The Book of Genesis

James Gunn

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The Book of Genesis --Part 1

The Book of Genesis

Part 1

James Gunn

Throughout the year 1955, we examined the need for, and the different methods of Bible study. It is now time for us to apply what we have learned, and to definitely select some one book in the Word of God for careful analysis. One brother suggested The Book of Genesis. This is the first book in the Divine Library, and it may be longer than some feel that they can handle, but, as we move along slowly, it is certain that much profit will be derived from its scrutiny.

We shall commence by determining the meaning of the name of this book, Genesis. The name is given as "Beginnings." Our studies will show how apt this title is, for herein we learn of the beginnings of creation, man, sin, punishment, salvation, the nations, and Israel, etc. It would be well for each student, as he daily reads and rereads this portion of God's Word, to list in a scribbler the many different beginnings recorded.

A word ought here to be written in regard to the authorship of Genesis. It generally has been believed, both by Jewish and Christian scholars, that Moses was the author of the first five books of the Bible. The history of Genesis closes at least three hundred years before the birth of Moses, It is not at all impossible that Moses received some of the facts from traditional records, or even from documents not now existing, but it is more probable that he received these historical accounts

directly by revelation of God, and wrote by divine inspiration. “For prophecy came not in old time by the will of man; but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (2 Pet. 1:21). “Beginning at Moses and all the prophets, Christ expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself” (Luke 24:27).

Genesis is a little long for a busy man to read through at one sitting, but if it is at all possible, do so. An evening at home will provide the necessary time and opportunity. If this plan is followed, it will be noticed that the book divides itself into two general sections:

I. The origin of the nations.

II. The origin of the Nation.

We may more explicitly state it thus:

I. The origin of all peoples.

II. The origin of the chosen people, Israel.

It will now be our endeavour to select the first general section, and by careful examination discover its several component parts; for example, A. Creation (1:1).

B. Reconstruction (1:2-25).

C. Man (1:26-28).

D. The Fall (3:1-24).

We shall stop now in our analysis, and submit what we have gathered to the principle of comparing spiritual things with spiritual, or, more plainly, compare Scripture with Scripture. As we do this, we shah find our original analysis somewhat expanded. A concordance will be quite a help to some. Through its use, or better, through

the aid of a good memory, we shall learn that the Bible deals with:

1. A natural creation: This is of course, a. A perfect creation (Gen. 1:1; John 1:3; Col. 1:16).

b. A ruined creation (Gen. 1:2; Ezek. 28:11-19).

c. A reconstructed creation (Gen. 1:2-2-3).

d. A marred creation (Gen. 3:17; Rom. 8:20-24).

e. A recovered creation (Isa. 65:17-25; Heb. 2:8).

f. A righteous creation (2 Pet. 3:12-13).

2. A new creation: The natural is the illustration of the new, the spiritual.

a. The Head, Christ (Col. 1:17-19).

b. The component parts (Gal. 3:27-29; Col. 3:10-17).

c. The spiritual affinity (Col. 3;11; Eph. 4:13).

d. The comprehensive equality (Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11).

e. The character (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15).

f. The final expectation (Rev. 21 and 22).

Much detail is given by the Holy Spirit to the reconstruction of the earth, and, since the New Testament contains a number of references to this wonderful process, we should give some thought to it in our future studies.

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A further study of this intensely interesting first chapter of the Bible leads us to the work of God during seven days. Since our examination of the wonderful wisdom and power of the Lord is to be devotional rather than critical, practical rather than scientific, we shall not discuss the problem of whether the days are days of actual creation or of reconstruction. Moreover, we shall not, at present, investigate the difficulty as to whether they are literal or figurative. First, let us deepen our acquaintance with God.

The Creator

It is impossible to read Genesis chapter 1 without noticing how frequently God is mentioned (twenty-seven times). By means of a Bible concordance with a Hebrew lexicon we find that the name God used here is a translation of Elohim, the plural form of El. This name, which occurs frequently throughout the Old Testament, emphasizes the might of God, and designates Him as the Supreme One with Whom man must do. Much profit may be derived from some reflection upon the testimony of Scripture to God. May the Holy Spirit confirm our faith as we compare this divine revelation with the vain philosophies of man.

ATHEISM: This evil system of thought denies the existence of God. The Bible does not attempt to logically

prove God, but, with a sublime majesty, assumes the recognition of a well established fact, and opens with the magnificent affirmation, “In the beginning God created.” “In the beginning,” the dateless past; “God,” the origin of all things; “created,” the stupendous accomplishment of His will and wisdom. The disbelief of some cannot annul this bold declaration of the Divine Spirit.

MATERIALISM: In many respects we live in a materialistic age, and pay far too much attention to what can be seen and handled. Materialism as a philosophy, however, goes far beyond this; it teaches that matter is eternal The inspired record of Genesis proves that God is eternal, that He existed before matter, and that matter was created by Him.

Both of these systems of thought are strongly advocated by Communism. In its teaching it would seek to annihilate God and deify material.

POLYTHEISM: So quickly did man depart from the knowledge of the One and Only True God that nations came to believe in and to worship many gods. Ancient history is full of evidence as to the practice of polytheism. Missionaries from dark places of the earth tell us of the belief of the heathen in many dieties, but the Bible teaches only one God.

It might be well to call attention again to the fact that the name Elohim is plural, and that there is an early intimation in the Bible of the Holy Trinity. “And God said, Let Us make man in Our image” (Gen. 1:26). There is one God composed of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In Him there is a plurality of persons, but a unity of essence.

PANTHEISM: Some of the ancient and the modern cults accept the erroneous teaching that God is identical with the universe. They deny both the personality and transcendence of God. In His Holy Word the Lord teaches so plainly that His existence is separate from that of the universe. The universe is His creation, and in it He is vitally interested, but He is distinguished apart from it.

There are one or two more errors relative to God, the Eternal Spirit, which we ought to consider before we further develop our studies.

DEISM: How far human reason wanders from God! Deism pictures the universe as a precise mechanism created by God, but left by Him to a process of self-development. What a prevarication! God is ever near to His universe. He is never far from any one of us (Acts 17:27), for in the person of His Son, He lived here on earth, and manifested the keenest interest in mankind. That God had withdrawn from His universe is forcefully denied by the very first chapter in our Bible.

AGNOSTICISM: Man may polish his ignorance and express it in the terms of a vain philosophy by stating that he does not know whether or not there is a God. The existence of God is proved by His accomplishments in creation and in redemption, for as Andrew Fuller has said, “God is the first cause and the last end of everything.”

A firm belief, a conscious nearness, and a redemptive relationship to God form the character of every true Christian. The testimony to God of Genesis chapter 1 will save the believer from the grip of error, the grief of fatalism, and the gloom of ignorance.

This God is our God forever and ever, He will be our guide even over death. Let us with reverence and worship examine in the months to come the wonderful works of God.

The Book Of Genesis --Part 3

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In our general analysis of the early part of this wonderful book, under the subheading, “A. Creation,” we discovered certain features of creation and certain facts about the God of creation. It is now time to examine more carefully the details under:

Reconstruction (1:2-25)

1. The ruin:

a. Creation (Gen. 1:1): “Thus saith the Lord that created the heavens; God Himself that formed the earth and made it; He established it, He created it not in vain, He formed it to be inhabited: I am the Lord; and there is none else” (Isa. 45:18).

b. Chaos (Gen. 1:2): “The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep.”

2. The recovery:

a. The power: The Triune God. “The Spirit moved upon the face of the waters” (Gen. 1:2); “His Son… by whom also He made the worlds” (Heb. 1:2); “God said (decreed), Let there be… ” (Gen. 1:3).

b. The process:THE FIRST DAY: “Light.” Natural light is the type of spiritual light and knowledge (2 Cor 4:6; 1 Pet. 2:9). “Darkness” becomes the symbol of moral ignorance (John 1:5; 3:19; Eph. 6:12; Col. 1:3). Division:

“God divided the light from the darkness.” Here is a fundamental principle, “What communion hath light with darkness” (2 Cor. 6:14). Definition: In Hebrew the word “day” signifies warmth, heat, and the word “night” signifies a rolling up, night enfolds all in its darkness.

What a precious picture we have here of the blessed experience of our souls in regeneration. There was a time when our minds were in a state of utter confusion, when our spirits were enfolded in the ignorance of a spiritual night, but God commanded the light to shine into our hearts, and by the decree, He separated us from the gross moral darkness of sin, and brought us into the warmth of His light (Acts 13:47; 26:23; 2 Cor. 4:14; Col. 1:12; 1 John 1:7).

THE SECOND DAY: “God called the firmament heaven.” It is very obvious that what is meant here is the atmosphere, the vault of heaven sustaining watery clouds above the waters of earth.

The Word of God speaks of three heavens (2 Cor. 12:2). It might be suggested that the third heaven is the very abode of God, paradise (2 Cor. 12:4; Luke 23:43); the second, the starry heaven, the sky; and the first, the atmosphere brought in to existence by God on this second day.

We could not possibly study “heaven” without noticing that the child of God, according to the New Testament, bears to it a two-fold relationship. First, it is his eternal home (Phil. 3:20-21). “I saw a new heaven and a new earth… I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” (Rev. 21:1-2). “We according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth,

wherein dwell-eth righteousness" (2 Pet. 3:13). In second place, it represents the sphere of delight in which even now the Christian may live. The Epistle to the Ephesians presents to all believers the challenge of a life in heavenly places. All our spiritual blessings are in heavenly places (Eph. 1:3). Our beloved Lord Jesus is there (Eph. 1:20). Our own present position through resurrection is there (Eph. 2:6). Angelic principalities and powers are there observing the manifold wisdom of God in the Church (Eph. 3:10). Moreover, in the heavenly places there are evil principalities, who dispute with us the enjoyment of that spiritual sphere, against whom we must stand (Eph. 6:11-18). To enjoy in this atmosphere of heaven, our innumerable blessings, to deepen communion with our Risen Head, to express the wisdom of God's grace in us to invisible intelligences, and to actually appreciate our own position in Christ in heavenly places, we must put on the divine panoply provided for us and stand against the very emissaries of Satan.

THE THIRD DAY: On this day God brought to light the earth, the sea, the grasses, the herbs (plants), and the trees. It is interesting to note that all the grasses, the plants, and the trees, had the power to reproduce themselves. Here we have the three great divisions of the vegetable kingdom. As the Lord on the third day attired the earth in beautiful verdure, even so, does He long to see the growth and fruitfulness that make a Christian's life lovely.

The work of the third day reminds us of Christ. He was the tender plant, the root out of a dry ground (Isa. 53:2), the tree planted by the rivers of waters whose leaf did not wither, and who brought forth fruit in his season

(Psa. 1:3). Moreover, He was the grain of wheat which falling into the ground died and brought forth much fruit (John 12:24). In the second place, we are also reminded of the Christian, for he likewise is to be fruitful, “But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life” (Rom. 6:22).“We should bring forth fruit unto God” (Rom. 7:4).

* * *

Joseph Reveals Himself

Genesis 45

Personal revelation: “There stood no man” (V. 1).

Tender affection: “Wept aloud” (V. 2).

Deep conviction: “They were troubled” (V. 3).

Gracious condescension: “Come near” (V. 4).

Complete restoration: “I am Joseph” (V. 4).

Loving consolation: “Be not grieved” (V. 5).

Full salvation: “To preserve you” (V. 5).

—John Hynd.

Pray for faith that can sustain you in the most trying circumstances. Remember that as a child in God’s family, you have nothing to fear but sin. Maintain nobility of spirit under the greatest stress and do not fall to the level of antagonists.

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As we pursue a careful study of the first chapter of Genesis we are arrested by the three expressions which are so frequently used, “God said,” “God called,” and “God saw.” The first one, “God said,” intimates His Divine power, “Let all the earth fear the Lord: let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him. For He spake, and it was done; He commanded and it stood fast” (Psa. 33:8-9). The second statement, “God called,” reveals His Divine wisdom, “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out… For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things: to Whom be glory for ever. Amen” (Rom. 11:33-36). The last of these, “God saw,” suggests that His Divine will had been accomplished. “But to us there is but one God, the Father, of Whom are all things, and we in Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by Whom are all things, and we by Him” (1 Cor. 8:6). God in His sovereign will, supreme wisdom, and infinite power, is the source of all things in creation and in redemption.

THE FOURTH DAY: “And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament… God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: He made the stars also” (chap. 1:14-19).

It is most interesting to notice that on this, the fourth day, God stated the purpose of His work, and this is fourfold.

Separation: “Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night.” As God divided the day from the night in nature, so He separates light from darkness in the moral universe, “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers… What communion hath light with darkness” (2 Cor. 6:14). Those who are, as we have seen in our studies, an heavenly people must learn to walk in the light of heaven.

Distinction: The heavenly light bearers were placed in the heavens in order that men learn through their functions to distinguish between night and day, and between seasons and years. Basically, these luminaries are the source of our meteorological knowledge. It is not only necessary that the child of God walk in the light of heaven, but that through that light he learn to approve things that are excellent, “In all discernment that ye may try the things that differ” (Phil. 1:9-10, R. V.).

Illumination: “Let them be for lights… to give light upon the earth” (chap. 1:15). In the first place this speaks to us of our blessed Lord Jesus, and more particularly when we think of the sun. As the sun shines from the heavens down upon the earth, so our Lord Jesus “the Dayspring from on high hath visited us” (Luke 1:78). While He was here, He said, “I am the light of the world: he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life” (John 8:12). Man, however, sought to extinguish that light, for “men love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil” (John

3:19). What a night of sorrow resulted from man's disobedience! Thank God this sad night will end in a glorious day for this benighted world, "Unto you that fear My Name shall the Sun of Righteousness arise with healing in His wings" (Mal. 4:2). Christ shall usher in the thousand years of peace and righteousness for which this poor world now groans. For the Church during the Eternal state there lies the joy and blessedness of fellowship with the Lord forever, "The city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof" (Rev. 21:23).

The moon and the stars that shine during the night suggest other thoughts: the moon, the Church; and the stars, the individual believers. The moon, we are told, derives all her light from the sun; her majesty is reflected glory. The Church in herself has no life, light, or glory, but these she receives from Christ, "We all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory (from the glory of the terrestrial to the glory of the celestial, 1 Cor. 15:40), even as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Cor. 3:18).

The stars fulfiling His will teach us our function in this present age, "A crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights (luminaries) in the world; Holding forth the Word of life" (Phil 2:15-16).

Order: "God set them in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth, And to rule over the day and over the night" (chap. 1:18). The astronomical relationship between the sun, moon, planets, and our earth was then fixed, as was the alternation of day and

night, of seasons and years. “God is not the author of confusion, but of peace” (1 Cor. 14:33). He exhorts, “Let all things be done decently and in order” (1 Cor. 14:40).

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The fifth and sixth days occupied by God in the reconstruction of the earth provide much material for thought. It is interesting that on these days the Holy Spirit of God uses the word He employed to describe the bringing in of the original heaven and earth (v.1), the word created. As this word appears three times in this chapter we notice that it suggests; (a) the beginning of all creation—v.1; (b) the beginning of animal existence—v. 21; and (c) the beginning of human life—v. 27. The word apparently suggests that God brought into existence something entirely new which had no causal relationship to things which already existed. The act which this word describes reveals the infinite wisdom, power, and determination of God. “The invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead” (Rom. 1:30). It was this witness of creation to her Creator that the Apostle Paul emphasised in his appeal to the men of Athens, “God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that He is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands” (Acts 17:24).

There is another important expression occuring in this chapter; it appears three times in this passage, the expression, “After his kind.” It is used of both the vegetable and animal kingdoms, and, of course,

intimates that each species possesses the power to reproduce itself. Moreover, it appears that this phrase could be translated, “In all their varieties,” for it also refers to variations within certain general groups. There are flowers in great variety, fish of every kind, animals of many types. God takes pleasure in divergence. Before the Fall of man, among both plants and animals, there was variety without variance, diversity without discord.

What a wonderful picture of the Church was given by the Lord to Peter. “He fell into a trance, And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth: Wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things and fowls of the air… What God hath cleansed that call not thou common or unclean” (Acts 10:10-14). What variety! Notwithstanding, there is no variance. What diversity! Yet, there is no discord.

This lesson is difficult for men to learn. Agreement among us is generally only the product of a conformity of thought. With many, uniformity of practice is the demanded price for accord in fellowship.

During these two days, God brought into being fish, fowl, animals, and man. Out of these four distinctions of life, through out the succeeding generations, and throughout all the Scriptures, God has chosen certain species to typify Himself as He is manifest in Christ.

The Fish

Fish has well been called God’s special gift to man. He may catch it in the sea and appropriate it for his own use without much labour. It increases abundantly. Of the

mighty river of a future and brighter day we read, “A very great multitude of fish… their fish shall be according to their kinds, as the fish of the great sea, exceeding many” (Ezek. 47:9-10).

The fish typifies the death, burial, and the resurrection of Christ, but very especially His glorious resurrection. “This is an evil generation: they seek a sign; and there shall no sign be given it, but the sign of Jonas the prophet. For as Jonas was a sign unto the Ninevites so shall also the Son of Man be to this generation” (Luke 11:29-30).

The Fowl

What thoughts fill the mind! In the Old Testament God is typified by the eagle (Ex. 19:4; Deut. 32:11); in the New, Christ is typified by the hen (Matt. 23:37). The Holy Spirit, of course, is typified by the dove (Matt. 3:16; Luke 3:22). In the two former we have feminine pictures of the Lord. They reveal His love and care of His own, and, of course, with these His strength and meekness, His solicitude and gentleness.

The Animals

While it is true that God accepted from His people, under certain circumstances, two turtle doves as a sacrifice, generally the sacrifices which typify the person and death of Christ were taken from among the animals, from the flock and from the herd (Lev. 1-5). God in His holiness declared, “The soul that sinneth it shall die” (Ezek. 18:4); yet, in the death of sacrificial animals God taught man His grace and love, for He willingly accepted a substitutionary death on behalf of the sinner.

The Man

That Adam is a type of Christ there is no doubt. The Spirit of God throughout the writings of the Apostle Paul contrasts, as well as compares, Christ with Adam, “And as it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit… The first man is of the earth earthy; the second is the Lord from heaven” (1 Cor. 15:45 and 47). “For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Cor. 15:22). “And not as it was by one that sinned, so is the gift; for the judgment was by one to condemnation, but the free gift is of many offences unto justification. For if by one man’s offence death reigned by one, much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by One, Jesus Christ… For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous” (Rom. 5:16-19).

Adam in his headship is a type of Christ; in his constitution he is an illustration of Christ, but in his sin he is a contrast to Christ.

The creation of man was the climax of the Divine work. It was God’s intention that the man whom He had made in His image and likeness have dominion over the earth, but alas, it was otherwise with Adam; nevertheless, God’s purpose will be fulfilled, “Thou madest Him a little lower than the angels; Thou crownedst Him with glory and honour, and didst set Him over the works of Thy hands; Thou hast put all things in subjection under His feet. For in that He put all in subjection under Him, He left nothing that is not put under Him. But now we see not yet all things put under Him. But we see Jesus, Who

was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour" (Heb. 2:7-9).

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THE CREATION OF MAN

As we have already observed the creation of man was climacteric, and God rested on the seventh day.

Man was created for the enjoyment of this Divine sabbath, but, alas, because of his sin the rest was broken, and man brought upon himself the toil and travail which have been his portion ever since.

There are three different view points from which we ought to consider the creation of Adam for he is a responsible man, a representative man, and a typical man.

RESPONSIBLE MAN

There are several salient points we must consider briefly in this study:

THE DIVINE COUNCIL (26a):

“Let us make man in our own image.” While the expression, Holy Trinity, is not found in the Bible, the fact it represents is. It has been stated before that the Trinity is inferred in the Old Testament, and manifested in the New. It is, therefore, inferred here in Genesis chapter 1. First, in the name, God (Elohim), which is in the plural number; and, again, in this conversation within the Godhead.

THE DIVINE IMAGE (26b):

“Our own image,” “Our likeness.” The word “image” suggest: first, resemblance; and in second place, representation. Whereas, “likeness” suggests similarity. Could it be that “image” intimates that man was, in his glorious and superior appearance and in his positional excellency, the Divine expression and representation upon earth? Moreover, could “likeness” refer more to his constitution? If so, then man has lost the first, although he still retains the second, for as God is a tri-unity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, man is a tripartite being of spirit, soul, and body (1 Thess. 5:23).

The lost image eventually will be recovered in redeemed man, “For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son” (Rom. 8:29). “Who is the image of the invisible God” (Col. 1:15).

THE DIVINE PURPOSE (26c):

“Let them have dominion.” What a remarkable commentary Psalm 8 is upon this creative intention of God. “Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of Thy hand” (Psalm 8:5-6). An appreciation of the supremacy in which God had placed man, makes more dismal and dreadful the depths to which he has fallen.

THE DIVINE BLESSING (28):

“And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it.”

The Apostle Paul tells us, “The Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God” (1 Cor. 2:10). There is no question but here, in these details of God’s work in creation, we have many of the deep things of the Lord. May the Holy Spirit take of the things of Christ and, as it may please Him, reveal them unto us. There are two words here which merit our attention, “replenish” and “subdue.” Is it possible that the first intimates a repopulating of an earth that had previously had been inhabited? Is it, also, possible that the second word, “subdue” intimates a state of confusion beyond Eden over which man was to make his government extend?

The Word of God does not substantiate the teaching of certain that there was a pre-Adamic man. Adam definitely was the first man. Could not other creatures have dwelt upon the earth, and could not these have been destroyed? Could not man have been given a reconstructed earth to people, and to subdue, that is supress any remaining disorder, and govern for the glory of God?

THE DIVINE PROBATION (2:15-17):

“And the Lord God commanded the man saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.” Let us notice:

HUMAN GUILT

“Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression” (1 Tim. 2:14).

DIVINE GRACE:

"And the Lord said… lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever… God sent him forth from the garden of Eden… So he drove out the man and He placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubim and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life" (Gen. 3:22-24). The Tree of Life was the symbol of man's blessedness; the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, the symbol of his probation. He failed under the latter; so, consequently, he forfeited the former.

THE DIVINE CONSIDERATION (2:18-25):

"It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for Him." A helper corresponding to him, an assistant suitable to him, was God's intention. Thus Adam was first formed (He has a priority through creation) then Eve" (1 Tim. 2:13), and the woman was created for the man (1 Cor. 11:8-9). "For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh" (Eph. 5:31). "Let every one of you in particular so love his wife as himself, and the wife see that she reverence her husband" (Eph. 5:33).

It is said of Stephen in Acts 6, "All that sat in the council, looking steadfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of angel." Stephen, gazing upon his Lord in glory, meets the stormy waves of a world that hated his Lord before it hated him; and the vessel, broken by the stones of the multitude, only emits the beauteous light of his glorified Lord as he tastes the fellowship of His sufferings.—Extracted.

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Man, who was made lower than the angels and yet higher than the animals, was created, not only a creature responsible to God, but also a being representative of God in all creation.

His Headship In Creation

In this man was THE VISIBLE IMAGE OF THE INVISIBLE GOD: “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness” (Gen. 1:26). How like our blessed Lord Jesus, “Who being the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high” (Heb.1:3).

THE ABSOLUTE MONARCH: “And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth” (Gen. 1:26b). Although man lost this dominion through sin, it will be restored to him in our Lord Jesus Christ, “Thou hast put all things in subjection under His feet. For in that He put all in subjection under Him, He left nothing that is not put under Him. But now we see not yet all things put under Him. But we see Jesus, Who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour” (Heb. 2:8-9).

“For He must reign, till He hath put all enemies under His feet” (1 Cor. 15:25).

THE PERSONIFACATION OF WISDOM: “And out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof. And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field” (Gen. 2:20). How like our Lord Jesus of Whom, under the guise of wisdom we read, “I wisdom dwell with prudence,… Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth:… When He gave to the sea his decree, that the waters should not pass His commandment: when he appointed the foundations of the earth: Then I was by Him, as one brought up with Him; and I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him; Rejoicing in the habitable part of His earth; and My delights were with the sons of men” (Prov. 8:12-31).

THE FEDERAL HEAD OF THE HUMAN RACE: There are certain details here to which we might call attention:

Man’s headship through priority (1 Cor. 15:47; 1 Tim. 2:13-14).

Man’s headship in innocence (Gen. 1:28).

Man’s headship in sin (Rom. 5:12).

Man’s headship in spite of death (Rom. 5:14-17; 1 Cor. 15:22).

His Headship In The Church

We read, “Christ also loved the Church and gave Himself for it” (Eph. 5:25). Thank God for the Church of our Lord

Jesus Christ, and for every local expression of it. For such assemblies of the saints the Lord has established a definite spiritual order. “The Head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the Head of Christ is God” (1 Cor. 11:3). The headship of God is revealed in the unveiling of Christ; the headship of Christ is manifest in the uncovering of the man; the headship of man is hidden in the presence of the Lord by the covering of the woman. The covering on the natural head of the woman is the sign of the covering of her racial head, man; therefore, in the Church the subjection of the woman is the symbol of the submission of her racial head, man, before the headship of Christ. “For this same cause ought the woman to have the sign of authority, the authority of the man, on her head because of the angels” (1 Cor. 11:10). The subjection of the Christian woman to man, who in turn is subject unto Christ, reminds the angels of their subjection to their Creator Head, even Christ.

This principle is the basis upon which Paul asserts, “Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection, But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence” (1 Tim. 2:11-12). Paul then gives two reasons why the woman must remain silent in the assembly: First, man has a priority through creation, “Adam was first formed then Eve” (1 Tim. 2:13). Man is therefore the federal head of the race. In second place, the woman has a priority in sin, “Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression” (1 Tim. 2:14). Her leadership is proved unreliable. The lovely submissive silence of the sisters in Christ to their brethren in the gathering of the saints

forms the example of what man's subjection to Christ ought to be.

His Headship In The Home

In an age when the woman seeks to be equal with the man in practically everything, it may be considered improper to restate facts which are viewed by many as old fashioned, but since they are taught in the Scriptures they cannot be ignored.

HIS HEADSHIP IN THE HOME ESTABLISHED: "For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the Head of the Church… Therefore as the Church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything" (Eph. 5:23-24).

HIS HEADSHIP EXEMPLIFIED BY SARAH: "For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves being in subjection unto their own husbands: Even as Sara obeyed Abraham calling him lord" (1 Pet. 3:5-6).

HIS HEADSHIP EXERCISED WITH SYMPATHY: "Likewise ye husbands dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered" (1 Pet. 3:7).

* * *

Friendship with Christians is the highest type of friendship. Therefore, let us find our friends among those of whom Christ said, "Ye are my friends" (John 15:14).

The Book of Genesis --Part 8

The Book of Genesis

Part 8

James Gunn

In our study we have noticed that man was not only a responsible being before God, but that on earth he was the representative of God. We must, before we pass on to another section of this chapter, consider him as a type, a type of Christ.

There have been previous hints that man may be viewed as a type of Christ the Sovereign Lord, the Head of the New Creation (1 Cor. 15:45; Heb. 2:13; Col. 1:15-17; Heb. 2:8). Let us now think of Adam as a type of Christ as the Heavenly Bridegroom.

The Glory Of The Sovereign Lord

HIS INHERENT GLORY: As we have learned, man is a tripartite being, a trinity, fashioned in the image and likeness of God. That through sin he has lost the image, we know, but he still retains the likeness. This actually is man's inherent glory. It is this which makes him differ from the beast over which he ruled. Man possesses a spirit that transcends his soul and body, and makes him conscious of God.

HIS POSITIONAL GLORY: Not only did God say, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness," but He said, "And let them have dominion" (Gen. 1:26). That Adam willingly renounced his positional glory in order to continue his relationship with Eve, appears from a comparison of Scripture. "Adam was not deceived, but

the woman being deceived was in the transgression" (1 Tim. 2:14). Our blessed Lord Jesus, the Last Adam, out of infinite love, and not through a circumstance, renounced His positional glories in Heaven and stooped down to redeem for Himself a bride. "Christ Jesus: Who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross (Phil. 2:5-8).

The Bride Of The Sovereign Lord

THE DESIRE FOR COMPANIONSHIP: As sovereign, all animals were subject to Adam; he knew them all, had named them all, but among them there existed no creature his equal, "For Adam there was not found an help meet for him" (Gen. 2:20). "And the Lord God said, it is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him" (Gen. 2:18).

It would appear that the man, Adam, had now discovered the fulness and superiority of his personality, and that his association with the animals had produced in him a desire for human and personal companionship. Is there here a hint that our blessed Lord likewise yearns for companionship, desires fellowship? As Adam discovered the need for Eve before she was created; even so, "Christ loved the Church, and gave Himself for her," before ever she had been formed (Eph. 5:25).

THE CREATION OF HIS CONSORT: "And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs… And the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made He a woman" (Gen.

2:12-22). From out of that deep sleep, from the incision in his side, from his very person, Eve was derived. Adam might well say of her, “This is now bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh.”

To this very experience the Holy Spirit makes an allusion when speaking of the union between Christ and His Church. “Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for it… We are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones” (Eph. 5:25 and 30).

Adam’s sleep with its natural darkness and the incision with its results are a foreshadowing of the deep darkness and the dreadful pain of Christ at Calvary.

THE COMPLEMENT OF HIMSELF: Adam said of Eve, “She shall be called woman, because she was taken out of man.” Immediately follows the statement, “Therefore shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave unto his wife and they shall be one flesh” (Gen. 2:24). Similarly we read of the Church that she is the fulness (the complementary part) of Him that filleth all in all (Eph. 1:23).

THE PRESENTATION OF THE BRIDE: When the Lord God had built the woman, we read that He brought her unto the man (Gen. 2:22). Eve was presented to Adam in all her lovliness, innocence and perfection. We know that eventually “Christ … will present to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing … holy and without blemish” (Eph. 5:27). The Church will appear faultless before the presence of His glory (Jude 24). Of that wonderful day we read, “Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb” (Rev. 19:7, 9).

The Book of Genesis --Part 9

The Book of Genesis

Part 9

James Gunn

The Fall Of Man

The third chapter of Genesis is of immense importance. Like the book in which it is found, it is a seed plot of much that is more fully developed throughout the Bible. Moreover, it proves the need for Divine redemption on behalf of the human race.

In this chapter we are, for the first time in Scripture, introduced to Satan. Here we have recorded his temptation of mankind, his subtle approach, the first transgression, the curse of the earth, man’s expulsion from Eden, and the grace of God providing a covering for guilty man and woman.

That there are mythical stories of the Fall found among the ancient traditions of Babylon which contain similarities to the Mosaic account, causes no concern to the honest student. Obviously, the record of Adam’s sin and ruin were traditionally known to the ancient peoples of the earth, and as it passed from generation to generation, it became corrupted. Through Divine revelation and inspiration the true account has been given in the Word of God.

In our studies it might be well for us to secure a better knowledge of the one who was the source of sin and its tragic consequences, the devil. This evil being, in his pride, attempted to be as God. He is called “the god of

this world" in imitation of God the Father; "the prince of this world" in imitation of God the Son; and, "the spirit that now worketh among the children of disobedience" in imitation of the Holy Spirit.

In the Bible there are many names and descriptive titles given to him, a brief examination of some of these may reveal to us his history, character, and power.

LUCIFER, son of the morning (Isa. 14:12): This name means either "the shining one," or "the light bearer." It was Satan's name before his fall through pride.

SERPENT (Rev. 12:9): There is no appellation applied to him in Scripture that so forcibly reveals his guile and sublety.

DEVIL (Rev. 12:9): This name means accuser or slanderer. We know that he is the accuser of the brethren, and the deceiver of the whole world (Rev. 12:9-10).

SATAN (Rev. 12:9): This name suggests his resistance against God, His order and will.

DRAGON (Rev. 12:9): The dragon character of this evil one is more evident at Calvary than elsewhere. His power, fierceness, and violence were hurled against the Lord Jesus. Praise God, Christ triumphed over him and annulled his power!

APOLLYON (Rev. 9:11): This is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew Abaddon, and surely it reveals the intent and final purpose of the god of this world; it means destroyer. How low the anointed cherub that covereth has fallen!

BELIAL (2 Cor. 6:15): This descriptive title implies that Satan is the chief of the unholy angels, the leader of evil principalities and powers in heavenly places.

We might well stand in awe at such a being, so subtle, fierce, and destructive. He tempted the first man, Adam, in the Garden, and secured his ruin; he also attempted to tempt the Second Adam, the Lord from Heaven, in a wilderness, but, thank God, he failed. Notwithstanding, he has wrought ever against God. This we see particularly at the time of the incarnation, at the place called Calvary, and in the conflict between light and darkness throughout all ages.

As students we must learn what God’s Word has to say about this wicked one, and as saints we need to put on the whole armour of God in order to be able to stand against him.

The Book of Genesis --Part 10

The Book of Genesis

Part 10

James Gunn

The Fall:

In our last study we were considering the tempter, and sought to learn a little about his character from the names and appelations given to him in the Bible. Let us now consider the circumstances under which the temptation was made, as well as the temptation itself, and the consequences of the temptation.

The Circumstances:

The happiness of man in the days of his innocence remains unparalleled. There are a number of things which obviously contributed to his happiness. Some of these were:

GEOGRAPHIC: The earth was but recently reconstructed, in the centre was the area, Eden, and eastward in Eden was a garden. This area was well supplied with water by a river, and so fertile was this garden that, “Out of the ground made the Lord God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food.” Moreover, in the garden at Eden were placed the trees of life and of knowledge of good and evil. A little reflection upon the geography of Genesis 2 and 3 will disclose something of God’s providence as well as His sovereignty.

SOCIAL: The innumerable species of zoological life provided a test of Adam's wisdom and a display of his knowledge as he named them, but these left him unsatisfied for among them there was not found an help meet for him (Gen. 2:19-20). Consequently, "The rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made He a woman, and brought her unto man. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife." Man, who not only was surrounded by the evidence of Divine providence, but in his wife found social and marital satisfaction, discovered that his existence and personality were perfectly integrated in this union with the woman.

SPIRITUAL: There was a sweet fellowship existing then between God and man. Some of the expressions found here are most interesting; for example, "The Lord took the man." "The Lord God commanded the man." They reveal to us that God accompanied the man into Eden, and personally gave him His commandments. Furthermore, we read that the Lord put man to sleep, and that finally the Lord brought Eve to Adam. What appears to be the customary approach of God to man is described for us, "They heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day."

An examination of the circumstances under which the temptation was made proves that man was satisfied with his geographic position, with the social, mental, and physical relationship to his wife, and with the spiritual response of God to his own spiritual consciousness. What more could he seek!

These considerations only prove the power of the tempter, and the force of his subtle approach and persuasive argument.

The Temptation:

Satan's approach to man was an indirect one; he went by the way of the object of man's affection. A direct attack upon the Divine representative who had been made in the image and likeness of God may have been considered indiscreet by the artful foe. By dragging down into sin the object of man's affection, by degrading the complementary part of man's being, Satan may have reasoned, he could indirectly accomplish his ruin. If so, in this, he reasoned correctly. Let us consider—

THE MEANS SATAN EMPLOYED: The first, insinuation "Yea, hath God said, ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden ?" What boldness! What falsehood! Second, assertion, "Ye shall not surely die." In third place, deception, "God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." This statement was but partially true. Man might possess the knowledge of good and evil without the power to adhere to the former and refuse the latter.

THE MOVEMENT SATAN ACCOMPLISHED: There exists a fixed law of moral movement, and this is produced by: first, a perception that results in an understanding of a matter, second, a desire that results from an appreciation of the matter understood; and, in third place, an action resulting from volition. These processes are readily detected in the case of Eve. "And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes." Here we have her

perception at work leading her to an understanding of the character, beauty, and possibility of the true knowledge of good and evil. “A tree to be desired to make one wise.” In this second statement, we discern in Eve’s mind a desire that has resulted from her appreciation of what she now understands about the tree. In the last clauses of this verse she wills to act. “She took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her and he did eat.”

The Book of Genesis --Part 11

The Book of Genesis

Part 11

James Gunn

The Fall

The Consequences:

While the sad results of man's sin are obvious in the world, it is only the Bible that explains to us the many ramifications of this problem. Let us consider the results of the Fall of man.

Spiritually: The prohibition was, "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Gen. 2:17). Full provision was made by God for man's physical being, and what is even more important, his training as a moral being was simultaneously established. As a moral being man failed, and immediately died spiritually. The implication here explains the real meaning of death as being separation not annihilation. Spiritual death embraces three consequences to man's sin; first, a sense of personal guilt, "The eyes of them both were opened; and they knew that they were naked" (Gen. 3:7): a realization of divine condemnation, the curse of God (Gen. 3:14-19); and, finally, the experience of moral separation, "The Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden to till the ground from whence he was taken" (Gen. 3:23).

Physically: The condemnation of God was pronounced upon the serpent, (Satan's medium) upon the woman,

and then upon the man. In all three cases it was manifested physically. In the woman by the physical experience of pain, “I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow shalt thou bring forth children” (Gen. 3:16); in the serpent, by the physical appearance of degradation, “Upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat” (Gen. 3:14); and in the man, the physical effort of toil, “Cursed is the ground for thy sake: in sorrow (toil) shalt thou eat of it all the days of they life” (Gen. 3:17).

Ultimately, there was the physical condition of death; human life was limited now, “All the days of thy life” (17), and at the end death, “Till thou return unto the ground; for out of it was thou taken; for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return” (19).

Socially: The social effect of the Fall is emphasized by the position afforded the woman, “Thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee” (Gen. 3:16). The woman who was the prime actor in the Fall, while obeyed by her husband then, is, henceforth, to live in subjection to him. “I suffer not a woman to teach or to usurp authority over the man” (1 Tim. 2:12). The woman’s place of subjection is consequent to the facts, man’s priority in creation (1 Tim. 2:13), and woman’s priority in transgression (1 Tim. 2:14). Socially this order remains and any attempt to change it only results in further wrong and confusion; nevertheless, it is blessed to know that it is abrogated in Christ in Whom “there is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ” (Gal. 3:28).

Racially: “Wherefore as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all

men, for that all have sinned" (Rom. 5:12). Dr. Moule has well expressed this fact, "Mankind inherits from primal man, tried and fallen, not only taint but guilt, not only moral hurt but legal fault." It is not so much the fact that every one has sinned individually, but that in their federal head all sinned. The entire race is viewed as having sinned in its head, Adam; therefore, sin pervades the whole of mankind both as to its guilt and penalty.

Ethically: "Love not the world (kosmos, the arrangement and system of man) neither the things that are in the world. If any man love (keep on loving) the world; the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world (arises from the inhabitants of the world), the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world." Out of depravity, depravity arises. The Christian's constant problem is how to live in the world, and not to be entangled in its systems of philosophy etc. It is ethically impossible for the child of God to enjoy the things of the world and to maintain a good conscience.

Geographically: Because of sin the whole of creation is in a state of suffering and degradation. It is held in the bondage of corruption, and bears upon it the sign of the curse, thorns and thistles. The Apostle Paul, personifying creation, writes, "The earnest expectation of the creature (creation) waiteth for the manifestation (revealing) of the sons of God.

Because the creature (creation) itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption. For the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now" (Rom. 8:19, 21, 22).

Such then are some of the evil consequences of the Fall of man.

The Book of Genesis --Part 12

The Book of Genesis

Part 12

James Gunn

We have considered the consequences of sin in its ruinous results; it would not be proper to leave our subject without examining the consequences through grace of sin in the remedial plan of God.

The affirmed guilt of man: (Genesis 3:16-17): There are three facts, the explanation of which we find only in the Bible.

Sin: The man may blame the woman, and through her God; the woman may blame the serpent, but they both had sinned. In sin they became conscious of instant spiritual death and were filled with the dread of future physical death (19).

Sorrow: Sin penetrates with grief every pleasure man seeks, and sin makes even natural love the origin of travail. The pair must still replenish the earth, but in suffering; the earth must still furnish for them its edible produce, but by sweat and labour (17-18).

Shame: Sin not only resulted in the feeling of suffering, but also in the sense of shame. The moral shame of a corrupt mind and an alienated heart was greater than the shame of a naked body (7-10).

The annulled power of Satan: (14-15): In the final triumph of the Messiah with His restored people, “The nations shall see and be confounded at all their might: they shall lay their hand upon their mouth, their ears

shall be deaf. They shall lick dust like a serpent" (Mic. 7:16-17). Licking dust is the token of abject humiliation and complete subjugation. The fact that the snake eats dust is an indication of the complete and final overthrow of Satan; for, while he may bruise the heel of the Seed of the Woman, even Christ (Gal. 3:16), the Seed of the Woman will bruise his head, a fatal wound.

The prophetic vision of Adam: "And Adam called his wife's name Eve; because she was the mother of all living" (20). Was this an act of faith? Is this statement anticipative of the promised Seed Who was to bruise the serpent's head? Is Eve not the mother of all mortals rather than of all living? Adam in the circumstance of death declares Eve the mother of all living. Is it to this that Paul makes reference? "Adam was first formed, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor, yet woman will be saved by the birth of the child, if they continue in faith, and love and holiness, with modesty" (1 Tim. 2:13-15, R.S.V. margin)."

The gracious provision of the Lord: "Unto Adam also and to his wife did the Lord God make coats of skins, and clothed them." One thing is certain, the animals which provided by their skins the covering for Adam and Eve, were not slain for food; meat was not given for human consumption until after the Deluge (Gen. 9:3-4); they could, therefore, have been slain in sacrifice. The clothing provided might well be understood as a figure of that imputed righteousness which must clothe guilty man to give him, on the basis of sacrifice, an acceptance before God (Rom. 3:21-22).

The cautious expulsion from Eden (22-24): To save man from even the greater tragedy of eating of the tree of life and remaining in the hopeless existence of perpetual death, God expelled him from the garden, and placed a guarding sword there.

God placed within Eden the cherubim. These strange creatures were an indication that man eventually would be brought back out of death into life, from distance to nearness, through expulsion to communion with God again. Ezekiel, who describes the cherubim, calls them living creatures (Ezek. 1:25), and we are told that the name, cherub, means a multitude of living creatures. Within the empty garden from which man had been driven in death stood these symbols of a multitude of living creatures, fit proofs of the return of man redeemed, regenerated, and glorified. Compare Rev. 22:1-6.

The Book of Genesis --Part 13

The Book of Genesis

Part 13

James Gun

When we began our studies in the Book of Genesis in January 1956, we noticed the two general divisions of the book; namely, “The Origin of the Nations,” and “The Origin of the Nation.” We more explicitly stated these as, “The Origin of all Peoples,” and “The Origin of the Chosen People, Israel.” We then began to subdivide the first section of the book, and began to examine Creation, Reconstruction, Man, and the Fall. We must continue with this interesting part of this Book of Beginnings, for the two, important events, the Deluge and the Tower of Babel, demand some consideration.

The Deluge

We shall not occupy our time with either the archeological evidences of the flood or with the geological effects of the flood. That there are certain scientific difficulties in many honest minds to our understanding of the details of the deluge is conceded, but the sincere Christian does not expect God to reveal every detail of His act to His creature man. For the believer, it is sufficient to know that God has accomplished works of His own planning. The spiritual mind confides in God and seeks to understand only that which God is pleased to reveal of His mighty acts and inscrutable ways.

The Retrospect:

The first family: A review of chapters 4 and 5 will acquaint us with the family life of early man. The very first human family, that of Adam and Eve, suffered through the Fall the sorrow of travail, the mystery of pain, the toil of the provider, the grief of bereavement, the violence of crime (The first death in the human family was by the hand of man as if to show that death did not come through God, but by human sin.), the severity of sovereign punishment, and the certainty of death. These, the effects of sin, increased in frequency and intensity as men multiplied, and more particularly, as family life developed into social life as man built cities in which flourished The first civilization: The features of a substantial civilization are given us in chapter 4 where we read of a city, therefore architectural design (17), of gainful employment (20), the musical arts (21), poetical literature (23-24), a system of technical education (22), and manufacturing (23). Along with progressive materialism in that early civilization, we also have an expansion of sin for here we find polygamy condoned and murder excused (4:23-24). Inspite of this obvious degeneracy we discover The evidence of Godliness (4:25-26): Seth was given to Adam and Eve in the place of Abel, and in the days of Seth's son, Enos, men began "to call upon the name of the Lord." As materialism was so prominent in the descendants of Cain, spiritualities were more marked among those of Seth.

Notwithstanding the salutary influence of the godliness of the line of Seth, "God saw that the wickedness of men was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it

repented the Lord that He had made man on the earth" (Gen. 6:5-6). Moreover the two lines soon intermingled, and the result of their abnormal wickedness soon appeared (6:4). Those who called upon the Name of the Lord, looked upon the daughters of men, those of Cain, "They took wives of all which they chose." This promiscuous immoral intercourse is stated as the consumation of the corruption of both lines and not as the cause of the giants referred to in chap. 6:6.

There are two characteristics of Antedeluvian humanity which do not generally exist since the Flood; namely, the longevity of the span of life, and the hugeness of the human frame, "There were giants in the earth in those days." Although some thousand years later there were giants in Canaan, it is probable that in a time when men lived for centuries their vigour produced individuals of much more than ordinary height, persons of unique size. It is no more necessary for the Bible student to seek an explanation for the immensity of the physical bodies of the Nephilim (giants) than it is to seek a reason for the prolongation of physical existence in Antedeluvian days.

The Book of Genesis --Part 14

The Book of Genesis

Part 14

James Gunn

Last month as we were studying the Deluge, under the subtitle, The Evidence of Corruption, we looked at the immensity of the physical bodies of the Nephilim (giants) in Antediluvian days. It seems proper that we spend some more thought upon this interesting subject.

Certain scholars regard the designation, “sons of God,” to refer to angels, and they urge that the abnormal union of the angels with the daughters of men produced a race of giants. While such an interpretation may appear quite ingenious, it is far from natural. In the earlier interpretation that we have given to these opening verses of chapter 6, the union of the Cainite and the Sethite lines appears more logical and more in keeping with the whole tenor of Holy Scripture.

It might be well to state four reasons why this alternative and more fanciful interpretation appears definitely improbable. First, heretofore, throughout the earlier chapters of the Scriptures, no reference has been made to the existence of angels. For one who believes in the progressive revelation of truth, it becomes necessary to read “angels,” a subject of later revelation, into this passage in order to support such an exegesis. Second, actually Scripture nowhere clearly sanctions such an interpretation. It is only through the power of a fertile imagination that 2 Pet 2:4 and Jude 6-7, can be applied to these Antediluvian corruptions. In third place, let us

notice that sexual relations are nowhere attributed in the Word of God (in the depraved mythology of the pagan world, yes) to superior beings; in fact, Matt. 22:30, pictures the angels as being sexless. In conclusion, there are those who conclude that since the appelation “sons of God” does apply to angels in a number of passages throughout the Old Testament, that it must be applied to them here. Further examination of the subject shows that the relationship suggested by the appelation was possessed by God’s chosen people, Israel, who were worshippers of the true and only living God. For example see Ex. 4:22; Deut. 4:21; Deut. 32:5, 6, 18, 19. This point becomes more evident as we notice that the worshippers of false gods are likewise called their children in Num. 21:29; Mal. 2:11.

We shall continue our study of this retrospect of things before The Flood next month under the subtitle The Evidence of Corruption, and shall call attention to God’s sovereignty and man’s free agency as they appear in this historical setting. We shall also trace the development of human sin in those pre-Deluge days, and discover the Divine reaction to such guilt and lawlessness.

The Book of Genesis --Part 15

The Book of Genesis

Part 15

James Gunn

The Evidence of Corruption. God, as the Divine Being, possesses attributes, manifests emotions, and exercises faculties; therefore, we read and understand what is meant by the statement, “God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the Lord that He had made man on the earth, and it grieved Him at His heart” (Gen. 5:5-6). A little later in this account we read, “The earth also was corrupt before God and the earth was filled with violence. And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth” (6:11-12).

The very reading of such a passage will raise thoughts in the sincere mind as to the great subjects, Divine sovereignty and human free agency. Did God, at this period of history, by Divine omniscience immutably foreordain matters pertaining to man, or did man’s freedom of choice and action take God completely by surprise?

Throughout the Holy Scriptures both of these subjects are maintained, and must be accepted by us, for although they are difficult to harmonize, both alike are doctrinally correct.

We should ever remember that man's freedom of action functions only within the limits set by Divine sovereignty. Whatever these predetermined limits may have been in this case we do not know, but we may illustrate the point by considering the matter of eternal salvation. God has decreed that if man believes in Christ he is saved; and, that, if man disbelieves in Christ he is lost. Within these limits man is left to make a choice, and thus by freedom of action to decide his own destiny. While the Antediluvians possessed freedom of action, their action, we may be sure, operated only within the scope of a Divine plan perfectly consonant with God's infinite wisdom and holy character.

Let us consider the action of man and then the reaction of God in those days which immediately preceded the Flood.

The Action Of Man

The Origin of Sin. "Every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (6:5). The Hebrew language states, "The whole imagination (that is, the entire fashion of man's thinking) was only evil." In chapter 1 repeatedly we read, "God saw …that it was good," but here we read, "God saw … evil continually." Man's heart had so far deflected from its original object, God, that he lived in open defiance of the moral laws of God.

The Development of Sin. "God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth." The enormity of human guilt is embraced in the adverb "great."

The Expanse of Sin. Sin had not only increased in its character but in its quantity, for it covered the inhabited earth, “The earth was corrupt before God.”

The Result of Sin. “And God looked upon the earth, and behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth.” “And the earth was filled with violence.” Man, even in those comparatively early centuries of human history, had degraded the material things of the earth into instruments for his own carnal wishes; moreover, he existed, not in a state of peace and good will toward others, but in a constant condition of strife.

The Reaction Of God

There are many details to examine, but probably the most prominent feature here is that of:

Divine Holiness. Throughout this entire record we understand God as apart from human sin. His immediate reaction is that of One separated from it through the positive holiness of His own nature. That He suffers through it and responds to it, there is no doubt, but He is outside as One looking upon its impious character and its hazardous effects.

Divine Revulsion. “It repented the Lord that He had made man.” The experience of God under these circumstances is couched in the language of human emotions (anthropomorphic language) in order that we understand His feelings and responses. Repentance with God is not a change of mind, a change of purpose, as it is with us, but, rather, a change of attitude. God’s attitude to man in sin is altogether different to what it was to man in innocence.

Divine Sorrow. “It grieved Him at His heart.” God was displeased by man’s corrupt behaviour.

Divine Punishment. Such depravity could only result in a pouring forth of Divine wrath. There are three points that should be noticed in this punishment of evil doing. First, the certainty of penalty, “And the Lord said, “I will destroy man.” In second place, the extent of the retribution, “Both man and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air.” As in the pouring out of the plagues in Egypt at a later time, the stroke fell upon all, from man, the governor, to the cattle that roamed the fields. Finally, the character of this dreadful punishment, “I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast.” The Hebrew word “destroy” that is used here means to delete or to rub out. Just as a proof reader deletes from a copy a discrepancy that marred the reproduction of a lovely manuscript, so God would rub out that which marred his lovely earth, man. This does not suggest that man was to be annihilated, but that he was to be removed from the face of the earth. That God had plans of grace, we shall soon discover; nevertheless, the severity of His judgment is a warning to men of all ages.

