites had meant conversion to the true God, then all objections to intermarriage would of course have disappeared.

**20. *The men of their city.*** The condition proposed by Jacob's sons seemed reasonable to the two suitors, and they were willing to submit forthwith to it. First, however, they went to the gate of Shechem, the place of public assembly, to lay the matter before the men of the town. Their graphic description of the wealth of Jacob and his family, and the advantages which they might anticipate from uniting with them, elicited ready assent to the plan. Generally, the common people can be counted on to follow the suggestions of strong-willed and popular leaders. This was true when Jeroboam inaugurated. This was true when Jeroboam inaugurated the worship of the golden calves at Dan and Bethel. In fact, throughout the history of Israel the people tended to follow the lead of the king. Similarly, when Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed, many Corinthians were likewise converted to Christianity (Acts 18:8).

**22. *Only herein will the men consent.*** Prominence was given by Hamor to those considerations that were in early reality secondary, whereas the main point, circumcision, was mentioned incidentally as a trivial condition to which there could be no reasonable objection. The prospect of material gain is ever an effective avenue of approach to worldly-minded men. Any device that might conceivably add to their own wealth appears desirable (see Isa. 56:11). The men of Shechem felt that they were driving a clever bargain, and stood to gain much and exchange for something of no value or importance.

**25. *On the third day.*** Inflammation and fever usually set in on the third day. While the Shechemites were thus helpless, two of Dinah's older brothers set about their bloody work of revenge. This cruel massacre demonstrates how one sin leads on to another, like flames of fire spreading in a dry thicket (Isa. 9:18). Dissipation led to seduction, and seduction to revenge and murder (see James 1:15). The disgrace that had been brought upon one family made widows and orphans of the women and children of an entire city.

Indirectly, this narrative testifies to the reliability of Moses as a historian. Himself a Levite, he does not spare the character of his progenitor.

**26. Took Dinah.** Perhaps Dinah had been detained by Shechem against her own will. On the other hand, his amorous overtures may have led her to remain willingly with him. To free Dinah from her by which it was accomplished were abductor was certainly honorable, but the means by which it was accomplished were despicable in the extreme. Like their ancestors on both sides of the family, the sons of Jacob manifested a strange admixture of religious zeal and carnal passion, of lofty and low craftiness.

**30. Ye have troubled me.** Jacob administered a stern rebuke for the impulsive deed, stressing the consequences of the crime for himself and his family. Emphasis on this aspect of the affair was calculated to impress his sons with the practical results of rash action. His last word concerning Simeon and Levi (ch. 49:5–7) are evidence of how deeply he abhorred their deed. His fear of reprisal was by no means groundless, and only the mercy of God averted the evil that might have come upon him and his house (ch. 35:5, 6). As for Simeon and Levi, they, like Reuben, forfeited the birthright they might otherwise have enjoyed. Again, warped character stood between men and the possibilities that might otherwise have been theirs.

**31. Should he deal with our sister?** But Jacob's sons did not see things as their father did. To them their reprisal seemed fully justified. They not only vindicated themselves but implied that their father was less concerned for his daughter than they had been for her as their sister. The word "harlot," *zanah*, signifying prostitution for hire, is here used for the first time in the Bible. This passage shows that prostitution

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This narrative forms a dark chapter in the history of the patriarchs. It teaches that a just cause for anger is not an excuse for rash action. Patience under injustice merits divine approval (1 Peter 2:19, 20; 3:17), for vengeance and retribution belong to God alone (Rom. 12:19). He alone has the wisdom to measure it out with justice and season it with mercy. Under certain circumstances anger may be fully justified, but it is to be directed against the sin rather than against the sinner. It has been stated that the only anger without sin is anger against sin (Eph. 4:26). Anger against one's fellow men disqualifies the angered person from exercising unbiased judgment (see Matt. 7:1, 2).

### ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

1-31PP 204, 205, 237

1 PP 204

19 PP 238

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<sup>8</sup>Nichol, F. D. (1978). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary : The Holy Bible with exegetical and expository comment*. Commentary Reference Series (Ge 26:1). Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association.

## CHAPTER 35

1 *God sendeth Jacob of to Beth-el.* 2 *He purgeth his house of idols.* 6 *He buildeth an altar at Beth-el.* 8 *Deborah dieth at Allon-bachuth.* 9 *God blesseth Jacob at Beth-el.* 16 *Rachel travaileth of Benjamin, and dieth in the way to Edar.* 22 *Reuben lieth with Bilhah.* 23 *The sons of Jacob.* 27 *Jacob cometh to Isaac at Hebron.* 28 *The age, death, and burial of Isaac.*

**1. Go up to Beth-el.** Jacob feared that the treacherous massacre of the Shechemites by Simeon and Levi would lead to reprisals on the part of other Canaanite tribes in the vicinity. The aging patriarch seems to have reflected on the horrible deed and its expected consequences without knowing what to do or where to turn. In his perplexity God appeared once more and instructed him as to what course of action he should take to protect his family. How happy Jacob must have been for the assurance that the same divine arm that had shielded him against the anger of Laban and the enmity of Esau would continue to protect and preserve him.

**2. Put away the strange gods.** The prospect of meeting with God at Bethel led to a thorough work of reform. There was much to be done before Jacob and his household were ready to face the Lord (see Amos 4:12; 1 John 3:3). Out of consideration for his wives Jacob had tolerated the presence of idols in their tents. These strange gods probably included the teraphim Rachel had stolen from her father (Gen. 31:19), the images of his servants, and others which may have come into the possession of his sons with the spoils of Shechem.

**Be clean, and change your garments.** Since the directives issued by Jacob to the members of his household resemble so closely those later issued at Sinai (Ex. 19:10), it seems that Jacob acted either upon specific instructions from God or upon a procedure he had learned from his father. The outward cleansing of the body and the change to other garments symbolized the moral and spiritual purification of the mind and heart (see Isa. 64:6; 61:10). The service of God is not to be entered upon without due preparation (see Luke 14:28).

**3. Let us arise.** It seems that Jacob had found residence in the vicinity of Shechem so pleasant and satisfactory that he had delayed paying his vows made to God at Bethel (ch. 28:20–22). The situation resulting from the horrible crime of his sons had once more made him conscious of his need of closer fellowship with God and more careful obedience to His will. The move to Bethel was well calculated to remind him of his past life and to draw him and his family closer to God.

**Who answered me.** A clear reference to answered prayer. If the experience at Bethel is meant, Jacob must have prayed before he slept that night. If it refers to the experience at the Jabbok, it was the prayer recorded in ch. 32:9–12. The patriarchs were evidently familiar with power of prayer and probably exercised it at fixed times, in full confidence that God hears and answers the petitions of His faithful servants (see ch. 24:12, 26, 52, 63).

**4. All their earrings.** Not only were the actual idols delivered to Jacob for removal from the household, but also all their jewelry. These things would have been a barrier to acceptance with God at Bethel. Whether the earrings were simply ornaments, or amulets, as some commentators think, is not clear. The wisest procedure for any child of God is to

follow the example of Jacob's wives and servants and put all such ornaments away (1 Tim. 2:9; 1 Peter 3:3).

The obedience of the members of Jacob's household in carrying out his directives is truly commendable. Apparently, they felt that the removal of the strange gods and all distracting ornaments was needed if God was to be sincerely worshiped. Later, an explicit law was given enjoining upon Israel as a nation the prohibition of other gods than Jehovah.

***Hid them under the oak.*** The complete disposal of both images and ornaments was a wise procedure; otherwise they might again have become a source of temptation. For anyone who sincerely loves the Lord, the only wise course to follow is to separate completely from besetting temptations. All modern objects of idolatry, including ornaments worn to the glory of self rather than God, are best not even preserved as keepsakes. In an unexpected moment the temptation to use them again may prove too strong to resist.

Whether the oak under which Abraham once pitched his tent (ch. 12:6, Heb.), the one under whose shade Joshua afterward erected a memorial pillar (Joshua 24:26), the oak of the sorcerers (Judges 9:37, Heb.), and the oak of the pillar at Shechem (Judges 9:6, Heb.) all refer to the same tree, the one under which Jacob buried the images and earrings, is not known. It is not at all improbable, however, that these texts do refer to the same tree, one that must have been a landmark.

**7. *El-beth-el.*** The nearby Canaanite city, henceforth known among the Hebrews as Bethel, was then called Luz (see on ch. 28:19). The form in which the name here appears has ever posed a problem to translators and commentators. Some have rendered this passage, he "called the place of God Beth-el." Others have suggested that the first "El," God, may not have been in the original text, but represents a copyist's error. The fact that it is missing in the LXX, Vulgate, and Syriac versions lends weight to this possibility. However, in view of the name of El-elohe-Israel, given to the altar erected at Shechem (ch. 33:20), it would not seem altogether strange to find Jacob naming the place of the altar near Luz, "God of Beth-el." By this he may have meant, "[Dedicated to] the God of Beth-el," that is, to the One who had appeared to him there on his flight to Haran. In calling Jacob to leave Padan-aram, God had identified Himself to Jacob as "the God of Beth-el" (ch. 31:13). It is most likely, therefore, that Jacob dedicated the altar with this in mind, in token of the fact that he had now reached the spot referred to by God in the command to return.

**8. *Deborah.*** Meaning "bee" (see ch. 24:59). She must have been greatly advanced in age. Jacob had been born 20 years after his mother's marriage and was now more than 100 years old. Since Deborah had left Padan-aram with Rebekah, she was now possibly 150 years of age. However, this would not have been considered extraordinary in the time of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who died at the ages of 175, 180, and 147 years respectively.

That Deborah had become a member of Jacob's household may be accounted for by supposing that Rebekah had sent her to Haran, or that she had left the home of Isaac after Rebekah's death.

**9. *God appeared unto Jacob.*** This was a visible manifestation in contrast to the audible one at Shechem (v. 1). The word "again," with the additional clause, "when he came out of Padan-aram," implies an earlier revelation. This may be a reference to the

first appearance of God to Jacob at Bethel in a dream. If so, the word “again” emphasizes the fact that Jacob received two divine manifestations at Bethel, one on his journey to Padan-aram and the second upon his return to the same spot. Support for this view lies in the fact that vs. 11 and 12 repeat the blessing first given to Jacob in his dream at Bethel (ch. 28:13, 14). It is also possible that the appearance of God to him at Peniel is considered by Moses as the first one of the two, which would make two visible revelations of God since his return from Padan-aram. Mention of the change of name from Jacob to Israel on both of these occasions favors the latter view.

**10. Called his name Israel.** In the previous appearance at Bethel, God had promised Jacob divine protection in the land of his exile and a safe return home, particularly in view of his call to succeed Isaac as progenitor of the chosen people and of the Messiah. This promise God had fulfilled, and Jacob therefore renewed his vow of faithfulness to God. On His part, God confirmed to him the name Israel, already bestowed at Peniel (ch. 32:28), and with it the promise of a numerous seed and possession of the land of Canaan. In form and substances this promise resembles that made to Abraham (ch. 17:6, 8) more than the previous one given Jacob at Bethel (ch. 28:13, 14). Toward the close of his life Jacob alluded to this second manifestation of God at Bethel (ch. 48:3, 4), which the prophet Hosea mentions in connection with his experience at Peniel (Hosea 12:4).

**13. God went up.** These words clearly suggest that this experience at Bethel was neither a vision nor a strong mental impression of the divine presence, but a real manifestation of God.

**14. Jacob set up a pillar.** Jacob perpetuated the memory of this divine appearance by erecting a memorial stone. The “pillar” erected some 25 or 30 years earlier had probably fallen down and disappeared. The setting up of pillars seems to have been a favorite practice of Jacob (chs. 28:18; 31:45; 35:20). Upon each “pillar” dedicated to God he either poured out a “drink offering” of wine or anointed it with (olive) oil, or both. According to the law of Moses the drink offering consisted of a fourth part of a hin of wine, equivalent to about 1 qt. (Ex. 29:40).

**He poured oil thereon.** As upon the previous occasion (Gen. 28:18). Jacob consecrated this stone by anointing it with oil, and confirmed the name of Bethel (v. 15).

**16. They journeyed from Beth-el.** It is not known how long Jacob remained at Bethel before continuing his journey southward. His departure from Bethel was not in contravention of the command to “dwell” there (v. 1), since that word does not necessarily denote a permanent abode (see Gen. 27:44; Lev. 14:8; 1 Sam. 20:19; etc.). He was to remain there at least long enough to erect the altar and to perform his vow. Having done so, Jacob proceeded to Mamre, where his father then abode.

## **Jacob’s Journey to Join Esau**



**A little way.** Ephrath was apparently another name for Bethlehem (v. 19), which was situated about 15 mi. south of Bethel. The exact meaning of the Hebrew phrase *kibrath-ha'ares*, “a little way,” literally, “a *kibrah* of land,” is uncertain. *Kibrah* is from *kabar*, which means “to be great,” “to be much,” “to be long.” It is thought, however, that a *kibrah* was originally a definite Hebrew measure of distance, now of unknown value. It is clear from the LXX and the Vulgate that at the time of their translation the meaning of the phrase was already lost. Based on the meaning of the root word *kabar*, the RSV, “when they were still some distance from Ephrath,” may come a bit closer than the KJV to the original meaning.

**18. Ben-oni.** The birth of Benjamin marked the fulfillment of Rachel’s expressed wish in the naming of Joseph, that God would give her another son (see on ch. 30:24). As she lay dying in childbirth she named this son Ben-oni, “son of my pain” or “son of my misfortune.” Under the circumstances, from her point of view, it was a most appropriate name.

**Benjamin.** Literally, “son of the right hand.” *Yamin*, “right,” connotes happiness and prosperity, and in Arabic, good fortune as well. A true optimist, Jacob felt that his youngest son should have a name expressing courage and hope, a name that would ever remind him of the joy that came to his heart at the birth of his 12th son rather than his sorrow at the loss of Rachel. The one compensated, in part, for the loss of the other.

**Her soul was in departing.** The idea that Moses here speaks of some immaterial but conscious part of Rachel, which presumably winged its flight to Paradise at the moment

of her death, is without Scriptural foundation. To read such meaning into the text would set it at variance with many other specific statements of Scripture which plainly teach that consciousness ceases completely at death (see Ps. 146:4; Eccl. 9:5, 6, 10; etc.). One of the primary meanings of the word *nephesh*, “soul,” is “life,” as it is translated 119 times (Gen. 9:4, 5; Job 2:4, 6; etc.), or “breath,” as it is rendered in Job 41:21. Genesis 9:5 speaks about the “blood of your lives [*nephesh*],” which makes it clear that the *nephesh* has blood, and that the blood is essential to its existence. The *nephesh* could not, therefore, possibly be an immaterial entity. In Gen. 1:20, 30 the brute creation is said to have a *nephesh*, “life.” The possession of a *nephesh*, then, gives man nothing more than all forms of animal life possess. Certainly no one would wish to claim that at death the “souls” of amoebae, mollusks, and apes go flitting their way to heaven. In fact, in Eccl. 3:19 it is specifically stated that both animals and men have the same “breath,” *ruach*, and that at death the same thing happens to both of them. According to Ps. 146:4 two things happen to a man when he dies:

(1) His “breath,” *ruach*, leaves his body.

(2) “His thoughts perish.” The text under consideration is a simple statement of the fact that Rachel, in her last moments of consciousness and with her last fleeting breath, gave her son the name Ben-oni.

***She died.*** Rachel had cried to her husband, “Give me children, or else I die” (ch. 30:1). Now both came at once.

**19. Ephrath, which is Beth-lehem.** Ephrath, or Ephratah (ch. 48:7), was the original name of the town later called Bethlehem. Occasionally both names were used together, as in Micah 5:2. *Ephratha* was a name derived from *'aphar*, a root meaning “to be light,” “to be fleet,” “to be fertile.” *Ephratha* would thus mean “fertility,” and as applied to the region of Bethlehem would imply the fertility of its soil. Bethlehem means “the house of bread.” Thus the two names are closely related in meaning, for in a land of “fertility” it would be only natural to find an abundance of “bread” in the “house.” It is possible that these two names, Ephrath and Bethlehem, are related to two members of early Hebrew families that settled in the vicinity of Hebron and Bethlehem. Caleb, of the tribe of Judah, married Ephrath, and one of their descendants in the fourth generation was named Bethlehem (see 1 Chron. 2:19, 51, 54).

**20. Rachel's grave.** The stone “pillar” that Jacob erected over Rachel's grave remained a famous landmark for centuries. It was still standing in the times of Moses and of Samuel (1 Sam. 10:2). The chapel *Kubbet Rachil*, “the grave of Rachel,” a very short distance to the north of Bethlehem, may perhaps be located over or near Rachel's actual grave. The present building, of Moslem construction and but four centuries old, marks the traditional spot generally accepted by Moslems, Christians, and Jews.

**21. The tower of Edar.** Continuing southward, Jacob halted just beyond *Migdal* ‘*Eder*, meaning “tower of the flock.” Watchtowers were commonly erected for the convenience of shepherds in guarding their flocks and for protection against approaching enemies (2 Kings 18:8; 2 Chron. 26:10; 27:4). The site of this particular tower is uncertain.

**22. Reuben went.** Since Bilhah was the wife of Reuben's father, this was an act of incest. Under Mosaic law it was punishable by death (Lev. 18:8), and was greatly despised even by pagans (1 Cor. 5:1). Though Bilhah may not have been entirely innocent, Reuben was certainly guilty of a most heinous moral lapse.

**Israel heard it.** Following these words the Hebrew text has a gap which led the ancient Jewish rabbis to comment, "There is a hiatus in the verse." The LXX fills in the gap by adding, "and it appeared evil in his sight." This would seem to represent but inadequately the mingled shame and sorrow, indignation and horror, with which the wickedness of Jacob's eldest son must have filled him. More bitter and crushing was this last blow than even the death of Rachel or the ravishment of Dinah. Jacob's silence may be interpreted as the silence of devout resignation. But when the time came to pronounce a blessing on his sons, the dying Jacob felt that Reuben had by his crime forfeited the birthright, his position of temporal and spiritual leadership in the family (Gen. 49:4; 1 Chron. 5:1). The first was given to Judah, the second to Levi.

**The sons of Jacob.** Called afterward the 12 patriarchs (Acts 7:8), Jacob's sons became heads of numerous families or tribes, and the people that descended from them are called the 12 tribes (Acts 26:7; James 1:1). In ancient times the number 12 was often taken to mean completeness. Twelve princes came from Ishmael (Gen. 25:16). Twelve spies searched the land of Canaan. Our Lord chose 12 apostles. Although there were at times more or less than 12 tribes actually functioning, Scripture usually recognizes 12, omitting the name now of one, then of another, as can be observed on different occasions (see Deut. 33; Eze. 48; Rev. 7; etc.).

**23. The sons of Leah.** The children are here arranged according to their respective mothers, not in the order of their birth. Leah's sons appear first, inasmuch as she was first to give birth (chs. 29:32–35; 30:18–20); then follow the sons of Rachel (chs. 30:22–24; 35:18), the sons of Bilhah, Rachel's maid (ch. 30:4–8), and those of Zilpah (ch. 30:9–13).

**26. Born to him in Padan-aram.** All except Benjamin were born there. In summary style, Moses considers the interval of time between Jacob's departure from and return to the paternal abode as his sojourn "in Padan-aram."

**27. Unto Isaac his father.** Jacob's arrival at Mamre constituted the formal return to his father's house, where he now took up his abode as Isaac's heir. Mamre was in the immediate vicinity of Hebron, formerly Kirjath-arba (see chs. 13:18; 23:2). Isaac lived 23 years after Jacob's departure from Haran.

**28. The days of Isaac.** Jacob was 120 at the death of his father (ch. 25:26). Ten years later, at the age of 130 years, he stood before Pharaoh (ch. 47:9). At that time Joseph had been governor of Egypt for nine years (ch. 45:11). Jacob was therefore 121 years old when Joseph was promoted at the age of 30 (ch. 41:46), and 108 when Joseph was sold at the age of 17 (ch. 37:2). Consequently, Isaac was 168 years of age when Joseph was sold into slavery. Since this tragic event occurred while Jacob was living at Hebron with his aged father (ch. 37:14), Isaac witnessed the grief of Jacob and survived that event for a period of 12 years.

**29. Isaac gave up the ghost.** A better rendition of the Hebrew would be, "Isaac breathed his last," as in the RSV (see on ch. 25:8). It is generally agreed that the death of Isaac is mentioned here out of its chronological order, inasmuch as several of the events narrated in succeeding chapters, particularly chs. 37 and 38, must have happened during his lifetime (see on v. 28). His obituary is inserted in anticipation of his actual death, to

avoid interrupting the history of Joseph. Isaac's death apparently came toward the close of Joseph's three years in prison.

**Esau and Jacob buried him.** Esau and Jacob had been fully reconciled now for about 23 years. It is not strange therefore to find Esau joining Jacob in the last rites for their honored father. Under similar circumstances Isaac and Ishmael had cooperated in the burial of Abraham (ch. 25:9). Isaac was pious and humbly submissive before God, amiable and generous toward his fellow men. In comparison with that of his son Jacob, his own character was by far the more excellent.

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### CHAPTER 36

1 *Esau's three wives.* 6 *His removing to mount Seir.* 9 *His sons.* 15 *The dukes which descended of his sons.* 20 *The sons and dukes of Seir.* 24 *Anah findeth mules.* 31 *The kings of Edom.* 40 *The dukes that descended of Esau.*

**1. The generations of Esau.** This chapter consists essentially of a number of name lists dealing with the descendants of Esau and of Seir the Horite, whose families had intermarried. The first verse is the title given by Moses to the collection as a whole.

**2. Esau took his wives.** The names of Esau's three wives as here given differ from those of the previous list (chs. 26:34; 28:9). In one instance the father's name and nationality vary also.

<i>ch. 26:34</i>		<i>ch. 36:2</i>
Judith, daughter of Beeri the Hittite		Aholibamah, daughter of Anah, daughter of Zibeon the Hivite
Bashemath, daughter of Elon the Hittite		Adah, daughter Elon the Hittite
<i>ch. 28:9</i>		<i>ch. 36:3</i>
Mahalath, daughter of Ishmael, sister of Nebajoth		Bashemath, daughter of Ishmael, sister of Nebajoth

Differences between the two lists are easily accounted for. (1) In harmony with an ancient Oriental custom still followed by the Arabs, a man may be known by different surnames at successive periods of his life, each name being based on some important experience or event. Abram, for instance, became Abraham, Sarai became Sarah, Jacob became Israel, and Esau became Edom (chs. 17:5, 15; 35:10; 25:30). As a rule women received new names at marriage, a custom that would account for the differences in the names of two of Esau's wives. (2) In the case of Judith and Aholibamah, the name of the wife, together with that of her father and his nationality, differs. As a rule childless wives are not mentioned in genealogical lists. It is therefore to be inferred that Judith died childless and Esau married a Hivite woman in her stead (cf. ch. 34:2). Aholibamah means "tent of the high place," Anah, "answering," Adah, "ornament." The name Zibeon may possibly be related to the Hebrew word for hyena, but since he was a Hivite, his name

may not have been Semitic at all. For the meanings of the other names, see the references as listed.

**4. Adah bare.** Five sons (see 1 Chron. 1:35) were born to Esau in Canaan by his three wives named in Gen 36:2, 3. The names are distinctly Semitic and reveal, in part, that Esau still clung in some degree to the religion of his fathers. Eliphaz the name also of one of Job's friends (Job 2:11; etc.), may mean "strength of God." Reuel, meaning "friend of God," was also one of the names of Moses' father-in-law (Ex. 2:18). The meaning of Jeush, though somewhat obscure, may be "whom Jehovah hastens." The same name was afterward given by King Rehoboam to one of his sons (2 Chron. 11:19). Jaalam may mean either "whom Jehovah hides" or "he ascends." Korah means "baldness." A Levite by this name became the father of a famous family of singers (see Ps. 42–49, title).

