

Shadows Of Redemption



LORRI FRANDBSEN

Grace Life Ministries 2018

SHADOWS
Of
REDEMPTION

by

LORRI FRANSEN

ARTWORK BY

Paul Gustave Louis Christophe Doré



Dore (1832–1883) was a French artist, printmaker, illustrator, comics artist, caricaturist and sculptor who worked primarily with wood engraving. Doré's Illustrations of the Bible (1866) were a great success and his paintings remain world-renowned. His works are in the public domain in its country of origin and other countries and areas where the copyright term is the author's life plus 70 years or less.

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from the Author

The whole Bible is the story of God's rescue of humankind, and many stories of the Old Testament are hidden mysteries pointing to what was to come in the future. In fact, reading the Old Testament is like reading a mystery story, trying to find the signs that lead up to the big finish. This makes reading the Bible very interesting. It is this author's hope that the reader of "Shadows of Redemption" will be amazed by God's character and His wonderful plan for His people that goes back over many thousands of years, and climaxes in the coming of the Messiah. May the scriptures come alive for you, creating worshipful wonder in your heart for our God and Savior.

Lorri Frandsen

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Introduction

The Bible, one of the oldest books in the world, has been translated into almost 2,500 languages. It is 2 collections of books called the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament is the scripture of the Jewish people written between 1500 BC and 430 BC. The New Testament was written at the time of Jesus Christ and shortly thereafter (30 - 100 AD), by Jesus' followers. The earliest people had no books, paper, or written language, so history was passed down by word of mouth. Later there would be symbols to represent letters to make up a word (alphabet) and eventually people would use paper to write on.

*The Bible is made up of many different groupings, such as history, poetry, epistles, and prophecy. It makes use of much symbolism and typology. A "type" is a kind of shadow of the real thing. Types and shadows point to something of greater importance. The apostle Paul said that the types in the Old Testament *'are a shadow of the things to come.'* (Colossians 2:17)*

The revelation of God's grace in Christ Jesus is the theme that runs throughout the whole Bible, often hidden as a mystery in the Old Testament and fulfilled and completely explained in the New. Both Testaments are about the Messiah. The Bible is His Story.

In The Beginning

CHAPTER 1



People have always been curious about how the universe and everything in it came to exist. The Bible, the Holy Book of the Jews and Christians, says that in the beginning God was the Creator of the universe with all its planets and stars, including our own earth.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless and empty. Darkness was on the surface of the deep and God's Spirit was hovering over the surface of the waters. (Genesis 1:1-2)

Not everyone accepts the Bible's creation account. Down through history many early civilizations developed their own stories about creation. These were often included in their religions and they are very different from the Jewish Biblical account. Most modern day scientists today believe that all of these stories are just fables (stories which never actually happened.) They think it took millions, and even billions of years for the earth to progress (evolve) to what it is today. For this reason some of these scientists say that the account in the Bible should not be taken literally.

It is interesting to learn what Jesus thought about the Genesis account. What we find is that Jesus confirmed the writings of Moses, some of which spoke about Jesus thousands of years earlier, and others which spoke of creation.

For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote about me. (John 5:46)

So what did Moses write?

For in six days Yahweh made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day; therefore Yahweh blessed the Sabbath day, and made it holy. (Exodus 20:11).

Since Moses wrote about the creation in Genesis taking 6 literal days, then Jesus implied that these teachings were true. Moreover the Jews traditionally held to the literal interpretation of Genesis as can be seen from the words of one of their religious leaders.

The ruler of the synagogue, being indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, said to the multitude, "There are six days in which men ought to work. Therefore come on those days and be healed, and not on the Sabbath day!" (Luke 13:14)

This is also confirmed by the first-century Jewish historian, Josephus, who said that Jews of his day believed that both the 1st day of creation and Adam's creation were about 5000 years before Christ.

From the Bible's creation account in Genesis we not only learn that God was the Creator of everything, but we also get a glimpse of God in the act of creating.

Darkness was on the surface of the deep and God's Spirit was hovering over the surface of the waters. (Genesis 1:2)

'Hovering' can also be translated as 'blowing' or 'moving', which are all descriptions of God creating. What we also learn from this verse is that 'waters' over the earth already existed when God began creating.

The first thing God created was light.

God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God saw the light, and saw that it was good. God divided the light from the darkness. God called the light "day", and the darkness he called "night". There was evening and there was morning, the first day. (Genesis 1:3-5)

Notice that the Bible mentions evening and morning as day one. We usually think of morning and evening as a 24 hour day, so it would seem that God may have created in 24 hour time periods, although some scholars would disagree. This passage also foreshadows Jesus Christ who referred to Himself as the 'Light' in the New Testament.

Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. He who follows me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the light of life." (John 8:12)

In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness hasn't overcome it. (John 1:4-5)

After this, God moved to create the atmosphere of the earth.

God said, "Let there be an expanse in the middle of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters." God made the expanse, and divided the waters which were under the expanse from the waters which were above the expanse; and it was so. God called the expanse "sky". There was evening and there was morning, a second day. (Genesis 1:6-8)

Some Bible interpreters believe that the waters above refer to a water vapor canopy, or mist, that was above the earth. This canopy trapped the sun's rays, giving a warm tropical climate to every part of the world.

*As mentioned in an earlier verse, 'waters' already existed. Here we see that waters are again mentioned on day two when the atmosphere (huge space) was being made. Some Bible interpreters explain this by saying that the first verse of Genesis (*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth*) refers to the beginning of the universe when the stars, planets and galaxies were formed. However they state that a 'gap' of maybe millions of years exists between that verse and the next (*The earth didn't have any shape. And it was empty. There was darkness over the surface of the waters.*) These 'gap' creation scientists believe that when God created our world, the earth was already there as an unformed, water-covered planet. They think that perhaps there was an earlier earth, which somehow got destroyed so that it became 'formless and empty'. This idea is called the 'gap theory' or 'gap creationism'. It accounts for an old earth which existed millions of years ago, and a six day Genesis creation of our present earth. It tries to solve the puzzle as to why we find dinosaur prints and fossils in the earth's layers that scientists say date back millions of years, while humankind has existed for only about 5000 years. Other Christians disagree with this idea and think that God would not have created an older world before our own, using the same planet. Whether one believes in the gap theory or not, (no one can definitely prove whether it is true or not) it is a good theory to study.*

Next God created land.

God said, "Let the earth yield grass, herbs yielding seeds, and fruit trees bearing fruit after their kind, with their seeds in it, on the earth"; and it was so. The earth yielded grass, herbs yielding seed after their kind, and trees bearing fruit, with their seeds in it, after their kind; and God saw that it was good. There was evening and there was morning, a third day. (Genesis 1:11-13)

At this time, humankind had not yet been created to look after the land, and there was no rain to water it, so God provided the plants with moisture from a mist that watered the ground.

No plant of the field was yet in the earth, and no herb of the field had yet sprung up; for Yahweh God had not caused it to rain on the earth. There was not a man to till the ground, but a mist went up from the earth, and watered the whole surface of the ground. (Genesis 2:5-6)

Then God created the sun, moon, and stars.

God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of sky to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs to mark seasons, days, and years; and let them be for lights in the expanse of sky to give light on the earth"; and it was so.

God made the two great lights: the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night. He also made the stars. God set them in the expanse of sky to give light to the earth, and to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness. God saw that it was good. There was evening and there was morning, a fourth day. (Genesis 1:14-19)

Some wonder how there could have been light on the first, second, and third days if the sun, moon, and stars were not created until the fourth day. Gap theorists think that God set the sun, moon, and stars on the first day of the week, which gave temporal light to the earth, but their light was not manifest until day 4, when God created the sun, moon, and other heavenly bodies. Others disagree because there is no indication from the Biblical text for this idea. The bottom line is that no matter how God did it, creation week was entirely miraculous and God could have used forces outside of natural laws. God Himself is light so perhaps no outside natural source was even necessary.

Next came the sea creatures and birds.

God set them in the expanse of sky to give light to the earth, and to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness. God saw that it was good. There was evening and there was morning, a fourth day. God said, "Let the waters abound with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth in the open expanse of sky." God created the large sea creatures and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarmed, after their kind, and every winged bird after its kind. God saw that it was good. (Genesis 1:17-21)

And then the animals on day six.

God said, "Let the earth produce living creatures after their kind, livestock, creeping things, and animals of the earth after their kind"; and it was so. (Genesis 1:24)

Then, still on day six, God decided to make the most important creation of all, but He did it in a different way from the rest of His creation.

God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the sky, and over the livestock, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."(Genesis 1:26)

God's reference to Himself as "Us" gives a glimpse into God's nature that is very mystifying. From later scriptures, we learn that God is One.

Hear, Israel: Yahweh is our God. Yahweh is one. (Deuteronomy 6:4)

Jesus also said the same thing in the New Testament when He was asked which commandment was the most important of all.

Jesus answered, "The greatest is, 'Hear, Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. (Mark 12:29)

Yet in this passage of the Bible God appears to be addressing Himself in the plural (more than one).

What can it mean? Later in the New Testament, there is a reference at the baptism of Jesus where God is clearly present as three Persons.

In those days, Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan. Immediately coming up from the water, he saw the heavens parting, and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. A voice came out of the sky, "You are my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." (Mark 1:9-11)

The voice speaking out loud was from God and He appears to be a Father to Jesus (calling him His Son). This agrees with many other scriptures in the Bible, which identify God as a Father figure.

A father of the fatherless, and a defender of the widows, is God in his holy habitation. (Psalm 68:5)

Don't we all have one father? Hasn't one God created us? (Malachi 2:10)

But now, Yahweh, you are our Father. We are the clay, and you our potter. We all are the work of your hand. (Isaiah 64:8)

At Jesus' baptism, God was also described as a Spirit (referred to in other places as the Holy Spirit)

And the Holy Spirit descended in a bodily form like a dove on him. (Luke 3:22)

And lastly Jesus Himself is identified as God when the apostle John tells us that there was a Personage involved with creation, called the Word, who is actually the Son of God in the flesh (Jesus Christ).

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him. Without him was not anything made that has been made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness hasn't overcome it... (John 1:1- 5, 14)

'If God is the Father, the Holy Spirit, and the Word,' does this mean He is three Gods? This can't be true because God has stated in other passages that He is One. Therefore it can only mean that God is three separate Persons - the Father, the Word (revealed as the Son of God in the New testament), and the Holy Spirit. Bible interpreters call this the Trinity of God. It is a difficult and mysterious truth, not fully understandable by humans, but one that is plainly taught in the Bible.

Then Yahweh God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul. (Genesis 2:7)

Instead of speaking humankind into existence as He had done with the rest of His creation, God made Adam from the dust of the earth and breathed life into him. The Lord God had created the rest of creation by simply speaking it into existence. With Adam, however, He created the substances (dust), and then He used those substances to create a man. Also, God had never breathed His own breath into any of the other creatures. Adam's creation was more personal and intimate than anything else God had made.

These verses reveal God as a Great Potter who wanted a creature made in his own image (like Himself), which is why He breathed His own breath of life into Adam. Because of the breath of God inside Adam, he became a living soul with a mind and spirit that could actually communicate with God. When we think of how miraculous this really is, that the God of the universe would actually want to relate to a mere creature in order to reveal His heart and mind to him, we cannot help but see that humans have an amazingly high purpose and destiny. This is why God calls those who follow Him 'children'. God created humankind to be His family.

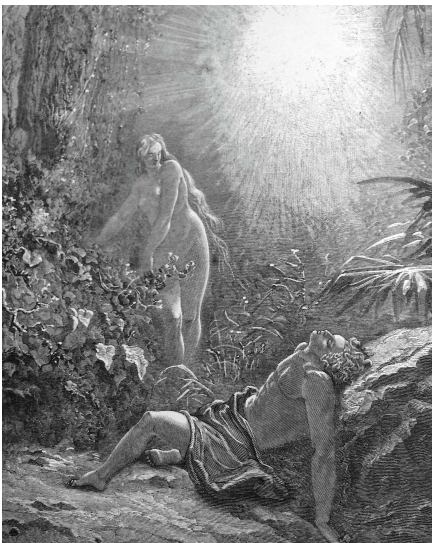
Of course such a special creation needed a special place to live so...

Yahweh God planted a garden eastward, in Eden, and there he put the man whom he had formed. (Genesis 2:8)

No one knows for certain where this garden was located although some Bible scholars think that the Garden of Eden may have been situated in what is today the land of Israel.

Out of the ground Yahweh God formed every animal of the field, and every bird of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. Whatever the man called every living creature became its name. The man gave names to all livestock, and to the birds of the sky, and to every animal of the field; but for man there was not found a helper comparable to him. (Genesis 2:19-20)

All of the animals God had created were brought to Adam so that he could name them. The fact that he could do so means that he was able to communicate in a language, and he also must have had a very high intelligence. The human brain has amazing powers to think and learn things. It is believed that today humans use only 10-20% of their brain's capacity. At the beginning of creation, Adam may have been able to use much more of his brain than we are able to use today. It also seems that God gave Adam a language because Adam was expected to come up with names for each of the animals. All of the creatures God had made were created in pairs. Only Adam was alone. God had always looked upon His creation and declared it to be good, but concerning Adam, God noted he was alone and He said that it was not good. So God carried out the next part of His plan.



Yahweh God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep. As the man slept, he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Yahweh God made a woman from the rib, which had been taken from the man, and brought her to the man. (Genesis 2:21)

Eve was God's idea, specially made for Adam and perfectly designed to complement, or complete him. She was created from one of Adam's ribs so, indirectly through Adam, Eve also came from the dust of the earth, but the fact that she was taken 'out' of man and formed from one of his ribs, makes her unique. Perhaps God was showing Adam that she was to be treasured as a special gift from God because she came from Adam's own body.

Whoever finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains the favor of Yahweh. (Proverbs 18:22)

Eve's creation from Adam's body is symbolic of Jesus and the Church, who is called His Bride, as well as His Body. 'Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually'. (1 Corinthians 12:27) 'For I married you to one husband, that I might present you as a pure virgin to Christ'.(2 Corinthians 11:2)

When Adam woke up from his deep sleep, he was amazed to find a lovely creature beside him, and she was human like him. One can imagine Adam's joy at finding that God had given him a human partner.

(Adam) said, "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh. She will be called 'woman,' because she was taken out of Man." (Genesis 2:21-23)

Some people think that Adam and Eve were not the first humans to live on earth. They see their story as just a fable (like a fairytale). Others think that the first humans actually descended from fish or apes and other animals over a period of many millions of years. Yet Jesus, who is described as God in the Bible, said that the creation of these two people literally happened.

(Jesus) answered, "Haven't you read that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall join to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh?' so that they are no more two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, don't let man tear apart."(Matthew 19:4-6)

Jesus' disciple, Mark, and the apostle Paul, both believed this too. The apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11:8,9 that man is not from woman, but woman from man; for man wasn't created for the woman, but woman for the man.

Mark 10:6 says, But from the beginning of the creation, God made them male and female.

The fact that the man was to leave his parents to form a close relationship with his wife foreshadows the close relationship Jesus would one day have with His Church (Bride). Adam and Eve were to be 'one flesh', just as Christians are called to become 'one' with Jesus.

The glory which you have given me, I have given to them; that they may be one, even as we are one; I in them, and you in me, that they may be perfected into one; that the world may know that you sent (John 17:22,23)

God had waited to end His creation with His best and greatest achievement-humankind. This brought creation to the end of the sixth day.

God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. There was evening and there was morning, a sixth day. (Genesis 1:31)

Then on the seventh day God's work of creation was complete.

He rested on the seventh day from all his work, which he had done. (Genesis 2:2)

God resting does not mean that He was tired, for God is all-powerful. The word 'rest' refers to the fact that God stopped His labors. This completion of God's work is actually a symbol (or foreshadowing) of the great work God would later do as the Messiah in rescuing humanity from sin. Through Jesus' labors (atonement on the cross), He would provide a permanent, spiritual rest for His people so that they would never have to labor for God's acceptance.

When Jesus had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, He sat down on the right hand of God, from that time waiting until his enemies are made the footstool of his feet. For by one offering he has perfected forever those who are being sanctified. (Hebrews 10:12-14).

Jesus rested after performing the ultimate sacrifice on the cross because there was nothing more to be done. He entered into His rest and brought all believers along with Him. The 'rest' of creation is a shadow of that astounding truth.

A river flowed through the Garden of Eden and there were two special trees in the middle of the garden. The first one was the tree of life. The second was the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

Out of the ground Yahweh God made every tree to grow that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food, including the tree of life in the middle of the garden and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. (Genesis 2:9).

God told Adam that he could eat from any tree except the tree of knowledge of good and evil. God said: "If you eat of that tree, you will die."

The tree of knowledge of good and evil was part of God's creation, which He had declared 'good'. Bible commentators believe that this tree represented the Law, which is good in and of itself, but is unable to give life, and indeed, brings death to those who attempt to live by it.

... the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone... (2 Corinthians 3:7) He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant--not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. (2 Corinthians 3:6)

There was a creature in the garden who was aware of God's command to the humans and he decided to approach the woman concerning it. This creature is described as a serpent, the most clever of all the animals that God had made. The identity of the serpent (or the being within the serpent) is a mystery until one reads Revelation 12:9 where mention is made of 'the old serpent, he who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world'.

Also, in the Book of Ezekiel there is a description of someone called the king of Tyre but the description of this person seems to have a double meaning.

This passage seems to show that Satan was once a highly placed angel who became proud, thinking he was just as great, or greater, than God Himself.

You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone adorned you: ruby, topaz, emerald, chrysolite, onyx, jasper, sapphire, turquoise, and beryl. Gold work of tambourines and of pipes was in you. In the day that you were created they were prepared. You were the anointed cherub who covers: and I set you, so that you were on the holy mountain of God; you have walked up and down in the middle of the stones of fire. You were perfect in your ways from the day that you were created, until unrighteousness was found in you. ...: therefore I have cast you as profane out of the mountain of God; and I have destroyed you, covering cherub, from the middle of the stones of fire. Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty; you have corrupted your wisdom by reason of your brightness: I have cast you to the ground; I have laid you before kings, that they may see you....All those who know you among the peoples shall be astonished at you: you have become a terror, and you shall nevermore have any being. (Ezekiel 28:13-19)

In Isaiah 14:12 there is another passage that seems to be about Satan.

How you have fallen from heaven, morning star, son of the dawn! How you are cut down to the ground, who laid the nations low!

Jesus said: I saw Satan having fallen like lightning from heaven. (Luke 10:18)

In the book of Revelation Satan is seen 'as a star that had fallen from the sky to the earth'. (Revelation 9:1)

Hebrews 12:22 says that one-third of a countless company of angels chose to rebel with Satan. The apostle John saw in a vision a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven crowns. His tail drew one third of the stars of the sky, and threw them to the earth. ...There was war in the sky. Michael and his angels made war on the dragon. The dragon and his angels made war. They didn't prevail, neither was a place found for him any more in heaven. The great dragon was thrown down, the old serpent, he who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world. He was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. (Revelation 12:3-9).

It appears that Satan had a very high position in heaven at one time, but his pride caused him to rebel against God and he even got one-third of the angels to follow him in that rebellion. Satan and these rebellious angels were all overcome and thrown out of heaven, losing their angelic status and becoming the demons that would bring so much evil into the world. Demons do not have physical bodies but in the New Testament, it is revealed that Satan and the demons can possess, or enter into, the physical bodies of humans and animals. Perhaps this is what happened in Genesis 3 where it describes a serpent who was able to communicate with Eve.

Now the serpent was more subtle than any animal of the field which Yahweh God had made. He said to the woman, "Has God really said, 'You shall not eat of any tree of the garden?'"

The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees of the garden, but not the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden. God has said, 'You shall not eat of it. You shall not touch it, lest you die.'"(Genesis 3:1-3)

It seems unlikely that an animal like the serpent would have been able to speak with Eve, although some animals, like cats, dogs, and parrots, can make noises that sound like human speech. But these animals can only copy human sounds without knowing what they really mean. Bible scholars believe that back then the serpent was such an animal who could mimic human sounds. Perhaps that is why Satan entered into its body so he could control the serpent's vocal cords and express himself through a seemingly harmless animal without raising any alarm in Eve. The fact that Eve was not shocked that an animal could speak to her may have been because she was the newest of God's creation and was not yet aware of what animals could or couldn't do. Everything was new and fascinating to her. Also, the animals had never been a threat to her or Adam. They had all come to Adam to be named and they were obviously all tame and gentle. She was also without sin and had no suspicion that evil or wickedness even existed, or that the serpent hated God and wanted to do her great harm. Her innocence and trusting nature were probably the reasons Satan chose her as his victim in the first place. After hearing the serpent's question, Eve repeated God's warning and even added a bit to it. She believed that even touching the fruit would be enough to kill her. Because Adam was the one who had heard the initial command from God, not Eve, she may have misinterpreted it.

The serpent said to the woman, "You won't surely die, for God knows that in the day you eat it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."(Genesis 3:4)

Eve was confused. The serpent was saying that God didn't want her to eat from the second tree because the fruit could somehow make her wise like God. What a temptation! Imagine becoming like God and knowing what He knew! And the serpent was very sure that she would not die either. She hesitated as she considered the serpent's words, noting that the fruit did indeed look tasty, so with the serpent's encouragement, Eve reached out and took the fruit from the tree...and ate it. Eve must have noticed at once that eating the fruit had not caused any physical harm to her. She was still alive and breathing. This would have made the serpent's words more convincing.

Adam had been standing nearby and saw the whole thing. He had been created before Eve and he knew more about God and His creation than she did. As the one created first, Adam was also the representative (head) of humankind. This is similar to the President of the United States representing the American people as their Federal head. Just as the President bears the responsibility of the entire nation, Adam bore the responsibility of humankind. His actions would decide the fate of the entire human race. Now, as he listened to the serpent tempting Eve and watched as she ate the forbidden fruit, he remained silent. The Bible says that Adam knew the serpent was lying to Eve, yet when Eve offered him the fruit, he took it and ate from it.

Adam wasn't deceived, but the woman, being deceived, has fallen into disobedience. (1 Timothy 2:14)

Eve was the first to fall into sin, but it was Adam, as the representative of humankind, who brought death to the entire human race by willfully choosing to disobey God.

It would require a Second Adam, Jesus Christ, to come to the rescue of humankind many thousands of years later.

For since death came by man, the resurrection of the dead also came by man. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. (1Corinthians 15:21,22)

So one man's sin brought guilt to all people. In the same way, one right act made people right with God. That one right act gave life to people. So then as through one trespass, all men were condemned; even so through one act of righteousness, all men were justified to life. For as through the one man's disobedience many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the one, many will be made righteous. (Romans 5:18-19)

After eating the forbidden fruit, both Adam and Eve knew something was different. Choosing to disobey God by eating the forbidden fruit did indeed bring knowledge to Adam and Eve, but it was not the wisdom of God that they had been hoping for. It was something entirely different. There was a change inside their souls that filled them with guilt and fear. They had gained knowledge of good and evil and it had brought condemnation and fear. Their minds became filled with wicked thoughts and ideas and they ran to cover themselves, sewing fig leaves to hide their nakedness from one another. They could not even look at one another without shame because their souls were now poisoned and they were destroyed spiritually. Before this, they had walked with God in the garden and enjoyed friendship with Him. Now they were afraid of God. They felt He would no longer love them because they were not innocent and pure anymore. The fig leaves did nothing to remove their guilt so they hid themselves in the bushes when they heard God walking in the garden.

Yahweh God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?" (Genesis 3:9)

God knew exactly where Adam was hiding but He wanted Adam to confess to Him what he had done. Finally Adam realized that he could not escape God so he told Him that he had not answered because he was afraid and because he was naked. When God asked him if he had eaten the fruit of the forbidden tree, Adam immediately tried to put the blame on Eve. "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate it."

Already sin had distorted Adam's heart so that the love he once felt for Eve was now gone. He was only concerned about protecting himself and he was willing to place all blame on Eve. And in an indirect way He was even blaming God for making the woman in the first place. His cowardice and blame shifting indicated he had indeed died spiritually.

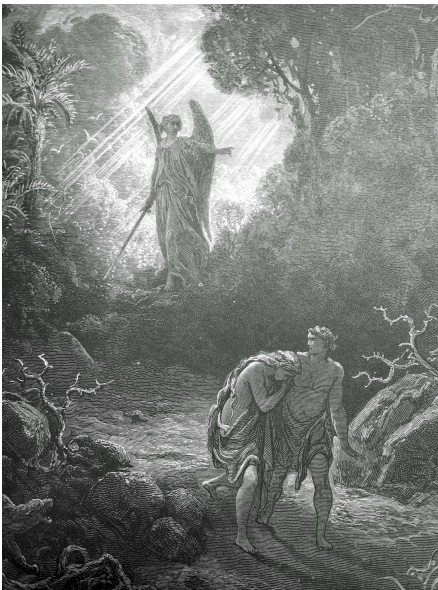
Yahweh God said to the woman, "What have you done?"

Eve was terribly frightened, and like Adam, she looked frantically for someone to blame. She pointed to the serpent and said: "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

God told Eve that because of her sin, her life was ruined. I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth, He said. In pain you will bear children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.

To Adam, God said: Because you have listened to your wife's voice, and eaten from the tree, about which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat of it,' the ground is cursed for your sake. You will eat from it with much labor all the days of your life. It will yield thorns and thistles to you; and you will eat the herb of the field. By the sweat of your face will you eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken. For you are dust, and to dust you shall return. (Genesis 3)

To the serpent God said: Because you have done this, you are cursed above all livestock, and above every animal of the field. You shall go on your belly and you shall eat dust all the days of your life. I will put hostility between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring. He will bruise your head, and you will bruise his heel.



These curses were to follow every human being who came after Adam and Eve. Women would suffer the pains of childbirth and be under the rule and domination of men as weaker partners. Men would be forced to do exhausting labor as they tried to make a living, only to die and return to dust in the end.

After being cursed, Adam and Eve were driven out of the Garden. 'So he drove out the man; and he placed cherubim at the east of the Garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life'. (Genesis 3:24) God did this so that Adam and Eve would not be able to eat of the tree that gave eternal life. This showed that because of sin, no human being would ever be able to have an eternal relationship with God. Spiritual death disqualified each and every sinner from living with God.

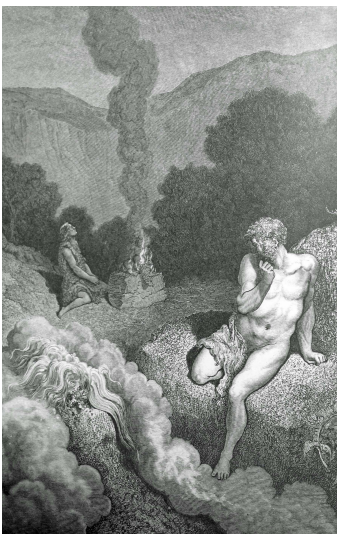
However, hope rested in the curse God made upon the serpent. This curse was spiritual and not merely about people and snakes not getting along together in the natural. It involved a continual battle between Satan and the woman and her offspring (humankind), but her Child would one day crush the serpent's head. The Child, born of a woman, who would one day destroy Satan. That Child was the Lord Jesus Christ who would come to earth to provide redemption for mankind. Already God was making a promise to send a Savior, but this promise was a shadow - a hidden mystery - that would be fulfilled many thousands of years later.