The Book of Genesis --Part 16

The Book of Genesis

Part 16

James Gunn

As we study the Divine reaction in regard to the Deluge, we must not only emphasize Divine holiness, revulsion, sorrow, and punishment, but also Divine grace. We have already noticed the severity and grace of God in Eden. In severity He pronounced a curse upon the earth, and expelled man from the Garden; in grace He provided coats, through sacrifice, for guilty man. Similarly, God manifests His severity in the Deluge, but there are in like manner, several details here which reveal His grace, “But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord” (Gen. 6:8).

Divine Patience:

“Yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years” (Gen. 6:3). While it appears certain that God’s primary intention here was to shorten human life, for why should he prolong the means and the opportunities by which man only deepened his guilt and hardened his heart, it is obvious that He also set a period of probation. During this period, a respite of 120 years, ample time was given to that sinful generation to repent and to seek after God.

Divine Righteousness:

“Noah … a preacher of righteousness” (2 Pet. 2:5). While there is no statement in the records of the Book of

Genesis that Noah preached during the period of probation, it is generally implied. This simple statement by the Apostle Peter leaves no doubt but that Noah warned his contemporaries of God's righteousness in Divine punishment of human sin. In all probability he also proclaimed that God could save only on the basis of righteousness.

Divine Scrutiny:

"And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth" (Gen. 6:5). "But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord" (Gen. 6:8). Amidst total corruption one exception was discovered. God said to Noah, "Thee have I seen righteous before Me" (Gen. 7:1). Solomon wrote, "One man among a thousand have I found; but a woman among all those have I not found" (Ecc. 8:28). Noah in this regard was not only unusual; he was unique. What a picture of our blessed Lord Jesus, "Who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners" (Heb. 7:26).

Divine Design:

"Noah being warned of God … prepared an ark" (Heb. 11:7). "Thus did Noah; according to all that God commanded him" (Gen. 6:22). Many centuries later the true Antitype of Noah, our blessed Lord Jesus, could say, "I have glorified Thee on the earth: I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do" (John 17:4).

The Book of Genesis --Part 17

The Book of Genesis

Part 17

James Gunn

It is necessary for us, not only to examine the moral attributes of God made so manifest at the time of the Deluge, but to examine the actual accomplishments of these attributes. God's grace, righteousness, and patience resulted in the preservation of the human race. This was Divine preservation from the punishment of sin. At the Deluge "mercy and truth met together." It is in this respect that the Deluge and the ark of safety became an excellent illustration of God's means of saving men today from the judgment merited by their sin. The Apostle Peter uses the event in exactly this manner, "Once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved" (1 Pet. 3:20).

Salvation With Noah

There is no doubt but that each person was responsible before God, and that each had to obey the Divine call, "Come thou and all thy house into the ark" (Gen. 7:1); nevertheless, it is obvious that relationship to Noah meant salvation to everyone in his household. The proof of this is found in such statements as the following: "Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord." "Come thou and all thy house into the ark; for thee have I seen righteous before Me." "Noah only remained alive, and they that were with him in the ark." "And God

remembered Noah and every living thing, and all cattle that was with him in the ark."

Noah as a type of our Lord Jesus reveals in measure what we see in perfection in Christ: his character, "righteous;" his witness, "perfect in his generation;" his fellowship, "Noah walked with God;" his work, "Thus did Noah;" his accomplishment, "According to all that God commanded him."

Just as relationship with Noah a man of perfect character and successful accomplishment resulted in the preservation of those who were associated with him in the ark, even so it is relationship to Christ that results in eternal salvation, "God, Who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved" (Eph. 2:4-5).

Salvation In The Ark

The actual means employed in this Divine act of grace was the ark, "By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith" (Heb. 11:7). In the ark Noah and those with him went under the outpouring of Divine wrath, and left in the depths below them a world buried because of sin. "And the ark rested in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, upon the mountains of Ararat" (Gen. 8:4). What a picture of Ephesian truth! "God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us… hath quickened us together with Christ… and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places" (Eph. 2:4-6).

Some Bible students believe that the seventeenth day of the seventh month was the identical day on which our Lord arose from the dead. The seventh month became the first month of the year to Israel at the time of the passover in Egypt, and the seventeenth day would be the third day after the slaying of the paschal lamb which was to take place on the fourteenth day of the month. Be that as it may, it appears that in the ark we have a picture of death and resurrection.

Salvation By Water

There is a rather unusual reference to the Deluge made by the Apostle Peter, “When once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water” (1 Peter 3:20). What can be meant, “Saved by water”? Were not Noah and his family saved from water? Yes, indeed. That is the message brought before us in Hebrews 11:7, “Noah… moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house.” Peter here has the ordinance of believer’s baptism in mind, for he adds, “The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 3:21).

As the Deluge separated Noah and his family from the former state of the world in its corruption and violence, and as by its water Noah had been transported into an entirely different sphere, a renovated earth, in like manner the baptism of the believer witnesses to the fact expressed elsewhere by this same Apostle “By these ye might be partakers of the Divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust” (Pet.

1:4). There is a sense in which we must await the Advent of Christ to be delivered from the “bondage of corruption” (Rom. 8:21), but that sense is rather physical, whereas here the Apostle is dealing with that which is spiritual.

The Book of Genesis --Part 18

The Book of Genesis

Part 18

James Gunn

Our studies of the Deluge would not be complete if we did not examine some of the details of events and circumstances which immediately followed this cataclysm. Let us consider:

The Renovated World

To do so properly demands that we contrast in some matters the pre-Deluge state of the world with its post-Deluge condition.

The Anti-Deluvian World:

The Lord Jesus has given a very concise description of the anti-deluvian world. “In the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage; until the day that Noe entered into the ark” (Matt. 24:38). It would appear that this statement of our Lord embraced more than merely the occupation with the ordinary pursuits of life. The tone of the entire passage intimates; first, that there was an over-emphasis upon the affairs of the present, and this to the exclusion of any proper consideration of the things of the future; and, second, that so great was man’s concern for present matters he indulged in gluttony, frivolity, and irresponsibility. Moreover, as we have noticed in the past, there was a dreadful moral degeneracy, “The wickedness of man was great in the

earth, and every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen. 6:5).

The Post-Deluvian World:

There is no doubt but that the flood caused many great and permanent changes.

Geological changes: The tremendous pressure of water must have caused changes in the earth. Some have seen what changes even a tornado or a hurricane has caused in changing water-courses, washing away bridges, roads, buildings, etc. These would be minor matters compared to the geological upheavals resulting from so great a flood.

Zoological changes: From the fossils of anti-deluvian life, we know that there were many changes in this department as well.

Moral changes: Whatever changes there were in the fields of geology and zoology, there was none in the mind and heart of man; man remained irretrievably sinful. God said to Noah, "I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more every living thing, as I have done" (Gen. 7:21).

Governmental changes: After the flood we have the establishment; first, of civil rule. Man became once more the human representative of Divine government. The Lord imposed this responsibility upon him, "Into thy hands are they delivered," said God to man. In second place, criminal law was invoked. The murderer was no longer to be dealt with mildly as had been Cain, "Whoso

sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed" (Gen. 9:6).

The Replenished Population:

"Be ye fruitful, and multiply; bring forth abundantly in the earth, and multiply therein" (Gen. 9:7). While there is striking similarity between God's command to Noah and God's command to Adam, there is also a very striking difference. God did not say to Noah, "Multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it," as He had to Adam. If we are correct in the assumption that outside of the Garden of Eden there still existed disorder, and that man, as the human representative of Divine government, was to subdue the entire earth and order its affairs, does not the omission of such an assignment to Noah suggest that through sin man had become weak and incapacitated? The assurance of physical protection that immediately follows this command would favour such a conclusion. "And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth." God placed in the brute an instinctive fear of man, and this timidity provides protection for the human race.

It is well to notice that as God placed a prohibition upon Adam for he was not permitted to eat of "the tree of life," even so, God placed a prohibition upon Noah against eating of the fluid of life, "The flesh with the life (soul) thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall ye not eat" (Gen. 9:4).

The justice of God should be one of our great incentives in preaching. It was because Paul knew the terror of the Lord, that he persuaded men.

The Book of Genesis --Part 19

The Book of Genesis

Part 19

James Gunn

In our previous study we considered two or three salient points regarding the condition of the world after the Deluge; let us now notice several things relative to God’s covenant with man at that time.

A covenant among men embraces terms mutally agreed to, terms which are ratified by an oath before witnesses. Jacob made such a covenant with Laban, and they gathered a heap of stones to be a perpetual witness between them (Gen. 31:46). The Apostle alludes to such a covenant in Gal. 3:15.

The covenants made by God are distinct from this in that He makes His covenants from Himself without consulting man, and pledges Himself to keep the terms made in these covenants. God has entered into numerous covenants with man.

The Edenic (Gen. 1:28-30; 2:16-17); This reveals the conditions under which man lived in innocence.

The Adamic (Gen. 3:14-19) embraces the conditions governing man’s life after the Fall.

The Noahic (Gen. 8:20; 9:27) disclosed God’s purposes respecting His mercy to mankind and His government through man.

The Abrahamic (Gen. 12:1-3; 13:14-17; 15:1-8): This is an assurance of everlasting blessing to Abraham's descendants and through them to the world.

The Mosaic or Sinaitic (Ex. 20:1-31; Deut. 30:1-9): The blessings of this covenant were dependant upon human behaviour and manifest God's demands of holiness. The covenant reveals God's intention to re-gather Israel in her own land.

The Davidic (2 Sam. 7:5-19); Through this is assured an everlasting kingdom, throne, and king for Israel through the House of David.

The New Covenant for Israel (Jer. 31:31-34; Heb. 8:7-12 This covenant surpasses that of Sinai which Israel broke, and is conditioned upon the faithfulness of God.

The Covenant of Grace (Luke 22:20; Titus 1:2; Heb. 13:20:) Although the expression Covenant of Grace is not found in Scripture, it is frequently used in the preaching of the gospel. Sometimes it is used in a general sense to reveal that God's attitude to man has ever been one of grace, but it is used more often in a specific manner to remind the heart of the many blessings vouchsafed to the believer in Christ and through His death at Calvary.

The Noahic Covenant, as we call it, is not only stated here in Genesis but it is symbolized by the rainbow. What a precious symbol it is! As the rainbow follows the storm and indicates the presence of the sunshine, the mercy of God assures the believer that judgment upon his sin is past and that he may now enjoy God's smile. The rainbow is universal and so also is God's mercy, and as it remains the same throughout every succeeding

generation, it declares that “His mercy endureth forever” (Psa. 136:1).

The rainbow symbolizes some of the attributes and some of the purposes of God.

His truth: It is the sign of a divine pledge which cannot be broken.

His mercy: Inspite of the known existence of sin God would not again destroy man by a deluge (Gen. 19:15; Psa. 108: 4; 103:11-12).

His grace: The Noahic covenant was one of pure grace for it was definitely one of unmerited favour.

His righteousness: This promise and its pledge were limited in their extent and in their time (Heb. 11:7; Matt. 24:28; Luke 17:26-30).

His character: “God is light” (1 John 1:5). Light, composed of the three primary colours, forms a precious symbol of the Holy Trinity. The prismatic colours of the rainbow manifest the beauty and oneness of the Divine Essence.

The Book of Genesis --Part 20

The Book of Genesis

Part 20

James Gunn

We must pass now from the study of the Deluge to that of another great historical crisis, the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11:1-9). If in the Deluge we have a manifestation of the grace of God in the midst of the penalty of sin, in the Tower of Babel we have a demonstration of the government of God in spite of the power of sin. Let us examine this historical event carefully.

THE RACE: The race at this time apparently was still one, and was characterized by a oneness of language. The entire population was (lit.) of one lip and of one kind of words. Moreover, mankind lived in a nomadic manner journeying from place to place. As shepherds and as herdsmen frequent movements were necessary. In their journeys they eventually reached the plains of Shinar, the plains in which Babylon was finally built.

THE RESOLVE: “Go to, let us make us a city.” Man now determined to abandon his tent and his nomad life, and to build houses and a city in which to settle permanently, and by which to protect himself. He apparently resented the idea of being scattered abroad over the earth to multiply and replenish it (Gen. 11:4).

THE REBELLION: “Go to, let us make us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven.” It would seem that there was a twofold object in the building of the tower; the first, religious. It is thought by some that

this is the tower which Nebuchadnezzar tried to rebuild, as one of his inscriptions relates. Professor Sayce suggests that Bab-El means the Gate or House of God. We know that Babylon afterwards became one of the worst and most idolatrous cities. The second object in the raising of the tower was self-aggrandizement, “Let us make us a name.” Such is man in his thoughts when left to himself, he degrades God to an idol, and he exalts self to a god.

THE REACTION: “The Lord came down to see the city and the tower.” “And the Lord said, … Let Us go down, and there confound their language.” What a picture we have of man when unrestrained in his imagination and in his efforts! When man attempted to raise himself in his sin, God descended in His judgment, and God forced man to do exactly what he did not want to do, “So the Lord scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth.”

It is not at all difficult to see how quickly dissension caused by the confusion of their language would result in this dispersion of the different families.

One cannot ignore the memorial to this confusion that stretches from Genesis to Revelation. Babel and Babylon long remain in the record of Scripture. They are not out of sight until the final overthrowal of Babylon, politically, religiously, and economically in the Book of the Revelation.

THE RESULT: “In all things He must have the pre-eminence.” The breaking up of the human race introduces a new method in God’s dealings with man. This was the first indication that God was making choice of a peculiar people, a special family and nation which

might serve Him as a channel through which He might reveal Himself by His Written Word, and by the incarnation of His Son.

The Book of Genesis --Part 21

The Book of Genesis

Part 21

James Gunn

In our last study we noticed in the confusion of tongues at Babel and the scattering of the human race that there was an intimation that God was preparing the nation through which He would deliver His oracles to the world, the channel through which He would send His Son as Saviour into the world.

We have come to the point in our examination of Genesis where we leave the detailed studies of peoples to engage in an introductory study of the people, Israel. This, of course, will lead us into the history of the father of that chosen nation, Abraham.

Inasmuch as there is much valuable material in Abraham's life, material illustrative of both the blessings and the dangers of the Christian experience, we shall proceed thoughtfully and prayerfully.

Some months ago in writing about different methods of Bible study, mention was made of the study of Old Testament types, and this particular method was further broken down into the study of typical events, typical ordinances, and typical characters. Now the portion of Genesis open before us (chaps. 12-50) is replete with typical characters.

There are four prominent men here, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. The meaning of their names has been given: Abraham, the father of a multitude; Isaac,

laughing; Jacob, one who supplants or trips up; Joseph, he who adds. From their individual histories we learn, that Abraham was selected from among the nations by God, that Isaac enjoyed an unusual experience of sonship with his father, that Jacob was much disciplined by the Lord, and that Joseph through prolonged suffering entered into dignity, power, and glory. In these personal details there lies a fore-gleam of the entire history of the chosen people, the Hebrews. That nation was elected by God, redeemed and brought by Him into the place of sonship before God, severely disciplined by the Lord, but, notwithstanding, through long suffering is destined for glory.

From the history of these four patriarchs, we also may learn deep lessons in regard to ourselves. Abraham speaks to us of faith, Isaac of love, Jacob of hope, and Joseph of glory. We are the subjects of faith, the objects of love, the recipients of hope, and the predestined for glory.

Moreover, we see that Abraham was a man with a tent, for divine election made him a pilgrim; Isaac was a man of wells for divine sonship produces refreshment; Jacob was a man of many pillors, for discipline leads to more faithful witnessing; and, Joseph was a dreamer of dreams, he was anticipating future glory.

Let us look more carefully into these things, and make an application of them to ourselves.

The Book of Genesis --Part 22

The Book of Genesis

Part 22

James Gunn

In our studies, we are now ready to begin an examination into the life of the patriarch Abraham, and it is only proper that we commence with

His Past

In the history of Abraham the descendant of Shem, the son of Noah, there lay, as we have seen, two of the most important epochs in the entire history of the human race; namely, the Deluge and the Tower of Babel. To the men of that time, to Abraham, the first should have spoken of grace and the second of guilt. Grace provided an ark of salvation from the Deluge, but guilt raised a tower in renewed rebellion against God. The first of these spoke of salvation in the midst of judgment, while the second spoke of condemnation in the midst of sacrilege. Throughout the whole of human history God has endeavoured to impress these two things upon the descendants of Adam. In Eden He emphasized guilt by the curse and grace by the provision through death of garments for Adam and Eve. In the story of Cain, He impresses us with the story of guilt, while in that of Abel, it is grace. Later on these two factors were taught Israel in Egypt: in the ten plagues, guilt; and in the passover, grace. Let us now look at Abraham in

His Preconversion Stage

Abraham was a native of Ur of the Chaldees, and from Jos. 24:2-15 we learn that he lived in moral and spiritual darkness; Abraham was a polytheist, a worshipper of many gods. In spite of the repeated manifestations of guilt and grace in the annals of human history, the mind of man was blinded by the god of this world (2 Cor. 4:3-4). Let us now consider in the life of Abraham

Divine Revelation

What a revelation! Divine glory shone into idolatrous darkness! Abraham was thereby transformed; the worshipper of idols became the friend of God. The title "The God of Glory" used by Stephen as he described this event in the life of Abraham is found only one other time, and that in the Millenium Psalm, Psalm 29. As we think of Abraham's relation to the nation of Israel, we see in the use of this title how God, at the very beginning of the nation's history, anticipated its final glory. There is a similar title found in one of the other Millenium Psalms, Psalm 24, "The King of Glory." Since we have mentioned that Abraham became the friend of God, let us consider this fact before we look further into the details of his life.

Friendship With God

From the three times in the Bible that Abraham is called the "friend of God," we learn something of the actual beginning of that friendship, and of the lengthy period through which its influence endured.

According to James 2:21-24, friendship with God for this patriarch began that day when he believed God, and, obeying Him, offered Isaac upon the altar.

The twice that reference is made to this friendship in the Old Testament suggests that God never forgot it, nor did Abraham's descendants ever forget it.

The Ammorite came against Israel in battle in the days of king Jehosaphat, so we read, "Jehosaphat feared and set himself to seek the Lord" (2 Chron. 20:1-13), and in his prayer he said, "Art not Thou our God, Who didst drive out the inhabitants of the land before Thy people Israel, and gavest it to the seed of Abraham Thy friend?" Jehosaphat pleaded with the Lord on the ground of God's friendship with Abraham.

When Cyrus, the Persian, was devastating the other nations and building his mighty empire, God touched his heart to preserve Israel and to restore the temple at Jerusalem (Ezra 6:1-3). We find the secret why God so touched his heart, "Thou Israel art My servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham My friend" (Isa. 41:1-9). God could not forget the descendants of His friend.

Friendship with God may wield an influence for good long after we have passed home from these scenes of Time.

The Book of Genesis

Part 22

James Gunn

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Friendship with God may wield an influence for good long after we have passed home from these scenes of Time.

The Book of Genesis --Part 23

The Book of Genesis

Part 23

James Gunn

In our biographical studies of Abraham we have examined several very important points, but none of these are more important than the point we must now investigate. The fact of justification was very significant in Abraham's life, even as in ours it is so cardinal.

It is well for us to remember that the words "righteousness" and "justification" are both derived from the same Greek root, and may in many cases be used interchangeably. The very connotation of these words suggests a law court in which we have:

The Judge.

Throughout the Holy Scriptures God is frequently pictured for us as a Judge, "And the heavens shall declare His righteousness: for God is Judge Himself. Selah" (Psa. 50:6); and "But the Lord of hosts shall be exalted in judgment, and God that is holy shall be sanctified in righteousness" (Isa. 5:16).

The Just Judge

"Just" is that adjective that reveals the character of the Divine Judge. There are many New Testament passages that confirm this aspect of God's character as, for example, "To declare, I say, at this time His righteousness: that He might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus" (Rom. 3:26).

Justice

The word justice suggests the process used by the Just Judge, “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” (Gen. 18:25). It is by justice that the Just Judge arrives at His final decision. This process operates in at least three different directions.

First: It must deal righteously with sin; sin must be fully and righteously appraised, and the penalty properly determined. “The soul that sinneth, it shall die” (Ezek. 18:4). In second place, justice must see that this penalty is executed. This act of judicial death becomes the very foundation of remission. Because the Lord Jesus assumed our guilt and bore our punishment, it is now possible for God to declare man” not guilty,” and thus to release him from the law, sin, and ultimate death. In the third place, justice demands that since the penalty of sin has been endured, the sinner be acquitted with no further charge against him.

Justification

This is the final declaration of acquittal by the Judge, His declaration of the sinner, not guilty, but righteous. This declared righteousness is offered as a gift (Rom. 5:17); and, therefore, must never be confused as being a quality of living. Justification before God is the legal status that He gives to the believing sinner.

Throughout this part of our studies, we have been looking into the meaning of justification; let us return to the biography of Abraham, for in it we have brought before us, in an illustrative way, the means of justification. By a contrast between Rom. 4:1-2 and Rom. 4:3, we learn the proper and improper approach to

justification. “What shall we say then that Abraham our father hath found as pertaining to the flesh?” that is, through the energy of the flesh. If through such energy he has been justified, he hath whereof to boast before God. Such a basis for justifying man is impossible. “What saith the Scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness.” Justification is simply the divine act that declares man righteous before God, when man believes God.

There is one other consideration before we leave this interesting subject, and that is the extent of this wonderful gift. The measure of divine righteousness given must be understood as being the very righteousness of God in all its fullness and perfection. Justification is not a rendering to man of so much righteousness, as a moral quality, for so much faith, but an imputation of the complete and infinite righteousness of God to all who believe, irrespective of the degree of their faith.

The Book of Genesis --Part 24

The Book of Genesis

Part 24

James Gunn

Our inquiry into the life of Abraham in our studies in the Book of Genesis will furnish us with many illustrations of the Divine principles by which God deals with His own. It will also reveal to us many of the current weaknesses of humanity. The particular period that is now before us, that which is recorded in chapters 11:27-12; 9, gives us certain details into God's request of the Patriarch, and the Patriarch's response to God.

The Request of God

To us it may seem unusual that God should call one man from among all the nations of the earth. Undoubtedly, He had a plan for the called one; moreover, it appears likely that God found a peculiar pleasure in that person whom He had thus singled out from the masses. There is no question but that the Lord longs for fellowship with man, but it is with a man wholly separated to Himself. In our former studies, we encountered other characters with whom God sought intimate fellowship, characters like Enoch, Noah, and, of course, Adam. Eventually, there came to earth one perfect Man in Whom God found perfect and supreme delight, the Man Christ Jesus.

In this Divine call of Abraham, there appear three very important points, and time spent in the investigation of these would be worth while.

The purpose of God: This we see in Gen. 12:3, “In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.” God’s call for separation on Abraham’s part was objective. Abraham thereby was to become a channel of blessing to others. This surely is a Divine principle. If we are to be a blessing to others, we must walk in separation from all defilement and in purity with God. Thus it was in the life of the Apostle Paul (Gal. 1:15-16). This is the principle that Paul places before his spiritual son in the last letter that he wrote to him (2 Tim. 2:20-21).

The patience of God: It appears as if God called Abraham twice, first in Ur of the Chaldees (Acts 7:2-4), and then a second time at Haran (Gen. 12:1). Some consider that the last passage refers to the first call, but from the margin it seems to be a repetition of the call received at the beginning. How patient of the Lord to call Abraham twice, especially when there was some hesitancy on Abraham’s part to obey! The Apostle Paul when he exhorts the Roman Christians to be patient, reminds them of the God of patience (Rom. 15:4-5), for it is as such that He deals with His own.

The purport of God: There are two very significant factors which we should consider in this call of Abraham. First, the Divine command: “Get thee out of thy country,” the breaking of national ties; “And from thy kindred,” the breaking of natural ties; “And from thy father’s house,” the breaking of nearest ties. Such are God’s demands in a life of separation. Many a young Christian has been forced to break all earthly ties because of separation with his Lord. It is said that John Nelson Darby was disinherited by his family because of his separation to the Lord.

The Easterner moves more easily than the Westerner. He is not afraid to go far. He has no furniture to carry except a carpet and a few pots. He has no trouble about meals for he is content with bare necessities. He is careless as to where he sleeps, provided his family is about him. He is indifferent to all that the Westerner considers comfort. Would to God that we held this world with as light a hand as the Easterner, held even what we call real estate in this way. Should we do so, it would be easier to separate ourselves from many things which are dishonouring to God.

In writing to the Corinthians, the Apostle Paul tells them not to be unequally yoked together with unbelievers (2 Cor. 6:147:1). The word “unequally” is actually the word “diversely,” and definitely refers to the Levitical law which forbade the yoking together of different animals (Deut. 22:10). There was with the Corinthians, as there is with all Christians, the danger of yoking together, not different animals, but different moral qualities: righteousness with unrighteousness, different types of actions; light with darkness, different characters; Christ with Belial, different leaderships; the believer with the unbeliever, different convictions; and the temple of God with idols, different forms of worship.

In the life of Abraham, God provides a perfect illustration of what He means by not being diversely yoked with the ungodly. Notice Gen. 11:29-12:9. In second place, we must consider the Divine compensation: separation to God on Abraham’s part meant that he must leave his country, but God offered him a better land (Gen. 12:1). It also meant separation from his kindred, but God promised to make him a great nation (Gen. 12:2). Separation likewise meant leaving

his family behind, but God promised, “In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed” (Gen. 12:3). Here then we have the Divine compensations which more than repay any sacrifice made for the Lord.

Once upon a time the Lord asked for a disciple’s boat, and the use of it was repaid by a miraculous draught of fish (Luke 5). The Apostle Paul gave to the Lord a drink offering, the smallest offering possible, and for this he will receive a crown (2 Tim. 4:6-8).

Our next study, in the will of the Lord, will cover the response of Abraham to this Divine call.

The Book of Genesis - Part 25

The Book of Genesis

Part 25

James Gunn

In our last study we had reached the point where we were ready to look into Abraham's response to the call of God. It would be well for us to refresh our memories by reading once more the early part of Genesis 12.

In the answer of Abraham to the divine summons we see his perfect confidence in God. We shall see that there were lapses in his life of faith, but hereafter we shall discover him to be characteristicly a man of faith in God. It is as such that he is presented to us in the New Testament.

Let us break down this lesson in order that we not only understand it the better, but in order that we apply it the more readily to our own individual cases. We must ever remember that Abraham, like the other Old Testament worthies, was a man of like passons as we. In first place, we shall look at the

Operation Of Confidence

(Vv. 4-5): "So Abraham departed." Here we have faith in action. Surely this is the faith commended by James "Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect" (Jas. 2:22). This is the same type of faith possessed by the young converts at Thessalonica. The commendation of Paul to them might be rendered, "Your operative faith, your labouring love, and your patient hope" (1 Thess. 1:3).

Let us now consider

The Obedience Of Faith (Heb. 11:8-9):

“By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise.” At the first Abraham’s obedience appeared only to be partial (Gen. 11:31). Full obedience on Abraham’s part is not seen until after the death of his father Terah. It is only when death, the reckoning of ourselves dead with Christ, has taken place, that implicit obedience is possible.

The Outcome Of Confidence (Gen. 12:4):

“And Lot went with him.” Such was the influence of Abraham’s confidence in God, Lot tried to follow his example. We know that he failed, and so must every carnal believer who attempts to walk the path of faith in the energy of the flesh. Nevertheless, it is precious to see how Abraham’s example inspired his nephew to more lofty aims in life. As Lot followed Abraham, the Apostle Paul has exhorted us to follow him, even as he followed Christ. Of elder brethren who have been called home to glory we read, “Remember them … whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation” (Heb. 13:7). Let us therefore not be slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises (Heb. 6:12).

The Obligation Of Confidence (Gen. 12:6-9):

Here we have before us three very important matters:

The corruption of faith (V. 6): Abraham passed through the land into the place of Sichem, Sycar, unto the plain (oak) of Moreh (teacher or soothsayer). Apparently under this tree, the terebinth or turpentine tree, the art of divination was practised by the Canaanites. It was the place of fortune-telling, the evil to which man subjects himself when he can no longer trust God and walk by faith. For Abraham it was the end of all that, even as, in a later day, it was for Jacob (Gen. 35:1-4).

The confirmation of faith (V. 7): “The Lord appeared unto Abram.” Here we have the first Theophany recorded in connection with this patriarch. God now appears directly beside the place of idol worship and soothsaying practices as if in open defiance of these works of the devil. In the New Testament (Matt. 16), the Lord Jesus leads His disciples northward to Ceasarea Philippi, and under the very shadow of a shrine to the idol Pan, as if in defiance, declared, “I will build My Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” Here then Abraham’s faith was confirmed in the very place where the devil would have attempted to corrupt it. There are those who consider separation as an isolation, but this is not the circumstance in which faith is tested and tried and proved real and strong. The separation that results in intimate fellowship with God is not one that leads us away from the circumstances of life, but one that enjoys communion with the Lord in the circumstances of life.

Our studies this month would be very incomplete if we did not look at The confession of faith (Vv. 8-9): “He removed from thence into a mountain on the east of

Bethel, and pitched his tent, having Bethel on the west, and Hai on the east: and there he builded an altar unto the Lord, and called upon the name of the Lord. And Abram journeyed, going on still toward the south."

All this was the direct result of God's appearing to our patriarch. First he pitched his tent, the tent that tells us of his relationship to the land, he was a stranger in the country, "dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob." In second place, he raised an altar to the Lord, and the altar manifested his relationship to God and to heaven. He was not only a stranger in the land of promise, but he was a pilgrim on his way through, "He looked for a city which hath foundation, whose builder and maker is God."

Abraham now had an altar, not an idol. God is spirit, invisible, and intangible, and as our Lord explained to the Samaritan woman at Sychar's well, the very place where Abraham had his tent and altar at the first (V. 6), the worship of such an One must be spiritual.

May the Lord give to each of His own the grace to respond to the call of the Lord in separation from this poor world, in order that each may live and assume the obligations of faith. Like Abraham we are priests to offer up sacrifices to God continually, giving thanks in His name. Moreover, we are strangers and pilgrims and therefore should abstain from fleshly lusts that war against our souls, and have our manner of life honourable among the Gentiles (Heb. 13:15. 1 Pet. 2:11-12).

The Book of Genesis - Part 26

The Book of Genesis

Part 26

James Gunn

We have reached a sad chapter in the life of the Father of the Faithful. A lapse in faith is always sad, and yet it is a sin that so easily besets us. God has given us ample warning by recording such a failure in the life of this saintly man from the past.

David has been anointed as king of Israel by Samuel under such circumstances as to leave no doubt that he was God's choice, and that eventually under God, he would reign (1 Sam. 16). Moreover, the Lord had preserved him from the hatred and hand of Saul, but one day through lack of confidence in the preservation and power of God, "David said in his heart, I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul: there is nothing better for me than that I should speedily escape into the land of the Philistines" (1 Sam. 27:1), and he sought shelter in the land of his former enemies over whom God had given him a great victory.

The Apostle Paul, the champion of Christian liberty, the one who was so directed of the Lord and who trusted in Him implicitly, is seen turning from the path of Christian liberty, from the path of confidence in God, and resorting to a human plan for bodily preservation (Acts 21). The plan that promised so much in the way of protection and profession resulted in an uproar of the people, maltreatment for Paul, and his final arrest. God

intervened and saved His servant from disgrace and death, for in spite of our failure, He abideth faithful.

Even Joseph, possibly one of the most perfect characters in the Old Testament, seemed to lose sight of God and to turn his eyes in hope to a man (Gen. 40:14), but alas he too was disappointed.

As we look into this sad picture in Abraham's life, we shall view it in three stages: Abraham in Canaan or the cause of his lack of confidence, Abraham in Egypt or the consequence of his lack of confidence, and, finally, Abraham's return to Canaan or the cure of his lack of confidence.

The Cause (Gen. 12:10-13)

A consideration of the cause of this sad failure in the life of our Patriarch reveals the intricate working of sin, the certain progress of sin within us. Notice:

The famine: "And there was a famine in the land." Surely this was a difficult circumstance, and yet such a difficulty could be expected. In Egypt artificial irrigation was extensively used, the water being supplied by the river Nile. In the Land of Promise there was no such natural provision. Palestine was dependent upon the annual rainfall and the dew. Canaan, therefore, had to rely more directly upon the Lord Who could send or withhold the rain. Consequently, such a difficulty as Abraham encountered was to be expected, for God always tests faith. The path of faith is not always a path of ease; moreover, faith is not only tested by difficulties, but it is developed by difficulties. (1 Pet. 1:7).

The failure: Abraham looked out upon the famine-stricken land rather than up to the faithfulness of God.

Peter walked upon the water to go to Jesus, but when he turned his eyes from Christ to the waves he began to sink (Matt. 14:28-31). Thus it must always be. When our eyes are upon adversity and difficulty, when we become occupied by the circumstance rather than with God, failure results, and defeat enters upon the path that should be one of dependence and victory.

The flight: “Abraham went down into Egypt to sojourn there.” How readily we deceive ourselves! We think that we will indulge ourselves for just a little while. We have no intention of remaining in Egypt. No! We only will sojourn there! Such was the intention of Abraham, but he, by turning from the path of faith to Egyptian relief, set up an example before his descendants that they never forgot. Isaac apparently tried to follow him, but God stopped him (Gen. 26:1-2). Jacob turned his eyes in the same direction and God over-ruled for His own glory (Gen. 43:50). At even a later date, in the times of Hezekiah, God had to say, “Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help … but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel, neither seek the Lord” (Isa. 31:1).

The falsehood: “As a man thinketh in his heart so is he.” There lay hidden in Abraham’s heart something that seemed to becloud his vision from time to time. He eventually confessed that it had been his thought as far back as Haran: “And it came to pass, when God caused me to wander from my father’s house, that I said unto her, This is the kindness which thou shalt shew unto me; at every place whither we shall come, say of me, He is my brother” (Gen. 20:13). Here, on the way to Egypt, this agreement is repeated. Later on, when he sojourned in Gerar, they again agreed to deceive (Gen. 20). In its final analysis, this was the working of fear rather than of

faith. Abraham did not consider the danger to which he exposed Sarah. His thoughts were selfish when he instructed her to tell the half-truth which was worse than a lie. How heavy must have been his heart when she was taken from him into Pharaoh's harem. The very gifts of Pharaoh must have been a great burden upon the weary conscience of Abraham.

May we learn from the experience of Abraham that once we leave the path of faith, fear may drive us farther away from the Lord until, like him, we are actually rebuked by the ungodly world (Gen. 12:18-20).

The Consequence (Gen. 12:14-20)

The effect of Abraham's leaving the Land of Promise and the path of faith was serious in the extreme.

The peril: Poor Sarah, through Abraham's selfishness and fear and lack of faith, found herself in an Egyptian harem. Poor Abraham! What must have been his thoughts as she was taken from him, his virtuous wife exposed to the lust of Egypt's king. Trouble, danger, peril we must ever experience when we take ourselves out of the hands of God. Peter responded to the impulses of fear, and found himself in danger at the fire of the world; there he denied his Lord (Mark 14:66-72).

The prosperity: At least on the surface things looked prosperous. "Pharoah… entreated Abraham well for her sake: and he had sheep and oxen, and he asses, and men-servants and maidservants, and she asses and camels." Pharoah may have done all this in perfect sincerity. If Sarah were Abraham's sister and he intended making her his wife, it was only proper, according to ancient custom, that he give to her brother

and protector dowry gifts. All may have looked well upon the exterior, but likely Abraham's heart was heavy. Lot sat in the gate of Sodom as a judge (Gen. 19), but there he vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds (2 Pet. 2:7-8). Without doubt, Abraham vexed his soul by his unseemly behaviour at this time. Man looketh on the outward appearance where all seems right, but God looketh on the heart.

The preservation: The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation (2 Pet. 2:9). He preserved Sarah and Abraham in a most unusual manner. The plague upon Pharaoh and his house was a voice from God. How wonderful that God should speak to this poor heathen king when all this time He remained silent to His child Abraham. It was a message from God to Pharaoh that saved Abraham, and started him on the way to recovery. It was the look that melted Peter's heart, and sight of the pierced hands that brought back Thomas from doubt to faith. Oh, that we might keep our ears open for His words, our faces uplifted for His look, our eyes fixed upon His pierced hands! Then, and only then, shall we be preserved from our fear and wanderings and kept close to Himself.

The protest: "And Pharaoh called Abraham and said, What is this thou hast done unto me?" What a rebuke from the world! How sad when the Christian's standard of morals becomes lower than what the poor world expects. There is constant need of reminding our hearts that we have been redeemed from our futile manner of living received by observation and instruction from our forefathers.

The Book of Genesis - Part 27

The Book of Genesis

Part 27

James Gunn

It Would not be proper in our examination into the lapse of faith in the life of the patriarch Abram not to consider the God-designed cure for this sad condition. That God was behind such moves in the lives of His servant, must be obvious to every honest student of the Word.

In the consideration of this the closing part of this present study, we shall look first of all into

The Return (13:1)

“And Abram went up out of Egypt.” This was more than a geographic ascent, it was a moral elevation. He was on a return journey to the place he had seen the Lord (12:7). How gracious of God to turn our feet homeward again! This restoration was all of God; it is He that turns us to Himself. There is an interesting translation of the first verse of Psalm 126 which reads as follows, “When the Lord turned again, then returned the captivity of Zion, and we were like them that dream.” In the restoration of His people the Lord takes an active part, and moves first in grace toward them. Let us now consider

The Reproach (13:2)

“Abram was very rich.” The word “rich” used here means literally “heavy.” Abram was heavy ladened with goods, but his subsequent experience was to prove that

when he came out of Egypt, he carried a weight with him that he could never lay down. One of the maidservants received from Pharoah in that hour of backsliding and deception was to prove oppressive to him and upon his seed after him, Hagar the symbol of bondage (Gal. 4:24-31), Hagar through whom Ishmael came. Thank God for restoration! Nevertheless, very frequently, in departure from the Lord, some moral stigma is thereby attached to us so definitely that we are never able to rid ourselves of its reproach. David's sin is the classic example. How imperative the need of keeping close to the Lord Jesus, abiding in Him for the power for fruit-bearing and testimony!

A young Christian couple was guilty of a serious sin. They were disciplined by the assembly, but eventually were repentant and restored to church fellowship. Nearly twenty years after, a nurse who had attended the young mother and knew the circumstances, entered an assembly gospel meeting. She was horrified and stumbled to see the very man involved in this affair opening that gospel service; the stigma remained in her mind.

The Recovery (13:3)

"He went on his journeys from the south even to Bethel, unto the place where his tent had been at the beginning … unto the place of the altar." Here we have recorded his return to, and his recovery of the place of nearness and the privilege of priesthood. There is no account of an altar in Egypt, but now at the place where God revealed Himself to Abraham at the first, he builds his altar again. In one respect he is outside the camp far

removed from Egypt, and in another, he is inside the veil, in solitude alone with his God.

The Reliance (13:4)

“And Abram called on the name of the Lord.” At long last God hears the voice of His child, and that always pleases His heart. “Let Me see thy countenance let Me hear thy voice, for sweet is thy voice and thy countenance is comely” (S. of S. 2:14), is His word to all of His own. Nothing betokens the recovery of his confidence and the complete reliance of Abraham’s heart in God like this short clause. His restoration is not only back to the place of nearness, back to the privilege of priesthood, but back also to the simplicity of confidence in God.

We now approach a new line of study in the life of Abraham. This, should we need a title, we might call His Repose of Faith. It is very interesting to see, after such a lapse in the pathway of faith, that Abraham rests in the Lord, and leaves affairs as they happen entirely in His care.

That both Abraham and Lot were children of God there is no doubt. From Rom. 4:3, we learn that Abraham was righteous before God, and from 2 Pet. 2:7-8 we learn that Lot likewise was a righteous man. The contents of this chapter and other subsequent events were not the result of a difference in their relationship to God, but rather because of a difference in their relationship to the world. Lot was an earthly man dwelling by choice within a wicked city (2 Pet. 2:8), while Abraham was a heavenly man sojourning in the Land of Promise, living as a pilgrim in a tent because he had his hopes fixed upon an eternal city (Heb. 11:8-10). Let us look at this portion under the three subtitles: The Circumstances (5-7), The

Choice (8-13), and The Consequences (14-18). We shall not have time to cover all of these in this one study, but let us commence, and may the Spirit of God take of the things that are Christ's and reveal them unto us.

The Circumstances

If these two brethren must part company, and it is after all better to part as friends than to live as enemies, there must of necessity be some underlying cause, and such there actually was.

Primary (5-6): There had been a happier day in the lives of these two men, a day in which the faith and the confidence of the elder, the uncle, had inspired his young nephew and he had become a follower of the example set before him. Abraham was the leader in the path of faith and Lot was the disciple (Gen. 12:4), but here wealth had come equally to both of them; consequently, they needed vast stretches of pasture land for their flocks. There is only one safe guard under such circumstances, "Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud and giveth grace to the humble" (1 Pet. 5:5). This Scripture has been translated, "And be girded with the servile apron of humility." This passage, therefore, is linked to the act of the Lord Jesus in the upper room (John 13:4-5). His gracious humility manifested in the washing of the disciples feet is the example of the moral quality that delights the Lord, and that removes pride, jealousy, and strife from the heart.

The Book of Genesis - Part 28

The Book of Genesis

Part 28

James Gunn

We closed our study last month by considering the different causes which led to the separation of Abraham from Lot. We detected, as the primary cause, the lack of humility on the part of the younger man. His action appeared to be quite contrary to the New Testament principle, ‘ ‘Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud and giveth grace to the humble” (1 Pet. 5:5).

Secondary: Another cause of this trouble between these two brethren might be traced to a lack of respect for Abraham on Lot’s part. Lot had gone down into Egypt with Abraham (Gen. 13:1); he, therefore, was aware of the duplicity practised by Sarai and Abraham. We may excuse ourselves, and speak of certain things as diplomacy which are actually deceit. Elders that rule well are to be counted worthy of double honour (1 Tim. 5:17); moreover, they are to be highly esteemed (1 Thess. 5:13), but who can honour or esteem highly a deceitful man? Lot may have lost some of his early respect for his uncle. Let us remember that an agreement to deceive made by another couple living in the early days of the Church was punished by death (Acts 5).

Third (V. 7): “And there was a strife between the herdmen of Abram’s cattle and the herdmen of Lot’s

cattle.” The circumstance of congestion often results in confusion, while competition frequently, develops contention. How unholy is the factuous spirit among brethren! It was evident on a much larger scale at Corinth (1 Cor. 1:10-13). It was evident in two sisters at Philippi (Phil. 4:2-3). Well might we pay heed to the words of Paul, “Mark them which cause division and offences” (Rom. 16:17-18), and to the promised blessing of unity (Psa. 133).

Fourth (V. 7): “The Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelled in the land.” These enemies of God and His children would view with pleasure the unrest and strife between these brethren. A distinctive testimony to God and to faith was imperilled so Abraham, the leader and the elder, submitted a proposal to his much younger brother, a proposal which met every need arising out of the circumstance. It left ample room for the flocks, settled the strife, and silenced the ridicule of the ungodly. One of the objectives of Christian behaviour set forth by the Apostle Paul in 1 Tim. 6:1 is, “That the name of God and His doctrine be not blasphemed.” The example of Abraham in this regard should be ever before us.

The basic causes of the split between these two brethren appear to be a lack of humility in Lot, a loss of respect for Abraham, open strife among their servants, and a genuine desire on the part of Abraham that these things not prove detrimental to their safety and testimony.

In our studies we have reached another major point in the history of the Patriarch Abraham:

Thf Choice (V. 8-13):

The Proposal of Abraham: One cannot fail to notice in this whole transaction the gracious virtues and the restful confidence of this man.

His concern: “Let there be no strife I pray thee between me and thee.” What apparently did not trouble Lot was of deep concern to Abraham. The strife at Corinth did not cause much exercise there, but it did concern Paul (1 Cor. 1). Such disagreements must always exercise the heart of the spiritual man.

His consideration: “We be brethren. Is not the whole land before thee?” Abraham put the needs and wishes of Lot before his own. He appears in this instance to have followed the maxim, “God first, others next, self nothing.” This is the attitude of Paul in Phil. 2:16-17.

His condescension: “If thou … I will.” Some one has said that it takes a man like Joseph to ride in the second chariot (Gen. 41:39-45); most want to be in the first. Here we view the humility of Abraham. How like the Master, the perfect example of condescension (Phil. 2)!

The Book of Genesis - Part 29

The Book of Genesis

Part 29

James Gunn

As We continue our studies in the life of Abraham, we shall consider

The Preference of Lot

In this we see the attitude and the action of a carnal man. Let us examine His survey: “Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plains (circle) of Jordan … well watered … even as the garden of the Lord … like the land of Egypt.” Here we have the lust of the eye (1 John 2:16). Eve saw and took, and sin resulted. Lot saw and took and disgrace resulted. Achan saw and took and death resulted. It is always dangerous for a Christian to lift up his eyes upon this poor world. “Love not the world” (1 John 2:15).

His selection: “Lot chose him all the plains of Jordan.” “Lot journeyed east and they separated.” “Lot dwelled in the cities of the plain.” Such expressions indicate deliberate acts on the part of Lot, and they remind us of certain acts recorded in the New Testament. “All they of Asia be turned away from me” (2 Tim. 1:15). “Demas hath forsaken me” (2 Tim. 4:10). “Thou hast left thy first love” (Rev. 2:4). Surely these are acts of deliberate departure. A survey of the world, occupation with its places, its politics, its systems, and its philosophies will usually lead to spiritual decline and retrogression.

His surroundings: “But the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the Lord exceedingly.” This is where Lot’s own judgment led him. There are two sad sides to spiritual backsliding; first, it leads away from God; second, it leads into association with the world. There are two expressions which speak volumes in the history of Simon Peter: “Peter followed afar off.” “Peter sat down among them” (Luke 22:54-55). Peter detached himself from Christ, and then he associated himself with the world. Let us beware lest we too become like Lot or like Peter. May our prayer ever be, “Draw me, we will run after Thee” (S. of S. 1:4).

As we have considered the details of the choice made by these two brethren, we must now examine in the same detailed manner the consequences of their respective choices.

The Consequences

All that happened after Lot’s departure we do not know, but what the Lord has stated here is full of real significance for us in this dispensation. Among the many things, let us ponder the following:

Separation: “And the Lord said unto Abraham, after that Lot was separated from him.” Abraham had been called to the path of separation from the ungodly at Ur of the Chaldees, but now he, the heavenly and spiritual man, must part from Lot, the carnal and worldly man. Between these two the Word of God always draws a line, “And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal” (1 Cor 3:1). There are times when we find it necessary for our peace and spiritual prosperity to part from Christians because of carnality. It appears not only expedient that we do so

from the viewpoint of discipline, but from the viewpoint of self-preservation. The Thessalonians were to turn from the point of following the disorderly brother to that of following the orderly Apostle Paul (2 Thess. 3:6-7).

Compensation: How many and how magnificent are the recompenses of God! Did Abraham lose aught by Lot's selfish choice? Did Lot gain anything? Let us find the answer here to the first question. Let us contrast the results of this incident in the lives of these two men.

Lot: "Lot lifted up his eyes and beheld all the plains of Jordan." This was a large territory indeed.

Abram: "The Lord said unto Abram … Lift up now thine eyes and look … northward, southward, and eastward, and westward." How much more vast is this expanse of country that filled the eyes of the obedient man of faith!

Lot: "Then Lot chose him all the plains of Jordan." This was the act of his own will This was what he wanted, but which actually he never possessed.

Abram: "All the land which thou seest to thee will I give it, and to thy seed forever." This was the result of divine liberality; God gave all to Abraham, and it was his forever.

Lot: "And Lot journeyed east … Lot dwelled in the cities of the plain, and pitched toward Sodom." Even here he was not welcome. When he called these wicked Sodomites "brethren" they answered, "This fellow came in to sojourn, and he will needs be a judge" (Gen. 19:6-9).

Abram: "Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee." Abraham was to possess and enjoy the land. Later

Abraham said to certain in the land, “I am a stranger and a sojourner with you.” They, notwithstanding, replied, “Hear us, my lord: thou art a mighty prince among us” (Gen. 23:6). It always pays to walk humbly with God in separation from the world. Surely there are divine compensations in the spiritual life. The man who tranquilly leaves all in confidence to God will definitely enjoy the blessings of heaven upon him.

Communion: “Then Abraham removed his tent and came and dwelt in the plain of Mamre, which is Hebron, and built there an altar unto the Lord.” The tent and the altar indicate the pilgrim character and the priestly function of this friend of God. Hebron suggests communion. All the circumstances we have traced only brought Abraham closer to the Lord. The farther he penetrated into his inheritance through grace, the more intimate became his fellowship with God.

* * *

Lord Guthrie tells how he spent a Sunday in London hearing the great preachers, and how he could not remember a single sentence of the sermons; but how he never forgot a sentence he heard that same Sunday as he passed an open-air meeting. It was uttered by a young fellow; “I have never been to college, but I have been to Calvary.”

The Book of Genesis - Part 30

The Book of Genesis

Part 30

James Gunn

We have now come to one of the noblest chapters in the entire history of our patriarch, Abraham. His deep affection for his captive brother, and his successful effort to recover him stir our hearts to admiration and emulation.

A very interesting passage occurs in Gen. 14:13, 15:1. It is the account of the two patriarchal priests, Abraham and Melchizedek.

In ancient times, the head of each family was the priest for the household. Among the patriarchs whom we see acting as priest and offering sacrifices are: Job (Job 1:5), Abraham (Gen. 12:7, 8:22), Isaac (Gen. 26:25), Jacob (Gen. 33:20, 35:7), Moses (Ex. 17:15 and 24:4), and of course Melchizedek. The combination of headship and priesthood in the family apparently was a divine appointment during those early years of human history.

As we consider the two patriarchs in this portion, we notice that, although both were priests, there are several interesting contrasts between them (Heb. 7). First Melchizedek is called the greater, Abraham the less (Heb. 7:3). Second, Melchizedek is without recorded genealogy or death, but of Abraham we have recorded both his ancestry (Gen. 11:31) and his death (Gen. 25:7-8). The records make it appear as if the first had lived forever, and the second for only a life span.

Third, Abraham pays human tithes to Melchizedek while Melchizedek bestows a divine blessing upon Abraham. Fourth, we read that Melchizedek was made like unto the Son of God, that is, in the inspired records that are given of him (Heb. 7:3), whereas, the comment that is made about Abraham only states that he was the ancestor of Levi, the tribal father of Aaron. Fifth, Melchizedek was a reigning king; whereas, Abraham is called a prince merely to honour him (Gen. 23:6).

These contrasts prove that, while both these patriarchs were priests in their own right, they typify for us two different priesthoods, one superior to the other; Melchizedek, the priesthood of Christ, and Abraham, the priesthood of Christians. These two priesthoods, that of Christ and that of Christians, are brought together in Eph. 4:32, 5:2. In these portions Christ is pictured as a priest offering Himself as a sweet smelling sacrifice to God for us, His divine love is seen expressing itself in His offering. Furthermore, we are enjoined to do likewise, to express our love to one another in sacrifice, in a burnt offering with its drink offering that retains nothing for itself. Such surely is priestly love. Let us examine this subject more closely.

Priestly Love

Abraham, the patriarchal priest, beautifully illustrates this for us in his love for his needy brother, Lot. His compassionate affection on this occasion ascends to the Lord as sweeter than many a burnt offering. Let us look more carefully at this priestly sacrificial love, the love that one brother should manifest to another; first, in the light of the New Testament; and, then, in the light of the example of Abraham.