**6. Esau took his wives.** After subduing the Horites and occupying their territory, the land of Seir, Esau moved his family there and made it his permanent home (see Deut. 2:12, 22). It seems that he did so voluntarily, perhaps on the suggestion of Isaac, since he was either already settled there or at least subduing the region when Jacob returned (Gen. 32:3; 33:14–16). Isaac may have planned that Esau inherit his property, and Jacob the title to the Promised Land, as an arrangement for bringing Jacob home from Haran. After Jacob and Esau had settled their differences near the river Jabbok, this arrangement proved mutually satisfactory.

**Into the country.** Inasmuch as the words "into the country" or "into the land," without an explanation as to what land or country is meant, seem a bit unusual, it may be that the name "Seir" or "Edom" (cf. Gen. 36:16) has been lost from the text. Some versions read, "into the land of Seir." On the other hand, the following phrase may express all that Moses intended to say. The two phrases together would then read, "into a land away from his brother Jacob," as in the RSV.

**9. The generations of Esau.** Through his sons and grandsons, listed in vs. 10–14, Esau became the father of the Edomite nation, whose home was the hill country of Seir. In the cases of Adah and Bashemath, who bore only one son each, the tribes were founded, not by the sons, but by the grandsons; but in Aholibamah's case her three sons were considered the founders.

**11. Teman.** The name later given to a locality in Idumaea (Jer. 49:20), and borne by one of Job's friends (Job 2:11).

**Omar, Zepho, and Gatam, and Kenaz.** Nothing is known about these grandsons of Esau through Adah.

**12. Timna.** Timna was a sister of Lotan the Horite (v. 22); hence, it is apparent that the family of Esau intermarried with the Horites. This may have provided the sons of Esau with a pretext for seizing Horite land and expelling its ancient inhabitants (Deut. 2:12).

**Amalek.** Ancestor of the Amalekites, who attacked the Israelites at Horeb on their way out of Egypt (Ex. 17:8–16). Mention of "the country of the Amalekites" in Gen. 14:7 does not necessarily imply their existence in Abraham's time, but may refer simply to the region inhabited by them when the book of Genesis was written. Balaam's expression "first of the nations" (Num. 24:20) does not represent Amalek as the aboriginal or oldest tribe, but simply as the first heathen tribe to attack Israel, or perhaps the strongest or most warlike of the desert tribes. Had there been an Amalek—and Amalekites—previous to Edom, considering their important role in opposition to Israel at the time of Moses, we

might reasonably expect to find him giving their genealogy, as he does of all others of equal importance to Israel.

At a very early period the Amalekites separated from the other tribes of Edom and formed an independent people, whose home was in the *Negeb*, in the vicinity of Kadesh (ch. 14:7; Num. 13:29; 14:43, 45). As a nomadic tribe, however, they roamed over the northern portion of Arabia Petraea, from Havilah to Shur on the border of Egypt (1 Sam. 15:3, 7; 27:8). One branch of the tribe even penetrated to the heart of Canaan, so that a range of hills in what later became the inheritance of Ephraim bore the name “mount of the Amalekites” (Judges 12:15; 5:14). Those who settled in Arabia seem also, in the course of time, to have separated into several branches, for Amalekite hordes sometimes joined the Midianites and the “children of the east” (Judges 6:3; 7:12), and at other times the Ammonites (Judges 3:13), on invasions into the land of Israel. They were defeated at various times by Saul (1 Sam. 14:48; 15:2–9) and by David (1 Sam. 27:8; 30:1–20; 2 Sam. 8:12), and were finally exterminated by Hezekiah (1 Chron. 4:42, 43).

**13. *Nahath, and Zerah, Shammah, and Mizzah.*** Nothing is known concerning these grandsons of Esau.

**15. *The dukes.*** The Hebrew word *'aluph*, more accurately “prince” or “chief,” was apparently the title taken by Edomite and Horite tribal leaders. Since the related word *'eleph* means “thousand,” some scholars have understood *'aluph* to be a military title meaning “captain of a thousand” (see Jer. 13:21). In postexilic Hebrew the term came to be applied to Jewish chiefs or governors (Zech. 9:7; 12:5). The names of these “dukes” are not primarily place names as some commentators have suggested. They are, rather, the three sons and ten grandsons of Esau already mentioned in Gen. 36:9–14. In both lists (vs. 9–14 and 15–19) Korah appears as a son of Esau (vs. 14 and 18). In the second list (v. 16) Korah appears also as a grandson of Esau (a son of Eliphaz), but not in the first list (v. 11). Otherwise, the two lists are comparable. Korah’s name is not found in v. 15 of the Samaritan Pentateuch, which had a separate existence after the Babylonian exile, but does appear in the LXX, produced in the 3d century B.C. The fact that Korah is not listed as one of the *grandsons* of Esau in 1 Chron. 1:36, but is listed as a *son* (v. 35), confirms the accuracy of the first list of Gen. 36. It appears, therefore, that a copyist’s error has occurred in connection with the Hebrew of Gen. 36:16.

**20. *The sons of Seir.*** The original inhabitants of the land, the Horites, were not cave dwellers as some earlier commentators suggested. Until comparatively recent times it was thought that the word translated “Horite” was derived from *chor*, “cave,” or “hole.” Horite would thus mean “cave man.” In recent years, however, the Hurrians (Horites), known not only to the Bible writers but also to Egyptian (*Charu*), Hittite (*Charri*), and Mesopotamian (*Churru*) scribes, have been rediscovered as a nation. They were scattered far and wide over the ancient East during the second millennium B.C. The Mitannian kingdom of the upper Euphrates region was ruled by Hurrians in the time of Moses. Their language has recently been deciphered, and considerable is now known about Hurrian culture and history.

In the early part of the second millennium B.C. Hurrians must have taken possession of Mt. Seir, where they first appear in the Bible as a people (ch. 14:6). Later, they were partly exterminated and partly subjugated by the descendants of Esau (Deut. 2:12, 22).

Seven sons of Seir, the “Horite,” or Hurrian, are listed once as tribal princes, and again as “dukes.” Seir’s grandsons and two granddaughters, Timna (v. 22) and Aholibamah (v. 25), are also named. Timna was probably the same as the concubine of Eliphaz (v. 12), and Aholibamah was the second wife of Esau (see v. 2).

**24. *Anah that found the mules.*** Moses supposes that the event here recorded was well known. We, however, know nothing more about the story than this verse tells. The meaning of the word *yemin*, translated “mules,” is uncertain. This KJV rendering follows an old Jewish tradition. Jerome, however, translated it in the Vulgate as “hot springs,” and some commentators concur in thinking that Moses here refers to the discovery of hot sulphur springs. Three such springs are known in the general region, one in the *Wadi Zerqa Ma’in*, another in the *Wadi el-Ahsa* to the southeast of the Dead Sea, and a third in the *Wadi Hamad* between Kerak and the Dead Sea.

**29. *The dukes.*** This list repeats the names of Seir’s sons, already given in vs. 20, 21. On the title “duke,” see on v. 15.

**31. *Before there reigned any king.*** This reference to kings of Israel has been pointed to as evidence of post-Mosaic authorship, or at least as a later interpolation from 1 Chron. 1:43. This conclusion is not necessary. It should be remembered that kings had been promised to Jacob, as Moses knew (Gen. 35:11). This promise had not been fulfilled in the time of Moses, whereas Esau’s house had already attained a high degree of political organization. It is therefore entirely consistent that Moses, in whose time eight kings had already reigned over Edom, make this remark.

The difficulty of finding room for 7 “dukes,” all grandsons of Esau (vs. 15–19), 8 kings (vs. 32–39), and 11 additional “dukes” (vs. 40–43) during the time between Esau and Moses, disappears if it be assumed that the kings and dukes were contemporary with one another. This is supported by a comparison of Ex. 15:15 with Num. 20:14. In the latter, Moses negotiated with a king of Edom for permission to pass through his land, but in the former the “dukes” of Edom are mentioned as trembling on account of the miraculous passage of Israel through the Red Sea. Furthermore, it is not necessary to assume that the 11 “dukes” of vs. 40–43 ruled consecutively. Since it is stated that they were dukes “according to their families, after their places,” all, or at least several of them, may have lived in different places at the same time. It is therefore necessary only to find room for 8 successive kings between Esau and Moses, a period of more than 200 years. This would allow an average of 25 years each as compared with 10 years for the kings of Israel and 17 for those of Judah.

It is apparent that the Edomite monarchy was not hereditary, since in no case did a son succeed his father. It was, rather, elective, with the kings chosen, perhaps, by the “dukes.” This would be similar to the situation in the Holy Roman Empire, where each emperor was elected by the princes and electors of the realm. Of the eight kings named, none is known from other sources. Although some of the names, such as Hadad (1 Kings 11:14), recur later, none refer to the individuals here mentioned. A few of the cities mentioned in connection with the kings can be identified, as follows:

**33. *Bozrah.*** A noted city that seems to have been the Edomite capital for a considerable period of time (see Isa. 34:6; 63:1; Jer. 49:13, 22; Amos 1:12). It was on the site of the present village *El Buseira* about 25 mi. southeast of the Dead Sea.

**34. Temani.** This region in northern Idumaea, with its city Teman, has not yet been identified. Jerome preserved a tradition to the effect that it lay only 5 mi. from Petra.

**37. Rehoboth.** Some scholars have identified this with Rehoboth-Ir in Assyria (ch. 10:11), which cannot possibly be correct. Others have located it elsewhere on the Euphrates, inasmuch as the Bible usually designates the Euphrates as “the river.” If this were true, the Edomite king Saul must then have been a foreigner. It is more likely that Rehoboth was either the Idumaeen *Robotha*, whose location is uncertain, or *Er Ruheibeh*, 23 mi. southwest of Beersheba in a valley near *El ‘Arîsh*. In the latter case “the river” would refer to the brook on which the city lay.

**39. Hadar.** Hadar, the last of the eight kings of Edom listed by Moses, was probably the one with whom he dealt to secure permission for passing through his land (Num. 20:14). That Hadar’s wife’s name and the names of his wife’s mother and grandmother are given suggests that Moses was intimately acquainted with him. In contrast to that of the other seven kings, the death of Hadar, recorded in 1 Chron. 1:51, is not mentioned here. This constitutes additional evidence that he was still alive at the time Moses wrote Genesis.

**40. The names.** Not of localities, as some have suggested, but of individuals, perhaps of local chieftains contemporary with Hadar, in the time of Moses.

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### CHAPTER 37

*2 Joseph is hated of his brethren. 5 His two dreams. 13 Jacob sendeth him to visit his brethren. 18 His brethren conspire his death. 21 Reuben saveth him. 26 They sell him to the Ishmeelites. 31 His father, deceived by the bloody coat, mourneth for him. 36 He is sold to Potiphar in Egypt.*

**1. Jacob dwelt in the land.** This statement introduces the period after Isaac’s death. Jacob was now heir to the blessings and promises that accompanied the patriarchal succession.

**2. The generations of Jacob.** Here opens a new section (see chs. 5:1; 6:9; etc.). Although the name of Jacob alone is mentioned in this title, the history of his family is clearly implied, as the following chapters show. During his lifetime whatever experiences came to members of his family are considered part of his family record.

**Joseph, being seventeen.** The events about to be described took place some 11 years after Jacob’s return from Haran, when he had reached the age of 108 years (see ch. 30:25 and on ch. 27:1).

**With the sons of Bilhah.** Joseph was more closely associated with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, who stood nearer to him in age, and who were perhaps less haughty than those of Leah. It may be that Bilhah, who had been his mother Rachel’s maid, cared for Joseph after Rachel’s death.

**Their evil report.** Joseph either reported what he had observed personally or repeated what he had heard about his brothers. This marks the beginning of the bitter hatred that his brothers felt toward him. Joseph was actuated by high ideals, and his sensitive conscience rebelled against the evil deeds of his brothers. His report of these things to Jacob was doubtless with the thought that his father’s influence might lead them to

change their ways, lest dishonor come to the family name as it had in the massacre of the Shechemites.

**3. *Israel loved Joseph.*** Jacob found particular satisfaction in the companionship of Joseph, whose amiability and ideals made him so different from his brothers. Since Jacob had been 91 years old at the birth of Joseph, and Benjamin was not born till a number of years later, he considered Joseph “the son of his old age.”

***A coat of many colours.*** Jacob’s preferential treatment of Joseph reached a climax in the special coat, or tunic, he made for him. The meaning of the word *passim*, “of many colors,” is uncertain. It is used also in 2 Sam. 13:18, 19 to describe the dress of Tamar, the daughter of King David. The LXX, Vulgate, and Syriac rendering, “colorfully dyed,” forms the basis of the translation found in most modern Bibles. A painting on the wall of a nobleman’s tomb at Beni Hasan in Egypt, dating from the time of Abraham, depicts a group of Asiatic men, women, and children, of whom some wore nothing but two-colored loincloths, and some, tunics that reached to the knee but left one shoulder bare. Some of these were of plain white material, but others had blue and red designs. The chief’s garment was especially colorful, and is distinguished from the others by a beautiful design woven into the fabric. The tunic Jacob gave to Joseph may have resembled this one. As pointed out here, however, the word *passim* is of uncertain origin. If, as seems probable, it is the plural of *pas*, “extremity,” it would refer to the hands and the feet. In Dan. 5:5, 24, *pas* is the word translated “part.” Accordingly, then, Joseph’s coat, or tunic, would be one with long sleeves, and one which also reached to his feet. Such a garment would not be suitable to wear while working, and was, furthermore, the kind worn by children of noble rank. The RSV reads, “a long robe with sleeves.” The Hebrew grammatical construction suggests the idea that Jacob not only made one such coat for Joseph but “used to make” them for him. In either case this coat excited the suspicion that Jacob intended to pass by this older children and bestow the birthright upon Joseph. Little wonder that his brothers all hated him (PP 209)!

**4. *They hated him.*** Jacob’s fondness for Joseph was natural, perhaps, since he saw in him not only the child of his beloved Rachel but also an excellence of character which stood in marked contrast to the notorious lives of some of his other sons. Many parents who find themselves in Jacob’s position, drawn to one child more than to another, at least put forth the effort to conceal the preference, which in their inmost hearts they probably feel is wholly justified. But with inordinate and obvious partiality, Jacob made evident his preference for Rachel’s son by presenting him with an expensive and princely garment. As expected, such a mark of esteem was distasteful to his other sons and, had it not been for Joseph’s fundamentally sound character, might have been injurious to Joseph himself.

**5. *Joseph dreamed a dream.*** The coat implied Jacob’s intention of making Rachel’s older son his heir; now, Joseph’s dream was taken as an expression of his own intentions in the matter. They hated him, not only because of the dream, but also for his boldness in telling them about it (v. 8). Though it is not stated that Joseph’s dreams were of God (chs. 20:3–7; 28:12–15), the subsequent history of his life makes it virtually certain that this was so, and that they were not the reflection of any personal ambition on his part. Joseph’s dream shows that Jacob did not limit his pursuits to cattle and sheep raising, but

was also engaged in agriculture, as his father Isaac had been before him (ch. 26:12). Such activity had been implied in Isaac's paternal blessing (ch. 27:28).

**9. Another dream.** If Joseph's first dream had pointed only to supremacy over his brothers, the second extended it to the entire family. That Joseph should have related this dream to his brothers, after seeing how they had reacted to the first one, reveals a decided immaturity of judgment. This dream could only intensify their envy and hatred. Joseph, however, seems to have felt a certain satisfaction in telling his dreams and watching his brothers' envy and anger. Jacob, who was present upon this occasion, administered him a sharp rebuke, partly, perhaps, in surprise, and partly to disavow any collusion on his own part. Though Jacob disapproved of the narration of the dream, he could not avoid being impressed by the way in which it reflected his own thoughts.

Some have questioned the divine origin of the second dream, inasmuch as it seems to have met but partial fulfillment. Neither Rachel nor Leah lived to see the rulership of Joseph's in Egypt (chs. 35:19; 49:31). It is sufficient to note that even Jacob did not take every detail of the dream thus literally, since Joseph's mother was already dead at the time (v. 10). Jacob apparently understood the dream as representative of Joseph's supremacy in a general sense.

**12. His brethren went.** The sons of Jacob seem to have made rather long annual migrations from one pastureland to another, as is often necessary even today. Shechem lies 60 road mi. north of Hebron, and Dothan (v. 17) another 16 mi. to the northwest of Shechem. Use of the northern pasturelands implies that the season was summer or early fall. The dry season began in April and lasted till October (see v. 24). The reason for pasturing the flocks at Shechem may have been the fact that Jacob's family owned property there, secured partly by purchase (ch. 33:19) and perhaps partly by conquest (ch. 34:27). Jacob's sons seem to have felt that they had nothing to fear from the surrounding population (ch. 35:5), who had never taken revenge for their massacre of the Shechemites.

**13. I will send thee unto them.** Jacob was apparently unaware of how keenly his sons hated Joseph, a fact they had been at pains to hide from him. This is evident not only from the fact that he sent Joseph alone to visit them but also from his reaction to their story of this disappearance. He seems never for a moment to have suspected foul play on their part. Jacob's concern for his sons was probably due not alone to their long absence but also to fear that fellow countrymen of the Shechemites may have either taken revenge for the massacre or hindered them in the pasturing of their flocks.

**17. Let us go to Dothan.** Lying about 12 mi. north of Samaria, in the direction of Esdraelon, Dothan was situated on the great caravan road from the north to Egypt. It lay in an oblong plain containing one of the best grazing areas of Canaan, and was therefore well chosen by Jacob's sons. It still bears its ancient name, *Dôtân*. In the time of Elisha it was the scene of a great miracle (see 2 Kings 6:13–19).

**20. Let us slay him.** To men who had slain the males of a whole city, the murder of a single individual could hardly seem a grievous sin. Hatred had developed in their hearts to the point that they were ready to kill their own brother in cold blood. They were far from home and its restraining influences. The "pit" into which they intended to cast his body was one of the cisterns common in Palestine. The story they proposed to tell their father would be entirely credible, for Palestine was a wild country during the second

millennium B.C., and lions, bears, and other animals roamed at will (see Judges 14:5; 1 Sam. 17:34).

**21. Reuben heard it.** Though Reuben had been far from perfect himself (see ch. 35:22), his heart was not so hard as theirs. As the eldest son, he felt a special responsibility for his younger brother, and determined, if possible, to save him from them. The would-be murderers were content, for the moment, to follow Reuben's suggestion. Weak and vacillating though he was (ch. 49:4), Reuben appears to have been the only one of Joseph's brothers in whom the natural affection of a brother was not completely lost. Though he lacked the courage to resist openly their stronger wills, he at least made a timid attempt to save Joseph's life. Reuben's plan was commendable as far as it went, but it failed because of his lack of determination and vigilance.

**24. Cast him into a pit.** Adding insult to injury, they stripped Joseph and threw him into a dry cistern nearby. It seems that cisterns were often put to such a use (see Jer. 38:6). The thought that he would die a painful death by starvation apparently satisfied their vindictiveness, and they paid no heed to his piteous appeals (ch. 42:21, 22).

**25. Sat down to eat.** Perhaps with a secret feeling of satisfaction, if not of exultation, and with infinite indifference, the heartless brothers sat down to eat.

**A company of Ishmeelites.** The word translated "company" in the KJV means a band of travelers, especially of merchants, and may therefore appropriately be translated "caravan." The Arabs, descending from Ishmael, occupied the desert regions of Arabia east of Egypt and northward in the general direction of Assyria. Biblical and secular records reveal that the Arabs carried on a flourishing trade with Egypt. That some of Ishmael's descendants had already become a trading people is not surprising, for it was now about 180 years since Ishmael's birth, and his family had no doubt grown rapidly.

**From Gilead.** Inasmuch as Dothan lay on a major trade route, it was only natural that caravans should pass by from time to time. The route from Gilead in Transjordan crossed the Jordan in the neighborhood of Beth-shan, at the eastern end of the Esdraelon valley, followed the valley to Jenin, then turned south to cross the Carmel range. Passing through the plain of Dothan, it continued southward by way of Er Ramle and Gaza toward Egypt.

**Spicery.** The word translated "spicery" is understood by some to be tragacanth gum, which is obtained from bushes of the genus *Astragalus*. It has also been identified with the dried red blossoms of the *naqawa* plant, or the resin of the cistus, or rockrose. Whatever the origin of the "spicery," or gum, it was probably used either as an ingredient of incense or as a cosmetic.

**Balm.** The Hebrew word translated "balm" probably refers to the gum of the mastic tree and the terebinth.

**Myrrh.** The meaning of the word thus translated is uncertain. It is usually understood to refer to labdanum, an aromatic gum exuded by the leaves of the cistus, or to what is known today as myrrh. Others think it to be the resinous bark of the mastic tree.

**26. Judah said.** Judah saw in the appearance of the Ishmaelite caravan a means for permanently disposing of Joseph without taking his life. This would effectively eliminate him from further competition in the contest for the birthright. The brothers reasoned, no doubt, that Joseph had done little to increase the family fortune, and they saw no reason why he should fall heir to the wealth their hands had produced. Judah's proposal proved to be a most welcome one to all the brothers, who by now, after reflecting upon their

original impulse to kill Joseph, found themselves somewhat reluctant to lay their own hands upon him.

**28. Merchantmen.** The traders are called “Ishmeelites” in vs. 25, 27, and 28, and “Midianites” in vs. 28 and 36. This has been explained by assuming that both groups were represented in the caravan, or that the two names were used synonymously in common parlance. In either case, only one caravan was involved in the transaction (see PP 211).

**Twenty pieces of silver.** The price paid for Joseph, 20 pieces or shekels of silver, was much less than the average price of a slave. According to Ex. 21:32, this price seems to have been 30 shekels, in all probability the retail price of the Ishmaelites expected to receive for Joseph in Egypt. Naturally, they would pay less for him. Twenty shekels would be approximately 8 oz. (228 gr.) of silver (see on ch. 20:16).

The selling of Joseph was an overt violation of the principle that no man has the right to subject another to involuntary servitude (cf. Lev. 25:39–43). It demonstrates clearly the extent of moral perversion that had taken place in the hearts of Joseph’s brothers. Those who sold Joseph demonstrated thereby that they had utterly lost all natural affection. Joseph’s sale into slavery is the first recorded example in the Bible of such a transaction.

Slave dealers have imitated but seldom surpassed the cruelty of which Joseph’s brothers were guilty, for it was not simply a fellow creature they sold, but their own brother. Nevertheless, divine Providence overruled the evil designs of these calloushearted men. The coming of the caravan at this precise time was Heaven’s appointed means of saving Joseph from their malicious plot on his life, and the saving of his life became, in turn, the means by which their lives were saved (ch. 45:4, 5).

Though Joseph could not know at the time, Providence was guiding his footsteps. How often life’s darkest roads lead to its brightest prospects! Let us ever be willing to follow on wherever God may lead (see Rom. 8:28, 35–39).

**29. Reuben returned.** The whole transaction took place in Reuben’s absence and without his knowledge. Having persuaded his brothers to consent to cast Joseph alive into a pit, he had left them before Joseph arrived, lest they should discern his intention to restore Joseph to his father (PP 211). The rending of one’s clothing was an ancient custom expressive of grief and sorrow (see Gen. 37:34; 44:13; 2 Sam. 13:31; 2 Kings 18:37; Job 1:20).

**30. The child is not.** Reuben’s helpless outcry revealed his secret intention to save Joseph. Now he was at a loss to know how he, as the eldest, was to give an account to Jacob for the disappearance of Joseph.