God is all knowing so one might wonder why God permitted Satan to enter the garden in the first place. Surely God knew that Satan would try to tempt Adam and Eve to sin. He knew they would disobey and die spiritually. Because God is holy and perfectly righteous (good) and cannot live with what is unholy and wicked, He also knew He would have to send them away. So why did He allow His human creation to make a decision that would separate them from the God who loved them and wanted to have a relationship with them? The answer is that God could not do otherwise. If God wanted a true love relationship with Adam and Eve, it was absolutely necessary that they be given the right to choose to obey Him or not.

Without choice they would have been without personality, individuality, or freedom. They would have resembled robots that can only function as programmed, unable to feel or express love. Nevertheless God had no intention of casting away humanity, so He did a strange thing. He made clothes from animal skins for Adam and Eve in order to cover their nakedness. He would have had to kill an animal in order to do that. It would have been the first animal sacrifice to cover the guilt of sin. Very likely, since later animal sacrifices were most often lambs, and because the coming Savior would be described as a Lamb of God, the animal that God killed was a lamb. And just as the divine Lamb would one day shed His blood and clothe humankind with His own righteousness, the earthly lamb sacrificed for Adam and Eve provided covering to hide their guilt and shame. Adam and Eve would likely have realized that God was showing mercy to them through this mysterious act. Perhaps they saw that God was, in effect, promising to cover mankind with righteousness and make him pure again sometime in the future. It's not certain how much Adam and Eve understood about God's plan for mankind, but His act of providing animal skins as covering clearly pointed to the greatest Sacrifice of all Who would one day do away with sin forever and bring great joy to His people. In fact, Jesus used the picture of a woman suffering birth pains (the result of the curse upon women) as a symbol of the suffering His followers would experience before His glorious return. Just as a woman goes through the pain of childbirth for the hope of getting a child, so Christ's followers would rejoice when He came to deliver them.

A woman, when she gives birth, has sorrow, because her time has come. But when she has delivered the child, she doesn't remember the anguish any more, for the joy that a human being is born into the world. Therefore you now have sorrow, but I will see you again, and your heart will rejoice, and no one will take your joy away from you. (John 16:21-22)

In the meantime, Adam and Eve had a difficult time living outside the Garden of Eden. It was often too hot or too cold, or the rains didn't come, and the crops were poor. Just as God had said, the land was full of thistles and thorns. It became even more difficult to make a living once they became parents. Their first child was a son named Cain. Then a second baby came and he was named Abel. Cain became a farmer while Abel became a shepherd.

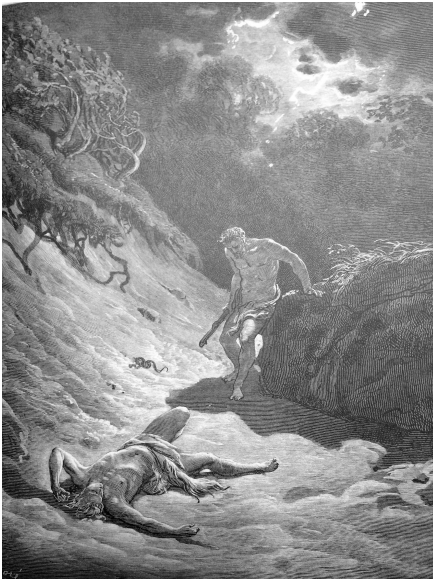


It seems that Adam had taught his sons about God and how to please Him with sacrifices because it is mentioned that both Cain and Abel were in the habit of making offerings to God. Cain brought the best produce from his farm to God, while Abel brought the best lamb from his flock. The Bible says that God was pleased with Abel's sacrifice, probably because it was a lamb and thereby showed that Abel was trusting in God's mercy to cover his sins. Adam would have taught his sons that after he and their mother sinned, God had slain an animal and used its skin to cover their nakedness (nakedness symbolizing the shame of sin). Abel's sacrifice pleased God because it revealed that Abel understood that the penalty for sin was death and only the death of an animal could appease God's anger for a time. It is possible that Abel also knew that the lamb's blood used in sacrifice pointed to a future Sacrifice that would remove the penalty of death altogether. This faith in God's promise was pleasing to God.

However He was not pleased with Cain's sacrifice because a vegetable offering was not acceptable for sin. His farm produce was the fruit of his own labor and did not indicate a trust in God's mercy and grace. When God rejected Cain's offering, Cain became furious.

Yahweh said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why has the expression of your face fallen? If you do well, won't it be lifted up? If you don't do well, sin crouches at the door. Its desire is for you, but you are to rule over it." (Genesis 4:6-7)

God warned Cain that sin would enslave him if he didn't resist it. It is interesting to see that God communicated with Cain directly, as He had with Adam and Eve, and undoubtedly with Abel too. Even though sin had caused their souls to die spiritually, they were still able to hear God's voice. But Cain didn't listen to God. He allowed his jealousy and rage to grow in his heart until he began to think murderous thoughts against his brother Abel. One day Cain asked his brother to come out to the fields so he could show him something. When they were both out of sight of their parents, Cain attacked Abel and killed him. Then he ran away, thinking that he had gotten away with murder. However God had seen it all and He said to Cain: "Where is your brother?"



Cain answered in a disrespectful way. *'Am I my brother's keeper?'*

Yahweh said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood cries to me from the ground. Now you are cursed because of the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. From now on, when you till the ground, it won't yield its strength to you. You will be a fugitive and a wanderer in the earth." (Genesis 4:9-10)

Cain was overwhelmed. No longer would he be able to produce bountiful harvests as the fruit of his labor. Furthermore he would have to leave his home and family and become an outcast on the earth, always on the run from those hunting him. He told God the punishment was too severe. Everyone would try to kill him and he would be helpless against them.

Yahweh said to him, "Therefore whoever slays Cain, vengeance will be taken on him sevenfold." Yahweh appointed a sign for Cain, so that anyone finding him would not strike him. (Genesis 4:15)

We don't know what God's mark was but it would not have protected Cain from actual physical death. It probably served as a warning to others that killing Cain would result in God's judgment.

Because people lived hundreds of years at that time, Adam and Eve could have had many children and grandchildren, allowing the population to grow quickly. The scriptures say that Adam lived 930 years, which is ten times longer than people live today. Eve would have had children for about 350 years. At a rate of only one child every seven years, this would result in 50 children for Adam's immediate family. So Cain was likely afraid that his own relatives would gang up and kill him.

Up to this point, no one had ever murdered a human being before and Cain's actions would have caused Adam and Eve great shock and sorrow. They would have remembered their sin in the garden and realized that Cain's murder of Abel was linked to their own disobedience. Their sin had infected the entire human race, including their son Cain, and this realization must have been crushing. Now Abel was gone but they also lost Cain when he left home and went far away. He would have taken a sister with him as a wife because brothers and sisters married back then. There was no law yet that said brothers and sisters could not form marriages, plus there was no other way to populate the earth. Because the gene pool was relatively pure, there was little danger of birth defects from such unions.

Cain and his children were the first to build cities and they worked in metal and created music. They were apparently a violent people as it is mentioned that one of Cain's descendants also committed murder.

Adam and Eve had other children but Abel had been special because of his faith in God. Losing him was a terrible loss. To comfort them in their sorrow, God gave Adam and Eve another son and they named him Seth (set in place of) because they believed that God had appointed Seth as a replacement for Abel. Adam lived almost a thousand years and then he died, as God said he would. Seth's son, Enosh, also lived a long time and then died.

From the genealogies in the Bible one can see that the early inhabitants of the earth lived extremely long lives and some scholars say this might have happened because the earth's environment was different from what it is now. Perhaps there was a protective canopy (covering) over the earth that shielded God's creation from the rays of the sun. Whatever the reason, the people were able to multiply quickly over the earth because of their long life spans.



The Bible says that it was around the time, when Enosh was born, that people began to 'call on the name of the Lord'. This is a mysterious phrase and may just mean that the people were no longer talking to the Lord face to face as Adam did, in which case they would need to "get His attention" by calling His name. Perhaps they had grown deaf to God's voice. The Bible states that the people grew evil as they multiplied, and the city streets were filled with all sorts of wickedness. Sin and cruelty existed everywhere. Slavery, rape, murder, and theft were just a few of the evil things that went on. Within 10 generations, humanity was so bad that God knew He could not let people live like this any longer. He was sorry He had made humanity and one of the reasons appears to be because of a certain race referred to as the Nephilim.

When men began to multiply on the surface of the ground, and daughters were born to them, God's sons saw that men's daughters were beautiful, and they took any that they wanted for themselves as wives. Yahweh said, "My Spirit will not strive with man forever, because he also is flesh; so his days will be one hundred twenty years."

The Nephilim were in the earth in those days, and also after that, when God's sons came in to men's daughters and had children with them. Those were the mighty men who were of old, men of renown. Yahweh saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of man's heart was continually only evil. Yahweh was sorry that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him in his heart. Yahweh said, "I will destroy man whom I have created from the surface of the ground—man, along with animals, creeping things, and birds of the sky—for I am sorry that I have made them." (Genesis 6:1-8).

There are differing opinions about who the Nephilim were. The Bible says the "sons of God" formed marriages with the 'daughters of men' and since 'sons of God' often refers to angels, some scholars think that fallen angels (demons) mated with human women, or perhaps demon-possessed human men mated with human women and the children born from these unions resulted in offspring known as the Nephilim. Members of this gigantic race were known for their skill in hunting and for doing great deeds. One naturally wonders why such a thing as angels and humans producing children could ever have happened, especially when one considers what Jesus said about angels.

For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are like God's angels in heaven. (Matthew 22:30)

Some Bible scholars see this scripture as proof that angels could not have had sex with humans in the time of Genesis. However Jesus could have meant that the obedient angels in heaven do not marry or have sexual relationships. Demons are evil, twisted beings, so nothing they do should surprise us. Various scholars think the demons were trying to pollute the human bloodline in order to prevent the coming of the Messiah. God had promised that the Messiah would one day crush the head of the serpent, Satan (Genesis 3:15). Maybe the demons were trying to prevent the crushing of the serpent and make it impossible for a sinless "seed of the woman" to be born. By mixing human DNA with demons, Jesus could not have come as a man to bring salvation to humanity.

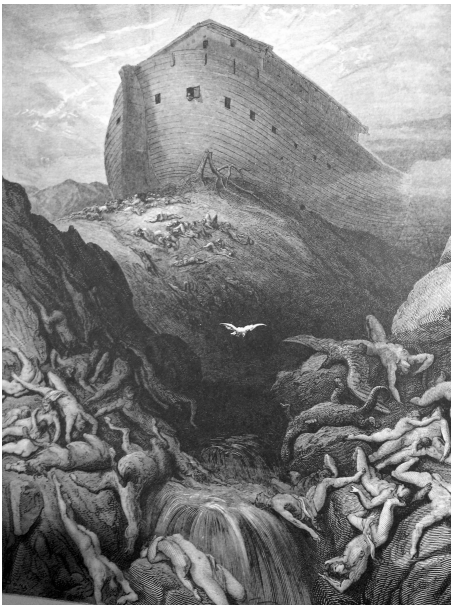
*Jude 6 in the New Testament states, **Angels who didn't keep their first domain, but deserted their own dwelling place, he has kept in everlasting bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day.***

Since not all of the angels who sinned with Satan are bound, these verses could be referring to God imprisoning the fallen angels who rebelled and associated with human females to create the gigantic Nephilim. This could certainly have been one of the main reasons that God decided to send a flood.

However God didn't wish to completely destroy humankind even though He said He wanted to wipe it out. He saw one man who refused to follow after wickedness. He was named Noah and it was through him that God planned to rescue humanity. He would do it through an ark - a huge box-like structure - that He commanded Noah to build according to exact measurements. It was a strange thing to build such a huge vessel because Noah lived far away from the sea. There was no water nearby. Why would he need to build an ark? However Noah was certain that he had heard from God and so he did exactly as God instructed.

It was a huge task and it was made more difficult by Noah's neighbors who mocked and made fun of Noah and his family for building such a monstrous boat in a place so far from the sea. It was as tall as a four story building and as long as one and a half football fields. It was waterproof and had a loading ramp, but no sails or rudder. It was more like a lifeboat than a sailing vessel. No one had ever seen anything like it before. There was a lot of preparation for Noah's family to do. Every crevice had to be sealed with pitch (tar) and a lot of supplies had to be collected and stored, especially for the cargo this boat was to carry. God told Noah that the ark was to house a pair of every animal that existed and these creatures would enter the ark two by two. These animals, including Noah's family, would contain the future of all life on earth.

Once the ark was completed and all the animals were inside, God told Noah to enter the ark with his family. God sealed the door Himself so that everyone inside was safe and sound. Then the skies grew dark and the rain began to fall. The rivers overflowed and the seas rose, flooding everything on land and causing every living thing to perish.



Even the mountains were covered and the earth became very still and silent. Everything on earth was destroyed. Only those in the ark were kept alive. The Bible says that the rain fell for 40 days and nights and the waters flooded the earth for 150 days.

In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on the same day all the fountains of the great deep were burst open, and the sky's windows were opened. (Genesis 7:11)

Some Bible scholars think 'the floodgates of the sky' refers to a protective water canopy (mentioned earlier) that covered the earth. It's a possibility because humans lived long life spans before the flood, yet afterwards the people did not live for nearly as long. Maybe a broken water canopy was the reason for this.

Five months after the first raindrop, Noah's ark came to rest in the Ararat Mountain range. However everyone in the ark waited another 7 months before daring to go outside. First Noah sent out a raven to see if it would return or not. If it didn't come back to the ark, then maybe that would mean there was dry land, and plants that could sustain life. But the raven came back because it found no place to land. Then Noah sent out a dove, but it too returned to the ark. Later he sent the dove out again and this time it came back in the evening with a branch in its beak, meaning there were land and trees nearby.

Finally it was time for everyone to leave the ark. The animals rushed outside into the fresh air and spread all over the earth. The first thing Noah and his family did was to worship God in gratitude for keeping them safe. God made a promise to Noah that He would never again destroy all living things with a flood. He promised that as long as the earth existed, there would be regular seasons.

He said this was a covenant that He was making between Himself and Noah, and between Himself and the whole earth. He placed a rainbow in the sky as a sign of this covenant, saying it would last forever. Then He blessed Noah and his sons, telling them to have many children and to rule the earth. Humans were to control everything on the earth and the animals and birds would be afraid of them.

Before people were vegetarians but God told Noah that from now on they could eat the meat of animals as well, but not meat that still had blood in it. Blood represents the life of a human or animal, and shedding blood, as Cain had done, represents the loss of life. God was teaching Noah and his family to respect blood and the life it represents.

Noah and his family moved out into the world with God's blessing and they multiplied and built great cities. Noah and his sons were the only men on earth after the flood. They were responsible to rebirth the human race.

It is obvious that Noah's ark was necessary to rescue humanity from the flood, but there is something even more important about this ark. If it hadn't been for the ark, the promise of a "Seed" who would destroy Satan would have been set aside. The ark was actually God's way of preserving the "Seed". It was a symbol, or shadow, of Jesus Christ who would come to be the Savior of mankind through His death and resurrection. Just as Jesus' followers would be described as being united "in Christ" in His death and raised with Him in His resurrection, so Noah and his family would enter the huge coffin-like ark which would be buried within the flood waters (symbolizing death), to eventually find rest on a mountain, bringing its occupants to safety (symbolizing resurrection and new life).

In it, eight souls, were saved through water. This is a symbol of baptism, which now saves you—not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, (1 Peter 3:20-21)

Or don't you know that all we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him through baptism to death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life. (Romans 6:3-4)

Because of him, you are in Christ Jesus...(1Corinthians 1:30)

When Noah and his family left the ark, they had no records of the Bible with them. Writing had not yet been developed. They passed along the stories of God by speaking them or drawing them on walls, like the ancient drawings that have been discovered in caves. Later, people would invent the alphabet and it would be easier to pass along Biblical and historical accounts, but that didn't happen right away.

There are other early accounts of a great worldwide flood on the earth such as the Epic of Gilgamesh from Iraq. This account mentions a man like Noah, named Utnapishtim, who released a dove from an ark after a great flood. The account was written in 2600 BC, more than a thousand years before Moses wrote the first books of the Bible.

*The similarities between the 2 accounts shows they came from a common source. The fact that the Gilgamesh account was written much earlier than the Bible does not mean it is the accurate account. From Adam onwards, the stories of God would have been well known to all the people of the earth and would have been carefully memorized and recounted orally. Noah and his sons undoubtedly carried on this tradition, repeating the Genesis account of creation to their descendants. But after the flood, as people began to spread over the earth, they lost touch with one another and the story of Noah and the flood became mixed with error, such as seen in the Epic of Gilgamesh. As people began to stray from the Lord and wander away from Him, the truth became more and more twisted. God had first revealed Himself as a plurality within a single Godhead when He had said: **“Let Us make human beings to be in charge of the earth, oceans, and skies.”** but because the Trinity is impossible to fully understand, ancient civilizations soon came up with their own ideas. Some split the Godhead into three separate gods. People imagined all sorts of deities (gods and goddesses) and made idols and built temples for them so they could practice their new religions. Often parts of the Biblical stories were kept but the facts were twisted so that their true meaning was lost. The farther away the people wandered from God, the farther they strayed from the truth. There was always a remnant (small remainder) of people who were faithful to God and these were the ones who carefully guarded the oral records which were later written as the scriptures that now make up our Bible.*

Abraham

CHAPTER 2



One of the great stories passed down to us in the Bible is about a man named Abraham who was one of the descendants of Noah and his family. He lived about 3000 years ago. He was a rich shepherd who lived in the city of Ur with his wife, Sarah, and his servants. Ur, in what is now southern Iraq, was a Sumerian city which practiced polytheism (worship of many gods). It was ruled by high priests who were seen as mediators between humans and the forces of the earth and universe. The city had a huge Ziggurat (building with many stairs) which stood as a skyscraper over the city. It had temples to worship in and there were big staircases to get up and down. One such ziggurat was built by a descendent of Noah named Nimrod (meaning 'rebel'), who became the mighty king of Babylon, a large empire of several great cities. This ziggurat was called the Tower of Babel and it had a temple at its top, built to worship the stars which were seen as gods (deities).

The Bible says that Nimrod was considered a hero on the earth but in the Lord's eyes he was seen as a hunter (most likely it was people he hunted). He tried to bring together the human race after the flood so that it could become a great nation that he could rule over. This wasn't difficult because the people of Babel all spoke the same language when they started their building program. In order to stop their project, God confused their language so that they began speaking in different languages. Their different tongues divided them and they were scattered over the earth to form different nations, each speaking its own language. In this way God was able to halt the rise of the powerful anti-God ruler, as well as weaken the false religion that tried to erase God in the hearts and minds of the people.

In the first few generations after the flood, men were still living to over 400 years of age so a man in his old age might have six, seven, or eight generations already born to him. This caused the population to increase quickly. There were 222 years from the time of the flood until the birth of Terah, the father of Abraham. Terah was probably 130 years old when Abraham himself was born. Terah and his family served other gods, as mentioned in Joshua 24:2.

Joshua said to all the people, "Yahweh says..Your fathers lived of old time beyond the River, even Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nahor: and they served other gods.

However some knowledge of God probably still existed, so even though Abraham grew up around idolatry, he probably also heard of an ancient religion declaring there was only one true God. Somehow he came to know of that God and received the call to leave his family and relatives and go to another place in order to establish a nation that would be true to God. This was extremely important because the knowledge of God was disappearing from the face of the earth.

Terah and his family headed out to Canaan (what is now Israel), but they only got halfway there when Terah died. God then told Abraham to continue on with his family to Canaan, promising to make him a great nation through which the whole world would be blessed. It was a surprising promise because both Abraham and Sarah were old by this time and the idea of having children seemed unlikely.

Abraham had his nephew Lot with him, who also had many flocks and herds. Soon the land was not large enough for the herds of both Abraham and Lot so they decided to split up, with Lot taking the better land and moving to the city of Sodom which was close to another city called Gomorrah.

One time there was a battle in which the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah were attacked by some other kings. The victorious kings captured everything in Sodom and Gomorrah, including Lot and his family. Abraham heard about it, and taking his servants with him, he went after the raiders and attacked them, rescuing Lot and all the other people who had been captured. The king of Sodom met with Abraham to thank him for delivering his people.

Another king was mentioned, Melchizedek by name (which means "my king is righteousness"). This king was the ruler of Salem (or Jerusalem) and the 'priest of the Most High God'. He brought out bread and wine and blessed Abraham, and Abraham in turn gave Melchizedek a tenth of everything as an offering. The Bible states in other passages that this mysterious Melchizedek was a type of Christ.

In Psalm 110:4 the Lord is described as "a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek" and in Hebrews this king is spoken of as being a model of Jesus Christ (Hebrews 5:6, 6:19-20, 7:2).

Melchizedek brought out bread and wine when he blessed Abraham and this reminds us of the last supper where Jesus shared bread and wine with His disciples at Passover.

Furthermore, Abraham gave to Melchizedek a 'tenth of everything' he had gained in the battle when he rescued Lot and his family. This is similar to the tithe that the Jews were commanded to bring to the Temple of God to provide for the Levitical priesthood. These similarities cause some Bible scholars to think that the King of Salem was actually the Son of God in the appearance of a man. This is possible because Hebrews 7:3 says that *Melchizedek, (who was) without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, remains a priest continually.* Since no earthly king "remains a priest forever," and no ordinary human is "without father or mother," then it is likely that it was actually God the Son who came to give Abraham His blessing, appearing as the King of Righteousness and Peace, and as the Mediator between God and Man. This would have been prophetic of Jesus' ministry as the Redeemer of humankind. It could also explain what Jesus meant when He said that Abraham knew all about Him thousands of years before He came to earth. Abraham and Melchizedek must have spoken together of God's plan to bring salvation to humankind through the Son of God.

Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day (i.e. Christ's coming as Messiah). He saw it, and was glad. (John 8:56)

When Abraham was 85 years old, he had a vision from God where he was promised that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky. God made a contract, (covenant) with Abraham, telling him that although Abraham's descendants would be slaves for 400 years, God would punish their enemies and they would eventually claim the land of Canaan as their own. Abraham asked God how he could be sure that he would own the land and that's when God made the covenant with Abraham. The ceremony was similar to those of other nations living nearby. An animal was killed and cut into 2 pieces after which both parties of the covenant would pass between the pieces of slaughtered animals. This signified that if either party broke their covenant agreement, death would be the penalty. In the Abrahamic Covenant however, God alone moved between the halves of the animals as a flaming torch. God put Abraham into a deep sleep so that he could not participate. This was because the covenant was an unconditional promise by God that He would fulfill on His own. This covenant foreshadowed the New Covenant that would come many years later and which would not be dependent upon human effort or human worth, but only on the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ, God's Son. Abraham believed God and his faith protected him from condemnation and judgment.

"What does Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." (Romans 4:3)

Similarly, in the New Covenant our faith in what Jesus Christ has done for us on the cross causes us to be placed into Christ, whereby His righteousness is credited as our own.

Abraham's wife Sarah had a harder time believing. She was long past the age of having babies, and she saw no hope of ever becoming pregnant. Abraham had undoubtedly told her of God's promise to give him many children but she did not see how this could involve herself. She decided to follow one of the customs of that time often used by barren women to adopt children into their family. She gave her servant, Hagar, to Abraham so that he could get her pregnant.

In that way the child would be Abraham's heir and Sarah would be the adoptive mother. Perhaps Sarah thought she was helping God along by taking this path, but actually her faith was just too weak to believe that God would give her a baby of her own. The plan Sarah thought up was not God's plan, although it looked to be successful since Hagar did become pregnant. However Hagar soon felt she was of greater importance than Sarah because she had been able to conceive while Sarah could not.

At that time, children were seen as a gift from God and a sign of His favor. Barren women were viewed as being under God's curse. Consequently Hagar thought of herself as better than Sarah, even though she was Sarah's slave. This caused Sarah to become jealous and angry. It finally got to the point where Sarah took revenge by being mean to Hagar and making her life as miserable as possible. Hagar couldn't stand it any longer and ran away, but God appeared to her and encouraged her to remain obedient to Sarah. God also gave her a prophetic promise concerning her descendants. Hagar returned to her mistress and gave birth to a son who was named Ishmael. Abraham was 86 years old at the time. At age 99, Abraham was again given a promise from God that he would have many descendants. This time the contract was sealed with the blood of circumcision (the removal of the skin around a man's penis). Abraham was told to have every male in his family, including his servants, circumcised. Later scriptures reveal God's purpose in using circumcision. It was a symbol for the removal of the sinful nature of man, which Christ accomplished through His death and resurrection.

In whom you were also circumcised with a circumcision not made with hands, in the putting off of the body of the sins of the flesh, in the circumcision of Christ. (Colossians 2:11).

It was around this time that God gave Abraham and Sarah new names, and He had a special reason for doing it. When God changed a person's name and gave him a new name, it was usually to give the person a new identity. God changed Abram's name (which meant 'high father') to "Abraham," (meaning 'father of a multitude') and his wife's name from Sarai (meaning 'my princess') to "Sarah," (mother of nations). He did this so Abraham and Sarah would always remember the promise God had given to them regarding their descendants. The new name was a way to strengthen their faith and to assure them that God's plan would be fulfilled in them.

Soon after this, Abraham was resting in the desert in a shady spot when he saw three figures coming his way. Visitors in the desert were rare, and it was the custom of that time and culture to show great honor to guests. Abraham hurried to show them eastern hospitality, but as they talked together, it became clear to Abraham that he was not speaking with ordinary human guests. Two were angels and one was God Himself! The Bible mentions several times where God took on the appearance of an angel or human being while on earth. King Melchizedek was likely one such example. These appearances are called 'theophanies' and they always involved the second Person of the Trinity, the Son of God. When Abraham first met the three 'men', he did not know whom he was addressing, but later he understood that he was speaking with the Lord Himself. As Abraham talked with God, he learned of God's plan to redeem his descendants and make them into a great kingdom, and it is very likely that he understood that this would involve the Lord coming to earth as a Savior.

This can be deduced from something Jesus said later on when He was speaking to some Jews. He told them that Abraham had seen His day coming and was glad. This means that Abraham had spoken with the Lord, first as the king named Melchizedek, and then in the desert, and in those meetings, God had told Abraham about the coming Messiah who would save the world. This is what Jesus meant when He said that Abraham had 'seen His day'. (John 8:56)

Although the Son of God appeared to Abraham as a human being (first as King Melchisedek and later as a desert visitor), God did not actually join His divinity (godhood) to humanity until He came to earth in the Person of Jesus Christ. The two angels who came with the Lord also appeared as humans, which means they would have veiled their original appearance and power. Angels are typically described in the Bible as kind, dreadful, powerful, and having wisdom and knowledge of earthly events. They can also be devastatingly formidable in appearance. They were created to serve God in heaven and they act as messengers for Him. They are very different from human beings, being neither male nor female and they do not reproduce. They are spirit beings with spiritual bodies and sometimes they act as warriors bringing death, destruction and God's justice on the earth. The first angels mentioned in the Bible were in the Garden of Eden where they were put on guard with flaming swords that moved back and forth in order to keep Adam and Eve away from the Garden of Eden.