Brother Love

The standard: The high and holy standard of such love is the love of Christ, “As I have loved you, that ye also love one another” (John “13:34).

The evidence: There are three Scriptures in the New Testament in which saints are enjoined to love one another even as Christ loved them, and from these we learn such ideal love is:

The proof of discipleship before the world (John 13:34-35). In this matter as in all others we see that while all disciples of Jesus are Christians, all Christians are not disciples in deed.

The sign of friendship with the Lord Jesus among the saints (John 15:12-14).

The act of priesthood before the Lord (Eph. 5:1-2). Sacrificial love is as worship, a sweet savour before God.

We must now consider brother love as it is manifested in Abraham.

He acknowledged relationship (Gen. 14:14): Abraham adopts an unusual role here, the pilgrim and the stranger becomes a warrior, the priest becomes a soldier. It was not for the king of Sodom and his crown, nor for the citizens of Sodom and their property, nor for the city of Sodom and its wealth that Abraham went to war. His brother Lot was in trouble and that was sufficient for him to do the extraordinary (Rom. 15:1-2; Gal. 6:1).

He sacrificed personal feelings (Gen. 13:7-13): Lot’s apparent mercenary motive in his choice of the well watered plains of Sodom, his ingratitude to and his disrespect for his elder relative’s preference, his rashly

formed association with wicked Sodom, and the resulting estrangement from Abraham might have been reasons on Abraham's part to leave Lot in his captivity and sorrow. Abraham might well have reasoned that Lot was reaping what he had sowed (Gal. 6:7-8). This is not the attitude of priestly love. Abraham sacrificed all personal feelings, even feelings of resentment as well as those of revenge, and set out to deliver his brother (Jas. 5:19-20).

He sacrificed personal safety (Gen. 14:5-12): He faced the confederate kings with a handful of followers. Abraham risked his all, life and all its affluence for his brother (Gal. 6:2; 6:9-10).

He sacrificed personal interest (Gen. 14:21-24: Abraham's behaviour is highly exemplary. His disinterestedness is admirable, for he risked all to no advantage for himself. He was none the richer for his intervention, in fact, he suffered the loss of his own personal expenses. In material things he was the poorer, but in heavenly values he was the wealthier as we shall eventually see.

The Book of Genesis --Part 31

The Book of Genesis

Part 31

James Gunn

As we continue our study in the life of the patriarch Abraham, and particularly as we examine his relationship with his nephew, Lot, we learn something of the rich compensations of brother-love. Let us look closely at another section of the Book of Genesis, chapter 15.

Priestly Blessing

There is something exceedingly interesting in the meeting of Melchizedeck, the priest of the Most High God, and Abraham, the patriarchal priest. Melchizedek is an excellent type of Christ our High Priest for his name means King of Righteousness, and since he was king of Salem, he must have been King of Peace.

The occasion: After the strife of battle, after the tension of conflict, after the clash of combat, Abraham was met by one whose name is peace. Psychologically speaking, Abraham would have an inward peace, but this was something much deeper.

After Lot had taken advantage of him; after Abraham had risked his all for this envious brother, after he had refused the reward of the king of Sodom, he was met by one whose name is righteousness. What a blessing, the blessing of Melchizedek upon Abraham!

The latter occasion (Gen 15:1): Would Abraham's benedictory peace be disturbed? Would the enemy re-mobilize and take reprisals? Listen, "After these things the Word of the Lord appeared unto Abraham in a vision, saying, "FEAR NOT, I am thy shield."

Would Abraham's disinterestedness, his sacrifice, mean nothing but personal expenditure? The Lord declares, "I am thy exceeding great reward." When Abraham loved his erring brother and risked his all in battle for his recovery, God's blessing was peace; when he ignored personal hurts and injustices, God's blessing was righteousness; when he sacrificed his safety, God's blessing was His shield and protection; when Abraham made himself expendible for Lot, God declared, "I am thy exceeding great reward."

As the sweet odour of Abraham's sacrificial love ascended from the altar of his action through his priestly heart, the glory of the Living Presence, the Shekinah, descended and filled his soul.

There are many other lessons which we must learn from the historical records of Abraham's life. In chapter 18, this patriarch is seen as a supplicant before the Lord, and since there is so much that we ought to learn in this regard, it might be well for us to pass immediately to this portion of Genesis. We shall only have time to introduce the study, but as we await another issue, we can be prayerfully reading this chapter.

The Spirit of God says, "I will therefore that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting" (1 Tim. 2:8). In this concise statement we have revealed the conditions which are absolutely necessary for prayer. The exercise of prayer is excellent,

and it may be performed anywhere, but the conditions are strict.

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The upward attitude: Before God, this is seen in “holy hands,” there must be no moral defilement in the life. The inward attitude: Within, we must foster an emotional calm, there must be no “wrath.” The outward attitude: How evident this is made by the word “doubting,” which is better rendered, contention or quarrelling, there must be an expression of love and peace. In other words prayer demands holiness of life, quietness of spirit, and peace and goodwill toward men.

These qualifications are well illustrated for us in the example of Abraham the supplicant. Throughout this chapter, we see him in different roles, and these we shall examine.

Abraham The Pilgrim (Vv. 1-2)

On this occasion, Abraham sits in his tent door at midday, and there meets the Lord, but in chapter 15: 4-6, he was with the Lord at midnight. He who has communed with God in the day-time experiences of life can most certainly enjoy fellowship with Him in the dark cloudy experiences. The Lord, Who here shows His friendship to Abraham in the sunlight, was the same Lord Who made His promise to Abraham when only tiny stars were shining in the dark. There are times, when like the bride in S of S. 1:13, we want Him closer to us in the darkness. It is ever blessed to be able to welcome Him as well in the daylight.

What a contrast there is here between spiritual Abraham and carnal Lot! Abraham the pilgrim sat in his tent door

in the day time, nothing was hidden, his personal behaviour and domestic life were fully manifested. This is fully borne out by the language of verse 2, “And, lo, three men stood by him (stationed themselves as in chapter 28:13; Ex. 17:9; not simply standing as in chapter 19:27). Lot, we know, sat in the gate of Sodom in the darkening evening (Gen. 19:1). Lot, the judge, the magistrate, the politician, was loath to leave his place of business even as the dark doom settled upon the city. Before the sun again reached its zenith, Sodom was a pile of burning ruins.

There is another contrast that we might make here. That bright day, three men arrived at Abraham’s tent, three persons in human form, but on the last evening at Sodom, Lot saw two angels. How close the men came to Abraham! How remote and distant the angels remained from Lot! Men in the nearness of nature visited the pilgrim; angels from a remote sphere and of a different nature spoke to the politician. Abraham was a man of the first essential quality for prayer, a man of holiness to God.

Abraham The Host (Vv. 3-15).

There is one thing in which the upper room, lent by the goodman of the house to the Lord for the pass-over and the Lord’s supper, and Abraham’s tent were similar; there was a place in both for the Lord Himself. In practically every other respect, they stand in contrast. Let us look at them.

Abraham was a servant in the tent (Vv. 3-5). Abraham was humble in the tent, “but dust and ashes” (19: 27); everyone in the upper room wanted to be great (Luke 22:24-27), all except Jesus. Abraham prayed; no one

prayed in the upper room except Jesus. Abraham provided a meal for the Lord; in the upper room, the Lord provided a supper for the disciples. This simple comparison shows how much Abraham was like the Lord. One cannot company with the Lord in the night seasons and the day times without becoming like Him. A school teacher who visited the Holy Land wrote an account of her visit which she closed thus, “We visited Bethlehem, Calvary, and the Garden, but we saw not the Christ, but the Christ we did see in a young Christian teacher who was instructing a class of Arab boys in a mission school in Jerusalem.” What a Christlike inward calm filled Abraham! There was no emotional disturbance when strangers called, no passionate burning of resentment when they stayed long. Abraham certainly possessed the second quality for prayer, inward calm.

The Book of Genesis --Part 32

The Book of Genesis

Part 32

James Gunn

In our last lesson from the life of Abraham, we noticed the different roles in which our Patriarch appears in the Book of Genesis. We looked at him as a pilgrim and as an host; we shall continue this same line of studies and look at him in still other roles.

Abraham The Friend - (Gen. 18:16-22)

God and Abraham were on the most intimate terms. The walk of Jesus and the two disciples to Emmaus may have been filled with warmth and hope, but it was not nearly as intimate as the walk of the Lord, His two attendants, and Abraham toward Sodom. How God opened the secret of His heart to Abraham! (Psa. 25:14).

Any disagreement that had arisen between Lot and himself was soon forgotten. There was no quarrel in the heart of Abraham with his nephew; there was nothing there but peace and good will toward Lot. Undoubtedly, it was Lot and his family that he was thinking of as he stood alone with God on the road to Sodom, looking out over the plains toward the city.

Abraham was a man of a holy pilgrim character, a quiet emotional spirit, and of no bitterness or quarrelsomeness toward any. Well might he be an intercessor!

Abraham The Supplicant

We have considered what might be called the state of intercession, that of holiness, calmness, and goodwill; let us now consider The place of intercession: (V. 22-23): Somewhere on the road to Sodom, the two attendants leave and the Lord and Abraham stand together. Abraham alone with God! As the full impact of what the Lord had said grips him, and as he looks over on the horizon toward the cities of the plain, “Abraham drew near.” (Jas. 4:8). Prayer is a ministry of the near place, and of no other.

The basis of intercession (V. 25): The basis of all prayer must ever be divine righteousness, the perfect will of God (1 John 5:14). The honest supplicant must be in the spirit of the Master, “Not My will, but Thine be done.”

The petition of intercession (V. 23): Abraham was Spirit taught (Rom. 8:27). He now knew for what to pray, “Wilt Thou destroy the righteous with the wicked?” The only way Abraham could see to save the righteous was to save the cities. There is an interesting contrast between Abraham’s prayer and that of Lot (Gen. 19:18-20). Abraham prayed for the sake of others; Lot, for his own sake. Abraham prayed that others be saved from judgment; Lot, that he might be sheltered from evil. Abraham’s was sacrificial prayer; Lot’s, selfish prayer.

The pleading: of intercession: It would appear as if Abraham expected the entire family of Lot to be righteous (Gen. 19:12-14), but alas, this was not so; nevertheless, he pled with God until God was willing to spare Sodom for the sake of ten righteous persons.

The recompense of intercession: (Gen. 19:27-29): We are told to continue in prayer and to watch in the same (Col.

4:2). It was a watchful Abraham that, early the next morning, returned to the place of his intercession, and there saw that the divine will had been accomplished, that divine righteousness had been vindicated, but that his prayer had been answered; the righteous had been saved (2 Pet. 2:9).

This is the second time that Abraham had accomplished the deliverance of Lot. He saved him with his sword from captivity, but foolish Lot had returned to Sodom. He saved him again, through his prayers, from a dreadful death among the wicked. Yet Lot never learned, and he died in absolute disgrace.

May we, by divine grace, develop those essential spiritual qualities of prayer in order that we be a means of salvation to the lost, deliverance for the erring, preservation for the saints, and blessing for all.

The Book of Genesis --Part 33

The Book of Genesis

Part 33

James Gunn

It is evident from Gal. 5:17, that the life of the believer is one of conflict. There are times when the Holy Spirit has the mastery, and the believer is led by Him, and there are other times when the flesh has the ascendancy and the believer cannot do the things that he otherwise would. The life of the Christian is one of high-lights and shadows.

This fact is clearly illustrated by events in the life of Abraham. In our previous lesson, we followed the man of faith as he grew stronger and stronger, until he walked and talked intimately with God, and until he showed a deep interest in the recovery of his erring brother. In the lesson that now occupies our attention, the pilgrim is seen acting in duplicity, being rebuked by a heathen king, and receiving a message from God through that same king. If such changes occurred in the spiritual life of Abraham, they will also occur in ours, “Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor. 10:12). Let us pursue our lesson.

The Deceit In Abraham (V. 1-2)

Our Patriarch’s sojourn in Gerar may have brought added riches, and eventually some blessing, but it also resulted in rebukes and regrets. Here we see Abraham stooping again to use, as an expediency, an arrangement made with Sarah years before. It was the same

expediency that he had used in his contacts with Pharoah in Egypt (Gen. 12). “Abraham said of Sarah his wife, she is my sister: and Abimelech king of Gerar sent, and took Sarah.”

Although this Abimelech, one in a line of Philistine kings, in all probability was an idolater; he seems to have been as well an honourable gentleman. He is another example of how God could speak to, and speak through a heathen.

Sarah, at this time, must have been quite advanced in years, probably in her late eighties. She surely must have been well preserved and beautiful. This natural femine loveliness led her along with her husband into the plot of deception.

How true are the words of Solomon written centuries later, “The bread of deceit is sweet to a man; but afterwards his mouth shall be filled with gravel” (Prov. 20:17).

The Detection Of Abraham (Vv. 3-8)

Abraham’s scheme was uncovered in a dream to Abimelech by God Himself. At this very time, our Patriarch was not far from Shur. It was near Shur that the angel of the Lord appeared to Hagar, and it was there that she named the well “Beerlahairoi, the well of the Living One Who seeth me” (Gen. 16). Abraham through fear, might hide from Abimelech his true relationship to Sarah but he could hide nothing from God, nor can we, “All things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do” (Heb. 4:13).

God not only uncovered Abraham's sin, but He warned Abimelech of the consequences of continuance in the delusion.

In spite of the unfaithfulness of Abraham and Sarah, God remained faithful to them. He had protected Sarah and would defend Abraham. Both were kept by the power of God. The God Who protected Abraham and Sarah from the innocent intentions of Abimelech, and saved David from the purposes of Saul, and delivered Daniel from the jaws of the lions still lives to deliver His own. This fact filled the heart of Paul with courage as he faced his court trial before Nero, for he wrote to Timothy saying, "The Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto His heavenly kingdom" (2 Tim. 4:18).

How gracious and yet how righteous is our God! He must expose the deflection of His child, Abraham, and warn a poor worlding of the ultimate result of not paying heed to this exposure, but at the same time He revealed the true character of Abraham who was a prophet and thus able to speak for God, and a priest and thus able to speak to God. The Lord laid more emphasis upon the general tenor of Abraham's life than upon his deviation from the path of rectitude. If it is the constant heart desire of a believer to live for God, restoration from single spiritual declension appears more sure. God will not deal lightly with sin, but He ever seeks the recovery of the erring one. "Who is a God like unto Thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He retaineth not His anger for ever, because He delighteth in mercy" (Micah 7:18).

The Defect In Abraham (Vv. 9-13)

There are two salient points in this portion that we must consider:

The condemnation by Abimelech: What a rebuke to the man of faith was given by this heathen king! Five times over Abimelech charged Abraham saying, “Thou hast,” “Thou hast.” Then he asked in so many words, why hast thou so done? Like Nathan the prophet who charged David saying, “Thou art the man,” Abimelech singles out Abraham and charges him with guilt.

The confession of Abraham: While we call this Abraham’s confession, we are forced to admit that it is not a frank one. In fact, it is like many we make ourselves. We so frequently excuse ourselves and on occasions, like Abraham, we indirectly blame others and even God.

Abraham thought that there was no reverential fear of God in Gerar; yet, a real sense of this fear in his own heart would have deterred Him in his deception. Since God had called him to wander from his father’s house, this should have assured him of the divine presence, preservation, and power. God’s commands are accompanied by His enablings; His calls, by His grace; and His commissions, by His power. Abraham was slow to learn all this; he was a man of like passions as we.

“He that covereth his sins shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy” (Prov. 28:13). As has been intimated, Abraham had misrepresented his true relationship to Sarah some years before when he was in Egypt (Gen. 12). He had been rebuked by Pharaoh at that time. Had Abraham confessed and forsaken this evil arrangement with

Sarah, in all probability, he would not have suffered this severe denunciation before the king of Gerar. “Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required” (Luke 12:18). “To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin” (Jas. 4:17).

The Deference Of Abraham (Vv. 14-16)

The attitude of this Abimelech under these circumstances was most admirable; he was firm and frank, nevertheless, genuine and generous. He respected Abraham: The deep regard shown by the king to Abraham arose, indubitably, from what God had told him rather than from what he had discerned in the behaviour of the Patriarch.

It might be well to understand here that the appelation “Abimelech” among the ancient Philistines, like the word, Pharaoh, among the Egyptians and the name, Caesar, among the Romans, was not the name of one man, but rather the title of a complete line of royal rulers. We speak today of the king, the ancient Philistines of the Abimelech, the Egyptians of the Pharaoh, and the Romans of Caesar.

This particular Abimelech assumed the responsibility for the wrong that had been done, and immediately restored Sarah to Abraham along with rich gifts to make reparation.

He reassured Abraham: We might expect a word of resentment on the part of Abimelech, but actually there was none. In fact, he was most considerate, and said, “Behold, my land is before thee: dwell where it pleaseth thee.”

He reproved Abraham and Sarah: In his words to Sarah, there is a stern rebuke. By his gifts, he righted her before the eyes of all. See the margin of verse 16. She had wronged him; his words form a reprimand, “He is to thee a covering of the eyes.”

The interesting story of Isaac meeting Rebekah shows us the value of a covering to an eastern woman. “Rebekah lifted up her eyes, and when she saw Isaac, she lighted off the camel. For she had said unto the servant, What man is this that walketh in the field to meet us? And the servant had said, It is my master: therefore she took a vail, and covered herself” (Gen. 24:64-65). Eastern etiquette, modesty, and propriety required that a chaste woman wear a vail, a covering, in the presence of strangers. The words of Abimelech to Sarah indicate that she had lost at least the demeanour of propriety even although she may not have failed to use an actual vail, that she had not deported herself according to the best standards of oriental etiquette. What a rebuke to these two saints of God! God would have His people, “Abstain from all appearance (form) of evil” (1 Thess. 5:22). All are to eschew evil, and do good” (1 Pet. 3:11). God in His commendation of Job said that he was one “that feareth God, and escheweth evil” (Job 1:8).

The Duty Of Abraham (Vv. 17-18)

It would seem that Abraham had failed before Abimelech as a prophet; his testimony for God there was not the best, but rising to the occasion and the responsibility, as a priest, he prayed for Abimelech and his family. God heard this prayer, and removed His

disciplinary hand from the king’s household and replaced the scourge with a blessing.

The Book of Genesis --Part 34

The Book of Genesis

Part 34

James Gunn

The lesson that we must learn from chapter 21, is one regarding legal bondage and Christian liberty. In the events of history recorded in this passage, our attention is diverted from Abraham and focussed upon Isaac.

The birth of Isaac may be considered in two different ways; first, as only a domestic event; second, as an allegory in doctrine.

The Domestic Event

At long last, God fulfils His promise. “The Lord visited Sarah as He had said.” Of this event we read, “Abraham considered not his own body now dead” (Rom. 4:19). The Revised Version omits the negative in this passage, and reads, “He considered his own body now dead,” and implies that the faith of Abraham was such that, when he thought on the subject of his age and circumstances, he disregarded his physical condition and trusted implicitly in God.

The proud parents named the babe Isaac, laughing. Here Sarah laughs in satisfaction and joy. As she did so, undoubtedly, she recalled how earlier she had laughed in incredulity and fear (Gen. 18:13).

The period, eventually, came in which Isaac was to be weaned. This according to Eastern custom was much later than in Western lands. Isaac probably was three or

four years old at the time; his half-brother being about seventeen.

Ishmael's action and attitude towards Isaac on this occasion were promptly noticed by Sarah, and she demanded that Hagar, the bondwoman and her son be expelled from the household. It is not at all difficult to sense the feelings of Abraham, nor is it difficult to imagine what his action otherwise might have been had God not said to him, "Let it not be grievous in thy sight because of the lad, and because of thy bondwoman; in all that Sarah hath said unto thee hearken to her voice."

Throughout this entire domestic conflict, Abraham had the inward conviction that God would work out His own purposes. He, Abraham, had failed in regard to Hagar, and under divine government had to suffer; nevertheless, he realized that under divine grace God would accomplish His own plans. In Isaac he saw the development of God's purposes, the fruition of faith, and the consummation of hope.

Like many family affairs recounted in the Old Testament, this one emphasizes the faithfulness of God in recompensing faith, and in forgiving failure.

The Allegory in Doctrine

Of these two events in Abraham's life, we read the New Testament commentary, "Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants, the one from the Mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar" (Gal. 4:24).

In this portion of His Word, God uses the principle of contrast to teach sound doctrine; Ishmael and Isaac, Mount Sinai and Mount Zion, Jerusalem on earth and

Jerusalem which is from above. In Abraham's two sons, the one after the flesh and the other by special promise, we have revealed the gospel system of free and sovereign grace over against the legal system that results in bondage. Here, then, we have illustrated the principle of salvation by human effort and salvation by divine favour.

By contrasting certain details relative to the two sons, we learn more of the Christian's heritage under grace.

Their privilege: Isaac was born in freedom; Ishmael in bondage. In the United States, before the Civil War of 1861-65, it was the law that every child born to a slave mother, was himself a slave. The father might be a freeman, but the status of the child was determined by that of the mother, rather than by that of the father. Apparently, this also was true in the days of the Patriarchs.

Isaac enjoyed security, but Ishmael was merely tolerated in Abraham's household. How near is the position of the Christian in Christ! The Spirit by the Apostle tells us of the coming of Christ "To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ" (Gal. 4:5-7).

Their permanency: Isaac remained within the household forever, but Ishmael was cast out. We, too, now experience an eternal relationship to God. "Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither

bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal. 3:26-29).

Their prospects: Sarah said to Abraham, "Cast out this bondwoman and her son; for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even Isaac" (Gen. 21:10). What a foreshadowing we have here of the glorious truth expressed in the New Testament! "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified together" (Rom. 8:16:17).

The law, then, leads only into bondage, but grace into an Eternity of blessing, joy, and liberty.

The Book of Genesis --Part 35

The Book of Genesis

Part 35

James Gunn

This very important chapter may be considered from at least three different view points: the historical, the typical, and the evangelical. Historically, it deals with the test of the strength of Abraham's faith. We consider the long wait on the part of Abraham for the birth of Isaac to be a test of the endurance of faith, but the offering up of his well-beloved son a test of the true power of faith.

Typically, the chapter reveals the sacrifice of the divine Father, God giving His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish.

Evangelically, this portion has been used as an illustration to teach the substitutionary work of Christ. Thus the Old Testament provides us with the material by which the doctrines of the New Testament may be elucidated.

The Historical Event (Gen. 22:1-19)

The Apostle James states, "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation, for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life" (Jas. 1:12). Abraham's experience in trial as recorded in this chapter manifests that he was not only filled with exceeding joy by the results of his trial, but also through the fact that he became the channel of great blessing to multitudes. We must examine this extraordinary experience in detail.

The test of faith: The statement, “God did tempt Abraham,” might better be understood, God did test or prove Abraham. The Apostle James differentiates between trial and temptation. He writes, “Blessed is the man that endureth temptation (trial)… Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed” (Jas. 1:12-14).

God tries the saint to reveal the very best that is in him; Satan tempts the saint to demonstrate the worst that is in him.

Abraham was tried by God, but not tempted by Him.

The response of faith: There was no hesitancy on Abraham’s part; his response to the voice of the Lord was prompt and complete. He was aware that without faith it is impossible to please God. Notice:

His attention: Throughout the years Abraham had heard the voice of God calling him, and he had learned that only prompt obedience resulted in good; therefore, immediately he said, “Behold, here I am.” He was ready and attentive to the divine summons.

His attitude: The New Testament reveals Abraham’s attitude toward God at this time. We read, “By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac; … accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead” (Heb. 11:17-19). Abraham implicitly trusted in God’s power. God’s promises to Abraham relative to Isaac were so real to him that he believed in their fulfilment even although it meant that God would have to raise Isaac from the dead. To Abraham “faith is the

substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1).

His action: "Abraham rose early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the burnt offering." The Patriarch did not fail to act upon the word of God. The Apostle James comments upon Abraham's action, saying, "Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought by his works, and by works was faith made perfect?" (Jas. 2:21-22).

The Sacrifice of faith: Since the day Abraham, in answer to the call of God had entered the land of Canaan (Gen. 12:6-7), he had built a number of altars to the Lord, and beside these altars, God had appeared to him. He, occasionally, had experienced very intimate fellowship with God as he had offered sacrifices. Here again he raises an altar to the Lord, and no doubt enjoys the anticipation of deeper communion with God.

"Abraham bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood." The best and the dearest that life had for Abraham, the gift of God to him in his old age, he sacrificed. By such action he showed that there was nothing he would withhold from the Lord. His act interprets a stanza of one of Isaac Watt's hymns:

"Were the whole realm of nature mine,

That were an offering far too small,

Love so amazing, so divine,

Demands my heart, my life, my all."

There was no pretense in this act of Abraham, "Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his

son.” In the same spirit of David who, centuries later, said “Of Thine own have we given Thee,” Abraham, without reservation, gave up Isaac. He gave his very best, and he gave it wholly. How pleasing this must have been to God!

* * *

Just when I need Him, Jesus is near;

Just when I falter, just when I fear;

Just when I need Him most.

The Book of Genesis --Part 36

The Book of Genesis

Part 36

James Gunn

We closed our lesson last month by discussing “The Sacrifice of Faith” (Gen. 22:9-10). We saw how that Abraham gave to the Lord the very dearest object of his heart, Isaac, and that by such action the Lord knew that there was nothing in his life that he would withhold.

Today there are Christians who are willing to make some sacrifice for the Lord. Alas! it is only a partial sacrifice. A Christian lady whose husband engaged much in local service for the Lord, when he felt exercised about giving his entire time to the ministry of God’s Word, objected. She feared what she thought might be privations, and maybe loneliness. Because of her insistence, he eventually stiffled his convictions. She held in reservation what she should have given entirely to the Lord.

It is well for us to remember the grammatical connection between Romans 11 and 12. Should we fail to offer the sacrifice in life the Lord requests, He may claim it, for actually it is His: “For of Him and through Him, and to Him, are all things: to Whom be glory forever. Amen.”

The Reward of Faith (Vv. 11 - 13)

For a recompense of his faith, God gave back Isaac to Abraham as if he were a double portion and blessing. He gave Abraham Isaac in birth, now He gives him in a

figurative resurrection. Here we have a precious example of a striking New Testament statement, “He that cometh to God must believe that He is (that He exists), and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him” (Heb. 11:6).

The Lord is ever ready to bless His beloved children. He says, “I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end” (Jer. 29:11). Nevertheless, He takes special pleasure in their faith and in. their willingness to sacrifice for Him. Hebrews 11 is a record of the rewards of faith. There are, likewise, many unwritten records of similar rewards in the lives of such men as George Mueller, Hudson Taylor, and David Livingstone, and a host of others who accomplished wonderful things, overcame opposition, and opened continents to the gospel.

The Testimony Of Faith (V. 14)

That sacred spot on the side of Moriah must be marked. The experience had been so real, faith had been triumphant, God had been so near; therefore, some mark must perpetuate the remembrance of all, and witness to the fact that God had seen the full expression of Abraham’s faith, and had accepted it. Moreover, that He had provided a ram to save Isaac, and in so doing provided Abraham a second time with a son.

Jehovah Jireh was not only given as a name to that hallowed place where the Lord looked down and provided out of His fulness, but it is written into the divine account of Abraham’s test of faith. It is his testimony to the truth that there is a great recompense of reward.

With these remarks, we will close our study of the historical event, and pass on to engage in a further examination of this same passage.

A Typical, Study

There is a verse from the Epistle to the Romans which might be used as an introduction to the further study of this important event in the life of the patriarch Abraham: “He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?” (Rom. 8:32).

First, we must understand the terms of this examination: The offerer, Abraham typifies God the Father; the sacrifice, God the Son; the character of the sacrifice is that of a burnt offering; the elements of the sacrifice are those described in the passage under consideration; and the results of the sacrifice are seen to be universal. Let us consider at least some of these salient points.

The Offerer

Frequently it has been pointed out that there are three epistles which bear an evangelical character: Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews. Galatians is the Epistle of the Cross; in it the crucifixion of Christ is prominent. Hebrews is the Epistle of the Throne; Christ there is seen enthroned in glory. Doctrinally speaking, between these two we have the Epistle to the Romans in which the resurrection is so noticeable. Romans is the Epistle of the Empty Tomb.

In calling attention to this, it must not be assumed that there is no sacrifice in Romans, for there is, but it is the sacrifice of the Father rather than of the Son. “God spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up” (Rom.

8:32, and 4:25). This act is surely typified in Abraham's offering up of Isaac.

God did not spare His Son from the infliction of suffering and death; moreover, He delivered Him over to all the sorrows of Calvary. He surrendered Him fully without any restraint.

An officer at General Headquarters during World War II had an only son in the force fighting in Normandy. Said a higher ranking officer to him one day, "I have been thinking about your boy, wondering if we should transfer him elsewhere; the sector in which he is fighting is most dangerous."

A day or two later, the father gave his reply, "No, I do not think my boy should be transferred. Other fathers think as much of their boys as I do of mine. They are not spared the rigour and terror of battle, so neither should mine.

A few days later, this father lost his son, killed in action. He spared not his only son.

The Sacrifice

Isaac might not know who or what was to be the offering, and might ask, "Where is the lamb?" The Lord Jesus knew from the very beginning Who the sacrifice would be (Heb. 10: 5-7).

The Lord said to Abraham, "Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest … and offer him there for a burnt offering" (Gen. 22:2).

As far as numbers are concerned, Isaac was not Abraham's only son; Ishmael was also his son. Isaac was his only son according to the purposes of God; therefore,

he was unique. There could be no other son in Abraham’s household comparable to him.

This unique son is a type of the Only Begotten Son of God, the One Whom He spared not to deliver up for us.

The Book of Genesis --Part 37

The Book of Genesis

Part 37

James Gunn

Our last study in the life of Abraham in chapter 22 brought us to the consideration of his sacrifice as viewed typically; we shall continue our examination of this matter, and notice.

Character Of The Sacrifice

It is interesting that all the offerings mentioned by name in Genesis are burnt offerings. There is no mention made of the sin, trespass, or peace offerings. “For until the law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law” (Rom. 5:13). Consequently, there is no mention of non-sweet savour offerings before the giving of the law at Sinai.

The burnt offering emphasizes the acceptance of the offerer in his offering rather than the substitutionary suffering of the sacrifice because of his sins. A study of the burnt offerings of Genesis reveals the true character of this particular offering. In Abel’s, we see the type of offering demanded by God; it is an offering in blood and death rather than one of human effort and strength. In Noah’s, the character of the victim is intimated, it had to be a clean animal, a fit type of Christ Who was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners.

Now, in Abraham’s offering up of Isaac, we have the intrinsic value of the sacrifice brought before us. As all of Abraham’s hopes lay in his unique son, Isaac, and all

of God's blessings to the nation were to be channeled through that son, and that, therefore, Isaac was of primary importance in the purposes of God; even so, the sacrifice of Christ is of infinite value.

A little child could not understand how she could purchase 12 large juicy oranges with one small piece of silver. Her father explained to her that it was because of the superior value of the silver coin. Silver was much rarer than oranges; moreover, it had first to be found in the earth, dug up, separated from the rock in which it was discovered, purified, and finally shaped into money. The one small piece of money surpassed in value 1 orange, 2 oranges, 3 oranges, even up to 12 oranges. Feeble picture indeed; nevertheless, we see the meaning of intrinsic value. The intrinsic worth of the sacrifice of God surpasses everything known to man.

Elements Of The Sacrifice

There are three important and symbolic features to be noted here: First, the wood which speaks of the humanity of our Lord. Of the Lord Jesus, it is stated, "For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground" (Isa. 53:2). Moreover, Psalm one fittingly describes Him as "A tree planted by the rivers of water." The wood that had grown in Canaan and was about to be placed upon the altar at least illustrates the humanity of the perfect Man Christ Jesus.

In the second place, there was the fire. In Scripture fire is frequently used as the symbol of God and His infinite holiness, "Our God is a consuming fire" (Heb. 12:29). He is also described by Isaiah as a devouring fire (Isa. 30:27. 33:14-15). Because of His infinite holiness, God

cannot permit sin in His presence; furthermore, the very nature of His holiness demands the punishment of sin.

Finally, there was a knife, a reminder of a sword that appeared to guard the tree of life from sinful man's approach. The knife and sword might symbolize God's righteousness in judgment.

Eventually, the nations are to be destroyed by the sword that goes forth from the mouth of the King of Kings (Rev. 19:15).

From these symbolic materials, we may learn that Christ in all His perfection is made sin for us, and that God in His infinite holiness decrees that He, therefore, must suffer for sin. Furthermore, this suffering we learn is imposed by the absolute righteousness of God.

There is one more salient point to be discussed here, and that is Isaac, although placed upon the altar ready for sacrifice, lived. Abraham received him in a figure from the dead (Heb. 11:17-19).

The entire preparation and movement of Abraham and Isaac on this occasion reveal, pictorially, the sacrifice of God Who gave His only begotten Son (John 3:16), and that Son Who offered Himself a sacrifice for sins (Heb. 10:12).

Here, then, we have foreshadowed Christ suffering because of our sins through infinite holiness, and yet a-rising from the dead in resurrection.

Universal Blessing

The Lord said to Abraham after these things, "Because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: That in blessing, I will bless thee, and in

multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of Heaven, and as the sand which is upon the seashore: and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; and in thy seed shall all nations of the earth be blessed."

While it is true that these words have a prophetic application, let us remember that Abraham's Seed which is Christ passed through in reality what Isaac did in a figure, and He did so that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles (Gal. 3:10-17).

Christ is the First-begotten from among the dead (Col. 1:18); the Firstborn among many brethren who, eventually, will bear His image (Rom. 8:29).

* * *

Raise thy thoughts to Heaven above,

There at God's right hand

Sitteth One Whose Name is Love,

Who doth understand.

The Book of Genesis--Part 38

The Book of Genesis

Part 38

James Gunn

In order to complete our study of what has been well called the Calvary chapter of the Book of Genesis, chapter 22, we must examine its evangelical application. Let us remember, at the same time, that every allegorical consideration of Holy Scripture demands that we control our imagination, and that we not indulge in that which is merely fanciful and novel. This type of study is illustrative and nothing more.

Let us now turn our attention to Isaac, and see in his experience an illustration of a man who by grace was saved apart from any effort of his own.

The Burden

“And Abraham took the wood…and laid it upon Isaac his son” (V.6). This must have been of considerable weight; much fuel would be required for the purpose. This weight Isaac carried to Moriah, and there it disappeared forever at the altar. Isaac never again felt its pressure nor did he sense its bulk.

Fallen man bears the heavy load of personal sin, and, frequently, imposes that mass upon others. The Psalmist felt all this and wrote, “Yea, in heart ye work wickedness; ye weigh the violence of your hands in the earth. The wicked are estranged from the womb” (Psa. 58:2-3).

The Cry

Isaac raised the question with his father, “Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” (V.7). All was evident to Isaac. The means of total destruction, the knife, the fire, and the wood, were ready, but what or who was the victim? There may have been a slight tone of apprehension in his voice as he made the enquiry. The glorious results of the cross work of Christ are seen in that He delivered them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage (Heb. 2:15). While this passage in Hebrews may refer to the full deliverance of Old Testament saints from all charge of guilt, it reveals the fact that man Lives in the fear of death and destruction. “The expectation of the wicked is wrath” (Prov. 11:23).

Hope

Let us think of Abraham’s reply, “God shall provide Himself a lamb for a burnt offering” (V. 8). Did Abraham see through the telescope of faith and hope the sacrifice of Christ? There are some who feel that the Lord’s words to the Jews in the temple may be interpreted in such a way, “Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and was glad” (John 8:56).

This reply of Abraham must have brought relief to Isaac. Whatever secret dread may have gripped his heart would be stilled, for divine provision would meet the need and supply the only means of acceptance with God. What a gospel message! What good news!

With his fears allayed and high hope in his heart, Isaac moved on to Moriah.

Substitution

“Abraham…bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood” (V. 9). Isaac was fettered and about to die; the very burden he had carried was to consume him; all hope vanished from his mind.

In that dark moment, Isaac heard the word of God, “Lay not thine hand upon the lad,” and knew that his life was spared. How his life was spared, he did not fully understand, until, “Abraham went and took the ram and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son” (V. 13). Isaac lived, but his substitute, the substitute provided by God, died.

Throughout all the centuries in which Levitical ritualism was practised in Israel, God impressed upon His people the fact that salvation, from the consequence of sin, death, was on the basis of substitution. How fully the Apostle Paul apprehended this, said he, “The Son of God loved me, and gave Himself for me” (Gal. 2:20). Abraham gave a ram in the stead of Isaac his son, but Paul declares that Christ gave Himself voluntarily for the believer. In that voluntary sacrifice of Christ the believer is accepted before God. “He hath made us accepted in the Beloved. In Whom we have redemption …” Eph. 1:6-7).

Life

Isaac, the one who had been exposed to death was alive and stood to watch the substitutionary sacrifice ascend to God.

We, too, were exposed to death; in fact, in one respect, were dead, but in and through Christ we live. “And you hath He quickened, who were dead in trespasses and

sins" (Eph. 2:1). The declaration of the Apostle John is forceful, "He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life" (1 John 5:12).

Death

It is obvious that Isaac never would have forgotten the experience when he lay bound and ready to die upon the altar, and the moment in which he saw a ram enduring that death for him. It would almost seem as if, in the ram, he, Isaac, had died.

While it is true that we who believe live in Christ, it is equally true that we died in Christ. The words of the Apostle Paul come to mind, "I am crucified with Christ" (Gal. 2:20). "Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Him (Christ), that the body of sin might be destroyed, that ye henceforth should not serve sin", "Reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin" (Rom. 6:6 and 11). "They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts" (Gal. 5:24).

The Christian definitely is to be identified with the death of Christ.

Resurrection

We know that Abraham considered the return of Isaac with him from Moriah as a resurrection. Thoughts of God's power to raise the dead filled his mind as he went to offer his son. "By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac … Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead" (Heb. 11:17-19).

In all probability to Isaac it also was a resurrection. How like the child of God! Of all true believers we read, "For

if we have been planted together in the likeness of His death, we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection" (Rom. 6:5). Well might the Apostle exhort the Colossians, "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God" (Col. 3:1).

May we, who like Isaac were once exposed to death, live in the power of our resurrection with and in Christ Jesus.

* * *

Teach us to look in all our ends

On Thee for Judge, and not our friends,

That we, with Thee, may walk uncowed

By fear or favour of the crowd.

— Rudyard Kipling

The Book of Genesis --Part 39

The Book of Genesis

Part 39

James Gunn

When Jacob was about to die, he blessed Ephraim and Manasseh, saying, “The God which fed (shepherded) me all my life long unto this day. The Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads” (Gen. 48:15-16). This aged Patriarch as he reviewed his years, at their close was conscious of God’s providential care in the details of his life.

In a similar spirit, David took a retrospect of the years he had spent hiding from Saul in caves, wildernesses, and foreign cities, and said. “The Lord liveth Who hath redeemed my soul from all adversity” (2 Sam. 4:9. 1 Kings 1:29). God’s providential dealing with him had preserved him throughout these trying times.

Many of the Psalms breathe these very sentiments. Psalms three to five are permeated with them. These Psalms, it is generally believed, were written as David fled before wicked Absalom. In them David prays, “Lead me, O Lord, in Thy righteousness because of mine enemies; make Thy way straight before my face” (5:6).

The somewhat unexpected insertion at the close of chapter 22 of the family news from far away Nahor, a city in Mesopotamia, can only be explained in the light of an over-ruling Providence. Without this knowledge, Abraham could not have acted as he did in chapter 24. To the devout mind things like this which appear to be

casual and even irrelevant, are acknowledged to be acts resulting from divine control and direction in the lives of God's people.

Let us consider the family life of Abraham at this time, and this latest information about his relatives.

Isaac

What a remarkable character we have to consider! The place he occupies in the Messianic line is his by divine election. As, in later times, God chose Jacob who was second to Esau, even so in this case God chose Isaac in preference to Ishmael, Abraham's first-born. Isaac was not only given to Abraham in a miraculous manner, was not only chosen by God over Ishmael, but, as we have seen, was returned to Abraham as if from the dead. In every respect, Isaac was a most remarkable individual, singled out by God and predestined to special purposes. Moreover, Isaac was now of marriageable age. From chapter 25:20, we learn that he was 40 years old at the time of his wedding.

In all probability, there were many attractive marriageable maidens known to both Abraham and Isaac among the Canaanites. Would one of them be a suitable wife for Isaac, the young man of divine provision and selection? Let us see.

Abraham's Convictions

Abraham said in conversation with his steward, Eliezer, "Thou shalt not take a wife unto my son of the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell" (24:3).

Abraham had learned by the bitter experience with Hagar the undesirability of the intrusion of aliens into

the race; therefore, he was anxious to keep his descendants free from foreign blood. Moreover, he knew God's mind about the Canaanites that by their sin they eventually would be expelled from the land, and that the land by promise belonged to his seed forever.

There is another salient point here we ought to consider. Throughout the Old Testament the major emphasis of history lies upon the genealogical line of the Messiah. In tracing this line, we see how God set aside Cain and chose Seth; how He took up Shem, selected Abraham, and covenanted through Isaac instead of through Abraham's first-born, Ishmael; and, how He made choice of Jacob over Esau. Abraham had so learned God, and so knew traditional history, that although he was ignorant of the formation of this genealogical line of Christ, he realized that the people of God were to walk in separation from the men of the world.

In the sixth chapter of Genesis, we saw the tragic mixing of the two lines, the line of Cain, "the sons of men," and the line of Seth, "the sons of God," and the dreadful resulting moral degeneracy. Abraham would have no such blending of the Hebrew and the Canaanite lines through his beloved Isaac.

Family News

Such thoughts and observations no doubt caused Abraham some anxiety. There is an ancient Arab law which says, "When a son has attained the age of 20, his father, if able, should marry him, and then take his hand and say, 'I have disciplined thee, and taught thee, and married thee; I now seek refuge with God from thy mischief in the present world and the next'." Abraham had disciplined and taught Isaac who was now well

advanced in his 30's, therefore, as his father, Abraham would be thinking of a suitable bride.

At this very time, interesting information reached our Patriarch about his family from which he had parted more than fifty years before, "And it came to pass after these things that it was told Abraham, saying, Behold, Milcah, she hath also born children unto thy brother Nahor." Among these was a son, Bethuel of whom we read, "And Bethuel begat Rebekah." What thoughts must have stirred in father Abraham's heart! He despised the daughters of the Canaanites among whom he dwelt, now by the good hand of the Lord, word had been brought that there was a suitable worthy maiden of his own race who might be wooed and won for his extraordinary son. These reflections he likely reserved to himself until the proper time arrived, and then, without hesitancy, he acted upon them (chapter 24).

This lesson in several respects reminds us of the statement made regarding all New Testament saints, "All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son" (Rom. 8:29). How little we understand of the fact that every happening in life is so controlled and directed of God that it results and culminates in that ultimate good, conformity to the image of the Son of God. As this information worked to the good of Abraham and Isaac, so all things in life work together for that ultimate good in the people of God, Christ likeness in Time and in Eternity.

"Oh, the joy, the inexpressible delight of being alone with your friend, when you can pour out everything that

is in your soul, all you think, wheat and chaff together, knowing that your listening friend will, with the breath of kindness, blow away the chaff and keep only the grain!”

—Mrs. Craig.

The Book of Genesis --Part 40

The Book of Genesis

Part 40

James Gunn

Faith, Hope, And Sorrow — Genesis 23.

A Virtuous Wife

From the records in Genesis, we know that Sarah was a woman of like weaknesses as others. She arranged with her husband to deceive, she laughed in unbelief at the promise of God, she connived with Abraham in the matter of Ishmael, and she treated Hagar with unkindness; nevertheless, there was a noble bearing about Sarah; her virtues surpassed her failures.

The commendation of the Holy Spirit indicates that she was an exemplary holy woman: “For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands: Even as Sara obeyed Abraham, calling him lord: whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement” (1 Pet. 3:6-7).

The life of Sarah is a proof of the proverb, “Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised” (Prov. 31:30).

A Sad Bereavement

It appears Abraham had been away when Sarah died. There is nothing reported of the fatal illness that removed her from his side. As soon as the news reached him, he went up to Hebron to mourn. His heart must

have been heavy as he realized that the tie which had bound them so happily was broken.

Abraham did not need professional mourners of whom we read that they make a tumult, and weep and wail greatly (Mark 5:38-40), Abraham's grief was sincere and his tears real.

A Stately Burial

Abraham never had possessed ground in Canaan; he was a stranger and a pilgrim. He now makes his first purchase of property, a cave that was to be a family tomb.

The transaction between Abraham and the sons of Heth teaches lessons:

The reality of death: We read, "Abraham stood up from before his dead," and said, "Give me a possession of a burying place with you, that I may bury my dead." Death is a crisis to be faced realisticly. Thank God! For the believer in Christ death is a sleep (1 Cor. 15:6; 1. Thess. 4:13-14). Notwithstanding, for those who remain, there should be the facing of the circumstance witha realization of mingled hope and sorrow.

The finality of death: There is reason to believe from accounts that Sarah was a beautiful woman, an attractive personality. Her loveliness became a snare to Abraham and herself. Death ends all that is earthly. Abraham says, "Give me a possession of a burying place with you, that I may bury my dead out of my sight." The silent form was no longer beautiful; the spirit and personality were no longer there. The remains would corrupt, for death is final.

Competent arrangements: Oriental customs seem quite laborious. The empty palavers would be difficult for us to endure under such circumstances. Abraham adhered to the etiquette of the land, and probably paid two or three times what the property was worth (Dr. Thompson). Nevertheless, there was esteem for Abraham and a seeming sympathy with him in his bereavement.

After arrangements were completed, he personally performed the last humane acts for his beloved Sarah, “Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave.”

Abraham never had purchased land on which to sow seed and reap, but in this cave, he sowed a precious seed that will reappear in a glorious harvest: sown in corruption to be raised in incorruption; sown in dishonour to be raised in glory; sown in weakness to be raised in power.

Hope

While it is true that Abraham was a stranger in the land and never possessed any of it, the promise of God to him was explicit, “All the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever” (Gen. 13:15). A small portion of what would be possessed by his descendants, he purchased, and in it he buried Sarah, and there would be buried himself. His act was in realization of the promise. In hope, he secured a part of that which would be his full possession in his seed.

We know that Abraham believed in the God of resurrection (Rom. 4:17), in immortality, and in a glorious destiny (Heb. 11:9-10). His tent in Canaan and the cave in Machpelah alike declared that he was heir of

the promises, and that he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. Even in his grief, his heart was full of hope, and no doubt the God of Hope filled him with joy and peace in believing (Rom. 15:13).

The Book of Genesis --Part 41

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James Gunn

Marriage Through the Lord (Chapter 24)

The event of Isaac's marriage to Rebekah may be considered from both the literal and the typical view points. In fact, it might be profitable to make, first, a literal examination of the circumstances which eventuated in the marriage, and then, in a future issue of Food for the Flock, to engage in a typical study.

Many of the points of interest recorded here occur in modern family life.

The Father's Concern

Isaac was now of marriageable age, possibly he was between 35 to 38 years of age, and according to prevailing customs Abraham had an important duty to perform. Abraham, at this time, would be approximately 140 years old. Since he lived to be 175 (Chap. 25:7), he survived Isaac's marriage by 35 years and watched Esau and Jacob grow into maturity.

There may have been something distasteful to Abraham in the comportment of the daughters of Canaan, but we have to look for a stronger reason than that for his insistence, "That thou shalt not take a wife unto my son of the daughters of the Canaanites". It is, even to this day, in certain parts of the Holy Land, customary not to allow a boy or girl to marry out of their kindred, lest in

so doing, they become united to a family which has a blood feud with their own. This, definitely, was not what Abraham had in mind.

The first apparent reason in his action was that God's call embraced the fact his seed was to remain a distinct people. They were not to marry one of another race lest they thus merge with the heathen. The call of God to Abraham was a call to complete separation. In second place, God's covenant with Abraham had to do with the land in which he was then dwelling. Under no circumstance was there to be a return of his seed to Mesopotamia; they ever were to remain in the land God had promised to them. Consequently, a bride was to be found who, although of Abraham's race, and thus born outside of Canaan, would be willing to live as a pilgrim and stranger in the Land of Promise.

While prevailing customs influenced Abraham's concern for his son, there is no doubt loyalty to God and His revealed will were the controlling factors in this momentous transaction. In a previous study we saw that Abraham had news of a maiden of his kindred who, in all probability, met these very requirements.

The Necessary Preparation

It seems obvious that all who have read the Book of Genesis have sought an explanation of the oath between Abraham and his steward. There are, of course, those who believe that the oath was merely one of loyalty between master and servant. There are others who attach it to the rite of circumcision, believing that the placing of the hand beneath the thigh suggested that only one circumsized could perform such a holy covenant. There are still others, who, taking the word

thigh as it means loin (Chap. 46:26. Ex. 1:5), believe there is a hint here that, as out of Abraham's loins his Seed, the Lord Jesus, was to come, the oath in practice was to maintain His line holy and pure. There may be a measure of truth in all three, but, in all probability, it was the first of these suggestions that both parties to the oath meant when they entered into that understanding.

The words of James are suggested by this contract: "Let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay." Fromthese words, we would gather that a true believer should be so loyal and truthful no oath is necessary in the affirmation of his words.

Dependence on God

The long journey made by Eliezer was made in the spirit of humble prayer and reliance upon the Lord. What a number of domestic tragedies would have been avoided had young Christians approached marriage in this attitude! The thanksgiving of Abraham's steward is a classic, "And the man bowed down his head, and worshipped the Lord. And he said, Blessed be the Lord God of my master Abraham, Who hath not left destitute my master of His mercy and His truth: I being in the way, the Lord led me to the house of my master's brethren."

A Test of Character

The well of water was the property of the whole city and was used at set hours; therefore, the travel-stained Eliezer had to wait until the women came to draw water. This was one of the daily duties of those Oriental

women, even as it is today in parts of Europe and Latin America.

There apparently was, over and above his desire for a drink, a fixed intention in the mind of Eliezer when he asked Rebekah, “Let me, I pray thee, drink a little water from thy pitcher.” His observant eye was quick to follow her response as an expression of her true character. There was no suspicion or fear in Rebekah’s attitude, only one of confidence and poise. There was a pleasant alacrity of mind and hand, and an admirable generosity of spirit. Moreover, Rebekah was not indolent. Some of the crowning features of her character were her respect for age and position, as this was seen in her attitude to Abraham’s steward, and in her kindness to a stranger.

To the man who had vowed to his master and had travelled so far to perform his vow, these were the natural qualifications required to make this young woman a suitable life-companion for Isaac. She was a virtuous woman of greater value than many rubies.

Overtures for Isaac

Although as a suitor Eliezer was acting by proxy, he did his part well, and won Rebekah for his master’s son. This remarkable steward not only displayed the riches of Abraham, but made his appeal to the young heart of the maiden and to her family in different ways:

Kinship: “I am Abraham’s servant.” Many years had passed since Abraham had parted from them to go into the land of Canaan, but he was still well remembered.

Greatness: “The Lord hath blessed my master greatly; and he is become great.” He sought to impress upon

their minds this human interest touch, his master was an important person.