Reuben’s intentions were commendable and his plan well laid; nevertheless he failed. Eventually, however, the day came when Reuben’s brothers were forced to listen to his vivid reproof for this evil hour and its hideous deed (ch. 42:22). Joseph was to be delivered, but not by Reuben. The dross must be purged from his life through suffering (cf. Heb. 2:10) ere he might enjoy the honor for which Heaven destined him. In the providence of God, the cross must often precede the crown, and affliction become the lot of individuals in order that many may benefit and that the gracious purpose of God may finally prevail.

**31. They took Joseph’s coat.** Though Reuben was beside himself with grief and perplexity, his ruthless and unrelenting brothers were at no loss for a plan. Apparently,

however, they had neither the brazen boldness to carry through their scheme in person nor the courage to witness their father's first outburst of grief. Hence they arranged for another, probably a slave, who knew nothing more of the matter than what he was told, and so could not reveal their dark secret, to carry the bloody coat to Jacob in Hebron.

**33. *Rent in pieces.*** Jacob's sons had not only besmeared the coat with blood but had also doubtless torn it to shreds to make the evidence of Joseph's misfortune more vivid and their story more credible. All too eloquently the rent coat bore its mute testimony to the fate that had presumably overtaken the youth. The object that once symbolized Jacob's unwise favoritism for Joseph now came to represent the undoing of both father and son.

**34. *Mourned for his son.*** Convinced of Joseph's death by the undeniable evidence presented, Jacob entered upon a period of mourning, according to the custom of ancient times. His ordinary garments rent, he dressed in sackcloth, the usual garb of mourners (2 Sam. 3:31; Neh. 9:1; Esther 4:1). This was a coarse, thick haircloth, of which corn sacks were also made. In Gen. 42:25 the same word is translated "sack." In cases of extreme mental distress the "sackcloth" was worn next to the skin (1 Kings 21:27).

**35. *Rose up to comfort him.*** When Jacob had mourned for Joseph longer than was customary, and his intense grief seemed unassuaged, his children became concerned. The callous criminals became tender comforters, and the would-be murderers sought to mollify the grief they had cruelly brought upon their father.

It is apparent that Jacob had other daughters besides Dinah, unless daughters-in-law are meant here (cf. Ruth 1:11, 12). Since Hebrew terms designating family relationships are often used in a more general sense than is true today, it is often uncertain what the words "son," "daughter," etc., really mean. It seems clear from Gen. 46:7, however, that these were Jacob's own "daughters."

***The grave. She'ol.*** This word is peculiar to Hebrew, is not found in any related Semitic language, and is of unknown origin. It is invariably used to designate the place to which the dead go.

**36. *The Midianites sold him.*** On the interchangeable use of the terms "Midianites" and Ishmeelites here and in vs. 25, 27, and 28, see on v. 28.

***Unto Potiphar.*** This name, though long recognized by Egyptologists to be a good Egyptian personal name, was not found until the 1930's on the monuments, where it appears, in Egyptian, as *P'a-di-p'a-Re'*. It means "the one whom [the god] *Re'* has given," and is comparable to the Hebrew personal names *'Elnathan*, "God has given," and *Yonathan*, "Jehovah has given."

***An officer of Pharaoh.*** The Hebrew word translated "officer" is *saris*, meaning, first of all, "eunuch." Oriental rulers made use of eunuchs in various important positions, especially as officers in charge of the royal harem. The fact that Potiphar was married has been taken as evidence that the term *saris* means more than "eunuch" would imply in the strict sense of the word. This may be true, but stands without proof, since even eunuchs may have been married.

Regarding the title "Pharaoh," see on ch. 12:15.

***Captain of the guard.*** The word translated "guard" is from the Hebrew *ṭabbachim*. In the singular it means "butcher" or "cook," and signifies the one who slaughters, cooks,

and serves the food (see 1 Sam. 9:23, 24). Here, in the plural, it refers to executioners. Potiphar, the “captain,” was probably chief of the executioners, or perhaps of the bodyguard of Pharaoh.

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1-36PP 208-214, 332; SR 100-101

2 ML 30

3, 7 PP 209

7, 8 SR 100

8-10PP 210

9-11SR 101

12-18PP 210

19-28PP 211

28 5T 321

29-35PP 212

31-33PP 238

36 PP 214

### CHAPTER 38

1 *Judah begetteth Er, Onan, and Shelah.* 6 *Er marrieth Tamar.* 8 *The trespass of Onan.* 11 *Tamar stayeth for Shelah.* 13 *She deceiveth Judah.* 27 *She beareth twins, Pharez and Zarah.*

**1. *It came to pass.*** This chapter gives the origin of the three leading families of Judah, the future princely tribe of Israel. It shows also that the sons of Jacob, forgetting the sacred vocation of their race, were in danger of perishing in the sins of Canaan. Had not God in mercy interposed to bring about the removal of the whole house of Jacob to Egypt, the chosen race might have succumbed to the corrupting influence of Canaanite customs. Thus, ch. 38 is an integral part of the early history of Israel.

The phrase “it came to pass” has been taken by many commentators to refer to the story of the sale of Joseph recorded in the preceding chapter. The term, however, is so general that it cannot be limited to a particular event; more likely, it refers to the whole period of Jacob’s history in Palestine. Chronological considerations make it almost necessary to place this narrative at the time Joseph was still in his father’s house.

Being the fourth son of Leah, Judah was certainly not more than 3 years or so older than Joseph, which would make him about 20 years old at the time Joseph was sold (see ch. 37:2 and on ch. 30:24). Between Joseph’s sale as a slave and Jacob’s migration to Egypt lay 22 years (cf. chs. 41:46; 45:6), so that Judah was about 42 years old when the family moved to Egypt. At that time he not only had the three sons, mentioned in ch. 38, but was apparently a grandfather as well, as ch. 46:12 seems to imply. If this be correct, his sons Er, Onan, and Shelah must have been born before Joseph was sold, since they themselves had already reached marriageable ages when the events involving Tamar occurred, and Tamar’s son Pharez had two sons of his own when the family moved to Egypt. These observations oblige us to conclude that some of Jacob’s sons must have married while very young. Judah could not have been more than 14 years old at the birth of his oldest son, Er, nor Er more than 13 at his marriage to Tamar. The birth of Judah’s twin sons by his daughter-in-law Tamar must have taken place within two years after Er’s death. Pharez cannot have been more than 14 years old when Hezron and Hamul were born, apparently also as twins, before the departure from Canaan. Such early marriages

are by no means uncommon in certain parts of the Orient even today. In the case of Jacob's family, they may represent Canaanite influence. The considerations make it virtually certain that Judah was a married man and a father at the time of Joseph's sale, and that part of the narrative of ch. 38 had already taken place.

**A certain Adullamite.** Adullam lies about 13 mi. southwest of Bethlehem, at a site now called *Tell esh-Sheikh Madhkûr*, and approximately the same distance northwest of Hebron, where Jacob lived at the time. For some unknown reason Judah visited Adullam while he was still a youth. Perhaps it was while feeding the flocks of his father in that vicinity that he accidentally made the acquaintance of the Adullamite and remained for a time with him. That Judah did not separate himself permanently from his parental home is clear from the fact that he was with his brothers when Joseph was sold (ch. 37:26), and also when the famine forced them to buy grain in Egypt (ch. 43:3).

**5. He was at Chezib.** This place is named in order that the descendants of Shelah might know where their forefather was born. Chezib, or Achzib (Joshua 15:44; Micah 1:14), is probably to be identified with the present site *Tell el-Beidâ*, which lies southwest of Adullam.

**6. Tamar.** Probably a Canaanite woman, though of unknown ancestry.

**8. Judah said unto Onan.** According to custom, Onan, as brother-in-law of Tamar, should have married the childless widow of his deceased brother and raised up a family for him. Onan, however, was loath to accept the responsibilities this involved, since the first-born son would not be his own but would perpetuate the family of the deceased and receive his inheritance. Onan's conduct betrayed a lack of natural affection for his brother and a covetousness for his possessions and inheritance. Even worse, his conduct was an offense against the divine institution of marriage. This is a sad commentary on the low estate to which Jacob's sons had fallen.

The custom of levirate marriage (from the Latin *levir*, "brother-in-law"), first mentioned here in the Bible, also existed, in varying forms, among other nations of antiquity, such as the Hittites. It was incorporated into the Mosaic legislation, with the provision that a brother-in-law might refuse to perform the duty. Such a refusal, however, was considered shameful, as the ceremony to be carried out in that case shows (Deut. 25:5–10). Ruth 4:5–8 records an example of such a refusal.

**11. Remain a widow.** The sudden death of his two older sons, so soon after their marriage to Tamar, made Judah hesitate to give her the third as a husband. In harmony with a superstition found in the Apocryphal book of Tobit (ch. 3:7–10), he may have thought that either she herself, or marriage to her, had in some way occasioned the deaths of Er and Onan. Therefore he sent her away to her father's house, with the promise of his youngest son as soon as he had grown up. That Judah never intended to fulfill his promise is clear from his excuse that Shelah might "die also, as his brethren did."

When Shelah had reached a marriageable age but was not given to her, Tamar determined to secure a child by Judah himself. This was completely in harmony with prevailing Hittite and Assyrian custom. The laws of the Hittites and Assyrians contained the provision that the duty of levirate marriage was to be performed by the father of the deceased if no brother was available.

**12. Went up unto his sheepshearers.** Judah had become a widower. Inasmuch as festivities were always connected with sheepshearing (see 1 Sam. 25:2–11; 2 Sam. 13:23), Judah could not attend till after the customary time of mourning had passed.

Mention is made of his friend Hirah accompanying him, because of the part he was to play in what follows (v. 20).

**Timnath.** This place was situated in the mountains of Judah, as the expression “went up” shows, and was later allotted to the tribe of Judah (Joshua 15:57). The site, known today as *Tibnah*, lies about 4 mi. northeast of Adullam.

**14. An open place.** The KJV translators did not recognize the Hebrew expression thus rendered as the name of a town. It should read, “the entrance to Enaim,” as in the RSV. Enaim must have been on the road between Adullam and Timnath, but has not yet been identified. It is probably the Enam of Joshua 15:34, mentioned there as being close to Adullam.

**18. Thy signet, and thy bracelets.** Judah’s “signet” was probably a cylinder seal, carried about his neck by a cord, translated in the KJV as “bracelets.” Rather, the passage should read, “your signet and your cord” (RSV). As literature of the time makes clear, the seal was an object of considerable value, since no business could be transacted without it. The staff may have been ornamented, as became the son of a wealthy cattleman. Asiatic staffs with human heads carved in the handles are mentioned in the list of spoils taken by the Egyptian king Thutmose III in the 15th century B.C., and were also found in the tomb of Tutankhamen, of the 14th century B.C.

**21. The harlot.** The Hebrew word here translated “harlot” is different from that of v. 15, *zanah*, an unchaste woman. In verse 21 “harlot” is from *qedeshah*, “the consecrated one,” or “the devoted one.” Canaanite religious worship, like that of Greece, provided for both male and female prostitutes in great numbers. This profession was respectable among the Canaanites, and therefore in making inquiry for the “harlot” to whom he was to deliver the kid, Hirah used the more respectable term.

**23. Let her take it.** Feeling that he had done his part, Judah chose to leave his pledge with the unknown girl rather than expose himself to ridicule by making further inquiry, even though the pledge was doubtless of more value than a young goat.

**24. Let her be burnt.** Judah gave this order by virtue of his authority as head of the family. This probably seemed to him a fortunate opportunity, furthermore, to extricate himself from his obligation to provide her with a husband. Tamar was regarded as the bride of Shelah, and as such was to be punished for a breach of chastity. The Mosaic law provided for stoning under such circumstances (Deut. 22:20–24). Only in the case of a priest’s daughter, or of certain forms of incest, was burning enjoined (Lev. 21:9; 20:14). Judah’s sentence, therefore, was more harsh than later Israelite law required. Whether he acted according to the custom of his time, or on other grounds, cannot be determined. The Code of Hammurabi lists two crimes for which the punishment is burning. Section 110 of the code states that a “devoted one” (see on Gen. 38:21) who opens a wineshop or enters a wineshop for a drink shall be burned alive, and sec. 25 provides that a thief shall be cast into the burning house from which he had attempted to steal property.

**25. She sent to her father in law.** In passing sentence upon Tamar, Judah had unwittingly condemned himself. His sin, however, consisted not only in giving way to lust, but also in breaking his promise to Tamar (v. 11). This made him personally responsible for the deception she had practiced upon him. His first error had been his own marriage to a Canaanite, in open violation of principle (cf. chs. 24:3; 28:1; 34:14). Furthermore, he certainly knew of the wickedness of his sons; but instead of recognizing

the hand of God in their sudden death, he blamed Tamar for it and determined to keep her a childless widow forever.

**26. *More righteous than I.*** There was little Judah could do but to admit his guilt. Again, as in the plot against Joseph, he revealed a spirit of fair play and sincerity beneath his sometimes scandalous conduct. His frank confession, his subsequent treatment of Tamar, his success in rearing the sons born to her, and the fact that one of them was honored by a place in the ancestral line of Christ—all clearly point to a thorough reform on his part. A character more excellent than that of his older brothers qualified him for the leadership of the family, and his posterity for leadership in Israel (see ch. 49:3, 4, 8–10).

**29. *Pharez.*** The names of Tamar’s children were based on the interesting episode which occurred at their birth. When the twins were born in the reverse order from that in which they first appeared, the midwife addressed the second one reprovingly, saying as it were, “What a breach you have made for yourself,” meaning perhaps, “You really knew how to push yourself to the front.” From this saying of the midwife the boy received the name Pharez, “break.” Although the midwife did not consider him the first-born, he is henceforth always placed before Zarah in the genealogical lists (Gen. 46:12; Num. 26:20; etc.). He became the ancestor of King David Ruth 4:18–22), and through him, of the Messiah (Matt. 1:3–16).

**30. *Zarah.*** The twin with the scarlet thread was named Zarah, “rising.”

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1-30P 238

### CHAPTER 39

1 *Joseph advanced in Potiphar’s house. 7 He resisteth his mistress’s temptation. 13 He is falsely accused. 20 He is cast in prison. 21 God is with him there.*

**1. *Down to Egypt.*** Inasmuch as Moses designates the kings of Egypt only by the general title “Pharaoh” (see on ch. 12:15), it is most difficult to correlate Biblical statements relative to Egyptian history with known dates and events of secular history.

Among Biblical scholars who believe in the historicity of Joseph there is general agreement that his activities in Egypt occurred during the first half of the second millennium B.C. Many believe that he held office under one of the Hyksos kings.

Under the illustrious kings of the powerful Twelfth Dynasty (1991 to about 1780 B.C.), Egyptian art, architecture, and literature flourished. The national economy was sound. Egypt exerted a strong influence in Western Asia to the north and in Nubia to the south, and carried on an extensive trade with various foreign countries. The two succeeding dynasties were weak, and lost ground before advancing Asiatic armies, whose leaders called themselves *Heqa’-cha’sut*, “rulers of foreign countries.” The Greek transliteration of this title is rendered in English as Hyksos. Josephus explains the name as meaning “Shepherd Kings,” but this is doubtful. The names of the various Hyksos rulers indicate that most of them were Semitic, though a few bore Indo-European names. Some of these kings were able to extend their power over most of Egypt, whereas others found it necessary to tolerate local rulers in various parts of the country.

Since Greek times the Hyksos rulers have been traditionally divided into two dynasties, the 15th and 16th, which ruled Egypt from their capital Avaris, in the Delta, from about 1730 to 1580 B.C. During the latter part of this period the local Egyptian rulers of Thebes gradually extended their influence over the whole of Egypt, pushing the

Hyksos northward. They finally conquered Avaris and drove the Hyksos from the country. The latter held out for another three years in the stronghold of Sharuhen in southern Palestine, but were again defeated and finally disappeared to the north. Thus ended the Second Intermediate Period, the Thirteenth to the Seventeenth Dynasty, which had lasted some 200 years. The native rulers of Egypt who waged the war of liberation against the Hyksos, Kamose, and Sekenenre, belonged to the Seventeenth Dynasty. Their successors, the powerful kings of the Eighteenth Dynasty, founded the Empire, or New Kingdom, during which the Exodus occurred.

The Asiatic Hyksos were intensely hated by the Egyptians, who, upon their return to power, destroyed all Hyksos monuments and records, with the result that very little is known about them. The names of their kings, a few sarcastic remarks about them, and a few brief episodes from the war of liberation are all that remain. Evidence for placing Joseph in the Hyksos period is, in brief, as follows:

1. Bible chronology. If we reckon back to the Exodus from the 4th year of Solomon (1 Kings 6:1)—which is located by the chronology of the kings based on the generally accepted date of 853 B.C. for Ahab's death—thence 215 years before the Exodus to Jacob's entry into Egypt (see pp. 184, 186), when Joseph was 39 (see on Gen. 27:1), that will place Joseph near the middle of the Hyksos period.

2. The horse and chariot were introduced into Egypt by the Hyksos, and were unknown in the land prior to their invasion. Since horses and chariots are repeatedly mentioned in the Joseph narrative (chs. 41:43; 46:29; 47:17), his activities in Egypt cannot have taken place before the time of Hyksos supremacy.

3. The statement that Potiphar, the captain of Pharaoh's bodyguard, was "an Egyptian" (ch. 39:1) would have significance only at a time when it was the exception to find native Egyptians occupying high office.

4. It is more likely that a Semite like Joseph would be advanced to the high position of prime minister under the Hyksos kings, of whom a majority were Semites, than under a native Egyptian monarch.

5. Avaris, the residence of the Hyksos kings, lay in the northeastern section of the Nile Delta, near the land of Goshen. This fact agrees with inferences in the Joseph narrative to the effect that the capital was not far from where Jacob and his sons settled (ch. 45:10). Avaris and Goshen are only about 25 mi. apart.

6. The statement that a new king arose who did not know Joseph (Ex. 1:8) can be explained best by assuming that reference is made to a Pharaoh of the Seventeenth or Eighteenth Dynasty, who had expelled the Hyksos and naturally hated all who had received favors from them.

7. The silence of all Egyptian records regarding Joseph would be most significant if Joseph lived in the time of Hyksos supremacy, for their records were systematically destroyed.

8. Egyptian records of the pre-Hyksos period show the existence of private enterprise and private ownership of land and livestock. All this changed during the time of the Second Intermediate Period, and we find that when the native Egyptians regained power, lands and cattle, with the exception of ecclesiastical property, were considered possessions of the crown. The explanation for this change is found in Gen. 47:18–26.

Arguments that seem to oppose placing Joseph's term as prime minister in the time of the Hyksos will be dealt with in the comments that follow.

**An Egyptian.** Resuming the thread of the Joseph narrative, interrupted by insertion of the incident involving Judah and Tamar, Moses repeats in essence what he had stated in ch. 37:36. The only important addition is the statement that Potiphar was an Egyptian. This seems to suggest that Joseph arrived in Egypt at a time when it was unusual to find an Egyptian in a responsible government position.

**2. The Lord was with Joseph.** Though Joseph found himself in a foreign land, abased from the position of favored son in a wealthy home to the social status of a slave, Jehovah was still at his side to bless and to prosper the work of his hands. It is God's design that men of the world, attracted by the diligence, care, and energy manifested by his faithful servants on earth, shall thereby learn to Him. Potiphar's confidence in Joseph increased, as he observed the blessings of Joseph's God upon his property in the house and in the field, with the result that he eventually left to him the management of all his personal affairs.

Obviously, Joseph was attentive, diligent, and conscientious in the performance of his household duties, as well as faithful and devoted to the interests of his master. Success seldom comes to the negligent, the idle, or the unprincipled. Though he was conscious that Jehovah was watching him (v. 9; ch. 45:5), it must have been a source of satisfaction to Joseph to know that his faithful service was appreciated by his earthly master.

**6. A goodly person, and well favoured.** Literally, "handsome in stature and handsome in appearance," or, "handsome and good-looking" (RSV). This, Joseph must have inherited from his mother, Rachel, of whom the very same words are used in the Hebrew (see ch. 29:17; PP 209). The fact is no doubt mentioned here in anticipation of the episode which follows, and to which it forms an introduction.

**7. His master's wife.** In this moment of crisis the personal integrity of Joseph stands forth in sharp contrast to that of his brothers. What would Reuben (ch. 35:22) or Judah (ch. 38:16) have done under the circumstances? Little wonder that Jacob favored Joseph, and that Potiphar felt such confidence in him. This confidence in him reinforced his serene purpose to be true to God, and made even more desirable to him his lofty ideals of personal honor and integrity.

**10. She spake to Joseph day by day.** Joseph's character stood firm under persistent attack. Wisely, he refused even to be in her company. In thus refusing, Joseph revealed sincerity, wisdom, and determination in the way of right. The stronger the temptation, the more resolute he became in resisting it.

**12. His garment.** It is not certain what kind of garment Joseph wore. The Hebrew word, *beqed*, is a general term for clothing, and may even mean a blanket. Most commentators have thought of it as a long gown thrown over the shoulders. In ancient Egyptian reliefs and paintings, however, men rarely appear in long garments. The standard dress of a man, from king to slave, was a loincloth. In the case of royalty, it was of fine material, immaculately clean, and starched. For all others it was of less value, its quality being determined by social standing. Overseers are occasionally pictured with a white piece of cloth hanging from their shoulders and wound around the body. Perhaps it was this that Potiphar's wife snatched from Joseph as he fled from the house.

**14. He hath brought in.** It is interesting to note that in telling the other servants of the affair Potiphar's wife spoke of her husband simply by the pronoun "he." This shows how little respect she had for him, and accentuates her already vulgar and wanton character.

It seems ever to have been a weakness of human nature to blame others for one's own misdeeds. Thus it was with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:12, 13). This is but a reflection of the spirit of the "accuser of our brethren" (Rev. 12:10), who seeks to justify himself by maligning those who serve the Lord (Zech. 3:1). His ultimate purpose is, of course, to prove God unfair in His dealings with created beings (see Job 1:8–11; 2:1–5). Stressing the defects of others, whether real or imaginary, is supposed to make the speaker appear better by contrast.

**An Hebrew.** That is, a descendant of Eber (see chs. 10:21; 14:13). It was generally thus that the descendants of Jacob referred to themselves as a people, and that others referred to them (see Gen. 39:17; 40:15; 41:12; 43:32; Ex. 1:15, 16, 19; 2:6; etc.). Originally, a "Jew" was a descendant of Judah, but after the captivity the term lost its strictly tribal application.

**To mock us.** In Gen. 26:8 the same Hebrew expression is translated "sporting." It would seem that here, as with Isaac and Rebekah, it must refer to conduct proper only between husband and wife (see also on ch. 21:9).

**15. Left his garment.** Potiphar's wife was careful not to state that Joseph had left his garment in her hand, since that would have revealed her duplicity.

**20. Put him into the prison.** In repeating her tale to her husband, Potiphar's wife indirectly blamed him for the supposed affront by referring to Joseph as "the Hebrew servant, which thou hast brought unto us" (v. 17). Potiphar's action in confining Joseph with political offenders may be considered extreme leniency in view of punishment customarily administered for the crime of which he stood accused. In later times the penalty for an attempt at adultery was a thousand blows upon the soles of the feet, and for the rape of a freewoman it was even more severe (Diodorus i. 78). Potiphar's lenience no doubt reflected his confidence in Joseph's integrity, and in contrast, very little respect for his wife's account of the episode. Nevertheless Joseph's punishment seems to have been severe at first, for more happened to him than the Genesis narrative implies. According to Ps. 105:18, his "feet" were "hurt with fetters," and "he was laid in iron."

There is an Egyptian papyrus, now in the British Museum, that relates a "story of the two brothers" superficially resembling the story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife. Numerous scholars have taken it to be the original of the story of Joseph's experience, and although the two are similar in some respects, the differences far outweigh the similarities. The Egyptian story, furthermore, has a mythological setting, and is of later origin than the book of Genesis by at least 250 years.