In Abraham's case, God and the 2 angels were on a double mission. First God told Abraham that he and Sarah would have a son in a year's time. Sarah laughed when she heard this while listening in on the conversation, but the Lord assured her that she would indeed conceive a son and that it had always been God's intention to give Abraham descendants through her.

The second part of God's mission had to do with the twin cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. These cities were extremely evil. All sorts of crime went on there. In fact, they were so full of wickedness that God decided to destroy them with fire. However because of His covenant with Abraham, and because Abraham's nephew Lot and his family lived there, God decided to warn Abraham about what He was going to do. As the two angels left for Sodom, the Lord stayed back to speak with Abraham and told him of the doom coming to the cities. Abraham was worried that his nephew Lot and his family might be destroyed as well, so he asked God to not bring judgment if there were at least 50 good people in the city. Eventually Abraham persuaded God to show mercy to the cities if there were only 10 good people.

Meanwhile the angels entered the city of Sodom in the evening. Lot was sitting at the gate of the city. Later scriptures say that Lot was a righteous man who was greatly troubled by the shameful sins of his lawless neighbors. This may have been why he rushed to invite the angels to his home when he saw them enter Sodom, so that they could be under his protection. He knew how the people would treat two strangers in their city. The two angels wanted to spend the night in the town square but Lot kept begging them to come with him, and they finally followed him to his home. Before they all went to bed, the men of Sodom, young and old, surrounded the house and demanded that the two strangers be handed over to them. They wanted to gang rape them, which seems to have been a common practice in Sodom.

The angels appeared as human males and the men of the city would not have known who they were really dealing with. At first Lot did not seem to know he was harboring angels either. In his eyes, he was trying to protect two male visitors from assault, even willing to go to the extreme of throwing his daughters to the wicked men as substitutes.! Thankfully the angels were well able to look after themselves and Lot's family as well.

When the men tried to break down the door of Lot's house, the angels blinded the attackers so that they couldn't find the entrance. The angels then told Lot to gather his family together because the Lord was about to destroy both Sodom and Gomorrah. Lot must have known at this point that the 'men' were angels. He believed that they would indeed do as they said, so Lot tried to get his two prospective sons-in-law to come with them. However they thought he was joking and refused to listen to the warning. Finally the angels grabbed the hands of Lot, his wife, and both daughters and led them out of the city. They warned them not to look back or hesitate for even one instant. Then God sent down burning sulfur from the sky, completely destroying the two cities. However Lot's wife stopped and looked back. The Scriptures say that she turned into a pillar of salt but it's not clear whether her death was a punishment for longing for her old life in Sodom, or if it was just the result of waiting too long and thereby endangering her life. Although Lot's wife was killed instantly, Lot and his daughters escaped the fiery judgment that rained down on Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham's bargaining with God had all been for nothing because there had not been even 10 good people in those 2 cities!

Lot and his daughters settled in a small nearby town and later ran to the mountains, keeping to themselves because they were afraid of the surrounding peoples. Unfortunately Lot's daughters believed they would never find husbands now that their city was destroyed, so they got their father drunk and had sex with him, each becoming pregnant with sons (their descendants later became the Moabite and Ammonite nations). Their incestuous behavior shows the sinful influence of Sodom and Gomorrah on these two girls.

As for Abraham and Sarah, they moved to Gerar, which was ruled by King Abimelek. This king saw Sarah and desired her for his wife. Apparently she was still quite beautiful even though she wasn't young anymore. The king took Sarah because he thought she was Abraham's sister (Sarah was actually Abraham's half-sister) and did not know that she was really his wife. God was merciful to the king because he had been deceived, and warned him to return Sarah to Abraham immediately or he and his people would all be destroyed.

*God was obviously protecting the mother of the great nation He had promised to build through Abraham, as well as safeguarding her as the ancestor of the coming Seed, Jesus Christ. God kept His promise and 9 months later, exactly as they had been told by the 'visitors' in the desert, Sarah gave birth to a son, whom they called Isaac (meaning 'laughter') because Sarah said: **"God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me."** In this little boy, Abraham and Sarah's dreams had all come true. Never had they been happier and very likely their whole lives centered around Isaac.*

On the day when Sarah stopped breast-feeding him, there was a party to celebrate this event. Unfortunately Sarah saw Hagar's son, Ishmael, making fun of her little boy. Perhaps Ishmael teased Isaac that even though he had been weaned, he would always be the baby of the family, whereas he, Ishmael, was the firstborn and would get the lion's share of Abraham's wealth. Sarah told Abraham that there was no way Ishmael would have a share of the family property. It all belonged to Isaac and that was that! She wanted Abraham to send both Hagar and Ishmael away because she saw them as a threat to Isaac. Abraham was very upset because Ishmael was his son too and he couldn't just reject him. However God told Abraham not to be troubled about either Ishmael or Hagar. He told Abraham that Sarah was right in her position that the family line was to go through Isaac and no one else. However God promised to make a nation of Ishmael as well because he was also Abraham's child. Next morning Abraham got food and water for Hagar and Ishmael and sent them off into the desert. It must have been an act of faith for Abraham to just send them away like that. It seemed like such a cruel thing to do. All Abraham had was a promise from God that He would take care of them, but it was enough for Abraham, even though he knew of the many dangers in the desert. It turned out that Hagar and Ishmael almost died of thirst and would surely have ended up as skeletons in the sand, if God hadn't called to Hagar and told her where to find water. The Bible says that God was true to His word and watched over Ishmael as he grew up. He lived in the desert and got married to an Egyptian woman.

Abraham was to receive yet another test of faith - this time involving his most precious son, Isaac. God told Abraham to take his boy to Mount Moriah and offer him up as a sacrifice there. As later revealed in Deuteronomy 12:31 and other scriptures, God hates child sacrifice and He did not desire this sacrifice as an act of worship. He gave Abraham this command as a test of faith. The point was for Abraham to show that he trusted God completely and placed Him above all else, even his own son. God of course already knew that Abraham had faith in Him, but it was necessary for Abraham to prove it through action.

Wasn't Abraham our father justified by works, in that he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? You see that faith worked with his works, and by works (actions) faith was perfected; and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him as righteousness"; and he was called the friend of God. You see then that by works (action arising from faith), a man is justified, and not only by faith (mental assent). In the same way, wasn't Rahab the prostitute also justified by works, in that she received the messengers, and sent them out another way? For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, even so faith apart from works is dead. (James 2:21-26)

Note: the word 'works' in the Bible passage is better translated as 'results' or 'actions' which is closer to the original intent of the word.)

Abraham knew that God had promised him descendants through Isaac, so he believed that God did not intend for Isaac to die permanently. This is evident in what he told his servants, instructing them to stay behind while he and Isaac went on ahead to worship. He added that he and Isaac would complete the worship and then return to them. When Isaac asked his father where the sacrificial lamb was, Abraham told him that God would provide the lamb for burnt offering. Abraham's faith was unshakeable even as he tied up Isaac, laid him on the altar, and lifted the knife to kill him.

He was certain that Isaac's death would not destroy God's promise, reasoning that God must be planning to raise Isaac from the dead. Even though outwardly it looked as though all Abraham's dreams would die with his son, Abraham prepared to plunge the knife into Isaac's heart. At that point the angel of the Lord called from heaven and stopped him.

By faith, Abraham, being tested, offered up Isaac. Yes, he who had gladly received the promises was offering up his one and only son; even he to whom it was said, "your offspring will be accounted as from Isaac"; concluding that God is able to raise up even from the dead. Figuratively speaking, he also did receive him back from the dead. (Hebrews 11:17-19)

After the Angel of the Lord stopped Abraham from killing Isaac, Abraham saw a ram caught by its horns in a bush and he used it to offer up a sacrifice to God. Then God called to Abraham again.

I have sworn by myself, says Yahweh, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son, that I will bless you greatly, and I will multiply your offspring greatly like the stars of the heavens, and like the sand that is on the seashore. Your offspring will possess the gate of his enemies. All the nations of the earth will be blessed by your offspring, because you have obeyed my voice." (Genesis 22:15-18)

Much of what is written in the Old Testament was a type and shadow of the spiritual realities that were fulfilled in the New Testament. Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac parallels God's own willingness to sacrifice His Son, Jesus Christ, for the sins of the world. Abraham's story is a prophetic type of what was to come about thousands of years later. Even Abraham's wife Sarah and his concubine, Hagar, were allegorical types (shadows).

For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the servant, and one by the free woman. However, the son by the servant was born according to the flesh, but the son by the free woman was born through promise. These things contain an allegory, for these are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children to bondage, which is Hagar. For this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and answers to the Jerusalem that exists now, for she is in bondage with her children. But the Jerusalem that is above is free, which is the mother of us all. For it is written, "Rejoice, you barren who don't bear. Break out and shout, you that don't travail. For more are the children of the desolate than of her who has a husband." Now we, brothers, as Isaac was, are children of promise. But as then, he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so also it is now. However what does the Scripture say? "Throw out the servant and her son, for the son of the servant will not inherit with the son of the free woman." So then, brothers, we are not children of a servant, but of the free woman. (Galatians 4: 21-31)

Abraham is the father of faith for the Christian, for just as Abraham's faith was counted to him as righteousness, so too is ours. God's promise to Abraham and his offspring, that he would be heir of the world, rested on God's grace and not on any work or effort on Abraham's part.

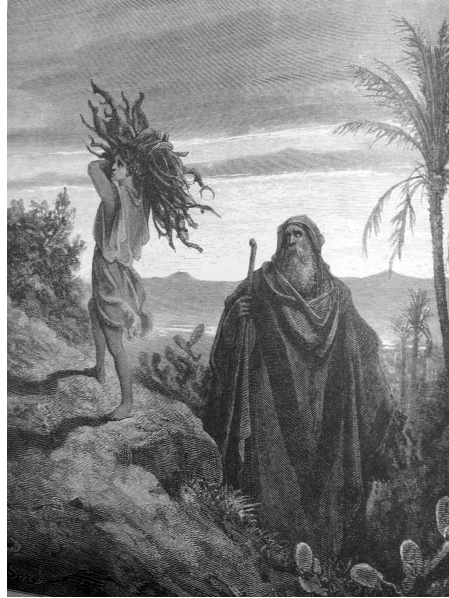
(Abraham) didn't waver through unbelief, but grew strong through faith, giving glory to God, and being fully assured that what (God) had promised, he was also able to perform. Therefore it also was "credited to him for righteousness."

Now it was not written that it was accounted to him for his sake alone, but for our sake also, to whom it will be accounted, who believe in him who raised Jesus, our Lord, from the dead, who was delivered up for our trespasses, and was raised for our justification. (Romans 4:20-25)

Today the righteousness of God is also accounted to us who believe in Him who raised Jesus from the dead, who was delivered up for our sins and raised for our justification. We, as believers, are the children of Abraham in a very real spiritual sense.

Isaac

CHAPTER 3



Abraham and Sarah were told by God that the promise of God's blessing to the nations would come through Isaac, their long awaited son. They were told that it would be Isaac, not Ishmael, who would receive this inheritance. To understand how remarkable this was, it is important to understand how ancestry (genealogy) was viewed in ancient times. In the Old Testament, the term for 'inheritance' occurs over two hundred times. The central focus of the inheritance idea in the Old Testament was God's promise to Abraham. The land of Canaan was promised to him and his descendants as an eternal possession.

Yahweh appeared to Abram and said, "I will give this land to your offspring." He built an altar there to Yahweh, who had appeared to him. (Genesis 12:7).

Abraham had lived under Babylonian and Hurrian laws, which had two options for a man whose wife could not bear a natural born son. He could legally adopt a son or he could have a son by a slave woman. This is why Sarah had offered Abraham her slave, Hagar, as a concubine (a lower status wife). Hurrian law stated that if the barren first-class wife bore her husband a son after the birth of a slave son, such a son would receive the first-born son status. This is what happened in the case with Isaac and this is the reason why he received the inheritance and Ishmael did not. Also it was forbidden for a second-class slave-wife, such as Hagar, to place herself above or even on the same level with a first-class wife. If she did so, the first-class wife could demand that her husband punish the slave-wife. This is what happened when Hagar acted superior to Sarah, which she was not allowed by law to do, and so was exiled from the family.



Sarah complained to Abraham and gained the legal right to be in authority over Hagar. Thus when Sarah demanded that Hagar and Ishmael be sent away, she had every legal right to make such a demand. She was simply following the laws of that time. It was also perfectly understandable that Sarah wanted to make sure that Ishmael had absolutely no claim to Isaac's inheritance and this is why she clung to her legal rights, insisting that Hagar be sent away as punishment. God backed her up, affirming that Isaac would receive the promised inheritance through Abraham. However God did not abandon Hagar or Ishmael. He told Abraham not to worry about them because He would take care of them and make Ishmael the father of a big nation.

Genealogy (listing of offspring) was extremely important regarding inheritances, especially since it decided who could claim land and inherit property, servants, and material possessions. Later scriptures also reveal that the inheritance God had promised to Abraham would also belong to Himself. The countless children that would outnumber the stars of the sky were promised to none other than Jesus Christ, the Son of God. We Christians are children of God through our faith in Jesus, making us spiritual descendants of Abraham and co-heirs of the promised blessings.

Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his offspring. He doesn't say, "To descendants", as of many, but as of one, "To your offspring", which is Christ. (Galatians 3:16)

If you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring and heirs according to promise. (Galatians 3:29).

It is clear from the genealogies in both Matthew 1 (Joseph's list) and Luke 3 (Mary's list) that legally and naturally Jesus is a descendant of Abraham. Abraham understood this because he 'saw' Christ's coming and was glad. The inheritance God promised to Abraham was not just about land or physical possessions. It was also about eternal and spiritual benefits. Abraham and Sarah saw this, and their actions in choosing Isaac over Ishmael reflected God's choice. Abraham never saw Ishmael again after sending him and his mother into the desert. The next time Ishmael appears in the Bible is at the graveside of his father Abraham some years later. Ishmael's children multiplied and settled near Egypt but none of them were friendly with any of their relatives.

Isaac was a grown man when his mother Sarah died at age 127. He had loved her dearly and both he and his father were deeply saddened by her passing. Abraham felt that it was now time for Isaac to be married, perhaps thinking that a wife would lessen his son's grief and comfort him in his loneliness. It was up to Abraham to arrange a marriage for Isaac but there was a big problem. All the women in that area worshipped idols. Abraham would have to seek a wife for Isaac from his own land in Mesopotamia if he hoped to have a daughter-in-law who believed in the one true God. This was essential for the sake of the covenantal promise, which was established on faith in God.

Because he was too old to travel that far, Abraham gave the job of wife hunting to his servant, a good man who prayed that God would help him find the right woman. After a long tiring trip he stopped at a well outside the town of Nahor.



It was evening and the old servant realized that unless God clearly led the right woman to him, he wouldn't know where to begin his search. Then he saw some ladies coming to the well to get water and it gave him an idea. "Lord, God of my master Abraham, make me successful today, and show kindness to my master Abraham. See, I am standing beside this spring, and the daughters of the townspeople are coming out to draw water. May it be that when I say to a young woman, 'Please let down your jar that I may have a drink,' and she says, 'Drink and I'll water your camels too'—let her be the one you have chosen for your servant Isaac. By this I will know that you have shown kindness to my master." (Genesis 24:14)

In answer to his prayer, God led a distant relative to the well, a beautiful girl named Rebekah. She politely gave the servant a drink and offered to draw water for all the camels, confirming to the servant that this was the perfect match for Isaac. Her kind act would also have shown the servant that she was strong and healthy for it was a big job to draw enough water for even one camel to drink! Plus she would need to be in good physical condition for the long trip back to Isaac's home.



After watering the camels, Rebekah brought the servant to meet her father Bethuel and her brother Laban. They were happy to hear how well Abraham was doing. They believed in God, as Abraham did, and they could see that God had led the servant to them. They told the servant that Rebekah could go back with him if she wanted. She agreed to the match and took her servants with her as she set off for a new life in Canaan. Isaac was in the fields when he saw the caravan approaching. Rebekah saw him get up and walk towards them and she shyly covered her face with her veil. The servant told Isaac everything that had happened in Nahor and Isaac brought his bride-to-be to his mother's tent where they were soon married. The pain Isaac had felt over his mother's death was soon replaced with love for his new wife Rebekah. God had not only found a believing mate for Isaac, but also healed his broken heart.

When Isaac was 60 years old, Rebekah gave birth to twin boys. The firstborn had red hair all over his body and he was named Esau, which means 'hairy'. The second was born holding on to his brother's heel, and his name was Jacob, meaning 'supplanter'.

(A supplanter takes the place of someone or something that was there first). This was not to be the only time Jacob supplanted, or grasped, what belonged to his older brother.)

Esau grew up to be a great hunter and his father Isaac liked to eat the wild game he brought home for dinner. Esau became his favorite. Jacob was a quiet man who liked to stay close to home and he became his mother's favorite. Perhaps another reason why Rebekah preferred her younger son was because of the prophecy God had given her before her sons were born, telling her that both would be fathers of great nations but the older son would serve the younger one. It seemed that God had a preference for Jacob over Esau, and later scriptures indicate that this was exactly so. The reasons were spiritual as Paul the apostle explained.

Neither, because they are Abraham's offspring, are they all children. But, "your offspring will be accounted as from Isaac." It is ... the children of the promise that are counted as heirs. For this is a word of promise, "At the appointed time I will come, and Sarah will have a son." Not only so, but Rebekah also conceived by our father Isaac. For being not yet born, neither having done anything good or bad, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him who calls, it was said to her, "The elder will serve the younger." Even as it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." (Romans 9: 7-13)

God loved Jacob, and although the Bible says God 'hated' Esau, it means that He 'rejected' Esau and his descendants. God chose Abraham out of all the men in the world to become the father of His people. God then chose Abraham's son Isaac instead of Ishmael. Later God chose Jacob over Esau. The inheritance - spiritual and physical - passed from Abraham to Isaac and then to Jacob. These were the fathers of faith in God whereas Ishmael and Esau both represented the world of unbelievers. They were rejected by God. Some may object to this idea of God's selection, as some early Jewish Christians apparently did, but Paul had an answer for them.

What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? May it never be! For he said to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." (Paul took this from Exodus 33:19) So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who has mercy. (Romans 9:14-16) In other words, there can be no argument against what God wishes to do with His own creation.

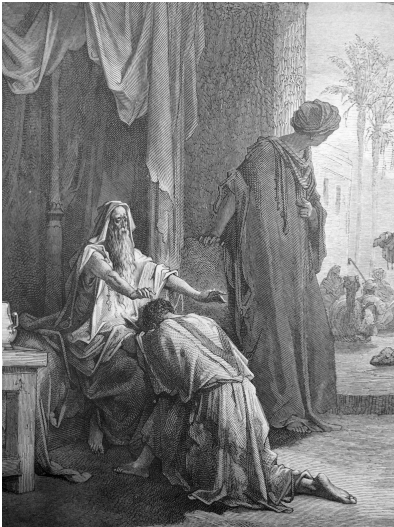
An incident between Jacob and Esau clearly reveals the spiritual difference between the two men. Esau had just come in from a hunt and smelled his brother's cooking on the stove. He was ravenously hungry and immediately asked Jacob to give him some of the stew. Jacob cunningly offered him a meal, but only in exchange for his birthright. A birthright was an honor given to the firstborn, giving him "head of household" status and the right to inherit his father's estate. The son with the birthright would get a much larger part of what was passed down, as much as double or two-thirds. Amazingly, Esau sold his birthright to Jacob for a bowl of stew. He was more concerned about his empty stomach than he was with the future blessings of inheritance. Jacob now had the inheritance along with all the special promises of God made to his forefathers.

It should be explained that an inheritance was different from a blessing. An inheritance passed to the oldest son but a blessing could be given regardless of birthright. However, a greater blessing was usually given to the one who held the birthright.

Later in the New Testament, Esau's insult to God is described.

Lest there be any sexually immoral person, or profane person, like Esau, who sold his birthright for one meal. (Hebrews 12:16)

It is interesting that although Esau is rebuked in Scripture, there is no reproof for Jacob's trickery, not even later when he deceives his father so he could steal Esau's blessing from him. Perhaps it was because Jacob at least honored the things of God, whereas his older brother clearly did not.



By this time Isaac had grown old and was bedridden and completely blind. He knew his time was short and he wanted to bless Esau before he died. He told Esau to hunt down some game and make him a fine meal, after which he would pray the blessing. Esau ran off to get his bow and arrow, not knowing that Rebekah had been listening nearby. She wanted Isaac's blessing to go to Jacob and a plan quickly formed in her mind. Rebekah told Jacob of his father's plan to give Esau a blessing. She told Jacob to go and kill two goats and bring them to her so that she could cook Isaac's favorite meal and then Jacob could serve it up to his father while pretending to be Esau. That way Jacob could get the blessing intended for his older brother. Jacob was worried that his father would guess he was being tricked as soon as he touched him because he was not nearly as hairy as Esau. However Rebekah had that all figured out too.

She covered Jacob's hands and neck with the skins of a goat and then she had him put on some of Esau's clothing, which smelled of the fields where Esau often hunted. When the food was ready, Jacob brought it to Isaac, identifying himself as Esau. Isaac seemed doubtful about the sound of his voice and he wondered how he was able to find game and cook it so quickly. Jacob lied that the Lord had given him success. Although Isaac was suspicious, the smell of the field on Esau's clothes finally persuaded him to give the blessing.

God give you of the dew of the sky, of the fatness of the earth, and plenty of grain and new wine. Let peoples serve you, and nations bow down to you. Be lord over your brothers. Let your mother's sons bow down to you. Cursed be everyone who curses you. Blessed be everyone who blesses you." (Genesis 27:28-29)

Jacob quickly left just before Esau returned to his father with the food from his hunt. It was a shock for both of them to discover that they had been tricked by Jacob. Isaac told Esau that there was nothing he could do to undo the blessing. It would have to stand. Esau said to his father "Behold, of the fatness of the earth will be your dwelling, and of the dew of the sky from above. By your sword will you live, and you will serve your brother. It will happen, when you will break loose, that you shall shake his yoke from off your neck." (Genesis 27:39-40)

It is usually thought that Rebekah and Jacob were wrong to use trickery to get the inheritance and blessing that by tradition belonged to the firstborn.

Treachery and lies are always wrong but it must be remembered that God had given Rebekah a personal prophecy that the older son would serve the younger. As she watched Esau grow up, she would have been aware of her older son's lack of interest in spiritual things and his lack of control over his physical appetites. While both Rebekah and Jacob greatly valued and respected the inheritance (and God's promises), Esau didn't value it above a bowl of stew. Furthermore Esau had married two Hittite wives who were unbelievers and this caused both of his parents much grief. His actions showed that he was insensitive to the things of God. Clearly Jacob had appreciated the covenant much more. He was God's choice, and Rebekah may have felt she was just helping the prophecy along by helping Jacob get the blessing. Sarah had done something similar. Esau was understandably angry with Jacob for stealing his inheritance and blessing. He spoke about wanting to murder Jacob as soon as Isaac died. Fortunately someone heard his threat and told Rebekah. She immediately warned Jacob, telling him to flee to his uncle Laban in Harran. She said she would send word to him when Esau's temper cooled down and he could then return home. Then Rebekah thought about how she could convince Isaac to send Jacob away, without making Esau suspicious of her plan. Using her cunning she discussed with Isaac the problem of Esau's pagan wives, using them as an excuse to send Jacob to Harran so he could find a believing wife. Isaac agreed and gave Jacob a stern command not to marry a Canaanite wife. Then he blessed Jacob and sent him on his way with these words:

May God Almighty bless you, and make you fruitful, and multiply you, that you may be a company of peoples, and give you the blessing of Abraham, to you, and to your offspring with you, that you may inherit the land where you travel, which God gave to Abraham.”(Genesis 28:3,4)

Jacob left his family and headed out for Harran, not knowing that once there he would be on the receiving end of the same kind of trickery and deceit that he had used with his father and brother.

Jacob

Chapter 4



Jacob had the inheritance, but he and his mother had lied to get it, with the result that now Jacob's life was in danger from Esau who had secret plans to murder him. Jacob and his mother had behaved badly but it was probably for the best. If Jacob had married a Canaanite woman, he and his family would have been exposed to sin and idolatry as they already were with Esau's wives. Intermarriage with unbelievers could have tempted Jacob to adopt the evil ways of the land and his descendants would have followed his example. So although Jacob and Rebekah's behavior had painful results, God's plan for Jacob went ahead as intended.

Jacob left his family and walked along until the sun was beginning to set. Alone in the hills, he took a rock for a pillow and laid down to sleep. That's when something strange happened. He dreamed of a stairway that reached up to heaven, with angels going up and down. God stood at the very top of the stairs, looking down at Jacob. He spoke these words:

Your offspring will be as the dust of the earth, and you will spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south. In you and in your offspring will all the families of the earth be blessed. Behold, I am with you, and will keep you, wherever you go, and will bring you again into this land. For I will not leave you, until I have done that which I have spoken of to you.”(Genesis 28:14-15)

Jacob was amazed. This was likely the first time God had spoken with him directly and God was giving him the covenant promise of Abraham. He realized this was a holy moment and place.

He had been sleeping at the gate of heaven and hadn't known it. Jacob used the stone he had been using as a pillow and made a pillar of rocks, anointing it with oil. Jacob named the place 'Bethel' meaning 'house of God' and made a vow to God, 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 clothing to put on, so that I come again to my father's house in peace, and Yahweh will be my God, then this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, will be God's house. Of all that you will give me I will surely give a tenth to you." (Genesis 28:20-22)

Jacob's dream was symbolic, representing Jesus Christ as Mediator between God and humanity, reconnecting the relationship with God that was cut off because of sin. Jesus said this Himself when he told Nathanael: "Most certainly, I tell you, hereafter you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man." (John 1:51)

(In the Old Testament, dreams were important to believers because they were often used by God to communicate His messages. Angels were also extremely important for that very reason. The Holy Spirit also came upon certain people but did not permanently indwell believers as He does today. He would choose certain people and temporarily work in their hearts to give them spiritual truth, convict them, and lead them along His paths. Sometimes He would come upon prophets or kings, anointing them with strength and wisdom.)

After some time Jacob reached Harran, the hometown of his uncle Laban. He saw some shepherds and asked them if they knew his uncle. They did, and amazingly one of his uncle's daughters, Rachel, 'just happened' to be coming along with her herd of sheep. He introduced himself and she brought him home to meet the family. He received a warm welcome and soon began working for Laban. After a month, his uncle asked Jacob what he wanted for wages and Jacob was quick with his reply. He had already fallen deeply in love with Laban's younger daughter, Rachel, and he offered to labor 7 years for her hand in marriage. Laban had an older daughter, Leah, who (according to that culture and time) should have been married off before the younger sister, but she was plain and Jacob was not interested in her as a bride. He wanted the beautiful Rachel and the 7 years of labor went by quickly as he eagerly awaited his coming wedding.