Affluence: “The Lord… hath given him flocks, and herds, and silver, and gold, … “ How this would assure the entire family! Should their sister leave them to go so far away, her every need would be well supplied.

Spirituality: This is very evident. First, he says, “The Lord hath blessed my master,” and then, in recounting his experience, he says, “The Lord before Whom I walk.”

All these different considerations impressed Rebekah’s family. Finally, Laban and Bethuel answered, “The thing proceedeth from the Lord: we cannot speak unto thee bad or good. Behold, Rebekah is before thee, take her, and go, and let her be thy master’s son’s wife, as the Lord hath spoken.”

It would seem that, at this point, Eliezer brought forth the real betrothal present, part for the bride and part for her family. Notwithstanding, it is contended by some that Eliezer, on meeting Rebekah at the well, was so convinced of guidance to God’s choice that he gave her an earring. More correctly this was a nose-rig, an ornament which hung from the left nostril and was the usual betrothal present in Arabia.

The Test of Love

It was one thing for Eliezer to know that he had impressed her family, but now he must discover how deeply he had impressed Rebekah. He, therefore, pressed for an immediate departure. What a test of the heart! To say farewell to all, to face a long and dangerous journey, to go among strangers, and to face the reality that she would never again see her relatives

surely was a deep probing of the strength of newly stirred affections.

In spite of the fact a woman in the East had little choice in her marriage, in this case her preference was sought. She was asked, “Wilt thou go with this man?” Promptly, Rebekah gave her decision, “I will go.”

While love does acquire much, it must also sacrifice much. In fact, true love ever is more ready to yield than to claim ought for itself.

The Bridal Party

As the caravan neared the end of its long trek, “Rebekah lifted up her eyes, and when she saw Isaac, she lighted off the camel.” It is still the custom in the East for an inferior to dismount before a superior and to approach on foot. This revealed an attitude of respect in Rebekah.

Moreover, we read, “She took a vail and covered herself.” Rebekah thus indicated that she was the bride, for among her race, a bride was not seen unveiled by her husband until after marriage.

The veil used on such occasion enveloped the whole person and was larger than one usually worn.

The long journey was over, the wedding accomplished. Two hearts were now united; two lives blended together. “Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah’s tent,” that had been so empty, “and took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her: and Isaac was comforted after his mother’s death.”

The Book of Genesis --Part 42

The Book of Genesis

Part 42

James Gunn

In our previous study, we considered the contents of chapter 24 in a literal sense; no doubt that was proper. We decided at that time to examine likewise this same chapter in a typical way, for this approach to the historical events there recorded is probably the more usual one.

A typical study of any Scripture requires a searching, not only for the types, but for their antitypes.

There are four character types here; namely, Abraham, Isaac, Rebekah, and Eliezer.

Abraham

While we were studying chapter 22, we saw the close intimacy between Abraham and Isaac (22:8), and what it must have cost Abraham to sacrifice his son (22:12). From that picture, we attempted to appreciate the intimacy within the Godhead, and what it meant to God the Father not to spare His Son, but to deliver Him up for us all (Rom. 8:32).

In this chapter, the details are altogether different, the intimacy between the father and his son still exist, the love of the father is just as great, but these express themselves, not in sacrifice, but in a real purpose and plan to seek a bride for Isaac.

The major theme of the Epistle to the Ephesians is that of the Church, particularly in its universal aspect. One of the metaphors used to describe her is that of a bride. The Church is the spouse of Christ (Eph. 5: 23-33. 2 Cor. 11:2).

As in Abraham's instructions to his servant he made known his purposes for Isaac; even so, at the very beginning of the Ephesian letter, God makes known His purposes for the members of the Church, the Bride of Christ: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love." (Chap. 1:3-4).

That Abraham had a plan for the carrying out of his purpose is most evident. That plan he entrusted to the steward over his house. What a wonderful plan God had for the accomplishing of His purpose! This plan is very concisely stated in the writings of the Apostle Paul: "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover, whom He did predestinate, them He also called: and whom He called, them He also justified: and whom He justified, them He also glorified" (Rom. 8:28-30).

Isaac

We must also consider Isaac who again is, as when we were examining chapter 22, a type of Christ, the only begotten Son.

Isaac had been placed upon the altar, to all intents he had died; yet, Abraham received him back as from death. He was sacrificed, yet, lived. How like our blessed Lord Jesus! Of His being resurrected, we read: “His mighty power, Which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places” (Eph. 1:19-20).

Abraham made plans to seek a bride for Isaac; even so, God made plans that, as Eve was the complementary part of Adam, the Church as the Lamb’s wife should be the fulness of Him that filleth all in all (Eph. 1:22-23). Forasmuch as “neither is the man without the woman neither the woman without the man;” therefore, “they two shall be one flesh” so also is the Christ (1 Cor. II:II. Eph. 5:31).

As Isaac, sacrificed yet living, could anticipate with joy the day when he would possess a suitable bride, our blessed Lord awaits the day when He, as the One Who loved the Church and gave Himself for her, will present her to Himself a glorious Church without spot or wrinkle or any such thing.

Rebekah

There are several salient points here which merit close consideration. Rebekah is a type of the Church, not only in her marriage, but in her suitability. She was related to Isaac, this, therefore, suggests that all in the Church must bear a relationship to Christ.

Relationship in life: Said Abraham to his servant, “Thou shalt go unto my country, and to my kindred, and take a wife unto my son Isaac” (V. 4). One of the daughters of Canaan would not do. Abraham insisted that Isaac’s bride be of the separate distinct race chosen by God. As those two, Isaac and Rebekah, were one kindred, we read, “Both He (Christ) that sanctifieth and they (members of His Church) who are sanctified are all of one (kindred)” (Heb. 2:11).

Relationship confessed: When Eliezer questioned Rebekah at the well, saying, “Whose daughter art thou?” she said unto him, “I am the daughter of Bethuel the son of Milcah, which she bare unto Nahor.” Later on, Eliezer acknowledged that God had led him the right way to take his master’s brother’s daughter as a bride for Isaac (V. 48). Rebekah had declared her genealogy; she was near of kin to Isaac. It is necessary that Christians be ready always to state their spiritual genealogy.

Relationship of love: In the Song of Solomon, it is intimated that the bride there bore a dual relationship to her bridegroom. He, the bridegroom, addresses her as, “My sister, my spouse.” The words, “My sister” indicate a relationship of life; the words, “My spouse,” a relationship of love. Such was the relationship between Isaac and Rebekah. She was of his father’s family, but true love existed between them. When asked, “Wilt thou go with this man?” that is, with Abraham’s servant, she answered, “I will go,” go to her Isaac.

The indissoluble union between Christ and His own is one of life and love. This dual relationship is apparent in John’s statements, “Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God (the relationship of life): and

everyone that loveth Him that begat (the relationship of love) loveth him also that is begotten of Him." Moreover, "We love Him, because He first loved us" (1 John 5:1 and 4:19).

Relationship in marriage: For a spiritual understanding of this, there are two Scriptures which we may place together, "Isaac … took Rebekah, and she became his wife" (Gen. 24:67). "Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to Him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb" (Rev. 19:7-9).

The Book of Genesis --Part 43

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James Gunn

Eliezer

The diligent steward of Abraham's household has frequently been considered as a type of the Holy Spirit in His ministry toward the Church. We may conclude, at least, that Eliezer furnishes us with a number of illustrations of the work of God the Spirit.

There was perfect accord between Abraham and his servant. The plan of Abraham was certainly executed by faithful Eliezer.

The commission: Abraham said, "Thou shalt go unto my country, and to my kindred, and take a wife unto my son Isaac." The Lord Jesus said, "I will send Him (the Holy Spirit) unto you. And when He is come, He will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment" (John 16: 7-8).

The testimony: Eliezer bore a wonderful testimony to his master; said he, "The Lord hath blessed my master greatly; and he is become great." Concerning the service of the Holy Spirit, the Lord Jesus said, "When the Comforter is come, Whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, He shall testify of Me" (John 15:26). Again He said, "Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth … He shall glorify

Me: for He shall receive of Mine, and shall shew it unto you" (John 16:13).

The endowment: "And it came to pass, that, when Abraham's servant heard their words, he worshipped the Lord bowing himself to the earth. And the servant brought forth jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment, and gave them to Rebekah" (Gen. 24:52-53). The Holy Spirit not only witnesses to all that Christ is, but He Himself becomes the evidence of Christ's wealth and the assurance of it to the Church (Eph. 1:13-14).

The direction: What a wonderful guide Eliezer was to Rebekah! He had travelled the way before and knew the distances, dangers, and difficulties.

The blessed One Who witnesses constantly to us of Christ and Who is the earnest of an eternal harvest of glory, leads us gently home. "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God" (Rom. 8:14).

The instruction: No doubt, Rebekah heard much about Isaac from Eliezer. Eventually, as they neared the end of their long journey, as Isaac drew close, he indicated, "It is my master."

The Spirit of God is the excellent teacher. He is the anointing which we have received, and of Him we read, "Ye need not that any man teach you: but the same anointing teacheth you all things" (1 John 2: 27).

The end: Faithful reliable Eliezer! We read concerning him, "The servant told Isaac all things that he had done." He now could review his activities all along the journey. Hehad remained with Rebekah to the end.

The Lord Jesus assured the troubled hearts of His disciples, saying, "I will pray the Father, and He shall

give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you for ever: Even the Spirit of truth; Whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him: but ye know Him; for He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you" (John 14:16-17).

The Book of Genesis --Part 44

The Book of Genesis

Part 44

James Gunn

Chapter 25:1-10

We have come to the last chapter in the biography of Abraham, the final disposition of his affairs, his death and burial.

The place that Keturah occupied in Abraham's life has been a problem to many. Although several commentators have offered their solutions to the problem, there is still room for further research.

We shall consider some of these explanations.

There are some who consider the story of Keturah as the record of the closing years of Abraham's life. They believe that the miraculous return of generative strength which preceded the birth of Isaac in his old age was prolonged, and that through it he begat more children by this younger woman.

The references in the New Testament to the birth of Isaac raise grave questions in an honest mind as to whether this is so. In Romans 4:17-25, the faith that resulted in the birth of Isaac, the son of his old age, is presented as the culmination of his life. From this passage one would certainly gather that the renewal of the physical strength of both Abraham and Sarah was for that purpose only.

If it is assumed that the miraculous return of generative powers in Abraham were prolonged so that he begat more children, why was it not prolonged in the case of Sarah? She survived the birth of Isaac some 37years. Compare Gen. 17:17 with 23:1.

The reference to Abraham and Sarah in Heb. 11:8-12, does not leave one with the impression that the renewed strength given to the patriarch was extended indefinitely. “Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead so many as the stars of the sky.” Even at Isaac’s birth Abraham was “as good as dead.” The statements of Gen. 17:17 also would preclude the idea of Abraham begetting children after the birth of Isaac.

Some Bible students realizing these details have concluded that the story of Keturah is a Jewish interpolation, and that, consequently, it does not belong to the Sacred Text. A proper statement of how they have arrived at this conclusion has not yet been found. It appears only as an easy way of dismissing the difficulty. If such a solution is adopted for every biblical problem, like the modernist, we soon would have a very small Bible.

Another explanation that is much more plausible and possible is that Keturah is no one else but Hagar with another name. This idea, while it is a possible solution, rests wholly upon assumption. There certainly does not appear any relationship between the two names, nor any similarity in the circumstances of the two records. Hagar as far as factual accounts are concerned had but one child and was expelled from Abraham’s household.

Keturah had six children and seemed in favour within the household even near the end of Abraham's life.

The most logical explanation is found in the fact that Abraham was a polygamist. From verse six of our passage we know that he had concubines (plural), and in 1 Chron. 1:32, Keturah is specifically called "Abraham's concubine".

The whole strain of the biblical records leads to the conclusion that Abraham had taken Keturah as a concubine while Sarah was yet alive. The words "then again" may be accepted as intimating a logical summary of events rather than as indicating a chronological order.

The Book of Genesis --Part 45

The Book of Genesis

Part 45

James Gunn

Chapter 25:5-10

The closing days of Abraham the Patriarch were not much different from the closing days of many another believing pilgrim. He did not know the clear revelation of the New Testament, notwithstanding his faith and hope were in God.

Like Job, Abraham could say, “I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh I shall see God: Whom I shall see for myself and mine eyes shall behold, and not another, though my reins be consumed within me” (Job 19:26-27).

Eliphaz the Temanite in propounding to Job his philosophy of life, tells him, that at the close of his days he may go down to the grave in a full age, like a shock of corn entering in his season. What a fit picture of resurrection!

Let us notice four important features of the close of Abraham’s life, especially in the days immediately before his death.

His Expectation

The writer of the Hebrew Epistle states of Abraham, “He sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs

with him of the same promises: For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (11:9-10).

Had he been mindful of the country he had left, surely he might have returned to it, but he desired a better country, that is an heavenly, wherefore God is not ashamed to be called his God, the God of Abraham.

Hope has been defined as an earnest desire mingled with a confident expectation. Such a hope strengthened Abraham for the final crisis of life.

His Preparation

In view of his death there were certain important matters which demanded Abraham's attention. The Patriarch faced death courageously, and as was the custom in ancient times, pronounced a paternal blessing upon his children, and allotted to each his portion of the estate. Frequently, these blessings were prophectic, as is obvious in the blessings of Jacob upon his sons (Gen. 49:1-28). They also contain charges, commands, and instructions (Gen. 49:29-33).

In modern times it is not the custom to wait until the end is near to transact such important business. Responsible persons occasionally have their last will and testament completed while they are still strong and healthy. This should be no problem to the Christian, for he can face death with assurance and hope. It is well to remember that the making of a will may save the breaking of a heart. Moreover, to make a will does not in any wise hasten death. We must ever remember that "Our times are in His hands."

Abraham gave gifts to his sons, the children of his concubines, but to Isaac he gave all his estate. The Bedaween of Arabia still follow the practices of Abraham. When their children are grown up, they give each of the younger sons his share of the goods (Luke 15:12), whereupon they move to a distance, and leave the eldest brother in quiet possession of the home.

His Demise

The divine obituary is brief: “Those are the days of the years of Abraham’s life which he lived, an hundred threescore and fifteen years. Then Abraham gave up the ghost, and died in a good old age, an old man, and full of years; and was gathered to his people.”

Since Abraham was one hundred and seventy-five years old when he died, Isaac would be seventy-five at the death of his father. Esau and Jacob were born when their father, Isaac, was sixty years of age; consequently, they would be fifteen at Abraham’s death, and without doubt were with him and received his blessing.

Thus ended the pilgrimage of the father of the faithful. He had been among the men of the land, but not of them. His altar and tent had been the symbol of his relationship to this earth. He refused to be a debtor to the men among whom he lived, but they were enriched spiritually by their contact with him.

His Burial

Isaac and Ishmael, at least for a short time, forgot their personal enmity and met at their father’s grave.

Of both the Old Testament and the New Testament saints it is said, that in death they fell asleep (Acts 7:60; 13:36).

For the believer the bitterness of death has been removed through the triumph of Christ over death and the grave. Declared the Lord Jesus, “I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive forevermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death” (Rev. 1:18).

Not only does Scripture describe death as a sleep, but it likewise describes a burial as the planting of a precious seed, “It (the body) is sown in corruption, but raised in incorruption” (1 Cor. 15:42).

Furthermore, the figurative language of the Word of God treats the resurrection as an awakening from sleep, “Behold, I shew you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed” (1 Cor. 15:51-52).

In the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron the son of Zohar the Hittite, lie the remains of both Abraham and Sarah awaiting the Resurrection of Life when “in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits: afterward they that are Christ’s at His coming” (1 Cor. 15:22-23).

The Book of Genesis --Part 46

The Book of Genesis

Part 46

James Gunn

We must now fix the attention which we had centred on Abraham upon his less colourful son, Isaac. In many respects we shall not find the biography of Isaac as interesting and fruitful as that of his father. Psycologically speaking, the second among these patriarchs of Israel was a negative personality, lacking in the heroic virtues of fortitude and valour. Isaac was a pacifist, and enjoyed peace, and that sometimes at too great a price.

In the passage before us we have a threefold picture of this child of promise. We see him, first in his sorrow, then in his home, and finally in the community.

In His Sorrow (25:11):

“And it came to pass after the death of Abraham, that God blessed his son Isaac.” Isaac had been bereft of his father, but not of his God. As he left the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron at Mamre, he must indubitably have felt lonely. All his half brothers were far removed from him, and he who had been the inspiration of his life lay cold in death. Under such circumstances a feeling of emptiness and isolation may have gripped him. Isaac, like many another, proved in that hour the power of the presence of God.

How real and blessed are the promises of God to tried and grief-stricken hearts! “Fear thou not; for I am with

thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee: yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of My righteousness" (Isa. 41:10).

In all probability, the statement, "God blessed… Isaac," is explained and expanded in the verses that follow. God's blessing was the perpetuating of the Abrahamic covenant through Isaac, the propogating of the Messianic line through him. The blessing of God to Isaac was therefore the experiential enjoyment of the eternal purposes of God.

When we were studying Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac in chapter 22, we saw them to be an illustration of God the Father and the Son in the work of redemption at Calvary. Isaac is not to be viewed in that sense now; he is a believer, enjoying at times the blessings of the Lord, and manifesting at other times the weaknesses of the flesh.

In His Home (25:12-34):

It is with mixed feelings that we investigate the home life of Isaac; there are some very commendable features, but there are also some very questionable traits about Abraham's son.

A childless home: Possibly we have noticed among our acquaintances the effect of a childless home. Such a home lacks a peculiar vivacity and cheerfulness which permeate the family where there are little children.

This is not the only reason why Hebrew families regret deeply a childless marriage. It is the hope of every loyal Hebrew wife that she may be the mother of the long-looked-for Messiah.

As we think of Isaac and Rebekah in the Old Testament, we also think of Zacharias and Elizabeth in the New. Both these couples longed for children, and prayed to God that such a blessing might be theirs. God heard their prayers, and a boy was born to these respective praying parents, two boys which became two of the greatest men in all the annals of human history.

The expectant mother: In the case of Elizabeth, there were certain conditions which produced a deep inward joy, and which led her, under the Holy Spirit's power to prophesy. In the case of Rebekah, certain conditions produced fear and doubt and forced her to go and enquire of the Lord.

Rebekah in so doing was not only to learn something about her two boys, but also to learn something about the sovereignty of God. From subsequent events one must assume that she learned her lesson well, and while she may have used, unnecessarily, wrong methods to accomplish the divine will, it is obvious that she knew it.

To Rebekah the Lord predicted concerning the two boys, "The elder shall serve the younger." It must have been apparent to her that God intended to reverse the order of nature in the imparting of the patriarchal blessing and birthright. We cannot excuse this mother for her deception; nevertheless, we must admit that she is to be commended for accepting the will of God.

We know that centuries later the words of God to Rebekah are used by the Spirit of God to teach us the truth of election. The Prophet Malachi records the words of the Lord, "Yet ye say, wherein hast Thou loved us? Was not Esau Jacob's brother? saith the Lord: yet I loved Jacob. And I hated Esau" (Mal. 1:2-3). In dealing with

the profound subject of sovereign election, the Apostle Paul quotes the very message of God to Rebekah as a proof of God's supreme choice: "And not only this; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac; (For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of Him that calleth;) It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger" (Rom. 9:10-12).

The family: It is impossible to consider Isaac's family life to be a completely happy one. There evidently was a vivid contrast between the parents and also between the two brothers.

When the twins were born, they were named after their different appearances. Esau received his name because he was red-haired and shaggy; Jacob received his because he caught his brother by the heel, a heelholder or supplanter.

Isaac, naturally quiet and easygoing, was attracted by the more reckless and adventurous Esau; whereas, ambitious, active Rebekah found her delight in the clever, plain tent dweller (home-loving) Jacob. We have a proverb, "Opposite poles attract," such apparently was the case here.

* * *

It is strange we trust each other, only doubt our Lord;
Take the word of fellow mortals, yet distrust His word.
Oh, what wondrous, joyous light would shine throughout our days,
If we always would remember, He means just whate'er He says!

* * *

“If the Lord will” we will journey; “If the Lord will,” we will stay; Oh, for grace at every turning, “If the Lord will” still to say.

The Book of Genesis --Part 47

The Book of Genesis

Part 47

James Gunn

Our last study closed with a few observations about the family of Isaac, and we decided at that time to examine the characters of the two brothers, Esau and Jacob. Before doing so, it seems necessary that we further look into the conduct of the parents.

The Parents

Actions which appear as merely incidental, occasionally are very significant for they reveal traits of character. The throwing of a shoe at a small puppy to hear it whine in fear, may indicate a hard and cruel attitude to human suffering. Discourtesy to others may be an expression of an exaggerated opinion of one's own importance.

In the case of Isaac, there are several minor actions which are self-revealing.

His faith in God: When God revealed Himself to Jacob in the vision of the ladder set up on earth, the top of which reached to heaven, He spoke saying "I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac" (Gen. 28:10-15). Many centuries later the Lord Jesus confused the Sadducees with His Statement, "As touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living" (Matt. 22:31-32). A very important act of faith in the life of

Isaac is recorded in the New Testament, “By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come” (Heb. 11:20).

There is no doubt that Isaac was a sincere believer, and that his faith was acknowledged by the Lord. Nevertheless, the lesson to be learned from his biography is that there may be life in the soul even when there is weakness in the personality.

His reliance upon the Lord: This is seen in the fact that he prayed for Rebekah that she might bear children. Whatever were his weaknesses, he did seek the Lord occasionally. It may rather have been that his circumstances drove him to the Lord than any desire on his part for a deeper communion with God. We read two or three times that the Lord appeared unto Isaac and blessed him, but these apparently were because of God’s covenant with his father Abraham.

His self-indulgence: “Isaac loved Esau because he did eat of his venison.” It was this very gratification of his own appetite and pleasure that occasioned the deceit on the part of Rebekah and Jacob (Chapter 27).

His deception: The failure of Abraham was repeated in his son. Isaac, like his father, had a beautiful wife, and like his father, he lied about her. He lied to the men of Gerar, saying, “She is my sister” (26:7).

His self-preservation: To save himself from hurt and possible death, Isaac exposed his wife to moral ruin (26:9-11). Self was of supreme importance to Isaac.

His pessimism: Twenty years and more before his death Isaac said, “I know not the day of my death” (27:2). Esau apparently thought likewise that his father would not

live very long. He said, just about the same time, “The days of mourning for my father are at hand” (27:41). Isaac may have been a delicate individual; nevertheless, his outlook on life must have been, to say the least, melancholy. How different to Moses (Deut. 34:7) or Caleb (Josh. 14:11)!

His indolence: Isaac did not seem ready to expend either time or thought to investigate matters; he failed to face up to an adverse situation. When Rebekah said, “If Jacob take a wife of the daughters of Heth, such as these which are of the daughters of the land, what good shall my life to me?” (27:46) Isaac, without any investigation as to Rebekah’s veiled motive, immediately sent Jacob away. He invariably took the course of least resistance.

We are fully aware that it was God’s purpose in maintaining the purity of the Messianic line not to have Jacob marry among the heathen of the land, but his separation from the children of Heth and his subsequent marriage to Rachel and Leah were the result of divine providence rather than strength of character in Isaac.

There was a lack of strong character in Isaac. He was similar to many another son of a godly father; he was deficient in practical spiritual qualities.

Let us also look at his wife Rebekah. While she partook of many of the faults of her husband, actually she was a contrast to him. If Isaac deceived the men of Gerar, she deceived him. If he favoured Esau, she favoured Jacob. If he risked her to moral ruin, she risked herself apparently without protest.

Notwithstanding these blemishes of character, in many other respects Rebekah was an opposite to Isaac, she was a woman of conviction and competence. Rebekah

was a thinker and a schemer. She conceived the idea through which the patriarchal blessing was obtained by her favourite. She thought out the way by which Jacob escaped from the wrath of Esau. Moreover, she planned where best to send Jacob in search of a wife.

She was active and ready to do things in a hurry. This is very evident in the plan and preparation of the meal which resulted in Isaac's blessing Jacob (Chapter 27).

Rebekah firmly believed that the elder (Esau) would serve the younger (Jacob), and this persuasion became within her an obsession. Her forceful personality imposed itself upon everyone who might obstruct the fulfilment of this divine prediction. Instead of leaving the accomplishment of His will to God, she interposed her own will and engaged in her own efforts. She may not have failed in the knowledge and understanding of the divine will, but she failed in that she did not make her will subservient to the will of God.

Of these two very different parents were the two brothers born at whom we must now look.

The Twins

Inasmuch as Esua is the elder, we shall examine first the traits of character in him. The Word of God uses Esau as the picture of him who has failed of the grace of God, of him who is a troubler and defiler of others (Heb. 12:15). It is extremely sad to realize that such a man as Esau was born and raised in a home where God was believed and in a measure honoured. Truly, grace may run in the ancestral line, but it is not transmitted in the blood.

His disrespect: It would appear that Esau chose Mahalah as a wife in order to further provoke and annoy

his parents; he certainly disregarded their wishes. Of course, we must admit that this attitude of his toward his parents could have resulted from the favouritism of his mother for Jacob, and from the fact that both Rebekah and Jacob had taken advantage of his weakness and absence. The attitude of parents produces either good or evil reactions in their children. If within the family circle there had been imposed upon them a feeling of inferiority, the natural reaction in them would be that of self-assertion. How careful parents should be!

His morals: It is obvious that Esau's ethics were not good. We read, "Lest there be any fornicator … as Esau " (Heb. 12:16). His standards in morals were low, and for this as well as for other things, he is condemned in the Word of God.

His profanity: He is not called profane because of his language, but because of his conduct. "Esau, … for one morsel of meat sold his birthright" (Heb. 12:16). Very definitely he placed little value upon spiritual things. Esau at heart was a materialist who always temporized.

His occupation: Esau is not condemned because he was a hunter (Gen. 27:3), but in this he was a contrast to his brother, who was a shepherd (Gen. 31:38-40). These two vocations are indicative of the two men. A hunter preys upon the animal, he hunts for self-gratification. A shepherd cares for the animal, and does so by self-sacrificing labour.

His changeableness: Esau was impetuous. He frequently acted in rashness and repented in leisure. We read about him that "after, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with

tears" (Heb. 12:17). He had changed in his esteem of the patriarchal birthright, and he attempted persuasively to change his father's mind, but his efforts were futile. God is over all, and accomplished His own purposes through Isaac. The man who generally took the line of least resistance, under divine influence became firmly fixed in this circumstance.

We must leave this sketch of Esau's habits and tendencies and make a brief survey of Jacob's life and character. Without engaging in too intensive a study, we notice that he was The object of divine love: The Word of God is quite implicit in this regard, "Was not Esau Jacob's brother? saith the Lord: Yet I loved Jacob" (Mal. 1:2). Rebekah from the birth of the two brothers realized God's mind upon the matter of His preference for the one over the other.

The object of His mother's favour: In certain respects this did not result in peace and quietness within the family. Her attitude may have developed because of her understanding of the will of God; nevertheless, events proved that it was wrong. Moreover, events further proved that God in His government and grace had to over-rule the damage done by Rebekah in her zeal for Jacob's welfare and progress (Gen. 32:1-23).

The object of his brother's hatred: "Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing wherewith his father blessed him; and Esau said in his heart, The days of mourning for my father are at hand; then will I slay my brother Jacob" (Gen. 27:41). Esau was of the spirit of Cain. God's love and favour upon Jacob filled Esau's heart with jealousy.

The Book of Genesis --Part 48

The Book of Genesis

Part 48

James Gunn

Before pursuing our studies in the life of Isaac, we must finish our brief examination into the characters of Esau and Jacob. Later we shall return to investigate the details of the life of Jacob. In the meantime, notice:

He was deceptive: There was little deception in the purchase of the birthright, it was open barter; but in the matter of the patriarchal blessing Jacob became notoriously deceptive. Throughout life it seems as if he reaped the harvest of his own sowing. Laban beguiled him on his wedding day, and on ten occasions changed his wages (Gen. 31:41). Jacob's life is a proof that "whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap" (Gal. 6:7).

He was loving: if the fraud committed by Jacob has become proverbial, similarly, his love for Rachel has become famous, "Jacob loved Rachel; … And Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her" (Gen. 29:20).

He was loyal: Only a loyal and responsible person would have remained so long with Laban. Amidst all his failures there is readily detected in Jacob an admirable fidelity to others. What a rare quality today! A constant fidelity to friends frequently compensates for the lack of other qualities in personality.

He was a learner: We shall see as we persue our study of Jacob that through divine discipline in the school of experience, Jacob was being taught of God. That he learned some of his lessons well seems obvious for he is found among the heroes of faith mentioned in the New Testament, “By faith Jacob, when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph: and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff” (Heb. 11:21). He who in early life was a deceiver, at its close was a disciple. He who worried during his prime, worshipped in his decline. He who plotted schemes for selfish purposes, closed his days presenting spiritual sacrifices to God’s praise.

In the Community

We have considered Isaac’s life in his sorrow and in his home. We must now consider his behaviour in the community.

There are three different experiences recorded as taking place in the different communities in which the patriarch resided. Let us investigate these experiences separately.

The trial: “There was a famine in the land, beside the first famine that was in the days of Abraham.” This, no doubt, was a test of faith. How frequently the traits and tendencies of a father are reproduced in a son! The power of an example is immeasurable! We read about Abraham, “There was a famine in the land: and Abram went down into Egypt to sojourn there” (Gen. 12:10). It was during this period in Egypt that Abraham obtained Hagar, the young woman whose presence in his home resulted in much grief.

One cannot believe that Isaac was totally ignorant of Abraham's departure from the land under the circumstances of a famine and its resulting sorrow. In spite of his probable understanding of this episode in his father's life, the first intention of Isaac, under the same circumstance, was to follow his father's example and go down into Egypt for help.

James declares, "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life" (Jas. 1:12). Peter adds to this a word of encouragement, "That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 1:7).

The promise: How wonderful are the interventions of divine grace! At this critical point, we read, "The Lord appeared unto him, and said, Go not down into Egypt; dwell in the land which I shall tell thee of: Sojourn this land (Gerar), and I will be with thee." Moreover, at this time God confirmed to Isaac the covenant that He made with his father Abraham, saying, "I will perform the oath which I sware unto Abraham thy father."

If Isaac, without seeking counsel from God, had started out for Egypt, walking by sight, in the grace of His heart the Lord set before him the pathway of faith. Isaac intended to go to Egypt in search of bread; God stopped him on the way and gave him a covenant. He sought contentment for the natural man; God gave him satisfaction for the spiritual man.

The failure: At Gerar, the father's weaknesses are reproduced in the son. Isaac, because of his beautiful wife, even as was Abraham, is filled with the dread of

the corrupt men of the place. To save himself from a feared violent death, he tells a deliberate lie and exposes his wife to grave moral danger. His degraded expediency which according to verse eight must have been for “a long time,” resulted in a sharp rebuke from the heathen Abimelch, who apparently was a man of high moral integrity. There is nothing sadder than that a child of God be rebuked for his sin by a man of the world.

In spite of the gracious blessing of the Lord upon him, we could not conclude that Isaac’s sojourn in Gerar was a spiritual success.

The Book of Genesis --Part 49

The Book of Genesis

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James Gunn

Peace, the way to increase—Chapter 26: 12-24.

The Word of God enjoins upon believers that they should follow peace with all men (Heb. 12:14), and that they should follow after the things which make for peace (Rom. 14:19). Occasionally, this Christian attitude is misunderstood, and is considered an evidence of weakness.

In the life of Isaac we have discovered the element of weakness. Our last study, Isaac in the community, furnished us with full proof of this. Nevertheless, one would hesitate to call him weak under the circumstances described in this passage. Instead, we would consider him meek. Moses is called the meekest man, but he certainly was not a weak man, nor was Isaac on this occasion.

From the incidents recorded here, we learn that the way of peace leads to sure increase. The name “Rehoboth” means enlargement. The advancement pictured in this word was the sequel to meekness and self-sacrifice.

The Recovery of Isaac

From the whole tenor of Scripture in its treatment of sin in a believer, one could gather that Isaac had been forgiven his deceptive practice at Gerar. In the light of divine holiness and in the light of the true character of

sin. it must be assumed that Isaac had experienced dealings with God about his behaviour. “He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy” (Prov. 28:13).

The Greatness of Isaac

We read with pleasure of the increase of Isaac’s wealth: “Jehovah blessed him. And the man became great, and he became continually greater” (Vv. 12-13, J.N.D.).

During his sojourn in Gerar, he engaged in both pastoral and agricultural activities. The vast plains surrounding the city enabled him to increase his flocks, and the great harvest provided food for his large household. All this, while representing much administrative ability, proved that the blessing of the Lord was upon him.

His wealth, of course, was material, a wealth of herds, flocks, and servants, but it was the indication of God’s favour. Generally, such blessing was the outcome of a proper attitude toward God. Years later the Lord said to Israel, “Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse: A blessing if ye obey the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you this day” (Deut. 11:26-27). The experience of this saint of the Old Testament is a proof. “The blessings of the Lord, it maketh rich, and He addeth no sorrow with it” (Prov. 10:22).

The Enemies of Isaac

We know that envy is one of the works of the flesh (Gal. 5:21). It arises within the depravity of human nature. Like a two-edged dagger it stabs in both directions. We read, “A sound heart is the life of the flesh; but envy the

rottenness of the bones" (Prov. 14:30). How detrimental to one's personality is the evil of envy! Again we read, "Wrath is cruel, and anger is outrageous; but who is able to stand before envy?" (Prov. 27:4). The example of Isaac should be followed, he withdrew from before envy, and God blessed him.

How delightful to learn from Paul's "Psalm of Love" (I Cor. 13) that love … envieth not!

In ancient times large uninhabited areas were considered "God's lands," and whoever dug wells and procured water became the proprietor of the parcel of land which he thus had made cultivable. To stop up a well was an encroachment upon territorial rights. It must therefore have been difficult for Isaac to surrender one well after another to these envious neighbours.

Two of the wells over which trouble arose were named by Isaac, Esek (quarrel) and Sitnah (strife). He would have nothing to do with either. From such places he wisely withdrew himself. His actions remind us of the words of James, "Where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated" (Jas. 3:16-17).

The name of the third well seems to intimate a certain satisfaction in success, "Rehoboth" which means "broadways or increases." Isaac now had undisputed room in the land. This he accepted temporarily although he may have resided here for several years.

The Claims of Isaac

"And he went up from thence to Beer-Sheba. And the Lord appeared unto him the same night."

By this move, Isaac claims the right of inheritance, and inheritance from God through Abraham. Beer-Sheba was Abraham's possession, his favourite home. This was an act of courage and faith. Isaac reveals true strength of character here. While ready in meekness to move from place to place in order to avoid open hostility, in strength he returns to Beer-Sheba, the possession of his father, a comparatively short distance from Gerar. Immediately, as a reward for his action and as an assurance of his safety, Jehovah appeared to him.

We are reminded of Paul's words to the Philippians, "Let your moderation ("gentleness" or "yieldingness") be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand" (Phil. 4:5). The closing sentence of this verse could mean, "The Lord is near." Isaac proved this as a blessed reality.

Isaac apparently did not travel far although his was a long life. There are only a few details in his biography, and several of these were discredits to him. Notwithstanding these, in an attempt to view his entire time, one is disposed to consider him a quiet, industrious type who found pleasure in meditation. Moreover, he preferred peace to strife, even to the point of yielding personal rights. Occasionally, in his actions there is full proof of an admirable strength of character.

* * *

Believer, art thou tempted now to doubt His love? Are His footsteps lost amid the night shadows through which He is conducting thee? Remember He had His eye upon thee before the birth of time; yea, from all eternity. What appears to thee now as some capricious exercise of His power and sovereignty, is the determination and decree of "everlasting love." "I have loved thee," He seems to

say, “suffering one, into this affliction; I will love thee through it; and when My designs regarding thee are completed, I will show thee that the love which is from everlasting, is to everlasting!!”

* * *

It is indeed humiliating that we require so many stripes to force us to God, when there is so much more than enough in Him to draw us to Himself and to keep us with Himself forever!

The Book of Genesis --Part 50

The Book of Genesis

Part 50

James Gunn

Study Portion: Chapter 26:23-33

In our more recent studies we have watched the behaviour of Isaac in his home and in the community. In these places there were acts which we approved and acts which we condemned.

One of the most commendable features of Isaac's character that we have discovered is his spirit of peace, his willingness to yield to the wishes and impositions of others for the sake of peace.

While this is most admirable, one wonders whether or not he would have yielded so much had he been actually conscious of being in the Lord's path. There are certain expressions in this portion, which dealing with his history, lead to the conclusion that his going to Gerar was a plan of his own.

Let us examine this passage in detail.

The Return

"And he (Isaac) went up from thence (Gerar) to Beersheba." No matter how sympathetically we view Isaac's sojourn in Gerar, there is a doubt, as already suggested, as to whether or not he should have gone to that city of the Philistines. He did obey God in not going farther away, in not going down into Egypt, but apparently without any word from the Lord, he went

down to Gerar. God, nevertheless, blessed him in a material manner, but there seems to have been a distance in spirit between the Lord and Isaac. This we do know, his return to the vicinity of his former dwelling place, brought an expression of divine approval.

In the life of a believer, there can be wanderings of heart although there may be no apparent persistent wanderings of ways. The life may be relatively correct, but the heart cold and unresponsive. It is possible to be externally at peace; yet, not to be enjoying intimate fellowship with God.

The Revelation

"And the Lord appeared unto him the same night." How promptly God acts! "The same night"! This movement in the right direction brought immediately a fresh revelation of Jehovah to Isaac. It is ever thus in spiritual experiences. Even if the worst should happen and God be forced, because of sin and departure, to chastise His people, His promise is precious and true, "But if from thence thou shalt seek the Lord thy God, thou shalt find Him, if thou seek Him with all thy heart and with all thy soul" (Deut. 4:29).

Isaac's experiences were in many respects similar to those of his father Abraham. There was not the constant change in those early times that we find today. Life in general was quite stereotyped in those early centuries of human history. In certain respects, notwithstanding, Isaac was very different from Abraham. Isaac's life was more settled; his years of wandering were few, only from eight to ten. After those years he returned to his former place of abode. Abraham was a pilgrim and a stranger from the time he was called out of Ur of the Chaldees.

This difference should also be noted, Abraham was a stronger character than Isaac. He dug wells and no one dared to take them from him. In fact, in this very matter, he reproved Abimelech. Isaac in contrast was driven by the enemy from well to well until the enemy, the Philistines, felt that they had room enough for themselves. Isaac accepted, even in the land that God had promised him, what others had left.

After Isaac's return and the revelation of God to him, we read, "And he builded an altar there, and called upon the name of the Lord, and pitched his tent there, and there Isaac's servants digged a well." There was room found here, so immediately he consolidated his claims to the territory. His spiritual life was properly regulated, he raised an altar to the Lord. His domestic life was enjoyed, he pitched a tent. Furthermore, his industrial life found better expression, his servants digged a well which was not disputed.

The Ratification

"And the Lord … said, I am the God of Abraham thy father: fear not, for I am with thee, and will bless thee, and multiply thy seed for My servant Abraham's sake."

Here Jehovah, the covenant-keeping God, confirms to Isaac the covenant made to his father Abraham.

"Then Abimelech went to him from Gerar, and Ahuzzeth one of his friends (probably his prime minister), and Phichol the chief captain of his army … And they said, … Let there be now an oath betwixt us, even betwixt us and thee, and let us make a covenant with thee; That thou wilt do us no hurt, … And they rose up betimes in

the morning, and sware one to another: and Isaac sent them away, and they departed from him in peace."

It should be understood that the appellation Abimelech (meaning royal father) was probably a title given to royalty and was similar to the title Pharoah given to the Egyptian kings. Consequently, the Abimelech that deals with Isaac is in all probability a different person to the one who dealt with Abraham in chapter 20.

First, we read, "The Philistines envied him." We then read, "The herdmen of Gerar did strive with Isaac's herdmen, … And he called the name of the well Esek (strife): because they strove with him" (Vv. 14 and 20).

God's preservation and blessing had increased Isaac's power and prestige until Abimelech said unto him, "Thou art mightier than we" (V. 16).

It is obvious that Isaac's strength and influence disturbed the authorities at Gerar, and led them into a peace-pact with the Patriarch.

There, on the exact spot where Abraham his father had entered into an oath, Isaac did likewise.

The Book of Genesis --Part 51

The Book of Genesis

Part 51

James Gunn

Family Favours and Frauds

Chapter 27:1-40

There is a great change in Isaac and Rebekah since the time of their marriage. On that occasion we read, “And Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah’s tent, and took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her: and Isaac was comforted after his mother’s death” (Gen. 24: 67). Domestic disagreement has developed, and the home is torn by paternal and maternal partialities. How unfortunate that the boys which God had given them should become the cause of discord between Isaac and Rebekah!

Obviously there is more in connection with this story of deception than appears on the surface. Let us submit the entire matter to careful scrutiny.

The Will of God

It was an extremely happy day when in the childless home of Isaac the twins were born. Isaac had in-treated the Lord for his wife, because she was barren (Gen. 25:21), and God had blessed the household with two boys.

Shortly before the babies were born, Rebekah enquired of the Lord about them, and received the reply, “Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall

be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger" (Gen. 25:23). When the boys were born, Esau was the elder and Jacob the younger. Consequently, in the natural course of events the birthright and the patriarchal blessing both belonged to Esau, but God had prophesied otherwise. To this divine predetermination the Holy Spirit further bares record, "When Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac; … It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated" (Rom. 9:10-13).

From before they were born, the will of God concerning the boys was known by the parents. When there was yet no ground for making any difference, God had distinguished between them. The ordinary basis upon which either could be preferred was that of priority of birth, but this was disregarded by the Lord; Esau was rejected and Jacob made heir of the Abrahamic promises.

The Will of Man

One wonders why Isaac, in possession of such a knowledge of God's purposes, should propose to bless Esau. It is impossible to acquit Jacob of deception and intrigue; nevertheless, it is clear that, while on the one hand God had spoken, on the other, Esau had shown complete indifference to spiritual values; moreover, he had forfeited his claim to the blessing by marrying Canaanitish women. How, then, Isaac could disregard the Word of God and the evil tendencies of Esau and make preparation to bless him whom God had not blessed, is a matter that baffles the student.

This domestic conflict within the ancient household arose from carnal zeal, the father attempting to follow the course of nature, and the mother engaging in evil that good might come, the blessing upon her favourite son.

From that day until now similar conflicts have disrupted many a home and many a Christian congregation. The flesh is as ready to carry out the Word of God in its own way as it is to directly thwart the will of God. “That which is born of the flesh is flesh” (John 3:6). “He that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption” (Gal. 6:8).

Isaac would be approximately 135 years of age at the time referred to in this account, and, no doubt, the condition of his eyes was the result of old age. Furthermore, ophthalmia, an inflamation of the eyes, was very common in the East. His impaired vision made him, therefore, the more susceptible to the deception.

The Wiles of the Flesh

We are forced to question the sincerity of Isaac’s statement, “Behold now, I am old, I know not the day of my death,” for he lived at least another 40 years (Gen. 35:27-29). There lurks the suspicion that Isaac, at long last, to gratify himself asserted his own will and determined to honour his ill-deserving firstborn. He would feast himself, and then favour his son; therefore, he instructed Esau, “Make me savoury meat, such as I love, and bring it to me, that I may eat; that my soul may bless thee before I die” (Gen. 27:4).

“God is not a man that He should lie, nor a son of man that He should repent” (1 Sam. 15:29). The Lord would

have to interfere in this matter for Esau was not His choice, the heir of God's promises. The purposes of God are yea and amen. The whole matter would have resolved itself properly according to the word of prophecy had Rebekah entrusted it to the Lord. Alas, how dark are the ways of unbelief! How rash the acts of impatience!

The Wickedness of Duplicity

Jacob, we admit, manifested a keener sense of spiritual values than Esau and had a deeper desire to walk in the traditional ways of his predecessors, but his means of securing the blessing from his father cannot be justified. We might have challenged him, "Shall we do evil that good may come?" "Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?" "Does the end really justify the means?"

The mother's scheme: After overhearing the suggestion of Isaac to Esau, and knowing that considerable time would be necessary for the hunting and the preparing of the savoury dish, she conceived a plot devoid of all rectitude and honesty. With Jacob's help she would prepare the savoury meal. She would take Esau's best clothes, not those he used in hunting, and in order that the smell of the great out-of-doors appeal to Isaac, she would probably lay them among the herbs that grew near-by. After the skin of the kid had been put on the exposed parts of Jacob's body, she would place on him the garments of Esau. Rebekah's plot was to deceive her husband by feeling, fragrance, and food. In the fraudulent act her future meant nothing to her, that of her son was paramount. She was willing to assume all loss if only he could secure the blessing. Propriety and honesty were set aside, and her behaviour became most

unethical. Both she and her son, Jacob, were later to learn that “God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” (Gal. 6:7). Years of suffering and separation formed part of the carnal sowing.

The son’s subtlety: There was only one deterrent in Jacob’s heart, fear, the fear of being discovered. The wickedness of the whole plan did not seem to disturb his conscience. In him there does not appear any revulsion to the crafty duplicity of the entire idea.

The Book of Genesis --Part 52

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Part 52

James Gunn

The Stolen Blessing — Chapter 27:18-40

We cannot approve the stealth with which Rebekah and Jacob acted, in spite of what has been revealed as to Isaac's attitude in this matter. We sympathize with a man with greatly impaired vision being made the victim of such a plot.

Let us study more deeply the reaction in the case, first, of Isaac, and, then of Esau.

Isaac

Isaac's suspicion (Vv. 18-22): It is a mistake to consider Isaac, as some of us have done for years, a decrepit old man in need of help to sit up in bed. Obviously Jacob did not offer such assistance for he did not go near until asked to do so. Moreover, when told, "Arise, I pray thee, sit and eat of my venison" (J.N.D.), he did just that.

Since Jacob and Esau were twins there may have been some similarity in the sound and tone of their voices. Had this not been, we would have expected Rebekah to attempt deception in the accent. Notwithstanding, there was something about the voice of Jacob that aroused suspicion in the mind of Isaac. Furthermore, Jacob's reply to Isaac's question, "How is it that thou hast found it so quickly, my son?" may have deepened this

suspicion. Esau was not the type of man to make references to God and His help.

Deprived of his vision, Isaac relied upon the sense of feeling, and in this he was deceived, although some suspicion seemed to linger, “The voice is the voice of Jacob (Isaac, in spite of the similarity to Esau’s voice had detected some peculiarities in Jacob’s), but the hands are the hands of Esau.”

Surely, the lesson to be learned from this part of the story is when in doubt do not act, wait.

Isaac’s blessing (Vv. 26-29): Isaac first bids Jacob to “come near now, and kiss me.” It is understood that this kiss was in preparation for the patriarchal blessing, and was considered solemn and sacred. The deception of Jacob in this intimacy brings to mind the kiss of Judas centuries later.

The pastures of Palestine are unusually fragrant because of the great abundance of aromatic herbs. The scent of these overcame completely the suspicion lurking in Isaac’s mind and he proceeded to bless his son. Did he feel at last the strength of the human will? Did a sense of satisfaction possess him in the accomplishment of his own purpose? Poor Isaac!

Many years later in blessing the two sons of Joseph, Jacob was most careful lest human interference mar the blessing he had to pronounce upon them (Gen. 48:14-20). It may have been that he recalled the circumstances of his father’s giving of the patriarchal blessing to him.

The blessing of Isaac was; first, a wish for divine blessing, “God give thee”; second, for material wealth,

“The dew of heaven and the fatness of the earth”; third, for national superiority, “Let people serve thee, and nations bow down to thee”; in fourth place, for racial pre-eminence, “Let thy mother’s sons bow to thee.” This latter part of the blessing embraced all the nations which have sprung from Abraham. Finally, this blessing was traditional; it is the same in part as the blessing of God upon Abraham (Gen. 12:3), but does not bestow the spiritual aspect of Abraham’s, “In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.” Later, Jacob was to receive this far more extensive blessing directly from the Lord, and in that blessing this spiritual element and others were promised (Gen. 28:13-15).

Isaac’s surprise (Vv. 30-33): Just as Jacob left Isaac’s presence, Esau entered. Then Isaac discovered the deception and trembled exceedingly. Was this trembling an expression of anger? One cannot think so. It was rather a trembling from shock and weakness. Isaac had thought his will supreme and his plan successful. He thought that he had blessed his firstborn in spite of God’s assertion, “The elder shall serve the younger.” The impact of disillusion caused him to shake. The entire matter was a shock to a self-contented man.

Isaac’s steadfastness (V. 33): There is one thing certain, the shock of being deceived caused Isaac to realize that the Supreme Mind directed the affairs of life, and that it was impossible for him to thwart divine determination. To this fact he now submitted, and from it refused to deviate, declaring, “I … have blessed him; yea, and he shall be blessed.” This is the pivotal point in the entire story; so fixed was Isaac’s intention that instead of cursing Jacob, as that son at first feared, he left the blessing.

We must now direct our attention to

Esau

There was deep remorse in the heart of Esau, but not an expression of true repentance for his own careless act of folly. In fact, he merely blames Jacob, “Is not he rightly named Jacob? for he hath supplanted me these two times.”

With tears and pleadings he sought to change Isaac’s mind, but all to no avail. The Spirit of God records, “Afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears” (Heb. 12:17).

The meaning here becomes clearer if the clause, “for he found no place of repentance,” is placed with brackets. It was the blessing of Isaac he sought with tears, but in this matter he could not change his father’s mind; there was no repentance in Isaac’s heart.

Esau becomes the example of the husbandry of life, “Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” (Gal. 6:7). He sowed carnal gratification and reaped the full harvest.

Since Esau found no repentance in the heart of his father, he allowed revenge to fill his own heart: “Esau said in his heart, The days of mourning for my father are at hand; then will I slay my brother Jacob.” His behaviour was similar to that of Cain, and even worse, for he made no secret of his evil purpose. In this he added sin to sin.

Isaac’s unreasonable partiality toward Esau resulted partly from his fondness for venison. He apparently ignored Esau’s action in bringing into the family the

heathen “daughters of Heth.” Notwithstanding this weakness of true spiritual character, there is no justification for the evil committed by Jacob and his mother. Jacob, as did Esau, reaped a harvest from his own sowing. For his deception, he in turn was deceived again and again. The sins of youth frequently follow throughout the years of maturity.

* * *

How poor are they that have no patience. — Shakespeare.

The Book of Genesis --Part 53

The Book of Genesis

Part 53

James Gunn

The Chosen Chastened

Chapter 27:41-46

In our previous study we considered the details of the stealing of the blessing, and saw something of the stealth with which Rebekah and Jacob accomplished their own plans. This particular study will help us to differentiate between divine grace and divine government. In grace God willingly forgives, but, in government He has to discipline.

The Epistle to the Hebrews distinguishes between two brothers, Jacob and Esau. Jacob is pictured as a man of faith (Heb. 11:21); whereas Esau is called a profane person (Heb. 12:16).

The Apostle Paul in writing to the Corinthians makes mention of natural, carnal, and spiritual men (1 Cor. 2:14-3:3). Jacob could not be classified as a natural man, but he certainly was not spiritual. God acknowledges His relationship to Jacob and repeatedly manifests Himself as “the God of Jacob.” This divine title reminds us that God is longsuffering and gracious in the training of His children.