**21. The Lord was with Joseph.** The same Providence that had attended Joseph in the house of Potiphar followed him to prison and brought comfort to him in his new affliction. Moses attributes the speedy favor he found in the sight of the keeper to the help of God. The irksomeness of his confinement must have been mitigated considerably by the jailer's growing trust and confidence in him, since the blessing of the Lord attended all things committed to his care. Although Joseph had been treated unjustly, he made the best of the circumstances in which he found himself. By discharging his duties in a cheerful, courteous, and sympathetic spirit he gained the confidence of the one in authority, and at the same time prepared the way for his own eventual release.

#### ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

1-23PP 214-218; SR 101-103

1-3PP 214

4 5T 321  
6 PP 214; SR 101  
7, 8 PP 217  
9 AA 575; AH 331; CE 43; Ed 52, 255; MB 67; ML 20, 76, 96, 120; PP 217, 457; SR 102;  
TM 437; 4T 544; 5T 124, 596, 628  
12-144T 525  
17-23PP 218  
19, 20 ML 76; 5T 321

## CHAPTER 40

1 *The butler and baker of Pharaoh in prison. 4 Joseph hath charge of them. 5 He interpreteth their dreams. 20 They come to pass according to his interpretation. 23 The ingratitude of the butler.*

**1. The butler.** Literally, “the cup-bearer,” an important court official. He was responsible personally for tasting everything the king drank, as a guarantee that it was free from poison and other harmful ingredients.

**The baker.** The officer who supervised (v. 2) the preparation of the king’s food and was responsible for the purity of everything that came to the royal table.

**Had offended.** Some incident, apparently, had aroused Pharaoh’s suspicion that either or both of the two high officials were involved in an attempt to poison him. That one of the two was later restored to office and the other executed indicates that investigation had convinced the king of the innocence of the one and the guilt of the other.

The Judicial Papyrus of Turin offers a most interesting parallel to the story of the butler and the baker who had fallen from royal favor. It contains the record of the trial of a number of high-ranking officials accused of conspiracy against the life of Ramses III, and is dated about 1164 B.C. Unfortunately, the papyrus is not complete, and we do not know the means employed by the conspirators against the life of the king, nor do we know whether the plot was successful. The parts of the document that have been preserved, however, provide information on how such cases were handled in ancient Egypt. The defendants in this trial were several butlers, scribes, and other high officials. Some were sentenced to be executed, others were found guilty but were allowed to take their own life, some were punished by cutting off their noses, and ears, and one was only rebuked and received no punishment. A number of judicial officers also were prosecuted for carousing with some of the defendants during the period of investigation.

**3. Put them in ward.** These two high officials were committed to the custody of the commander of the royal bodyguard. This officer was Potiphar, the master and owner of Joseph, according to chs. 37:36 and 39:1. Potiphar placed them in the same state prison in which Joseph was held, and since their cases were still under investigation, and they themselves were high officers of state, he charged Joseph to wait upon them and act as their attendant.

**4. They continued a season in ward.** Literally, “and they were in custody for days.” This expression is indefinite and gives no clue as to the time these men spent in prison before their cases were settled and the event recorded in the following verses occurred.

**5. They dreamed.** The striking similarity of their dreams convinced the two men that the dreams were in some way related to their fate, but just how they knew not. Knowing, no doubt, that their cases might be decided any day, and being deprived in prison of

professional dream interpreters, they were obviously anxious the next morning when Joseph entered their room.

**8. *Do not interpretations belong to God?*** Thinking of his own two dreams, and realizing that God was still with him, Joseph sought to help the two dejected men in their perplexity. This desire to help others later proved to be the key to his own release from prison. Bearing his own unearned misfortunes with cheerful resignation and admirable fortitude, Joseph, by his friendly nature, was led to sympathize with other unfortunates, who lacked the inner strength that buoyed him up. It was not out of curiosity but with an earnest desire to assist those in need that Joseph offered the two men his assistance. At the same time he pointed them to God, his own source of strength and consolation.

**9. *A vine was before me.*** The duties of the royal cupbearer were unmistakably represented. To conclude that Pharaoh drank only fresh grape juice, however, is entirely unwarranted. The cultivation of the vine and the making and drinking of wine by Egyptians are attested by ancient Egyptian records, statements by Herodotus (ii. 77) and Plutarch (*De Isis et Osiris* 6) to the contrary notwithstanding.

**13. *Lift up thine head.*** This expression, as in 2 Kings 25:27, means release from prison and restoration to responsibility and honor. That it may also have an adverse meaning is evident from v. 19.

**14. *Think on me.*** Joseph appealed his case to Pharaoh. He had been abducted from the land of the Hebrews (see ch. 39:14), which was the reason he was now in Egypt, and had been imprisoned, though innocent of any crime. If Joseph lived in Egypt under the Hyksos, as the evidence seems to indicate, the cupbearer was probably not an Egyptian. Joseph might therefore more reasonably expect help from him than if he had been an Egyptian. Investigation of Joseph's case, if ordered by the king, would involve Joseph's master, a native Egyptian (ch. 39:1).

**15. *The dungeon.*** Here, a contemptuous term for the prison. In ancient times pits, cisterns, and cesspools, when empty, were used for the incarceration of offenders (see Jer. 38:6; Zech. 9:11). That the word "dungeon" is here a synonym for prison is evident from Gen. 40:14, in which the place of Joseph's confinement is called a "house."

**16. *Three white baskets.*** Encouraged by Joseph's favorable interpretation of the butler's dream, the chief baker told his. The picture described by the baker is again thoroughly Egyptian. Reliefs, wall paintings, and figurines found in ancient Egyptian tombs show that such things as baskets and pottery vessels were often carried on the head. As everywhere in the Orient, birds of prey would naturally try to snatch something from the uppermost basket. The baker pointed out the resemblance of his dream to that of the cupbearer by his words, "I also." The similarity was not confined to the numbers in the two dreams—three branches of the vine and three baskets of bread—but was also evident from the fact that their official duties at court were represented.

**19. *Lift up thy head.*** The expression "lift up thy head" was used in v. 13 in a favorable sense. However, the additional phrase here, "from off thee," signified its unfavorable meaning. It must refer to execution by beheading, after which the culprit's body would be displayed on a tree as a warning to other would-be conspirators. Egyptian records testify to the practice of capital punishment by decapitation, after which bodies were sometimes exhibited as a means of deterring others from the same crime. On the other hand, execution by hanging or strangulation is unattested in ancient records.

**20. It came to pass.** The fulfillment of Joseph's predictions proved the dreams to have been of divine origin, and Joseph as possessing the gift of interpretation (see Jer. 28:9). Pharaoh "lifted up the head" of each of the prisoners, but in very different ways (vs. 13, 19).

**23. Forgat him.** The cupbearer apparently promised Joseph he would speak on his behalf (ch. 41:9). When the ensuing weeks and months brought no evidence of the butler's gratitude, Joseph probably began to wonder whether he was to pine away his whole life in prison. At the same time, however, the fulfillment of the dreams of the court officers may have encouraged him to believe that in some way his own dreams would come true (ch. 37:5-9). But, for the moment, the ingratitude of the cupbearer must have been a painful experience to Joseph, probably as cruel and unkind a blow as any he had yet received. The experience is a reminder in reverse of the value of expressing our appreciation for the kindness and assistance of others. This chief cupbearer stands condemned to perpetual dishonor. How often high station makes men too proud to notice their humble friends of former days.

## ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

1-23PP 219

### CHAPTER 41

1 Pharaoh's two dreams. 25 Joseph interpreteth them. 33 He giveth Pharaoh counsel. 38 Joseph is advanced. 50 He begetteth Manasseh and Ephraim. 54 The famine beginneth.

**1. He stood by the river.** The word translated "river," *ye'or*, is used in the Bible for the Nile only, with the exception of Dan. 12:5-7, where it is employed for the Tigris. It is borrowed from the Egyptian *'iru*. This word had been *'itru* before the time of Moses, but with the Eighteenth Dynasty it became *'iru*. Since the Hebrew word is derived from this later form, it is accepted by some as an evidence that Genesis was written later than the Eighteenth Dynasty, which began in 1580 B.C.

**2. They fed in a meadow.** The Hebrew word *'achu* translated "meadow," is also borrowed from the Egyptian. This is derived from the Egyptian *'ichi* and means "reed" or "grass." It is used only in Gen. 41:2, 18 and Job 8:11, and provides one of the arguments in favor of attributing both books, Genesis and Job, to the same author.

**3. Seven other kine.** The seven lean cows were unparalleled for ugliness (Gen. 41:19). More than that, they were lean, literally, "thin in flesh."

**6. The east wind.** This east wind, blowing in from the Arabian Desert and extremely hot, withers the crops and scorches the land. The Arabs differentiate between two kinds of east wind: (1) the *chamsin*, which may blow for as long as 50 days in the spring, (2) the *samum*, which comes at irregular times. Although it blows usually only for a short time, sometimes only for a few hours, the *samum* has the characteristics of a severe storm and can be very destructive in its effects upon men, animals, and plants.

**7. It was a dream.** The dreams seemed real. Only when he awoke did Pharaoh realize he had been dreaming. Though there had been two distinct dreams, they are considered as one (vs. 8, 15, 25, 32) because of their similarity and because of the obvious fact that they referred to one and the same event. The essential message was repeated for emphasis (v. 32).

**8. Magicians.** Outside the Pentateuch this word, from *chartummim*, is used only in Daniel 1:20; 2:2. It is derived from an Egyptian word meaning “to pronounce a magic spell,” “to pronounce a name in magic,” and designating the priests as masters of magic. These men occupied themselves with the sacred arts and sciences of the Egyptians, the hieroglyphic writings, astronomy and astrology, and interpretation of dreams, the foretelling of events, with magic and conjuring, and were guardians of the occult arts. In short, they were the wise men of the nation. Inasmuch as the Nile, whence the lean as well as the fat cows ascended, was regarded by the Egyptians as the source of all life and fertility, these wise men were puzzled as to the meaning of the dreams and could think of no interpretation that would be likely to satisfy the king. Unlike Nebuchadnezzar upon a later occasion, Pharaoh remembered his dreams, but the Egyptian wise men proved no more successful in spite of their obvious advantage in this respect (Dan. 2:4, 7). That they were unable to explain Pharaoh’s dreams, clothed in the symbolic language of the time, was no doubt surprising to them as well as to the king; but “the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God,” and those to whom the Spirit of God reveals them (1 Cor. 2:10, 11). The wisdom of God excels, and will therefore ever confound, that of the world.

**14. Shaved himself.** Ancient Egyptian pictures and reliefs show Asiatics wearing long hair and beards, whereas the Egyptians shaved themselves. The Egyptian story of Sinuhe provides an interesting parallel to this episode in the life of Joseph, so thoroughly Egyptian itself. In this story a courtier who lived some 300 years before Joseph’s time tells of his return to the court of Pharaoh after a long period of exile in Canaan. He says, “I was shaved, and my hair was combed. . . . I was clad in fine linen and anointed with choice oil.”

**16. It is not in me.** In all modesty Joseph pointed Pharaoh away from himself to the God of heaven, as he had the two prisoners two years earlier (ch. 40:8).

**An answer of peace.** Court custom required that the dreams of the king be given a favorable meaning. Joseph had lived long enough in Egypt and had associated enough with high officials to know well the customary formula of speech to be used in the presence of the king.

**17. My dream.** The two dreams are related in essentially the same words as in vs. 1–7. However, Moses avoids monotony by adding a few words in one place and using synonyms in others.

**25. God hath shewed Pharaoh.** Joseph declared first of all that the two dreams had the same meaning, and pointed to their Author, God, who thereby sought to warn Pharaoh and his subjects of events to come. The number seven, which played so prominent a role in the dreams, pointed to two periods of seven years each. The fat cows and the full ears represented seven abundant harvests; the lean ones, seven barren years. The latter would follow the former over the whole land of Egypt, so that the years of famine would leave no trace of the seven fruitful years. Joseph added that the repetition of the dream was to emphasize the certainty of the events indicated and the urgency of taking measures to meet the emergency. Joseph’s confidence in his interpretation, which looked 14 years into the future, in contrast with the perplexity of the Egyptian wise men, could not fail to impress the king.

**33. Look out a man.** Joseph followed up his interpretation by the advice that Pharaoh should appoint a man as minister of food over the whole land, and a staff of officers to carry out his instructions. Joseph advised also that during the seven years of

superabundance a fifth part of the harvest should be levied, as a tax, and stored up throughout the country.

**34. *The fifth part.*** That only a fifth of the harvest should be collected each year implies that even in the lean years the land was to produce something. The fertility of Egypt has always been dependent upon the yearly inundation of the land by the Nile, since rain is practically unknown.

Before the construction of the Aswân Dam and levees along the Nile in the last century to regulate the inundation, dikes were built to control a normal rise in the river. This was 25 or 26 ft. above the low level of the river in the dry season at Aswân. If the inundation reached 27 ft., dikes were washed away; if it reached 30 ft., villages were destroyed and lives lost. On the other hand, an inundation of but 23 ft. would not bring water to fields lying 2 mi. from the river, and would result in partial drought. Of the inundation of the Nile, Pliny wrote: "The ordinary height [of the inundation] is 16 cubits. When the waters are lower, they do not overflow the whole ground; when higher, it takes a long time for them to recede. In the first case the ground is not saturated; in the second, the waters are detained so long on the ground that seed-time is lost. The administration takes cognizance of both. At a height of only 12 cubits a famine is the consequence. Even at 13 cubits hunger prevails; 14 cubits produces general rejoicing; 15, perfect security; and 16, all the luxuries of life" (*Natural History*, v. 10).

Since Egypt produced more grain in normal years than it needed for home consumption, and was therefore able to export great quantities, the collection of 20 per cent of the crop in plentiful years would work no hardship and would, at the same time, add up to an enormous amount of grain. It would not be wise to require too great an amount; otherwise the good will and cooperation of the farmers and landlords would be lost. With abundant harvests they could easily pay this increase in taxes and not feel it to be oppressive.

**38. *A man in whom the Spirit of God is.*** Joseph's counsel was so sound and pleasing to Pharaoh and his counselors that the king proposed the appointment of Joseph as minister of food, and granted him emergency powers. If this Pharaoh was a Semitic Hyksos, as is likely, his evaluation of Joseph as "a man in whom the Spirit of God [*Elohim*] is" can easily be understood. It is not clear, however, in what sense Pharaoh understood the word *Elohim*, the plural of *Eloah*. It is used by Bible writers to designate both the true God and heathen deities. Whether the king referred to the *Elohim* of Joseph (vs. 16, 25, 28, 32) as one God or to several of his own deities is uncertain, although Joseph had used the singular verb form in describing God's activities. Since he was certainly an idolater and a polytheist, Pharaoh may have conceived that Joseph was talking of "gods," and if so, Pharaoh's statement would be translated, "a man in whom the spirit of the gods is."

**40. *Be ruled.*** The Hebrew expression thus translated was long given various strange explanations by commentators, until the suggestion was made that an Egyptian expression might form the basis of the text. If so, the statement would read, literally, "According to your word [or mouth] all my people shall kiss." In colloquial Egyptian, however, the phrase "to kiss" also means "to eat." Moses' first readers, all of whom grew up in Egypt, would certainly have understood what was meant. If this was Moses' meaning, it would constitute additional evidence that Moses, a man educated in Egypt,

wrote the book of Genesis. If, on the other hand, the expression is Hebrew, the word translated “be ruled,” from a root meaning “to cling to,” “to hang upon,” should be rendered “be obedient.”

**41. *I have set thee.*** After considering the appointment for some time the king announced his decision to elevate Joseph to the highest office under the crown, and proceeded with the inaugural ceremony. First, there was a royal proclamation declaring Joseph to be viceroy over all Egypt.

**42. *Took off his ring.*** From numerous tomb reliefs of high Egyptian officials depicting their own installation in office, we have pictures that agree very well with the short report of Joseph’s installation. These show the king, usually standing behind the “window of appearance” of his palace, handing out the insignia of dignity. The seal ring given Joseph certainly contained a stone in the form of a scarab, with the king’s name engraved on it, and was used for affixing the royal seal to documents.

***Vestures of fine linen.*** He was provided a wardrobe of fine linen such as the king and priests wore. The Egyptian story of Sinuhe (see on v. 14) also mentions “fine linen” in which the hero of the story was dressed upon his return to the Egyptian court.

***Gold chain.*** Pictures representing the installation of high officers regularly show a gold collar placed around the neck of the official. Some of these “collars” have been preserved and are to be found in museums. They are beautiful specimens of art, made of gold and beads of semiprecious stones. Hanging from the collar in front is an inscription giving the king’s names and titles.

**43. *The second chariot.*** This statement is appropriate to the time of the Hyksos, who introduced the horse and chariot into Egypt (see on ch. 39:1).

***Bow the knee.*** The call of the heralds preceding the chariot of Joseph when he drove through the country or in official processions. The Heb. *’abrek*, “bow the knee,” is the transliteration of an Egyptian phrase that has been interpreted in various ways. The most plausible explanation, first given by the Egyptologist Brugsch, sees back of it the Egyptian verb *berek*, “to praise,” or “to do homage.” The Heb. *’abrek* would therefore be a faithful rendering of the Egyptian imperative *i’a berek*, “Praise!” or, “Do homage!” The suggested alternate reading, “tender father,” is certainly incorrect.

**45. *Zaphnath-paaneah.*** The name given Joseph by Pharaoh was long recognized as Egyptian, but its meaning was not known. However, the name has been discovered in an inscription of the later, Bubastid period (9th century B.C.), and was written in Egyptian *Djed-pa-netjer-iuf-ankh*, meaning, “The god speaks that he may live.” Joseph’s name must have referred to contemporary events, signifying that God had spoken through Pharaoh’s dream and Joseph’s interpretation and counsel, to preserve the lives of the king, of Joseph, and of all others as well.

***Asenath.*** Joseph received not only an Egyptian name but also an Egyptian wife, a woman from one of the most eminent priestly families. Pharaoh apparently sought to increase Joseph’s honor and reputation by this marriage, as is evident from the fact that some of the kings themselves took their wives from priestly families.

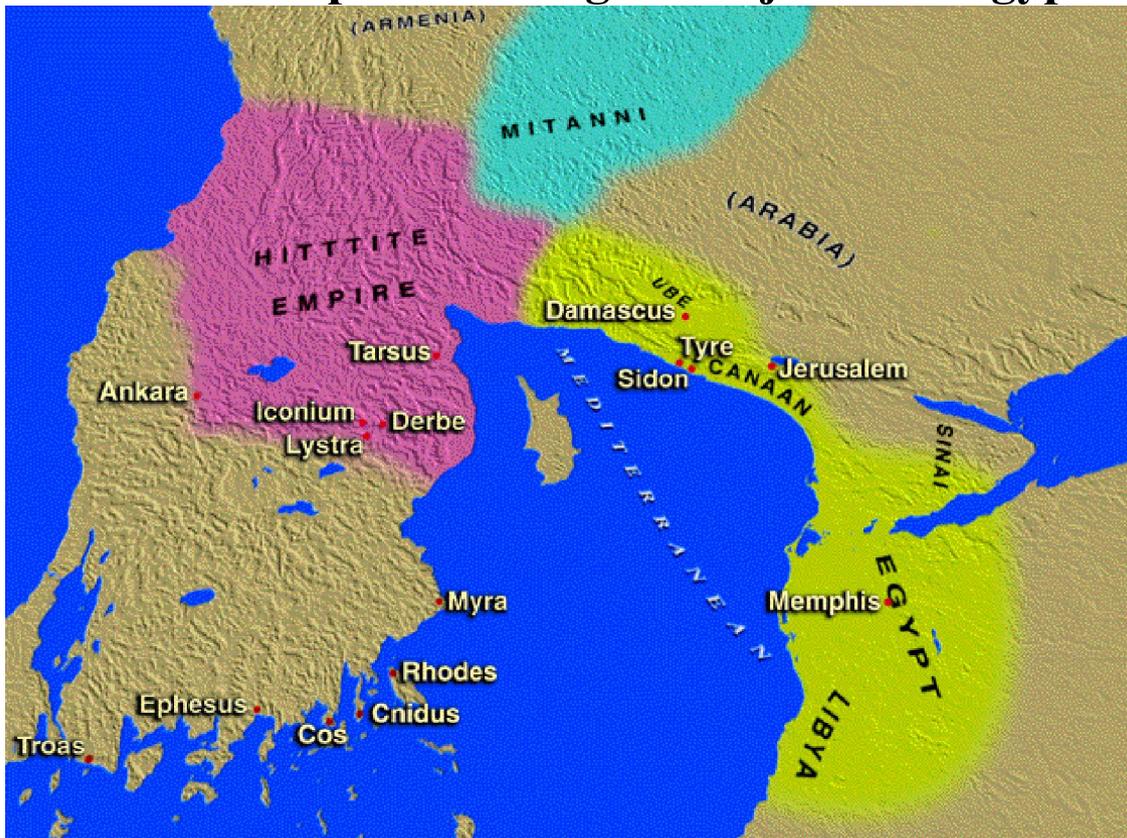
Asenath means, “belonging to [the goddess] Neith.” Her father’s name is identical to that of Joseph’s former master (see on ch. 37:36), though a slight difference exists in the Hebrew transliteration of the names. However, the fact that both names are the same does not imply that the persons bearing them were identical also. Joseph’s former master was

commander of the royal bodyguard, whereas his father-in-law was high priest of On, the city of the great sun temple, which was a few miles from Memphis on the eastern bank of the Nile. The Greeks later called this city Heliopolis. The sun temple of On and its priesthood wielded a strong influence on Egyptian religious life for many centuries, until the worship of Amen and later of Amen-Re of Thebes overshadowed the sun worship of Heliopolis, in the 15th and succeeding centuries. Joseph's social position was tremendously strengthened by his marriage to a daughter of one of Egypt's first families.

The marriage of Joseph to an Egyptian woman seems not to have weakened his allegiance to the God of his fathers. His sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, were apparently brought up in the Hebrew religion, since they were made heads of two tribes of Israel, and in this respect achieved equality with their uncles, the brothers of Joseph. Joseph's strong loyalty to his God may even have been the means of converting his Egyptian wife. Moreover, it should not be forgotten that the hand of God by which he had been so highly exalted after deep humiliation, also preserved him in his lofty position of honor from sinking into the heathenism of Egypt.

What a change God had brought about in the life of Joseph! His fetters were exchanged for a chain of gold, the prisoner's rags for fine linen, his cell for a chariot, and his jail for a palace. Potiphar's slave had become his lord, and the clank of chains had given way to the exclamation, "Do homage!" Humility goes before honor; servitude and suffering were the stepping-stones to authority. How well was God's faithful servant repaid for his loyalty and patience!

## The Great Empires During the Sojourn in Egypt



**46. *Thirty years old.*** Since Joseph was 17 years old when sold into Egypt (ch. 37:2), and was now 30, he must have spent 13 years in servitude.

**47. *The earth brought forth.*** Joseph's prediction was accurately fulfilled. The grain grew by "handfuls," or "bundles," and Joseph gathered 20 per cent of it into granaries throughout the land. The quantity of grain flowing into the royal storehouses was so enormous that it soon exceeded all facilities for recording the amount. Available scribes may have been needed as additional tax collectors.

**50. *Two sons.*** Joseph gave the two sons born to him names expressive of God's bountiful providence.

**51. *Manasseh.*** Literally, "causing to forget." This name Joseph gave his first-born in gratitude that God had caused him to forget his former state of servitude and the intense longing he had felt for his father's home. He was grateful that God had built him a home, though it be in the land of his exile. Erstwhile misery could not embitter his present state of happiness, for adversity had been transformed into prosperity.