But Laban was a cunning man who realized that he might have a difficult time marrying off his less attractive older daughter, so he tricked Jacob on his wedding night. As was the custom, the bride remained veiled during the ceremony so Jacob didn't know that his bride was not the one he had bargained for. It was not until next morning, after he had slept with his wife, that Jacob realized that he had been tricked. He was rightfully very angry but Laban tried to calm him down. He mentioned the tradition of marrying off the older sister before the younger and he offered to give Rachel to him as his second wife in 7 days' time, if he agreed to work for another 7 years. There was nothing Jacob could do if he wanted the woman he loved. Besides he had no money or property and there was no place else to go.

The next years were not easy for Jacob. His two wives were always jealous and trying to compete for his favor. Rachel was the favorite wife, but she couldn't get pregnant which greatly saddened her. Leah was unloved, but God felt sorry for her and He enabled her to conceive easily. However this didn't even things out for the two women.

The rivalry only increased and Rachel finally used the same plan Sarah had used with Abraham so many years ago. She gave Jacob her servant as a slave wife so that she could have children through her. Leah decided to do the same thing and she also gave Jacob her servant. Jacob ended up as the husband of his two full wives and two slave wives as well. The conflicts soon made Jacob's life a living nightmare. Leah ended up having 6 sons and 1 daughter, including 2 sons from Jacob's union with her servant Zilpah. Rachel's servant Bilhah had 2 sons by Jacob, whom Rachel claimed as her own. Eventually God had mercy on Rachel and she conceived a son who was named Joseph, and later another son was born named Benjamin.

Jacob's marriages were not his only problem, however. Laban, his boss, was always taking advantage of him. After Jacob had worked 14 years for his wives, Jacob wanted to take his family back to his home country, but Laban, who could see that God blessed him because of Jacob, persuaded Jacob to remain by finally offering him wages. A deal was struck and Jacob continued to work for Laban, but he was allowed to keep some of the herds for himself. God continued to bless Jacob by increasing his herds more than Laban's, to the point where Laban and his sons became jealous. The situation got worse and worse until Jacob finally gathered his wife, children, and herds together and secretly ran away while Laban was away sheering his sheep. Laban found out about it and angrily chased after them. Seven days later he and his men caught up with them and they set up camp close by.

God came to Laban in a dream, warning him not to speak to Jacob, either good or bad. Laban obeyed God's command as far as not harming Jacob, but he and Jacob argued as soon as they met. Laban accused Jacob of stealing away his family and even taking his household gods. This greatly angered Jacob who hotly denied the accusation and proclaimed that if anyone of his family or servants had taken the statues, he would be put to death. Jacob of course didn't know that Rachel had taken them and was hiding them under a camel's saddle in her tent. When her father came into the tent to search for the statues, Rachel was sitting on the saddle and apologized for not standing up in his presence. She told her father that she was in the middle of her menstrual cycle. Laban was probably embarrassed and he left the tent without finding anything. Clearly the daughter was every bit as cunning as the father.

The Bible doesn't say why Rachel stole her father's idols. These idols were called 'teraphim' and were common in the Canaanite religion. They are mentioned in other parts of scripture and described as objects of divination (fortune telling). These household idols were also thought to have some importance concerning hereditary rights. Still, the fact that they were present in Laban's household is a mystery since Laban was a believer in the God of Abraham. Also mystifying is why Rachel stole them. One theory suggests that she stole them to get back at her father, whom she felt had mistreated her, her husband, and her whole family. This might be so because Rachel spoke bitter words about Laban when Jacob told her of his plans to run away from Laban.

Jacob sent and called Rachel and Leah to the field to his flock, and said to them, "I see the expression on your father's face, that it is not toward me as before; but the God of my father has been with me. You know that I have served your father with all of my strength. Your father has deceived me, and changed my wages ten times..."

Rachel and Leah answered him, "Is there yet any portion or inheritance for us in our father's house? Aren't we accounted by him as foreigners? For he has sold us, and has also quite devoured our money. For all the riches, which God has taken away from our father, that is ours and our children's. Now then, whatever God has said to you, do." (Genesis 31:4-9; 14 -16)

Jacob and Laban both had bad feelings towards one another and they decided that a promise made before God was necessary to keep them from taking revenge. They gathered a pile of stones as a symbol of the agreement they made. The stones were to serve as a reminder of their promise, but also to be a boundary marker that they were not to cross. It was a parting of the ways between two men who were related, but who had no trust in one another. They decided that it was best to avoid one another completely in future. Next morning, Laban said his farewells and returned home while Jacob continued on in his journey.

Jacob had left his home in Canaan with nothing but a staff to lean on, but now he was returning with a big family and many herds of sheep, goats, and camels. He had a large family and many servants. But even though God had prospered and blessed him, showing His complete faithfulness, Jacob was now worried as this large caravan of people and animals travelled across the desert. He would soon meet up with his brother - a brother who years ago had sworn to kill him, and who probably still felt that way. Would Esau take revenge and murder him, perhaps destroying all his family as well?

Jacob sent scouts up ahead and they returned reporting that Esau was coming towards them with 400 men. That news terrified Jacob and he felt sure that his brother was coming to take revenge. Jacob decided to send an extravagant gift ahead of him: two hundred female goats and twenty male goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams, thirty female camels with their young, forty cows and ten bulls, and twenty female donkeys and ten male donkeys. He put them in the care of his servants, each herd by itself, and said to his servants:

Pass over before me, and put a space between herd and herd." ... "When Esau, my brother, meets you, and asks you, saying, ..Where are you going? Whose are these before you?' Then you shall say, 'They are your servant, Jacob's. It is a present sent to my lord, Esau. Behold, he also is behind us. (Genesis 32.16-18).

Jacob wanted to make peace with his brother using bribery to soften his heart. He cleverly divided his gift into groups so that if one group was attacked, at least the others had a chance of escape. The last group included his wives and children, whom he sent on ahead across the river while he stayed back to pray. It was then that he encountered a 'man' who came out of the dark. At first Jacob may have thought the man was a robber, or even one of Esau's men sent to kill him. He wrestled with the man till daybreak. When the man saw that Jacob would not give up, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip and dislocated it. This was when Jacob realized that his 'opponent' was not an ordinary man but more likely a divine being, maybe even God Himself.

The man said, "Let me go, for the day breaks." Jacob said, "I won't let you go, unless you bless me." (The man) said to him, "What is your name?" He said, "Jacob". (The man) said, "Your name will no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have fought with God and with men, and have prevailed.

“Jacob asked him, “Please tell me your name.” (The Lord) said, “Why is it that you ask what my name is?” He blessed him there. Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, for, he said, “I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.” The sun rose on him as he passed over Peniel, and he limped because of his thigh. (Genesis 32:21-31)



The Angel of the Lord (for this is who He was) gave Jacob a new name. The Hebrew name translated as ‘Jacob’ means ‘one who supplants.’ (Supplant means to take the place of another through trickery). Jacob was truly a supplanter because he had stolen the birthright and blessing from his older twin Esau, although God knew this was going to happen and had even told this to Rebekah before the twins were born. God’s new name for Jacob was ‘Israel’ (the Hebrew word which means ‘triumphant with God’, or ‘prince of God’). The giving of Jacob’s new name was to give him a new identity and mission purpose. It parallels the new identity of the new creation that Jesus Christ brought into being through His death and resurrection thousands of years later. In Jacob’s case, he went from a name suggesting a devious nature, to calling him a prince with power. Similarly the new creation transforms the identity of a sinner into that of a priest seated in the heavenlies with the Lord.

And God has raised us up with him, and made us to sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2:6)

And made us kings and priests to our God, and we will reign on earth.” (Revelation 5:10)

To the one who is victorious, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give that person a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to the one who receives it. (Revelation 2:17)

After his struggle with God, Jacob went on to meet his brother Esau. He now walked with a limp from a dislocated hip, a reminder of his weakness and his dependency on God. All his life Jacob had tried on his own to grasp things for his future. He schemed to steal away the inheritance and blessing that would have gone to Esau. He schemed to secretly escape from Laban with all his family and possessions. But now, with Esau and an army of 400 men coming towards him, Jacob had no one to help him except God. He agonized with God, struggling physically and spiritually for some assurance that God would protect him.

Over the last 20 years God had faithfully provided for Jacob, but this new trial was not an issue of provision, but of protection. If God wouldn’t protect him, then Jacob would be killed and the promise of the inheritance would be meaningless. This was a faith issue for Jacob and he finally won God’s assurance of a secure future, including a new name to strengthen his faith.



Jacob saw his brother coming and he bowed down to him 7 times. Esau, for his part, ran to Jacob and hugged him, crying for joy. Whatever Esau's plans had been in coming out with 400 men, he was clearly no longer angry with his brother. Esau asked Jacob why he had sent all the servants and animals to him, and Jacob said they were a gift. In spite of Esau's protests, Jacob insisted that Esau accept them. Esau then offered to go the rest of the way back to Seir with his brother, but Jacob made the excuse of needing to go more slowly because of the young animals in his caravan. He promised to meet up with Esau later. Esau then offered to leave some of his men with Jacob, but Jacob again made excuses. Finally his brother left and Jacob and his household travelled on to Shechem rather than Seir. Throughout the account Esau called Jacob, "My brother" but Jacob never used similar words of affection. Jacob called Esau, "My lord", a title of honor, but not a term of endearment.

They had kissed in greeting and Esau had repeatedly invited Jacob to his home, but Jacob refused each time. It appears that the brothers never actually became friends although Esau's actions showed he may have forgiven his brother. But perhaps Jacob didn't trust Esau's forgiveness, remembering that his brother's emotions could easily become violent and vengeful. As with Laban, Jacob may have thought it wiser to keep a distance and live apart from his brother in order to keep the peace. But there could have been another reason as well. Esau had married 2 pagan wives against his parents' wishes and both Isaac and Rebekah had been very unhappy about this. It must have saddened them that their oldest son had so little respect for God or the faith of his forefathers. This is why they agreed that Jacob should find a wife with his uncle's people because they believed in the God of Abraham. Jacob likely realized that living close to Esau and his family would expose his own family to pagan influence. Whatever the reason for separation, the brothers never met again until after their father died, and then only to bury him.

The family of Jacob settled in Canaan, but it was not to be a peaceful encampment. In nearby Shechem his daughter Dinah was raped by the young prince of that city who also wanted her as his bride. The prince's father tried to arrange a marriage, and, unknown to Jacob, Dinah's brothers agreed to it. But they had one condition. They wanted all the men of Shechem to be circumcised. The king didn't oppose the idea, probably seeing it as a sign of acceptance of the Israelite God. Many nations in Canaan added the gods of neighboring lands to their own religious system, so the king did not suspect anything. Even though the rite of circumcision was very painful for adults, he persuaded the men of the city to go through with it. But on the third day after the circumcisions took place and the men were still healing, some of the brothers, led by Simeon and Levi, took revenge by murdering the king, the prince, and all the men of that place, robbing them of flocks, herds, everything in the fields, even the women and children. They took Dinah from the palace and brought everything back with them to their home. Jacob was not happy about any of it. His sons had acted independently, but as head of the family, he would be blamed for it. He knew he now had a bad reputation among the Canaanites and it would be dangerous to keep living there.

God spoke to him and told him to move on to Bethel, build an altar to Him, and live there instead. Jacob did as he was told and also instructed all his family and everyone with him to make themselves clean and to get rid of all the statues of the false gods they had with them. Jacob (now called Israel) moved on to Hebron, the home of his father Isaac, and lived there.

The Bible teaches that the child of God is to be separate from the world.

Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial (Satan)? Or what does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people. Therefore, Come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you." (2 Corinthians 6:14-17).

For Christians this does not mean we can have no contact with unbelievers. Jesus associated with sinners and told His followers to reach out to them with the gospel. We are to be light to the world. However we are not to intermarry with unbelievers or form close bonds with them lest we are tempted by their worldly lifestyle.

Joseph

CHAPTER 5



After living in Bethel for a time, Jacob moved his family towards Ephrath. It was during this journey that Rachel gave birth to Benjamin, and unfortunately died in childbirth. She had previously born Jacob a son named Joseph but the Bible doesn't say how old Joseph was at the time Benjamin was born. What the Scriptures do say is that Joseph was the son of 'Jacob's old age' at age 17, indicating that perhaps Benjamin was not yet on the scene. He could have been born much later.

The Bible states that Joseph was much favored by Jacob, and was given a special coat to signify his father's love for him. Perhaps it was very costly and elaborate which is why his other 10 brothers became jealous. The coat may have even been the kind worn by royalty. It would have shown the high regard Jacob had for Joseph, and perhaps the brothers saw this as a sign that their father would one day give Joseph the biggest share of the inheritance, leaving less for them. Also, Joseph was the son of Jacob's favorite wife Rachel, the one he had fallen in love with at first sight and for whom he had gladly labored 7 years. After she died, Joseph would have been more precious than ever to his aging father. But there was another reason why Jacob may have preferred Joseph to his brothers. Joseph was gifted with dreams that revealed God's plans and foretold that he would one day be a great leader. God's favor seemed to rest especially on Joseph. One time Joseph had a dream where he and his family were in the fields and all their bundles of wheat bowed down to his bundle. Another time he dreamed that the sun, moon, and 11 stars bowed down to him, indicating that his mother, father, and 11 brothers would one day show honor and respect to him. Jacob found this a bit hard to accept and suggested that Joseph forget about his dreams, although Jacob never completely forgot about them.

On one particular day, the brothers were a 3 days' journey away from home near Shechem with their herds of sheep. (Joseph was 17 years old at this time). Jacob told Joseph to go and check up on his brothers and see how they were doing. Jacob was perhaps concerned because they were near the place where Simeon and Levi had committed murderous genocide against the people of Shechem. Joseph obediently left to carry out his father's instructions and he finally caught up with his brothers near Dothan. The brothers saw him coming from a long way off and the sight of Joseph put them in a very bad mood. After talking together, they decided to kill him.

They said to one another, "Behold, this dreamer comes. Come now therefore, and let's kill him, and cast him into one of the pits, and we will say, 'An evil animal has devoured him.' We will see what will become of his dreams." (Genesis 37:19-20)

The oldest son Reuben persuaded the brothers not to murder Joseph in cold blood but rather to throw him into a well to die. Reuben then went off to look after the sheep. (He had plans to rescue Joseph later, when his brothers weren't around.)

When Joseph came near to where the brothers were, they seized him, ripping off his coat and throwing him into an empty well. Then they sat down to eat while Joseph wept in the depths of the well, begging them to let him go. It was no use. His brothers had hardened their hearts against him and his pleas were ignored. After awhile some Ishmaelite caravan traders on their way to Egypt came by. Judah must have been feeling sorry for Joseph by this time because he persuaded the brothers to sell Joseph to the traders instead of letting him starve to death in the well. An agreement was made with the traders and Joseph was pulled up from the well and sold for 8 ounces of silver. As he was taken away, his brothers looked on, ignoring his pleas for mercy, their hearts cold and unfeeling. Reuben later returned to find Joseph gone, which greatly upset him, but there was nothing he could do.

*The caravan moved off into the distance and the brothers killed an animal and smeared Joseph's coat with its blood. They agreed to lie to their father saying that a wild animal must have killed Joseph on his journey to catch up with the herds. When they returned home and brought out the blood-soaked coat, Jacob recognized it as belonging to Joseph and he was overcome with sorrow. No one in the family was able to comfort him. He said: **"I will continue to mourn until I join my son in the grave."***

In Egypt the traders sold Joseph to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's high officials who was captain of the palace guard. He had a big house, which included a prison where Pharaoh kept political prisoners and others who had fallen out of his favor. Potiphar made Joseph his household servant and before long he saw that Joseph was a very smart young man who took his responsibilities seriously and did all things well. In fact it was because God blessed Joseph that all of Potiphar's household and possessions were blessed as well. Eventually Potiphar became so confident in Joseph that he made him the manager of everything he owned.

Joseph was strongly built and very handsome, and soon caught the lustful eye of Potiphar's wife. She wanted to have sex with the young man but he repeatedly turned down her offers and tried to avoid her. However one day she cornered him in the house when Potiphar and all the servants were away.

She became forceful, demanding that Joseph go to bed with her. She even grabbed his coat but Joseph pulled away, leaving his coat in her hands as he ran out of the house. The surprised woman was filled with anger. How dare a mere servant reject her! Most likely she also felt embarrassed, which probably added to her rage. In revenge, she called her servants together and accused Joseph of attempted rape, holding out the coat as proof. She told them she had screamed for help and luckily her scream had frightened her attacker, who took off running. When Potiphar came home, she repeated her lies to her husband, who was understandably very angry. He put Joseph in the prison that was within his house and left him there. However God was with Joseph even in the prison and soon the prison manager saw how skilled and talented Joseph was in everything he did. He soon took advantage of this and put Joseph in charge of all the prisoners.

One day 2 prisoners were brought in - Pharaoh's former cupbearer (a servant who tasted everything the king drank in case it was poisoned), and his baker. Joseph was given charge of them. Each of the men had a dream, which greatly troubled them because they didn't know what the dreams meant. When Joseph came to them the next morning, he saw that they were depressed, so he asked: "Why are your faces so sad today?"

"We both had dreams," they answered, "but there is no one to interpret them."

Joseph told them that interpretations belonged to God and he asked them for the details of their dreams. The chief cupbearer told Joseph that he had seen a vine and on the vine were three branches. The vine budded and grew clusters of ripened grapes, which the cupbearer squeezed, into Pharaoh's cup. He then gave the cup to Pharaoh. Joseph immediately knew the dream's meaning and told the man that within three days Pharaoh would restore him to his former position and he would once more serve as Pharaoh's cupbearer. In that particular dream, the three branches were three days. Joseph had complete confidence that the dream would come true so he asked the cupbearer to remember him when he returned to his position in the palace. He told the man that he was innocent of the attempted rape charges and asked the cupbearer to speak to the king for him. The chief baker heard the positive interpretation of the cupbearer's dream and felt hopeful that his dream might also have a happy meaning. He told Joseph that he dreamed of three baskets of bread on his head. In the top basket there were all kinds of baked goods for Pharaoh, but the birds were eating them out of the basket on his head. "This is what it means," Joseph said. "The three baskets are three days. Within three days Pharaoh will cut off your head and stick your body on a pole and the birds will eat away your flesh." This time the three baskets equaled three days and the dream was about his future death. The poor baker probably had a hard time sleeping the next few nights.

On the third day it was Pharaoh's birthday, and he gave a party for all of his officials. Just as Joseph had foretold, on that day the chief cupbearer was given back his former job. However the chief baker was executed as Joseph had foretold. Unfortunately at this time the cupbearer forgot all about Joseph who remained in prison for another two years. Then one night Pharaoh had 2 dreams, which greatly worried him when he awoke in the morning. He told his magicians about them but none of them knew their meaning. However the cupbearer suddenly remembered the Hebrew slave in prison who had correctly interpreted his dream a few years back. The king sent for Joseph and after being made presentable, Joseph was led to the throne room to stand before Pharaoh.

Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I have dreamed a dream, and there is no one who can interpret it. I have heard it said of you, that when you hear a dream you can interpret it." Joseph answered Pharaoh, saying, "It isn't in me. God will give Pharaoh an answer of peace." Pharaoh spoke to Joseph, "In my dream, I stood on the brink of the river: and behold, there came up out of the river seven cattle, fat and sleek. They fed in the marsh grass, and seven other cattle came up after them, poor and very ugly and thin, such as I never saw in all the land of Egypt for ugliness. The thin and ugly cattle ate up the first seven fat cattle, and when they had eaten them up, it couldn't be known that they had eaten them, but they were still ugly, as at the beginning. So I awoke. I saw in my dream seven heads of grain came up on one stalk, full and good: and seven heads of grain, withered, thin, and blasted with the east wind, sprung up after them. The thin heads of grain swallowed up the seven good heads of grain. I told it to the magicians, but there was no one who could explain it to me." (Genesis 41:15-24)



Joseph was able to give the interpretations of the dreams without difficulty because God told him exactly what they meant. Joseph explained that Pharaoh's 2 dreams had a single meaning. There would be 7 years of good harvests followed by 7 years of famine. The double dreams meant that the matter was firmly decided by God and it would happen soon. Then Joseph advised Pharaoh: *Now therefore let Pharaoh look for a discreet and wise man, and set him over the land of Egypt. Let Pharaoh do this, and let him appoint overseers over the land, and take up the fifth part of the land of Egypt's produce in the seven plenteous years. Let them gather all the food of these good years that come, and lay up grain under the hand of Pharaoh for food in the cities, and let them keep it. The food will be for a store to the land against the seven years of famine, which will be in the land of Egypt; that the land not perish through the famine.* (Genesis 41: 33-36)

Pharaoh liked the plan and he was greatly impressed with Joseph, saying that since God had made everything known to him, he was the best one to carry out the plan. He then put Joseph in charge of the whole land of Egypt, making him his second in command. Pharaoh even put his own signet ring on Joseph's finger and dressed him in robes of fine linen and put a gold chain around his neck. He had Joseph ride in a chariot and men shouted before him, "Make way!" Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I am Pharaoh, but you will be in charge of my palace. All my people must obey your orders. I will be the only one greater than you because I am the one who sits on the throne. "

Next he gave Joseph the name 'Zaphenath' and gave him Asenath, the daughter of the priest of On, as his wife. This marriage was of high honor because On (City of the Sun) was the center of worship of the sun god, Ra, the major god in Egypt. The high priest in On held the title "Greatest of Seers." (A seer is a prophet) When Joseph married into this family, he joined a high social class, which was fitting for a National leader. Since Joseph was himself a 'seer' or prophet, Pharaoh may have thought it suitable that Joseph should marry into this particular family. Joseph was 30 years old when he began serving Pharaoh.

During the 7 years of plenty that Joseph had foretold would come to Egypt, two sons were born to him. The first was Manessah, meaning 'forget' because God had made Joseph forget all of his trouble and the pain he felt over his lost family. The second was Ephraim, meaning 'double fruitfulness' because God had given Joseph children, honor, and prosperity in the land where he had suffered so much. Both names were Hebrew rather than Egyptian, perhaps indicating that Joseph carried on his family's faith and traditions in his own home.

After 7 years of good harvests, the famine came as prophesied. The country suffered failing crops and eventually many desperately hungry people came to Joseph because it was known that he managed the storehouses of Egypt, the only place where there was an abundance of grain to be had. Eventually as the Egyptian economy became stretched, Joseph made an arrangement with the people, where they were supplied with seed but they had to return one-fifth of their crops to Pharaoh. All farmland now belonged to the king, and the people willingly became serfs (farmers who had to work in their master's fields as servants). It seems strange that Joseph turned Egypt into a slave society, although he probably did it to benefit the nation. Obviously slavery was not a new idea to Egyptian society. Some Egyptians were sold into slavery because of debts or they sold themselves to escape poverty. Indentured slaves (those who signed a contract with their master for a certain period of time) did not lose all their civil rights and sometimes were better off than they had been before giving up some of their freedoms. Slaves were sold all over the Middle East (as Joseph was). Slaves filled a wide range of positions, from lowly laborers to government administrators. Foreigners could also become slaves.

In the meantime, Joseph managed the economy so well that the Egyptians did not starve like the surrounding nations did. People from all over the world heard that there was grain in Egypt and they traveled from near and far to buy food from Pharaoh. Of course with so many foreign people arriving in Egypt every day, national security had to be strict and visitors were carefully investigated.

Back in Canaan, Jacob and his family also suffered from the famine but they heard that people were buying grain in Egypt. Jacob commissioned his 10 sons to go there to buy food, but he did not allow Benjamin to go with them because he was afraid something might harm him. (At this point in time Jacob was around 130 years old. Joseph was around 37 years old and his younger brother Benjamin could have been between 20 and 30 years of age. It is not clear if Benjamin was already born when Joseph was sold into slavery.)

Joseph's ten brothers took some money and traveled 200 miles to Egypt. When the brothers arrived, they went to see the Governor, not knowing that he was their own brother, although Joseph certainly recognized them when he saw them. Joseph had been a boy when the brothers had sold him to the slave traders, but he was now a grown man dressed as an Egyptian nobleman, speaking the Egyptian language, and commanding many servants and guards. He would have appeared as a total stranger to them. The brothers bowed down to this mighty official with their faces to the ground, and as they did so, Joseph remembered his dream so many years before that showed his brother's bundles of wheat gathered around his own, bowing down to it. Joseph also would have remembered his brothers ripping off his coat and throwing him down into a well.

His memory would have flashed back to the shock he felt upon hearing his brothers plotting his death. Memories of his brothers selling him to the traders for silver would have come rushing back as he gazed at the ten men bowing before him. Added to those memories were ones of enslavement and prison life with all the emotions of grief, despair, and loneliness that he experienced before being elevated to his high position. The very ones who had caused all that pain and suffering were now before him, and in his power. That power was exceptionally great, for Joseph had the responsibility of protecting Egypt and Pharaoh. Matters of national security would have come under his authority as well, and he probably investigated visitors from other lands to ensure they were not a threat to the land. If Joseph suspected anyone of being a spy, a mere word from him could have the suspects locked up forever, or even have them executed. In short, the lives of his brothers were in Joseph's hands, even as his had been in theirs when he was a teenager lying at the bottom of a well, listening to his brothers while they argued about his fate. Now Joseph could enslave his brothers and pay them back for the misery he had suffered as a slave. It would have been justice. And such thoughts must have crossed his mind as he spoke harshly to them.

Joseph recognized his brothers, but they didn't recognize him. Joseph remembered the dreams which he dreamed about them, and said to them, "You are spies! You have come to see the nakedness of the land." They said to him, "No, my lord, but your servants have come to buy food. We are all one man's sons; we are honest men. Your servants are not spies." He said to them, "No, but you have come to see the nakedness of the land!" They said, "We, your servants, are twelve brothers, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan; and behold, the youngest is today with our father, and one is no more." Joseph said to them, "It is like I told you, saying, 'You are spies!' By this you shall be tested. By the life of Pharaoh, you shall not go out from here, unless your youngest brother comes here. Send one of you, and let him get your brother, and you shall be bound, that your words may be tested, whether there is truth in you, or else by the life of Pharaoh surely you are spies." He put them all together into custody for three days. (Genesis 42:8-17)

This may have been the first time Joseph even knew of a younger brother. He likely wondered if the youngest brother was also in danger from these ten men. He decided to put a plan into action that would give him the answer to that question. After 3 days in prison (so they could feel what he himself had suffered as a slave and prisoner) Joseph released his brothers, except for one whom he would keep as a hostage until the others returned with Benjamin.