From the life of Jacob we are to learn that “whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth” (Heb. 12:6). The love of God toward

His child not only expresses itself in pity, but also in training.

The Problem

How frequently our own conduct results in a conflict for which we do not possess sufficient courage, a conflict from which we would readily flee! Such was the case with Jacob at this time. He sowed falsehood and reaped fear; he sowed deception and reaped distress. Jacob's dread arose from two factors.

Revenge: Rebekah said to Jacob, "My son obey my voice; and arise, flee thou … until thy brother's anger turn away from thee, and he forget that which thou hast done to him" (vv. 43-45). Rebekah and Jacob both were afraid of reprisals by Esau.

Jealousy: There was another matter which caused Esau to hate Jacob. "Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing wherewith his father blessed him" (v. 41). Isaac's blessing upon Jacob gave him a place of supremacy which Esau must have resented, and of which it would seem, he was, jealous. The blessing was pronounced, "God give thee … Let people serve thee, and nations bow down to thee: be lord over thy brethren, and let thy mother's sons bow down to thee." How inferior Esau, Isaac's firstborn, must have felt! The great injustice of which Jacob had been guilty resulted in great indignation in Esau. That God intended to give the blessing to Jacob is obvious. How He would have done so, we do not know; but the manner in which Jacob possessed it was wrong, and for that wrong he suffered. Mr. Darby remarks that God responded to his faith, but chastened his evil, "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Gal. 6:7). The exalted position afforded

Jacob by the patriarchal blessing produced envy in Esau's mind, and "jealousy is cruel as the grave" (S. of S. 8:6).

The Proposal

Rebekah, more than Isaac, appreciated the mind of God about the two boys. She understood what God intended when He said, "The elder shall serve the younger." Her mistake was the attempt to execute God's mind in the energy of the flesh. Since in carnality she had resorted to human expediency, in order to save Jacob she again had to engage in further contrivance.

She instructed Jacob, "Arise, flee thou to Laban my brother to Haran; and tarry with him a few days, until thy brother's fury turn away; … then I will send, and fetch thee from thence: why should I be deprived also of you both in one day?" (vv. 43-45). The astute mind of Rebekah was ready with a proposal.

The Plan

The plan was made to appear very plausible; in fact, made to appear as complying with divine principles.

Rebekah in all probability recalled Abraham's decision in regard to her own marriage to Isaac: "Abraham said unto his eldest servant of his house, … I will make thee swear by the Lord,.. thou shalt not take a wife unto my son of the daughters of the Canaanites among whom I dwell: …go unto my country, and to my kindred, and take a wife unto my son Isaac" (Gen. 24:3-4).

In conveying her plan to Isaac, Rebekah used a means that would gain his sympathetic support. Actually she evaded the main issue. There was pretence in her

scheme to this extent, under the pressure of circumstances the primary objective was the escape of Jacob from Esau's, anger, other considerations were of less importance.

Occasionally, this same method is used in the work of the Lord. In Paul's day there were certain who preached the gospel, and nothing could be more important, yet, we read, "Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; … not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds" (Phil. 1:15-16).

The wrong of pretending to carry out the ways of the Lord when really one is indulging in his own ways is subterfuge that will be fully exposed at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

The Protest

God's displeasure over our misconduct may not show itself immediately. Peter states that He is "longsuffering to usward" (I Pet. 3:9). Although infinite in patience, we know "whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth" (Heb. 12:6).

Through the circumstances of life God disciplined Jacob, and that for his profit, that he might partake of holiness. Jacob deceived his father; years later he admitted that he had been "beguiled" on his wedding day (Gen. 29:25), and he complained that his father-in-law had deceived him and changed his wages ten times (Gen. 31:7). That he expected to be away from home for only a very temporary period seems clear from our passage (v. 44), but he was gone for over twenty years (Gen. 31:38 and 41). He had shrewdly bartered with Esau and had thus taken from him his birthright (Gen. 25:29-34). In

Laban he found a man more shrewd than he, to that man he had to say, “Except the God of my father, the God of Abraham, and the fear of Isaac, had been with me, surely thou hadst sent me away now empty” (Gen. 31:42).

Jacob was to await word from his mother as to his return home, but he and his mother apparently never did meet again.

God used the circumstances of life to both correct and train Jacob whom He loved. In this way, as well as through His holy Word, He speaks to His children. “Despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him” (Heb. 12:5).

The Book of Genesis --Part 54

The Book of Genesis

Part 54

James Gunn

The Open Heavens

Chapter 28:10 - 22

It is our privilege to examine one of the best known details of Jacob’s long life. This particular incident has provided encouragement and strength to saints in all ages, and it has provided a basis for a ministry of instruction and comfort.

This portion of the Book of Genesis describes how Jacob carried out the plan devised by his mother. In spite of what had transpired in the home and the grievances which had developed, there must have been considerable sorrow in the hour of parting.

His Departure

The pen of another has well pictured the hour of farewell. “He crossed, after looking back to that gleaming little spot, so well marked by the clustering trees, the wide and rolling tableland of Beer Sheba, all ablaze with red anemone, and saw before him at last the dreary hills that form part of the ridge which is the backbone of Palestine” (Brooks).

Frequently such changes occur in life, some made by ourselves, some caused by the sins of others, and all, without doubt, permitted of the Lord as means of child-training within His household.

In accepting these changes in life, as in this paragraph, what lies behind looks best and pulls at the heart strings with an almost irresistible force. Furthermore, what lies ahead seems dreary and unattractive. Notwithstanding, let it be remembered that David's abrupt severance from the pleasure and the prestige of the palace home of Saul and the dreary days of wandering in the wilderness of Judah provided the discipline that prepared him to be king over all Israel.

Jacob, at the end of his eventful life, testified saying, "The God which fed (shepherded) me all my life long unto this day, The Angel which redeemed me from all evil" (Gen. 48:15-16). He acknowledged at the close of his days divine guidance and divine preservation. Divine operation was constantly working in his favour even when he was not conscious of its influence.

His Dream

Travellers inform us that the terrain surrounding Bethel resembles a stairway. It may have been that Jacob lay down on one of those natural steps on the hillside to sleep while towering above him was the great elevation, as of hill piled upon hill. What more suitable surroundings for Jacob's remarkable dream! This dream, of course, was a vision of God never to be forgotten by the Patriarch. As he lay down in an attempt to rest, his thoughts were troubled and his heart cried out. Years later he refers to this experience, saying, "I will make there an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went" (Gen. 35:3). Furthermore, many centuries later, the minor prophet Hosea in making reference to this experience at Bethel says, "God found him at

Bethel" (Hos. 12:4). What an encounter Jacob must have had with God on that occasion! The influence of this meeting with God remains with him throughout his entire life. Whatever previous contacts he may have enjoyed with God, Bethel was the beginning of days to Jacob, from that time onward he was, a different man, living a different life, with different energy, and with different assurance in his heart.

The details of this remarkable dream, an open heaven, a stairway set up on earth to reach it, angels ascending and descending upon it, all assert that access to heaven from earth was available. Could it be that angelic messengers carried the cries from, and the answers to, this burdened heart?

These very details were used by our Lord to intimate the access to heaven from earth in the glorious future day (John 1:50-51), when heaven will be seen "open", not opened occasionally. The circumstances of Jacob at Bethel seemed to pervade the thoughts of Stephen at the time of his martyrdom.

It should be added here that the word "ladder" in our King James Version is rather unfortunate for the Hebrew word definitely means a stairway.

His Discovery

When Jacob arrived at Bethel that night, he possessed no particular consciousness of God's nearness to him, but when he awoke in the morning he exclaimed, "Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not!" He sensed in a very real way, the presence of God in his own life and experiences. The circumstance was a divine revelation to his heart and that revelation made all the

difference between ignorance and knowledge. As Jacob reviewed the past, he summed it up in the words, “I knew it not,” but his new state is described in different language, “Surely the Lord is in this place.”

Not only did God make His presence real to Jacob, but upon the weary exile He pronounced His blessing. This blessing was similar to the one bestowed upon Jacob’s forefathers, Abraham and Isaac. Furthermore, it was quite different to the blessing of his father upon him as recorded in chapter 27:28-29. Through his father’s patriarchal blessing he was to become great. Said Isaac, “Let people serve thee, and nations bow down to thee: be lord over thy brethren.” Through this blessing bestowed by God at Bethel greatness and blessing were to flow through Jacob to others, “In thee and in thy seed shall all families of the earth be blessed.”

The Book of Genesis --Part 55

The Book of Genesis

Part 55

James Gunn

Bartering with God

Chapter 28:16-22

As we pursue our thoughts relative to the discoveries that Jacob made at Bethel, we see that not only did he now possess a very definite sense of the Divine Presence, but that the divine blessing upon his forefathers was now his with the added promise of constant preservation; furthermore, he discovered that Bethel was a spot of ready access to God and exclaimed, “How dreadful (remarkable) is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of Heaven.” Probably these three statements were echoes of the longings of his own heart. Under the circumstance of his solitude, he would yearn for companionship; in his weakness wish for strength; in his fear, for peace: in his errors, for forgiveness; and in his poverty, for blessing. These he realized could be found in perfection only in God. Had he known the words of the Psalmist, he might have used his language to express the desire of his heart, “As the heart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God” (Psa. 42:1).

These three statements seem to suggest: first, a divine revelation, “How dreadful is this place!” Second, they suggest a Divine Resident, “This is none other than the

house of God." Third, they also suggest, a divine reception. "This is the gate of Heaven."

Obviously, Jacob did not wish to forget this sacred place, this holy experience, because for his pillow he makes a pillar, and Luz he makes Bethel. Here Jacob raised the first of several pillars which marked the history of his wanderings. This was a pillar witnessing to the fact that God had revealed Himself to the lonely exile.

The life of Jacob should teach us the folly of planning our own course of action without taking into consideration the confusion and conflict which we may make for ourselves and others. At the same time, the biography of this particular Patriarch testifies to the grace of God. Who would have expected such a disclosure of divine forbearance and care to one whose own behaviour had banished him from his father's house? It would seem that in this inspired narrative we have exemplified the divine promise made to the nation that bears the new name of Jacob, Israel: "But now thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and He that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art Mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee" (Isa. 43:2-2).

While all this is true, we must not forget that although God deals with His children in grace and forgives them, He also deals with them in government and disciplines them.

His Determination

“And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, So that I come again to my father’s house in peace; then shall the Lord be my God: And this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God’s house: and of all that Thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto Thee.”

There is evidence that Jacob had a heart hunger for God, and that he valued this special revelation of God to him in the vision, but there appears to be some doubt in his mind as to the promise of God. This might be explained by the fact that the revelation of God to him was actually in a dream; and that consequently, he questioned the reality of the whole matter.

Even before Jacob’s day, Job made vicar his convictions regarding such divine interposition: “God speaketh once, yea twice, yet man perceiveth it not. In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumberings upon the bed; Then He openeth the ears of men, and sealeth their instruction” (Job 33:14-16).

God spoke in dreams to Joseph, Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel, Peter, Paul, and others.

In its final analysis this vow of Jacob is a selfish if not a mercenary arrangement. God was to do much for Jacob, and if He did, then Jacob would accept Him as his God, and would tithe his income to the extent of ten percent and give that to the Lord.

Let us notice what Jacob, in his bartering, expected of the Lord. First he asked for the Divine Presence, “If God will be with me.” Second, he requested divine

protection, “And will keep me in this way that I go.” Third, he wanted divine provision, “And will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on.” Fourth, to these he added divine prosperity, “So that I come again to my father’s house in peace.” What more could anyone ask in life: God’s presence, protection, provision, and prosperity! Jacob asked much of God for the little he offered in return.

In the full light of completed revelation it would be improper to thus impose conditions upon the Lord. In fact, the enjoyment of God’s presence with us is wholly dependent upon our meeting the conditions He imposes upon us: “Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty” (2 Cor. 6:17-18).

Let us notice what Jacob offered in return. “Then shall the Lord be my God,” he asserts, and follows this statement with the promise, “Of all that Thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto Thee.”

How strange the language of Jacob sounds, “Then shall the Lord be my God!” What does he imply? Is he stating that if God can meet all the yearnings of his heart, then he will embrace fully the Lord, Jehovah, as his God? Is he suggesting that if he sees the evidence then he will believe and accept God? The Lord Jesus said to Thomas, “Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed” (John 20:29). Jacob made his decision to accept God dependent upon certain visible proofs. Ruth made her decision upon faith developed under the rather adverse testimony of her mother-in-law. Poor

Naomi said to her dauthers-in-law, “It grieveth me much for your sakes that the hand of the Lord is gone out against me” (Ruth 1:13). What mingled feelings must have been stirred in Ruth as she heard of God’s action against one she loved! Notwithstanding, she insisted, saying, “Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God” (Ruth 1:6). Jacob, Thomas, and many others have attempted to walk by sight, but Ruth and an innumerable host of saints have sought to walk by faith (Heb. 11).

Let us examine the other term in Jacob’s part of the pledge. “Of all that Thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto Thee.” The Lord was to give the entire one hundred percent to Jacob, and then Jacob was to divide it between them, ninety percent for himself and ten percent for God. Jacob’s thoughts were quite adverse to the words of Christ, “Do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again” (Luke 6:35).

What a mercy for Jacob, and what a mercy for us that the Lord does not treat His people as they treat Him! God loves a cheerful giver because He is a cheerful giver.

The principles used by Jacob at Bethel are not in anywise comparable to those taught in the New Testament. He was to be the recipient of every benefit, and as such the sole owner. Furthermore, he was to have the final disposition of all he received, even of what he was to return to the Lord. In the New Testament the Christian is only the administrator, not the owner, of all that God gives to him, and this is as true in the spiritual

aspect of life as in the material. The Christian is to properly administer for God his praise, purse, and personality.

In what a vivid contrast to Jacob does Paul see the Macedonian believers! “Moreover, Brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia; How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality. For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves; Praying us with much intreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. And this they did, not as we had hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God” (2 Cor. 8:1-5).

The Book of Genesis --Part 56

The Book of Genesis

Part 56

James Gunn

Motivations in Life

Chapter 29:1-20

THere is never a dull moment for the one who indulges in the study of Jacob's biography. Quickly one scene changes to another, each being so diverse from the other. Let us follow him into new localities and relationships.

Jacob Resumes His Journey

Nothing eventful seems to have transpired in Jacob's journey from Bethel to Haran, a distance of possibly four hundred miles, but indubitably God kept His promise and was with him all the way. On his arrival in Mesopotamia, and in the district where Laban the Syrian lived, little did Jacob expect that more than twenty years should elapse before the Lord would direct that he return home again. Joy mingled with sorrow, delight marred by deception, progress effected through jealousy, and toil interspersed by trial were to characterize the years at Padanaram, but on the afternoon of his arrival he probably anticipated only the pleasure of meeting with his mother's relatives and of experiencing a period of rest and safety in their home.

How futile it is for man, especially a Christian man, to plan his life! Much better is it that he yield life and all to

the Lord. Job, who wrote probably before Jacob's birth, avers, "Man's days are determined, the number of his months are with Thee, Thou hast appointed his bounds that he cannot pass" (Job 14:5). In the school of God David had learned this lesson well, he says, "I trust in Thee, O Lord; I said, Thou art my God. My times are in Thy hand" (Psa. 31:14-15).

Jacob Arrives at Haran

What a place is the village or district well! The importance, in the community, of this centre is not understood by the residents of a modern city with all the conveniences of public utiltiies.

Night and morning in many Latin American towns and villages, as well as in many communities of the Middle East, neighbours gathered around the well to obtain their supply of water. On such occasions they gossip together; family news is divulged, community plans are made, friendships are forged, and enmities are formed. The well in the centre of the village becomes the hub of village activities.

It was at such a well that Eliezer met Rebekah (Gen. 24:10-28). David knew the well at Bethlehem, and longed for a drink from its cool depths. Sitting on the stone parapet surrounding the well at Sychar, our blessed Saviour conversed with the Samaritan woman (John 4).

James, the Lord's brother, apparently has the village well in mind as he presses the lesson about the tongue upon the conscience (James 3). Maybe he had stood by a community well and listened to the gossip there, the kind words and the cruel words, the blessings of the

tongue and the cursings of the tongue. Obviously, he drew a contrast between the human mouth and the well, “Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing… Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter?” The implication in the language of James might easily be that, since from the fountain at the village-well only sweet water is expected, so from the mouth of the Christian only words of blessing should be expected.

Jacob Meets Rachel

Jacob, from the shepherds gathered around the well, promptly made enquiries about his mother’s relatives. He learned that they were well, and that a cousin, Rachel, was expected at any moment with her father’s sheep. In those ancient times in the East, it was the custom that the youngest unmarried daughter take charge of her father’s sheep. While awaiting her arrival, it seemed to Jacob that the shepherds were wasting a lot of time. He could not understand why they did not allow the flocks to drink and then return to their pasture for the rest of the day. He was told that the well was not opened until all who used it regularly were present. The well was kept covered by a heavy stone to ensure that no animal or irresponsible person open it, and to conserve the water from loss by evaporation in the heat.

It was at this well that many of the noble qualities of Jacob’s character were seen. He was of an enquiring mind. He did not know the practices of the men of Haran, but he asked questions and soon learned. He was co-operative for he rolled away the stone. He probably did not do this himself for generally the stone used was so heavy that two or three men were required to remove

and replace it; he certainly helped. Furthermore, he was industrious. Jacob had spent the greater part of a month on the way, he had walked hundreds of miles; yet, without hesitancy whatever he watered his uncle's flocks. He was affectionate for Jacob kissed Rachel and disclosed to her his relationship, he was her father's brother; using the word in its broadest sense of uncle, nephew, or brother. He was warm-hearted, and lifted up his voice and wept. Jacob was not a Stoic; emotionally he was overcome. He had arrived at his destination; he had found his relatives for God had evidently guided him. The tension of the past weeks, the fears of the way, and the suspense of inward struggles were over so he found relief in tears.

There were weaknesses in his personality, we know. He had been dominated by his mother; under her influence he had acted deceptively. He was mercenary and bought from Esau his birthright. Yes, there were bad traits in his personality, but there were also noble qualities worthy of emulation and development as well.

The child of God should learn to overcome the evil with good. He should understand the conflict between the flesh and the Spirit, and yield himself to the Spirit of God who produces the fruits of righteousness in Christian lives (Gal. 5:17-23). In the building of a strong character, he should add to the new nature that God has created within him virtue, knowledge, patience, self-control, etc. (2 Pet. 1:5-10).

Jacob Receives a Welcome

How light a load becomes, and how sweet even drudgery seems when love is the motivation of action!

The welcome received in the home of Laban was sincere and genuine, the hospitality extensive and real. The conversation between the uncle and nephew was cheerful and informative. Jacob learned from Laban much about his uncle, his household, and his two daughters. Laban learned from Jacob much about his sister, Rebekah, her household, and her two sons.

The Book of Genesis --Part 57

The Book of Genesis

Part 57

James Gunn

Reaping Of The Flesh

Chapter 29:15-30

Jacob was now to learn that “with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you” (Mark 4:24). Laban’s deception over the marriage of his daughter is only one in a long series in which Jacob found himself the object of a duplicity similar to that which he had practised on his father. Let us follow some of the details.

Acquaintance Deepened

It may have been when Jacob met Rachel at the well, he recalled that under parallel circumstances Eliezer found a bride for his father Isaac. He may have prayed as did Eliezer that the Lord would show him whether or not Rachel was to be his wife.

The early days of his stay at Haran quickly passed, and remembering the advice of his mother that he remain there until he was sent for, Jacob set about to make himself useful. For a month he thus served his uncle apparently as a shepherd. Did he assist Rachel in her duties, or did he assume her duties? Were the days of the first love of this young shepherd and shepherdess spent in the vicinity of the well where they met? Was Jacob’s proverbial love for Rachel first kindled as they poured water together for the flocks? It may have been

that in the joint performance of their duties his love intensified to such a degree that the seven years of service for Rachel were as “but a few days.”

The custom then was that a proposal of marriage to the parent of the young woman be accompanied with either; first, a costly present to the family; second, the value in cattle that the father placed upon his daughter; third, the giving of personal service for a specified period of time. Necessity, of course, left no alternative to Jacob, so for love to Rachel he became Laban’s hired shepherd.

In a day when men are without natural affection (2 Tim. 3:3) and divorce is so prevalent, it is refreshing and stimulating so see an example of domestic love that approaches the high standard of Scripture, All should remember the words ture. All should remember the words have not love, I am nothing” (1 Cor. 13:1-3).

Rachel’s Hand Sought

Jacob certainly found in Rachel an object for his heart. Poor Leah was tender-eyed, that is, she had weak dull eyes, thus failing in one of the features of extreme beauty demanded among the Bedouins. Rachel was beautiful and well favoured; she was most attractive, and Jacob soon learned to love her.

Laban had observed the industry of his nephew, and realizing his value made an offer of permanent employment to him. Whether subtle Laban knew what he would later do when he entered into the contract with Jacob, we have no means of knowing. Sincerely Jacob served the seven years for Rachel; and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her.

The Wedding Day

Jacob could never consider that day as one of great delight and satisfaction, but, rather, one in which through wicked trickery he had been deprived of his Rachel, and forced into a second seven years of service to his father-in-law. As has been suggested by another, had Jacob received on his wedding day the bride of his choice, he might have walked more in the steps of his fathers, Abraham and Isaac.

It is difficult to ascertain whether the deception of Laban at the marriage actually was based upon a local custom, “It must not be done in our country to give the younger before the first-born,” or whether this was an excuse. If such were indeed the custom, Jacob should have been told at the beginning. Jacob believed it to be a complete deception for he said, “Wherefore then hast thou beguiled me?”

Did Jacob discern in the unkind act of Laban a duplicity similar to that which he himself had played upon his blind father Isaac? Did he realize that “whatsoever a man soweth, that shall be also reap. For he that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption” (Gal. 6:7-8)? Jacob was in the training school of discipline. God was dealing with him, not only because of the past but also in view of the future.

The Disappointment

Not a few have been disappointed in their marriage; they have discovered that infatuation is a poor substitute for love. Jacob’s disappointment did not arise from a failure of love on his part, but from the

circumstances which deprived him of giving his all to the one he loved, Rachel.

The treachery of Laban imposed Leah upon Jacob, and forced him into a double marriage with its consequent polygamy which he did not wish; made him serve in all, fourteen years instead of seven; and reduced his anticipated domestic happiness to an endurance of the constant rivalry of two jealous sisters.

It seems obvious from a careful examination of the story that Jacob was married to Rachel at the beginning of the second seven years of service, not at the close. Verse 27 has been interpreted thus: "'Fulfil her week,' live with her (Leah) as a bridegroom for a week, the usual duration of the wedding feast (Judges 14:12), 'and we will give thee this (Rachel) also.' At the end of the week, on the eighth day, Rachel will become your bride; and after marrying her, and as her price, 'thou shalt serve with me yet seven other years.' Really Jacob served fourteen years for Rachel.

His Submission

How difficult it must have been for Jacob to accept these unalterable conditions. Notwithstanding, they formed the very rudiments of his spiritual education. His life becomes the illustration of our heavenly Father's treatment of His children: "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?" (Heb. 12:6-7).

Out of Jacob's submission came the greatest blessing to the world. From these two sister-wives came the twelve-

tribe nation of Israel, and from one of Leah’s sons, Judah, our Saviour descended. How strange the purposes of God appear at times! Out of the confusion and bitterness of our lives He accomplishes His own will.

The Book of Genesis --Part 58

The Book of Genesis

Part 58

James Gunn

The Discipline of Life

Chapter 29:31-31:3,

In a cursory reading of these chapters one sees the matching of wits by two clever and subtle men, Jacob and Laban. Unfortunately it is the crafty dealing of a believer with an unbeliever. A more careful perusal of the passages reveals behind all, the hand of God.

The Lord uses the circumstances of life as the means by which He trains His children. Behind every experience God moves, exerting His influence in every aspect of life. Without much difficulty we can see the Lord patiently working for Jacob in his domestic, industrial, and religious life.

His Domestic Life

Polygamy, although tolerated by the Hebrews, was not by divine ordination; consequently, as might be expected, it brought its own sorrows.

Leah felt keenly the neglect by her husband; she was less loved than Rachel (29:30). Notwithstanding, there appears a measure of pride in her attitude over her ability to bear children to Jacob. It is true that she gave her first four sons names which intimated she attributed her success to God; but, eventually, she forgot the Lord in this, and apparently considered the events of the

births of two more sons and daughters as merely personal experiences.

Rachel resented her own barrenness; felt frustrated, and envied her sister. The two wives were in open conflict and bartered the one with the other over their husband. Moreover they vied with each other. Each wife craved for what she did not have: Leah for her husband's love, Rachel for children, and in the struggle committed their own personal maid to the accomplishment of selfish purposes. Many wives, in those far away days, received slave girls before their marriage, and these they took with them into the home of their husbands. These slaves could not become the concubines of the husbands without their mistresses' permission which was seldom given.

It is no surprise that such constant irritation and strife exerted a baneful influence upon the entire household, and very especially upon the children's dispositions. From what later is recorded, we see that the absence in the home of love, peace, and honesty produced a sad harvest in their adult years.

Poor Jacob seemed to be the victim of this domestic tragedy rather than its source.

What an unveiling of the true nature of the Lord is manifest in all these details! He was indeed Jehovah, the Covenant-keeping God. He manifested His compassion and pity for the despised and neglected. He revealed His power over procreation. He displayed His sovereignty in the fulfilment of His Messianic intentions. He demonstrated His fatherly interest toward His carnally minded child, and His ability to train and develop his spiritual character.

The Book of Genesis --Part 59

The Book of Genesis

Part 59

James Gunn

Labour And Capitalism

Chapter 29:25 - 31:3.

In our last study in the life of Jacob we began to trace the hand of the Lord with him in three aspects of his life: domestic, industrial, and religious. The short space available to us at that time was fully occupied with an examination of affairs in his home. This month we shall consider some of the details in the other aspects.

His Industrial Life

The struggle between Laban and Jacob suggests the more intense struggle between capital and labour today. We cannot ignore the conflict in many centres between employer and employee.

It is well that the Christian understand his relationship to these matters. James' the Lord's brother, leaves no doubt as to the attitude of the spiritual man amidst the strife: "Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord" (Jas. 5:1-7).

If we measure Jacob by the standards suggested by James, he cannot be accepted as a truly spiritual man. Nevertheless, we must think of the great provocation under which he served Laban. There are several features to look at in the negotiations between Laban and Jacob as recorded here.

Jacob's desire: "Send me away, that I may go unto mine own place, and to my country." More than fourteen years had passed since Jacob had left his own home, and no doubt considerable resentment toward his astute uncle and father-in-law had developed over the cruel trickery which beguiled him in his marriage. He, furthermore, saw that it was impossible to live longer with Laban and his sons. Naturally his thoughts turned homeward again. He apparently thought of establishing himself in Canaan, and this was one of his arguments for he asked, "And now when shall I provide for mine own house also?" (30:30).

Laban's discovery: "I have learned by experience that the Lord. hath blessed me for thy sake" (30:27). It is difficult to ascertain whether these words were stated in a sincere or a patronizing manner.

Laban was a heathen; he was not a worshipper of Jehovah, but his experiences with Jacob had taught him that the Lord (Jehovah) was real, therefore, he acknowledged God in this way. Furthermore, his experience has been frequently that of employers. God's blessing has been upon them because of their association with some of His people.

Laban's design: The deceitful interplay between uncle and nephew is disgusting. Each tried fraudulently to profit from the other, but this must be conceded, the knavery began with Laban. Our biggest surprise is that one who knew God as did Jacob should defraud another.

Laban's statement in verse 28 must be considered hypocritical. He did not mean to give Jacob anything, but he did intend, if possible, to get from him whatever he could, as the sequel shows. The part of the flock

Jacob agreed was for his hire, Laban removed, probably in stealth, and placing it under his son's care, removed it a three days distance from Jacob. What a man this Laban was! He imposed upon Jacob his unhappy marriage to Leah, and now he deprives him of the flocks which were to have been his.

Jacob's defiance: Whether we consider Jacob's biological experimentation the result of sagacity or superstition is immaterial; one thing is sure, he made every attempt to outwit Laban. When he commenced this new tenure of service, all the arrangements were favourable to Laban, but when he closed it, so great was his personal success it offended Laban and produced jealousy in the hearts of Laban's sons.

The language that describes Jacob's prosperity is similar to that used in regard to Abraham and Isaac (Gen. 24:35; 26:12-14). Through this and the confession of Jacob to his two wives (Gen. 31:7-13), we know that all his wealth was the result of divine intervention and benevolence.

What a lesson we have here! While man employs all his knowledge and subtlety to accomplish an end; when the end is acquired he is forced to admit that it was attained through divine permission and not through his own efforts. May we likewise learn this same lesson through reading these experiences of Jacob.

His Religious Life

If in Abraham's life we see election in operation, and in Isaac's life son-ship enjoyed, in the life of Jacob we see the product of discipline. Whilethere is much evidence of carnality in Jacob's behaviour, there also is an attitude of

listening to the Lord. What a contrast there is between Laban and Jacob in this regard! Laban, when forced by circumstances acknowledges God; Jacob holds some communion with Him. “The Lord said unto Jacob, Return unto the land of thy fathers, and to thy kindred; and I will be with thee.”

This divine communication not only included a command but a promise. Should Jacob obey, he would experience the presence of God in a fuller more evident manner. True, God had work for him (Gen. 31:9), but He had seemed remote. Obedience to His will would result in a closer companionship. In every dispensation it is the same. The Lord is never far from any one of us; He never forsakes His own. Nevertheless, there are conditions in which He draws nearer. “Be ye separate, saith the Lord, … and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be My sons and daughters” (2 Cor. 6:17-18).

Separation, on the one hand from religious and moral defilement, and on the other through obedience to His will, assures one of a more intimate and enjoyable communion with the Lord.

As Jacob tells his wives of the vision he had received, and of the reference made by the Lord to Bethel, he promptly witnessed to the faithfulness of God throughout the years; he had received far more than bread to eat and raiment to put on. Goodness and mercy had followed him all the way.

Now he had assurance of a safe return to his father: “The Lord said unto Jacob, Return unto the land of thy fathers, and to thy kindred; and I will be with thee.” Furthermore, there is the intimation in this divine

reference to his vow, that the time to pay was approaching.

The Book of Genesis --Part 60

The Book of Genesis

Part 60

James Gunn

Kept by the Power of God

Chapter 31.

The clandestine departure of Jacob from Padan Aram and his secret intention to break relations with his uncle Laban are quite typical of the man. He truly was a supplanter; one of the traits of his behaviour was deception.

In spite of his spiritual immaturity, it is evident that, while God disciplined Jacob as a child in varous ways, He also protected him. Laban was prohibited by God to take any forceful action against Jacob.

The Lord is always zealous for His own people. “Touch not Mine anointed, and do My prophets no harm,” is ever His attitude. “The eye of the Lord is over the righteous, and His ears are open unto their prayers; but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil” (1 Pet. 3:12-13). Jacob may have had this and similar experiences in mind when he said, “The Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads” (Gen. 48:16).

The Divine Command (Vers. 3-4)

As Jacob was working in the field, he received a vision of the Lord and heard Him say, “Return unto the land of thy fathers, and to thy kindred; and I will be with thee.”

This command so deeply impressed Jacob that he immediately sent for his two wives.

As God had called his grandfather Abraham to leave Ur of the Chaldees so He was commanding Jacob to leave Padan Aram. How could he longer remain after having received such a revelation and call!

The Domestic Counselling (Vers. 5-16)

Jacob did not hide anything from his two wives. He may have thought that they might hinder him in doing the will of God. We know that he had told them about God, but they were still, at least partly, pagans. Rachel's stealing of Laban's idols is an indication of this. The ties of nature could have been stronger with them than the will of God as it had been manifested to their husband.

Jacob explained to them his feelings toward their father. Laban had taken undue advantage, and had frequently changed the agreement of payment between them. In Jacob's conception, Laban was not to be trusted, and this he stated to Laban's two daughters.

No matter how deeply he felt these things, it is refreshing to see that at this juncture of his life, they were secondary to God's command.

The reply of both Leah and Rachel intimates that their estimate of their shrewd father differed very little from that of their husband. Laban's actions had alienated him from their affections.

The Word of God enjoins upon parents that they not do to their children that which is incompatible with their relationship (1 Pet. 3:21).

The Departing Caravans (Vers. 17-21)

That Jacob watched for an opportunity is obvious from verse 19. He was probably timid to face this issue and its certain unpleasantness. He hoped that he might avoid a conflict, so during Laban's absence he left. He hurried away for he well knew that Laban would likely follow, and he was anxious to make the distance between them as great as possible. He realized how quickly one without the encumbrance of flocks and families could overtake him. Jacob was still relying much upon his own schemes rather than upon the strength of the Lord. He did not appreciate that divine commands are accompanied by divine power (Phil. 2:12-13).

The Contentious Parties (Vers. 25-42)

The departure of Jacob with all his possessions could not long be hid; it was finally reported to Laban. He, therefore, set out and followed after Jacob. One may readily visualize the meeting of these two angry men. Had God not intervened, it would have been even more belligerent. The two parties pitched their tents opposite the one to the other as if preparing for the battle of words.

Laban was the same pretentious prevaricator. The language of verses 26 and 27 is most insincere, for his former conduct belied his statements.

Two important items impress one here. Laban in speaking to Jacob says, "The God of your father spake unto me yesternight," and then he set about to recover, if possible, his stolen idols. Such is the darkness of the human heart, it clings to idolatry in spite of a divine revelation! This might also be said of Rachel. Thank

God! No matter what she thought about these images, they were soon to be buried beneath the oak at Shechem. These she could not long retain in the home of one who knew the true and living God, and who was about to broaden his dealings with God.

The contention ends with Jacob's noble and frank defence in which he reviewed his stay with Laban, charged him with covetousness and greed, and then testified to the protection of God toward him throughout the years.

The Covenanted Pledge (Vers. 43-55).

Laban ended his strong remonstrance. Perhaps he was overawed by Jacob's references to the Lord, by his new courage, and by his insistence that it was the Lord who had cared for him despite Laban's questionable treatment. Whatever prompted the thought in his mind, Laban suggested a covenant between Jacob and himself.

This arrangement was quickly accepted by Jacob, and the covenant was "cut." Furthermore, a heap of stones was raised and called Mizpah, and the Lord was invoked to watch between them that no evil intent be carried out by the one against the other.

In this incident Jacob rises higher and higher in his spiritual evaluation of matters. If Laban took the initiative in raising the pillar, the witness of stones, Jacob took the initiative in raising an altar to the Lord. The closing events of this meeting are most touching and impressive. On the evening before, Jacob offered sacrifices to God, and prepared a feast for all. The abuses of former years, the deception and intrigue are all forgiven and forgotten as they eat together, and in

the morning they separate forever. Jacob's attitude illustrates the exhortation of Paul to the Colossians, "If any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye" (Col. 3:13).

The Book of Genesis --Part 61

The Book of Genesis

Part 61

James Gunn

Faith and Fear Chapter 32:1-2

What a strange experience life is! It is composed in great measure of faith and fear, faith in God and fear of man. This period of Jacob's pilgrimage provides an ample illustration of this fact. His faith is recorded in verses one to two, and his fear in verses three to twenty-three.

His Faith

It is known in the light of New Testament truth that angels are ministering spirits sent forth to minister on behalf of those who shall be heirs of salvation (Heb. 1:14).

When Jacob, because of his own deception and sin, became a fugitive from his father's house, a vision of God attended by angels was given him (Gen. 28:1-3). He began his wanderings from home under the observant eye of angels. This chapter informs us that after over 20 years of absence, as he starts his return, the angels of God are in very close attendance.

A careful reading of this passage reveals instruction in regard to these spiritual creatures and their ministry.

On several occasions in Jacob's life, we have noticed that whatsoever he sowed morally, he also reaped (Gal. 6:7). Here, we further notice that the Lord is

longsuffering toward him (2 Pet. 3:9) for His mercy is from everlasting to everlasting (Psa. 103:17). While in government God deals in severity, through grace, righteousness and peace are blended. Jacob, therefore, is spared much of the discipline that his carnality merited. This, of course, is true in the case of all of God's children: "The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy" (Psa. 103:8).

The circumstance: It appears quite certain that Esau felt the day of revenge had come. He recalled the wicked craftiness of his brother in securing the patriarchal blessing, and the advantage he seized in order that he purchase the birthright at such a low cost. With burning hatred in his heart, Esau, having heard of Jacob's return, went out to meet him.

Esau was a man of the field, a hunter accustomed to the use of arms. Jacob was a quiet, home-loving individual with no knowledge of battle strategy; consequently, defenceless before an attack from Esau's well-trained and well-equipped men.

The Lord's host: Jacob's eyes must have been anointed with heavenly eye salve. We read, "The Angels of God met him. And when Jacob saw them, he said, This is God's host."

There is a precious title used for the Lord which occurs frequently in the Old Testament and twice in the New, "The Lord of Hosts."

When Joshua, at a much later date, was about to invade the land of Canaan, a heavenly apparition approached him. This person Joshua challenged, "Art thou for us, or for our adversaries?" In reply he was told, "Nay, but as

Captain of the host of the Lord am I now come." What a Captain! What a host!

Obviously, the host of angels was for defensive purposes. Two hosts invaded Canaan, the host of Israel and the invisible host of angels with their Captain who had made Himself visible to Joshua.

The Psalmist considered this mighty angelic host for protective purposes for he wrote, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble … The Lord of Hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge" (Psa. 46:1 and 11).

The Lord Jesus understood their ministry in a similar manner. In the dark hour of His need, He said, "Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He shall presently give Me more than twelve legions of angels?" (Matt. 26:53).

The title "The Lord of Hosts" (The Lord of Sabaoth, K.J.V.) occurs twice in the New Testament; the first time, in connection with the defence and preservation of His ancient people Israel (Rom. 9:29); the second time, in regard to the vindication of His people of the New Covenant, the Church, who are oppressed by the wealthy of earth (Jas. 5;4).

Such, then, was the revelation of God's defensive power to poor distraught Jacob.

Mahanaim: "And when Jacob saw them, he said, This is God's host; and he called the name of that place Mahanaim." The meaning of Mahanaim is two hosts or two bands. He apprehended that, while his own camp was only a defenseless group, God's guardian host was about it. By faith Jacob appropriated this divine

provision. Centuries later, underdistressing circumstances, David expressed Jacob's sentiments in poetry: "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him, and delivereth them" (Psa. 34:17).

This place where Jacob met the angels of God may have been considered a holy place by his descendants. It is mentioned as on the border of both Gad and Manasseh, and that connects it with the brook Jabbok. It was allotted for an inheritance to the tribe of Gad, and a city was built upon it.

There are two interesting references to Mahanaim, one in the history of David, the other in the writings of Solomon. It was to Mahanaim that David fled from before Absalom. If ever a king needed to resort to the place of two hosts, that king was David. Like his forefather, Jacob, his camp was weak and humanly speaking defenseless; but, like him, he too proved that "the angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him." God revenged David with his few followers, and slew wicked Absalom.

Solomon likened his beautiful bride to Mahanaim. This will be seen in the marginal reading of The Song of Solomon 6:13, "What will ye see in the Shulamite? As it were the company (dances, expressions of joy) of two armies."

Since it generally is accepted that the bride in this wonderful Song of Solomon is a picture of the Church, there is a great lesson for her here. No matter how strong and militant she may appear, even as an army, she cannot stand alone. In all her conflict against the world, the flesh, and the devil, she needs the second army, the host of the Lord of Hosts.

The Church would feel feeble in itself, but His presence would bring discipline to His own, it is true, but destruction to the enemy.

The Book of Genesis --Part 62

The Book of Genesis

Part 62

James Gunn

Faith and Fear

Chapter 32:1-23

Faith is a settled confidence which is objective; fear is a stirred emotion that is subjective. Faith makes one restful; fear makes him restless. Faith enjoys tranquility; fear experiences torment.

We have considered Jacob's faith, or more properly, God's faithfulness to Jacob, a faithfulness that produced confidence in Jacob's heart. We must now examine his fears, their cause and effect.

Their cause: The cause of Jacob's trouble here is both historical and immediate. The historical cause may be traced back over a period of twenty years. Beyond those years there lay the time when he took advantage of his brother Esau and purchased the birthright for little or nothing. There lay also the time when by deception he stole the patriarchal blessing of his father from Esau.

Job, who probably lived before Jacob's day, wrote, "They that plow iniquity, and sow wickedness, reap the same" (Job 4:8). Jacob now faced the harvest that had gathered over the years.

The immediate cause is quite understandable, Esau believed that the hour of revenge had come. It would seem that Jacob, in advising Esau of his return,

intimated to him that there was no need now for him to claim the birthright, that in Padan-Aram he had become very rich, that he had all his heart desired. His instructions to his servants were: “Thus shall ye speak to my lord Esau; Thy servant Jacob saith thus. I have sojourned with Lab-an, and stayed there until now: And I have oxen, and asses, flocks, and men servants, and women servants: and I have sent to tell my lord, that I may find grace in thy sight” (32: 4-5). He adopted a very courteous and conciliatory mood, and hoped that the information sent might placate Esau’s anger.

Esau, obviously enough, did not receive the news as his brother had hoped. Promptly he prepared and sallied forth to meet him with four hundred armed men. Little wonder that we read, “Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed.” It would appear that the threat of Esau, “The days of mourning for my father are at hand; then will I slay my brother Jacob,” was about to be executed.

The effect: The effect of all this upon our Patriarch was both natural and spiritual.

Under any adverse circumstance the most natural thing for Jacob to do was to plot and scheme in order that he free himself from the tangle. Immediately, therefore, he resorted to bribery. If the evidence that he now was very rich and not in need of an inheritance did not appease Esau, then in Jacob’s thinking he must be bought over.

For protective purposes he divided his caravan into two parts so that if Esau fell upon the one, the other would have time to escape; he himself brought up the rear. Having thus prepared for the worst, he put his plans into action, and sent gifts to Esau. “He took of that which came to his hand a present for Esau his brother.” “A gift

doth blind the eyes of the wise," we read, and in this lay much of Jacob's hope.

Occasionally, the true spiritual character of Jacob becomes manifest, and we see him getting in touch with God. We need not accuse him wrongfully for "as face answereth to face in water so the heart of man to man." How like Jacob are many Christians! In difficulties they make their own plans to escape, they endeavour to find solutions to the problems which bother them. After their attempts have been unsuccessful, they turn in prayer to God; they appeal to Him when all else has failed.

Let us notice the prayer of Jacob. It is the first actual prayer recorded in the Bible, and might well be a pattern to follow. First, he appeals to God as the God of his fathers, but finally draws nearer and addresses Him as Jehovah who had personally revealed Himself to him at Bethel. He then humbly acknowledges his unworthiness, and follows this with a definite petition for deliverance from Esau. He closes his prayer by reminding God of His covenant and promise. There is an urgency about this prayer that reminds us of some of David's prayers, "I am poor and needy: make haste unto me, O God: Thou art my help and my deliverer; O Lord, make no tarrying" (Psa. 70:5).

O, for grace to cease from our own strivings and to rest more implicitly upon the word of God and the power of God.

It seems to be necessary for the Lord to deal with His people in solitude, to have them alone with Himself in order to teach them lessons concerning their own weakness and lessons concerning His power. He who in later centuries revealed Himself to Moses in the

backside of the desert, and revealed Himself to David when he too was alone out in the fields of Bethlehem, now confronts Jacob as he spends the night alone near the brook Jabbok.

The responsive heart frequently feels the need of being alone with God. Apparently, Jacob yearned to be alone. Torn within by conflict, harassed without by the confusion of travelling; afraid to proceed, and yet knowing that he could not retreat; exhausted in making plans, and yet forced to develop more, Jacob longed for quietness, solitude, and contact with God.

By the brook Jabbok God and Jacob met face to face, and there Jacob learned lessons in human weakness and divine power.

We read, “And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day.” Jacob did not initiate this struggle. Without doubt, God in the appearance of a Man, undertook to subdue the proud schemer from Padan-Aram. With all his strength Jacob resisted until finally a touch of divine discipline left him so weak, he could only cling, and so crippled, he could only limp along with his staff.

The man who had a conflict with his brother Esau, and had hoped to overcome him with strategy, was now forced to meet him as a cripple, totally unable to defend himself. God alone was his refuge and strength in the face of enmity and anger. If he were to escape from Esau and the four hundred armed men who were with him, all Jacob’s hopes lay in God, and in God alone.

The Book of Genesis --Part 63

The Book of Genesis

Part 63

James Gunn

Conditions for Blessing

Scripture Readings: Chapter 32:1-2, 24-32; and 35:1-11

Together we have considered the faith and the fear of Jacob on the eve of meeting his brother Esau. We noticed that Jacob who had a conflict with his brother Esau, and whom he hoped to overcome with strategy, was forced to meet him as a cripple, totally unable to defend himself. God alone was his refuge and strength in the face of enmity and anger.

There is something more that happened on the night before the two brothers met, Jacob had an encounter with God. From God he asked a blessing which apparently he was not prepared to receive, and not in a condition to retain.

Behind every circumstance in life, the Lord stands ready to bless. This fact is so obvious in the life that we are now studying. When Jacob's fears were the greatest and danger nearest, the Lord opened his eyes to see the host of God ready to defend him.

One of the titles of God in both Testaments is "The Lord of Hosts." This title pictures God as the Defender of His beloved people. The Psalmist knew Him as such, "The Lord of Hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge" (Psa. 46:11). James also knew Him as such, "Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped

down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth; and the cries of them which have reaper are entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabbaoth (The Lord of Hosts)" (Jas. 5:4).

In the two passages for our Scripture reading, we have recorded two epochs in the life of Jacob. Both of these raise the matter as to whether or not the believer is always ready for blessing.

As far as God's blessing upon the Patriarch is concerned, there is a definite similarity in the two passages, but in another sense there is a contrast.

Jacob's name was changed to Israel, a prince with God, but the fact of its being repeated proves that the child of God is not always conditioned for blessing. Let us examine the two epochs.

The First at Jabbock

Jacob's struggle with Esau was a moral conflict in which he sought to appease his wrath and to change his mind. This he attempted to do with bribery, "A gift blindeth the eye."

It could hardly be considered that a man who would stoop to deception would be spiritual.

In his struggle with God Jacob prevailed, but received more than the blessing he implored, a blessing he was in no state to appropriate and enjoy, he received the stroke of divine discipline that quelled his fighting spirit.

One must learn that he cannot resist God. The marks of discipline remained with Jacob, but the blessing had to be repeated. It is notable that it is not always that which we consider a blessing that make a life beautiful, but a

life is made lovely through discipline. This is so well illustrated in the life of the Apostle Paul (2 Cor. 12:1-10).

The Second at El Bethel

On this occasion without Jacob asking for it, the blessing was voluntarily given by the Lord. This probably resulted from a better spiritual condition in Jacob.

The thrust of the sharp sickle at Jabbock produced the golden harvest at El Bethel. This improved state is reflected in Jacob's words and actions. Several features of this improvement may be detected.

Remembrance: Jacob remembered the time God came unusually close to him; he recalled his first visit to Bethel and the vision of God he received there. It is ever well to compare the present state with that of the past. Frequently, such a comparison leads to an inventory of one' spirituality.

Cleansing: It seems difficult to believe that a man who had been so near to God would allow idols in his home. Jacob, of course, was not alone in this, Solomon did likewise. Because of their love to their pagan wives, these two men lived in a compromise with idolatry.

Here there is a decided change in Jacob, he cleanses his house and expells all rivals with God.

In writing his exhortations to the Ephesians, Paul equates covetiouness with idolatry (Eph. 5:5). In this connection John, the last surviving apostle, says, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols" (1 John 5:21).

Obedience: There are times when obedience is obligatory, as in the case of Jonah. There are other times when obedience is voluntary, as in the case of Jacob

here. He hasted and delayed not to keep God's commandments.

Worship: On this occasion Jacob builds an altar, not a pillar. During his first visit to Bethel he raised a pillar, a witness that God had come down to him. Here he builds an altar for all his heart now ascends up to God. He ascribes thanksgiving, praise, and honour upon that altar to the Lord. Such should be the attitude of the Christian now (Heb. 13:15).

In such a condition of soul Jacob is ready for the confirmation of the divine blessing. It is good when discipline yields the peaceable fruits of righteousness. The soul then can say with David, "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now have I kept Thy word" (Psa. 119:67).

The Book of Genesis --Part 64

The Book of Genesis

Part 64

James Gunn

Reconciliation

Chapter 33

Deception and malice have resulted in many calamities; they have wrought both alienation and murder. Here it looked as if there might be re-enacted a tragedy similar to that of Cain and Abel.

Between the two estranged brothers, Jacob and Esau, our sympathies have fluctuated. When Esau was offended, they were in his favour; but when Jacob stood defenceless before Esau’s strength, our feelings were with the apparently helpless. The conflict between these two sons of Isaac, produced a conflict of sentiment in our own hearts.

Jacob

God had been dealing with Jacob; much had been accomplished in his heart. True, he was returning home in obedience to the Lord, but he was returning in subtle self-reliance. He compensated for his fears by craftiness. If he could not fight, he could barter. Through his superior ability, he would meet Esau; even, although through expensive bribery.

Was Jacob self-deceived? Could he ever have met Esau in this spirit of superiority and haughtiness? “Whoso boasteth himself of a false gift (in a gift of falsehood) is

like clouds and wind without rain … A soft tongue breaketh the bone" (Prov. 25:14-15). "A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger" (Prov. 15:1).

The Apostle Paul stated, "When I am weak, then am I strong" (2 Cor. 12:10). His testimony was, "There was given me a thorn in the flesh… lest I should be exalted above measure" (2 Cor. 12:7).

In the morning Jacob went forth to meet his brother in weakness for he halted upon his thigh, in humility for he bowed himself to the ground seven times; yet, in confidence for, instead of sending before him the different sections of his caravan, he himself went in front (vs. 3).

Esau

Esau was a man of the flesh, and God will hold him accountable for despising the birthright; moreover, he acted provocatively toward his parents. Nevertheless, we must admire the magnanimity that possessed him on this occasion. The sight of his brother lamed and humbled stirred him, "And Esua ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him: and they wept."

Esau's great-heartedness is seen in that not only did he forgive the wrong done against him, but in that he offered armed protection for the rest of the journey.

"Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Eph. 4:32).

The Book of Genesis --Part 65

The Book of Genesis

Part 65

James Gunn

Partial Obedience

Chapter 33:17- 34:31.

While Jacob was in the path of obedience to the will of the Lord, God was with him to protect and guide him. As we review the details of his reconciliation with his brother Esau, we realize that “when a man’s ways please the Lord, He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him” (Prov. 16:17). What a pity that frequently in life there is a departure from the path in which there is blessing and joy, and a wandering in ways which leave the heart in distress and grief. The portion of Jacob’s history now before us was written aforetime for our learning to warn us of the consequence resulting in deviation from the will of God. Let us examine the details disclosed in these chapters.