The question has been asked, Why did not Joseph, upon reaching so exalted a position, communicate at once with his father? Had he really forgotten his father's affections, and did he feel no obligation to let the aged man know that he was still alive? That he had not actually ceased to care is clear not alone from the tender meeting with his brothers and his father, soon to be described, but also from the statement he made at the birth of Ephraim, characterizing Egypt as the land of his affliction. That he did not at once declare his parentage and send a message home to Canaan may be attributed to hesitation to reveal to his father the wickedness of which his brothers had been guilty, or perhaps a divine impulse warning him that the time for disclosing the fact had not yet arrived. At all events, Joseph's conduct in this matter reveals nothing inconsistent with the piety so conspicuously permeating his life. If God chose to place him in Egypt, in Egypt he would remain.

**52. *Ephraim.*** That is, "double fruitfulness." This name was expressive of Joseph's gratitude that God had given him, a slave doomed to perpetual servitude, a happy family and two sons. The name reflects a heart full of joy and gratitude.

**54. *The dearth was in all lands.*** As Joseph had foretold, the seven plentiful years were followed by seven years of famine, which affected not only Egypt but surrounding countries as well. Famine conditions in Egypt are produced when the Nile fails to overflow its banks (see on v. 34), and this in turn is due to a lack of rainfall in the highlands of Abyssinia.

**56. *Joseph opened all the storehouses.*** When the Egyptians had consumed their own stores of food they turned to the king, remembering, no doubt, the special grain levy imposed for seven successive years. He directed them to Joseph, the minister of food, who opened the granaries for native Egyptians and for the foreigners who came to Egypt for food. Several hieroglyphic records found in Egypt mention famine conditions. In these records certain high officials claim to have alleviated the misery of the poor and hungry during times of want, proclaiming in their tomb inscriptions, "I gave bread to the hungry, water to the thirsty, clothing to the naked and a boat to the one who was without." An official of the Twelfth Dynasty (20th century B.C.) claimed, "When years of famine came I plowed all the fields of the Oryx district, ... preserving its people alive and furnishing its food so that there was none hungry therein."

Joseph's wisdom as an administrator now became apparent to all. If anyone had had doubt as to his policy of hoarding tremendous quantities of grain year after year, none questioned the prudence of the policy now. What would Pharaoh, a foreign ruler, have done with a famishing population? How could he have averted the overthrow of his own dynasty, except for the forethought of Joseph? This young Hebrew, a former house slave, had become the savior of the throne, of all Egypt, and of surrounding nations as well.

**Sold.** That Joseph did not distribute the stored grain free to the perishing multitudes was not without reason. The people had certainly been warned of the impending calamity, and might by care and economy have saved a little themselves for the days of want. Since the people had to pay for the grain, they were encouraged to exercise frugality and to avoid wasting the precious supply of food, which must be made to last for seven long years. This plan also enabled Joseph to extend relief to the starving populations of other countries. The fact that the grain was sold back to the people makes it clear that the collection had been made as a form of taxation and not as a public service rendered by the king.

## ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

1-57PP 219-224  
1, 9-13PP 219  
14 PP 220; 5T 321  
15-25, 31, 33-36PP 220  
38-40ML 66  
38-43PP 221  
39, 40 PP 241  
39-44PP 368  
40 5T 321  
48, 54-56PP 224

## CHAPTER 42

1 *Jacob sendeth his ten sons to buy corn in Egypt. 16 They are imprisoned by Joseph for spies. 18 They are set at liberty, on condition to bring Benjamin. 21 They have remorse for Joseph. 24 Simeon is kept for a pledge. 25 They return with corn, and their money. 29 Their relation to Jacob. 36 Jacob refuseth to send Benjamin.*

**2. Get you down thither.** As the drought became more and more severe, and man and beast were both suffering, Jacob made the decision to fetch grain from Egypt to preserve his family from starvation. That he did not, like Abraham (ch. 12:10) and Isaac (ch. 26:2), plan to move his family to Egypt may have been due to the fact that the famine prevailed in Egypt as well as Canaan.

**3. Ten brethren went down.** That all ten went to Egypt was either for safety or because the grain was distributed to heads of families. Their number would possibly enable them to secure more grain, and would certainly enable them to return with more of it. Also, the famine conditions would render plundering of their caravan for its supplies of food a very real possibility.

**4. Benjamin.** Benjamin was not kept back because of his youth, since he was now more than 20 years of age, but because, as the only remaining child of Rachel, he had taken Joseph's place as the object of Jacob's most tender affections.

**5. Among those that came.** Joseph's brothers either formed part of a caravan of Canaanites or simply arrived with others who had come for the same reason.

**6. The governor.** From *shallit* in turn derived from the root *shalat*, “to rule.” It is used to designate one invested with unlimited authority. This word, known also in Aramaic and Arabic, lies behind the title sultan, and perhaps behind the personal name *Salatis*, which, according to Manetho, belonged to the first Hyksos king. Manetho, however, may have mistaken the word meaning “ruler” for a personal name. This word shows clearly that Joseph was more than an ordinary minister of food. As the second man in the country he was the actual ruler, or prime minister, of Egypt.

**7. He knew them.** Joseph recognized his brothers at once, but they, not having seen him for more than 20 years, did not recognize him (v. 8). Not only was he older now, but he was Egyptianized as well, wore Egyptian dress and had a clean-shaven face instead of a Semite beard. Furthermore, he spoke a strange language and was, apparently, a great lord. The mere thought of connecting Joseph with this mighty man would have seemed highly absurd (see ch. 45:3).

**Spake roughly unto them.** That Joseph spoke “hard things to them,” as the text reads literally, was not due to a feeling of revenge, but rather to ascertain their present state of mind, particularly with regard to himself and to Benjamin, whose absence had certainly arrested his attention and perhaps aroused his suspicion.

**9. Ye are spies.** The “hard things” Joseph spoke to his brothers are now revealed. Egypt had always been suspicious of its eastern neighbors, who had not only raided Egypt and then vanished back into their desert abodes, but had in the past infiltrated Egypt and actually taken over the government of parts of the country. Such incursions during the First Intermediate Period, prior to the Twelfth Dynasty, had led King Amenemhet I to build border fortifications between the Mediterranean and the Red Sea, called “Wall of the Ruler,” to keep the Canaanites out of Egypt. The Hyksos, coming afterward and also from the east, had now gained the supremacy of the country and were watchful that others might not do to them what they had done to the Egyptians. It was therefore natural for Joseph to examine all easterners carefully, and make an effort to detect any undesirables or actual spies. Since the famine raging in the neighboring countries brought great numbers of foreigners to Egypt as grain purchasers, greater care had to be taken to weed out those whose presence in the country might endanger its security.

**10. Nay, my lord.** If Joseph’s brothers were offended by the accusation hurled against them, fear led them to swallow their pride, and they asserted their complete innocence. When their claim to being honest men failed to impress the Egyptian lord, they told him more particularly about their family. By this they sought to prove their innocence. Inasmuch as they all belonged to one family, which could hardly make a hostile attack upon a whole kingdom, there was no real reason for suspecting them of being spies. Joseph took up the challenge and insisted that they prove the accuracy of their story by producing their missing youngest brother.

**17. Into ward three days.** Joseph had solemnly charged his brothers (v. 15) to send one of their number back to Canaan to fetch Benjamin. Their apparent unwillingness to do this, in the knowledge that Jacob would not consent, led Joseph to send them all to jail for three days. This was ostensibly done in consequence of their unwillingness to agree to his proposal, but in reality to test them further. He had languished in prison for approximately three years, as the result of their inhuman treatment; he inflicted on them a confinement of only three days.

**18. *This do, and live.*** On the third day Joseph modified his severe attitude. His explanation, "I fear God," was intended to be understood in a general way, without reference to Jehovah, as supposedly coming from an Egyptian ruler. Instead of imprisoning nine of them he would keep only one in prison, and allow the others to return to fetch Benjamin and to carry food to their suffering families. Their return with Benjamin would procure the release of the one to be held in prison. If, on the other hand, they had deceived Joseph with their story, they would die of hunger, and the one remaining behind in Egypt would be executed as a spy.

**21. *We are verily guilty.*** As they realized that this lord of Egypt would not punish or slay them upon mere suspicion, but judge them justly, their consciences began to speak. How differently they had acted toward Joseph! The ruler of all Egypt had compassion on their families, who suffered hunger in Canaan, whereas they had intended to leave their brother in the pit to starve. As these and similar thoughts passed through their minds, they were led to an acknowledgment of their guilt. Their own misfortune brought back to them the anguish of their brother. Reuben reminded them of how he had warned them, unsuccessfully, not to sin against the boy, and now they were receiving a just reward for their coldness toward him. Thus they accused themselves in Joseph's presence, without realizing that he understood every word.

**24. *Took from them Simeon.*** Passing by Reuben, who had been comparatively guiltless, Joseph selected Simeon, the chief instigator of the cruel treatment he received (PP 226). Simeon's heartlessness had been manifested on other occasions also, as when he and Levi had massacred the Shechemites. As Simeon was bound before the eyes of his brothers they were forcefully reminded of what they had done to Joseph, who may have hoped that pity for Simeon would encourage their more speedy return with Benjamin.

**25. *Their sacks.*** The first word translated "sacks," *keli*, means "vessels" or "receptacles," and may have signified a basket or other container. The second word "sack," into which the money was placed, is a transliteration of the Hebrew *śaq*, which has found entrance into the European languages through the Greek *sakos* and the Latin *saccus*. Besides these terms another old word for "sack" is used, the Hebrew *amtachath*. It is employed in the Bible only in connection with this story, and must have been a synonym of *śaq*, because it is used interchangeably with it (vs. 27, 28; ch. 43:12; etc.).

Joseph did not return their money maliciously, but could not bring himself to accept money from his father and brothers for bread. Even if he may have thought it possible that his brothers would be alarmed upon finding the money, he saw no reason for sparing them this anxiety. It would help to soften their hard hearts still more, after the bitter experiences of the preceding days.

**27. *Opened his sack.*** The word "inn" would be more accurately rendered "lodging place," as in the RSV. The discovery of his money by one of them brought consternation to all. Was it a harbinger of further misfortunes yet to befall them? In Egypt they had already been taken for spies; would they now also be accused as thieves? That the brothers looked upon this, for which they were at a loss to account, as a punishment from God, is evidence of its salutary effect upon them. In their consternation and alarm they forgot to examine the rest of the sacks.

**29. They came unto Jacob.** Reaching home, they reported their sad experiences, including the detention of Simeon. Upon opening their containers and finding all their money, they were more alarmed than ever. The reason that only one had discovered his money while on the road, and the others after their return home, may have been that it was hidden in the opening of one sack only, but at or near the bottom of the others. Or, it may have been placed in the fodder sack of one and in the food sacks of the others.

**36. Me have ye bereaved.** Upon hearing their sad story and seeing the evil omen of the returned money, and realizing that he had lost a second son, Jacob broke out in a bitter lament, accusing his sons of responsibility for the loss of Joseph and Simeon. Now, they were bent on taking Benjamin away also. Jacob was hardly fair toward his sons, since he did not know that they were guilty in the matter of Joseph's disappearance, and since, of course, were not directly to blame for Simeon's imprisonment. Nevertheless, they must have accepted Jacob's lament as a well-deserved rebuke. They knew that he spoke more truly than even he himself knew. They had certainly bereaved their father of Joseph, and felt also that Simeon's imprisonment was a just reward for that cruel act. How could they now shoulder the responsibility of taking Benjamin to Egypt, when there was no certainty that he would return safely? They were in a predicament, but their only other choice was starvation. If they were to secure Simeon's release and save him from certain death, and if they and their families were to survive the famine, they must return to Egypt for grain.

**37. Reuben spake.** Reuben's offer represented supreme sacrifice on his part. It was a sincere but rash offer. Reuben was the eldest, though certainly not the wisest, of Jacob's sons, and once more he turns up as the tenderhearted one. But Jacob refused; he had little confidence in their ability to guarantee Benjamin's safe return. Their hands were not clean. They had caused him many anxious hours in the past. Reuben had committed a grievous sin, Simeon and Levi had murdered the population of a city, and the family of Judah was so evil that two of his sons had died in their youth for their wickedness. How could God prosper Benjamin with such men? Everything in which they were involved ended in disappointment or disaster.

### ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

1-38PP 224-227

1-3, 6, 8PP 224

9-17PP 225

18-29PP 226

36 PP 234; 3T 67

36-38PP 227

<sup>9</sup>

### CHAPTER 43

1 *Jacob is hardly persuaded to send Benjamin.* 15 *Joseph entertaineth his brethren.* 31 *He maketh them a feast.*

**2. Go again.** When the grain brought from Egypt had all been consumed, and the continued drought brought no relief from famine, Jacob called upon his sons to return to

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<sup>9</sup>Nichol, F. D. (1978). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary : The Holy Bible with exegetical and expository comment.* Commentary Reference Series (Ge 34:31). Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association.

Egypt for “a little food.” The sons themselves were not taking the initiative; they knew the uselessness of returning without Benjamin, and the apparent impossibility of changing their father’s mind. Judah, becoming spokesman for the others, firmly maintained that they would not go unless Benjamin should accompany them, since the Egyptian lord had solemnly declared that they should not see his face without their youngest brother. Judah, Jacob’s fourth son, was spokesman upon this occasion because Reuben, Jacob’s eldest son, had already been refused, Simeon was in an Egyptian prison, and Levi had probably forfeited his father’s confidence as a result of his treachery against the Shechemites (ch. 34).

**6. *Wherefore dealt ye so ill?*** To the father’s reproachful question, why they had informed the Egyptian viceroy about Benjamin, they replied in self-defense that they had been guilty of no slip of the tongue. How could they have known that such a question would become a source of trouble later on? Though Joseph’s questions concerning their family do not appear in the preceding narrative (ch. 42:13, 22), it is apparent that that information had been supplied in answer to a direct inquiry. In pleading before Joseph in behalf of Benjamin, Judah later reminded him of having asked just such a question (ch. 44:19).

**9. *I will be surety.*** Judah repeated then the unavoidable condition for returning to Egypt, hinting at death by famine as the only alternative. He would personally accept responsibility for Benjamin’s safe return. What more could he, or any of them, do? The nobility of character so conspicuous in Judah’s language is illustrated later in his pathetic pleading before Joseph (ch. 44:18–34). A great change must have taken place in his character since the incidents recorded in chs. 37, 38.

**11. *If it must be.*** After the eloquent plea of Judah, whose logic was irrefutable, Jacob submitted to the inevitable. Now that he was reconciled to Benjamin’s going, Jacob set about doing everything within his power that might contribute to the success of the journey. The present he suggested was to be of the choice products of the country, ones that were highly valued in Egypt (see on ch. 37:25).

***A little honey.*** That this was probably not bee “honey” appears from the fact that honey was abundant in Egypt. A small quantity of bee honey from Palestine would not have been considered a respectable gift, even by the giver. More likely, it was grape honey, prepared by boiling grape juice or new wine down to a half or a third of its original volume. The Greeks called it *hepsema*, “the boiled matter.” It is still imported into Egypt from the Hebron region of Palestine.

***Nuts.*** This fruit, the oblong nut of the *Pistacia vera*, is mentioned in the Bible only this once. It has an oily kernel and is considered a choice delicacy by Orientals.

***Almonds.*** The almond tree is called *shaqed*, “the watcher,” from the verb *shaqad*, “to be sleepless,” “to be awake,” “to watch.” It is the first of all the trees to blossom in the spring. Though it flourished in Syria and Palestine, this tree seems not to have been known in ancient Egypt.

**12. *Double money.*** Since the amount paid for the first lot of grain had been returned, Jacob advised his sons to take a double amount of money back to Egypt, to pay for the grain procured previously and for food to be bought on this trip. Although Jacob had feared that the return of the money might be interpreted falsely in Egypt (ch. 42:35), he expressed hope that it might have been done by mistake.

**14. *If I be bereaved.*** Before their departure, the aged patriarch blessed his ten sons and expressed confidence that God would give them mercy before the ruler of Egypt. The word translated “mercy” means, literally, “bowels,” and refers to the abdomen, considered anciently the seat of the affections and emotions. Though Jacob expressed faith in God’s protection, his very next statement reveals uncertainty as to whether God could bless his reprobate sons. They were an unpredictable lot, and might be counted on to get into trouble even where none might otherwise exist. In a spirit of resignation he acquiesced to the divine will, whatever it might be.

**16. *When Joseph saw Benjamin.*** Inasmuch as Joseph had charged them with being spies, there was no way of by-passing him and getting the desired corn from a lesser official. Joseph had probably issued an order to have them brought to him personally as soon as they should return to Egypt. Whatever may have been the procedure required of foreigners, especially of Jacob’s sons, the ten brothers soon found themselves once more in the presence of the dreaded lord of the land. Seeing the men, Joseph gave orders for them to be taken to his private residence and a meal prepared for them, literally, “to slaughter a slaughtering.” Egyptian reliefs reveal that beef and geese constituted the rich man’s usual fare in Egypt, and that considerable quantities of meat were served at meals when visitors were entertained.

**18. *The men were afraid.*** Joseph’s brothers were more deeply alarmed than ever upon discovering that they were to be taken to Joseph’s house. They may not have understood Joseph’s order, which had been given in Egyptian, and when they arrived at his official residence and were bidden to enter, they expected to be put into slavery, under indictment for theft. In an effort to avert what they feared, they approached the steward at the door, explaining how they had found the money in their sacks and that they were prepared to repay it. There is no need to assume a discrepancy between the record of the occurrence as given in ch. 42:27, 28 and as repeated here. It is possible that all had opened their sacks at the “inn,” but that only one had discovered his money at that time. It is inconceivable that the entire group had taken back only ten sacks of grain to feed their animals and their families for a period of several months.

**23. *I had your money.*** The steward, who apparently knew of Joseph’s plans, calmed them with the reassurance that their money had reached him, and that the reappearance of their money was to be explained as an act of God. As if to banish all their fears, he brought Simeon to them, and with true Oriental courtesy treated them as guests, giving them water for washing their feet and feeding their beasts of burden.

**26. *When Joseph came home.*** Joseph may have been busy on some important matter when his brothers arrived, and could not give them his attention just then. Or, more likely, his plans were already well laid, and he did not wish to see them until the time designated. Upon Joseph’s return, they handed him their present with the most reverential obeisance, unwittingly fulfilling the dreams of Joseph that had incited their intense hatred for him.

**29. *Saw his brother.*** When his eyes fell upon Benjamin, his brother by his own mother, Joseph went through the form of inquiring as to his identity—had the men actually fulfilled the required conditions?

**30. *His bowels did yearn.*** This was the second occasion on which Joseph was overcome with emotion, the first having been when his brothers spoke of their cruelty toward himself (ch. 42:21). Now it was the sight of his own brother, whom he had not

seen for 22 long years, that stirred his emotions. The expression “did yearn” reads literally, “were becoming warm,” that is, due to the intensity of his love (see on v. 14). Since he desired to test the attitude of his brothers toward Benjamin, he was not yet ready to make himself known to them, and withdrew hastily lest he be unable to carry his plan through to its logical conclusion. At the meal, where they might be expected to converse freely, he would have an excellent opportunity to discern their attitude. Regaining his poise, he washed his face, rejoined his brothers, and ordered dinner served.

**32. *For him by himself.*** A separate table was prepared for him, for his brothers, and for the Egyptians who dined with him. He ate separately either because of his high position or because his Egyptian entourage would not eat with him, an Asiatic, for the same reason they would not eat with Joseph’s brothers. The ancient Egyptians were always particular in the matter of association with foreigners. They considered themselves to be the highest class of human beings. They called themselves “people,” whereas all others were more or less barbarians, creatures standing between them and the animal world. The aversion to foreigners revealed itself strikingly in the matter of eating. The Hebrews, for example, slaughtered and ate animals that were regarded by the Egyptians as sacred. According to the account of Herodotus (ii. 41), no Egyptian would use the knife, or fork, or saucepan of a Greek, nor would he eat of the flesh of a clean animal that had been cut up with a Grecian knife.

**33. *The men marvelled.*** Discovering their arrangement at the table according to age, the men looked at one another with amazement, convinced that this august official had been supernaturally advised as to their ages.

**34. *Five times.*** To honor the men, special servings were brought them from Joseph’s table. To show Benjamin special honor, Joseph sent him choice cuts five times larger than those sent the others. Benjamin was the guest of honor. The custom of showing respect to distinguished guests by giving them the largest and best pieces appears in other ancient records (see 1 Sam. 9:23, 24; Homer *Iliad* vii. 321; viii. 162; Herodotus vi. 57). Joseph sought to test his brothers that he might discover their real feelings toward Benjamin, and thus toward himself. He desired to see whether they envied and hated their youngest brother on account of his maternity, as they had formerly envied Joseph.

## ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

1-34PP 227-228

### CHAPTER 44

1 *Joseph’s policy to stay his brethren.* 14 *Judah’s humble supplication to Joseph.*

**2. *Put my cup.*** This was Joseph’s final and decisive test prior to revealing himself to his brothers. His purpose was to create a situation by which he could legitimately claim the right to retain Benjamin in Egypt, so that his brothers might have an excuse for returning to Canaan without the favorite of their father. By this he would learn beyond a doubt what kind of men they now were. Either they would abide by the decision of Joseph to keep Benjamin in Egypt and return to their father with the heartbreaking message that he must reconcile himself to the loss of the remaining son of his beloved Rachel, or they would do everything in their power to prevent such a misfortune.

**5. *Whereby indeed he divineth.*** The goblet was a valuable possession. It was not an ordinary drinking cup, but one, supposedly, capable of detecting any poisonous substance placed in it. Such cups were also used for the practice of magic. The word translated “divineth” means “to whisper,” “to mumble,” “to prophesy.” Classical writers speak of

the Oriental practice of pouring water into a goblet and looking into it for representations of future events (Jamblichus *De mysteriis* iii. 14). Another custom described by the ancients consisted of pouring water into a goblet, dropping in pieces of gold and silver or precious stones, and then observing and interpreting the appearance in the water (Pliny *Natural History* xxxvii. 73; Strabo *Geography* xvi. 2. 39). That the steward was ordered to mention the practice of magic to the brothers does not imply that Joseph had actually adopted this superstitious practice himself. As previously (ch. 43:33), he was willing that they should believe he could read their thoughts. This would tend to unnerve them and lead them to abandon pretense.

On account of his great wisdom, the Egyptians probably attributed to Joseph the practice of magic. Had he not accurately predicted the years of plenty and of famine, and taken care that Egypt be prepared for the emergency? He certainly excelled their best “magicians” (ch. 41:8), and must therefore possess superior magic (see Ex. 8:19). Perhaps his fame as a wise man had spread far and wide, even to foreign lands, so that the supposed thieves of the goblet might appropriately be asked whether they were unaware of this fact (Gen. 44:15).

**9. Let him die.** Conscious of their complete innocence, the brothers did not hesitate to pronounce upon themselves the most severe penalty should the missing object be found with them. Their rash words seem a little foolhardy, particularly after the experience of finding their money mysteriously placed in their sacks. They might have been expected to be suspicious, and consequently somewhat more cautious. However, the unfeigned friendliness with which they had been received and entertained upon their second visit to Egypt, both by the viceroy himself and by his subordinates, had dissipated all doubts concerning the sincerity of Joseph’s intentions.

**10. Let it be.** Professing an exalted sense of fairness and justice, the steward declined to think of punishing the innocent with the guilty, or even the guilty as rigorously as they proposed. When others speak rashly we should not take advantage of their rashness. We ourselves may at times make commitments without due deliberation which might bring injury to us, except for the leniency of others.

**12. He searched.** The steward’s systematic search must have reminded them of their surprise the day before at finding themselves seated according to age. Also it must have kept them tense, for the lost object was not found until the very last moment of the search. One after another the men found themselves cleared. By facial expression, and perhaps even in words, they may have expressed triumph at the growing evidence of their declared innocence. But then the lost object was found in Benjamin’s sack. With anguish and alarm at this new calamity they rent their clothes (see on ch. 37:34), reloaded their asses, and returned to the city.