Joseph said to them the third day, "Do this, and live, for I fear God. If you are honest men, then let one of your brothers be bound in our prison; but you go, carry grain for the famine of your houses. Bring your youngest brother to me; so will your words be verified, and you won't die." (Genesis 42:18-20)

The brothers spoke to one another in their Hebrew language, admitting their guilt at having harmed Joseph so many years ago. Reuben felt that they were all being punished by God for what they had done. Joseph heard what they were saying, although he pretended he couldn't understand their language, using an interpreter when speaking with them. His emotions overwhelmed him and he turned away from them and wept. Then he returned to them and picked Simeon as his prisoner and had him bound before their eyes. There may have been a good reason for Joseph's selection of Simeon as his hostage.

Simeon, along with Levi, had plotted the assassination of all the men of Shechem after the prince of that city raped their sister Dinah. He was obviously a violent individual who had experience with murder. Although the Bible doesn't say so, he may have been the leader of the plan to kill Joseph. Joseph would have heard his brothers talk about his fate while he was at the bottom of the well and he would have known which of the brothers was most in favor of killing him. At any rate, Simeon was the one chosen for imprisonment. Then Joseph gave orders to fill his brothers' bags with grain, and to replace every man's money in his sack, and to give them supplies for the journey. Joseph knew this would terrify them once they discovered the sacks of money, for it would make them appear guilty of theft and confirm the Governor's suspicions about them. Joseph's false accusations and his threats of prison were designed to let the brothers experience the emotions of fear and injustice he had felt when falsely accused of rape by Potiphar's wife and then punished in prison for a crime he had never committed. And just as Joseph had planned, the brothers were shocked when they saw the money in their grain sacks, and they turned trembling to one another, saying, "What is this that God has done to us?" These guilty men believed that God's hand was against them for their past sins (which was true), and they were understandably afraid.

When they returned to their father Jacob in Canaan, they told him all that had happened to them. They related how they had tried to defend themselves by telling the Governor about their family, including the fact that they had a younger brother. They described their dismay when the Governor demanded that they bring Benjamin to him as proof that they were telling the truth. Jacob was devastated, accusing them of taking Joseph and Simeon away from him, and now trying to take Benjamin as well. Reuben made an emotional appeal saying that Jacob could kill his own two sons if he do not bring Benjamin back (a foolish oath for Jacob would surely never kill his 2 grandsons in revenge for losing Benjamin!). Jacob was unmoved by Reuben's appeal, stubbornly refusing to let Benjamin go, saying that if anything were to harm his youngest son, he would surely die of grief.

The food lasted for only so long and after a time (while Simeon was still in an Egyptian prison), Jacob told his ten sons to go back to Egypt and buy more grain. Judah protested that the Egyptian Governor had been firm that they were not to return to Egypt unless they brought Benjamin with them. Jacob bemoaned that they had ever mentioned that they had a younger brother, but Judah explained that the Governor had closely interrogated them and they had simply answered his questions. They never suspected that the Egyptian would demand to personally see Benjamin. Judah added that he would personally guarantee Benjamin's safety. Jacob finally saw that he had no choice if he was to keep his family alive. They were all starving and the famine showed no sign of ending any time soon. Jacob gave strict instructions to his sons to take back a generous gift of spices and nuts to the Governor and he gave them twice as much money as before, to pay back the money that they found in their sacks and to pay for more grain. He also accepted the possibility that he might lose both Simeon and Benjamin. All he could do was entrust them all to God's care and hope for the best. So the brothers took the gifts and money and Benjamin and went on their way to Egypt.

Once there, the 10 brothers were immediately brought before Joseph. As soon as Joseph saw Benjamin, he ordered his attendants to take all the brothers to his house. The nine brothers interpreted this move as a plan to attack and enslave them and they were terrified.

They went to Joseph's manager and tried to explain the mistake about the money in their grain sacks from their last visit to Egypt, but the manager said that it must have been their God who blessed them because he had received their money. He then brought Simeon to them from the prison and he gave them water to wash their feet. They were told that they would be meeting the Governor at noon for a meal in his house. As they waited, they prepared the gift they would present to him. When Joseph arrived at his house, the brothers presented their gift and bowed low to him. Joseph asked about their family while looking straight at Benjamin, his younger brother. The emotions aroused by the sight of him were so overwhelming that Joseph had to leave to go to his room where he wept uncontrollably. His heart had been broken by the loss of his family and the betrayal of his brethren, and although God had helped him to forget his pain, the sight of Benjamin had reopened the old wounds. After calming down and washing his face, Joseph came back out and called on his servants to serve the meal. Joseph and his Egyptian guests sat apart from his brothers as Egyptian beliefs did not allow them to eat with Hebrews. The brothers were seated according to their birth rank, which surprised them and made them wonder how the Governor could know so much about them. Perhaps they thought that this Governor had occult powers like some of the Egyptian magicians were reputed to have. It must have also surprised them when they saw that Benjamin was served a portion 5 times the size of their own. After the meal, Joseph instructed his house manager to fill the brothers' sacks with goods and to include each man's money in the sack as had been done before. However Joseph's silver cup was to be put into Benjamin's sack.

Next morning the brothers departed and had gone a little ways from the city when Joseph's manager, on Joseph's orders, caught up with them and stopped them. He accused them of stealing his master's special silver cup. The manager told them that his master's cup was special as it was used not only for drinking, but also for interpreting dreams. He added that stealing such a cup was a very serious crime. The brothers were shocked and strongly denied the charge, but when they opened their sacks to prove their innocence, the cup was found in Benjamin's sack. They were absolutely horrified! It seemed that the Egyptian Governor had extremely strong powers of divination and the theft of his divining cup would obviously carry a great penalty. In much anxiety and grief, they went back to the city with the manager to stand before the fearsome Governor. Joseph rebuked them for their wickedness in stealing his possession, whereupon Judah replied:

"What will we tell my lord? What will we speak? Or how will we clear ourselves? God has found out the iniquity of your servants. Behold, we are my lord's slaves, both we, and he also in whose hand the cup is found." (Genesis 44:16)

Joseph told him he didn't want to enslave them all. Only Benjamin would become his slave. The others could return to their home in peace. It may be that Joseph had it in mind to keep his younger brother with him in Egypt because he didn't trust his stepbrothers not to harm him. From his interview with the brothers he had learned that Benjamin was his father's favorite just as he himself had once been. Being his father's favorite son had resulted in jealous hatred and wicked actions against Joseph. Might his brothers not try to harm Benjamin out of jealousy too? It was then that Judah made an emotional plea, speaking of his father's pain and suffering if they returned home without Benjamin. He said that it would be the death of their father. He also asked that the blame be put upon himself personally and he offered to become a slave in Benjamin's place.

Judah's offer to sacrifice himself for Benjamin caused Joseph's heart to break and he commanded all his servants to leave the room, after which he wept so loudly that all the servants outside could hear him.

Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph! Does my father still live?" His brothers couldn't answer him, for they were terrified at his presence. Joseph said to his brothers, "Come near to me, please. They came near. "He said, "I am Joseph, your brother, whom you sold into Egypt. Now don't be grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. For these two years the famine has been in the land, and there are yet five years, in which there will be no plowing and no harvest. God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant in the earth, and to save you alive by a great deliverance. So now it wasn't you who sent me here, but God, and he has made me a father to Pharaoh, lord of all his house, and ruler over all the land of Egypt. Hurry, and go up to my father, and tell him, "This is what your son Joseph says, "God has made me lord of all Egypt. Come down to me. Don't wait. You shall dwell in the land of Goshen, and you will be near to me, you, your children, your children's children, your flocks, your herds, and all that you have. There I will nourish you; for there are yet five years of famine; lest you come to poverty, you, and your household, and all that you have. Behold, your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin, that it is my mouth that speaks to you. You shall tell my father of all my glory in Egypt, and of all that you have seen. You shall hurry and bring my father down here." He fell on his brother Benjamin's neck, and wept, and Benjamin wept on his neck. He kissed all his brothers, and wept on them. After that his brothers talked with him. (Genesis 45:3-15)

Proverbs 28:13 says that whoever hides his sin does not prosper, but the one who confesses and turns away from it, will find mercy. This is what Joseph had been hoping would happen in his brothers' hearts. When they had sold him as a slave to traders all those years ago, their hearts had been as hard as stone. But now there was a change in them. Because they confessed their sins and repented of their wicked past actions, Joseph was able to forgive them. It takes a strong person to say he is sorry, but it takes an even stronger person to forgive, and fortunately Joseph was just such a person. In spite of extreme anguish he forgave his brothers, choosing not to seek vengeance upon them. Forgiveness is a miracle of the heart and it often takes time, and God's enabling grace, for healing to occur to the point where forgiveness is even possible. God was gracious to Joseph, showering him with blessings while time worked healing in his soul. Finally Joseph was at the place where he could truly put the past behind him. And the sinful brothers finally came to the place of confession and repentance, without which they would not have received forgiveness. God, the only true Judge, brought justice and mercy into the situation and restored this broken family.

Joseph sent his brothers back home to Canaan with supplies and gifts, instructing them to bring Jacob and all their families to Egypt so that he, Joseph, could take care of them during the famine. He promised that they would have the best of everything. As a parting word, he warned them not to argue along the way, perhaps remembering how they argued together about his fate after throwing him into a well so many years ago.

When the brothers arrived home, they told their father everything that had happened. Jacob was stunned at the news that Joseph was alive and the governor of Egypt.

Seeing all the carts and goods Joseph had sent, Jacob's heart leapt with joy and he was eager to go to Egypt to see the son he thought he had lost forever. However he must have had some fears about making such a great journey, wondering how God's promise concerning the land of Canaan would be fulfilled if he left. However God came to him in a dream and put his mind at ease.

He said, "I am God, the God of your father. Don't be afraid to go down into Egypt, for there I will make of you a great nation. I will go down with you into Egypt. I will also surely bring you up again. Joseph will close your eyes."(Genesis 46:3-4)

Then Jacob, his sons and their families, servants, and all their livestock left Beersheba for Egypt. Jacob sent Judah ahead of him to Joseph to get directions to Goshen. When they arrived in the region of Goshen, Joseph had his chariot made ready and went to Goshen to meet his father. As soon as Jacob and Joseph saw one another, they threw their arms around each other and wept for a long time.

*Israel said to Joseph, "Now let me die, since I have seen your face, that you are still alive."
(Genesis 46:30)*

Joseph then gave his father a piece of advice concerning their new home in Egypt.

It will happen, when Pharaoh summons you, and will say, 'What is your occupation?' that you shall say, 'Your servants have been keepers of livestock from our youth even until now, both we, and our fathers:' that you may dwell in the land of Goshen; for every shepherd is an abomination to the Egyptians." (Genesis 46:33-34)

Joseph had a good reason for saying this. He knew that Egyptians looked down upon shepherds and did not like associating with them. Settlement of the Hebrews in Goshen (which was on the outskirts of the city) would keep the peace between the Hebrews and Egyptians and also keep Joseph's relatives distinct as a people. It was better that the two groups not mix too much as the Egyptians had pagan gods and Joseph probably did not want his relatives negatively influenced by Egypt's culture and religion. What's more, Pharaoh was agreeable to this plan and offered Joseph's family the best land in Goshen.

Joseph settled his father and his brothers, and gave them a possession in the land of Egypt, in the best of the land, in the land of Rameses, as Pharaoh had commanded. (Genesis 47:11)

Jacob would have been 130 years old at the time he traveled to Goshen. He lived there for 17 years and his children became 12 tribes in Egypt. Before Jacob died, he gave a blessing to all his sons. Jacob's blessing for Joseph was the longest. He formally adopted Joseph's 2 sons (Manessah and Ephraim) as his own so that Joseph would receive a double portion of the inheritance, a custom usually reserved for the first born. Then Jacob died and was given a king's burial. The number of days of mourning for him was 68, two days shorter than that of a Pharaoh. Then his body was taken back to Canaan to be buried with Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, and Rebekah.

If one looks at the story of Joseph it is easy to see that Jesus is prefigured throughout, especially in the character and life of Joseph. Joseph is a type and shadow of Jesus Christ in that just as Joseph was rejected by his brethren, so Jesus was rejected by His people; as Joseph was sold by his brothers for silver, so Jesus was sold by Judas for 30 pieces of silver; as Joseph was exalted far above his brethren, so Jesus was resurrected and seated with honor on the right hand of God His Father; as Joseph married a Gentile wife, so the Lord married a Gentile Bride, the Church; and as Joseph forgave his penitent brethren, so Jesus forgives all who repent of their sin and come to Him for forgiveness.

Jacob had blessed his sons, as was the custom of fathers back then, but he also cursed some of them. Reuben had slept with one of Jacob's concubines, so he was cursed. Simeon and Levi had massacred the men of Shechem so Jacob prophesied that they would be scattered. Judah received a very special blessing, perhaps because of his willingness to take Benjamin's place as a slave when Joseph was threatening to keep his younger brother in Egypt. Jacob prophesied that the royal line of Israel would come through Judah, including the Messiah, the promised Seed.

"Judah, your brothers will praise you. Your hand will be on the neck of your enemies. Your father's sons will bow down before you. Judah is a lion's cub. From the prey, my son, you have gone up. ... The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs. To him will the obedience of the peoples be. Binding his foal to the vine, his donkey's colt to the choice vine; he has washed his garments in wine, his robes in the blood of grapes. His eyes will be red with wine, his teeth white with milk. (Genesis 49:8-12)

Jacob stated that a descendant of Judah would receive praise from the children of Israel. This descendent would conquer his enemies, and the descendants of all the children of Israel would bow in submission before him. (In the same manner that Joseph's brothers bowed in submission to him, the children of Israel would bow in submission to this relative of Judah). Jacob prophesied that this descendent of Judah would be like a young lion - powerful and of high rank, and no one would be able to overpower Him. Judah's family would be a family of kings. They would be in positions of authority over Israel. The scepter - the symbol of authority - would not depart from Judah until "Shiloh" came. The Hebrew word "Shiloh" means, "He whose right it is." This refers to the Messiah whom God appointed as Savior to deal with the sins of the world and to fulfill His promises to Abraham as a "blessing to all the families of the world."

Judah's blessing was especially surprising because he had a scandal in his life that involved having sexual relations with his daughter-in-law, Tamar, (although he was unaware of her identity at the time). Tamar had married Judah's firstborn son but her husband acted wickedly and was killed by God. According to custom the brother of a deceased man was supposed to marry his brother's widow, and any children from that marriage would legally belong to the deceased husband. So Judah's second son married Tamar. However he also behaved wickedly by ejaculating (spilling his seed) outside Tamar's womb so that she couldn't become pregnant. Perhaps he did not want to sire a son who would not be considered his own and who would inherit along with his own sons, perhaps even getting more than they would. Because he would not fulfill his duty to Tamar, God killed him as well.

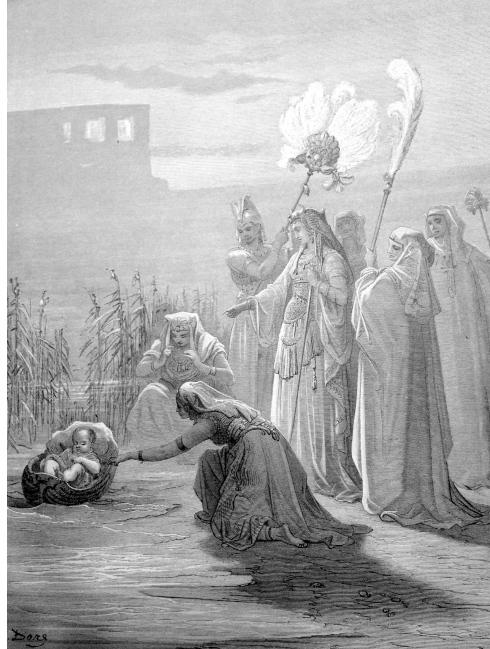
The two sons' disobedience was obviously no small matter for both had foolishly defied God, and disqualified themselves from being the ancestor of the coming Messiah. Now Judah was afraid to give his remaining son to Tamar in case he was killed too. This forced Tamar to remain a widow, without any way of having children, even though Tamar was a believer in God's Covenant and desperately hoped to bear a son in the line of the Messiah. But Tamar took matters into her own hands and came up with a plan that would enable her to become pregnant from Judah's line. She disguised herself as a prostitute and sat beside a road that she knew Judah would take during the sheep-shearing time. Judah's wife had died, leaving him a widower, so he was tempted when he saw the woman who appeared to be a prostitute, sitting by the side of the road. He decided to have sex with her but after doing so, he realized he had no money to give her as payment. Tamar asked him to leave his staff, seal, and cord behind as a guarantee while he went home to get the money. These items were important because they clearly belonged to Judah and she would need them in order to establish the identity of the father of her child after she conceived (which she had complete faith would happen). Judah got the money and sent a servant to pay her but Tamar was nowhere to be found. Judah's servant said that no one had ever seen a prostitute on that road before.

Soon Tamar's pregnancy became obvious and her neighbors accused her of adultery and wanted to burn her to death. Fortunately she had proof that Judah was the father of her child. She sent Judah's 3 items to him, leaving it to him to admit the truth or stay quiet and let her die by fire. Her plan worked because Judah admitted he was the one who had sex with her and he admitted that he had been wrong to withhold his youngest son from marrying her. Tamar had twins from Judah and one of them became the ancestor of Jesus Christ Himself. It appears that Tamar knew of Jacob's prophecy and this was why she had such absolute faith and courage to take the chance she did, risking her life in order to have children from Judah's line.

The story of Joseph ends when he died at 110 years of age. He had many grandchildren and great-grandchildren from his sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. Before he died, Joseph made his brethren promise to carry his bones out of Egypt to Canaan when the time came for God to deliver their people. He was aware of the promise given to Abraham that the Israelites would be enslaved for 400 years after which God would rescue them. When Joseph breathed his last, his body was embalmed according the Egyptian custom and placed in a coffin in Egypt. He would have had the funeral of a great king. Later when the Jews finally left Egypt, 430 years later, Joseph's bones were carried out and he was buried in Shechem, on land that Jacob had once owned.

Moses

Chapter 6



While the Hebrews were under the powerful protection of Joseph, they prospered in the land, but after his death the Israelites were persecuted by a new pharaoh who refused to recognize the Israelites' land grant in Goshen and acted quickly to enslave them. God had told Abraham that his descendants would be enslaved in a foreign nation for 400 years.

Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who didn't know Joseph. He said to his people, "Behold, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we. Come, let us deal wisely with them, lest they multiply, and it happen that when any war breaks out, they also join themselves to our enemies, and fight against us, and escape out of the land." (Exodus 1:8-10)

This was the fulfillment of what the Lord had told Abraham 430 years earlier.

He said to Abram, "Know for sure that your offspring will live as foreigners in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them. They will afflict them four hundred years. (Genesis 15:13)

A possible reason for the 4 centuries of Israelite enslavement could be due to God's desire to make a chosen nation for Himself. If Jacob's sons and their families had remained in Canaan, they would likely have gone their separate ways and formed separate clans. However as slaves in Egypt, this wasn't possible. They couldn't leave the land and were forced to dwell together.

Also, because the Israelites were looked down upon by the Egyptians, intermarriage didn't generally happen between the two races. Because of these factors Israel remained distinct as a nation unto itself.

*History shows that a new Egyptian dynasty came into power under Seti I who included his young son Rameses II in his government. Rameses II was a cunning monarch. He put the Israelites to hard labor in order to reduce their numbers, and when that didn't work, he ordered the infanticide of all Israelite newborn males. Infanticide (the killing of infants) was widely practiced throughout history. The Greeks practiced it and so did the Romans. The Syrians offered unwanted children as sacrifices to their god Moloch. Many nations did not generally regard human life as sacred. Condemning to death all the male Hebrew children would not have been viewed as particularly monstrous by the Egyptians. The Nile River was viewed as a god and throwing the babies into it might have been seen as offerings to the Nile. It would also have been viewed as a necessary political move to protect Egypt from possible uprisings. Of course it was actually Satan who was influencing Pharaoh (through his fear and hatred of the Israelites) in an attempt to destroy the coming Seed promised to Abraham - the Seed who would crush Satan beneath His feet. God had told the serpent in the Garden of Eden: ***I will put hostility between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring. He will bruise your head, and you will bruise his heel.***" (Genesis 3:15)*

This was not the first time Satan had tried to destroy God's promised Seed. Satan's first attempt was when Cain killed Abel. Satan saw that Abel's sacrifice was accepted by God whereas Cain's was not, so he guessed that the promised Seed would come through Abel. He therefore got Cain to destroy Abel, believing that in this way he could defeat God's promise of Genesis 3:15. That didn't work because God gave Adam and Eve another son through whom the line of the coming Seed was established. God gave Eve a replacement for Abel and she named him Seth, which means "set in place of". When Seth was 105 years old, his son Enosh was born thereby continuing the godly line that led to Abraham and would ultimately lead to Jesus Christ. However Satan did not give up easily, and now that the 400 years were almost over, he knew that God was likely planning to send a deliverer to rescue the Israelites out of Egypt. Because Satan did not know the exact timing of the Messiah's coming, he may have surmised that the Seed would soon be born in Egypt and this must have greatly concerned him. Consequently he influenced Pharaoh to murder all the Hebrew baby boys.

But one particular family of the Levite tribe disobeyed Pharaoh's command and hid their little son for three months until it became too difficult to hide him from Pharaoh's men. The mother took her baby to the Nile River and placed him in a basket made out of reeds (a little ark that may have been inspired by Noah's example), which she covered with tar so that it could float. Being a loving mother, she also felt her son was particularly beautiful and she hoped that God had a special plan for him. By faith, she trusted that God would protect him somehow. Her faith must have been great because the Nile was filled with hungry crocodiles. Undoubtedly they had already devoured many little Hebrew babies and were probably always on the lookout for a meal. The woman, whose name was Jochebed, sent her young daughter, Miriam, to watch what would happen to the baby. It so happened that a group of ladies was walking along the banks of the river at just that time.

They were the servants of the royal princess, daughter of Pharaoh, who was taking a bath in the river. When the princess saw the basket, she sent one of her slaves to fetch it. As she opened the basket, the baby cried and she felt sorry for him. She knew immediately that he was a Hebrew child under her father's sentence of death. At that moment Miriam stepped out from the reeds and asked if the princess would like her to go find a Hebrew nursemaid for the baby. Undoubtedly the princess knew this was no coincidence and probably guessed that the young girl was a relative to the crying baby. Amazingly she did something very daring by purposely going against her father's command to abandon all Hebrew male babies to the Nile. She sent Miriam to find a nursemaid (no surprise that it turned out to be the baby's birthmother) and when the royal princess met Jochebed, she commissioned her to nurse the baby for her. The princess called the baby Moses (a word that sounds like the Hebrew word "to pull out" and can mean "child" in Egyptian). When Moses was weaned a year or so later, Jochebed took him to the princess, who adopted him as her own son and raised him at the palace.

In the Bible, the princess is not named, but a daughter of Pharaoh named Bithiah is mentioned in later scriptures. The Midrash, an ancient commentary on part of the Hebrew Scriptures, says she received her name because of her compassion in saving Moses. Bithiah literally means "daughter of Yah" (Yah being a form of YHWH, which is God's Hebrew name). The Midrash describes her as a spiritually righteous woman, who would bathe in the Nile to cleanse herself of the impurity of idolatrous Egypt. The Midrash also records that she was exiled from the palace because of her adoption of Moses and later accompanied the Hebrews into the desert after they left Egypt. She is mentioned in 1Chronicles 4:18, as being the wife of Mered from the tribe of Judah, who is identified in the Midrash as being Caleb, one of the Twelve Spies.

Moses probably lived in the palace with his adoptive mother for about 35 years. As part of the Royal Family, he would have had the best of everything in Egypt - living in a beautiful palace, riding in a chariot, traveling down the Nile by royal barge, and being taught by the finest tutors in the land. Egypt had a well known university which taught astronomy, chemistry, music, art, mathematics, and engineering. He would have learned about medicine, literature, the Egyptian religion, and Egyptian writing.

Later Moses would commit to writing the oral history of God's people. The Phoenician alphabet was developed from Egyptian hieroglyphs and the Hebrew alphabet came from the Phoenician. This would have been the language in which Moses wrote the Bible.

Although Moses was raised in Egyptian culture, Moses identified with the people of Israel. He also knew his own birth family, even though he was adopted into Egyptian royalty. One can only imagine how Moses must have felt seeing his people being mistreated, maybe even by of the very officials he associated with every day in the Egyptian palace. Then there was the fact that his own adoptive grandfather, Pharaoh of Egypt, had ordered the death of all Hebrew infants and Moses would surely have died if he hadn't been rescued. Added to this, he had two mothers - a Hebrew birthmother and an Egyptian adoptive mother - both of whom had saved his life and taken huge risks in protecting him. He probably loved them both and perhaps felt conflicted because of it.

Maybe he identified with his forefather, Joseph, who was part of a little known tribe in the desert until placed by God in a position of great wealth and influence in order to provide protection for his Israelite family. The Bible says that when he was grown, *(he) refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to share ill treatment with God's people, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a time. (Hebrews 11:24-25)* By thus identifying with the Hebrews, Moses watched with resentment when he saw how badly the Egyptians were treating his own people.

One day, that resentment was fanned into flames when he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew. Moses reacted by coming to his fellow Israelite's defense, killing the Egyptian and then covering up the murder by burying the body in the sand. It's not clear why Moses reacted as he did in this situation. He would have seen this kind of thing every day of his life. Perhaps he had seen it just one time too many and that caused his anger to rise up so dangerously that he committed murder. It was a reckless thing to have done considering the Egyptians' dislike of the Israelites, Pharaoh's in particular. Moses thought no one had seen what he'd done. He also probably assumed that the slave he'd tried to help would not tell anyone what had happened. However the very next day Moses saw two Hebrews fighting and when he tried to stop the fight, one of the Hebrews said: *"Who made you a prince and a judge over us? Do you plan to kill me, as you killed the Egyptian?" (Exodus 2:14)* Moses was shocked. He realized that it was already common knowledge that he had murdered an Egyptian the day before. If Pharaoh ever heard about it, he would be in big trouble. Pharaoh disliked and distrusted the Israelites and Moses' act of murder would prove whose side Moses was really on. Pharaoh wouldn't hesitate to execute him once he found out. The only thing to do was to escape into the desert as quickly as possible, before the Egyptian soldiers came for him. He probably left that same night.

It was a long journey across the wilderness. Finally Moses entered Midian and came to a well where he rested. It was there that his anger once again flared up over injustice. Some shepherds were driving away some women who had approached the well. The seven daughters of Jethro were trying to water their flocks but some shepherds wouldn't allow them to do it. Moses came to the women's defense and watered the flocks for them. As a result he was invited to Jethro's house, where he was no doubt treated as a hero. After that, Moses worked for Jethro as a shepherd of his flocks and eventually married Zipporah, one of Jethro's daughters.