Disobedience

The Word of God to Jacob was clear and plain: “I am the God of Bethel, where thou anointedst the pillar, and where thou vowedst a vow unto Me: now arise, get thee out from this land, and return unto the land of thy kindred” (Gen. 31:13). This command would arouse vivid recollections, so vivid that they would the more deeply impress this command of the Lord upon his heart. We, therefore, are very much surprised at his negligence, and disappointed that he stopped at Shechem rather

than proceeding to Bethel: “And Jacob journeyed to Succoth, and built him an house, and made booths for his cattle: therefore the name of the place is called Succoth. And Jacob came to Shalem, a city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, when he came from Padanaram; and pitched his tent before the city. And he bought a parcel of a field, where he had spread his tent, at the hand of the children of Hamor, Shechem’s father, for an hundred pieces of money. And he erected an altar, and called it Elelohe Israel” (Chap. 33:17-20). God had blessed and guarded him, and yet Jacob failed to comply fully with the expressed will of God.

The case of king Saul is suggested by this failure on Jacob’s part. There was a grave crisis in Israel. The Philistines were armed ready for battle. The time was passing and Samuel tarried. Saul called for offerings and in his zeal burned them upon the altar. The faithful priest, Samuel, left no doubt in Saul’s mind that he had been disobedient, for he charged, “Thou hast not kept the commandment of the Lord thy God” (1 Sam. 13:5-13).

At a later date Saul defeated the Amalekites, and there is no doubt that he sacrificed much of that which he could have retained. As will be remembered, he kept king Agag in spite of the fact God had instructed that he was to be slain. Samuel again spoke to him, saying, “To obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams” (1 Sam. 15:1023).

That Jacob should purchase property, build a house, dig a well, raise an altar, and make booths for his cattle are all indications that he intended to remain at Shechem.

His obedience was only partial; he stopped short of Bethel; he failed to fulfil his vow.

Deception

There are intimations that Jacob was quite pleased with himself. Probably he did not admit to himself when he "came in health and safety to a city, Shechem" (Vs. 18, margin) that it was the central location of the city, its accessibility, and the great advantage in its abundant water supply that attracted him and caused him to remain and to settle there. In his raising an altar and in his giving it an extraordinary name would suggest some compunctions of conscience. In calling the altar "Elelohe Israel", God is the God of Israel, another has written, "He did not name it Elelohe Bethel, God is the God of Bethel for that would have reminded him of his failure. In what he did, he reminded himself of the experience at Jabbock, but not of the experience at Bethel."

The altar gives to his actions a religious tone which when completely analysed reveals a measure of hypocrisy, for while seemingly dedicating himself and his family to the Lord, he had established himself contrary to the divine intention away from Bethel. It is remarkable how the human heart can pretend to possess spiritual qualities even in paths of disobedience.

Degeneracy

Divine principles are unalterable. The divine principle of headship is clearly stated in the New Testament, "I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God" (1 Cor. 11:3). "The husband is the head of the wife" (Eph. 5:23).

This principle that is so clearly stated in the New Testament was likewise in force in times of the Old Testament. The head in each household during patriarchal days was also the priest. He was God's representative in the home; and, furthermore, he was the family's representative before God. See Job 1:5.

Jacob was therefore the head of his house and responsible for the behaviour of each member. God always expects a leader to be "one that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity" (1 Tim. 3:4).

It was in this particular sphere that Jacob failed. Dinah must have been only in her teens, and therefore in need of guidance and control. The entire narative of chapter 34 is a sad proof that Jacob had lost control over his household.

Only in the measure that the head of a family is controlled by the Word of God and the Spirit of God, can he rule well his own home.

Disgrace

The shame of Dinah is the dishonour of her father. The trouble began when this young unrestrained teen-ager "went out to see the daughters of the land." Like many another young girl, she yearned for companionship. In this there is nothing wrong; the wrong lies in the place where she sought companionship. Well might James write, "Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God" (Jas. 4:4).

Another has written wise words concerning Dinah's fall, words that should be impressed upon the minds of

young daughters by the heads of all families, especially Christian families: “Dinah is found mingling, as it would seem, freely and without reproof, in the gay circle in which female beauty is apt to be a snare to the possessor, and female innocence is in danger of falling a prey to the arts and flatteries of the seducer.”

The Book of Genesis --Part 66

The Book of Genesis

Part 66

James Gunn

Partial Obedience Chapter 33:17-34:31.

This study actually is the closing part of the one that appeared last month. In it we followed Jacob to Shechem, and considered the disgrace brought upon him in the matter of Dinah. It would seem that Jacob's incomplete response to God's revealed plan for him resulted in this unsavoury domestic trouble.

It must have been with a very heavy heart that "Jacob held his peace until they were come," for "his sons were with his cattle in the field." Perhaps he felt much like David who at a later date wrote, "I said, I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue: I will keep my mouth with a bridle, while the wicked is before me. I was dumb with silence, I held my peace, even from good; and my sorrow was stirred" (Psa. 39:2-1).

In his grief he sought counsel from these sons of his. Why did he not seek counsel from God? Subsequent events prove that by them he was misdirected. Alas, he who had deceived his own father, by his own sons was now deceived. How much better it would have been had he turned to the Lord. Do we not read, "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy" (Prov. 28:13). Such an attitude would have changed this bitter experience for Jacob. "There are many devices in a

man’s heart: nevertheless the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand” (Prov. 19:21).

It would be improper to pass unnoticed the apparent honourable approach of Hamar and his son Shechem. They seemed ready to make amends for the wrong done against Jacob and his family. Of course, obviously, they were taking into consideration the advantages which would accrue to them through a closer alliance with Jacob’s family. They expected a complete absorption of his entire household, a definite enrichment through this amalgamation. Nevertheless, the courtesy and the consideration shown by these pagans surpassed by far the attitude of the sons of Jacob who should have known through paternal instructions the ways of the Lord.

The world is very seductive; within it operate the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life (1 John 2:16). It can appear at times most attractive and ethical; it can allure with an irresistible magnetism; it can be diplomatic and most amenable and thus entrap the unwary. There may have been some of this in the plans of Hamor and Shechem; but, alas, they were a poor match for the sons of Jacob.

The family’s stay at Shechem not only resulted in the shame of Dinah, the disgrace of Jacob, but also in his delusive compromise with sinful paganism. The words of the Apostle Paul might well apply under any similar circumstance, “Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God” (Rom. 12:2).

Naturally speaking it would have been honourable on the part of Jacob and his sons firmly but mannerly to

have declined the overtures of these Hivite princes. This would have been in perfect keeping with the mind of the Lord in regard to the descendants of Abraham. Had they done so, we would not have recorded the sobbing of shame and fear on the part of Jacob, as he quickly abandoned all that he had built at Shechem (34:30).

In the negotiations between Hamor, Shechem and the brothers of Dinah, we see further evidence of Jacob's weakness as head of his household. Verse six states, "And Hamor the father of Shechem went out unto Jacob to commune with him." After this voluntary and manly approach, Jacob's sons, particularly the full brothers of Dinah, assume the lead in resolving the difficulty. We read, "And the sons of Jacob came out of the field, … And Hamor communed with them." Later we read, "And the sons of Jacob answered." Finally, we read, "And they (Jacob's sons) said unto them (Hamor and Shechem) we cannot do this thing…But in this will we consent." Jacob is far in the back-ground; he has lost control; consequently, tragedy must follow.

Nothing could be more unscrupulous than the plot of these shrewd pretenders, but they had no scruples in taking advantage of physical suffering and in slaying many who were innocent in this matter.

That Jacob had nothing to do with this plot and wickedness is obvious; his grief was genuine. The wicked action of ruthless Simeon and Levi inflicted upon their father a hurt he never forgot. In fact, unhealed, he carried it to his grave.

When Jacob lay dying, he called his sons around his bed. As a dying father, he too would bless his children, even as his dying father had blessed him and his brother

Esau. As Simeon and Levi stepped forward for their blessing, Jacob remembered the matter of Shechem; his words were weighty and condemnatory: “Simeon and Levi are brethren; instruments of cruelty are in their habitations. O my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united: for in their anger they slew a man, and in their selfwill they digged down a wall. Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel: I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel” (Gen. 49:5-7). What evil reputations these two men had!

There is a great difference between the blessing (curse) of Jacob upon Levi his son, and the blessing that was invoked upon his descendants by Moses at the time of his death. The bravery that had been used so cruelly at Shechem, between the death of Jacob and that of Moses had been used in zeal to maintain the standards of divine holiness. At Shechem in a ruthless fleshly way Levi avenged the dishonour of his sister, at Baalpeor, Phinehas of the tribe of Levi, avenged the dishonour to God’s holiness (Num. 25:6-9).

Among other details of the blessing of Moses, we read, “They shall teach Jacob Thy judgments, and Israel Thy law: they shall put incense before Thee, and whole burnt sacrifice upon thine altar. Bless, Lord, his substance, and accept the work of his hands: smite through the loins of them that rise against him, and of them that hate him, that they rise not again” (Deut. 33:8-11).

The Book of Genesis --Part 67

The Book of Genesis

Part 67

James Gunn

Prompt Obedience

Chapter 35:1-8

During the visit of the Editor to the other side of the Atlantic, the studies in Genesis were discontinued for a month. In resuming them, we pray that the Lord may guide in all our meditations, that His name might be glorified and our souls blessed.

In the June issue we considered Jacob's partial obedience (Chapter 33:17-34:31). Let us recommence our examination of the life of the Patriarch as with prompt obedience he moves back into Bethel.

What a difference there is between our last lesson and this one! In the former, we saw only partial obedience and its results; in this we are to witness implicit obedience and its blessed consequence; Jacob's stay at Shechem was characterized by shame and sorrow; his return to Bethel, by satisfaction and strength. The contrast here seems to illustrate the difference between the carnal and the spiritual nature in the believer. Let us notice several salient points in their logical sequence.

The Prompting

"And God said unto Jacob, Arise go up to Bethel, and dwell there: and make there an altar unto God, that

appeared unto thee when thou fleddest from the face of Esau thy brother."

Three verbs of action are used by the Lord: "Arise," "Go," and "Make."

To trust in the Lord and to wait patiently for Him to act on our behalf may be a very blessed experience under certain circumstances, but there are other circumstances in which one must arise and act in response to divine probings. Of course, when the Lord calls upon His people to act, He imparts the ability to accomplish. "It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13).

God in His goodness as He gave this command to Jacob blended with it a veiled promise. God who had rescued him from the hand of Esau could also deliver him from the Shechemites through whose land he had to travel.

The Preparation

As Jacob prepared himself and his family for this return journey to Bethel, there is an urgency in his movements. He becomes very imperative about matters, and speaking with authority says, "Put away the strange gods." "Cleanse yourselves." "Change your garments." Before Jacob could be morally fit for the presence of God, idolatry had to be judged and abandoned, personal holiness had to be practised, and the outward evidence of that inward sanctification had to be displayed in the garments of the Spirit. In terms of the New Testament, there had to be a putting off and a putting on (Col. 3:8-14).

The Plan

“And let us arise, and go up to Bethel; and I will make there an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went.”

Here Jacob is really busy in his full obedience to the divine command. First, he calls upon all, himself included, “Let us arise.” There is a suggestion that heretofore there had been a hesitancy if not a lethargy in his return to Bethel. Did Shechem and his recent investments there hinder him from going all the way for God? Was the disgrace at Shechem the means permitted to shake him loose and force him along the way to Bethel? It does seem that there had been some reluctance on his part to perform the will of God. Such, frequently, is the experience of the backslider in heart who is filled with his own thoughts.

In the second place, Jacob said, “Let us arise, and go up to Bethel.” Geographically there was a natural ascent into the mountains of the area, but we may also consider a higher spiritual altitude here as well. Divine discipline through a great variety of circumstances had been salutary for Jacob, like the Psalmist, could say, “It was good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn Thy statutes” (Psa. 119:71).

His insistence in going up immediately is worthy of note. There was a way back to Bethel. Thank God, there always is a way back into fellowship with the Lord! He is the God of recovery. The Lord’s appeal to the nation of Israel illustrates His attitude toward all His own. “O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity, and receive us graciously; so will we render the calves of our lips … I will heal their

backsliding, I will love them freely: for Mine anger is turned away from him" (Hosea 14:1-4), Notwithstanding the gracious loving appeal to the wandering soul, we must remember that the road back is as long as the road away. The bitterness and the regret found in many a restoration has been produced by the facing of the details of departure. The only possible means of recovery from backsliding is the way of repentance and faith.

In the third place, Jacob said, "I will make there an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went."

What a wonderful faculty is memory! There is no doubt that Jacob occasionally relived the day of his distress, the day when Esau approached with four hundred armed men. There is no doubt that he recalled with pleasure the vision of the two camps at Mahanaim (Gen. 32:1-2).

Here Jacob reviews the kindness and love of God. He had not always sensed the presence of the Lord, but now he realized that God had been ever with him.

These serious reflections urged him on to obey God's command, and here he states his intention to build an altar for God at Bethel. He is not so much interested in raising a pillar, as on his former visit. He is not making a bargain with God. No, he is ready to offer all to God in worship.

The Progress

Whenever there is prompt obedience to the will of the Lord, there is notable progress, and no better illustration of this can be found than what is stated in

these verses: “They gave unto Jacob all the strange gods.” “They journeyed.” “Jacob came…and all the people that were with him.” “He built there an altar.”

His diligence in the ways of the Lord so impressed his household that they surrendered their idols. It will be remembered that Rachel had stolen some from her father. It is also to be expected that all his servants from Padan-Aram would be idolaters. Jacob would not longer tolerate these images in his household. Each one gave these former objects of veneration to Jacob, and he hid them so that they could not again be found. His entire household henceforth was to know only the living and true God.

God’s ways of protecting His people here were altogether different to His ways at Mahanaim. Here he did not send forth His host as a body-guard, but rather influenced the populace round about. “The terror of God was upon the cities that were round about them.” A supernatural dread fell upon them so that in spite of the slaughter of the men of Shechem by Jacob’s sons, none pursued them for revenge. God is not limited in His means of protecting His people. He may use a special method today and an entirely different one tomorrow. He who sent an angel to deliver Peter (Acts 12), and a chief captain to deliver Paul (Acts 23), employs many means in this ministry of love.

The journey to Bethel was accomplished with sincerity and with haste. Thirty years had elapsed since Jacob had stood upon that ground. What recollections must have been his!

A difference between this altar and the one he had built at Shechem has been noticed frequently. The name

given to the altar at Shechem was Elelohe Israel, the God, the God of Israel, suggesting God's relationship to Jacob. Here at Bethel the full name El Bethel is given, the God of Bethel, or the God of the House of God. Jacob's thoughts on this occasion are wholly of God, not upon any relationship to Him. As another has pointed out, his spiritual condition being higher, his conception of God was higher.

The entire experience here as expressed by Jacob himself reveals the fact that occupation with God results in worship. That attitude of worship indicated such a state of spiritual response that God appeared unto Jacob and blessed him, bestowing upon him the name of Israel. God had appeared to him when he left his father's house to wander in fear and in need (Gen. 28:10-22); He now appears to him in the day of the gladness of his heart, the day of his return to God.

The Pain

"But Deborah Rebekah's nurse died, and she was buried beneath Bethel under an oak: and the name of it was called Allon-bachuth."

It is not known how Deborah Rebekah's nurse had entered Jacob's household at this time. Had she gone out to meet Jacob at Bethel, or had she travelled all the way to Padan-Aram to find him? In her death a very precious link with the past was broken.

The tree by which she was buried received the name Allon-bachuth, the oak of the weeping. This probably intimated the esteem in which she was held. She was probably a much loved person, and her passing caused Jacob sorrow and tears.

This incident reminds us that even when our spiritual state is the best, we are not immune to the common afflictions of life. “Man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward.”

Thank God, when the grief of bereavement presses sore upon us, and we sorrow over the loss of loved ones, we sorrow not as those that have no hope (1 Thess. 4:13).

“Is there anything you are in the habit of doing which dulls your sense of fellowship with God or takes the keen edge off your spiritual life? Whatever impairs the tenderness of your conscience, obscures your sense of God, takes off the relish for spiritual things; that thing is sin to you, however innocent it may be in itself.”

The Book of Genesis --Part 68

The Book of Genesis

Part 68

James Gunn

Trials And Disappointments

Chapter 35:8-29

The Christian is not immune to the sorrow and suffering which are common to all men. In fact, a man of deep spirituality frequently appears to others to endure more than his own share of tragedy. The Book of Job is ample evidence to substantiate this conclusion. The Epistle to the Hebrews pictures God the Father as one engaged in training His own children. “Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons” (Heb. 12:6-8).

We have noted in our studies an improvement in Jacob’s spiritual state, and that is gratifying; but the Lord is still dealing with him; He is still training him.

Sorrows come in so many different ways, and they affect one in such a variety of degrees. Let us consider some of the trials which beset Jacob as these are recorded in this chapter.

Loss of a Close Friend

“Deborah Rebekah’s nurse died.” As mentioned in our last lesson, it is not known how or when the aged nurse who belonged to Jacob’s mother joined his household. One does not need to draw much upon his imagination to know that her presence there was to Jacob a link with the past. What a reminder of home, of mother! Deborah was probably one of the first to see and cuddle Jacob. Her passing would sever one of the strongest connectives with maternal love and parental security. It is no wonder that the aged loyal nurse was laid to rest under an oak named Allonbachuth, the oak of weeping.

Life has its difficulties, but it also has its compensations. The other experiences of Jacob on his return to Bethel were rich in blessing. If the death of one of the closest friends in life separated him from earlier times, the revelation of God provided all that he needed for the future.

God renewed the blessing of the better man, Israel. He renewed His covenant promise to Abraham and Isaac. Furthermore, He talked personally with Jacob. What unlimited blessing is the presence of the Lord! Men may change, close friends leave us, but God remains immutably the same (Heb. 13:8).

Severance of the Closest Relationship Jacob now suffers the deepest sorrow. The wife whom he loved so dearly and for whom he laboured so long was suddenly removed from him. Rachel dies in an hour of high hopes. She died under the saddest of circumstances; her own feelings adding to the tragedy for she named her baby Benoni, the son of my anguish.

In the midst of this, his deepest sorrow, Jacob's spirit rises higher than usual. There is nothing so touching as a cradle beside a grave; yet, as Jacob visited the one and then the other he changed the baby's name from Benoni to Benjamin, the son of my right hand. Jacob saw in his infant son the strength and comfort he so sorely needed on this occasion. There is no doubt that Benjamin was a consolation to Jacob then, and in the future in a greater measure during the absence of Joseph; nevertheless, when Jacob came to die, he intimated the natural belligerent attitude of Benjamin as he passed on the patriarchal blessing, "Benjamin shall ravin as a wolf."

Some think that foreknowledge of future events will provide assurance and pleasure. What a blessing for Jacob in his sorrow that he did not know the future of little Benjamin!

Shame and Disappointment

What a grief to Israel was the incestuous act of Reuben! It has been well said, "The candour of the Bible is one of its chief proofs to be divine." No other book records so factually the sins of prominent individuals. If Jacob had hopes in the infant Benjamin, he received only disillusionment in Reuben his firstborn.

The interesting comment of the divine Historian is noteworthy, "And Israel heard it." He does not record that Jacob heard it, but that Israel heard it. Only recently at Bethel God had appeared to Jacob as God Almighty, El Shaddai, and had renewed to him the power and the blessing of the new name, Israel. It is in the enjoyment and strength of this divine favour that Jacob, with quiet dignity, meets this domestic disgrace.

The Book of Genesis --Part 69

The Book of Genesis

Part 69

James Gunn

The Divided Household

Chapter 35:21-37:2

Said one thinker to another, “The more I consider God and His infinite grace, the greater becomes the problem in my mind as to why God discriminated between Isaac’s two sons, saying, ‘Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.’ Why should He hate the one and not the other?”

“The hatred of God is not my problem at all,” replied the other. “My problem is, why should God love Jacob?”

Thank God for the deep mystery of His love! When men merited only His hatred, He loved them and gave His only begotten Son for them.

Long before Christ became incarnate, the Lord intimated the truth that Christ Jesus, in the days of His flesh, stated clearly, “Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you nay; but rather division: For from henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three. The father shall be divided against the son, and the son against the father; the mother against the daughter, and the daughter against the mother; the mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law” (Luke 12:51-53).

It is difficult to appreciate that God in His grace should choose to save some while others are left in their natural sinful state. This divine purpose has been defined: “God, that Sovereign Being who has an absolute right to do what He will with His own, having determined to create man and to leave him to the freedom of his own will, foreseeing he would certainly fall; of His own free distinguishing love, chose a certain number out of the apostate race of Adam, and ordained them to a participation of grace here, and to the enjoyment of glory hereafter” (The Reign of Grace, Abraham Booth).

The natural man cannot discover any accord between the acts of the Sovereign Being and the freedom of the human will. This, nevertheless, is understandable, God has decreed that all who trust the redemptive work of Christ are destined for heaven; whereas, all who refuse to confide in that accomplishment, endure the reasonable consequence of sin, which is hell. Man is left to the freedom of his own will to make a choice between these.

Let us consider the records of this divided family. In the generations of Jacob, by the grace of God, is the scarlet line of redemption, the scarlet line of the Messiah. In the generations of Esau, by his profane act (Heb. 12:16-17), is the scarlet line of sin, the scarlet line of lawlessness and rebellion.

Jacob and Esau United

The account of the death of Isaac appears here in anticipation of the actual event. From a comparison of the ages of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, it appears that Isaac did not die until Joseph had been in Egypt for ten to twelve years. No doubt the record is inserted here in

order to show that Jacob was the true heir and head of the household. The indulgent father Isaac and the fugitive restored son must have enjoyed times of sweet fellowship together. Isaac, the man of the home, mellowed by quiet communion, and Jacob, the man of many experiences, matured by conflict, defeat and victory probably found secret delight in those years together.

Eventually, at 180 years of age Isaac died, and his sons Jacob and Esau buried him. In this narrative the place of burial is not mentioned, but when Jacob gave instructions for his own burial, he asked to be buried beside Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, and Leah (Gen. 49: 29-31). It is interesting to know that the three greatest patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, all rest in the cave at Machpelah awaiting a glorious resurrection.

The two brothers, Jacob and Esau, were brought together by their common bereavement. They were still suspicious the one of the other; their natural dispositions conflicted and made them hostile rivals. Such a condition is very sad in any household, but it is increasingly so within a Christian household. Men, natural brothers and professing Christians, have been known to act toward each other as if they were without even natural affection. A scathing rebuke to all such may be found in chapter two of John’s First Epistle.

Jacob and Esau Separated

To see two brothers permanently part company is tragic, and we might well enquire into the reasons why. Probably there were certain natural qualities as well as some spiritual influences which contributed to this

matter. Of course, it can be argued that wealth alone caused the division between them. “Esau took his wives, and his sons, and his daughters, and all persons of his house, and his cattle, and all his beasts, and all his substance, which he had got in the land of Canaan: and went into the country from the face of his brother Jacob. For their riches were more than that they might dwell together” (Gen. 36:6-7). Notwithstanding, the great contrast drawn between these two brothers in the Epistle to the Hebrews convinces one that there are causes deeper than material riches.

In a general review of Esau’s life there are many commendable features, but an analysis of deeper characteristics reveals Esau as a neglectful person for he despised his birthright (Gen. 25:29-34); disrespectful, he married a daughter of a Hittite and grieved his parents (Gen. 26:34-35); changeable, later he sought the blessing with tears (Gen. 27:34); compromising, the second time he married, he took a kinswoman, an Ishmaelite, in order to win the favour of his father (Gen. 28;9). To these traits we might add that he was revengeful, he determined to slay Jacob (Gen. 29:41; 33:1). In spite of many admirable qualities, Esau was an unreliable self-centred person.

Jacob, as we have seen, was shrewd to an objectionable degree, but he valued spiritual things and sought after them, although he did so in a wrong way. He certainly was respectful to Isaac and Rebekah, and brought God into his life. One recalls his visit to Bethel. Jacob himself is an example of great love and of deep devotion, and his consideration for others is evidenced along the return route from Padan Aram.

There are moral differences between these two men which could cause them to separate, but the real point of division rests not in wealth or moral traits and standards, but in spiritual relationship to God. We read, “By faith Abraham, … sojourned in the land of promise, … dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob the heirs with him of the same promise” (Heb. 11:9).

The Book of Genesis --Part 70

The Book of Genesis

Part 70

James Gunn

The Generations of Esau and Jacob

Chapters 36 And 37

We have reached another transition in the book of Genesis. At this point of change the generations of Esau are merely listed; whereas, the generations of Jacob are given with considerable detail. Without doubt the Spirit of God is more interested in following the ancestry of the Messiah than engaging time and thought in the history of other peoples.

The Generations of Esau

From chapter 36 we learn that Esau founded a strong kingdom which advanced rapidly to a place of some importance. The number of dukes mentioned were probably governors who were able to provide a thousand men for the Edomite army.

Esau’s descendants, comparatively speaking, were more quickly organized to national status than were the descendants of Jacob. Alacrity and advancement are quite characteristic of the man of the flesh. The impressive enumeration of the names of these dukes may be in honour among men, but Christians might well rejoice that their names are written in Heaven rather than upon an honour-roll on earth.

A Canadian Christian who had been honoured by the Queen of England for his outstanding work, on being congratulated by a friend, replied, “Rejoice rather that your names are written in Heaven.”

As one follows the apparent success and the increasing strength of Edom as a nation and the slow development of Israel, he might be tempted to doubt the predictions made concerning Jacob and his posterity. In the blessing that Isaac pronounced upon Jacob he said, “Let people serve thee, and nations bow down to thee: be Lord over thy brethren, and let thy mother’s sons bow down to thee: cursed be everyone that curseth thee, and blessed be he that blesseth thee” (Gen. 27:29).

Centuries later, Balaam, whom God forced to bless rather than to curse Israel, prophesied, “There shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corner of Moab, and destroy all the children of Seth. And Edom shall be a possession for his enemies; and Israel shall do valiantly” (Num. 24:17-18). Seven and a half centuries were to pass before even a partial fulfilment of these prophecies appeared. God is not slack concerning His promises, as some men count slackness, and what He has promised that He is able also to perform. Eventually, during the reign of David, the type of Christ the Star and Sceptre, it was recorded, “He put garrisons in Edom, throughout all Edom put he garrisons, and all they of Edom became David’s servants. And the Lord preserved David withersoever he went” (2 Sam. 8:14). David, God’s king over Israel, subdued Edom and ended temporarily the Edom monarchy. Thus “we have the word of prophecy confirmed; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as

unto a light that shineth in a dark place” (2 Pet. 1:19, margin).

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The Book of Genesis

Part 71

James Gunn

Joseph—Chapter 27

It would be advantageous to read again our lesson of last month in order that we see the connection which unfortunately had to be broken because of insufficient space.

Later during Israel's decline, in the days of Jehosophat king of Judah, Edom revolted and made a king over themselves (2 Kings 8:20). Well might the Prophet write, "The Lord is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked: the Lord hath His way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of His feet" (Nahum 1:3).

The wicked Herod who attempted to slay the Lord Jesus in His infancy was an Edomite, an Idumean. The conflict between Esau and Jacob was perpetuated by their descendants. Nevertheless, God declared, "Whereas Edom saith We are impoverished, but we will return and build the desolate places; thus saith the Lord of Hosts, They shall build, but I will throw down; and they shall call them, the border of wickedness, and, The people against whom the Lord hath indignation for ever" (Mal. 1:4).

Ezekiel predicts the final and full destruction of the strong and strange people that descended from Esau: "Behold, O Mount Seir, I am against thee, and I will

stretch out Mine hand against thee, and I will make thee most desolate … I will make thee perpetual desolations, and thy cities shall not return: and ye shall know that I am the Lord" (Ezek. 35:1-5).

The Generations of Jacob

There seems to be an unusual and interesting contrast between the manner in which the generations of Esau are listed and the manner in which the generations of Jacob are recorded. In registering the descendants of Esau, the Spirit of God does so chronologically, but in treating the descendants of Jacob, He rather abruptly introduces Joseph, Jacob's favourite son, the elder child of Rachel. This contrast naturally demands an explanation, if one is available. The Lord who knows the end of a thing from the beginning had a purpose in this; He reveals the way He intended to preserve the nation of which Christ came, who is over all, God blessed forever (Rom. 9:5). Years later Joseph himself stated this, "God meant it unto good, to save much people alive" (Gen. 50:20).

The abruptness with which Joseph appears at this point intimates that he has an important role to play in the divine plan for Jacob's family.

Partly because of the momentous place Joseph occupied in the history of Israel; partly because of his excellent behaviour under most provocative circumstances; and, partly because of the noble character that he developed, Joseph has been considered a type of the Lord Jesus Christ. That he was a most admirable man is no doubt true, but the matter might be raised as to whether it is proper to weave the personal perfections of our Lord

Jesus into the life of one that was a sinner, no matter how excellent his reputation.

There are two salient points which must ever guide us in the study of any human character delineated in the Holy scriptures. First, “All have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). “As face answereth to face in water, so the heart of man to man” (Prov. 27:19). Never must the perfections of Christ be so intimately applied to a member of Adam’s ruined race as to make that member appear perfect or nearly so. “By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned” (Rom. 5:12). Second, it is a safe principle in the study of the types to accept as types only those Old Testament characters, institutions, and events which are so used by the Spirit of God in the New Testament. Moses, Aaron, Melchisedec, Solomon, Jonah, and others are referred to as being types of Christ, but among all the characters from the Old Testament thus used by the Spirit of God the name of Joseph is not found. From the lengthy reference made to him by Stephen one could not assume that Joseph was used as a type (Acts 7:9-15). This should be remembered as we proceed with our studies. In our zeal we must not ascribe to a depraved human moral perfections which are beyond possibility in even a very good man. The Apostle Paul, the most enlightened, the most zealous, the most devoted of all the Lord’s servants, said: “That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death; If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect; but I follow after, if that I may

apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:10-12).

We must learn to admire an exemplary man, but we must not elevate him beyond measure nor idolize him. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh."

It is also important to distinguish between an illustration and a type. Many Old Testament characters can be used as illustrations, although they may not be types.

The generations of Jacob are given in a story form rather than in a statistical list; consequently, as already suggested, we are introduced abruptly to Joseph. What an interesting character! This young man appears before us as a son in the home, a slave sold to a foreigner, a prisoner in a jail, and a prime minister of an ancient despot. The life of Joseph is full of action and, for us, full of illustrations for he was a man approved of God.

First, we shall look at Joseph as a child in his father's home. We shall notice his relationship to his father, to his brothers, and then to his entire family.

His relationship to his father (Gen. 37:2-3): Joseph, like all the patriarchs learned early in life the duties of a shepherd. It was during his apprenticeship, served under his older brothers, that he heard their evil talk. The evil that he heard probably embraced not only their language but the content of their conversation.

This passing reference to evil intimates the manner in which Joseph had been reared, it intimates the influence of his mother. Obviously, he had been taught how to discern evil, and had been instructed to fear God and eschew it. The early influence of his father and mother

and their instructions moulded his life, formed his character, and in measure prepared him for his future. Similar statements might also be made of many a young man since. Timothy, for example, whose biography is given in the New Testament (2 Tim. 1:5).

Indubitally, Joseph's carrying of the report of evil among his brethren to their father contributed to the antipathy which they developed toward him. Great discretion is required to know when and when not to repeat a matter. Chloe returned to the spiritual father of the assembly at Corinth with an evil report of the behaviour of that church. Her action was a blessing to the church of God at Corinth and to the Church ever since. Notwithstanding, we must be absolutely sure that the Lord would have certain subjects repeated, for we read, "Let no corrupt communications proceed out of your mouth, … Let all … and evil speaking, be put away from among you" (Eph. 4:29-31).

One of the clearest evidences of the attachment between Jacob and Joseph is seen in the coat of many colours (many pieces) which this father made for his son. Samuel's mother made a special coat for him. We read, "Moreover his mother made him a little coat, and brought it to him year by year" (1 Sam. 2:19). Love cannot hide itself.

Robes of many colours were made for the unmarried daughters of some ancient kings. These were signs of royalty and moral purity (2 Sam. 13:18). Jacob, by this coat placed Joseph as a prince among his brethren. It is true that Moses eventually spoke of Joseph in just that manner, and said, "Let the blessing come upon the head of Joseph, and upon the top of the head of him that was

separated (a prince among, K.J.V. margin) from his brethren" (Deut. 33:16). Nevertheless, it would seem that Jacob was somewhat premature, and only intensified the dislike against Joseph in the hearts of his brothers.

The Book of Genesis --Part 72

The Book of Genesis

Part 72

James Gunn

Joseph The Messenger: Chapter 37:13-17

Jacob’s solicitude for the welfare of his sons and their flocks became the occasion on which Joseph’s half-brothers openly manifested their hatred and spite against him.

Jacob’s sending of Joseph in order to ascertain the circumstances of his sons and his sheep reminds one of Paul’s sending Timothy back to Thessalonica to see how the faith and the love of the young converts there endured the trials and afflictions to which they were exposed. Similarly, it reminds one of the Philippians sending Epaphroditus to see how Paul fared in the prison at Rome. Many a Joseph since that day has gone out on an errand of mercy, a mission of kindness. Many have been welcomed as Timothy or warmly received as Epaphroditus; and, no doubt, many have been treated with disdain and contempt as was Joseph.

There are several interesting qualities in Joseph’s personality which grew from these early beginnings to maturity in his adult life. These are qualities which are necessary in a faithful steward of God (1 Cor. 4:2).

Industry

While Jacob loved Joseph dearly, and in certain ways favoured him above his brothers, this did not result in

his exempting him from the toils and the strains of a shepherd's life. At an early age Joseph had to face the rigours of changeable elements and wild beasts on the hillside: "Joseph, being seventeen years old was feeding the flock with his brethren" (Gen. 37:2).

There is every evidence that Joseph gladly shared in these labours of his brothers. There is no indication of indolence on his part. In fact, there is ample proof in the records of his full and useful life to substantiate the belief that Joseph from his boyhood was an industrious person.

Obedience

It is somewhat stimulating to notice how promptly and voluntarily Joseph obeyed his father's wish. The father and the son appear as contrasts. Jacob, at least in his earlier life, was very hesitant in his response to the requests of others. Not only was he not prompt, but even when he did obey, frequently it was only with partial obedience. Joseph, on the other hand, replied to his father's call, "Come, and I will send thee unto them," with a quick, "Here am I." His ready compliance with his father's authority irrespective of what involvements there might be is most admirable. Obedience here meant a journey of some sixty miles which, of course, would require several days of fatigue and peril.

Such obedience is rare in this day of lawlessness when every man seems to be doing that which is right in his own eyes. It is difficult for men to realize that in the sight of God "to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams" (1 Sam. 15:22).

Experience

Joseph at this time was only seventeen years of age; consequently, we are not surprised to read, “A certain man found him, and, behold, he was wandering in the field.” In his search for his brethren, he had gone astray.

Inexperience is not a commendable quality, to be sure; notwithstanding, it provides the background against which moral excellencies are clearly displayed. Goliath expected a complete victory over the untrained David. He fully thought that his own experience in battle assured him of success. David was an expert shepherd, not a skilled soldier; but David’s God was mighty in battle. When challenged by the boastful giant who cried, “Come to me, and I will give thy flesh unto the fowls of the air, and to the beasts of the field;” David replied, “Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of Hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied.” His lack of experience provided the opportunity to rely implicitly upon God, and this confidence received a rich reward.

Proficiency does not necessarily assure success, nor does inexperience spell defeat when the soul in its immaturity and weakness clings to God.

Courage

One understands a little of Jacob’s concern for his sons and his belongings when he recalls the bitter episode at Shechem. It was there that Simeon and Levi in revenging the dishonour done to their sister Dinah slew so many of the male inhabitants (chap. 34). The words of Jacob on that occasion may be recalled, “Ye have

troubled me to make me to stink among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and the Perizzites; and I being few in number, they shall gather themselves together against me; and I shall be destroyed, I and my house."

It may have been comparatively safe for a group of men like the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah to return again to such a danger spot. In an emergency they could defend themselves, but for a lad who must have known something of the happenings at Shechem, his going into that region was an act of real courage. Joseph probably had his fears about the district, but these he mastered and went to do his father's bidding in spite of any inward anxiety.

Diligence

The sum total of all these traits adds up to diligence, that persistent effort to accomplish a task. Joseph, when he did not find his brethren at Shechem, pressed on to Dothan which was on the southern slope of Mount Gilboa. They may have had a feeling of dread at Shechem so placed several miles between them and the city where they had established such an evil reputation. Joseph, however, diligently sought them out.

There are biblical examples of men who failed in this very matter. John Mark, a young man of New Testament times, certainly lacked diligence (Acts 13:13; 15:36-41), and withdrew from the place of action and service; not so Joseph. He resolutely pressed onward until he accomplished the mission assigned him by his father.

It has been pointed out that Joseph apparently combined the best moral excellencies of his predecessors. He had

the faith of Abraham, the calmness and peacefulness of Isaac, the ability of Jacob, and all the graciousness of his mother's side of the family.

These virtues are found in all the true and great servants of God. We see them in men like Moses, Joshua, Samuel, Isaiah, Paul, John, and a host of others, but most of all do we see them in Jehovah's Perfect Servant, the Lord Jesus. In others they appear relatively and in different degrees; in Christ, they are revealed in absolute perfection. In the true expression of Christian graces, we fail; Christ never fails to truly express the perfections of Christian graces. Nevertheless, because of His perfection, He bears with us in our imperfection.

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James Gunn

Without Natural Affection, Chapter 37:18-38

The Apostle John declares, “He that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes” (1 John 2:11).

The blindness of Joseph’s hateful brothers became more intense with the passing of time. For many years no light penetrated the darkness in which jealousy, hatred, and malice had enveloped them.

It is reasonable that we enquire into the great difference between Joseph and his half-brothers. Our enquiry will lead to the conclusion that we never actually dispose ourselves of the influences of those around us. The story is told of an accident in the Bureau of Standards in Washington, D. C. A tiny tube containing a very small amount of radium was dropped and broken on a hardwood floor. With a camel-hair brush the radium was swept up. The floor was then washed to get the rest, but enough remained to make another washing necessary. Other washings followed, each yielding hundreds of dollars worth of radium. Finally, a carpenter was called and instructed to scrape the floor. When the shavings were burned, the ashes were found to be strong with radium. Likewise, it is impossible to entirely remove human influence whether it be good or bad.

The life of Jacob, generally speaking, falls into two parts; the first part, before his experience at El Bethel (Gen. 35: 1-7); the secondpart, after that wonderful experience.

Before El Bethel

Joseph's half-brothers were adults before he was born. They had been reared while Jacob was still in Mesopotamia, and without doubt had been greatly influenced by the life at Haran. They must have sensed the jealousy, seen the duplicity, and been involved in the scheming between their father Jacob and their uncle Laban. The behaviour and actions of both father and uncle would be reproduced in these young men. They would develop the tendencies to deceive for they must have participated under the circumstances in some of the plots of their father. Indubitably, Jacob saw in these sons an expansion of his own life previous to the experience at El Bethel.

After El Bethel

A definite change came over Jacob as he prepared to return to Bethel as well as during his period there. From that time onward, Jacob was a different man. There was a reverential fear of God in his attitude which seemed to cleanse him of the old aptitude to treachery. The veneer of pretense which formerly had charactrized him was removed. Divine discipline was yielding its fruits of righteousness. His return to Bethel meant a return to the Lord with the corresponding sanctification and submission. It was under these circumstances that the personality of young Joseph had been developed. The

spiritual influence of improved home conditions is reflected in the life of Rachel’s son.

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The Book of Genesis

Part 74

James Gunn

Jealousy is Cruel as the Grave (Chapter 37:18-36)

As Joseph's brethren saw him approach, they plotted against him: "When they saw him afar off, even before he came near unto them, they conspired against him to slay him."

There is a moral order of degeneracy here; envy resulted in hatred (36:4), hatred resulted in callousness, callousness resulted in cruelty. In this case cruelty expressed itself eventually in avarice.

Envy

Jacob's love for and partiality to his young son made his other children jealous. The coat of many colours which he gave to Joseph only intensified the envy of his brothers.

There had been a radical change in Jacob since his experience at El Bethel. During the resulting period of his life there is much to commend; notwithstanding, his indulgence in his son is questionable. When favouritism is shown by the parents to only one of the children, the emotional reaction in others is harmful. The Apostle may have had this in mind when he wrote, "Ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath" (Eph. 6:4).

There was nothing wrong in what Jacob did for Joseph; the wrong was that he apparently showed little

favouritism to the others. Nothing was wrong in Joseph's receiving the coat, but coupled with the dreams of his youth, they developed animosity in other hearts against him. Centuries later Solomon wrote, "I considered all travail, and every right work, thatfor this a man is envied of his neighbour" (Ecc. 4:4).

Hatred

The Apostle Paul reviews his and Titus' past in language with which we are here familiar: "We ourselves also were sometime foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another" (Titus 3:3). To hate is to detest. How the sons of Bilhah abhored their younger half-brother!

Callousness

His brothers were callously indifferent to the sufferings of Joseph in the pit and to the sorrow of Jacob over the loss of his son. Jacob was not unmindful of this callousness when he said, "Simeon and Levi are brethren; instruments of cruelty are in their habitation" (Gen. 49:5). Men who had slaughtered the inhabitants of Shechem would not be touched by the cries of a lad whom they hated. In the days of his prophecy, Amos used their callousness as an illustration of the harshness of those that were at ease in Zion. He wrote of those "that drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with chief ointments; but they are not grieved for the afflictions of Joseph" (Amos 6:6). The brothers sat down to eat and drink, and "saw the anguish of his (Joseph's) soul, … and would not hear" (Gen. 42:21). They experienced no grief for the

afflictions of Joseph. Years later, the recollection of that wicked hour produced remorse in their hearts.

The Book of Genesis --Part 75

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James Gunn

Reaping of the Flesh: Chapter 37:18-30

In our consideration of the traits of character manifested by the behaviour of Joseph's brothers, our attention was directed to envy, hatred, and callousness; it is obvious that other baneful features also come into prominence. We shall mention only two, and then proceed with other details hi the story.

Cruelty

There are many forms of cruelty. These men were bent on murder; the change in their plans is not a credit; they accomplished their design and got rid of Joseph. True, they avoided the sin of murder, although some of them were already guilty of that. Their callous cruelty caused years of mental anguish. "Man's inhumanity to man, makes countless numbers mourn."

Covetousness

One wonders if Rueben had some compunctions of conscience over his incestuous deed which may have been the climax of alienating Bilhah's love from her husband (Gen. 35:22). One could hope that with some repentance he did not wish to inflict another wound upon Jacob. He may have hoped for Joseph's escape, and apparently had intended himself to release him later (Gen. 42:22).

If Reuben's plans were favourable to Joseph, these were soon overcome by the proposal of Judah.

Their profits were small, but they were rid of the strongest deterrent in the family to their wickedness.

For their evil doings they eventually suffered, but the reason this account is given in such detail is to show that God works out His own purposes through even the wrath and the crimes of foolish men. "Joseph said unto them,…ye thought evil against me: but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive" (Gen. 50, 19:20).

On this occasion there does seem to have been a difference on the part of Reuben. What his intention was is not clear, but from his attitude we learn that compromise with wickedness always results in inward conflict and grief. Any attempt to mitigate evil by a compliance which goes part way and hopes that something will prevent the worst, can only end in shame and confusion.

From the narrative it appears that they sold Joseph to the Ishmealites during a period when Reuben was not with them, and that on his return the discovery of Joseph's absence led him to the conclusion that he was indeed dead. Later, he reproved his brothers in such a manner as to imply that he had not agreed with their plot. "Reuben answered them (in the presence of Joseph, the Prime-minister of all Egypt), saying, Spake I not unto you, saying, Do not sin against the child; and ye would not hear? therefore, behold, also his blood is required" (Gen. 42:22). If Reuben thus believed Joseph to have been murdered, he may have felt it better to

allow Jacob to think of him as killed by some wild beast rather than by his brothers.

The suggestion that Joseph be placed in a pit (a subterranean cistern) should be understood as an attempt to deliver him out of their hands. The intention of the others, contrariwise, was that their brother perish in the mire and slime of that gloomy place, while they enjoyed the very provisions he had brought from their father.

How God makes the wrath of man to praise Him! By strange and circuitous paths the Lord directs the fulfilment of His own purpose. Little did the brothers or the Ishmaelites know that they, in their negotiations, were accomplishing the will of God.

The Ishmaelites and the Midianites were descendants of Abraham through Keturah; consequently, they were blood relatives of Joseph. The Ishmaelites apparently were the owners and the operators of the caravan, and the Midianites a group of merchants that had joined the caravan in their business ventures. Into the hands of these shrewd men, the sensitive Joseph was sold. The suffering and the anguish through which he passed is elsewhere described for us. Years later his brothers acknowledged, “We saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear” (Gen. 42:21). The Psalmist states, “He (God) sent a man before them, even Joseph, who was sold for a servant: Whose feet they hurt with fetters: he was laid in iron” (Psa. 105:17-18).

Joseph knew something of the wickedness of his brothers, but the full impact of their malice must have come as a surprise to him to intensify the sense of desertion that tortured him. In the slimy pit Joseph

drank deeply from the cup of sorrow; yet, that experience was one of the early steps along the pathway God had planned as He sent Joseph before them to be the saviour of their entire family and nation.

In the caravan, Joseph, now a slave, was to learn the need of submission and self-control. No longer was he the favourite in the home but merely an article of commerce.

There have been some attempts to acquit Joseph's brothers of the sinful selling of him to strangers. Those who indulge in such vain thinking apply the pronoun "they" in verse 28 to the Midianites. The supposition is that as some of the Midianites went to the pit to draw water, they found the lad, "and they drew and lifted up Joseph out of the pit, and sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites." Of course, such reasoning rests upon the idea that the Midianites were the travellers who found Joseph and made merchandise of him. The historian Luke did not accept this theory. He records the words of Stephen which place the blame where it belongs: "And the patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt: but God was with Him" (Acts 7:9).

The Lord did not forget this act of cruelty; eventually, in Israel a law passed the sentence of death upon the crime committed by the sons of Jacob at this time: "He that stealeth a man, and selleth him, or if he be found in his hand, he shall surely be put to death" (Ex. 21:16).

The Word of God declares, "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting" (Gal. 6:7-8). This is

clearly exemplified in the life of Jacob. He reaped an ample harvest from his sowing of deception. As Jacob had deceived his aged father, Isaac, even so did his sons deceive him. How hopelessly he mourned for the son whom he thought dead!

The Book of Genesis --Part 76

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James Gunn

Trials And Temptations (Chapter 37:34-36)

In spite of the wrongs in Jacob's early life, his duplicity and covetousness, we cannot but feel sympathy for him in his advanced years as, deceived by his own children, he mourns the loss of his son Joseph. There is no doubt that he had sown what he now was reaping. From the records of his subsequent attitudes and performances, one would gather that the punitive discipline of the Lord yielded the fruits of righteousness.

It is necessary that we pass from the account of the weeping father to follow the course of Joseph who now had become a slave. "The Midianites sold him into Egypt unto Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, and captain of the guard."

That Joseph was a chosen instrument of the Lord which He eventually intended to employ (Gen. 50:20), must enter into all our consideration. Nevertheless, because the Lord had made purposeful selection of him did not mean that He had rendered Joseph immune from trials and temptations. The narrative of Joseph's experiences demonstrates that a vesel chosen by God for ultimate use must not only be prepared through the moulding conditions of life, but must be properly approved by the tests of circumstances.

Joseph Sold

Emotions of compassion and of exhilaration have been aroused by the accounts of men and women born in slavery, and by the description of the feelings of the few who escaped to freedom. Nothing could be more depressing than to ponder the confused feelings of a man who, after having been born and reared in freedom, suddenly discovers himself sold into slavery. It might be difficult in a cursory survey of Joseph's life to see the true value of this emotionally disturbing ordeal, but God who knew the end from the beginning permitted the enslavement of this free man. He was training him in the virtues of sympathy, justice, and forbearance.

Many years later when he was second ruler over all Egypt, he who was sold to an Egyptian, purchased all the Egyptians and "made bond-men of them" (Gen. 47:21, margin). Little did either he or they understand the day he was purchased that they would plead with him saying, "Buy us and our land for bread, and we and our land will be servants unto Pharaoh," end that it would be recorded, "Then Joseph said unto the people, Behold, I have bought you this day and your land for Paraoh" (Gen. 47:19-23).

No other man in the government of Egypt could have conducted this act with the gracious sympathy, solicitude, and understanding as the man Joseph who himself had endured the bitter experience of being purchased as a bondman by others.

The Book of Genesis --Part 77

The Book of Genesis

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James Gunn

Adjustments and Adversities — Chapter 39:1-14

There are high-lights even amidst the dark shadows of grievous happenings. Although he was a slave, “The Lord was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man: and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian. And his master saw that the Lord was with him, and that the Lord made all that he did to prosper in his hand” (Gen. 39:1-3).

Joseph Trusted

The word rendered here “prosperous” might have been rendered “profitable.” The use of this word brings to mind another slave, a slave mentioned in the New Testament, Onesimus by name (Philm.).

Onesimus, the meaning of which name is profitable, was the property of Philemon a Christian in Colosse. Inasmuch as he stole from his master and ran away, he belied the meaning of his name, and proved to be most unprofitable. In some remarkable manner this fugitive was brought into contact with the Apostle Paul through whose influence he was genuinely converted to the Lord. Later, the Apostle attempted to bring about a reconciliation between the offended master, Philemon, and the offending slave. He wrote, playing upon the meaning of Onesimus’ name, “Which in time past was to

thee unprofitable, but now profitable to thee and to me" (Philm. 11).

Through the grace of God Onesimus was given power to live in accord with the significance of his name. Joseph, unlike Onesimus, was always a most profitable slave in the Egyptian household.

The reason for Joseph's success and profit is found in the constant presence of the Lord with him." The Lord was with him…the Lord made all that he did to prosper." Consequently, one is not surprised to learn that Joseph's master promoted him, "And he made him overseer over his house, and all that he had he put under his hand" (Gen. 39:4).

The presence of the Lord with His people resulted in strength and success in Joseph's case. In the case of Moses who prayed, "If Thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence" (Ex. 33:15), it meant wisdom and guidance. David considered the presence of the Lord as the source of light and comfort; he wrote, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me" (Psa. 23:4).

"It is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful" (1 Cor. 4:2). In regard to deacons, the Spirit of God states, "Let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon" (1 Tim. 3:10). Joseph was tested thoroughly by heavy responsibility in the Egyptian household and found faithful. He is an illustration of the principle stated by the Lord, "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much" (Luke 16:10). His life also illustrated the purpose of reward during the kingdom reign of Christ. The King, if satisfied by the fidelity of His servant, will say, "Thou

hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority…" (Luke 19:16).

Joseph Tempted

We must satisfy ourselves from the Word of God as to the true meaning of temptation. Without a clear understanding, it is possible that certain Scriptures may be misconstrued. The statement in Genesis 22:1, "And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham," might lead to a wrong conception of God and of His dealings with His own. The Apostle James differentiated between trial or testing and temptation. It is regretable that this distinction is not more evident in the English translations of the Bible. The dual usage of the word temptation, unfortunately confuses the matter. Speaking of trial James writes, "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed" (Jas. 1:12-14).

It could be said that temptation is a trial or a test, but, in the sense in which the word is employed here, trial may not be necessarily temptation.