**13. Returned to the city.** Now it would be seen how they felt in their inmost hearts toward their father’s favorite, who had been so honored by the great man of Egypt. Would they give him up as they had Joseph, and bring their aged father with sorrow to the grave, or would they be ready to surrender their own liberty and lives that he might return in safety to his father?

**14. They fell before him.** With Judah leading the way, the men came to Joseph’s house, where they all fell down before him, pleading for mercy. Several ancient Egyptian reliefs depicting similar situations have been preserved. One shows Canaanite petitioners before the general Haremhab in the 14th century B.C. Some of them lie flat on the ground,

with arms outstretched and heads lifted pleadingly to the high official. Others kneel or bow low before him, all of them with arms raised, to impress the general with the urgency of their request. In the case of those who fell down before Haremhob the request was to be permitted to settle in Egypt, since they had been expelled from their homeland.

**15. *Wot ye not?*** Joseph spoke harshly, which must have been reminiscent of the reception accorded them on their first visit to Egypt. On Joseph as not being a practitioner of magic, see on v. 5.

**16. *Judah said.*** Judah, the leader of this second mission to Egypt (ch. 43:8), stepped forward as spokesman. He made no attempt to justify himself and his brothers or to clear himself and them from suspicion, but acknowledged freely their guilt. He referred, without doubt, to the crime committed against their brother Joseph, a crime that had been haunting their consciences ever since its perpetration (ch. 42:21, 22). To the Egyptian bystanders, particularly the steward, the words of Judah meant the acknowledgment of their guilt, and this no doubt astonished the Egyptians, since they knew the men were really innocent. Joseph must have felt the anguish of their souls, realizing that they felt the punishment soon to be meted out was deserved. In reply to Judah's offer that all should remain as slaves in Egypt, where they had once sold their brother into slavery, Joseph declared that his sentence would be mild and just. The guilty one alone should be his slave; the others might go back to their father unharmed and unmolested.

**18. *Judah came near.*** The remaining 17 verses of the chapter repeat the speech of Judah on behalf of his brother Benjamin. This speech has appropriately been called one of the masterpieces of Hebrew literary composition, one of the finest specimens of natural eloquence in the world.

***Thou art even as Pharaoh.*** Judah's speech began with a request for a gracious hearing. He was speaking to one who was equal to Pharaoh, with authority to condemn or to pardon. Inasmuch as the monarch of Egypt was considered a god, the paragon of all perfection, the highest honor that might be conferred upon a person was comparison with the monarch.

**19. *My lord asked his servants.*** First of all, Judah related how Benjamin happened to become involved in the trouble. Joseph had inquired into their family affairs, and they had truthfully informed him concerning their youngest brother, who was still at home. Joseph had insisted that they should not venture to return to Egypt without their brother, by way of proving his existence and thus the accuracy of their statements. Although some phases of this report relate more than the shorter account of the conversation in ch. 42, Judah must have reported the original conversation accurately, in order to avoid making any untrue or exaggerated statements.

**25. *Our father said.*** After having reminded Joseph in courteous but definite terms that his demands were the cause of Benjamin's presence in Egypt, he proceeded to depict in affectionate and effective words the love of their aged father for the son of his old age, and his grief when they informed him that they might not return to Egypt without Benjamin. He related the intense anxiety with which, after a severe struggle, their father had finally permitted him to come. He emphasized the sober fact that they would bring down the gray hairs of their father with sorrow to the grave (see ch. 37:35), should they return without the youth.

**27. *Ye know that my wife.*** This remark, made here for the first time, implies that Jacob regarded Rachel more as his actual wife than Leah, Bilhah, or Zilpah (see ch. 46:19). She was ever the wife of his affections.

**28. *Surely he is torn.*** Jacob meant here that Joseph, had he been alive, would certainly have been able to return himself or to send word. Never having seen him since that fateful day of his departure from Hebron, Jacob could only conclude that his fears were fully justified.

**33. *Instead of the lad.*** Judah's self-sacrifice is certainly deserving of praise. Voluntary submission to servitude on behalf of a brother who enjoyed a higher degree of parental affection, in order to save his aged father fresh sorrow and anguish, cannot be overestimated. Judah's self-forgetful magnanimity has never been surpassed, and but seldom equaled. Judah emerges here as a truly converted man, a worthy ancestor of the promised seed, and worthy to give his name to the chosen people of God.

Joseph could no longer doubt that a complete change had come over his brothers, and over Judah in particular, since the day when he had so eloquently urged the sale of Joseph into slavery. Joseph's tactics had proved eminently successful. He was now convinced regarding the attitude of his brothers, and satisfied that their conversion was genuine. There was no further need to test them, and he was therefore ready to reveal his identity.

## ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

1-34PP 229-230

### CHAPTER 45

1 *Joseph maketh himself known to his brethren.* 5 *He comforteth them in God's providence.* 9 *He sendeth for his father.* 16 *Pharaoh confirmeth it.* 21 *Joseph furnisheth them for their journey, and exhorteth them to concord.* 25 *Jacob is revived with the news.*

**1. *Then Joseph could not refrain.*** Judah's appeal did not fail to impress Joseph. His speech had shown the most tender affection for their aged father, the most devoted brotherly love and faithfulness to the only remaining son of Rachel, and had given ample evidence of the change of heart that had taken place in all of them. Recognizing this, Joseph could not restrain himself longer. Wishing to be alone with his brothers while he revealed his identity to them, and feeling that he could not keep back his tears, he ordered all his attendants to leave the room.

**2. *He wept aloud.*** This, Joseph's entourage heard and reported to Pharaoh. It is not necessary to suppose that Joseph's residence was so close to the palace that his voice was heard by the king's household itself.

**3. *I am Joseph.*** The effect of this announcement is easier to imagine than to describe. Hitherto Joseph had been known to his brothers as Zaphnath-paaneah, a man who spoke to them through an interpreter (ch. 42:23). Now this august lord of Egypt suddenly spoke to them in their own language. The voice and the likeness of their long-lost brother rushed upon their minds at the sound of the familiar name and filled them with amazement and apprehension.

***Doth my father yet live?*** Perhaps Joseph was impelled to ask this question so abruptly upon seeing alarm in their faces. Now he no longer refers to Jacob as the "old man of whom ye spake" (ch. 43:27), but as his own beloved and revered father. That he was still living, Joseph had not only been informed previously (ch. 43:27, 28), but had just been told again (ch. 44:34). His heart yearned to hear more of his father.

***They were troubled.*** This new turn in events was too much; the men were speechless. They were terrified, not only because of Joseph's greatness, but by the recollection of their former crime against him. So far, they had been conscious only of divine retribution for that act, and had not feared human punishment, inasmuch as their crime was not known to anyone outside of their own small circle. Now, however, they stood in the presence of the one whom they had so deeply wronged. Little wonder that they cringed in alarm before him, thinking that now the hour of recompense for the deeds of Dothan had arrived.

***5. Be not grieved.*** Instinctively they shrank from Joseph's presence, at the alarming truth that the mighty lord of Egypt was their brother. He assured them in the kindest of words that he had no intention of taking revenge on them. He could not avoid allusion to their former wickedness, but this was done in a spirit of charity and forgiveness.

***God did send me.*** Joseph's great-mindedness is clearly reflected here. God's hand was evident in the strange experience that had made him, a favorite son, first a slave, then a prisoner, and finally ruler of Egypt. He might have justly rebuked his brothers, but instead he manifested sympathy and consideration toward them.

***6. Neither be earing nor harvest.*** "Earing" does not refer to the collection of ears of corn, which would make the word a synonym for harvest. It means, literally, "plowing," from the Anglo-Saxon *erian*, probably borrowed from the Latin *aro*, "to plow." This is also the meaning of the Hebrew word so translated. In other countries the failure to plant and to harvest would be due to a lack of rain; in Egypt, to a marked deficiency in the rise of the Nile (see on ch. 41:34). That Joseph spoke of there being neither sowing nor reaping in a general, rather than in an absolute, sense is evident from ch. 47:19, which states that the Egyptians came to Joseph to buy seed. It is probable that even during this famine they sowed some of the ground, particularly near the banks of the river, from which a crop, though small, might be reaped.

***7. To preserve.*** Joseph repeated his former assertion, that it was God who had sent him to Egypt for a definite purpose. He spoke prophetically here, to the effect that God had brought him to Egypt in order to preserve through him the family destined to become God's chosen people, by delivering them from starvation.

***8. A father to Pharaoh.*** Joseph spoke to them concerning his authority, giving God the honor for his appointment to the high position he held. He used three expressions to describe his office, of which the first was "father to Pharaoh." Some commentators have seen in it a specific Egyptian title, one clearly attested for high dignitaries of the Eighteenth Dynasty. But this interpretation is questionable, inasmuch as the title was borne by men who fulfilled priestly duties, and there is not the slightest evidence that Joseph performed any such duties. It is probably better to explain the word as a Hebrew expression, since Joseph spoke to his brothers as a Hebrew to Hebrews, and not as an Egyptian. He may have meant that he was a trusted counselor of the king and a sustainer of the dynasty (see Isa. 22:21; Job 29:16).

***Lord of all his house.*** The second term had already been used by the king himself, at the time of Joseph's appointment (Gen. 41:40). It indicates that Joseph stood at the head of the royal household.

***Ruler throughout all the land of Egypt.*** The third designation, also bestowed upon Joseph by Pharaoh, was certainly not new to Joseph's brothers, who had heard of and experienced his authority. They already knew that his power was not limited to the

distribution of food or to dealings with foreigners, but that he was actually viceroy of Egypt (see ch. 42:30).

**10. *The land of Goshen.*** Although the name Goshen has not yet been found outside of the Bible, it is generally agreed that the area around the *Wadi Tumilat*, in the eastern part of the Nile Delta, is meant. It is a valley some 40 mi. in length, whose river, usually dry except in the rainy season, connects the Nile with Lake Timsah. This area has been one of the richest sections of Egypt, in both ancient and modern times.

***Near unto me.*** Avaris, the capital of the Hyksos, was only 20 to 30 mi. from this area, much closer than any other capital in all of Egypt's history. This is one of the many arguments supporting the view that Joseph was ruler over Egypt in the time of the Hyksos.

**12. *Your eyes see.*** Although Joseph had now spoken for several minutes, his brothers were so overwhelmed that to convince them of the reality of the whole affair, Joseph was obliged to point out that they could see for themselves that what he said was true. Only when Joseph embraced his brothers and kissed them was the spell broken. Now they regained control over their emotions and were able to converse with him. When he had revealed himself in the role of a loving brother and not of an offended judge, and by his kisses and tears had given them assurance of complete forgiveness, a truth that words could not have expressed so well, only then did they dare to speak.

**16. *It pleased Pharaoh.*** The report of the arrival of Joseph's brothers soon reached the ear of the king and made so favorable an impression on him and on the other courtiers, that the king was happy to confirm Joseph's invitation to his brothers to come with their father and their families to Egypt. Though Joseph had the authority to invite his family, he apparently felt it right and proper to seek and receive Pharaoh's personal approval, lest his conduct in office be open to question. No one could say that Joseph had in any way taken personal advantage of the power and authority entrusted to him. It is evident also that Joseph's administrative ability, demonstrated now for nine years, had so pleased the king and the other statesmen of Egypt that they were delighted to have Joseph's relatives make their home in Egypt. To Pharaoh it was an opportunity to show his gratitude.

**19. *Take you wagons.*** Since the Hyksos had introduced the first horses and the first chariots into Egypt, neither of which had previously been known in the Nile valley, light two-wheeled vehicles were in use by the Egyptians, especially in warfare, but also for transportation outside of Egypt. In Egypt itself all transportation of people and goods was carried on by boats on the Nile, and carriages were of little use.

**20. *Regard not your stuff.*** Joseph had asked his brothers to come to Egypt with all their possessions. Pharaoh, in contrast, manifested his good will by inviting them to leave all their household furniture behind and accept the bounties of Egypt in token of his gratitude for what Joseph, one of them, had done for the country of his adoption.

**22. *Changes of raiment.*** Joseph not only sent carriages, according to Pharaoh's directions, and food for the journey, but also gave presents to his brothers. The phrase "changes of raiment" probably means "festal garments," as in the RSV, that is, clothing to be worn on special occasions. Thus upon arrival in Egypt they would not be unduly conspicuous. Inasmuch as Benjamin is specifically mentioned as receiving five such "changes," it is probable that the others received less than five each, though certainly

more than one. The 300 shekels of silver, given to Benjamin, as Joseph's favorite brother, would weigh approximately 71/2 lbs. (3.42 kg.).

**24. Fall not out.** Literally, "be not moved," or "be not disturbed," that is, with violent emotion, particularly anger. This is generally understood as an admonition against quarreling, particularly over their relative responsibility for the course events had taken. This advice gives evidence of Joseph's deep insight into human nature. He had already overheard Reuben denounce his brothers severely (ch. 42:22). He might well suppose that Reuben and others would repeat these things, even more vehemently, when alone. Reuben might have argued how different the result would have been had they taken his advice. After that each would have added his own comments, and a serious quarrel might have been the result. The unexpected prosperity into which they had fallen might also serve to arouse old feelings of enmity, particularly with respect to Benjamin. All this was now restrained by Joseph's sober and timely advice.

**26. He believed them not.** When they reached their home at Hebron, bringing word that Joseph was not only alive but ruler of all Egypt, the shock was so great that Jacob's heart nearly stopped. When his sons had come to Hebron with the tidings of Joseph's supposed death, Jacob had readily believed their lies. Now that they came telling the truth, Jacob would not believe them at all. Only the costly gifts and the Egyptian carriages finally convinced him of the truth of their story.

**28. Israel said.** The change of name here is significant. In spirit, Jacob rose once more to the stature of a "prince" of God. The realization that his long-lost son was still living and the anticipation of the imminent reunion with him invigorated the aged patriarch. His vitality revived, as is apparent from the immediate decision to go down to Egypt. The sight of Joseph would be rich compensation for all the long years of sorrow and anguish, and would crown his life with joy.

### ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

1-28PP 230-232

5-8SR 103

### CHAPTER 46

*1 Jacob is comforted by God at Beer-sheba: 5 Thence he with his company goeth into Egypt. 8 The number of his family that went into Egypt. 29 Joseph meeteth Jacob. 31 He instructeth his brethren how to answer to Pharaoh.*

**1. Came to Beer-sheba.** Jacob's camp had probably been at Hebron for many years (chs. 35:27; 37:14), the place where his grandfather Abraham and his father Isaac were buried, together with other members of the family. This was probably the place of departure. On his way to Egypt, Jacob halted at Beersheba, on the southern borders of Canaan, where Abraham (ch. 21:33) and Isaac (ch. 26:25) had erected altars to Jehovah. When Jacob passed this sacred place, and saw, possibly, the remains of his father's altar, he stopped to offer sacrifices to God, who had dealt with him so graciously in the past. These sacrifices were probably thank offerings for the good tidings concerning Joseph. Jacob may also have desired to consult with God concerning his journey to Egypt, which may have occasioned gloomy forebodings in view of the scenes of affliction revealed to Abraham (ch. 15:13). It is certain that Jacob here commended himself and his family to the care of God.

**2. God spake unto Israel.** This was apparently the first vision accorded Jacob for many years. Several of the previous revelations had come during the night, mostly in the

form of dreams (chs. 28:12; 31:11; 32:30). This one is not called a dream, which would have come during sleep, but a vision.

**Jacob, Jacob.** That God called him Jacob instead of Israel may have been to remind him of what he had been, since he had seen his own former character clearly reflected in that of his sons. Once he had deceived his father and cheated his brother; his own sons had deceived him concerning Joseph for 22 years ere the truth came out. Many times he no doubt wished he might see nobler traits in his sons, only to think of the unregenerate character he himself had possessed for so many years.

## Route of Joseph and Kindred to Egypt



**3. Fear not.** This divine admonition reveals the fact that Jacob had feared he might be doing wrong in going to Egypt. He yearned to see Joseph, his long-lost son; but he also remembered the evil consequences of Abraham's journey to Egypt (ch. 12:14–20), and that God had once forbidden Isaac to go there during a famine (ch. 26:2). Whether his journey would meet God's approval may have been a serious question in the patriarch's mind. Now God expressed approval of the journey and gave him reassuring promises. As formerly, when setting out for Padan-aram, so now in departing for Egypt, Jacob received the assurance that God would go with him, that the divine promise concerning his posterity was still valid, and that the move into Egypt would not mean the permanent abandonment of the Land of Promise.

**4. Bring thee up again.** In a limited sense this promise was fulfilled to Jacob personally, when his body was returned to Canaan for interment, but fully in the exodus of Jacob's descendants from Egypt some 215 years later.

**6. *All his seed.*** Strengthened and encouraged by the divine promises again vouchsafed to him in the nightly vision, Jacob went into Egypt, accompanied by his children and grandchildren.

Many commentators have drawn attention to a tomb picture from Beni Hasan in Egypt, as a parallel to Jacob's migration to Egypt. This picture, already described in connection with Abraham's earlier journey to Egypt (see on ch. 12:10), depicts the arrival of Semites in the Nile valley in the 19th century B.C., at the time of the Twelfth Dynasty. This would be at least two centuries before Jacob's journey to Egypt, and the picture therefore cannot be taken as a contemporary illustration of the event under discussion. It is, nevertheless, important to an understanding of Jacob's migration, because it shows Semitic men and women with their goods loaded upon asses and their children in wicker baskets on the backs of asses. It shows their colorful dress, and the style of their garments, shoes, weapons, and even a musical instrument, a lyre (see p. 160).

**8. *The children of Israel.*** First occurrence of this expression. The size of Jacob's family, which was to grow into a great nation, is given here, in evident allusion to the fulfillment of the divine promise with which he went into Egypt. The list of names includes not merely the "sons of Israel" in the stricter sense, but also the patriarch himself, and Joseph, with his two sons, who were born before Jacob's arrival in Egypt.

**9. *The sons of Reuben.*** Of the four sons of Reuben, the last two mentioned must have been mere babes in the arms of their mother, since Reuben had had only two sons at the time of his first return from Egypt (ch. 42:37). Their names mean: Hanoch (a variant of "Enoch"), the name also of Cain's first-born (ch. 4:17), and of the patriarch Enoch (ch. 5:19), means "dedicated"; Phallu, "separated"; Hezron, "enclosure"; and Carmi, "vinedresser" or "my vineyard."

**10. *The sons of Simeon.*** Jemuel means "day of God"; Jamin, "right hand"; Ohad, "united"; Jachin, "he [God] establishes"; Zohar, "whiteness" or "brilliance"; and Shaul, "asked for."

***Canaanitish woman.*** The reference to one of the sons of Simeon as "the son of a Canaanitish woman" implies that it was not the custom of the sons of Jacob to take wives from among the Canaanites. As a rule they were chosen from the paternal relatives in Mesopotamia, the families of Ishmael, the Keturah sons, or Esau. Only Simeon and Judah (ch. 38:2) seem to have had Canaanite wives.

**11. *The sons of Levi.*** Gershon means "expulsion" or "extortion"; Kohath, "assembly"; and Merari, "bitter."

**12. *The sons of Judah.*** On the meaning of the names of Pharez and Zarah see on ch. 38:29, 30. Er and Onan, who died in the land of Canaan, are not counted, but Pharez already had two sons, Hezron, meaning "enclosure" (see v. 9), and Hamul, "one who has received mercy."

**13. *The sons of Issachar.*** Tola means "worm" or "scarlet," and Phuvah, "mouth." Job, which seems to stand for the unabbreviated form Jashub (Num. 26:24; 1 Chron. 7:1), means "turning oneself," and Shimron, "watch."

**14. *The sons of Zebulun.*** Sered means "fear"; Elon, "oak"; and Jahleel, "wait for God."

**15. *Dinah.*** Apparently unmarried since her misfortune in Shechem, and therefore mentioned here as an independent member of Jacob's family.

**Thirty and three.** This number is reached either by excluding Er and Onan and including Jacob and Dinah, as is most likely correct, or by including Er and Onan and excluding Jacob and Dinah. The 6 sons of Leah, 23 grandsons (who were still alive), 2 great-grandsons (sons of Pharez), and 1 daughter, add up to 32 persons, or with Jacob, 33.

**16. The sons of Gad.** Ziphion means “expectation”; Haggi, “festive”; Shuni, “quiet”; Ezbon, “toiling”; Eri, “guarding”; Arodi, “hunch-backed”; and Areli, “lion of God.”

**17. The sons of Asher.** The meaning of Jimnah is uncertain. Ishuah and Isui both have the same meaning, “he is equal,” and Beriah means “gift.” Their sister Serah’s name means “abundance.” Heber means “friend” or “fellow,” and Malchiel, “king of God.”

It is inconceivable that of Jacob’s grandchildren, of whom 51 grandsons are enumerated by name, only 1 girl should have been born, the daughter of Asher. She is probably mentioned because, like Dinah (v. 15), she remained unmarried. She had not gone over to another family, like the other daughters and granddaughters of Jacob, who had followed their husbands to their homes.

**18. Sixteen souls.** Zilpah’s 2 sons, her 11 grandsons, 1 granddaughter, and 2 great-grandsons make up the number 16.

**20. Manasseh and Ephraim.** See on ch. 41:50-52.

**21. The sons of Benjamin.** Belah means “devouring,” and Becher, “young male camel.” Ashbel, Gera, Muppim, and Ard are of uncertain meaning. Naaman means “pleasantness”; Ehi, “my brother”; Rosh, “head”; and Huppim, “coverings.”

In Benjamin’s genealogical list of Num. 26:40 Naaman and Ard are given as the sons of Bela, that is, the grandsons of Benjamin. A reasonable explanation is that the two sons of Benjamin, Naaman and Ard, died without offspring, and that Bela called his sons after the names of his two deceased brothers. In this way they would take not only their uncles’ names but also their position in the tribe, and become heads of families. The names of Becher, Gera, and Rosh may likewise have been omitted from the list in Num. 26 for the reason that they had died early without offspring.

**22. All the souls were fourteen.** Rachel’s 2 sons and her 12 grandsons make up the number of 14.

**23. The sons of Dan.** Only one son of Dan is listed. The plural form “sons” is used as a stereotype phrase, whether one or several sons are named. Another example of this custom is v. 15, where the term “daughters” is used, although only one, Dinah, is mentioned. Hushim’s name is of uncertain meaning.

**24. The sons of Naphtali.** Jahzeel means “allotted by God,” but Guni is of uncertain meaning. Jezer means “image” or “frame,” and Shillem, “recompense.”

**25. All the souls were seven.** Bilhah’s two sons and five grandsons make up this number.

**26. All the souls.** This figure includes only descendants of Jacob who were still living at the time of the migration to Egypt, but not his sons’ wives, or his married daughters and their families, if such came down with him to Egypt, since they had become members of other tribes. The number 66 is constituted of the following parts:

Jacob’s 11 sons and 1 unmarried daughter	12
euben’s sons	4
imeon’s sons	6
evi’s sons	3

Judah's 3 sons and 2 grandsons	5
Sachar's sons	4
Rebulun's sons	3
Jad's sons	7
Sher's 4 sons, 1 daughter, and 2 grandsons	7
Man's son	1
Shaphtali's sons	4
Benjamin's sons	10

Total 66

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**27. Threescore and ten.** Moses adds Jacob, Joseph, and his 2 sons to the 66 descendants of Jacob, giving 70 as the total of Jacob's family that settled in Egypt. Stephen's total of 75 (Acts 7:14), instead of 70, is probably due to his being a Greek-speaking Jew who used the Greek OT version, often quoted in the NT (see on Acts 6:1). This version includes 5 other (later) descendants of Joseph (see vs. 20, 27, LXX).