The family Moses married into was Midianite. The Midianites were descended from Midian, Abraham's son through his wife Keturah. The fact that Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, was a priest indicates that this people still retained some knowledge of the God of Abraham, although it is thought that they also worshipped other gods as well. Moses lived in the desert for 40 years. Though once a prince of Egypt, he was now nothing more than a lowly shepherd. His great dream to deliver the Hebrew people had died with the death of the Egyptian overseer he had killed. It was all very discouraging and Moses likely felt he was doing nothing important with his life. But God was actually using all these experiences to shape Moses into the great leader he would one day become. Moses was learning all about the secrets and dangers of desert life, which would come in handy when he and thousands with him would wander in the desert for 40 long years. God was also producing character in Moses, teaching him humility and wisdom.

He would need those traits when confronting the most powerful ruler in the land in order to deliver the Hebrew people. Though the old Pharaoh had died, the new one was just as bad, or worse, and the Hebrew people groaned under his tyranny. But God heard their cries. He had not forgotten His promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to make their descendants a great nation in their own land. That had been the initial plan and it had never changed; it had just been waiting for God's perfect timing. Now 400 years later, it was time for the divine plan to be put into action.

One day while Moses was herding sheep in the desert, he saw a bush that appeared to be on fire, yet when he went near to investigate, he found that it was not burnt. Then Moses heard a voice calling to him from out of the bush.

"Don't come close. Take your sandals off of your feet, for the place you are standing on is holy ground... I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. ... I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows. I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and large land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Amorite, the Perizzite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite. Now, behold, the cry of the children of Israel has come to me. Moreover I have seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. Come now therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh, that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt." (Exodus 3:5-10)

Moses had lost whatever confidence and courage he had once felt in Egypt years ago. Back then he had bravely tried to help his people but the results had been disastrous. In the process he had killed a man and the ones he had tried to help had turned on him. Consequently he had been forced to run for his life in order to escape the anger and punishment of Pharaoh. Now God was commissioning him to face the new Egyptian king and demand the release of his Hebrew slaves. Moses could guess what Pharaoh would think of that idea. If his life had been in danger before, it would be doubly so if he took on this impossible mission. Moses was afraid and so argued with God, making the excuse that the Hebrews would never accept him as their leader. God refused to be put off. He gave him three signs to authenticate his mission. First, his staff (used in his care of the sheep) turned into a snake when cast upon the ground, but when Moses picked it up by the tail, it became a wooden staff once more. Secondly, when Moses put his hand inside his clothing, it became leprous but when he put it back next to his chest, his flesh was restored. For the last sign, God told Moses that he was to take some water from the Nile and pour it on the ground, whereupon it would turn into blood. There was a reason that God gave these three signs to Moses. Egyptians saw the snake as a symbol of divine power. The sign of the staff turning into a snake would show God's greater power over Egyptian snake power. Leprosy was a symbol of judgment and would be a sign that God had the power to judge and restore. The Nile River was the life-source of Egypt, so turning the water to blood showed that God was superior to the Nile gods of the Egyptians. When Moses still protested that he was not a good speaker, God became angry at his hesitancy. However He showed tolerance for Moses' fearfulness by commissioning his brother Aaron to go with him to be his mouthpiece.

After that Moses dared not resist and he packed up his wife and children and headed off to Egypt. Along the way Moses again stirred up the anger of God. This time it almost disqualified him as the deliverer of the Hebrews and even came close to costing him his life. Apparently one of Moses' sons was not circumcised, which seems to be the reason why God almost killed Moses.

Circumcision was the sign and seal of the Abrahamic covenant. It was the evidence of the parents' faith in the promise of God to Abraham that through his seed blessings would come to Israel and to the whole world. And it was not optional.

He who is born in your house, and he who is bought with your money, must be circumcised. My covenant will be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. The uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin - that soul shall be cut off from his people. He has broken my covenant." (Genesis 17:13-14).

*The Covenant was the whole reason for sending Moses to Egypt in the first place. God desired to make a great nation out of the Hebrew people. He wished to fulfill the Abrahamic promises through them. They were to become God's instrument of grace that would proclaim God's love and mercy to all the nations of the earth. Through Abraham's covenant, great promises were given to Abraham and to his "Seed" (i.e. Jesus Christ) who would bring redemption to the world. Circumcision was the sign of faith in that covenant, but by neglecting to circumcise his son, Moses showed disrespect for both God and the covenant. This appears to be why God decided to take Moses' life, for when Zipporah stepped in and performed her son's circumcision herself, God spared Moses' life. However Zipporah seems to have been repelled by the rite. After the circumcision she touched her son's foreskin to Moses' feet with the rebuke, **"Surely you are a bridegroom of blood to me."**(Exodus 4:25) This could indicate that Zipporah may have been the reason why Moses' son was not circumcised in the first place. However whether it was due to her objections or Moses' neglect, God was so angry with Moses that He almost killed him. After this incident Zipporah and her two sons returned to her father Jethro's house instead of going on with Moses to Egypt. The Bible doesn't give a reason for this but it may have been for the sake of the circumcised boy who would have needed to heal after being circumcised. Later Zipporah and the two boys rejoined Moses in the wilderness.*

Aaron (who was 83 at this time) met up with Moses (who was 80) and together they went on to Egypt. Once there they talked with the Hebrew elders, who, after seeing Moses perform the miracles, were persuaded that God was going to deliver them. They bowed down and worshipped God, thankful that at last the cries of the people had been heard. However the interview with Pharaoh did not go so well. When Moses and Aaron asked the king to let the Israelites go into the desert to worship God, the king was disdainful and arrogant. This was no surprise to Moses, as God had warned him that Pharaoh would be resistant. Moses' request to go into the desert to worship God actually showed sensitivity to the Egyptians who would have been disgusted by the Hebrew worship practice of slaughtering cattle. However Pharaoh didn't see it that way. He accused the Israelite slaves of just wanting to get out of their work. As a cure for their 'laziness', Pharaoh increased their workload and made their lives even more unbearable. This caused the Israelites to complain to Moses.

The officers of the children of Israel saw that they were in trouble, when it was said, "You shall not diminish anything from your daily quota of bricks! They met Moses and Aaron, who stood in the way, as they came out from Pharaoh: and they said to them, "May Yahweh look at you, and judge, because you have made us a stench to be abhorred in the eyes of Pharaoh, and in the eyes of his servants, to put a sword in their hand to kill us." (Exodus 5:19-21)

Moses was dismayed and took their complaint to God, asking why God had even sent him if it just caused the Hebrews more suffering.

Yahweh said to Moses, "Behold, I have made you as God to Pharaoh; and Aaron your brother shall be your prophet. You shall speak all that I command you; and Aaron your brother shall speak to Pharaoh, that he let the children of Israel go out of his land. I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and multiply my signs and my wonders in the land of Egypt. But Pharaoh will not listen to you, and I will lay my hand on Egypt, and bring out my armies, my people, the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great judgments. The Egyptians shall know that I am Yahweh, when I stretch out my hand on Egypt, and bring out the children of Israel from among them."(Exodus 7:1-5)

God anointed both Moses and Aaron with great authority and He instructed them to go back to confront the king, which they did. Apparently it was the custom of Pharaoh to permit open audiences, so this enabled them to approach the king.



Aaron threw down his staff in front of Pharaoh and it became a large wriggling snake. However Pharaoh called forth his magicians who, through their black arts, were able to mimic the miracle (although their snakes were swallowed up by Aaron's larger one). Pharaoh still wasn't impressed so God stepped up the pressure by sending plagues. First God turned the Nile River to blood so that the Egyptians couldn't drink the water or wash in it. Egyptians worshipped the Nile River as a god. They called it Hapi and believed it to be very great in power. When God turned the water to blood, the Egyptians saw that the Hebrew God was very powerful, maybe even more powerful than Hapi. Pharaoh immediately called forth his magicians who were able to copy the miracle and thus retain the reputation of their god. The king then ignored Moses and Aaron and refused to do anything about the plague.

The Egyptian people had to dig along the banks of the river in order to get drinking water. This went on for an entire week. God then told Moses and Aaron to go back to Pharaoh and tell him that He would punish Egypt with a plague of frogs. The Egyptians worshipped a frog-headed goddess of birth called Heqet. Frogs were considered to be sacred and it was forbidden to kill them. However God had the frogs invade every part of the Egyptian homes and they had to kill the symbol of their god because there were so many underfoot. When the frogs died, their dead bodies were swept up into huge piles that gave off a terrible stench throughout the land.

This was too much for Pharaoh and his people so Moses and Aaron were called back to the palace and the king requested that they stop the plague. Pharaoh pretended that he would allow the Hebrews to offer sacrifices in the desert, but as soon as the plague was gone, Pharaoh went back to being stubborn. A plague of gnats, and then of flies, came next. Egyptians worshipped Uatchit, the Egyptian god of the flies, but when the magicians tried to create flies with their own magic (as they had done with the snakes and blood) they were unable to do so. Reluctantly they were forced to admit that the power of the Hebrew God was indeed behind the plague of flies. Pharaoh however refused to listen to them. He could see that the plagues did not affect the Hebrews in Goshen, an obvious sign that the Hebrew God was responsible for the plagues, yet he refused to listen to any warnings. So God sent other plagues such as boils, hailstones, and locusts that destroyed all the crops. The Egyptians worshipped many gods associated with crops, such as Nepri, the god of grain, Thermuthis, the goddess of fertility, and Seth, another god of crops. All these so-called gods (demonic entities in reality) were powerless before the God of the Israelites. Then God sent a sun eclipse that lasted 3 days - a direct insult to the Egyptians' most powerful gods - Horus, the god of light; Ptah who supposedly created the moon, sun and earth; Atum, the god of the sunset; and Shu, the god of sunlight and air. Greatest of all was their supreme deity, Ra or Re, the sun god. Pharaoh was thought to be a divine representation of Ra so the eclipse was a direct challenge to Pharaoh's supposed godhood as well. The darkness covered the land for 3 days and this must have greatly astonished and frightened the Egyptians. Undoubtedly it caused doubts in their minds concerning the powers of their supreme god and his physical representative, Pharaoh. Pharaoh was shaken and he pretended that he would allow the Israelites to leave if the darkness was withdrawn, but he again went back on his word as soon as the plague was removed. Finally Pharaoh became so angry that he threatened to kill Moses and Aaron if he ever saw their faces again.

While this was going on, the Egyptians had begun to respect the Israelites and they saw Moses as a great man. Perhaps for the first time the Egyptians were looking upon the Hebrew slaves with favor and some were even doubting their own religious beliefs. But Pharaoh was completely resistant to God's commands and stubbornly refused to give in. The Bible says that the Lord made Pharaoh's heart hard so that he refused to let the Israelites leave Egypt.

For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I caused you to be raised up, that I might show in you my power, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." (Romans 9:17)

Romans 9 indicates that it is God, not us, who is in control. In fact, God is in such total control that He can and does decide to show mercy to some people while hardening the hearts of others, as He did with Pharaoh. Furthermore, He is just and righteous in doing so. "What if God, willing to show His wrath, and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath made for destruction, (Romans 9:22).

The Lord now spoke to Moses and Aaron, giving them instructions for the last plague He would send. These instructions were to be passed along to the Israelites and carefully followed, lest they suffer along with the rest of the Egyptians.

God warned that around midnight He would cause all the firstborn sons of the Egyptians (rich and poor) to die. Even their firstborn farm animals would die. Only those who put lamb's blood on the tops and sides of their doorframes would escape God's judgment.

For I will go through the land of Egypt in that night, and will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and animal. Against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am Yahweh. The blood shall be to you for a token on the houses where you are: and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and there shall no plague be on you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt. (Exodus 12:12-13).

*There were other detailed instructions. The lamb or goat was to be in perfect condition, one year old, and roasted whole over a fire. It was to be eaten with bitter herbs and unleavened bread. The bread was unleavened because there was no time to wait for yeast to rise before baking the bread. But there was a deeper meaning. Leaven is a symbol of sin and it foreshadowed a truth about the nature of God's deliverance. In the New Testament, 1 Corinthians 5:7-8 says: **Purge out the old yeast, that you may be a new lump, even as you are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, has been sacrificed in our place. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old yeast, neither with the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.***

The bitter herbs also were symbolic, serving as a reminder to the Israelites of their suffering as slaves in Egypt, with a wider representation of another type of slavery - one that applied to all of humanity, that is, mankind's slavery to sin. Just as the Israelites in Egypt were delivered by God from a bitter life of slavery, so God would later rescue mankind from spiritual bondage through His Son, Jesus Christ.

Lastly a lamb was killed and its blood smeared over the doorposts as a substitute to spare the firstborn in each household from God's judgment. When the Lord saw blood on a doorpost, He would see that judgment had already been done there. This pointed to a future Passover in which the shed blood of Jesus Christ would satisfy the penalty for sin and provide protection from God's judgment for everyone who rested in Christ as Savior.

But Christ having come as a high priest... nor yet through the blood of goats and calves, but through his own blood, entered in once for all into the Holy Place, having obtained eternal redemption. (Hebrews 9:12)

Anything left over from the meal was to be burned up next morning. Everyone in the house was to be fully dressed, ready for a quick exit from the land. This event would forever be remembered as the Lord's Passover because on this particular night God would pass over all those who obeyed His instructions, thus sparing their firstborn sons and firstborn cattle from death. It would be the most powerful display of God's grace in all of Israel's history in the Old Testament. This is why the Lord gave strict instructions to Moses to tell the people to always remember the Passover and to keep it with all diligence.



After receiving Moses' instructions, the Israelites ate their meal, packed their belongings, and waited. Just as God had warned, death visited each Egyptian home that night and killed every firstborn son in Egypt, as well as every firstborn farm animal. Pharaoh and his officials and all the Egyptians got up in the night and began to mourn those who had died in their houses. A loud outcry went up throughout the land. This time Pharaoh called Moses and Aaron to the palace and told them they could leave. All the Egyptians also told the Israelites to hurry and go, saying *"If you don't leave, we will all die!"* God told Moses to instruct the Israelites to ask their Egyptian neighbors for gold and silver, and the Egyptians readily gave them such items. God was causing the Egyptians to look upon the Israelites with favor so that there would be no opposition to their departure. Also, the Egyptians had witnessed the defeat of all their gods by the Hebrew God and they were probably relieved that the Israelites were leaving Egypt.

Altogether there were about 600,000 men, not including women and children, who left Egypt that night. Many others went with them, some of them Egyptians (like Moses' adoptive mother). Altogether it must have been an impressive sight - well over a million and a half people heading out of the city. On the very day that the 430 years had ended, they were leaving Egypt, just as God had foretold.

That night the Lord kept watch over the Israelites and spoke with Moses and Aaron about the rules of the Passover.

"Sanctify to me all the firstborn, whatever opens the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and of animal. It is mine."...It shall be, when your son asks you in time to come, saying, 'What is this?' that you shall tell him, 'By strength of hand Yahweh brought us out from Egypt, from the house of bondage. When Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, Yahweh killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man, and the firstborn of animal. Therefore I sacrifice to Yahweh all that opens the womb, being males; but all the firstborn of my sons I redeem.' (Exodus 13:2, 14-15)

The word 'redeem' means "buy back." Obviously God did not intend that the Israelites offer their firstborn children as human sacrifices, so He commanded that they be bought back by means of a lamb sacrifice. This redemption of the firstborn was a type and shadow of what God would do in the future when His own Firstborn Son, Jesus Christ, was killed as our Passover in order to set us free from sin and death.

For whom he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. (Romans 8:29)

And from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us, and washed us from our sins by his blood; (Revelation 1:5)

And Hebrews 12:22 states: But you have come to Mount Zion, and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable multitudes of angels...to the assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect.

The assembly and church of the firstborn refers to us as Christians, as God's very own beloved, redeemed children! Christians are God's New Covenant firstborn, and first fruits to God and to the Lamb. We look back to that first Passover and see how it prefigures what God has accomplished in us today. What an absolutely amazing thing God has done!

After giving Moses His instructions, God led the Israelites out of Egypt, and although they were dressed for battle, He led them by a circuitous route rather than on a straight path through Philistine country. God knew that in spite of the armor they were wearing, the Israelites didn't have the courage or daring to face a fight at this point. They had been slaves for hundreds of years and were used to being downtrodden and helpless. They needed strong leadership so God went ahead of them as a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire at night. Moses carried the bones of Joseph out of Egypt, just as Joseph had requested of the Israelites four centuries earlier.

Meanwhile back in Egypt, Pharaoh changed his mind yet again. After the shock of losing their firstborn, Pharaoh and his officials realized that they had lost their cheap labor force. This would affect the entire economy of Egypt! Perhaps there was also a desire for revenge. Quickly Pharaoh ordered all his chariots into service and summoned up his army to recapture the Israelites. They finally caught up with them at the Red Sea. The Israelites were terrified when they saw Pharaoh's army in the distance. It would have been frightening to see the countless soldiers on horseback and riding in chariots advancing towards them. They immediately blamed Moses for endangering their lives by bringing them out of Egypt. Moses tried to calm them by assuring them that God would fight for them, but God was impatient with his response. He wanted Moses to act, not give the people a sermon.

Yahweh said to Moses, "Why do you cry to me? Speak to the children of Israel that they go forward. Lift up your rod, and stretch out your hand over the sea, and divide it: and the children of Israel shall go into the middle of the sea on dry ground. Behold, I myself will harden the hearts of the Egyptians, and they shall go in after them: and I will get myself honor over Pharaoh, and over all his armies, over his chariots, and over his horsemen. (Exodus 14:15-17)

The angel of the Lord was in the pillar of cloud and He now moved between the Egyptian army and the fleeing Israelites. The sky became totally black on the Egyptian side, but the Israelites walked in light. A strong east wind blew back the sea until the seabed was dry to walk on and the Israelites made it safely to the other side. It would have been alarming to walk on a path between two high walls of water rising up on either side, but the Israelites had no choice. The Egyptian soldiers were right behind them! For the Egyptians the situation was even more frightening. Not only were they in the dark, but their chariot wheels got stuck in the mud and wouldn't move.



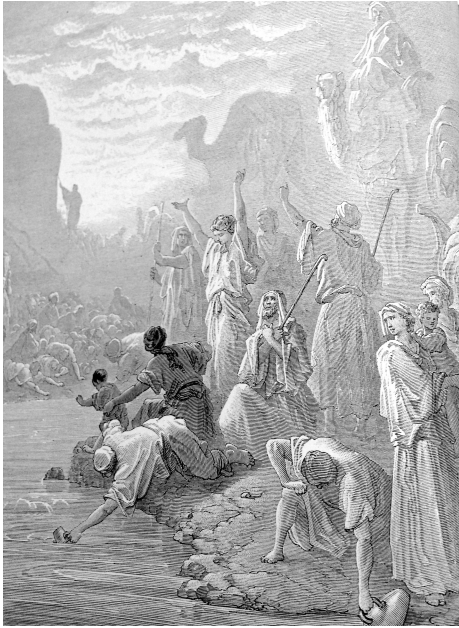
They couldn't move ahead and they couldn't go back. Once all the Israelites were safely on the opposite shore, God told Moses to stretch forth his staff over the waters and as he did so, the sea returned to its place. The Egyptians saw the waters rolling back towards them and they tried to run but their chariots remained mired in mud and they, with all their horses, were swept away and drowned. Not one of them survived. Moses and the Israelites looked upon the Red Sea and watched with amazement as the scene unfolded before their eyes.

The display of God's mighty power filled them with so much joy that they burst forth in a song of celebration and praise. Aaron's sister Miriam took up a tambourine and led the women in a song and dance of victory. They praised God for throwing the horses and riders into the sea, hailing Him as a Warrior Lord who would be King forever.

Moses could now look back over his life and feel a deep sense of satisfaction. Finally the events of his life made sense. Nothing had been an accident. God had planned it all from the beginning, watching over events and guiding them along to fulfill His divine purpose. He had raised Moses from a lowly shepherd in the desert to become the leader of a newborn nation. This was not unlike what God's own Son would experience centuries later. In fact, Moses was a type and shadow of Jesus Christ. Both of their lives had many fascinating parallels.

- *An evil king (Pharaoh) tried to kill Moses as a baby; King Herod tried to kill the infant Jesus.*
- *Moses was hidden from Pharaoh; an angel warned Jesus' parents to hide Him from Herod.*
- *Moses was sent to the Egyptian palace for protection; Jesus was taken to Egypt to protect His life.*
- *Moses became a prince of Egypt; Jesus is the Prince of Peace.*
- *Moses went from being a prince to a poor man; Jesus put aside His divine powers and became a man (while still retaining His Godhood).*
- *Moses became a shepherd; Jesus is the Good Shepherd.*
- *Moses had a mission to rescue Israel from slavery; Jesus had a mission to rescue mankind from slavery to sin.*
- *Moses was rejected by his people; Jesus was rejected by many of His own people.*
- *Moses performed signs and miracles; Jesus performed many signs and miracles.*
- *Moses was the prophet of the Old Covenant; Jesus is the Prophet, Priest, and King of the New Covenant.*

After their amazing deliverance from the Egyptian army, the Israelites traveled on farther into the desert. Only 3 days passed, however, before the memory of their deliverance at the Red Sea faded from their minds. They had come to Marah, and with the hot sun bearing down on them, they looked for water to quench their thirst, but the water they found was too bitter to drink.



Soon they began to complain to Moses, unable to trust that God would take care of their needs and provide for them. This seems amazing, considering that God had just delivered them from the Egyptian army by causing a sea to part for them! Nevertheless God graciously provided good water to drink by leading Moses to a certain tree, the branch of which, when thrown into the water, made the water fit to drink. However a few weeks later the Israelites complained again, this time because food was scarce and they felt they had eaten better in Egypt. In this instance God was gracious again, causing food to rain down upon them in the form of thin white flakes, which they called 'manna'. These little flakes of food tasted like wafers made with honey and they appeared every day without fail. The Israelites boiled or baked the manna into bread and cakes. But this wasn't all God did for them. He also caused low flying quail to cover the camp one evening so that the Israelites could catch them and thus enjoy meat in their diet.

Another time the people camped at Rephidim where there was no water, and again they quarreled with Moses, accusing him of endangering their lives by leading them into barren wasteland. They grumbled that it would have been better if they had stayed in Egypt rather than die of thirst in the desert. Moses was frustrated with the people but God told him to strike a certain rock with his walking stick. When he did so, water gushed out and the Israelites satisfied their thirst. Moses named the place Meribah (meaning 'quarrel') because the Israelites tested God when they asked "Is the Lord with us or not?!" The fact that they asked this is surprising, considering all the fantastic miracles God had already performed for them, all of which clearly proved His love and care for them.

Another challenge presented itself at Rephidim when some roving Amalekites attacked the Israelites. They were descendants of Amalek, the grandson of Esau, and they had no fear of God. These nomadic raiders saw that the Israelites were weary and worn out from their travels and they saw this an opportune time to attack all who were lagging behind, typically the women and children.

Moses said to Joshua, "Choose men for us, and go out, fight with Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with God's rod in my hand." So Joshua did as Moses had told him, and fought with Amalek; and Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. When Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed. When he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed. But Moses' hands were heavy; and they took a stone, and put it under him, and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held up his hands, the one on the one side, and the other on the other side. His hands were steady until sunset. Joshua defeated Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword. Yahweh said to Moses, "Write this for a memorial in a book, and rehearse it in the ears of Joshua: that I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under the sky." Moses built an altar, and called its name Yahweh our Banner. (Exodus 17: 9-15)

The altar Moses built commemorating the victory over the Amalekites was called 'The Lord is my Banner'. A banner is a military flag that identifies and brings together a particular group of people. In this case, the Israelites were identifying themselves as the followers of God and they were celebrating the victory they had won under His leadership. It was indeed a wonderful victory but the Amalekites who escaped the battle that day went on to trouble the Israelites for many generations to come. Eventually, after giving them a long time in which to repent, God completely wiped them out, just as He had told Moses He would do.

One day, Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, came to visit Moses and the Israelites, bringing Moses' wife Zipporah and their two sons with him. Jethro had heard the news of what God had done for the Israelites in Egypt and he responded with amazement.

Now I know that Yahweh is greater than all gods.." Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, took a burnt offering and sacrifices for God. Aaron came with all the elders of Israel, to eat bread with Moses' father-in-law before God. On the next day, Moses sat to judge the people, and the people stood around Moses from the morning to the evening. (Exodus 18:11-13)

Jethro was a Midianite, and like the rest of the Midianites, he probably worshipped a multitude of gods, even though he also had knowledge of the true God. He was obviously very delighted to hear about all the good things the Lord had done for Israel, and his words indicate that he may even have had a conversion experience at this time. He also gave Moses some excellent advice about delegating authority to officers who would settle disputes and give counsel so that the burden didn't fall on Moses alone.

Three months to the day after the Israelites had left Egypt, they reached the Desert of Sinai. Moses went up the mountain and God spoke with him there.

This is what you shall tell the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel: 'You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings, and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice, and keep my covenant, then you shall be my own possession from among all peoples; for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation.' (Exodus 19:3-6)

Next God gave Moses Ten Commandments that summarized His holy nature.

- "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me.*
- You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.*
- You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.*

- *Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.*
- *Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you.*
- *You shall not murder.*
- *You shall not commit adultery.*
- *You shall not steal.*
- *You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.*
- *You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor."*

These Ten Commandments were very important and necessary because Israel plainly needed standards to protect her from the paganism that plagued all the surrounding nations. The Israelites had lived in Egypt and witnessed the idolatry there. They had also been influenced by the practices of that nation. The Law that God was giving them would reveal the holy character of God, make Israel aware of what God expected, and make them realize their sinfulness when they discovered that they couldn't keep God's commands. However, glorious as it was, the Law was a ministry of condemnation and death.

Because by the works of the law, no flesh will be justified in his sight. For through the law comes the knowledge of sin. (Romans 3:20)

What shall we say then? Is the law sin? May it never be! However, I wouldn't have known sin, except through the law. For I wouldn't have known coveting, unless the law had said, "You shall not covet." But sin, finding occasion through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of coveting. For apart from the law, sin is dead. I was alive apart from the law once, but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. (Romans 7:7-9)

Moses came down from the mountain and told the Israelites of God's offer and the Israelites immediately accepted it, even though they had not yet heard the terms of this covenant that God was making with them. The fact that they could so easily agree to perfectly obey God shows that they knew very little of God, and very little of themselves either. They were either unaware that God was completely holy and would require complete holiness from them, or else they truly believed that they were capable of blameless behavior. They also seemed unaware that the covenant God was now offering differed greatly from the Abrahamic Covenant. This covenant (called the Mosaic Covenant) was conditional, i.e. the blessings that God promised depended on Israel's obedience. If Israel was obedient, then God would bless them, but if they disobeyed, then God would punish them. The Abrahamic Covenant was a permanent agreement that was entered through faith. The promises rested on God alone and were not conditional on the actions of a second party (i.e. Israel).

The Mosaic covenant, however, was a temporary covenant between God and the Israelites, given to Israel to govern itself until the Messiah came.