Joseph was tried by adversity, the hatred of his brothers, and the consequences of their malicious actions. He was also tried by prosperity in Potiphar's home. In that same home he was to be tempted. The ordeal through which he was to pass manifests the character of temptation, and the only effectual resistance against it.

Temptation: Temptation is attractive. Such was the form in which it approached Joseph. It is also wicked, illicit, in character. It is unexpected as to its source, and insistant

in its efforts; it repeatedly attacks moral standards. It thrusts with the element of surprise, and in the final analysis, it is against God.

Undoubtedly, temptation injures those who indulge; it also offends those who otherwise may be involved; but, even more serious than these, it is an affront to God.

Resistance: To be effectual, as in the case of Joseph, resistance must develop strength with each enticing approach of evil. In the first place, Joseph refused and stated his refusal in pointed language to Potiphar's wife. In the second place, his refusal was re-enforced by reason, The prohibitions demanded by holiness and ethics were a power in Joseph's defence. In the third place, his refusal was in accord with divine standards; he solemnly asked, "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" Finally, when seductive wickedness insisted in its attempts to overcome Joseph's moral guard, he retreated from the presence of temptation.

Even in such resistance to sinful inducements, the depraved heart of man is so selfish that it reasons, "It is vain to serve God; what profit is it that we have kept His ordinance…?" (Mal. 3:14). Joseph's refusal and resistance only resulted in further trouble. Granted, the loss of his garments was only indication of more important losses, his freedom and his reputation.

It has been said that reputation is what others believe a man to be, while character reveals what a man actually is. These have been further defined thus: character is the sum of a man's habits, for character is built by the slow process of thought, act, repetition, habit, and then character. Reputation has been defined as the sum of a

man’s pretensions. It is the hypocritical veneer behind which he hides before the public. Resistance does not defend reputation; it defends character. Joseph sacrificed his reputation, but not only retained his character; he strengthened it.

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James Gunn

Chapter 38:1-30

In the review of Joseph's entering Egypt, it seemed necessary to omit chapter 38 in order to follow the details of his trying experience. We must return to that passage which we then excluded for it is against its sordid picture that Joseph's character is best seen.

The contrast between Judah and Joseph is vivid: the first is morally corrupt, the second morally correct; the first is sensual, the second spiritual. While grace may be seen acting on behalf of Judah and his descendants, grace is seen acting through Joseph in blessing to others.

Guilt

The guilt of Judah and of his sons is well proven. The evidence is presented with concise frankness, a frankness that produces shame in the mind of even the casual reader.

Occasionally one is asked why there are such chapters in the Bible; why God exposes great wickedness in minute detail. God is absolutely just, consequently, He does not cover sin. He deals with it openly so that men will not only recognize it, but will eschew it.

This entire record discloses the extremely low moral standards among the Canaanites, and it should be noticed that both Judah's wife and daughter-in-law were

Canaanites, in spite of the fact Tamar is a Hebrew name. Centuries later, for God is patient, because of the moral degradation and the transgression of this people, God expelled them from the land of Canaan.

The indignation of Judah at Tamar's misbehaviour was very quickly dismissed when he discovered that he was an accomplice to her sin, and merited the very sentence that he had pronounced against her. The fact of her guilt was evident and so was his; she had carefully obtained pledges which readily identified him; he had left the proofs of his sin behind him. How like men in general! His iniquity was marked before him. "Some men's sins are open beforehand, going before to judgment; some men they follow after" (1 Tim. 5:24).

Government

When God placed Adam and Eve in Eden, He stated the terms of His government over them, and over the exercise of the freedom of their wills. "The Lord commanded man saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Gen. 2:16-17).

Ever since the fall of man this principle has been operative, "When lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death" (Jas. 1:15).

What striking examples of this we have throughout the Bible: Nadab and Abihu (Lev. 10:1-2), The thousands of Israel who were slain at Baal-Peor (Num. 25:9), Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11), and, of course, the two sons

of Judah, Er and Onan; of each we read, “The Lord slew him.” Surely, “the soul that sinneth, it shall die.”

The Book of Genesis --Part 79

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James Gunn

Chapter 38:1-30

Our studies closed last month with a consideration of God's dealings with Judah. Some thought was expended upon the guilt of this brother of Joseph and upon God's governmental severity upon his sin and that of his sons.

There are cases in which God implemented suddenly this severity in His governmental dealings with men, and there are times when He exercised patience with the guilty, "The Lord … is long suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9).

Grace

The New Testament opens with a reference to this very chapter in Genesis, to the act of Judah with Tamar, and to one of the sons born to them, Phares (Matt. 1:3). These references are all a part of the geneology of the Lord Jesus. As is known, there are some important personages omitted from this long list of names, but these, in spite of their sin, through grace find a place in this honour roll.

What lessons may we learn from this? Are we "to continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid" (Rom. 6:1). Surely the lesson is this, "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound" (Rom. 5:21).

One may wonder why this account of gross sin appears in the centre of the biography of such a person as Joseph. Several answers may occur to one, but of this we are certain, the pure life of Joseph scintillates against the impure behaviour of Judah and his family.

Joseph Imprisoned - (39:17-23)

It has been questioned whether or not Potiphar believed his wife's story. A woman with such marked immoral tendencies could have manifested them on former occasions. Since she had made such an outcry, for the sake of appearances her husband had to put Joseph in prison. It seems reasonable that Potiphar believed in the innocence of Joseph and in the guilt of his wife, but contrary to justice, because of his position allowed Joseph to suffer.

The silence of Joseph here is admirable. He could have laid a counter charge against this woman. Instead he remained quiet; when reviled, he reviled not. In this he provides us with an extraordinary illustration of the statements of Peter: "If any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God on this behalf."

One might ask whether there are any compensations for the endurance of injustice. In the case of Joseph there was. Let us place the two statements over against each other, "And he was in prison. But the Lord was with Joseph, and shewed him mercy, and gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison." The Lord favoured him with His divine presence and with the kind considerations of the jailor. Truly, "When a man's ways please the Lord, He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with Him" (Prov. 16:7).

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James Gunn

Speaking the Truth in Love

Chapter 40:1-23

In our last study we considered the injustice that cast Joseph into prison. From several Scriptures we learned that in the life of a believer such suffering frequently results in present spiritual compensations.

Joseph had not been in prison long until he was appointed to serve two officers from Pharoah's court, imprisoned there, so it is assumed, for a conspiracy to poison their monarch. These two men apparently were awaiting trial, and during that period Joseph's intercourse with them, in a measure, would educate him to stand before Pharoah, and to behave properly in the royal court.

At home Joseph had been his father's favourite, and might, therefore, like many another such son, have been spared from any burdensome and menial tasks. Nothwithstanding, whether accustomed to constant labour or otherwise, he served faithfully and graciously the butler and the baker. The butler was Pharoah's chief cup-bearer, a position of considerable honour; the baker was the head of the royal confectioners. Joseph must have proved himself very trustworthy to the captain of the guard, otherwise he would not have assigned him the service of these gentlemen of rank; furthermore, one

does not need to draw upon his imagination to believe that this Hebrew servant would be most considerate toward his charges.

Every circumstance seems to reveal some new facet of the character of Joseph. Here are fresh evidences of his fidelity, industry, and sympathetic understanding.

A close scrutiny of his behaviour in prison reminds one of Paul's exhortation, "Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh: not with eyeservice, as menpleasers, but in singleness of heart, fearing God. And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men" (Col. 3:22-23).

The next episode in this exemplary life manifested the large place God had in the heart of Joseph; suffering, cruelty, and injustice had not decreased his faith in God. One particular morning he encouraged the two officers of the court to tell their dreams of the night before, saying, "Do not interpretations belong to God?" He himself had dreamed, and although his dreams had not yet come true, he believed that God, in those days of incomplete revelation, used such means to manifest His will to men. Job wrote, in all probability long before Joseph's day, "God speaketh once, yea twice, yet man perceiveth it not. In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men …, and sealeth their instruction. That He may withdraw man from his purpose, and hide pride from man" (Job. 33:14-17). It pleased the Lord then to use frequently a human interpreter to make known His mind, even as today He uses a human expositor of His word to clarify its meaning.

God may have imparted to Joseph the conviction that through him He would give the interpretation of these respective dreams, and so he requested that the men tell the details. There is nothing that strengthens a believer as the consciousness of God's presence with him. It was this that strengthened David to meet the challenge of Goliath. In reply to the defiance of the Philistine, he said, "Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of Hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied" (1 Sam. 17:45).

The writer of Psalm 46, whether Hezekiah or Isaiah, at the triumph over the forces of Sennacherib, is not important, boldly asserted, "The Lord of Hosts is with us: the God of Jacob is our refuge" (Psa. 46:11). They had seen real demonstrations of the power of God in the victory over their enemies. Many a time did Joseph in his eventful life prove the strength and deliverance of the Divine Presence.

God gave Joseph the occasion of his service to these two officers as a means of displaying the truth. What he said in the interpretation of their dreams most certainly came to pass, his yea was yea, and his nay was nay. His words were of salvation and elevation to the one, and of execution to the other. It is assumed that at their trial, the one was exonerated and the other condemned; and that consequently, Pharoah released the butler and executed the guilty baker.

What Joseph was to those two men with whom he was incarcerated, the Lord Jesus was to the malefactors with whom He was numbered. The servant is not greater than his Lord, and in this respect, "As He is, so are we in

this world." The Apostle Paul wrote, "We are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: To the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life" (2 Cor. 2:15-16). The Gospel in a believer's life and ministry divides humanity into the two groups, the saved and the lost.

Men have criticized Joseph for his appeal to the chief butler, "Think on me when it shall be well with thee, and shew kindness I pray thee, unto me, and make mention of me unto Pharaoh, and bring me out of this house: For indeed I was stolen away out of the land of the Hebrews; and here also have I done nothing that they should put me into the dungeon." Some imagine in this declaration of his innocence and his appeal for human aid that he departed from his silence and absolute dependence upon the Lord, An understanding of all the contributing circumstances will produce only sympathy for Joseph. That he may have taken his eyes off the Lord is possible, for although an extraordinary person, he was human. How blessed to realize that in all conditions of life "Like as a father pitieth his children so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him. For He knoweth our frame: He remembereth that we are dust" (Psa. 103:13-14).

The Book of Genesis --Part 81

The Book of Genesis

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James Gunn

Chapter 41:1-24

Unrighteous To Forget

If the assumption that the attention and confidence of Joseph had been diverted from the Lord and placed upon man be in any degree true, Joseph was soon to discover how unreliable, neglectful, and forgetful man can be, and that over a prolonged period of time.

The Time

The butler to whom Joseph had said, “Think on me when it shall be well with thee,” forgot all about his benefactor for two full years. He did not forget Pharaoh’s wrath in those former years, or days spent “in ward in the captain of the guards house,” but he did forget about Joseph. Not until he was prompted by circumstances did he recall the man of godly wisdom and deep understanding. Thus does man reward the wisdom that solves his problems, the kindness that enables him joyously to anticipate his freedom, and the prediction that assures him of restoration.

The attitude of man to his fellow was the subject of Job’s lamentation when he said, “My kinsfolk have failed, and my familiar friends have forgotten me” (Job 19:14). There are times when, like the Psalmist, we think of God as such an one as man, and we ask, “Hath God forgotten

to be gracious? Hath he in anger shut up His tender mercies?" (Psa. 77:9). How precious are the words of testimony and comfort to the Hebrew Christian, "God is not unrighteous to forget" (Heb. 6:10)! Even a woman may forget her child, "yet will I not forget thee," said the Lord to His ancient people (Isa. 49:15).

In two full years Pharaoh would have celebrated his birthday twice; therefore, the butler would have passed through two occasions which might well have stirred his memory. It was no pleasant celebration that caused him to remember, but, rather, a gravely deep experience for the entire court of his monarch.

The Circumstance

These dreams of Pharaoh actually are manifestations of divine grace to one given over to idolatry. In his dream he stood by the river Nile, considered by the ancient Egyptians as a deity, one of their several objects of veneration. Centuries later when God executed judgment against all the gods of Egypt (Ex. 12:12), the river, as well as the other objects of worship, became a plague, the water was turned to blood (Ex. 7:14-25). Without doubt, in his dream Pharaoh imagined himself engaged in some religious ritual at the river, and there he saw the first parabolic vision.

The two dreams visualized a strange circumstance that devoured the choicest vegetable and animal foods intended for man. The foods were consumed, the amount depleted, the supply exhausted, and yet the need constantly increased.

This divine communication was not understood by the monarch, therefore, we are not surprised that he sent

for his diviners, the magicians and the wise men of Egypt. As we consider the learning and prestige of these men and their apparent inability in this matter, we might well ask with Paul, “Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?” “The world by wisdom knew not God” (1 Cor. 1:20-21).

The Recollection

Memory possesses the faculty of storing incidents, events, and circumstances and filing them in minute detail. At times the individual may be quite unconscious of the depth of the impressions recorded; nevertheless, these are all ready for some future occasion.

One of the means used to stimulate recollection is the association of ideas, both comparative and contrastive. The fact that Pharaoh had a dream that troubled him would induce the butler to recall his own dream, and that no one could interpret the dream would remind him of the young man who was able to reveal the strange meaning of his own dream. Once he had remembered his experience in the prison, he did not hesitate to relate the whole matter to Pharaoh. He told of the young Hebrew prisoner who with remarkable accuracy had foretold by the butler’s own dream events then future.

The Presentation

There were few preliminaries in the presentation of Joseph to the court. He was suitably groomed and dressed, all being accomplished in haste. No one on seeing him would have suspected that he had been released from prison. This complete change would have a definite psychological effect upon Joseph and those

who knew his circumstance, but it did not produce pride and self-sufficiency in his heart. Joseph had been in the school of God for years, and in that school he had been taught how to behave himself not only in a prison but in a palace, the two extremes of social life.

Joseph's conduct in the presence of earthly majesty was the result of true spirituality. There are several commendable qualities of character on display here:

Humility: When Pharaoh explained why he had sent for him and made reference to his dreams, expressing the hope that Joseph might help by giving an interpretation, immediately the reply was, " It is not in me." No claim to superior knowledge or wisdom was made. This statement, had it been made alone, would have troubled an already disturbed mind, for it was quite contrary to the commendation of the butler, who had said, "An Hebrew servant … he interpreted to us our dreams."

Confidence: Dr. Moule in one of his expositions of Philippians 3:3 affirms that this verse contains four positive statements, not three positives and one negative. He suggests this reading, "We are the circumcision, which worship God in the Spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have confidence, but not in the flesh."

How true this final statement was of Joseph! He said to Pharaoh, "It is not in me: God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace." He not only confided in the Lord himself, but he directed Pharaoh to God as the All Wise who could give the interpretation of the dreams and peace to the distressed mind.

The demeanour of the erstwhile prisoner so inspired the faith of Egypt's monarch that he not only related his

dreams, but told them with the definite expectancy of a genuine answer.

The Book of Genesis --Part 82

The Book of Genesis

Part 82

James Gunn

Humility Exalted: Chapter 41:17-40

At the close of our last study, we saw Joseph in the presence of Pharaoh disclaiming any personal ability to interpret the dual dream that had so perturbed that monarch of Egypt. It would be improper to pursue our investigations without noticing the great contrast between speculation and revelation, the first is human, the second is divine.

Speculation

The Egyptians placed considerable importance upon astrology and necromancy. They relied upon the speculations of their magicians and wise men. The remarkable powers of those men are clearly demonstrated in the early chapters of the Book of Exodus. When Moses and Aaron performed the God-given miracle of changing the rod into a reptile, we read, “The magicians of Egypt, they also did in like manner with their enchantments.” True, there was this difference, “Aaron’s rod swallowed up their rods.” Nevertheless, those men were influential at court, and were esteemed for their ability to foretell certain events. Apparently by a system of symbols they attempted from dreams to reveal the occult.

There is a reference to them in the New Testament. The Spirit of God through Paul says, when discussing men of

the last days, “Now as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, reprobates concerning the faith” (2 Tim. 3:8). One would assume that those ancient magicians had been satanically inspired.

Although they did have remarkable powers and capabilities, there is no doubt that they frequently indulged in chicanery and deceit. At the best their attempts to prophesy were speculative.

Revelation

In contrast to all this, we read, “Joseph said unto Pharaoh, The dream is one: God hath shewed Pharaoh what He is about to do” (V.25). The dreams which had so troubled Pharaoh were of divine origin. When Joseph first entered the presence of Pharaoh, he said, “God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace.” That statement was an expression of his confident hope in the Lord. God honoured that trust, so that Joseph later was able to speak by authentic revelation. Joseph could have said with Daniel, “He (God) revealeth the deep and secret things” (Dan. 2:22).

The dream was repeated with only variations in the forms, and by that its message was strongly emphasized. Joseph told Pharaoh, “For that the dream was doubled unto Pharaoh twice; it is because the thing is established by God.”

How gracious of God to reveal His own purpose toward Egypt and the surrounding nations! True, Pharaoh’s knowledge of the divine plan was limited, but he acted upon what he knew. God’s full plan was to bring Jacob and his family into Egypt there to await the time when

the iniquity of the Amorites was full (Gen. 15:13-16). With Jacob it may have been a sense of self-preservation that turned him to Egypt for help, but God had plans “to save much people alive” (Gen. 50:20). Through the divine warning given to Pharaoh Egypt became the granary of the ancient world.

Provision

It seemed natural that Joseph should add his few words of advice, saying, “Let Pharaoh do this, and let him appoint officers over the land, and take up the fifth part of the land of Egypt in the seven plenteous years.” This advice was wisely given for it was based upon divine revelation. It was also given in humility without any self-assumption. Joseph did not then know but that he would be returned to the prison. What could a Hebrew, a slave, a prisoner expect in a foreign court of experienced ministers of state?

It seemed to Pharaoh that Joseph possessed supernatural ability, divine power as well as extraordinary sagacity. “And Pharaoh said unto his servants, Can we find such a one as this is, a man in whom the Spirit of God is? And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, Forasmuch as God hath shewed thee all this, there is none so discreet and wise as thou art: Thou shalt be over my house, and according unto thy word shall my people be ruled: only in the throne will I be greater than thou.” Thus the prisoner became the prime minister, with full power to implement a policy that was to govern Egypt for a period of at least fourteen years. God had brought him through almost fourteen years of trials, difficulties, and disappointments to train him for a second fourteen year period of leadership, management,

affluence, and statesmanship (Gen. 37:2 and Gen. 41:46).

Remuneration

Circumstances frequently are like the weather, they change suddenly. It was that way in Joseph's case. He arose one morning from his hard cot as an inmate of the prison, and in the evening of the same day, he retired in comfort as the premier of the nation.

His office: He certainly was not a minister without portfolio. He was not only the head of the government, the next under Pharaoh, but he was the Minister of Food and Supplies.

The signet ring was the symbol of the authority delegated in him. When Alexander the Great was dying he took off his ring and gave it to Perdiccas, for such was the custom. The robe and necklace were indications of rank, the high rank to which Joseph had been exalted. The people quickly accepted him, and cried before him, "Bow the knee," which in modern language might be expressed by the salutation, "Hail."

One feels that Joseph as he heard the cry, "Bow the knee," must have recalled his boyhood dreams and the rebuke of his father in connection with them, His family: Pharaoh acted promptly to fully naturalize Joseph. He changed his name to Zaphnath-paaneah, a name that has been variously interpreted: "The Revealer of Secrets," "The Saviour of the World," "Food for the Living," etc.

Furthermore, Pharaoh gave Joseph a wife, Asenath the daughter of one of the most important families in Egypt.

He thus bound him to the nation by one of the closest possible bonds.

The names of the two baby boys which Asenath bore to Joseph are very significant. They may not have been understood by the public, but they meant much to their father. “Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manassah: For God, said he, hath made me forget all my toil, and all my father’s house. And the name of the second called he Ephraim: For God hath caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction.” His family naturally would produce in his heart the feeling of permanent residence in Egypt.

The Book of Genesis --Part 83

The Book of Genesis

Part 83

James Gunn

In the Day of Prosperity Consider: Chapter 53-57

What lessons may be learned by the believer from these historical events we have been reviewing! God is not always in a hurry to accomplish His purpose; He may wait many years to execute His plans in the life of His child. When the fulness of time comes, nothing will hinder Him; He may have to disturb the routine of a royal palace, and interfere with the schedule in a prison. “He doeth according to His will in the army of Heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay His hand, or say unto Him, What doest Thou?” (Dan. 4:35).

May the attitude toward the Lord’s dealings with us be that of a humble mind and a submissive will, knowing that “tribulation worketh patience: and patience, experience; and experience, hope” (Rom. 5:3-4).

Slowly, through a painful process God had raised Joseph from the miry clay in a dark pit to the governor’s residence in Egypt. By that process, a discipline in itself, God had trained him for the task that now lay before him. The next section of Joseph’s history, generally speaking, divides itself into two parts, prosperity and preparation, adversity and administration.

Prosperity and Preparation

Pleasant events seem to pass so quickly! With only fifteen words the narrator records the history of seven years, “And the seven years of plenteousness, that was in the land of Egypt, were ended” (41:53). During these years in which there was no direct indication that Joseph’s predictions would come true, there is no doubt that he busied himself, and that with complete reliance upon the Lord, he executed the plan he had proposed.

With a heavy schedule to keep and tremendous administrative duties to perform, Joseph did not forget his God. Circumstances had so changed that much of the sorrow of the past was obliterated from his memory; notwithstanding, God remained supreme. “God, said he, hath made me forget all my toil, and all my father’s house.” Later he added, “God hath caused me to be fruitful.” Solomon realized the tendency of the human heart to stray from the Lord through changes of circumstances, especially when these became advantageous. He wrote, “Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: Lest I be full, and deny Thee, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain” (Prov. 3:8-9).

The Psalmist refers to some of Joseph’s activities during this period. “He (Pharaoh) made him lord of his house, and ruler of all his substance: To bind his princes at his pleasure; and teach his senators wisdom” (Psa. 105:21-22). Apparently there were those among the counsellors who opposed the adoption of the austerity program when everything seemed so prosperous, and

these Joseph had to discipline, he had to imprison some. There were others who were co-operative, and these he had to instruct in the best methods of collecting and conserving grain. Joseph in all those years was an excellent example of the fact, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.”

Adversity and Administration

“And the seven years of dearth began to come, according as Joseph had said: and the dearth was in all the lands; but in all the land of Egypt there was bread.” One not only notices in this confirmation the intensity and the extent of the famine but also the wise preparation for the emergency. The provisions gathered in the form of a taxation were stored throughout the entire country. Joseph’s plan was not one of centralization but of distribution. Food was apportioned in such a manner that it was dispensed locally to the communities scattered over all Egypt.

It is common and wise practice to have for so gigantic an undertaking some headquarter in which general management is set. It would be to such an office that non-Egyptians would make application for grain and flour. Fuller details of Joseph’s methods of administration are given in chapter 47.

An interesting account is given by Brugsch of the tomb of one called Buba. It bears the inscription, “When a famine broke out for many years, I gave corn to the city during each famine.” This Historian believes that this inscription dates from the time of Joseph. This may be the tomb of one of the officers under Joseph.

The terrible suffering caused by even one year's famine is well illustrated for us by happenings in our own day in both China and India. In populous areas we have read of the people eating the thatch of their cottage roofs, of selling their children, and of even suiciding.

In an attempt to piece together the method of administration employed, it would seem that a fourfold objective had been set. First, there was the selling of the grain in order to regain for Pharaoh the moneys originally invested. Second, to leave with the people the feeling of personal responsibility, the plan was not a relief work of charity, for each man retained the sense of individual moral duty. Consequently, they used their cattle and land in making their purchases. The result of this was that each became a tenant on government land at a fair rental. It is confirmed in secular history that the land eventually became Pharaoh's by this purchase. Third, we read, "And as for the people, he removed them to cities from one end of the borders of Egypt even to the other end thereof." There may have been several reasons for this, but the most probable is that it became a necessity to gather the people near to the distributing centre lest through isolation some of them perish. Fourth, to leave the land belonging to the priest inviolate.

In this way God set in motion the instruments which were eventually to complete the predictions made to Abraham centuries before: "Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not their's, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substances" (Gen. 15:13-14). One is

constrained to say with the Apostle, “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!” (Rom. 11:33).

In all His dealings with men and nations when there has been a yielding to His will in any measure and a following of His guidance, the ultimate end is enrichment. When at last Israel left Egypt, Egypt was impoverished and Israel made wealthy.

The Book of Genesis --Part 84

The Book of Genesis

Part 84

James Gunn

Frequently one is asked how a believer may ascertain the guidance of the Lord in the movements of life. The reply generally involves four salient points: the Word of God, the Lord would not have us do anything contrary to His revealed will; the Spirit of God (Acts 16:6-7); circumstances (Acts 16:8-9); and the peace of Christ as an umpire in the heart (Col. 3:16).

The Circumstance

It appears that at this point in Jacob's life God directed his affairs through circumstances. God had predicted in His promise to Abraham that his descendants would be strangers in a foreign land (Gen. 15:13). We know in looking backward over history, that Egypt was meant, but it is doubtful if Jacob understood the prediction in that way. In fact, from the history of his predecessors, Jacob might well have avoided going down into Egypt. His grandfather Abraham had done so, and certainly found troubles multiplied as a result. It was in Egypt that Abraham obtained Hagar. Isaac, Jacob's father, had been warned of God against going down into Egypt for help (Gen. 26:1-3).

The Lord who knows the end of a thing from the beginning allowed the circumstances which resulted in the moving into Egypt of the entire family of Jacob.

While the circumstance was unusual that began the chain of events which culminated in the arrival in Egypt of Jacob's family, there was also something very ordinary about it, famine and food, need and a source of supply. There is no doubt about the Lord's ability to employ the commonplace and make it extraordinary to accomplish His own purposes.

It would seem proper to assume that Jacob had no thought of changing his place of residence; nevertheless, when the way was opened and God's word of assurance given (Gen. 46:1-5), without further hesitation he yielded to the divine intention.

The Action

Even in old age, Jacob was alert and resourceful. There was nothing indolent about him. "Why do ye look one upon another?" he asked his sons. To sit around and do nothing to alleviate their predicament was much against his nature. Jacob had received news that there was corn in Egypt, and no longer being able to travel himself, he dispatched his sons, all of them with the exception of Benjamin. How little did the ten brothers know of all that lay before them! What they had sown, they now were going to reap.

Being foreigners, it apparently was necessary that they make direct appeal to Egypt's Food Administrator. The Jewish Talmud says that everyone entering that land had to register by signature, and implies that Joseph there recognized his brothers by name. This seems very improbable and does not agree with the inspired record in the Book of Genesis.

Twenty years at least had passed since Joseph had seen his brothers (Gen. 37:2; 41:46; 41:54). Memory not only brought back their features but his early dreams.

The Book of Genesis --Part 85

The Book of Genesis

Part 85

James Gunn

There is nothing revengeful about Joseph’s treatment of his brethren. It was not his intention to hurt them merely in an arbitrary way. There were matters which he wished to clarify in his own mind. There were conditions for which he hoped, and these he would investigate. There was information that he longed to know, and this he would seek. Had there been any change in the character and morals of his brothers? All these things he attempted to ascertain before revealing himself to them. By a simple method of cross-examination, he discovered where the family was now located, that his father was still alive, that there had been no bereavement in the family, and that his own full brother was able to travel, therefore, must be in good health.

Joseph’s words to his brothers, “I fear God,” must have sounded strange in a land where polytheism was so predominant. These words might have betrayed him as a foreigner. By this statement he acknowedged that although he was a man of authority, God was over him, and that with a conscience toward God he would do the proper thing by them.

How gratifying is this attitude when manifest in a man of official position and authority! The Lord Jesus marvelled when He saw it in a Roman centurion. “Speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed,” said this officer to Christ. He acknowledged, thereby, a superior

power and a supreme authority, saying, “I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh.” When human authority is subservient to divine authority, the people might well expect benevolent rule and sober action. “By the blessing of the upright the city is exalted: but it is overthrown by the mouth of the wicked” (Prov. 11:11). Where this is lacking, despotism develops and suffering ensues.

There were two very important questions which could not be answered immediately. It was only through a severe test that Joseph could satisfy himself about these. He, without doubt, recalled the circumstances under which he had last seen his half-brothers. At that time they had stripped him, cast him into a pit, drawn him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmeelites. He had been the innocent victim of their jealousy, brazenness, and cruelty. Had they in any wise changed? He was conscious that these men must have indulged in much purposeful prevarication to explain his complete disappearance to their father. True, he did not know what they had done or said to deceive him, but Joseph was aware that perversion and duplicity had been practised.

How had they treated Benjamin their brother? This would be to Joseph the test. If they could produce Benjamin safe and sound, then there would be a proof of some change in their hearts.

The second question in Joseph’s mind would be in regard to his aged father whom he now knew to be alive. Did his father trust these sons of his? On an occasion they had gone home without one of their brethren,

Joseph himself, and they had lied and deceived him. Perhaps there still lingered some little suspicion in the mind of his father. Joseph would send them home again without a brother, without Simeon. If they could persuade their father of the truth, Benjamin would return with them on their next visit. Joseph would then know that their father had some measure of confidence in them.

In order to make this test extreme, he placed their money in their sacks. Would Jacob believe they had purchased the corn? These men found themselves under very strict surveilance by Joseph in Egypt and by their father in Canaan.

It is not too difficult to understand the feelings of Joseph throughout all this; the surge of natural affection would prod him to reveal his identity, but wisdom would restrain him until repentance had been produced in the hearts of his brethren, and a firm basis had been established for the renewal of their relationship. It is no wonder that he turned about and wept.

The very thought of being imprisoned and enslaved by the Prime-Minister of Egypt, caused Joseph's brethren to think of him. The impossibility of self-help impressed upon them the anguish that they had witnessed years before when Joseph besought them and they would not hear his cry for release. For a few days they lived in similar distress, and in this circumstance "said one to another, we are verily guilty concerning our brother." Centuries later the Prophet Hosea said to the nation that descended from these twelve men, "Ye have eaten the fruit of lies" (Hos. 10:13). Such indeed was the perdicament in which they now found themselves.

The report of his sons was not a very encouraging one for Jacob. That they had been treated roughly and called spies by the Food Administrator of Egypt would be sufficient to disturb the patriarch. Add to this the story of the money discovered in each sack. Was this an accident, knavery, or a theft? He could hardly have considered it the latter, for we read, “They were afraid,” yet some suspicion seemed to linger in the aged man’s mind.

The most disconcerting part of the entire report was that about Benjamin. Somehow Jacob blamed his sons for his increased troubles: “Me have ye bereaved of my children: Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away; all these things are against me.” The conviction of guilt commenced in their hearts in Egypt was not sufficiently deep to produce a confession to their father. Eventually, we know, he did learn the whole matter, for the hidden things of darkness and the counsel of the hearts were made manifest, but up to this point they remained silent.

How often the Christian, like Jacob here, feels that all things are against him. How precious the assurance of God’s Word: “All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to His purpose” (Rom. 8:28). No better illustration can be found of this statement than the period of Jacob’s life now before us. Behind the incomprehensible, the anxiety, the perturbation, a plan had been instituted by God for the preservation, comfort and life of Jacob and his entire family, and the plan was working together for their good.

Whom God predestines, He finally glorifies. In the experience of the soul much time lies between predestination and glorification, and it is during part of this time that all works together for the believer's good. An old commentator wrote, "That is good for the saints which does their souls good. Every providence tends to the spiritual good of those that love God; in breaking them off from sin, bringing them nearer to God, weaning them from the world." To these might be added, the developing in them of a moral likeness to Christ.

The Book of Genesis --Part 86

The Book of Genesis

Part 86

James Gunn

Chapter 43:1-14

In writing to Timothy the Apostle Paul indicated that God gives us all things richly to enjoy (1 Tim. 6:16). The context in which this statement is found involves a contrast between uncertain riches and God who gives richly, between material possession and the Living Lord. With the former we may purchase what we need, but from the latter we may receive gratuitously all that is necessary for life and godliness.

Joseph's brethren were about to find out that they could not pay for the supplies which they sought, and that all were given freely for their enjoyment. What an illustration of God's dealings with men! Jacob and his sons thought that they might purchase what they needed; in fact, they were determined to pay with money and a little present for a benefit beyond their wildest imagination. In every respect and in every aspect of life, men are more willing to use their own currency for possession than to comply with the moral requirements for enjoyment. What are the moral requirements? These may be learned from a careful analysis of this chapter.

A Consciousness of Need

"And the famine was sore in the land. And it came to pass when they had eaten up the corn which they had

brought out of Egypt, their father said unto them, Go again, buy us a little food."

There are certain matters which may be considered in a visionary manner while others demand a realistic consideration. Hunger is probably one circumstance that makes the strongest claims in this regard. It was so here; all were conscious of their need.

While there was a keen sense of a quickly diminishing food supply, there was actually no sense of insufficiency; if there was little food, there was plenty of money, and they were ready to make the exchange. It ever has been difficult both socially and spiritually to help those who cling to their independence.

The highest hopes entertained by Jacob were expressed in his instructions to his sons, "Buy us a little food." All unknown to him, the storehouses of Egypt were at his disposal.

The Proof of Genuineness

These sons of Jacob were under the close surveillance of Joseph. As we saw earlier, he was testing them to see if there had been any change in their hearts. Would these men be as ruthless as ever and abandon their brother Simeon in prison, as they had abandoned him those many years ago? Had they regained the confidence of their father? Would he entrust Benjamin to their care?

Judah, especially, understood that it would be futile to return without his youngest brother. He did not perceive the reason for the demand, but he recalled the stern words, "Bring your youngest brother unto me; so shall your words be verified, and ye shall not die." Whether the death referred to here was death as the natural

outcome of famine and the refusal of food, or execution as spies, is difficult to discern. The severity of the charge remained with Judah.

The insistence of Judah eventually prevailed, and the necessary permission granted to take Benjamin with them as the evidence of their truthfulness. It is obvious that by sending Benjamin, Jacob could have recovered Simeon immediately. The loss of Simeon did not move Jacob nearly as much as did the risking of Benjamin.

An Indication of Gratitude

Does there still linger in Jacob the tendency to barter and to bribe? He who bargained with God at Bethel saying, “If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father’s house in peace; then shall the Lord be my God: … Of all that Thou give me, I will surely give the tenth to Thee” (Gen. 28:20-22), and he who attempted with some measure of success to bribe his brother Esau (Gen. 33), apparently thought that he could propitiate the Egyptian and ingratiate himself with this governor of Egypt.

That Joseph in Egypt did not need the present from the famine stricken land is obvious; our highest appraisal of Jacob’s act must therefore be that by it he manifested some gratitude of heart to the benevolence of the Food Adminstrator.

The Assurance of Honesty

“Take double money (Lit. second money) and the money that was brought again in the mouth of your sacks.” They were to return the money that mysteriously had found its way in among the corn, and they were to pay

for all they bought. Honesty in this regard, so it seems clear, was one of the virtues most likely to reinstate them in the confidence of Joseph.

C. Simmons once said “True honesty takes into account the claims of God as well as those of man; it renders to God the things that are God’s as well as to man the things that are man’s.”

Having given his sons their instructions, and having committed Benjamin to their care, Jacob for the first time brings God into the arrangements. In despair he says, “God Almighty give you mercy before the man, that he may send away your other brother, and Benjamin. If I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved.” There was not very much hope in this appeal for divine protection and aid.

We dare not censor Jacob’s action here; this is the usual with most Christians. Their schemes and plans are all made before the Lord’s guidance is invoked. Frequently the Christian depends more on his own ability and wisdom than upon the Lord’s guidance and power.

With the full revelation of New Testament truth, we appreciate more than Jacob probably could the significance of this title he uses for God, “God Almighty give you mercy.” This title is found repeatedly in the first Book of the Bible and again in the last, in Genesis and the Revelation. It was as God Almighty that the Lord appeared to Abraham (Gen.-17:1) and also to Jacob (Gen. 35:11). The title “God Almighty” (EI Shaddai) gives a somewhat feminine picture of the Lord for literally it means the breasted God, and implies that God loves, nourishes, and sustains by His own inexhaustible bounty. All this He was to the patriarchs.

The Book of Genesis --Part 87

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James Gunn

Chapter 43:15-34

It appears that Joseph's brethren were subjected to further tests, the first in this portion was the test of hospitality. Roberts, in his work, "Oriental Illustrations," says, "A more natural picture of the conduct of men from the country, when taken into the home of a superior, cannot be drawn. When they are told to go inside, they at once suspect that they are about to be punished or confined." There is much more than this in the divine record here; surely the fear experienced by these men was the penalty of deception and hidden cruelty. The presence of authority produced a dread of reprisal for misdeeds committed in the past.

Reassurance

While there is no doubt that Joseph was probing very deeply into their consciences, he did so with a gracious kindness. "He (Joseph's steward) brought Simeon out unto them" (V. 23). There was no better way of reassuring these men for he would report on the treatment he had received during the period of his detention.

The steward's words were a confirmation of good-will toward these fearful individuals. It is true that he dissociated himself from the God of the Hebrews; nevertheless, he acknowledged God, and said, "Your

God, and the God of your father, hath given you treasure in your sacks: I had your money." It is not to be supposed that he understood the purpose of Joseph in his dealings with his brethren, but he realized that God had moved the heart of his master to act in benevolence toward these apparent strangers from Canaan. The goodness and severity of God were seen through the acts of Joseph and provided us with an illustration of God's treatment of their descendants of whom we read, "God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep His commandments or no" (Deut. 8:2).

Enquiry

The filial feelings between Joseph and his brethren were not the strongest at any time. While they had the same father, they did not have the same mother, and this may be the explanation. The family ties among Jacob, Joseph, and Benjamin, nevertheless, were the very best. There is a pathos in Joseph's words, "Is your father well, the old man of whom ye spake? Is he yet alive?" It was with difficulty that he veiled his emotions as they made reply, "Thy servant our father is in good health, he is yet alive." What good news this was for Joseph! When he saw his mother's son, Benjamin, he could no longer control himself, and hurried away to weep in seclusion. His tears would be a strange mixture of sorrow and joy, sorrow because of the years that now lay behind, and joy at the sight of Benjamin and at the information that his father was yet alive, for these raised the hope in his heart that soon he might join those loved ones from whom he had been violently separated.

The Book of Genesis --Part 88

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Chapter 43:15-38

Fulfilment

As the conversation between the would-be purchasers and the Food Administrator progressed. we read, “And they bowed down their heads, and made obeisance.” Without doubt Joseph recalled his dreams, and the stern rebuke given by his father when he told them: “What is this dream that thou hast dreamed? Shall I and thy mother and thy brethren indeed come to bow down ourselves to thee to the earth?” (Gen. 3.7:10).

Joseph’s long discipline of his brethren was not in the way of revenge, nor was it to impress upon them, when at last he revealed himself to them, his superiority and importance. Much rather, it was to reveal to them deep-seated guilt complexes, to treat old corruption, and to break evil habits. He attempted to touch their consciences, subdue their wills, and to produce in their hearts true repentance of their wicked ways. His chastisement of his brethren was intended to restore strong and righteous characters which had been impaired by sin and wickedness.

Knowledge

Joseph not only sought to reveal these men to themselves, but he yearned to reveal himself to them,

so, in view of the time of his full disclosure to them, he gave intimations of his inner knowledge of their family.

In the dining hall Joseph took care of all the arrangements himself, and, as would be expected, in perfect accord with Egyptian customs. This becomes very evident as he places his brethren for their meal. We read, “And they sat before him, the firstborn according to his birthright, and the youngest according to his youth.” We are not, consequently, surprised to read, “The men marvelled one at another.” How could he have known their respective ages? This amazement was further intensified when Joseph sent a much larger portion to Benjamin. We might well enquire, did he favour Benjamin in order to prove whether or not the rest were jealous, or did he act in this knowledgeable manner in order to see if they could possibly recognize their long-lost brother? It seems so difficult at times to detect the almost obvious; fear and wonderment may in themselves hinder the powers of perception.

Dr. Griffith Thomas, in his Devotional Commentary on the Book of Genesis, has a very instructive paragraph upon this chapter, he writes: “The moral power of fear — There is scarcely anything more interesting and striking in the story of Joseph’s brethren than the way in which they were impressed and actuated by fear from first to last. Fear possessed them on their first journey; fear actuated them when they found the money in their sacks (42:28); fear continued to affect them as they once again appeared before Joseph (43:18); and the crowning fear was seen when the discovery was made of the cup. God uses fear to recall the heart to Himself. Fear probs, searches, warns, purifies, and keeps the heart tender and true, sensitive to God’s will, and ever shrinking from

that which is evil. The “fear of the Lord” has two sides, a shrinking from sin and an intense desire to be true to God — and it is because of these things that it is the beginning of wisdom.

There are few subjects more worthy of careful and prolonged attention and practical meditation than the fear of the Lord as it is revealed in Holy Scripture.”

Chapter 44:1-17

It is difficult to decide whether Joseph’s scheme of putting his silver goblet into the mouth of Benjamin’s sack was to further test his brethren in order that he determine how deep and real was the moral change in their hearts, or simply to arrest and to retain Benjamin in Egypt as he had done with Simeon. Was Joseph afraid that without one of his brethren in Egypt, he might again lose contact with his family?

He might have considered it necessary to subject his brethren to one more test of love and loyalty; they had sold him into slavery, and abandoned him completely, would they act similarly in the case of his full brother, Benjamin? This seems to be the severest test of Joseph’s austerity. It was through this probing that Joseph earned the full story of his father’s love, not only for Benjamin but toward himself.

The test provided extensive information. Joseph learned more completely the deep change that time and repentance had wrought in his brothers, of their attachment to and care for his own brother Benjamin, of his father’s love for the child of his old age, and of the grief his father suffered over the supposed death of his other son, Joseph himself.

In the case of Joseph's brethren, they were proved by an ancient Egyptian custom, that of a divining bowl. To them Joseph was an Egyptian prince. Such means of producing prognostics were as common, if not more common, among the nobility of the Ancient World as tea-cup reading is now in parts of England.

The assumption that Joseph had descended to the superstitions of the land of his adoption is quite unfounded. He was still acting incognito, still concealing his true identity, and therefore played the part of a man of his rank and times.

All unconsciously his brethren were being tried by the common affairs of life, true they did not understand them; nevertheless, they were circumstances which could have happened to anyone. Is it not true that the most effective test of character is the routine circumstances of life? The simple test of how they drank water indicated the type of men God needed for Gideon's army. "The lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eye, and the pride of life" are not only the avenues of temptation, but they are steps in the process of testing character. A weakness in David's character was detected under just such a test.

Two lamps had been stolen from a chapel being built in India. Being convinced that they had been taken by one of the workmen, the constable assigned to the case directed that all the men be fetched immediately. Seeing one of them more nervous than the others, he enquired of this man what he knew about the stolen goods. The poor fellow in terror dropped at the policeman's feet as if he had been shot, and cried, "True, true, I took them!" Some such sight must have resulted in Joseph's

presence that day when all his brothers filed in and fell down before him.

The Book of Genesis --Part 89

The Book of Genesis

Part 89

James Gunn

Chapter 44:18-34

Thank God! personality and character are not fixed liabilities. These may be changed, improved, and refined. Many a life in its early years has been marred like the vessel seen by Jeremiah in the potter's house (Jer. 18), but the Divine Potter has made it again another vessel as it pleased Him. This moral change and refinement are well illustrated by the remarkable transformation in the attitude and behaviour of Joseph's half-brother Judah.

Judah was the fourth son of Jacob and Leah. Reuben, Simeon, and Levi were his older brothers while Issachar and Zebulun were his younger ones. When he was born, his mother said, "Now will I praise the Lord: therefore she called his name Judah" (Gen. 29:35). His name probably means, "Let God be praised." What a wonderful name! A name that implies reliance upon God, gratitude to God, and reverence before God.

Although Judah was given such an honourable name, obviously he belied its import. In fact, from his attitude toward his brother Joseph one would assume that God was not in all his thoughts. Some Bible students imagine that in his advice to sell rather than to slay Joseph, he manifested compassion and mercy. There are others who see in his words, "What profit is it if we slay our brother,

and conceal his blood? Come, and let us sell him to the Ishmeelites," evidence of cruelty and cowardice, as well as greed.

That sad chapter in the biography of Judah is followed by another just as dark (Gen. 38). If in the one there is the proof of cruelty and greed, in the other there is the evidence of sensuality and impiety. Judah stooped to the very lowest in morality and ethics.

The earliest indication of moral improvement appears when it became necessary for Jacob's sons to go the second time and purchase food in Egypt. It was then he became responsible and surety for Benjamin.

When the cup was found in Benjamin's sack, and his young half-brother was exposed apparently to the full penalty of a serious offence, Judah ascended to ideals rarely found in man. His intercession on behalf of Benjamin and his father is exquisite, warm, and real. In lowliness of mind he approaches Egypt's Food Administrator, saying, "Oh, my lord, let thy servant, I pray thee, speak a word in my lord's ears." Touchingly he speaks of his father, and rehearses the story of Joseph and Benjamin: "We have a father, an old man, and a child of his old age, a little one; and his brother is dead, and he alone is left of his mother, and his father loveth him." Finally in total self-disregard and in complete self-abnegation he offers himself as a slave in order that Benjamin be spared and returned home to his father. There is something deeply pathetic and heroically grand in this appeal, an appeal quite irresistible to Joseph. Judah here excells, and no one who reads his speech can fail to be moved by its simplicity and genuine sincerity.

The Book of Genesis --Part 90

The Book of Genesis

Part 90

James Gunn

Chapter 45:1-27

One more touching story can be found than that of Joseph's making himself known to his brethren. Its simplicity and pathos warm the heart and captivate the imagination. His self-disclosure and his commission to fetch his father arrest and hold the attention of even the casual reader.

The Self-Disclosure

Three important features of this part of the narrative form a beautiful sequence: revelation of his person, reconciliation with his brethren, and review of his circumstances.

The revelation: The pent-up feelings of months could no longer be repressed, so Joseph calls for privacy. There are occasions in life altogether too sacred for the eyes of strangers. Moments in which the fountain of the emotions is opened and tears flow either in grief or gladness are not for the gaze of the public. Rumours may be heard by others, but such times of holy seclusion are an exclusive experience not to be vulgarized or fritted away.

This was the grand moment for which Joseph had been preparing himself. He was convinced of the reformation of his brothers, he knew his father to be alive, his full

brother Benjamin stood before him; no further delay was necessary, “Joseph could not refrain himself… and he cried out, “Cause every man to go out from me…” while Joseph made himself known unto his brethren.

Joseph had wept alone in his chamber as he dealt with his brethren (Gen. 43:30), testing them as to their characters and intentions, but now tears of joy flowed freely.

The reconciliation: One can realize the surprise of these men. The discovery that Egypt’s Prime Minister was the brother that they had hated and sold into slavery left them nonplused and troubled. The one who had taken time to test and prove his brothers was very quick to discern their silence and distress: “Moreover he kissed all his brethren, and wept upon them,” but first, they had witnessed the most convincing evidence of what he had told them, “He fell on Benjamin’s neck, and wept, and Benjamin wept on his neck.”

Such scenes are ethically delightful in this day when men are so frequently without “natural affection” (2 Tim. 3:3), “hateful and hating one another” (Titus 3:3).

Joseph was the complete opposite of “Cain who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother’s righteous” (I John 3:12).

The review: This retrospect of the past is another proof of the magnanimity of Joseph’s heart. He pictured his brothers who had treated him so cruelly as only agents in the hands of God. “It was not you that sent me hither, but God: and He hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house” (v. 8). Furthermore, he sought to relieve them fully of any guilt complex, saying, “Be not

grieved or angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life" (v. 5). Joseph, with forgiving grace, released his brothers from all blame because he knew himself to be a divine provision, God's man of the hour. He here traces the hand of God behind human failure and circumstance. If such reflections would result in a release from guilt in the heart of his brothers, even so would it release Joseph from the feelings of revenge and hatred.

The Commission

In sending his brothers to fetch his beloved father, Joseph spoke words of command, counsel, and caution.

The command: "Haste ye, and go up to my father, and say unto him, Thus saith thy son Joseph, God hath made me lord of all Egypt; come down unto me, tarry not." Joseph was not only a man under authority, he was a man of authority. He would not permit any delay in the carrying out of his orders especially when they were for the benefit and good of his own father's household. No time was to be wasted. What an illustration of the exhortation found in the sister Epistles, Ephesians and Colossians, "Redeeming the time." If Joseph felt that time was too precious to waste, surely the Christian should be possessed by the same feelings, especially in these end times when the pilgrimage of the Church is nearly closed, and her period of testimony nearly ended.

The counsel: Words of counsel and instruction as well as words of promise were spoken to the brothers in order that they repeat these to their aged father. Joseph was understanding enough to know that it would be very difficult for so elderly a person to uproot himself and move to a foreign country; consequently, his message

was both enticing and persuasive. Five years of famine still remained, years in which there would be no ploughing or reaping, but Jacob and all his family were to come immediately because the land of Goshen would provide them with both a home and a means of livelihood.

The land of Goshen lay between the eastern part of the ancient Delta and the western frontier of the Holy Land; it was, therefore, scarcely a part of Egypt proper. It could be that there were other Semitic fugitives there at that time, but this was not Joseph's reason for assigning them properties there. Goshen was suitable to their needs and vocation; it was excellent for flocks and herds, and therefore ideal for the sons of Jacob. Furthermore, in Goshen they were more or less secluded and separate from the heavy Egyptian population in other parts of the country.

Pharaoh himself was ready to welcome the family of his great Administrator, and provided plenty of supplies for their journey as well as means of transportation. It was these that actually convinced Jacob of the reality and accuracy of his son's report. Joseph instructed them that no one was to regard his "stuff." Whatever they could not bring: sheds, troughs, and other permanent buildings and fixtures, although valuable for their work as shepherds, was to be abandoned without concern; everything necessary for their comfort and work would be there on their arrival.

The caution: Joseph's last words to his brethren are significant, "See that ye fall not out by the way." He feared lest they might reproach one another, attempting to throw the blame on those they considered chiefly

guilty for his dreadful experience; there was to be no incrimination the one of the other. Such an attitude among them could lead to but one thing, a bitter quarrel.

The Book of Genesis --Part 91

The Book of Genesis

Part 91

James Gunn

Chapter 45:25 - 46:48

It has been said that the shortest distance between two points is a good companion; to this might be added, the shortest time between two distant points results from good news. How briefly the narrator covers the journey from Egypt to Canaan! “They (Joseph’s brothers) went up to Egypt, and came into the land of Canaan unto Jacob.” Obviously Joseph’s words of caution were sufficient, and they arrived home ready to execute his charge which involved the confession of their sin and the convincing of their father, a period of spiritual preparation on the father’s part, and the journey itself.

Convincing Their Father

Their own statement was free from duplicity, altogether different from the evil deception made at the time they showed Joseph’s bloodstained coat to Jacob (Gen. 37:31-33). They told their father, “Joseph is yet alive, and he is governor over all the land of Egypt.” What wonderful experiences they had to report! Not only experiences did they recount, but confessions did they make!

One would gather from chapter 50:16-17 of this Book of Genesis that they had admitted to their father the crime of which they were guilty in the selling of Joseph and in their deception throughout so many years. They had

proved the veracity of the proverb, “He that covereth his sins shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy” (Prov. 28:13). Through Joseph’s dealings with them, even before he revealed himself, they had acknowledged among themselves their dreadful guilt, and had stood before him self-condemned and ashamed.