**28. He sent Judah before him.** The list of the house of Jacob is followed by an account of the arrival in Egypt. Judah, having shown remarkable qualities of leadership on their previous trip to Egypt, was naturally selected to represent the aged patriarch and announce his arrival. He would also obtain from Joseph necessary instructions as to the place of their settlement, and then return to guide the caravan to Goshen (see on ch. 45:10). The fact that Judah performed this task suggests that he had already been selected by Jacob as inheritor of the birthright. Benjamin, though beloved, was young and lacking in experience, and, as later circumstances proved, he lacked qualities of leadership. Benjamin was only a "wolf," but Judah was a "lion" (ch. 49:9, 27).

**29. Fell on his neck.** The expression "presented himself," generally used only of the appearance of God, here suggests the glory in which Joseph came to meet his father. This meeting brought the lives of both men to a climax. How earnestly they had yearned to see each other is a matter for the imagination, not for description. Their great love, each for the other, overflowing in the joy of their hearts, was poured out in tears, which could no longer be kept back. These were tears of joy, that came after many tears of bitterness shed during their long separation.

**30. Now let me die.** Not that Jacob wished to die, but that he was now completely satisfied. Having seen Joseph with his own eyes, and knowing that his beloved son's happiness was assured, he felt that life could offer him no greater joy. The last earthly longing of his heart was completely satisfied, and he was ready to lay down his life whenever and wherever God saw fit.

**33. When Pharaoh shall call you.** One of the first things Joseph purposed to do, after welcoming his relatives to Egypt, was to introduce his father and brothers to the king. Pharaoh might have intended to appoint some of them as officers, thinking they might be as useful to him as Joseph. But Joseph, well aware of the allurements of Egyptian court life, and the weak characters of his brothers, feared that they might soon succumb to temptation and lose the vision of their future part in God's plan. This way why Joseph emphasized that they should state, if asked, that their occupation was that of shepherds, so implying that they were unqualified for court life.

**34. The land of Goshen.** Goshen, in the eastern Delta region, was admirably suitable for flocks and herds. Though near the capital (ch. 45:10), it would isolate them from the Egyptians, and would permit them to live their own lives, continue their own culture, and serve their own God without offense to others. Furthermore, they would be comparatively near to Canaan, and could easily leave in a time of emergency. Joseph thus revealed insight into the destiny of his people, apparently realizing that the time would come when they would have to leave.

**Every shepherd is an abomination.** These are probably not the words of Joseph, but of Moses, the historian, given in explanation of Joseph's advice and action. If his brothers should voice a desire to continue their occupation as shepherds, the king would most likely consent to their settling in the region of Goshen, which would isolate them from the valley of the Nile and most Egyptians. Moses' evaluation of the Egyptian attitude toward shepherds is corroborated later by Greek writers (Herodotus, ii. 47, 164) and by Josephus (*Antiquities* ii. 7. 5), as earlier by pictorial representations in paintings and reliefs. Shepherds are frequently represented as miserable creatures, dirty and unshaven, naked and half starved, and often either lame or deformed.

#### ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

1-34PP 232-233

6, 7 SR 147

29 5T 125

#### CHAPTER 47

1 *Joseph presenteth five of his brethren, 7 and his father, before Pharaoh. 11 He giveth them habitation and maintenance. 13 He getteth all the Egyptians' money, 16 their cattle, 18 their lands to Pharaoh. 22 The priests' land was not bought. 23 He letteth the land to them for a fifth part. 28 Jacob's age. 29 He sweareth Joseph to bury him with his fathers.*

**2. Took some of his brethren.** Having previously informed Pharaoh of the arrival of his relatives in Goshen, Joseph presented five of his brothers to the king. The Hebrew expression correctly translated "some of his brethren" in the KJV was misunderstood by earlier commentators, who gave unwarranted interpretations of it. It is simply a Hebrew idiom meaning "out of the whole number of his brothers."

**6. The land of Egypt is before thee.** They had come to sojourn in the land (not to settle there) because there was no pasture for their flocks in the land of Canaan, owing to the drought. The king then authorized Joseph to give his father and brothers a dwelling in the best part of the country, the land of Goshen.

**7. Joseph brought in Jacob.** Joseph then presented his father to Pharaoh, once royal permission had already been given for settling in the region of Goshen. It has been suggested that the interview granted Joseph's brothers was of an official nature, whereas Jacob's audience with the monarch was of a purely private character. The king may have requested the opportunity of meeting the father of his first minister.

**Jacob blessed Pharaoh.** Jacob did not extend to Pharaoh the customary salutation accorded kings, such as, "May the king live forever!" (2 Sam. 16:16; 1 Kings 1:25; Dan. 2:4; etc.). Conscious of his own dignity as a prophet of Jehovah, Jacob pronounced upon him a heavenly benediction.

**9. The years of my pilgrimage.** Jacob referred to his own life and that of his father as a "pilgrimage." They had not come into actual possession of Canaan, but had been obliged to wander about, unsettled and homeless, in the land promised them as an

inheritance. This “pilgrimage” was at the same time a figurative representation of the inconsistency and weariness of the earthly life, in which man does not attain to that true rest for which he was created and for which his soul continually longs (see Heb. 4:8, 9). Paul could therefore appropriately regard these words of Jacob as a declaration of the yearning of the patriarchs for the eternal rest of the heavenly Canaan (Heb. 11:13–16).

**An hundred and thirty years.** Joseph had been 30 years old at the time of his appointment to office (Gen. 41:46), and since that time the 7 plentiful years (ch. 41:47–49) and 2 years of famine had passed (ch. 45:6). Now he had reached the age of 39, and his father was 130 years of age. It is evident from these figures that Joseph was born when his father was 91 years old. Since his birth occurred at the close of Jacob’s 14 years of residence in Padan-aram (ch. 30:25), the patriarch’s age upon arrival there must have been 77.

**Few and evil.** Jacob’s evaluation of his life was only too true when compared with that of his fathers. Abraham had lived to be 175 years old, and Isaac 180. Neither had led so uncertain a life, so full of distress and danger, of tribulation and anguish, as had Jacob. From his flight to Haran to the time of his removal to Egypt, his life had been nothing but one long succession of troubles (ch. 42:36).

**11. The land of Rameses.** Two views concerning this statement are held by critical scholars. According to some, it constitutes strong evidence for a variant tradition regarding the settlement of the Israelites in Egypt, inasmuch as the land has thus far been called Goshen (vs. 1, 6). Others have drawn the conclusion that it indicates the time when the children of Israel were in Egypt as that of the Ramessides. The first Ramses began to reign in 1320 B.C. The first argument is unacceptable because Moses was sole author of Genesis, and the book is a historical narrative and not a collection of traditions. Neither can the second argument be accepted, for it would bring chronological confusion to this section of the OT narrative. It must therefore be assumed that the term “land of Rameses” was a later name for the older term “and of Goshen,” and accordingly represents the effort of a copyist to identify “Goshen” for his readers. By the same procedure we might say today that New York was founded by the Dutch, although the city they founded was known as New Amsterdam. Our statement would nevertheless be considered not only correct but even desirable, for the name New Amsterdam would have no meaning for many modern readers.

**12. According to their families.** Literally, “according to the mouth of the little ones.” It probably means “in proportion to the size of their families.” Some commentators, however, have thought that it refers to Joseph as providing food for his relatives as a father would for his offspring, and others, that it means all were fed, from the greatest to the least. The benefits Joseph was in a position to confer upon his family become all the more apparent from the description of the distress into which the inhabitants of Egypt and Canaan were plunged by the continuation of the famine for five years more.

**13. Fainted.** This verse introduces a great social revolution forced upon Egypt by the stern necessity of famine, which had by now reduced the entire nation to a state of utter misery.

**16. Give your cattle.** The animals that thus became Pharaoh’s property were probably left in the care of their owners. These terms, therefore, were not so severe as it would appear. A famishing people could expect no profit from starving cattle and dying herds. Now they were to receive fodder for their animals, and probably enjoy a partial profit on

them, by analogy to what happened to their land and its produce the next year (see vs. 23, 24).

**17. For horses.** The existence of horses in Egypt proves that the Joseph narrative may not be dated earlier than the Hyksos period, since the horse was unknown there until the Hyksos introduced it (see on ch. 41:43).

**For that year.** It is not certain which of the seven years of famine is here meant. Some commentators think that the distribution of seed to farmers the following year (v. 23) shows that that was the seventh year of the famine, and the year in which the cattle were exchanged for food consequently the sixth year. However, it is probable that some planting had been carried on during all the years of famine in fields bordering on the Nile, which would render the reference to seed in vs. 23, 24 of no value as evidence that the last year is here meant. Nevertheless, the year referred to in v. 17 probably fell in the latter part of the period of famine.

**18. The second year.** That is, the second year after their money was gone, not the second year of famine.

**19. Buy us and our land.** Realizing that their lot as Pharaoh's serfs would be preferable to that of free but starving citizens, they considered this solution advantageous to themselves as well as to the king. A full stomach was a far happier prospect than starvation.

Although no contemporary non-Biblical records have survived to corroborate the Bible account of the famine, the fact remains that the kings of Egypt enjoyed sole possession of all nonecclesiastical properties after the expulsion of the Hyksos, a situation that did not exist before their arrival. Prior to the Hyksos invasion of Egypt a great proportion of the land was owned by the people, being in the hands of large and small landowners. Concerning conditions during the Hyksos period no records exist, but when that period ended and the monuments began to shed light on the existing situation once more, it is found that all lands and practically all the other property of Egypt had become the monopoly of the crown and the priesthood. The best explanation for this radical change in the social structure of the nation is the Biblical record of Joseph's administrative measures during the seven years of famine.

**21. He removed them to cities.** This statement is an accurate translation of the Hebrew text as we know it today. It seems to mean that Joseph distributed, or organized, the population of the land according to the cities in which grain was stored, placing them either in the cities or in their immediate vicinity. However, the LXX and the Vulgate may reflect the original more accurately: "He brought the people into bondage to him for servants." Since the Hebrew text presumably underlying these early translations would represent the exchange of but two very similar Hebrew letters, the equivalents of *d* and *r*, and the addition of another letter, *b*, it is possible that the LXX and the Vulgate are closer to the original text. Their rendition certainly seems more appropriate to the context. Until the recovery of an ancient Hebrew text of this passage may decide the problem one way or the other, however, it is best to withhold judgment.

**22. The land of the priests.** The priests formed a most influential and powerful segment of Egyptian society. No Pharaoh ever succeeded in permanently breaking their power, and very few dared to arouse their hatred or even lose their good will. More than half of all the wealth of Egypt was in the hands of the priests. They were tax-exempt throughout Egypt's ancient history. Even the Hyksos kings did not openly fight the

priesthood, though in general they did not worship the national gods. Joseph, who personally did not sympathize with the Egyptian priests, was wise enough not to interfere with the long-established priestly privileges, which guaranteed their support at public expense.

**24. *Ye shall give the fifth part.*** The levy of 20 per cent collected during the 7 plentiful years, as an exceptional measure, had not seemed an excessive burden because of the tremendous amount of produce. Henceforth it was to be perpetuated as the regular tax rate, inasmuch as all lands had become the property of the crown.

**25. *Saved our lives.*** This acknowledgment by the people shows clearly that the new regulation was not considered harsh or unjust. It is an adequate refutation of the oft-repeated charge that Joseph despoiled the Egyptians of their liberties and reduced a free people to slavery. Slave-owners are usually not content with a tax of 20 per cent on the gross income of their estates. Except for the tax, royal ownership of the lands was more nominal than real. At all events, the tax was not considered exorbitant by the people themselves. They were grateful to be able to remain alive and to retain the use of their animals, houses, and lands, even though it be under the nominal lordship of Pharaoh.

**27. *Multiplied exceedingly.*** Since Jacob's family lived in a fertile region and were amply supplied by Joseph (v. 12), it is not astonishing that they enjoyed an unprecedented period of prosperity. The result was not only an accumulation of wealth but also a rapid increase in population. Thus began the fulfillment of the promise made by God to Jacob at Beersheba (ch. 46:3).

**28. *Seventeen years.*** In these verses and in the following chapters the patriarch Jacob's last days are described. He had lived 77 years in Canaan, 20 in Padan-aram, 33 more in Canaan, and finally 17 in Egypt, in all 147 years.

**29. *Thy hand under my thigh.*** Concerning this ancient custom, see on ch. 24:2.

**30. *Bury me.*** Though Jacob's request was due in part to a deep-seated attachment to the ground where his ancestors lay buried, it was chiefly inspired by clear faith that Canaan was the true inheritance of Israel. He knew that his descendants would eventually return to the Land of Promise as their permanent home, and that Egypt offered them but a temporary refuge for the time of their necessity.

**31. *Upon the bed's head.*** This is an accurate translation of the Hebrew text as vocalized by the Jewish scholars, the Masoretes, in the 7th century of our era. The Jewish translators of the LXX of the 3d century B.C., however, whose Hebrew text contained no vowels, took the word *mth*, vocalized by the Masoretes as *mittah*, "bed," to be *matthah*, "staff." Accordingly, they translated the passage, "Israel bowed himself on the top of his staff." Since the action of leaning on his staff while doing obeisance to God would be quite as suitable to Jacob's age and infirmity as turning over and bowing on the head of his bed, and inasmuch as Heb. 11:21 reflects the LXX reading of Gen. 47:31, the latter is probably closer to the meaning of the original than the extant vocalized Hebrew text, and therefore preferable. Whatever the exact position of the patriarch, it was a posture of devotion in which he poured out his soul in grateful adoration to God.

#### ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

1-31PP 233-234

2-4PP 233

6 PP 233, 241; SR 104; 5T 180

7 PP 233

11, 12 SR 104  
12, 23, 24 PP 241  
28 PP 233  
29, 30 PP 234

## CHAPTER 48

1 *Joseph with his sons visiteth his sick father.* 2 *Jacob strengtheneth himself to bless them.* 3 *He repeateth the promise.* 5 *He taketh Ephraim and Manasseh as his own.* 7 *He telleth Joseph of his mother's grave.* 9 *He blesseth Ephraim and Manasseh.* 17 *He preferreth the younger before the elder.* 21 *He prophesieth their return to Canaan.*

**1. Thy father is sick.** Not long after the visit of Joseph, at which Jacob made arrangements for his burial, Joseph was informed of his father's final illness. He immediately went to him with his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, who were between 19 and 25 years of age (see v. 5; chs. 47:28; 41:50; 45:6).

**2. And Israel.** The change of name from Jacob to Israel is significant here as it was in ch. 45:27, 28. Jacob, the human warrior enfeebled with age, gathered together his remaining strength for a task he was about to perform as Israel, bearer of the gracious promises of God.

**3. God Almighty appeared unto me.** By way of an introduction to what was to follow, Jacob related experiences of his earlier days, particularly the divine appearance at Luz, or Bethel, after his return from Padan-aram (see ch. 35:9–15). Use of the sacred name, "God Almighty," the account of the appearance, and the sequence of the different promises related by Jacob show that he did not refer to his dream there on the way to Haran, but to the later vision at the same place after his return to Canaan.

**5. Ephraim and Manasseh.** Jacob interpreted God's promise at Bethel as empowering him to adopt the sons of Joseph and give them the same status as his own children. Since God had promised the increase of his seed, and Canaan as their possession, he felt justified in granting to Ephraim and Manasseh each a share in the promised inheritance equal to that of his own sons. Thus "Joseph" would enjoy a double portion.

**6. Which thou begetteth after them.** This privilege was to be restricted to the first two sons of Joseph. Other sons of Joseph are not mentioned in Scripture, but if there were any, their descendants were later included in the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, as Jacob predicted. The adoption of his two elder sons placed Joseph in the position of the first-born, so far as the inheritance was concerned.

**7. Rachel died by me.** Joseph's mother, who had died so early, was also honored, posthumously, in the adoption of Joseph's two elder sons. This accounts for the allusion made here by Jacob to his beloved Rachel. His words seem to express an unspoken wish that she might have lived to see her first-born son exalted to lordship over the world's greatest empire of the time, and thereby in a position to become a savior to his father's house.

**8. Who are these?** The failing sight of the patriarch (see v. 10) was probably the reason why Jacob did not recognize his grandchildren sooner. The fact that he was not at first aware of their presence shows that the act of adoption was prompted, not by beholding the youths, but by the inward promptings of the Spirit of God.

**10. *The eyes of Israel.*** The feeble patriarch, almost blind, may not have seen Ephraim and Manasseh for some years, so that he did not recognize them now that they were once more in his presence.

**13. *Joseph took them both.*** Joseph, who had prostrated himself before his father, either in filial reverence or in the realization that his father was speaking under inspiration, now took his two sons from between the knees of Israel, who had been sitting with the youths between his knees and embracing them. He took Ephraim, the younger, on his right hand, and Manasseh, the elder, on the left, so that Ephraim stood at Jacob's left hand and Manasseh at his right.

**14. *His right hand.*** This is the first Scriptural record of the imposition of hands being a symbol of blessing. Though not essential to the transmission of blessing, the act is not without an appropriate fitness as being a symbol of the invisible fact. Accordingly, it became the recognized mode of conveying spiritual powers, or gifts. This procedure was employed in the OT period for the dedication of Joshua (Num. 27:18, 23; Deut. 34:9), as in the time of the NT church for the ordination of officers (Acts 6:6; 8:17; 1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6), and in the performance of many miracles (Mark 6:5; 8:23, 25; Acts 9:17; 19:6; 28:8).

**15. *He blessed Joseph.*** By the imposition of hands Jacob transferred to Joseph, through his sons, the blessing he besought for them from God.

**16. *The Angel.*** Here placed on an equality with God, "the Angel" could not possibly be a created being, but must be the "Angel of God," meaning God manifested in the form of an angel (see Ex. 32:34; Isa. 63:9; 1 Cor. 10:4). To the more fully developed revelation of the writers of the NT, He is the "Word," the "Shepherd," and the "Redeemer," Jesus Christ. Both Jacob and Job (Job 19:21) reveal acquaintance with this Divine One, who delivered them from ill, both temporal and spiritual, and who would complete His work of liberation by freeing them from the power of the grave. The Redeemer to whom Jacob and Job looked forward, and of whom both Moses and the prophets testified, was Christ Jesus (1 Cor. 10:4; Gal. 3:13; Titus 2:14; 1 Peter 1:18).

***Let my name.*** By this Jacob meant that Ephraim and Manasseh were to be counted as Jacob's sons. Thus they would become in a special sense recipients of the blessings promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

**18. *Not so, my father.*** Assuring Joseph that Manasseh, the elder of the two, would also become a great nation, Jacob stated emphatically, however, that Ephraim would become even greater, a "multitude of nations," or, more literally, a "fullness of nations." This blessing began to meet its fulfillment from the time of the judges onward, by which time the tribe of Ephraim had so increased in extent and power that it took the leadership among the northern ten tribes, and its name acquired equal importance with the name Israel (see Isa. 7:2; Hosea 4:17; 13:1; etc.). At the time of Moses, Manasseh numbered 20,000 more than Ephraim (Num. 26:34, 37). Subsequent history shows that this promise was from God, and that the blessing of Jacob was not merely the pious wish of a dying grandfather but the actual bestowal of a blessing of definite prophetic significance and force.

**22. *One portion above thy brethren.*** The word translated "portion," *shekem*, is the same as the name of the city of Shechem, in whose neighborhood Jacob had bought a piece of land (ch. 33:18, 19) and whose population two of Jacob's sons had massacred. The word *shekem* means "shoulder" or "ridge." Since Joseph was later buried at

Shechem (Joshua 24:32), and there was a piece of land near Sychar, or Shechem, in the time of Christ which was still considered as that portion which Jacob had given to his son Joseph (John 4:5), it is very probable that this statement of Jacob, by which he presented a piece of land to Joseph, was a play on words. The piece of land that Jacob owned was at Shechem, and was perhaps a ridge or had the appearance of a shoulder, for which reason Jacob called it a *shekem*, a “shoulder” or “ridge.” The meaning “portion” for *shekem* is otherwise unattested, and is based entirely on the ancient versions. *Shekem* may appropriately be rendered “mountain slope” (RSV).

***With my sword and with my bow.*** This is the only place reference is made to warlike acts on the part of Jacob. All other texts referring to the piece of land that Jacob gave to Joseph speak of it as purchased (Gen. 33:18, 19; Joshua 24:32). Since these texts must refer to the same piece of land that Jacob mentioned as having conquered with sword and bow, it must be that Jacob’s property had been taken away from him by the Amorites after he had left the Shechem region (Gen. 35:4, 5). Although the “terror of God” prevented them from attacking Jacob and avenging the massacre of the Shechemites, they seem to have taken Jacob’s estate, so that the patriarch was forced at some later time to reconquer his property by force of arms. This explanation seems to be more reasonable than that of some commentators who wish to see in Jacob’s utterance a prophecy referring to the future conquest of Palestine in the time of Joshua.

#### ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENT

1-22PP 234-235

5 PP 234

7 PP 206

8-10PP 234

15, 16 Ed 147; PP 234

21 PP 235

#### CHAPTER 49

1 *Jacob calleth his sons to bless them. 3 Their blessing in particular. 29 He chargeth them about his burial. 33 He dieth.*

**1. *Jacob called unto his sons.*** Jacob now revealed to his 12 sons his spiritual bequest. Solemnly he exhorted them to listen to the things he was about to say. As Isaac, by virtue of divine foresight, had in his blessing (ch. 27) pointed out prophetically to Jacob and Esau the future history of their families, so in broad outline the future of the entire nation, as represented by the 12 sons, was pictured by Jacob. Although the characters of his sons formed the starting point of his prophecies concerning them, the Spirit of God revealed to the dying patriarch the future history of his seed, so that he discerned in the characters of his sons the future development of the tribes descending from them. To each he assigned its position and importance in the nation, with unerring prophetic insight.

***In the last days.*** Literally, “at the end of days.” This is not a reference to the end of this world’s history, as in some other prophetic utterances, nor does it refer merely to the Messianic age as the close of Jewish history. Here it simply means “in the future.”

**3. *Reuben.*** Jacob addressed his first prophecy to his first-born son, and clothed it, as he did all the following statements, in poetic garb. Hebrew poetry consists of a rhythmic repetition of thought rather than of sound and syllables. Arranged in poetic form, the blessing upon Reuben would read:

Reuben,  
my first-born you, my might,  
and first fruit of my strength;  
pre-eminent in dignity,  
and pre-eminent in power.

Boiling over like water, you shall have no preference,  
for you ascended the bed of your father,  
then you defiled my couch ([which] he ascended).

**4. *Unstable as water.*** Reuben is characterized by a threefold designation: (1) his position in the family as Jacob's first-born, (2) his relation to Jacob as his might and the beginning of his strength, (3) the natural pre-eminence that belonged to him as the eldest. Nevertheless, the advantages normally accruing to Reuben as Jacob's first-born were to be taken from him because of the weakness of his character. The word translated "unstable," literally, "a boiling over" of water, implies, figuratively, giving in to one's emotions. Another form of the same root word is used in Judges 9:4 and Zeph. 3:4 for frivolity and pride. Jacob thus described the moral weakness of Reuben's character, by which he forfeited the privileges as a first-born. Though, specifically, his crime consisted in committing fornication with Bilhah, his father's concubine (Gen. 35:22), his later history gives evidence of a fundamental instability of character. This basic weakness disqualified him from becoming a leader, for leadership often calls for firmness and determination. As Jacob remembered this heinous deed, and mentioned it in his prophecy, he turned away in indignation, passing from the direct form of address to the third person as he repeated the thought.

***Thou shalt not excel.*** By the withdrawal of the rights of the first-born, Reuben lost the leadership of Israel. His tribe never attained a position of influence in the nation (see Deut. 33:6). Not one prominent personality emerged from the descendants of Reuben—no judge, no king, no prophet. Leadership was transferred to Judah, and the double portion to Joseph (1 Chron. 5:1, 2).