After the Israelites agreed to the covenant, the first thing God did was to educate the people as to His holiness. He gave commands through Moses for the people to wash their clothes and stay well back from the mountain. He warned that anyone touching the mountain had to be put to death through stoning or shot with arrows (from a distance and without physical contact) because to even touch that person would result in making them unclean. The people were also to abstain from sexual relations. This would have given the Israelites a sense that God was so holy that sinful mankind could not approach Him without being destroyed. This is exactly what the Lord wanted the people to understand. He wanted them to know that He was not like the Egyptian gods who were thought to feel emotion and act much like humans, being able to eat, drink, fight, get sick, and die. Israel's God was much different and the people had to be instructed as to His character and requirements.

On the third day there was thunder, lightening, and a cloud covering Mt. Sinai. A loud trumpet blast caused all the Israelites to cower in fear as Moses led them to the base of the mountain. Smoke rose up into the air, hot as a furnace, and the entire mountain shook wildly. Moses told the people not to be afraid. God was testing them so that they would respect Him and not sin. Moses told them that only he and Aaron were able to go up the mountain without being destroyed. The people would have to wait below until Moses and Aaron returned to them.

Up on Mount Sinai God gave other laws to Moses, such as those dealing with slavery, homicide, manslaughter, property regulations, sexual relations, marriage and divorce, Sabbath rules, feasts and ceremonies, etc. When Moses came down from the mountain and relayed all these words from God to the Israelites, they answered unanimously that they would do everything God said. Moses then confirmed the agreement by writing it all down and then offering burnt sacrifices on behalf of the people. After this, he read the words of the covenant again and the Israelites repeated their earlier promise to obey everything the Lord had commanded. Moses took some of the leaders and 70 elders up on the mountain with him and there they saw the God of Israel. At His feet was a surface that was as clear as the sky and appeared as though it was paved with blue sapphire stones. Amazingly God did not destroy these men although they had seen God up close.

God had said: "You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live." (Exodus 33:20)

Mt. Sinai, where Moses was given the Ten Commandments, represents the Law with its impossible demands and frightening punishments. This mountain was a terrifying place for the people of God. It created fear in their hearts and the desire to escape divine judgment. No one could draw near to God on this mountain, except for Moses and Aaron. However God had another mountain in mind right from the beginning, called Mount Zion.

Yahweh loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob. Glorious things are spoken about you, city of God. (Psalm 87:2-3)

Zion represents Jerusalem, the city of God, a place that God loves. The word Zion occurs over 150 times in the Bible and means “fortification”.

It was originally a fortress on a hill that later became Israel’s possession as the city of Jerusalem. In the Old Testament Zion symbolizes the physical nation of Israel but in the New Testament, it refers to God’s spiritual kingdom.

But you have come to Mount Zion, and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable multitudes of angels, to the...assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better than that of Abel. (Hebrews 12:22-24)

Under the Law (Mt. Sinai) the people of God were afraid of Him. Intimacy with Him was not possible because the Law’s condemnation made the people feel condemned and guilty. Under grace (Mt. Zion) the people of God are free from all condemnation and they are invited to approach God boldly without fear. Mount Zion shows the work of Jesus Christ at the cross, whereas Mount Sinai shows mankind’s attempt to become perfect through his own effort. Mount Zion is the city God loves and the place He has chosen as His resting place forever.

For Yahweh has chosen Zion. He has desired it for his habitation. “This is my resting place forever. Here I will live, for I have desired it. I will abundantly bless her provision. I will satisfy her poor with bread. Her priests I will also clothe with salvation. Her saints will shout aloud for joy. (Psalm 132:13-16)

He chose Mount Zion, which He loved. (Psalm 78:68)

Those who trust in Yahweh are as Mount Zion, which can’t be moved, but remains forever. As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so Yahweh surrounds his people from this time forward and forever more. (Psalm 125:1-2)

He says to them, “Yet I have set my King on my holy hill of Zion’. (Psalm 2:6)

So if God loves Mount Zion, which represents intimacy and relationship with His people, why did He give the Law to Moses on Mount Sinai, knowing it would create fear in the hearts of the Israelites and do the exact opposite of what He really desired?

What then is the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring (Seed) should come to whom the promise has been made. It was ordained through angels by the hand of a mediator. (Galatians 3:19)

The above scripture indicates that the Law was given to reveal the sinful nature of mankind. The Israelites in the desert did not understand their own sinfulness. In order to form a relationship with them, God had to make them see their sinful hearts (thereby humbling them) so that they would despair of their own righteousness and seek His righteousness instead (through Jesus Christ). This is why God gave the Law.

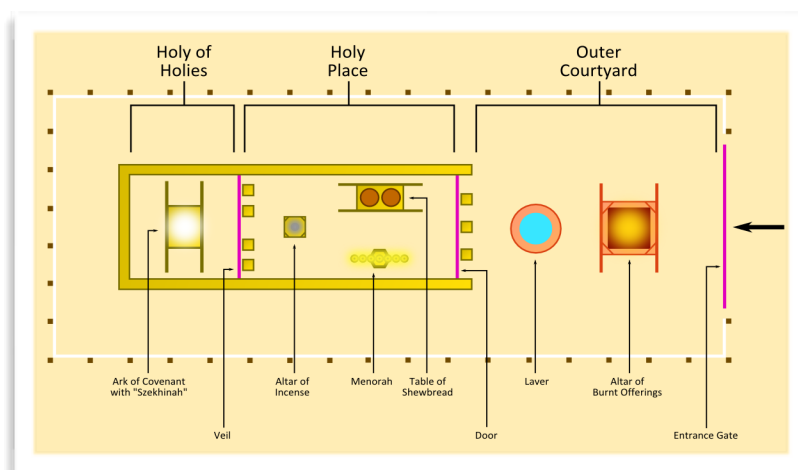
So that the law has become our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. For you are all children of God, through faith in Christ Jesus.(Galatians 3:24-26)

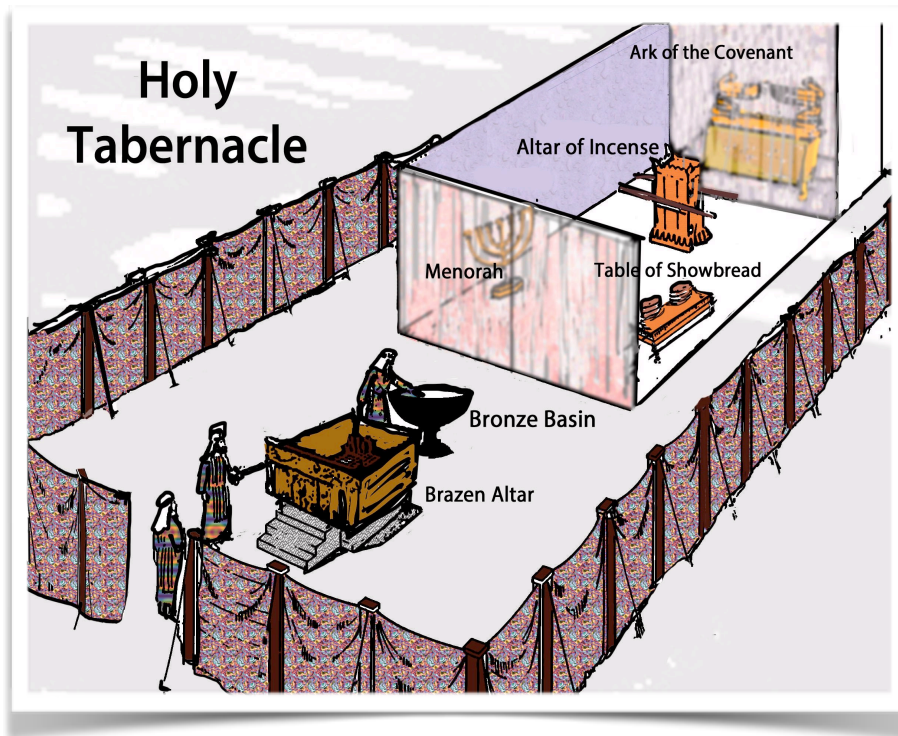
Moses went up yet again to the mountain, this time taking Joshua part way, and then moving higher until he was completely covered inside the cloud. Moses was there with God for 40 days and nights, during which time God gave more commands which involved an ark, lamp stand, and other furnishings that would be housed within a holy tent called a tabernacle. Tabernacle means tent or sanctuary. God knew that the Israelites needed to have some sort of visual evidence of His presence, so everything in the tabernacle was to signify something about God Himself and His relationship with His people. He gave very detailed instructions about the size of each part and the materials the Israelites were to use. Everything in the tabernacle was designed to show God's holiness, and to emphasize that people could only come to God on His own terms. They had to obey the directives concerning the construction of the tabernacle and also how they worshipped. Any disrespect or ritual impurity could result in an individual being cut off from Israel or in being put to death. The entire tabernacle was like a portable Mount Sinai. It was also a display of God's redemptive plan and pointed to Jesus Christ, the Word of God, who would fulfill the picture of the Old Testament tabernacle. It served as a powerful shadow to His life and ministry.

The Word became flesh, and lived among us. We saw his glory, such glory as of the one and only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14)

I heard a loud voice out of heaven saying, "Behold, God's dwelling is with people, and he will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. (Rev. 21:3)

THE TABERNACLE





The 2 illustrations above show the tabernacle (a portable tent) and how its furnishings were to be arranged. It consisted of 3 parts - the outer courtyard, the holy place, and the Holy of Holies. 1st part - The GATE served as a barrier between sinful mankind and a holy God. There was only one gate through which the Jewish people could enter into the tabernacle courtyard. It was covered by a curtain made of finely twisted linen in blue, purple and scarlet (royal colors). If an Israelite wanted to have his sin covered, he had to enter through that gate. The gate foreshadowed Jesus Christ who called Himself the one and only gateway to salvation from sin.

I am the door (gate). If anyone enters in by me, he will be saved, and will go in and go out, and will find pasture. (John 10:9).

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father, except through me. (John 14:6)

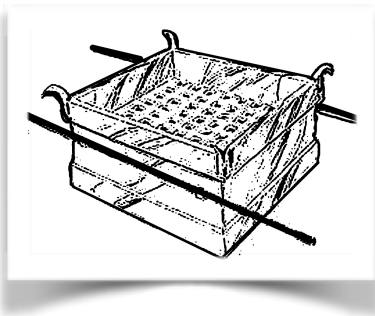
"Enter in by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter in by it. How narrow is the gate, and restricted is the way that leads to life! Few are those who find it. (Matthew 7:13-14)

2nd part- The OUTER COURTYARD was enclosed by curtains and supported on pillars. Its entrance was on the east side. The first thing that one saw upon entering through the gate into the outer courtyard was a reminder that the sinner needed a blood sacrifice in order to approach God.

The brazen altar, or altar of burnt offerings, was situated right inside the courtyard upon entrance through the gate to the tabernacle. It was the place for burning animal sacrifices and showed the Israelites that the first step for sinful man to approach a holy God was to be cleansed by the blood of an innocent creature. The altar stood on a mound of earth higher than the surrounding furniture, a shadow of Christ, our sacrifice, lifted up on the cross (His altar), which stood on a hill called Golgotha.

According to the law, nearly everything is cleansed with blood, and apart from shedding of blood there is no remission. (Hebrews 9:22)

There were 5 main offerings that the people could offer at the Altar.



The Burnt Offering was a sin offering where the person brought a blemish-free animal to the priest at the tabernacle gate. The whole animal (except the hide) was burnt up, and it atoned for the person's general sins. This offering was made twice a day for the whole nation so that God could dwell in their midst (Exodus 29:38-46), but an individual could also offer it on a voluntary basis. The one presenting the offering would lay his hand on the sacrifice, identifying himself with the animal.

He shall lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him. (Leviticus 1:4)

Then the priest slaughtered the animal and burned it, pouring the blood at the bottom of the altar. The Altar had horns at each corner, which were a symbol of power and strength in biblical times. When the sacrifice was made, blood was dabbed on the horns of the altar, signifying the power of the blood to atone for sins. Jesus is described as the "horn of our salvation"

Yahweh is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge; my shield, and the horn of my salvation... a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David. (Psalm 18:2, Luke 1:69).

The Grain Offering (Leviticus 2) was also offered twice daily on behalf of the nation, and an individual could also offer it on a voluntary basis as a gift to God. This sacrifice was offered in gratitude for God's gracious provision in life.

The Fellowship (Peace) Offering (Leviticus 3) was a sacrifice where only the fat of the animal was burnt up. The meat was shared between the priest and the person's family, who invited guests for a communal meal in the presence of God. This kind of offering might be made to thank God for prosperity or success, or as an expression of love for God. It was offered to show a desire for a deeper relationship with Him.

The Sin Offering (Leviticus 4:1-5:13) and the Guilt Offering (Leviticus 5:14-6:7) atoned for specific sins and was not voluntary. The Sin Offering atoned for sins of moral impurity and also for major ritual impurity. It had to be completely burned up, showing a total surrender to God from the one offering it. If restitution was also required, then the Guilt Offering was made as well. (Leviticus 5:11-13). (The sin offering symbolizes sins being transferred to Jesus Christ on the cross.)

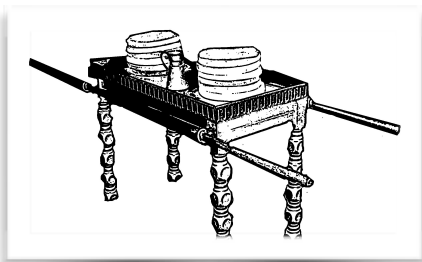


Beyond the brazen altar was the bronze basin (laver) where the priests washed their hands and feet before entering into the holy place. It served as a reminder that the people needed cleansing before approaching God. After the priests offered sacrifices at the Altar, they cleansed themselves at the Basin before entering the Holy Place. This is a symbol foreshadowing the cleansing power of God's Word, which is like the "washing of water" that is spoken of in the New Testament.

Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the assembly (Church), and gave himself up for it; that he might sanctify it, having cleansed it by the washing of water with the word. (Ephesians 5:25-26)

Let's draw near with a true heart in fullness of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and having our body washed with pure water. (Hebrews 10:22)

3rd part- The TABERNACLE came next, covered by cloth and divided into 2 chambers. The first chamber was the HOLY PLACE, the entrance of which was covered by a veil. It contained 3 items - the table of showbread, the menorah (lamp-stand), and the golden altar of incense.



The table of showbread was a golden table with 12 loaves of bread on it. It reminded the Jews that God fed His people and provided what they needed. There were 12 loaves to represent the 12 tribes of Israel. Jesus referred to Himself as the 'bread of life' and therefore the bread also signified eternal life.

Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will not be hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty. ...The Jews therefore murmured concerning him, because he said, "I am the bread which came down out of heaven." They said, "Isn't this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How then does he say, 'I have come down out of heaven?' Jesus answered them, "Don't murmur among yourselves. No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up in the last day. ... Most certainly, I tell you, he who believes in me has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died.

This is the bread, which comes down out of heaven that anyone may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down out of heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. Yes, the bread which I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.” The Jews therefore contended with one another, saying, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” Jesus therefore said to them, “Most certainly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you don’t have life in yourselves. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father; so he who feeds on me will also live because of me. This is the bread which came down out of heaven—not as our fathers ate the manna, and died. He who eats this bread will live forever.” (John 6:35-59)

Jesus spoke very clearly when He said that bread symbolized His flesh. By telling His audience that it was necessary to drink his blood and eat his flesh, Jesus was reminding them of the Tabernacle sacrifices, indicating that He would become the Supreme Sacrifice who would take away the sins of mankind. When Jesus said they would need to eat His flesh (as the Bread of Life) and drink His blood (for their Atonement), He was saying that eternal life came by taking Him personally into their lives. Eating and drinking, as Jesus explained it, was trusting in Him, just as the one who offered up an animal sacrifice in the Tabernacle trusted that the animal’s blood would cover his sins. Many of Jesus’ followers were offended and confused by His teaching and from that point on, they refused to follow Him any longer. Although they respected the traditions of their religion, they never truly understood it’s meaning and purpose.



There was also a golden lamp stand in the Holy Place called a menorah which was made out of purest gold with 7 branches, each topped with a lamp shaped like an almond blossom. Each lamp burned olive oil and remained burning throughout the night as a symbol that God’s presence was always with His people. The middle lamp represented God and it was never allowed to go out. The Menorah symbolized the light of God and the number 7 symbolized the 7 days of creation. This ever-burning light foreshadowed Jesus who would bring the light of salvation to humanity.

Again, therefore, Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world. He who follows me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the light of life.” (John 8:12)

In the New Testament, the local churches are also represented by golden lamp stands, indicating that Christian believers are filled with the light of truth that is in Christ Jesus and have His life within them.

You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. (Matthew 5:14)

In the book of Revelation, the city of God (the New Jerusalem or Bride of Christ) is mentioned as needing neither sun nor moon because the glory of God gives it light and the Lamb is its lamp. This means that the light that was once only for the nation of Israel in the Old Testament now dwells in each Christian, shining Christ's truth to all the nations of the earth.

The city has no need for the sun, neither of the moon, to shine, for the very glory of God illuminated it, and its lamp is the Lamb. (Revelation 21:23)



The menorah has been a symbol of Judaism since ancient times and is the emblem on the coat of arms of the modern state of Israel.



The altar of incense also stood within the Holy of Holies. The aroma of sweet incense (made from a special mixture used only for the tabernacle) was continually burned on this altar. It was a foreshadowing of the work of Christ, which brings great spiritual and physical joy to those made acceptable to the Father through His sacrifice.

Walk in love, even as Christ also loved you and gave himself up for us as an offering, a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling fragrance. (Ephesians 5:2)

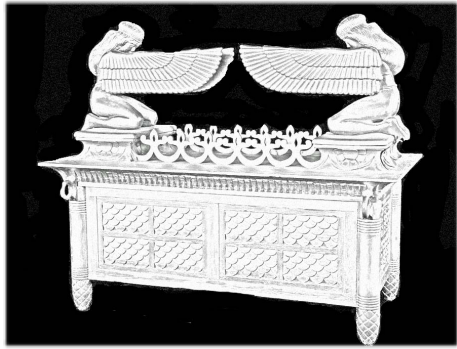
Through the veil was the second chamber, the HOLY OF HOLIES, which represented the heavenly Temple of God. It was shaped as a perfect cube representing the perfection of the Trinity. Only the High Priest was permitted to enter past the veil into this chamber, and only once a year on the Day of Atonement when he would offer up a sacrifice for the people and nation of Israel. The New Testament states that the veil was a shadow, or symbol, of Christ's body, which was crucified on the cross. When Jesus offered up His spirit, the veil was torn from top to bottom, thus allowing us to enter into the presence of God.

Having therefore, brothers, boldness to enter into the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by the way which he dedicated for us, a new and living way, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh. (Hebrews 10:19-20)

Only God could have torn the veil because it was too high and too thick for human hands to have done so. It was reportedly about 60 feet in height, 30 feet in width and four inches thick.

Jesus cried again with a loud voice, and yielded up his spirit. Behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from the top to the bottom. The earth quaked and the rocks were split. (Matthew 27:50-51).

Behind the veil stood the Ark of the Covenant, a symbol of God's Law (it contained the stone tablets of the Ten Commandments) and it symbolized the presence of God. It was a rectangular chest of acacia wood overlaid with pure gold, inside and out. It had four gold rings at each corner through which four gold poles could be inserted when carried on the shoulders of men. No one was allowed to directly touch the ark.



God would meet with the priest above the lid, called the mercy seat, that was between two Cherubim. (The cherubim are actual, unearthly creatures, perhaps a higher order of angelic beings, who attend God in heaven.) God told Moses that it would be above the mercy seat of the ark that He would give him all His commands for Israel. This mercy seat was the most important part of the ark. The blood of the sacrifice would be sprinkled over the mercy seat and the golden cherubim were designed to be constantly gazing down upon the blood. They symbolized the presence and holiness of God.

Once the ark was constructed, Israel's high priest would enter the Holy of Holies once a year and he would make atonement by offering animal sacrifices for his sins and the sins of the Israelites. The sprinkled blood of a sacrificed animal would appease the anger of God for past sins committed. This was, of course, a foreshadowing of the ultimate sacrifice of all, Christ's blood shed on the cross. Until Christ came, the blood of sacrificed animals sprinkled over the mercy seat "covered" sin, but it would be Jesus Christ who would ultimately make the supreme sacrifice that alone could atone for sin.

For the law, being a shadow of the good to come, not the very image of the things, can never with the same sacrifices year by year, which they offer continually, make perfect those who draw near. Or else wouldn't they have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, having been once cleansed, would have had no more consciousness of sins? But in those sacrifices there is a yearly reminder of sins. For it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins. Therefore when he comes into the world, he says, "Sacrifice and offering you didn't desire, but you prepared a body for me. You had no pleasure in whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin. Then I said, 'Behold, I have come (in the scroll of the book it is written of me) to do your will, O God.'" (quoted from Psalm 40:6-8)..Every priest indeed stands day by day serving and often offering the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins, but he, when he had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down on the right hand of God. (Hebrews 10:1-12)

He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours, but also for the sins of the whole world. (1 John 2:2.)

He did not enter through the blood of goats and calves, but through his own blood, he entered in once for all into the Holy Place, having obtained eternal redemption. (Hebrews 9:12)

The Law

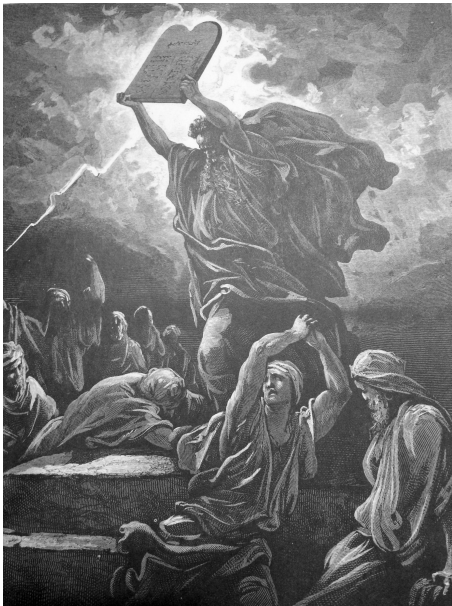
CHAPTER 7



Up on Mount Sinai God had finished giving His instructions and He ended by giving Moses two tablets of stone upon which He had etched the ten commandments. Then He warned Moses that the Israelites were in rebellion back at the camp, so much so that God disassociated Himself from them, saying the Israelites were Moses' people, not His own.

Yahweh spoke to Moses, "Go, get down; for your people, who you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves! They have turned aside quickly out of the way, which I commanded them. They have made themselves a molten calf, and have worshiped it, and have sacrificed to it, and said, 'These are your gods, Israel, which brought you up out of the land of Egypt.' ...I have seen these people, and behold, they are a stiff-necked people. Now therefore leave me alone, that my wrath may burn hot against them, and that I may consume them; and I will make of you a great nation." Moses begged Yahweh his God, and said, "Yahweh, why does your wrath burn hot against your people, that you have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians speak, saying, 'He brought them out for evil, to kill them in the mountains, and to consume them from the surface of the earth?' Turn from your fierce wrath, and repent (turn aside from) this evil against your people. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, to whom you swore by your own self, and said to them, 'I will multiply your offspring as the stars of the sky, and all this land that I have spoken of I will give to your offspring, and they shall inherit it forever.'" Yahweh repented (turned from) the evil, which he said he would do to his people. (Exodus 32: 7-14)

Moses acted as a mediator (peacemaker, go-between) for the Israelites, foreshadowing the Lord Jesus who would later become the Mediator for mankind. Moses appealed to God's reputation, saying that God's destruction of the Israelites would cause the surrounding nations to view Him as a God without mercy. Moses' plea showed that he was not just concerned for the Israelite people, but he was also concerned about God's reputation. This factor turned the Lord away from destroying the people. It is important to remember that God's Spirit resided in Moses. It was God Himself who inspired Moses in his role as intercessor. As a holy and righteous Judge, God hated the sins of Israel and rightfully demanded the death penalty, but because God is also grace and love, He desired to show mercy as well. Ultimately God wished to bring this revelation to the entire world and so it was important that the nations not view Him as only a Punisher of sin. Generations later God would satisfy both sides of His divine nature (His righteously just side, and His merciful loving side) by becoming the God/man, Jesus Christ, and dying on a cross. But even now, the seemingly conflicting sides within the Godhead were clearly evident. While demanding wrath and judgment for the Israelites' idolatry, God was also moving Moses to intercede for mercy and forgiveness. This would not be the first time God would use human intercession, inspired by Himself, to turn away His own wrath from sinful humanity.



Moses took up his tablets and descended the mountain, and that's when he saw for himself what the Israelites were up to. What he saw made him so angry that he broke the stone tablets in two. Just as God had said, the Israelites were worshipping a golden calf, feasting and getting drunk, while engaging in sexual sin. Aaron was the one who had crafted the idol. When Moses demanded an explanation, Aaron defended himself by saying that the people were rebellious and he had been unable to control them. Because they pressured him, he had instructed them to bring their gold earrings, which he had thrown into the fire, and the calf 'just came out' spontaneously. Obviously this was not how it had happened. The calf would have been crafted from the gold and this would have taken some craftsmanship, time, and planning. Aaron made the idol and identified it as the God who had parted the Red Sea and delivered them from Egypt.

He probably chose the figure of a bull to represent God because Egypt had bull gods, which symbolized strength and fertility. Although he would have known that it was wrong to make the idol, it seems that Aaron was not a bold leader like his brother Moses, for he feared to resist the will of the people. After their idol was made, the Israelites offered sacrifices to it and indulged in feasting, drunkenness, and sexual orgies, just as they had observed and practiced in Egypt.

The Israelites were entirely without excuse for this outright display of rebellion for they had already received God's commands against idolatry. Their demand for an idol was a purely rebellious act. God held the people responsible for their corruption and He would have destroyed them if it hadn't been for Moses' intercession on their behalf. Moses immediately dealt harshly with the situation.

He had the idol ground into powder, which he mixed with water, and then he forced the people to drink the mixture. Metals in drinking water can cause health problems so it is possible that the people would have become sick from drinking the water. Then Moses called for those who were on the Lord's side to come stand with him. The Levites obeyed and stood with him, after which Moses gave them the Lord's command to go through the camp and kill anyone who persisted in their rebellion. These were probably the ones who refused to drink the water with the gold dust in it. Three thousand men were killed. It was an object lesson that the Israelites would not soon forget.

The next day, Moses went up and confessed the people's sins before God, asking Him for forgiveness. He even told God that if He didn't forgive the people, then he wanted his own name blotted out of God's book of life. God answered that the guilty ones would pay with their own deaths and their names would be erased from His book. Later this is exactly what happened because the Israelites denied God's promises and refused to follow His leadership into the land of Canaan. As a result God would give up on them and would send them into the wilderness to die in their sins.

The Holy Spirit says, "Today if you will hear his voice, don't harden your hearts, as in the rebellion, like as in the day of the trial in the wilderness, where your fathers tested me by proving me, and saw my deeds for forty years. Therefore I was displeased with that generation, and said, 'They always err in their heart, but they didn't know my ways; as I swore in my wrath, 'They will not enter into my rest.' (Hebrews 3:7-11)

Moses had a close relationship with God who spoke with him face to face, as with a friend. One day Moses asked God to show him His glory. Unable to withstand the full force of such a display, Moses was nevertheless allowed to see God's back as He passed by.