Before all inward conflict could be stopped, and a true relationship within the family be restored, their trespass had to be confessed to their father. James exhorts in his Epistle, “Confess your faults one to another.” This was very imperative in the case of these men.

The brethren of Joseph not only had a story of guilt to uncover; they had a wonderful story of grace to tell. Joseph, who knew in every detail the acts of their wickedness, had forgiven them fully and was most anxious to bring them all close to himself, and to provide abundantly for them.

How like the benevolence of our heavenly Father who forgave us all sins, and raised us up and made us sit in heavenly places in Christ Jesus! It is very gratifying to believe both the bad news of his sons’ deception and the good news of Joseph’s exaltation. It was not until the visible evidence of Joseph’s existence, magnanimity, and power were demonstrated in the wagons and animals did he exclaim, “It is enough; Joseph my son is yet alive: I will go and see him before I die” (45:28)!

Spiritual Preparation

“And Israel took his journey with all that he had, and came to Beersheba.” What memories must have filled his mind as he approached the edge of the wilderness

and looked beyond the southern frontier of Palestine! Both his grandfather and his father had stayed in that place at different times, and he himself had been there previously. While he lingered in this open-air sanctuary, God appeared to him once more in visions of the night, and said, “Jacob, Jacob … I am God, the God of thy father: fear not to go down into Egypt; for I will there make of thee a great nation.” A similar promise had been made at the very same place to Isaac (Gen. 26:23-25). These promises to Isaac and Jacob were only a reaffirmation of God’s covenant to Abraham. “He said unto Abraham, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs … afterward shall they come out with great substance” (Gen. 15:13-14). “He is faithful that promised” (Heb. 10:23). Furthermore, “What He had promised, He is able also to perform” (Rom. 4:21).

God’s promises to His ancient earthly people form a substantial proof that to us “all the promises of God in Him (Christ) are yea, and in Him, Amen, unto the glory of God” (2 Cor. 1:20).

Not only was God going to be with Jacob and his descendants, but in the prediction and pledge there was an item of very personal importance, an item very precious to Jacob, a father who for long had considered himself bereaved of his favourite son. God averred, “Joseph shall put his hand upon thine eyes.” This was more than Jacob had expected. The promise was tantamount to saying, Thou shall die in Joseph’s arms.

Among the ancients the grief of a parent was greatly intensified if he were unable to be with his loved one in the hour of death, unable to close his eyes and fold his

arms, to perform the last acts of love and respect for one more intimate than others. This promise to Jacob was a special consolation meant to mitigate the sorrow and anxiety of the past years.

One, consequently, is not surprised to read, “Israel … offered sacrifices unto the God of his father Isaac.” The spirit of awe and gratitude in Jacob impelled him to worship and to ascribe praise, thanksgiving, and honour to the Lord. God had revealed Himself as “God,” the Mighty One (El), in intimate and perpetual relationship with Jacob’s ancestors, “the God of thy father,” and therefore with him.

The Journey

With this revelation and promise deeply implanted in his mind “Jacob rose up from Beer-sheba, and the sons of Israel carried Jacob their father, and their little ones, and their wives, in the wagons Pharaoh had sent to carry them” (46:5).

Some have thought that there is a discrepancy between the list of those who entered Egypt recorded here and the 75 souls mentioned by Stephen in his address given in the Book of Acts chapter seven. (Stephen probably was quoting from the Septuagint, the Greek Version of the Old Testament). It must be remembered that the list drawn up in Genesis was recorded in a legal manner, giving only the names of all who became heads of families, whether they were actually born at the time of the migration, or later. Such a listing may not therefore be numerically complete, but it is, nothwithstanding, historically very important. In this instance it was most important for it not only traced the history of the fathers of the nation of Israel, but it traced the thin red line of

redemption in the Scriptures, the line of the Messiah and Saviour.

The Book of Genesis --Part 92

The Book of Genesis

Part 92

James Gunn

Chapter 46:28 - 47:6

It is very difficult for man with his limited knowledge and foresight to grasp an over-all picture of God's purposes for him as an individual. The Christian knows more than others in this regard, "For all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to His purpose. For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son" (Rom. 8:28). He, the Christian, realizes that ultimately he will be conformed to the image of the Son of God. Nevertheless, in spite of that, at times he chafes under the process employed to accomplish this: the sorrow that makes one more sympathetic, the tribulation that makes one more patient, the disappointment that makes one more understanding, and the experience that stimulates one's hope.

One can but surmise the thoughts of Jacob as he approached Egypt, and as he sent Judah before him unto Joseph (V. 28). There had been a time when the behaviour of Judah had been discreditable and a time when Joseph had been mourned as dead. Now Judah is his confident and Joseph lives to bless him. There had been a time when Jacob's vision, like our own, had been both narrow and short. His going down to Egypt was a proof of God's wisdom during those years in directing

and executing in grace the plan of life He had devised for the Patriarch.

Apparently, the purpose of sending Judah for instructions was that he might the better direct them to a more or less isolated area where the entire family would be able to continue its usual customs and religion without interference, and without the danger of being absorbed by the Egyptian population. Jacob knew that the divine intention was to keep Abraham's descendants a separated people. Centuries later, God stated this through Balaam, "Lo, the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations" (Num. 23:9).

The meeting of the aged father and his long-lost son is very touching. Obviously, Jacob considered it the apex of his life, for him the plan of life was now completed, for he said, "Now let me die, since I have seen thy face, because thou art yet alive" (V. 30). How true the proverb! "Hope deferred maketh the heart sick: but when the desire cometh, it is a tree of life" (Prov. 13:12).

One is reminded of the aged Simeon who waited for the consolation of Israel, when he took Jesus up in his arms and blessed God, and said, "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word: For mine eyes have seen Thy salvation" (Luke 2:29-30).

In the cases of both Jacob and Simeon the purposes of God in a long full life had been fulfilled. God had led them step by step, sometimes by circumstances, sometimes by special visions, and in the case of Simeon, especially by the Holy Spirit. God had led them all the way, and at eventide there was light.

One is not ignoring the fact that the Lord Himself may have, for other reasons, directed Joseph in his choice of

the Land of Goshen (Gen. 45:10), as the area in which to settle his father's family. The choice may have been for their preservation as well as for their separation, because every shepherd was an abomination to the Egyptians (V. 34). Egyptian sculpture depicts shepherds as lame or deformed, dirty, unshaven and even of a ludicrous appearance; and dressed only in matting.

Different reasons for this disdainful attitude have been given. It is said by some that they were detested because of their nomadic character and wanderings; by others, because of the Egyptian contempt for sheep, they valued these neither for food or sacrifices; and then again by others, because Egypt once had been invaded and subjugated by shepherd-kings under whose rule the people had greatly suffered. No matter what the reason was, this national hatred could have been dangerous to the safety of Joseph's father and brethren; consequently, they were directed to the delta region where there was excellent grazing for their flocks and herds, and sufficient land for certain types of agriculture. Goshen, furthermore, was not considered of great value by the Egyptians because of its distance from the Nile irrigation canals.

In all these apparently quite natural movements, one detects divine Providence superintending the affairs of an aged man and his family. From such narratives we might well learn the lesson "to trust where we cannot trace" the hand of God.

The Christian knows that the powers that be are ordained of God (Rom. 13:1), and that the Lord commands, "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to kings, as

supreme: Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him" (1 Pet. 2:13-14), In this, as in so many other features of commendable character, we admire Joseph. On the arrival of his father's family, "Joseph came and told Pharaoh, and said, my father and my brethren, and their flocks, and their herds and all that they have, are come out of the land of Canaan; and behold, they are in the land of Goshen" (47:1). Joseph, although prime minister of Egypt and invested with extra-ordinary authority, manifested a submissive spirit and frankly reported the entire matter. He covered the entire move from Canaan to Goshen, and revealed that his brethren were of the despised cast, shepherds. Nothing is hidden. Furthermore, he instructed his brethren as he prepared them to meet Pharaoh that they in like manner were to be frank and honest. Joseph believed in providing things honest in the sight of all men.

The words of the Lord recorded by Samuel seem to be applicable here, "Them that honour Me I will honour, and they that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed" (1 Sam. 2:30). The divine principles of integrity and honesty which controlled Joseph's dealings with Pharaoh certainly brought large compensations: "Pharaoh spake unto Joseph, saying, Thy father and thy brethren are come unto thee: The land of Egypt is before thee; in the best of the land make thy father and brethren to dwell; … If thou knowest any men of activity among them (able men), then make them rulers over my cattle" (47:6). Thus Joseph's brethren were engaged in the service of the monarch and all their families abundantly provided with food. Surely, "He that loveth pureness of heart; for the grace of his lips the king shall be his friend" (Prov.

22:11), and “He that diligently seeketh good procureth favour” (Prov. 11:27).

The Book of Genesis --Part 93

The Book of Genesis

Part 93

James Gunn

Chapter 47:7-26

Throughout our studies of the life of Joseph we have considered him in his relationship to God and to his family, in this portion of the Book we are to look at him in his relationship to the state, Egypt. That his relationship to the Government of that land was extraordinary is admitted for he was part of that government for a number of years. Nevertheless, he, like all the people of God everywhere, must meet the high standards set by the Lord, “It is required in stewards that a man be found faithful” (1 Cor. 4:2). Joseph’s attitude to those over him must be the same as that taught in the Word of God: “Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake: whether it be to the king as supreme: Or unto governors” (1 Pet. 2:13-14). “First of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority” (1 Tim. 2:1-2).

Joseph would have to be faithful to the Crown, to the Egyptian People, and to his own family, the members of which were now guests of Pharaoh.

His Family

Any criticism of Joseph’s care for his father and his brothers and their families can only be accepted as a

criticism of the policy of the monarch. It was he who said, “The Land of Egypt is before thee, in the best of the land make thy father and brethen to dwell; in the land of Goshen let them dwell; and if thou knowest any men of activity among them, then make them rulers over my cattle” (V. 6).

Pharaoh had already honoured Joseph, but may we not accept the kindness of the monarch toward Jacob and his sons as another token of the high esteem in which Joseph was held by all in authority? Such would be but small recompense for the great service rendered by the man whom Pharaoh had named “The Saviour of the World,” Joseph.

With the arrangement made by Pharaoh God saved, as later He did in other adverse circumstances, the line of the Messiah. Many were the vicissitudes that befell the direct ancestors of Christ, a list of which stretches from the centuries before Abraham (Matt. 1:1-17. Luke 3:23-38). A further example of this timely preservation is found in the case of the boy king Joash (2 Kings 11).

Joseph himself was conscious of divine intervention in the entire plan and made reference to this when speaking with his brethren after the death of his father (Gen. 50:19-21).

This remarkable Prime Minister was just the kind of brother that is born for adversity (Prov. 17:17). How splendidly Joseph illustrates the conclusion of the Apostle John, “He that loveth his brethren abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him” (1 John 2:10).

“The race of mankind would perish did they cease to aid each other. We cannot exist without mutual help. All

therefore that need aid have a right to ask it from their fellow-men; and no one who has the power of granting can refuse it without guilt" (Walter Scott).

The Book of Genesis --Part 94

The Book of Genesis

Part 94

James Gunn

Chapter 47:13-21

In the brief study appearing in the December issue we noticed the faithfulness of Joseph as an administrator to his own family, we must now consider events and see whether or not this same quality controlled his dealings with the people of the land, the Egyptians.

The Egyptians

There are critics who accuse Joseph of enslaving the inhabitants of Egypt, buying them and all their possessions. The people apparently did not think so. “They said, Thou hast saved our lives: let us find grace in the sight of my lord, and we will be Pharaoh’s servants” (47:25). The people obviously concluded that service to Pharaoh on any basis was not too great a price for being alive under such circumstances.

Joseph’s policy throughout his wise administration was to economize and to save during the years of plenty so that there would be food for all during the times of the predicted famine. In order to execute his plan, he placed overseers over the land and taxed each harvest. In this manner he made preparation for the future emergency.

In his administration of the food supplies, Joseph did not break the morale of the people by distributing relief rations, he sold them the food. In his wisdom he

maintained their independence. He continued this plan when their money was exhausted by accepting their cattle as payment, and finally by accepting their lands and their persons. This did not result, as some have suggested, in slavery. The people became tenants at a fair rental instead of being proprietors.

It has been intimated by students of history that some such nationalization of the land was a necessity to break the influence of the old aristocracy. It was the rich who were directly affected, not the rank and file of the nation. Joseph actually freed the ordinary working class from the power and domination of the wealthy.

The sympathetic understanding of the needs of the people is seen in that "he removed them to cities from one end of the borders of Egypt to the other end thereof" (v. 21). As the provisions were stored in the cities, the people would be sure of nourishment and survival if they were closer to the sources of supplies.

The career of Joseph provides many useful illustrations of those Christian graces that ought to be seen in the life of the believer. Peter writes, "Be pitiful, be courteous: … rendering … blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing." Paul could have said of Joseph as he did of Timothy, "I have not a man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state." Would to God that we had among the assemblies of His people, men who would so love and care for them!

The Book of Genesis --Part 95

The Book of Genesis

Part 95

James Gunn

Chapter 47:1-26

We must now, in the third place, consider the administration of Joseph as it considers his loyalty to the crown, to Pharaoh. His faithfulness to his own father's family and to the Egyptian people has been noticed; he had the keen ability and the warm affection to do what he thought best for all.

Loyalty To Pharaoh

It is necessary that we remind ourselves of the powers invested by Pharaoh in Joseph: "And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, Forasmuch as God hath shewed thee all this, there is none so discreet and wise as thou art: Thou shalt be over my house, and according unto thy word shall all my people be ruled; only in the throne will I be greater than thou" (Gen. 41:39-40).

These remarkable and extensive powers were granted because Pharaoh detected almost supernatural talent in Joseph, possessed through the Spirit of God.

Executive Ability: Joseph had been faithful in the management of Potiphar's household (Gen. 39:1-4); he had been diligent in the position of trust in the prison, now he is promoted to much greater responsibilities. "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also

in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much" (Luke 16:10).

Moral Quality: Joseph was not only highly intellectual but strictly moral. The change from a prison to a palace did not influence his self-control. In his humiliation he carried himself with dignity; in his exaltation he comported himself with humility. Self-discipline was practised constantly.

Spiritual Endowment: Joseph is one of the Old Testament worthies in whom it is said the Spirit of God dwelt. See Genesis 41:38; Numbers 27:18; and Daniel 5:11. His spirituality was no hinderance but rather a help; it activated his mind as well as enlarged his heart.

As a token to the public that Joseph had been actually made regent, Pharaoh gave him the signs of rank and authority. The robe and the golden chain were symbols of his rank, and the signet ring a symbol of his authority.

A regent is one appointed to rule a kingdom during special and difficult circumstances; as for example, during the minority of the rightful heir, or while the ruling monarch is incapacitated by illness. Such were the many qualifications of Joseph that he acted in the capacity of regent during the years of crisis.

Joseph's loyalty to Pharaoh is seen in so many different ways. He certainly believed that the powers that be are ordained of God (Rom. 13:1), and that as a child of God he ought to be subject to principalities and powers over him, even although these were represented in an idolatrous pagan.

His Obedience: Joseph's obedience to the dictates of the ruler is seen in his attitude toward things in general and

to things in particular. He was meticulous about details as well as about expanse. He obeyed and undertook the assignment to administer the kingdom; he obeyed Pharaoh in the locating of his father and brethren.

His Humility: It is said of Joseph that he rode in the second chariot. One has made the comment upon this, “Only a Joseph could ride well in the second chariot.” There is sufficient of the devil in every human heart to aspire higher and to seek the first place. There was no attempt upon his part to usurp authority or to arrogate to himself extra powers; he was perfectly contented to remain in the position given to him by Pharaoh, the position for which God had been preparing him throughout his earlier life.

His honesty: What a wonderful commendation is written here by the Holy Spirit: “Joseph gathered up all the money that was found in the land of Egypt, and in the land of Canaan, for the corn which they ‘bought: and Joseph brought the money into Pharaoh’s house” (Gen. 47:14). He was not like the tax collectors of Rome who exacted for self-profit more than was just.

His homage: That he honoured their monarch in the eyes of the Egyptians is very patent. He told them, “Ye shall give a fifth part unto Pharaoh” (Gen. 47:24). Furthermore, with food he made purchase of all for Pharaoh, “Behold, I have bought you this day and your land for Pharaoh” (Gen. 47:23).

There is really no more admirable character among men than Joseph. Well he knew in business that “Divers weights and divers measures, both of them are alike abomination to the Lord” (Prov. 20:10). David wrote, “The godly man ceaseth, for the faithful fail from among

the children of men” (Psa. 12:1). In this the modern man has not changed, it is therefore a great relief to examine the character, behaviour, and performance of this historic Hebrew gentleman.

The Book of Genesis --Part 96

The Book of Genesis

Part 96

James Gunn

Chapter 47:27 - 48:22

Come and see how a Christian dies," cried the Communist captor of a servant of God who had lived in their country as a witness and who was now to die in their country as a martyr. That day the people of China saw a Christian die in perfect submission to the will of God and in graciousness and dignity before the world.

The story of Joseph that we have been following, in great part closes here and the Spirit of God resumes the history of Jacob. The account of Joseph's experience in Egypt was necessary only to explain how Israel came to be in Egypt. The Genesis narrative now returns to the main subject, Jacob.

God gave to Jacob seventeen years in which he enjoyed the presence and the prestige of his son. One can only imagine the pleasure that this relationship afforded him during his declining days. The rehearsal of experiences by Joseph would result in both sadness and delight in the heart of his father. Parental admiration would be a great stimulant in Jacob's old age.

Furthermore, Jacob not only enjoyed the provision which he received in Egypt but also the development and the increases of his family. "They had possessions therein, and grew, and multiplied." Although the Lord eventually had to expell Israel from Egypt, in the early years in that

land God developed and prepared them for nationhood. They entered Egypt as a family; they left so increased that they were ready to be constituted a nation.

Preparation for Death

Jacob began to sense that his sojourn in time was near its end, and in talking over the matter with his son, he testified of God's goodness, made arrangements for his burial, and invoked a patriarchal blessing upon Joseph's children.

His testimony: In reviewing his life as he blessed Joseph's sons, Jacob said, "God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk, the God which fed me all my life long unto this day; The angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads" (Gen. 48:15-16).

There is a marginal reading of this verse which says, "God who shepherded me all my life long." To shepherd is to lead, to heed, and to feed. Here Jacob acknowledges that God had done all these for him. Our critical attitude would consider this patriarch, at certain points of his history, a wandering sheep, and in all probability he did so himself. What a testimony to the patience and the faithfulness of the Lord! Psalm 23 had not been composed in Jacob's day, but he knew the sentiments expressed in it.

His arrangements: In these closing conversations of Jacob and in his final arrangements, there appear two statements which naturally arrest the attention; the first is, "I will lie with my fathers;" the second, "I am to be gathered unto my people" (Gen. 49:29). Obviously the first one has to do with the burial of his body; but, we

may ask, is there not more than this implied by the second?

Joseph vowed to his father that his remains would be laid with those of his predecessors in the cave that was in the field of Ephon the Hittite, at Mamre, in the land of Canaan. Jacob's removal, even in death, from Egypt and his return, even in that state, to Canaan were in anticipation of the return of his descendants to Canaan; in fact, it was a token of their exodus from Egypt and their conquest of Canaan.

It would seem that in the second clause to which reference has been made, there is a hint of Jacob's belief in immortality. In reading his statement one is reminded of the words of the Lord Jesus, "…the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. He is not the God of the dead, but of the living" (Luke 20:37-38).

Jacob believed his people to be still living, and that he in passing from these scenes of time would be assembled with them. Job who probably lived in those patriarchal days has clearly stated his belief not only in immortality but in resurrection: "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body yet in my flesh shall I see God: Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me" (Job 19:25-27).

The Patriarchal Blessing

In the New Testament the Holy Spirit gives a very pleasing commentary upon one of the last acts of Jacob's life: "By faith Jacob when he was a dying, blessed both

the sons of Joseph; and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff" (Heb. 11:21).

One in reading the Genesis record of Jacob's life does not find much that could be defined as an act of faith. Early in his life he deceived his brother Esau; later he devised self-advantageous schemes in his service with Laban; and, later still he attempted to bribe Esau. Nevertheless, God who knows the heart records that at the close of his life he did act in faith.

It probably is rash to say that this was the only act of faith in all his experience, even although it is the only one left on record. Notwithstanding, there are lessons for all from this solitary statement. It was when the natural man was deteriorating that he arose to higher altitudes in the spiritual realm.

Jacob acted in faith after a life of discipline in the school of God; after God had dealt with him in numerous ways, it is said that he actually worshipped. It is certainly true that the repression of the old nature and the ascendancy of the new, condition the heart for faith and 'worship.

Jacob 'blessed the two sons of Joseph as if they were his own immediate children. He said, "Ephraim and Manasseh, … are mine as Reuben and Simeon, they shall be mine" (Gen. 48:5).

Indubitably Jacob now realized that it was not his deception that secured for him the blessing of his father but the purposes of God. An overruling Providence had executed the divine will despite human impatience and sin. In all probability the remembrance of the past impelled him to rely wholly upon divine guidance as he crossed his hands and blessed Ephraim and Manasseh making the elder subservient to the younger.

There can be no greater attainment in a Christian's life than what is here stated concerning Jacob: he acted in faith, he worshipped God, and he blessed others. Here we have implicit faith, reverential hope, and objective love. According to Hebrews 10:19-25, these are the three Christian graces which flourish within the veil. In this cold world they are soon blighted and wither, but inside the veil, their own climate, they bloom in all their moral loveliness.

The Thessalonians manifested these graces very early in their spiritual experience, and with the passing of time the Apostle Paul wanted them to increase and abound more and more in these. He knew that the true evidence of the reality of Christianity in the world today is a manifestation of these in the believer's behaviour. "Now abideth faith, hope, and charity; but the greatest of these is charity (love)" (1 Cor. 13:13).

The Book of Genesis --Part 97

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Chapter 49:1-7

Jacob, realizing that his days were few, called his sons together before him. He sought to tell them what was to befall them in the last days. Actually his words were more in the way of predictions than in blessings. In the case of the aged patriarch there was a divine insight and foresight which enabled him to prophesy the future of the nation that was to arise out of his family. Notwithstanding the prophetic light imparted to him, much of what he said was the expected development from the characters manifested in his sons. Character expresses itself in behaviour, and in many cases gives indications of future reactions.

There seems to be a contrast between Jacob who sought a blessing from his father, albeit he did it in a wrong way, and his own children who, as far as the record is concerned, asked nothing of him. Perhaps they had become in measure like Esau and despised the patriarchal benediction.

The blessings of Moses upon the tribes of Israel (Deut. 33) are complementary to what was spoken by Jacob. Jacob saw the future in what he knew about his sons; Moses saw the future of the nation in what he knew about God and His purposes of government and grace. The expression used by both Jacob and Moses, “In the

last days," usually contains a reference to the period of Messiah's rule.

Some expositors divide the blessings of Jacob upon his sons into four sections. In so doing there are some very important moral lessons to be learned. There are, of course, three names in each section. The first mentions Reuben, Simeon, and Levi, and reveals man by nature, man irrepressible and violent. The second mentions Zebulun, Issachar, and Dan, and indicates the influence which leads to departure and apostacy from God. The third lists Gad, Asher, and Naphtali, and suggests what God can do for those who in weakness turn to Him. The fourth contains Judah, Joseph, and Benjamin, and manifests the power of leadership that retards evil and seeks recovery.

Reuben is described by his father as being unstable as water. Literally he bubbled over as water when it boils. This suggests an unrestrained dispostition, a passionate nature. To Reuben Jacob said, "Thou shalt not excel. As a tribe Reuben sank from the first place to the most insignificant. A lack of self-control invariably results in a decline.

"Simeon and Levi are brethren," said their father. Not only were they brothers in the same family but in the same disposition and crime. In his prediction their father had in mind their deceit and violence at Shechem, and upon them he uttered a curse rather than a blessing: "I will divide them in Jacob and scatter them in Israel."

The Book of Genesis --Part 98

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James Gunn

Chapter 49:1-7

In our last study it was noticed that these patriarchal blessings of Jacob were relevant to “the last days;” this term usually being understood to refer to the period of the Messiah’s manifestation. The statement was made in that study that the blessings of Moses upon the tribes of Israel just previous to his death (Deut. 33) were complementary to those of Jacob. It is therefore to be expected that these blessings trace a prophetic outline of Israel’s future; that is, future from the times of Jacob and Moses.

Of course, there are not only foreshadowings in these words, but there are also moral and spiritual lessons which we as Christians might learn.

Reuben

In earlier studies in the life of Jacob, we saw the great importance placed upon the birthright by the patriarchs and the Hebrews. Jacob acquired it by stealth. We know that in this Esau assisted him because of an attitude that despised the birthright. That Esau finally repented and sought it carefully with tears proves the point.

From the words of Jacob to Reuben, we learn that because of sin, a brief gratification of the flesh, this son, his firstborn, forfeited all claim to the birthright. He who

enjoyed in order the first place, through immorality lost it forever. Not only did he loose the birthright but he incurred divine displeasure. Had Reuben lived personally under the law, he would have been executedfor his evil (Lev. 20:10-11).

The blessing of Moses upon the tribute that descended from this man is striking; even the Law Giver spoke words of grace. “Let Reuben live and not die; and let not his men be few” (Deut. 33:6). These words sound more like a prayer than a benediction, a real intercession. Moses hoped for life for one who by his behaviour merited death. Reuben lost through government the blessing of the firstborn but through grace he was forgiven and encouraged.

Simeon

Simeon and Levi are here linked together because of their violence and judgment, the judgment that Jacob pronounced upon them. The words of Jacob in this connection are more historical whereas the words of Moses are more prophetical. Because of their duplicity and wickedness at Shechem (Gen. 34:25-31), Jacob condemns them and would scatter them throughout Israel. He detaches himself from their dreadful deeds and curses their revengeful act.

The words of Jacob joined the two men together, but in the purposes of God they were eventually separated. In Simeon’s history it is noticeable that during the journey in the wilderness, his tribe became smaller and smaller. At the first they numbered 59,300 (Num. 1:23), but at the close only 22,2000 (Num. 26:14).

Sin always results in penalty and loss. Moses does not at all mention the tribe of Simeon in his blessings upon the nation. The words of Jacob seem to imply that not only was Simeon the elder of the two but that he was the leader in crime. Furthermore, in the grievous experience at Baal-Peor, Zimri, the son of Salu, a prince of a chief house in Simeon, was one of the prominent offenders. It was on that occasion that Simeon and Levi definitely parted for it was Phinehas of Levi who in holy indignation slew both Zimri and Cozbi the Midianitish woman (Num. 25:10-15).

Levi

What appears in the language of Jacob a curse, by divine arrangement through Moses becomes a national blessing. The Levites scattered throughout the nation became God's representatives to man and man's representative before God.

Because they had kept God's commandment at Baal-Peor and separated themselves from immoral wickedness, they were fitted to teach God's judgments and laws to all the tribes. Furthermore, they were to burn incense as priests before the Lord.

The lessons to be gathered from these two tribes are important lessons. To pursue the path of sin only exposes one to punishment, but in repentance to judge and eschew it prepares one for the favour of God in position and service.

Judah

The blessing of Jacob upon his son Judah predicted supremacy, peace, and abundance. Assuming that Shiloh

is indeed the Messiah, there is here a prophecy of His glorious advent as the One who gives rest.

Judah was to be the royal tribe that was to govern and legislate for the entire nation until Christ should return to reign in righteousness, no other tribe was thus to rule. The Messiah would be the tranquilizer who would subdue all opposition and give peace to a war torn and panic stricken world. To Him the people would rally in obedience for as the Lion of the Tribe of Judah He would prevail and wield the sceptre of justice.

The peace that will then characterize the world is illustrated by the tying of the foal and the ass to the choice vine, and their doing it no damage. The abundance of that millennium of peace and righteousness is demonstrated in the fact that wine will be as plentiful as water, water that is used to cleanse garments and quench thirst.

To this wonderful prophecy by Jacob, Moses adds two other details: God will receive praise; He will hear the voice of Judah, and He will strengthen Judah against all his enemies.

The few points discussed in connection with Reuben explain why he was deprived of the first place among his brethren. From what has been considered in regard to Judah, it is seen that the pre-eminence has been given to this tribe; and no matter how many vicissitudes may befall the nation, no one else within the nation will have complete supremacy. When Christ of Bethlehem of Judea (Matt. 2:5) returns, He will sit upon the Throne of His father David (Luke 1:32). This is part of the tribal distinction of Judah.

It all becomes obvious to the devout student of the Holy Scriptures that all these predictions have their complete fulfilment in the Lord Jesus Christ.

“He is coming! and the mountains of Judea ring again,

Jerusalem awakens, and shouts her glad Amen.

He is coming! wastes of Horeb, awaken and rejoice:

Hills of Moab, cliffs of Edom, lift the long silent voice.
He is coming! sea of Sodom, to heal thy leprous brine,
To give back palm and myrtle, the olive and the vine.”

The Book of Genesis --Part 99

The Book of Genesis

Part 99

James Gunn

Chapter 49:8-33

Fulfilled prophecy is only one of the many proofs of the authenticity of the Holy Scriptures, but it is a very fascinating one. A servant of Christ, in response to a challenge that he prove the inspiration of the Holy Scriptures, asserted that this he could do in one word, and that word was Jew. Of course, he thereby implied fulfilled prophecy in regard to the Jewish people.

As has been noticed, the predictions of both Jacob and Moses relevant to the tribes of Israel in great part have been fulfilled during the intervening centuries.

Zebulun

Jacob’s words to Zebulun implied that his part of the territory was to be on the sea coast, and that he was to have havens of rest for ships. Zebulun, it will be remembered also provided an asylum for Joseph, Mary, and the little Lord Jesus (Matt. 2:1923), for Nazareth was in Galilee of the Gentiles, part of which was within the borders of Zebulun. Here also were Caperanum, Chorazin, and Cana, places in which our Lord ministered in both word and deed. From the land of Zebulun He called several of His disciples, as for example, Philip, Andrew, and Peter. It was from Zebulun that the Lord sent Jonah, who lived in Gath Hepher in Galilee.

It is felt by some that there is in the words of Moses some intimation of the apostolic commission given centuries later by the Lord Jesus. “Rejoice, Zebulun, in thy going out.” It was on a mountain of Galilee that the Lord sent forth the Apostles, “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you, and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.”

Issachar

Issachar’s territory was between Zebulun, the maritime tribe, on the north and Manasseh on the south. From the words of Jacob one pictures Issachar as an agricultural people. The marginal reading of verse 14 suggests that Issachar bowed himself between two sheepfolds, as a shepherd watching while resting. As the ass in the Middle East is considered a patient burden-bearer, this adds to the picture of this tribe as an agricultural shepherd community. The land finally allotted by Joshua to Issachar is very fertile.

There are those who believe that this tribe contributed extensively from the plains of Esdraelon food for the royal household, in this manner it was under tribute.

Dan

Both Jacob and Moses picture Dan as fierce and ruthless. Jacob likens him to a reptile, and Moses likens him to a fierce animal. Dan in his movements was as subtle as a serpent and as strong as a lion. He would therefore be a dreadful enemy. Perhaps these are the characteristics that made him so insubordinate and

independent and that eventually led him away from God and into idolatry. Judges 18 relates a very sad chapter in the history of this tribe.

When Jeroboam began to reign over the ten tribes which had seceded from the house of David, he set up a golden calf in the city of Dan in the north of the country. This city, because the tribe had found itself cramped in the territory assigned by Joshua, was captured, its inhabitants slain, and its area possessed and peopled by Danites.

In the Book of Revelation chapter seven where the servants of God are sealed in the forehead, 144 thousand out of each tribe in Israel, the name of Dan is omitted from the list. On this account some have assumed that the Anit-Christ, the leader in the national idolatry of the future, will arise from this apostate tribe. If this be so, then we have another proof of the grace of God in the recovery of His own for Ezekiel describes Israel in a day yet to come as a united nation in proper relationship to the Holy City, the millennial capital, and the name of Dan holds a prominent place.

The account of the life of Samson, one of Dan’s greatest sons, apparently epitomizes the history of the entire tribe in its unfaithfulness to God and His testimony. He had a good beginning, a boastful ascendancy characterized by departure from the Lord, divine discipline, and then finally gracious recovery.

Well might Jacob exclaim as he foresaw the general history of this descendant, “I have waited for Thy salvation, O Lord!” Only God could deliver from such a decline and from such an evil influence.

Gad

The predictions concerning this tribe are both interesting and instructive. Gad is visualized as an overcomer. True, there were occasions when he would be overcome, but finally he would be victorious. The history of man collectively and individually is made up of defeats and triumphs.

According to the blessing of Moses, Gad was to expand, not by his own ability (the arm) or his own wisdom (the head), but by realizing that in order to provide for himself he had to reserve a portion for the Lawgiver.

Furthermore, because of his close association with the heads of the nation, Gad was to engage in the executing of the righteous judgments of Jehovah. What commendable prophecies!

That Gad was true to this preview is well attested in Scripture. When David was pursued by Saul we read, “And of the Gadites there separated themselves unto David into the hold to the wilderness men of might, and men of war fit for the battle, that could handle shield and ‘buckler, whose faces were like the faces of lions, and were as swift as the roes upon the mountains; … These were the sons of Gad, captains of the host: one of the least was over an hundred, and the greatest over a thousand.”

The Book of Genesis --Part 100

The Book of Genesis

Part 100

James Gunn

Chapter 49:20-26

The study of the blessings of Jacob and Moses upon the twelve tribes of Israel unfolds a whole train of events, connected events which controlled the course of the entire nation. As history is the post-written aggregate of a natural career, even so prophecy is the prewritten history of a future career. In these blessings upon his sons, Jacob reveals their history, and predicts their future.

Asher

The name Asher means happy. His mother expressed her emotion of joy in thus naming her little son.

While some spiritualize the details of the blessings pronounced upon this tribe by both Jacob and Moses, there is no doubt but that they were first intended to be taken literally. Whatever moral lessons may be drawn from the statements of Asher’s father, one must first of all consider the statements as facts.

The territory allotted to Asher stretched from Carmel along the Mediterranean coast to Zidon. This area was extremely fertile and produced corn, oil, and wine in large abundance.

From the subsequent history, temporal prosperity made this tribe self-satisfied and ease-loving; consequently,

the tribe was readily influenced by idolatrous neighbours. Asher became so indolent that she took no part in the war against Sisera (Jud.5:17), although later she did participate in the struggle and victory of Gideon (Jud. 7:23).

It is rather interesting to notice that the whole nation although divided was represented at the time of Christ's birth. Zecharias represented the tribe of Levi, the exclusive priestly tribe. Anna of the tribe of Asher represented the northern kingdom composed of the ten tribes which seceded from the house of David. If, as is supposed by some, Simeon was of the tribe of Judah, then he represented the southern kingdom which remained with David's heirs.

How frequently temporal prosperity improverishes the beauty of a high moral and vigorous spirituality! The Lord said to the church of the Laodiceans, "Because thou sayest, I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of Me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; …" (Rev. 3:18).

Naphtali

It was Rachel that named Bilhah's son, Naphtali the Wrestler. His own mother was slave to Rachel; consequently, Rachel claimed him as her child. She wrestled with her sister; later, her husband, Jacob, wrestled with the Angel. Although he bore such a name, it is questionable whether Naphtali inherited either the envy of his mother or the intrepidity of his father.

Naphtali, although a numerous tribe, did not possess what the world calls leadership; nevertheless, one of her sons became a national hero in the days of the Judges. It was Barak the son of Abinoam of Kedesh-Naphtali that Deborah the prophetess called and commanded to take soldiers from Naphtali and Zebulun and to fight against Sisera the captain of Jabin's army. Barak apparently was a self-effacing individual, notwithstanding, his name appears on the honour roll of the faithful (Heb. 11: 32).

One notices that in the record of the battle in Judges, its preparation and success, Deborah is quite boastful and claims much of the praise for herself, but in the New Testament, her name is not even mentioned; whereas, the timid Barak is honoured with the nations mighty. It is better to wrestle in seclusion and defeat self there, and be praised publicly by the Lord on the proper occasion than to praise oneself and eventually to be ignored.

The portion of the land allotted to Naphtali lay in the northern angle of Palestine, and was bordered on three sides by Zebulun, Asher, and Manasseh; south, west, and east respectively. This territory is well known to all now under the name of Galilee an area of great importance in the life of the Lord Jesus.

There is another picture of the tribe over which we must not hurriedly pass: "Naphtali is a hind let loose; he giveth goodly words." He was not always in grips with an opponent wrestler. There were times when he was free, let loose, when in liberty he dashed like a deer that had broken loose from a trap and bounded through the forest. How like the Christian life! At times the believer is in the close grip of hand to hand fighting; at other

times he enjoys the full pleasure of perfect freedom. May one have grace to as readily submit to the one as to delight in the other.

Joseph

That Joseph, the first child of Rachel, was Jacob's favourite is obvious to all who read the Holy Scriptures. Doubtless this partiality arose not so much from the circumstances of his birth as from the excellency of his character. No matter what personal qualities may be, favouritism invariably results in jealousy and dislike. Consequently, we read, "When his brethren saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him" (Gen. 37:4).

Although Joseph grew to be a man of a most distinguished character, and although many of his experiences provided illustrations of the different phases in the life of our blessed Lord, one must not apply the excellencies of the Man Christ Jesus to Joseph. Joseph, like all others save Christ, was born in sin and shapen in iniquity. There is ever a vivid contrast between Christ and any other man. Of Him and Him only was it said, "An High Priest …, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens" (Heb. 7:26).

Jacob pictured Joseph as a fruitful bough by a fountain whose branches run over the wall. This is a picture not only of fertility but of benefience; Joseph shared with those on the other side of the wall, the benefits of his life.

Life has its highlights and shadows; Joseph experienced these in reverse order; the shadows of hatred, misunderstanding, slavery, injustice, and imprisonment crowded the early part of his life. The story of how Egypt's prisoner became Egypt's Prime-Minister provides delightful reading.

The Book of Genesis --Part 101

The Book of Genesis

Part 101

James Gunn

Chapter 49:27-33

We are now going to consider the last son mentioned by Jacob in his patriarchal blessing, Benjamin. This son was the baby of the large family, and the second child of Rachel who died at his birth (Gen. 35:18). He was therefore a full brother of Joseph. Benjamin was the only son born to Jacob in the land of Palestine. His mother called him Ben-oni, the son of my pain or sorrow, but his father renamed him Benjamin, the son of my right hand.

Jacob may have changed his name not only because of his grief and deep regret at Rachel's death, but because of his hope in this little son. He expected that Benjamin would be a strong man, a stay to many in their hour of need. The reading of his last words about Benjamin leads one to imagine that his high hope had not been realized: "Benjamin shall ravin as a wolf: in the morning he shall devour the prey, and at night he shall divide the spoil." Was Benjamin actually ferocious and subtle like a wolf? One thing is certain, Benjamin became the most warlike of all the twelve tribes, the fiercest fighters in battle. They fought with Deborah (Judges 5:14); fought against all the other tribes in a civil war (Judges 19-20). The first king of Israel, the choice of the people, Saul, lived up to this reputation of fierceness. Like a ravining wolf he hunted for David, and would have killed the man of God's choice.

One of the most obvious fulfilments of this prediction by Jacob is seen in the early life of the Apostle Paul. Saul of Tarsus was a Hebrew of the Hebrews and of the tribe of Benjamin (Phil. 3:5). In taking a retrospect of his early life, Paul wrote: “I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious” (1 Tim. 1:12-13). Of that same period he also wrote, “I persecuted the Church of God and wasted it” (Gal. 1:13). In his address before Agrippa, Paul shows how this fierce nature dominated his preconversion years: “I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them” (Acts 26:9-10).

Thank God, He tamed that wolflike fierceness! How subdued Paul became through intimacy with the One who said, “I am meek and lowly in heart” (Matt. 11:28). The Apostle’s words to the Colossians are a proof of the reality of his conversion: “I Paul am made a minister; Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for His Body’s sake, which is the Church” (Col. 1:23-24).

As he neared the close of his life and ministry, Paul wrote to his spiritual son, Timothy, “I am appointed a preacher, and an Apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles. For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed” (2 Tim. 1:11-12). How radically Paul had been changed! The fiercest persecutor of the Church became its finest preacher; he

who caused much suffering to the Church willingly suffered for her, and that without complaint. The wolf, speaking figuratively, who would have devoured the flock of God was so transformed that he became a shepherd over the flock; upon him rested the care of the churches.

The Summation

“All these are the twelve tribes of Israel.” Jacob, with prophetic vision, saw a great nation and the descendants of his sons as tribes in that union. These were words not of hope only but of faith. During his second visit to Bethel God appeared to him, “And God said unto him, I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall be of thee, and kings shall come out of thy loins” (Gen. 35:11). He believed that what God had promised, He would surely bring to pass.

The summation is a checking over to see that none were omitted from this blessing. Blessing it was although some critical points were raised and harsh statements made. Each blessing suited perfectly the condition for which it was intended. God, through Jacob the channel, bestowed the exact provision and ‘benediction required for each prevailing circumstance.

Jacob had been the cause of strife and hatred in the case of both Laban and Esau, but under the divine discipline of years, he became the cause of blessing. May the prayer of each redeemed heart be, “Make me a channel of blessing today.”

Funeral Arrangements

Jacob now gives instructions in regard to his death and burial. The family stood united about him, and he was conscious that because of their respect and loyalty for him, they would fulfil his wish.

The expression, “I am to be gathered unto my people,” was commonly understood by the ancients merely to be joined to one’s ancestors in death and not necessarily meaning to be reunited with forefathers in a world of spirits.

Death is inevitable because of Adam’s sin (Rom. 5:12). Jacob contemplated this crisis in full assurance of faith, and calmly gave his directions. Man is made in the image of God, therefore his body merits reverent treatment in a decent burial, and Jacob realized this.

Men were not satisfied with the sufferings and the death of the Lord Jesus; to these they sought to add another indignity. They made His grave with the wicked; they wished to bury His corpse among criminals. Instead of this, God appointed that He have the tomb of a rich man after His death. In contrast to man’s evil intention for the Saviour, Jacob planned a respectable burial in his family plot.

What memories were attached to the family grave: “The cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite… There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife; there they buried Isaac and Rebekah; and there I buried Leah.” Though Rachel was the wife whom he loved, Jacob here shows an affection for Leah. The cave-tomb was a place of sad yet hopeful gathering. In it this pilgrim family sleeps in certain hope of a glorious resurrection.

Thus ends the life of this remarkable patriarch. He committed himself to God and made arrangements for the committal of his body to the hallowed ground of the Land of Promise.

The Book of Genesis --Part 102

The Book of Genesis

Part 102

James Gunn

Chapter 49:33 - 50:15

Solomon said, “It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting; for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart” (Ecc. 7:2).

It is not difficult to visualize the mourning over Jacob’s passing, some of it according to Egyptian custom, to be sure, and some of it in all sincerity.

Jacob’s Resignation

“When Jacob had made an end of commanding his sons, he gathered up his feet into the bed, and yielded up the ghost, and was gathered unto his people.” These last movements were indicative of his resignation in death. He knew that his long pilgrimage had ended, so without a struggle he expired.

The ultimate in Christian submission to the will of God is a voluntary yielding to Him in this grave crisis of life. The Apostle Paul wrote, “That in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death” (Phil. 1:20). To Timothy at the close of his ministry he wrote, “The time of my departure is at hand” (2 Tim, 4:6). Such submission renders glory to the Lord. In predicting the death of Peter, the Lord Jesus

said that He signified by what death he (Peter) should glorify God (John 21:19). How willingly Peter submitted! In anticipation of death he wrote, “Shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shewed me” (2 Pet. 1:14).

The Mourning

Historians give descriptions of Egyptian mournings. Pompous ceremonies for the dead were relished by them. Great men among them, after embalming, were buried in state. Professional mourners were hired and wailed after the customs of the East. Men waving palm branches joined the procession, and at the end of the cortege the coffin followed on a boat, for the soul of the deceased, so they believed, was thus transported into the invisible world.

While there was much pretense in this ancient custom, there is no doubt about the sincerity of Joseph’s mourning. “Joseph fell upon his father’s face, and wept upon him, and kissed him.” Until he was seventeen years of age, Joseph had been very close to his father, and during the last seventeen years of his life this intimacy had not only been restored, it had been greatly increased. The loss to Joseph was keen.

The patriarchs believed in the resurrection (Job 19:25-27, Rom. 4:17. Heb. 11:17-19), but they did not have the full light of New Testament revelation nor its enduring hope. Paul comforted the hearts of the Thessalonian saints, saying, “I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others that have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with

Him" (1 Thess. 4:13-14). Well might he add at the close of that passage, "Wherefore comfort one another with these words."

The Honour

"The Egpytians mourned for him (Jacob) threescore and ten days." The usual time for the mourning of a king, so we are told was seventy-two days. The mourning of the Egyptians for Jacob must therefore indicate their high esteem. During the seventeen years he had been among them he had won their respect. It should always be thus with the people of God. The commendation of the early Christians has been left on record: "They continued daily with one accord… Praising God, and having favour with all the people" (Acts 2:4-7). They were much like their Lord, "Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man" (Luke 2:52).

The Compliance

"And his sons did unto him according as he commanded them." There was no attempt to break the will in this case. Filial love expressed itself in complete agreement and obedience. Their father had died in faith relying upon the covenant that God had confirmed to him. In hope he asked that his remains rest in the Land of Promise, thus anticipating the future when his descendants would possess that land given to them of God. That Joseph entertained the same hope is obvious. "Joseph took an oath of the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you, and ye shall carry up my bones from hence (Gen. 50:26).

The covenant, the land, and the future were all in the minds of the patriarchs. The wealth of Egypt might

serve them temporarily, but it could not hold them indefinitely.

When the sons of Jacob returned from the burial of their father, the impression was deeper in their souls that their sojourn in Egypt was of a temporary nature. The cave in the field at Macpelah was a witness to that fact.

Joseph's Forgiveness

That his brothers had lived near him and worked under him for seventeen years and yet doubted him, deeply grieved Joseph's heart. We do not wonder that "Joseph wept when they spake unto him."

Their attitude at this time indicates how deeply they were convicted of their own sin, how difficult it was for them to forgive themselves because of its enormity, how difficult it was to implicitly trust the words of Joseph, and how wrong their thoughts were relative to the premise upon which his forgiveness rested. We therefore do not wonder at their lack of assurance.

These components of their attitude illustrate why some believers do not enjoy the full assurance of divine salvation. Sin before God is exceedingly sinful, it is heinous, but He has provided a means by which it may be removed. He has said, "Though your sins be as scarlet (readily seen so that they cannot be hid before Him), they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson (double dyed, therefore humanly permanent), they shall be as (undyed) wool" (Isa. 1:18).

Joseph did not forgive his brothers for his father's sake. His attitude of grace was not dependant upon either the presence or absence of Jacob. He acted out of the love and consideration of his own heart. Joseph's unlimited

pardon reminds us of the premise upon which divine forgiveness rests: “I even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins” (Isa. 43:25).

The Book of Genesis --Part 103

The Book of Genesis

Part 103

James Gunn

Chapter 50:15-26

A man’s greatness does not emanate from his position but from his personality. It is not how much he governs that makes him important but how gracious he is. Haughtiness discredits a man, but humility distinguishes a gentleman. How true these maxims were in the case of Joseph! His true greatness was never so manifest than when after his father’s death, disturbed by the incredulity of his brethren, he assured them of his forgiveness.

Did his brethren judge him to be such as they? Did they expect that with the removal of their father and the influence of his maturity and love, Joseph would at last seek revenge? Had they forgotten that he had fully and generously forgiven them before he had been reunited to his father? Obviously, they had. Nevertheless, their unbelief and Joseph’s benevolence illustrate clearly not only the security of the believer in Christ, but the conscious assurance of that security. Let us consider this, the closing section of Genesis, in just such a manner.

Conviction Of Sin

As these men spoke among themselves there were three stages in the process of their thinking.

Memory: They spoke of “all the evil which we did unto him.” They recalled the hardness of their hearts and of their wickedness toward Joseph. The circumstance drew from the files of memory the dark deeds of the years that had passed.

Conscience: They not only recalled their past actions among themselves, but they called them trepasses as they appealed to Joseph through their messenger. They justly suffered from a serious guilt complex, and faced the reality of their guilt. What once to them seemed a great success, was now only sin. Thank God for the promptings of conscience!

Reason: Fear of reprisals filled their hearts, for they said, “Joseph will peradventure hate us, and will certainly requite us all the evil that we did unto him.” Reason could lead them to only this one conclusion. Conscience convicted them of sin, and reason convinced them of its penalty. Under the pressure of conscience and reason Joseph’s brethren sought some means to determine his attitude toward them; they looked for a mediator.

A Mediator

The messenger the brothers chose to represent them prepared the way for these conscience-stricken individuals to appear before Joseph, and to deal directly with him. Job longed for such an one to stand between God and him. The Apostle Paul points to the divine answer to Job’s wish: “There is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 2:5). All must eventually deal with God, but we have in Christ One who in His death made intercession for the transgressors (Isa. 53:12).

Joseph

Joseph acts the part, not of a brother, but of a saviour. True, they had caused him to pass through a dreadful experience, but behind their hatred, and behind the circumstances that resulted from that evil, he traced the hand of the Lord. He said to them, “Ye thought evil against me: but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.” By divine guidance he had been sent before them as a deliverer. How this reminds us of the teaching of the New Testament: “But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law” (Gal. 4:4-5).

His Brethren

In order to understand the magnanimity of Joseph’s act, we must look again at his brothers. Several salient points suggests themselves as we consider them in his presence:

Their fear: There lingered in their minds the fear of reprisal. Sin makes cowards of all. How real are the deductions of the Apostle Paul as he wrote about the Gentiles. “When the Gentiles, which have not the law (the ten commandments), do by nature the things contained in the law,… shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another” (Rom. 2:14-15).

Their plea: “Forgive,” they ask, “the trespass of the servants of the God of thy fathers.” Do they indicate by these words a change of heart? Do they now consider

that when they did the evil to him, they were the servants of sin? Is there an intimation here that they had now become the servants of God, that they thought differently and acted differently? One thing is obvious, in asking for pardon they do not even hint at the basis upon which a righteous pardon might be granted them. They left Joseph to provide the ground upon which he could be gracious to them.

In dealing with mankind God has provided for Himself a righteous ground upon which to extend a full pardon: “Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time His righteousness: that He might be just, and the Justifier of him that believeth in Jesus” (Rom. 3:24-26).

Their hope: “Behold, we be thy servants.” How like the prodigal son in our Lord’s story whose highest hope was to be like one of his father’s hired servants (Luke 15:11-24). The father did not treat the prodigal son that way, nor did Joseph treat his brothers that way.

Their Security

The princely generosity of Joseph is seen in every word he spoke to these repentant men. His words were those of comfort, assurance and peace.

The comfort: “He comforted them, and spake kindly (Heb. to their hearts. Marginal reading) unto them.”

The assurance: How assuring are his words, “God meant it unto good, … to save much people alive. Now therefore fear ye not: I will nourish you, and your little ones.”

The peace: “Fear not: for am I in the place of God?” By his question Joseph seems to imply that he too is human, and therefore cannot condemn. With this sense of his own weakness, he fully forgave them all.