**5. *Simeon and Levi.*** They were brothers, not merely in the flesh, but also in their thoughts and actions (see ch. 34:25).

***Their habitations.*** The meaning of the word translated "habitations" is obscure. Other suggested translations of this uncertain Hebrew word are "machinations," "joining," "rage," "swords." It is clear, however, that Jacob had in mind their wantonness in treacherously massacring the population of Shechem (ch. 34:25–29), a crime of which Jacob never approved.

**6. *They slew a man.*** Here, "man" is a collective term for the plural "men." The singular form is used indiscriminately throughout the Hebrew OT for both the singular and the plural.

***Digged down a wall.*** Literally, "they hamstrung an ox." The singular "ox" stands for the practically unused plural "oxen," found but once in the Bible (Hosea 12:11), and corresponds to "man" in the first line of the parallelism. To hamstring an animal is to render it lame by cutting its tendons (see Joshua 11:6, 9; 2 Sam. 8:4). In Gen. 34:28 it is merely stated that the cattle of the Shechemites were carried off, not that they were lamed. However, since the sons of Jacob were more concerned about revenge than booty, they probably mutilated some animals as well. Jacob mentions only the former, because it

was this which most strikingly displayed their brutality. This trait disqualified them for leadership.

**7. *I will divide them.*** Since the brothers had committed this crime jointly, their posterity was to be divided, or scattered, in Canaan. They would not constitute independent tribes. The fulfillment of this prediction was evident by the time Israel returned to Canaan. When Moses numbered Israel the second time, Simeon had become the weakest of all the tribes (Num. 26:14), and in Moses' blessing, Simeon was entirely passed over. This tribe received no separate assignment of territory as an inheritance, but merely a number of cities within the borders of Judah (Joshua 19:1–19). Since the families of Simeon, generally, increased but little (1 Chron. 4:27), most of them were eventually absorbed into the tribe of Judah. Others migrated, in two waves, to areas beyond the borders of the Promised Land (1 Chron. 4:38–43).

Instead of a territorial inheritance, Levi received 48 cities, scattered throughout the other tribes (Joshua 21:1–42). The scattering of Levi in Israel, however, was changed into a blessing for all, through the election of the tribe to the priesthood. Though Jacob withdrew the rights of the first-born from Reuben, and uttered a curse for the crime of Simeon and Levi, he disowned none of them. Levi's later history is an illustration of how a curse can be fulfilled and yet result in blessing for all concerned. At Sinai, Levi's descendants stood alone for right when all the others fell (Ex. 32:26), and were therefore appointed, as a tribe, to religious leadership. Though the curse of Jacob, that they should receive no inheritance, was not changed, its fulfillment brought blessing to them and to their brethren (Num. 18:20).

**8. *Judah.*** Jacob's fourth son was the first to receive a rich and unqualified blessing, one which bestowed upon him supremacy and power. Though not expressly so stated by Jacob, Judah received the right of the first-born to leadership, forfeited by Reuben because of emotional instability, and by Simeon and Levi because of their cruelty.

***Thy brethren shall praise.*** According to ch. 29:35 the name Judah means "the praised one." By a play on words, so dear to the Oriental heart, Jacob assured Judah of the praise of his brethren. Judah had shown a noble character. Even in the dark hour when Joseph's brothers were plotting to kill him, Judah had proposed a solution that saved Joseph's life (ch. 37:26, 27). The excellency of his character was illustrated, moreover, in the offering of his own life as a pledge for that of Benjamin, and also when he pleaded with Joseph on Benjamin's behalf, to save him from slavery (chs. 43:9, 10; 44:16–34). It had been apparent even earlier, in his conduct toward Tamar (ch. 38:26), though originally he seems to have been a rather wild and reckless individual (see on ch. 38:7–26). His own personal strength of character, acquired by stern victories over natural tendencies, was reflected in the virility of the tribe that bore his name.

***Thy father's children.*** Having prophesied that Judah would put his enemies to flight, and subdue them, Jacob asserted once more that Judah's brothers also would do homage to him. It is noteworthy that not merely the sons of his mother were to do so (see Gen. 27:29; Judges 8:19), that is, the tribes descending from Leah, but "the sons of his father," or all the tribes of Israel. This came true when David was crowned king over all Israel (2 Sam. 5:1, 2).

**9. *Judah is a lions whelp.*** By a bold figure of speech Judah is compared to a young lion growing up into the full strength and ferocity of an old lion (see Rev. 5:5). Roaming through the forests in search of prey, returning to his mountain lair when his booty has

been devoured, he lies there intrepid, in quiet majesty, and calmly defiant of any creature that might presume to disturb him. Many commentators have understood the Hebrew word translated “old lion” to mean “lioness,” and have seen in it a deeper meaning. However, the word *labi’* means only “lion” and is a common synonym for the word *’aryeh*, “lion,” used twice in the same verse.

**10. The sceptre.** The scepter is a symbol of royal authority. In its earliest form it was a long staff that the king held in his hand when speaking in public assemblies, but that rested between his knees when he sat upon his throne. Such scepters are depicted in various ancient Egyptian reliefs. Judah was to continue as leader among the tribes until the time of the coming of the Messiah.

**Until Shiloh come.** Neither the explanation of Shiloh as a place name nor the interpretation as “rest” is convincing. However, the majority of commentators have believed Shiloh to be a personal name, and agree that the person referred to is the Messiah. This view, expressed long ago by both Jewish and Christian scholars, is correct (see DA 52). As to the exact significance of the word Shiloh, however, interpreters are by no means agreed. It has been variously explained to mean “offspring,” “the one sent out,” “he to whom it [the scepter of the kingdom] belongs,” and “the rest giver.” The last interpretation of the word Shiloh, as “rest giver,” is favored by more commentators than any of the others and is endorsed by Ellen G. White (DA 52). Shiloh, therefore, is the Messiah, who in Jacob’s prophecy was to take over Judah’s royal prerogatives as leader of Israel and to whom all nations would gather.

**11. Binding his foal.** The reference to the riding of the Messiah on an ass was fulfilled at the triumphal entry of Jesus (Matt. 21:7). It designates him as a harbinger of peace, and as a nobleman, since asses were not used for warfare but served as riding animals for persons of superior rank (Judges 1:14; 10:4; 12:14). Judah’s vine would be so strong that asses might be bound to it, and so fruitful that its juice could be used to wash one’s garment. Judah’s wine and milk would be so exhilarating and invigorating as to impart a sparkling brilliance to the eyes and a charming whiteness to the teeth. This is, of course, a highly figurative picture of Judah’s prosperity.

**13. Zebulun.** The territory allotted to the tribe of Zebulun under Joshua may be ascertained from the boundaries and towns mentioned in Joshua 19:10–16. At that time it neither reached to the Mediterranean nor touched directly upon Zidon. It lay between the Sea of Galilee and the Mediterranean, near to both, but separated from the former by Naphtali and from the latter by Asher. This prophecy may have found its fulfillment, however, at some later time. The remarkable fulfillment of all Jacob’s prophetic utterances that can be checked excludes the possibility that this one should have remained unfulfilled, though the Bible is silent on the point.

**14. Issachar.** The comparison of Issachar to a bony and strongly built ass, particularly well adapted for carrying burdens, pointed to the fact that this tribe would content itself with material good, devote itself to agriculture, and not strive for political power. It indicated also that the descendants of Issachar would be men of strength and would receive a pleasant inheritance. This was fulfilled in the allotment to it of lower Galilee, including the attractive and fruitful tableland of Jezreel. Although the tribe once acquired renown for heroic bravery, together with Zebulun, during the time of the judges (Judges 5:14, 15, 18), it was generally content with its lot, whatever happened to the nation. It is seldom found coming valiantly to the forefront and fighting for threatened rights or

liberties. This was perhaps the reason Issachar is mentioned last among the sons of Leah, though he was not her last son.

**16. Dan.** By a play on his name the first-born son of Rachel's maid, Bilhah, is described as one who was to occupy an important place and perform important duties in the future state of Israel. This was partially fulfilled in the latter time of the judges, when Samson, a Danite, judged Israel for 20 years (see Judges 13:2).

**A serpent by the way.** This statement describes the character of the tribe. It became apparent in the expedition of a portion of the Danites to Laish in the north of Canaan (see Judges 18), and was apparent also in the adventures of Samson, who with the cunningness of a serpent overthrew his strongest foes. Since the tribe of Dan seems to have been the first to introduce idol worship into Israel (Judges 18), and since his character would not qualify anyone for admission to the heavenly Canaan, the name of Dan alone, among the 12 tribes, is omitted from their enumeration in Revelation 7.

**18. I have waited.** Not only was this prayer voiced by Jacob on his own behalf, but it expressed confidence that his descendants also would receive the help of God, as he had in his own life. It is interesting to watch the dying patriarch in this last tense hour of his life. Although most of his words seem to have been spoken by inspiration, this prayer evidently expresses his own natural feelings. A sudden relief from tension or a sudden accident may reveal the level of one's spiritual attainment. From one man's lips a curse will be forthcoming, from another's an empty and meaningless expression, and from still another's a prayer may come. It is often unjust to judge a man by the words spoken in an unguarded moment, but Jacob would stand such a test. The years of the deceiver were long past; now he belonged to the company of God's chosen ones.

**19. Gad.** This poetic passage, in which the words translated "troop" and "overcome," from the same root, occur, might better be rendered, "An attacking force shall attack him, but he shall attack the heel." The language seems to refer to attacks that the tribe of Gad would have to endure with patience, but that they would successfully repel. Although the known history of the 12 tribes does not provide a specific fulfillment of this prophecy, the account given in 1 Chron. 5:18–22 shows that the Gadites displayed, wherever it was needed, the bravery promised them by their father. The Gadites who came to David are described as lions, and their swiftness is compared to that of the gazelle (1 Chron. 12:8–15), which comparisons prove that they were a valiant tribe.

**20. Asher.** This refers to the fruitful soil that was to be Asher's future region of abode. In fulfillment of this prediction Asher received as his inheritance the lowlands of Carmel on the Mediterranean, as far as the territory of Tyre. This is one of the most fertile parts of Canaan, abounding in wheat and oil, with which Solomon supplied the household of King Hiram (1 Kings 5:11).

**21. Naphtali.** The meaning and allusion are obscure, and little is known of the history of the tribe of Naphtali. In association with Zebulun, under Barak it obtained a great victory over the Canaanite king Jabin, which the prophetess Deborah commemorated in her celebrated song (see Judges 4, 5).

**He giveth goodly words.** This must be an allusion to a gift in eloquence and song manifested in that northern tribe, though no historical records of such activity in the tribe of Naphtali have survived.

**22. Joseph.** Whereas Jacob's blessings regarding the four sons of the concubines were especially brief, and his prophecies in part as obscure as the later history of the

tribes that descended from these four men, a great difference is found in the blessing upon the first-born son of his beloved Rachel. Now the patriarch's heart swelled with grateful love, and in the most expressive words and figures he besought unlimited blessing for Joseph.

**23. *The archers.*** From the simile of the fruit tree Jacob passed next to one of war, describing the victory of the tribe of Joseph over all its foes. This is an illustration of the prophetic present, which speaks of future events as already in process of fulfillment. The words are not to be referred to any warlike deeds of Joseph in Egypt, but probably hint, in terms not directly offensive to his brothers but understood by all of them, to the persecution he had suffered at their hands as well as during his years of slavery and imprisonment.

**24. *The mighty God of Jacob.*** If the last clause is parenthetical, as in the KJV, it may signify either that from the time of Joseph's exaltation he became the shepherd and the stone of Israel, or that from God, the Mighty One of Jacob, Joseph received strength to become such. In this capacity he then served as a type of the Good Shepherd, who is the Rock, and would become the foundation of His church. If, however, the clause, "the shepherd, the stone of Israel," is coordinate with the preceding phrase it applies to God Himself. In that case the sentiment is expressed that the hands of Joseph were made strong by the One who is the Shepherd and Stone of Israel (see Deut. 32:4). The Hebrew text permits the second interpretation, which seems preferable to the first.

**26. *The blessings of thy father.*** The blessings that the patriarch implored for Joseph were to surpass the blessings that his parents had passed on to him. Joseph is referred to, literally, as "the separated one," the *nazir*. Joseph is so designated, both here and in Deut. 33:16, on account of the preservation of his virtue and piety in heathen Egypt.

**27. *Benjamin.*** The warlike character that the dying father here attributed to his youngest son was later manifested by his descendants. It was seen in the war that his tribe waged against all the tribes, a war due to their own wickedness in Gibeah (Judges 20, 21), and upon other occasions as well (Judges 5:14). The Benjamites were distinguished archers and slingers (Judges 20:16; 1 Chron. 8:40; 12:2; 2 Chron. 14:8; 17:17). Also, from the tribe of Benjamin came the heroic judge Ehud (Judges 3:15), and King Saul and his valiant and chivalrous son Jonathan (1 Sam. 11, 13; 2 Sam. 1:19-27).

**28. *The twelve tribes.*** Jacob blessed the future tribes in the persons of his 12 sons. No one was excepted, and even Reuben, Simeon, and Levi, though humbled because of serious personal faults, each received a share in the promised blessings.

**29. *Gathered unto my people.*** See on ch. 15:15.

***Bury me.*** Joseph had already promised his father, under oath, to fulfill this desire. Jacob mentions it once more, in the presence of all his sons, as an invitation to them to participate in the rite of burial.

**33. *Gathered up his feet.*** Jacob now lay down, for he had been sitting upright while blessing his sons, and died in peace. Concerning the poetical euphemisms for death, see on chs. 15:15 and 25:8. Jacob's age at death, as given in ch. 47:28, was 147 years.

## ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

1-33PP 235-238

1-4PP 235

4 2T 127

5-7PP 205, 235

6 MYP 390; TM 87  
7 Ed 148; PP 235  
8-10PK 683; PP 236  
10 AA 223; DA 34, 193, 205  
22 COL 214  
22-26Ed 53; PP 236  
25 COL 214  
29-31 PP 237

## CHAPTER 50

1 *The mourning for Jacob.* 4 *Joseph getteth leave of Pharaoh to go to bury him.* 7 *The funeral.* 15 *Joseph comforteth his brethren, who craved his pardon.* 22 *His age.* 23 *He seeth the third generation of his sons.* 24 *He prophesieth unto his brethren of their return.* 25 *He taketh an oath of them for his bones.* 26 *He dieth, and is chested.*

**1. Joseph fell upon his father's face.** Joseph had no doubt closed the eyes of his beloved father, as God had promised (ch. 46:4). That only Joseph's grief is described in this passage does not imply that the other sons did not sorrow for their father. Perhaps their grief was less demonstrative than that of Joseph, since the heart of Joseph appears to have been peculiarly susceptible to tender emotions. The grief of Joseph is representative of the grief of all, and we may assume that their sorrow was just as real.

**2. Embalmed Israel.** The ancient Egyptian method of embalming has been described, both by Herodotus (ii. 86) and by Diodorus (i. 91). The accuracy of their descriptions has been confirmed in the main by ancient Egyptian documents and by an examination of the mummies themselves. The process was expensive, costing as much as \$1,000. The brain was first extracted through the nostrils by means of a crooked piece of metal, and the skull was then thoroughly cleansed of any remaining portions by rinsing it with drugs. Through an opening in the left side made with a sharp knife, the viscera were removed and placed in separate jars, the so-called canopic jars. The empty abdomen was purified with palm wine and an infusion of aromatics, and then filled with various spices. After the opening had been sewed up, the stuffed form was submerged for many days (up to 70) in a bath of natron solution. Then it was washed, wrapped in a linen shroud, smeared over with gum, and finally painted to resemble the natural features of the deceased.

**3. Forty days.** It is known from Egyptian documents that the length of the period from the death of a man to his burial varied. In one case the embalming occupied 16 days, the bandaging 35 days, and the burial 70 days, 121 days in all. In another case the embalming occupied 66 days, preparations for burial 4 days, and the burial itself 26 days, in all 96 days. Elsewhere we are told that the embalming lasted for 70 or 80 days, and the burial 10 months (see E. A. W. Budge, *The Mummy*). The time involved depended upon the wealth of the family of the deceased and the period of Egyptian history. Jacob, being the father of the prime minister, received the best care of the time. His embalming continued for 40 days, and the preparations for his burial another 70 days. This was proclaimed an official period of mourning.

**4. The house of Pharaoh.** It has been a matter of conjecture among commentators why Joseph, at the end of this period of mourning, did not place his request before the king personally, rather than through other courtiers. His reasons for this apparently strange procedure are unknown, but it may have been perfectly normal in his time. Some have suggested that Joseph did so in recognition of the courtiers and to earn their good

will. Perhaps the men through whom Joseph addressed the king were priests, and as such directly concerned with the interment of the dead. It is possible that Joseph, having allowed his beard and hair to grow, incident to the customs of mourning, could not enter the king's presence without first being shaved. The suggestion made by some, that Joseph's authority had been restricted after the famine, or that another Pharaoh who was less friendly to Joseph had come to the throne, is without foundation. Jacob's death was mourned by the Egyptians, and this would not have been the case had the popularity of Joseph waned. Again, Joseph's procedure of approaching the king through mediaries may have been due to nothing more than the Oriental tendency to transact important personal business through a middleman.

**5. *In my grave.*** Jacob's claim to have dug the tomb in which his grandfather Abraham had been interred, has been criticized as a contradiction of facts presented in ch. 23. However, it is not necessary to assume that Jacob here attributed to himself what had really been done by Abraham. Jacob may either have enlarged the original cave at Machpelah to make room for additional bodies or prepared in it the special niche he intended to occupy. Or, the expression may simply be Joseph's way of informing Pharaoh that the burial would not take place in Egypt, but in Canaan, and that therefore permission was requested to go thither.

**7. *Joseph went up.*** The king's permission having been granted, the corpse was carried to Canaan, attended by a large company. With Joseph, there went up the leading officers of the court, together with all members of the family. As an escort through the desert and into the foreign land of Canaan, a large company of chariots and horsemen probably accompanied them. The splendid retinue of Egyptian officers may be explained, in part, from the esteem in which Joseph was held in Egypt and, in part, from the fondness of the Egyptians for such funeral processions.

**10. *The threshingfloor of Atad.*** The threshing floor was a large open area for the trampling out of grain by oxen, and was most convenient for the accommodation of a large body of people such as accompanied Joseph. Atad was either the name of the owner or, since *'atad* is the Hebrew name for buckthorn, it may have indicated that buckthorn grew abundantly.

***Beyond Jordan.*** The funeral procession did not take the shortest route, by Gaza, through the country of the Philistines, nor through Beersheba, but around the Dead Sea. The reasons for this long detour are unknown, but may have been political. Very little is known of the general relations between Egypt and Palestine during the period of the Hyksos, and a state of insecurity in southern Palestine may have been responsible for the extraordinary route Joseph took to reach Hebron.

***There they mourned.*** Sculptured reliefs and painted murals in ancient Egyptian tombs reveal that the Egyptians were very demonstrative and vehement in their public lamentations for the dead. They rent their garments, beat their breasts, threw dust and mud on their heads, and chanted funeral hymns to the music of a tambourine from which the tinkling plates had been removed.

**11. *The name of it.*** When the procession made a halt of seven days at the threshing floor of Atad (v. 10), for a special mourning, the inhabitants of the surrounding countryside were much impressed by the way the Egyptians mourned the father of one of their dignitaries. This unusual event was the reason the Canaanites of that region called

the place Abel-mizraim, the “meadow of Egypt.” This name represents a play on the words “mourning,” *'ebel*, and “meadow,” *'abel*, both having the same consonants.

**13. *His sons carried him.*** It seems that the Egyptians remained at the threshing floor of Atad, while Joseph and his brothers proceeded alone to Canaan for the burial of their father, in the cave of Machpelah at Hebron. For the history of this burial place, see on chapter 23.

**14. *Joseph returned.*** The time had not yet arrived for the descendants of Jacob to settle permanently in Canaan. They were first to become “a great nation” (ch. 46:3).

**16. *Thy father did command.*** Joseph’s brothers were now filled with alarm, fearing that he might avenge himself for their cruelty. They thought that Joseph’s tender love for his aged father might have restrained him from taking revenge so long as he lived. Literally, “they charged Joseph,” meaning they sent one of their number, possibly Benjamin, to appeal to Joseph to honor the desire expressed by their father before his death and to implore forgiveness. There is no reason for regarding the appeal to their father’s wish as a mere pretense. The fact that no reference was made to their sin by Jacob in his blessings proves that he, as their father, had forgiven the sin of his sons, in view of the fact that the grace of God had made their crime the means of his family’s salvation.

**17. *Joseph wept.*** Inasmuch as the brothers did not personally appear before Joseph, it would perhaps be better to translate, “Joseph wept at their address to him.” He was hurt that they should for a single moment have entertained such a misconception of his love.

**18. *His brethren also went.*** Assured that Joseph had no intention of taking revenge, they dared to meet him personally, offering themselves as his slaves. But any thought of revenge was far from Joseph’s thinking. The spirit of his inner life was permeated with forgiveness. Though acquainted by experience with human treachery, he had never entertained any thoughts of bitterness or hatred. He hastened to assure his brothers that they had nothing to fear of him, but could trust him completely.

**22. *Joseph lived an hundred and ten years.*** Since Joseph had been born when his father was 91 years of age (see on chs. 27:1; 47:9), he was 56 at his father’s death, and consequently outlived his father by 54 years.

**23. *Joseph saw Ephraim’s children.*** It is not certain whether Ephraim’s great-grandchildren or his grandchildren are meant. In the second commandment of the Decalogue the expression “third and fourth generation” (Ex. 20:5; Deut. 5:9) apparently includes the fathers, and means the grandchildren and great-grandchildren. It is used in the same sense in Num. 14:18. However, in Ex. 34:7, where the following sequence is given, fathers, children, children’s children, third and fourth generation, the latter two generations obviously refer to great-grandchildren and great-great-grandchildren. Since sometimes the father is included in the number of generations mentioned, and sometimes excluded, it is uncertain, in Joseph’s case, what was meant. At the same time it is perfectly clear that Moses desired to show that Joseph lived to see the beginning of the fulfillment of his father’s blessing. There is no practical difficulty in Joseph’s seeing the great-grandsons of Ephraim. Since his 2 sons were born before he himself was 37 years old (ch. 41:50), he may have had grandsons by the time he was 56 or 60, and great-grandsons 20 years later at the age of 80. Great—grandsons may thus have been born when he was approximately 100 years old.

***The children also of Machir.*** In the case of Manasseh's children Moses is more definite, stating specifically that Joseph saw his own great-grandchildren.

***Upon Joseph's knees.*** Literally, "were born upon Joseph's knees" (see on ch. 30:3).

***I die.*** As Joseph saw death approaching, he expressed to his brothers firm belief in the fulfillment of the divine promise (see chs. 46:4, 5; 15:16). He placed them under oath, that when God should lead them to the Promised Land they would bury his bones there. This desire was carried out. When he died he was embalmed, like his father (see on vs. 2, 3), and placed in a coffin. His body probably was accorded a temporary burial in a previously prepared tomb, according to Egyptian custom, and remained in Egypt until the time of the Exodus. At that time the Israelites, fulfilling his desire, carried his remains to Canaan and buried them at Shechem, in the piece of land that had been bought by Jacob and given to his son Joseph (Gen. 33:19; 48:22; Joshua 24:32).

In an act of faith on the part of the dying Joseph the history of the patriarchal period ends. His coffin, or tomb, became to the sojourners in Egypt a constant reminder of the promises of God, that their permanent abode was to be the land of Canaan and not Egypt. It remained a standing exhortation to them to turn their eyes from Egypt to Canaan, and to wait in patience and faith for the fulfillment of the promise God had made to their fathers.

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## ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

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<sup>10</sup>Nichol, F. D. (1978). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary : The Holy Bible with exegetical and expository comment*. Commentary Reference Series (Ge 43:2). Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association.