God told Moses: "I will make all my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim Yahweh's name before you. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy." (Exodus 33:19)

Moses cut 2 stone tablets and took them back up to Mt. Sinai where he was met by the Lord in a cloud. There God spoke to Moses, revealing Himself as a merciful God who is kind and is not easily angered. He spoke of His love for the Israelite people and His willingness to forgive the penitent, but He warned that this did not do away with His justice for He would surely punish the guilty. God then added that He was a jealous God who would not tolerate idolatry. He stated that the pagan peoples of Canaan would try to tempt the Israelites to sin and they needed to be on guard. When Moses eventually came down from the mountain with the two tablets, on which God had rewritten the Ten Commandments, his face was shining from having met with the Lord, although he was unaware of this at first. The people saw it and were afraid of him so Moses put a veil over his face. Then Moses was able to talk to the people and tell them what God had told him.

After this, Moses set about getting skilled workers from among the Israelites to make the Holy Tent (Tabernacle), the Ark of the Covenant, the lamp stand, and all the other furnishings God had described. An altar was built for sacrificial offerings and a large bronze bowl was crafted from the mirrors donated by the Israelite women.

Curtains were made for the courtyard and special clothes were woven for the priests. Moses inspected everything to make sure that it was all done according to God's instructions. When everything had been completed, Aaron and his sons were given holy clothes to wear and then anointed with oil at the entrance of the Tabernacle. The stone tablets were put inside the Ark of the Covenant and the Ark was brought into the Tabernacle. A great cloud settled over the Holy Tent, filling it with the glory of God so that no one could enter. As long as the cloud hovered over the Tabernacle, the people stayed in one place, but when it moved, then the people would pack up all their belongings and move on. The cloud sometimes stayed over the Tent for 2 days, a week, a month, or even a year. The cloud was always within sight as the Israelites journeyed. God had given detailed instructions to Moses concerning the tabernacle and how the people were to worship Him, and Moses had faithfully passed these on to the people.



However Aaron's two older sons, Nadab and Abihu, were careless, ignoring God's instructions for burning the holy incense. They had been given the special privilege of accompanying Moses, Aaron, and the seventy elders when they all went up the mountain and they saw the God of Israel. They should have had a great respect for God because of this. However they took their censors, put fire in them, and offered it before the Lord contrary to His command. It could have been that the brothers offered fire of their own making rather than taking fire from the altar, or they could have shown disrespect in some other way. Whatever they did, it greatly angered God because it dishonored Him. Immediately fire came out from God's presence and the two men died in the blaze, clearly emphasizing that those who served as priests before the Lord were required to serve Him faithfully, or die if they disobeyed Him. It was a lesson needed by the entire nation of Israel for they were a stubborn and rebellious people.

They had so quickly returned to pagan idolatry when they worshipped the golden calf, proving that they needed God's laws to restrain them. They were given 613 rules in every area of life concerning diet, skin diseases, motherhood, personal hygiene, modesty, sexual relations, slavery, priesthood behavior, holidays, Sabbath rest, harvests, feasts, property laws, parenting, etc. However the laws and rules were not all restrictive and there were many joyous festivals of celebration such as the Year of Jubilee, which released the people from all debt and bondage. All prisoners, slaves, and captives were set free and all property was returned to its original owners. No one labored that year and both the land and the people were able to rest. This year of freedom presents a wonderful picture of redemption and forgiveness in Christ who sets free those who are slaves and prisoners to sin. Thousands of years later, Jesus would read from Isaiah 61:1,2 where it describes Messiah as being anointed to announce good news to poor people in the year of Jubilee.

He has sent me to heal the broken hearted, to proclaim release to the captives, recovering of sight to the blind, to deliver those who are crushed, and to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord. (Luke 4:18)

In spite of the Law, rebellion sometimes occurred within the camp, such as when the son of an Israelite woman and Egyptian man got into a fight and began cursing God. This was something God could not allow for one moment, and Moses and the people were instructed to deal harshly with the rebel by stoning him to death. The Israelites were obedient to God's command and they delivered the death penalty to the rebellious man. Far from being harsh, it was a necessary action to dissuade the rest of the people from treating sin lightly. Disrespect for God's holiness could lead to more incidents like the one where the Israelites fashioned a golden calf to worship. Through Moses, God promised the people that when they were obedient, He would give them rewards such as abundant crops, health, large families, and peace, but when they were rebellious, He promised to send severe punishment.

'But if you will not listen to me, and will not do all these commandments; and if you shall reject my statutes, and if your soul abhors my ordinances, so that you will not do all my commandments, but break my covenant; I also will do this to you: I will appoint terror over you, even consumption and fever, that shall consume the eyes, and make the soul to pine away. You will sow your seed in vain, for your enemies will eat it. I will set my face against you, and you will be struck before your enemies. Those who hate you will rule over you; and you will flee when no one pursues you.... 'If you walk contrary to me, and won't listen to me, then I will bring seven times more plagues on you according to your sins. I will send the wild animals among you, which will rob you of your children, destroy your livestock, and make you few in number. Your roads will become desolate. (Leviticus 26:14-17, 21-22)

These warnings, though severe, were ignored by certain Israelites. At the time for the Israelites to celebrate their first Passover since leaving Egypt, there were some who had little gratitude in their hearts for their miraculous deliverance. These troublemakers were always complaining and they got the other people to join along them.

The mixed multitude that was among them lusted exceedingly; and the children of Israel also wept again, and said, "Who will give us flesh to eat? We remember the fish, which we ate in Egypt; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlic; but now we have lost our appetite. There is nothing at all except this manna to look at. (Numbers 11:4-6)

This murmuring angered the Lord and Moses became discouraged and depressed. Moses felt that the burden of leading such a difficult people was just too much. God must have agreed because He told Moses to bring 70 elders to the Tabernacle so that He could transfer some of His Spirit from Moses to them. Then God dealt with the people's complaints by sending a strong wind from the sea, which caused flocks of quail to pass low over the camp so that they could be easily captured. The people had so much meat that they couldn't eat it all. However the Lord was still angry with them and He caused some of the people to sicken and die while the meat was still in their mouths.

Complaining was common among the Israelites and it could quickly spread to the entire camp in a very short time, which is why God put a sudden stop to it. This was especially important when it was the leadership that was doing all the complaining. In one case, Aaron and Miriam began to speak against Moses, largely because they didn't approve of his marriage to a woman from Cush, a region south of Ethiopia, where the people were known for their black skin. It was not illegal at that time to have more than one wife, and since Moses' wife Zipporah seems to have chosen to remain with her father back in Midian, his choice of a second wife was not impractical. However, choosing a dark-skinned woman seems to have elicited disrespect for Moses in his brother and sister who saw themselves as equal or superior to Moses as leaders of the nation. This was something God would not allow. If Miriam and Aaron disrespected Moses and went against him, Israel as a nation would soon follow their example. God called Moses, Aaron and Miriam to the Tabernacle and told them of His decision.

“Now hear my words. If there is a prophet among you, I, Yahweh, will make myself known to him in a vision. I will speak with him in a dream. My servant Moses is not so. He is faithful in all my house. With him, I will speak mouth to mouth, even plainly, and not in riddles; and he shall see Yahweh's form. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant, against Moses?” Yahweh's anger burned against them; and he departed. The cloud departed from over the Tent; and behold, Miriam was leprous, as white as snow. Aaron looked at Miriam, and behold, she was leprous. (Numbers 12:6-10)

Some suggest that God may have struck Miriam with leprosy because her complaint of Moses' marriage to the Cushite woman was racist in nature, i.e. she opposed the marriage on the grounds that the woman's skin color was black. Was God perhaps giving Miriam a sharp lesson in preferring white skin by causing her to become “white as snow”? Whether this was so or not is uncertain. What is certain is God's affirmation of Moses as His chosen leader. Miriam's leprosy put a stop to any further rebellion from Moses' siblings. Both of them begged Moses for forgiveness and Miriam was healed of her leprosy after Moses prayed for her. However God said she had to suffer with the disease for one week, perhaps to let the message sink in and keep her from further rebellion.

Having Aaron and Miriam challenge Moses' leadership was bad enough but another act of rebellion was yet to come. The Israelites had reached the edge of Canaan and were now faced with the prospect of taking over the Promised Land. The Lord told Moses to gather a leader from each tribe to make up 12 spies to secretly go exploring. They were in Canaan for 40 days, after which they returned to the camp to give their report.

The first thing they showed the Israelites was a huge vine with a cluster of grapes so large that it took two men to carry it. Obviously Canaan was a fertile land with good crops. However almost all the spies gave a bad report about the people living there, describing them as strong, tall, and much too powerful to overcome. They said the Anakites, who were related to the Nephilim (giants from the Genesis flood), made them feel like grasshoppers in comparison.



Only Joshua and Caleb spoke positively about taking the land, expressing faith in God's power to defeat all their enemies. However the people were overcome with fear and they began to cry loudly, saying they were better off in Egypt. In fact, they began to talk about picking a leader to take them back there. Moses and Aaron bowed before the Lord in silence but Caleb and Joshua spoke out boldly: *"The land, which we passed through to spy it out, is an exceeding good land. If Yahweh delights in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it to us; a land which flows with milk and honey. Only don't rebel against Yahweh, neither fear the people of the land, for they are bread for us. Their defense is removed from over them, and Yahweh is with us. Don't fear them."* (Numbers 14:7-9)

Unfortunately their encouraging words fell on deaf ears. The people began to grumble against Joshua and Caleb and talked about killing them with stones. But at that moment the glory of the Lord appeared at the Tabernacle and God spoke out in anger against the people, threatening to get rid of them. Again it was only Moses' intercession that stopped God from carrying out His intention.

Moses said to Yahweh, *"Then the Egyptians will hear it; for you brought up this people in your might from among them. They will tell it to the inhabitants of this land. They have heard that you Yahweh are in the middle of this people; for you Yahweh are seen face to face, and your cloud stands over them, and you go before them, in a pillar of cloud by day, and in a pillar of fire by night. Now if you killed this people as one man, then the nations which have heard the fame of you will speak, saying, 'Because Yahweh was not able to bring this people into the land which he swore to them, therefore he has slain them in the wilderness.' Now please let the power of the Lord be great, according as you have spoken, saying, 'Yahweh is slow to anger, and abundant in loving kindness, forgiving iniquity and disobedience; and that will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and on the fourth generation.' Please pardon the iniquity of this people according to the greatness of your loving kindness, and according as you have forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now."* (Numbers 14:13-19)

Moses' appeal to God's mercy won out and God forgave the people, but not without making a promise to them. Because they had seen all His miracles in Egypt and in the desert, yet still had rejected Him, none of them would be permitted to enter the land of Canaan. Only their children would be allowed to take the land. Everyone 20 years or older would have to wander in the desert for 40 years (one year for each of the 40 days the spies explored Canaan) until they died there. The 10 spies who gave the bad report didn't even get off that easy. God killed them right there with a terrible sickness. Only Joshua and Caleb did not die.

The Israelites were saddened and too proud to accept their fate. The idea of wondering for 40 years in the desert did not appeal to them at all.

Some of them took up weapons and went up into the mountains to fight the Amalekites and Canaanites, even though Moses warned them not to go because the Lord would not go with them. Just as Moses had warned, the Israelites were defeated and driven back by their enemies. God had left the Israelites, because the Israelites had first left Him.

Generations later, just before the Temple in Jerusalem was forever destroyed, there were Jews who outwardly professed Christ but who were seriously thinking about turning back to Judaism. Just as their ancestors had hesitated about entering Canaan, these doubters also hesitated to enter the heavenly 'promised land' (the Kingdom of Jesus Christ). The apostle Paul warned them not to repeat the same disastrous mistake the Israelites had made in the desert.

Therefore I was displeased with that generation, and said, 'They always err in their heart, but they didn't know my ways;' as I swore in my wrath, 'They will not enter into my rest.' (Hebrews 3:10-11) (from Psalm 95:7-11)

God's warnings did not impress four leaders from the Levite and Reuben tribes - Korah, Abiram, On, and Dathan by name. These men were stubborn rebels and they gathered 250 other well-known leaders from the community and challenged Moses and Aaron by questioning their authority to rule the people. They told Moses that he had 'gone too far'. Moses replied that it was they who had gone too far and God would make His choice known the following day. The four rebels, and the 250 who followed them, were instructed to get pans for burning incense and take them to the Tabernacle. However Nathan and Abiram refused to come, thereby showing their rejection of Moses' right to lead them in any way. All the rest stood before the Tabernacle and the glory of the Lord appeared before them. God told Moses and Aaron to warn the people to stand away from the tents of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram (On was not mentioned, perhaps because he was having second thoughts about the wisdom of going against God). The people moved away from the rebels and Moses prayed that the Lord would clearly show the Israelites that He had chosen both himself and Aaron to lead the nation. He asked God to give this confirmation by causing the earth to swallow up the rebels. This time Moses did not pray for God to have mercy. He could see that these men would never repent and that they would become a bad example for the rest of the Israelites. If Korah, Dathan, and Abiram got away with defying Moses' leadership, then the entire nation would follow them. Immediately the ground shook and split open, swallowing up Korah's men, along with their families and all their possessions. Then the ground covered them up, burying them alive amid their screams. This was followed by a fire that came down and consumed the 250 men who had also taken part in the rebellion.

It was a frightening event, but rather than persuading the people to obey, it stirred up their anger. Next day the people gathered around Moses and Aaron, accusing them of killing the Lord's people. They reacted the same way Pharaoh had reacted when God sent the judgments against Egypt. Their hearts were hardened and they became more rebellious than ever. Suddenly God appeared in a cloud in front of the Tabernacle and declared to Moses that He would destroy the people immediately. Moses knew God meant what He said and this time his intercession would not help. A deadly sickness began to spread through the masses, killing the people where they stood. However Moses had an idea.

He told Aaron to quickly put incense in his pan and run into the crowd to remove their sin. Because of Aaron's high priestly action, God stopped the sickness from spreading, but not before 14,700 people died.

God knew that the people needed even more persuasion to stop their grumbling against Moses and Aaron, so He instructed Moses to have the leader of each tribe write his name on a walking stick and put them in the Tabernacle. Aaron put his name on the stick representing the Levite tribe. Moses told the people that the stick that bore leaves and buds would be proof of God's choice among them. Next day when Moses entered the Tabernacle, it was seen that Aaron's stick had grown leaves, buds, blossoms, and even had almonds on it. Each tribal leader took up his stick but Aaron's was placed before the Ark of the Covenant as a constant reminder to the people to stop complaining against God. This time the people were impressed and cried out in fear that God would surely destroy them. They were so terrified that they were afraid of coming anywhere near the Tabernacle. The sickness that killed 14,700 people, and the earth swallowing up Korah and the rebels had done little to teach the Israelites to respect God. However the miracle of a dead tree branch coming to life absolutely terrified the people. Finally they realized that they were dealing with the Creator God. They had seen plenty of instances where God had caused death, such as the plague that took the firstborn in Egypt, but now they had seen God bring something to life and this inspired real awe.

The people moved on and came to Kadesh in the Desert of Zin. This is where Miriam died and was buried. There was no water there, however, and soon the Israelites were complaining once more. Moses must have been completely frustrated with the people by this time. Over and over again the Israelites grumbled and complained against God and himself. God told Moses to take his staff and go with Aaron to gather the people around a certain rock. Moses was to speak to the rock and water would flow out. However Moses was unable to control his rage and he spoke angrily to them.

Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock, and he said to them, "Hear now, you rebels! Shall we bring water out of this rock for you?" Moses lifted up his hand, and struck the rock with his rod twice, and water came out abundantly. The congregation and their livestock drank. (Numbers 20:10,11)

God was displeased with what Moses had done. He had disobeyed a direct command from God and had taken the credit for the miracle of bringing forth the water. Worst of all, he had done it in front of all the people in a highly public manner. Such disrespect could not go unpunished. Besides, the rock was a shadow or symbol of Christ.

Now I would not have you ignorant, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and all ate the same spiritual food; and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of a spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ. (1 Corinthians 10:1-4).

Previously Moses had been instructed to strike a rock in order to get water for the Israelites. That action had symbolized the crucifixion of Jesus on the cross.

However in this instance God had wanted Moses to speak to the rock in order to give the people a picture of God's grace in response to faith and prayer. Instead Moses disobeyed and acted in arrogance and rage, misrepresenting and disrespecting Christ and His sacrifice. As a result God told Moses he would not be leading the people into Canaan.

Yahweh said to Moses and Aaron, "Because you didn't believe in me, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them." (Numbers 20: 12)

Aaron was included in the Lord's prohibition, probably because of his creating the golden calf at Mount Sinai and dishonoring the Lord in that way. Both Moses and Aaron were greatly saddened by the Lord's pronouncement. God had made some amazing promises concerning the land of Canaan and Moses and Aaron had been given the honor of leading the entire nation of Israel towards it. Now to be told that they were unable to enter it themselves must have been a crushing disappointment. Unfortunately such defeat can happen to spiritual leaders who, through disobedience or neglect, disqualify themselves as leaders. Leaders useful to the Lord have a high calling to be faithful and self-controlled. This is confirmed in the qualifications necessary for a pastor (overseer) in the New Testament.

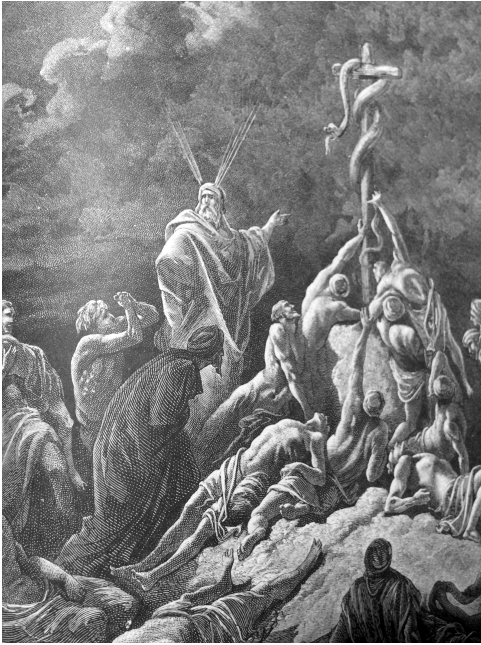
For the overseer must be blameless, as God's steward; not self-pleasing, not easily angered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for dishonest gain; but given to hospitality, a lover of good, sober minded, fair, holy, self-controlled. (Titus 1:7-8)

Moses and Aaron were set aside by God as leaders for Israel into Canaan, but they were allowed to continue in their leadership roles while in the desert. Their unfortunate failures did not mean that they lost the reward of salvation promised through the coming Messiah. In fact, Moses is honored in many places in scripture, including in the list of faith in the New Testament.

By faith, Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to share ill treatment with God's people, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a time... accounting the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he looked to the reward. By faith, he left Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king, for he endured, seeing God who is invisible, ahead of him. (Hebrews 11:24-27)

As is true for Moses, so it is true for all God's children who seek the spiritual riches of a spiritual Canaan (the kingdom of heaven) by placing their faith in Jesus. Unfortunately most of the Israelites did not have a genuine faith in God, but only professed to have faith.

To whom did he swear that they wouldn't enter into his rest, but to those who were disobedient? We see that they were not able to enter in because of unbelief... For indeed we have had good news preached to us, even as they also did, but the word they heard didn't profit them, because it wasn't mixed with faith by those who heard. (Hebrews 3:18-19, 4:2)



At Mount Hor the Israelites once again became impatient with God and with Moses. They began to grumble and complain, and this time God sent poisonous snakes to bite the people as punishment. When they begged Moses to ask God to take the vipers away, the Lord told Moses to make a bronze snake and place it on top of a pole. When anyone who was the victim of snakebite looked at it, he would live. The bronze snake would have reminded the people of the time in Egypt when Moses' rod turned into a large snake that ate up all the Egyptian magicians' snakes. It would have reminded the Israelites that God's power is greater than all the forces of nature and all false gods. However it was also a very powerful foreshadowing of what God would do in the future, many generations later. The bronze snake Moses made symbolized the destruction of the snake in Eden, i.e. Satan, who was instrumental in bringing the curse of sin on mankind.

That ancient serpent had been cursed with the promise that a Seed, born of woman, would come and ultimately crush the tempter beneath His heel. Jesus Christ was that promised Seed. When Jesus was lifted up on a cross, He became a curse and took away sin from everyone who would look to Him in faith, thereby saving them from an eternity in hell. Satan's power over mankind through death and sin was destroyed forever. This was foreshadowed in this incident where the Israelites were saved from physical death by looking to the upraised snake symbol.

*Jesus told a man named Nicodemus: **As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life. (John 3:14-15)***

*And the New Testament says: **Since then the children have shared in flesh and blood, he also himself in the same way partook of the same, that through death he might bring to nothing him who had the power of death, that is, the devil. (Hebrews 2:14)***

As the Israelites travelled through the desert, they had to pass by various tribes living there. One of these tribes was led by a king called Og who ruled over 60 fortified cities. He was a very large man—his bed was made of iron and was 13.5 feet long and 6 feet wide. This means he was probably 10 or 11 feet in height! Og was one of the last of the Rephaites, a race of giants. (These were likely the descendants of the Nephilim mentioned in Genesis). But in spite of King Og's great size and strength, God gave Israel's army the victory and they possessed the land of Bashan. Reports of this great victory, along with the Red Sea crossing and other miracles God had performed for the Israelites, spread throughout the surrounding neighboring tribes. Some, such as the Moabites who lived near the Jordan River, were absolutely terrified of the Israelites. They were too afraid to engage them in direct battle because they feared they would lose.



King Balak of Moab was so fearful that he sought out a well-known prophet named Balaam, who really did hear from God and received true prophecies. These prophecies always came true so King Balak sent money to Balaam, and asked him to curse Israel. He was hoping that if the Israelites could be weakened through a curse, then perhaps he could defeat them and make them leave the area. Balaam was a greedy man so he was willing to do this but he needed God's permission first because he knew he had no power in himself to curse Israel. However God told Balaam that he was not to put a curse on the Israelite people because they were blessed. When Balaam sent word to King Balak that he could not curse Israel, Balak sent more messengers and the promise of greater reward.



This time God told Balaam to go see Balak but to only speak as God instructed. The next morning, Balaam saddled his donkey and left for Moab but God sent an angel to stop Balaam on the way. This was because God knew that Balaam's heart was wicked and He knew the evil plans on the prophet's mind. Balaam's donkey saw an angel on the path they were taking, but Balaam didn't see him. Three times the donkey moved to avoid the angel and Balaam got so angry that he began beating the animal. Then God opened the donkey's mouth and it rebuked the prophet for the beatings. This was probably God speaking through the animal in order to forcibly get Balaam's attention, who seemed to be out of his mind with anger. God opened Balaam's eyes so that he could finally see the angel of the Lord standing in the road with his sword drawn. The angel told Balaam that he certainly would have killed him if the donkey hadn't spared him. The angel then repeated God's instructions to Balaam to speak only what God told him to speak concerning the Hebrews.

In Moab, King Balak took the prophet up to a high place where a temple of Moab's god, Baal, was situated. Balaam offered 14 sacrifices on 7 altars and met with God, but God would still not allow him to curse Israel. Instead He instructed Balaam to bless them. Then King Balak took Balaam to another worship site high up on a mountain and Balaam made some more sacrifices to God, but with the same result. God refused to curse Israel. In fact, Balaam was again given a prophecy of blessing for the Israelites.

“Rise up, Balak, and hear! ... God is not a man, that he should lie, nor the son of man, that he should repent. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not make it good? Behold, I have received a command to bless. He has blessed, and I can't reverse it. He has not seen iniquity in Jacob. Neither has he seen perverseness in Israel. Yahweh his God is with him. (Numbers 23: 18-21)

King Balak was enraged and he sent Balaam home without any reward. However it appears that before Balaam left for home, he gave the king some advice about how to turn the Hebrew God against His own people.

Balaam knew that if the Israelites could be corrupted, God might be persuaded to curse them after all. Knowing the Lord's standards of morality and His jealousy against worshiping any other gods, Balaam cunningly advised Balak to send the women of Moab out to the Israelites so they could offer the men sexual favors if they worshipped their god with them. The plan worked and the Israelite men joined the Moabite women in their worship of their god, Baal Peor. God was indeed angry and He commanded that Israel's judges put to death all the people who had been involved in the pagan worship. A terrible sickness swept through the camp that eventually killed 24,000 people. It was only stopped when Phinehas, son of Aaron, took up a spear and went after an Israelite man who had taken a Midianite chieftain's daughter into his tent to have sex with her. The execution of the sinful man stopped God's anger. It pleased Him that Phinehas hated sin as much as He did and had tried to save God's honor among the people. As a reward for this, God promised that Phinehas and his descendants would always be priests.

However the Lord was not about to let the Midianites get away with their wicked actions. He called upon the Israelites to make war against them. They attacked and killed all the Midianite men, including Balaam the prophet, but they made an exception concerning the women, children, animals, and goods by keeping them for themselves. Moses was angry with the army officers when he saw this.

Moses said to them: "Have you saved all the women alive? Behold, these caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to commit trespass against Yahweh in the matter of Peor, and so the plague was among the congregation of Yahweh. Now therefore kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman who has known man by lying with him. But all the girls, who have not known man by lying with him, keep alive for yourselves. (Numbers 31:15-18)

Israel was now on the border of Canaan and the people were given God's instructions for dividing up the lands between the tribes. The Levites were to be given 48 cities, 6 of which were to act as cities of safety. These cities were places of refuge for anyone who accidentally killed someone and needed protection from the victim's vengeful family and friends. Accidental deaths were to be judged by the community and if they were truly accidental, then the murderer was to remain in the city until the high priest died, after which he could go home. If the death was not accidental however, the murderer was to be put to death. In cases where the murderer was judged to have killed accidentally but left the city of safety while the priest was still living, the attacker could be caught and the avenger would have the right to kill him. It was only the high priest's life that covered over his sin and provided protection from judgment. These cities of refuge were a type of Jesus Christ, who, as our High Priest, provides refuge from sin and judgment if we flee to Him for safety. Because Jesus Christ is our High Priest and because He can never die, we are eternally safe in His presence and cannot be judged or condemned.

Moses was now 120 years old. The Lord had told him that he would soon die and that Joshua would take his place as leader of Israel. Moses wrote down all the laws and commands of God in a book and gave them to the priests and elders of Israel to be placed beside the Ark of the Covenant in the Tabernacle.

Then he gathered the people and commanded them to choose life and success through obedience to God. He warned the people that if they turned away from God they would be choosing death and destruction. He left them with a song inspired by the Holy Spirit as a 'witness against them' because he knew that Israel would become completely evil after he died.

...They abandoned the God who made them and rejected the Rock their Savior. They made Him jealous with their foreign gods and angered Him with their detestable idols. They sacrificed to false gods, which are not God— gods they had not known...You deserted the Rock, who fathered you; you forgot the God who gave you birth. The Lord saw this and rejected them because he was angered by His sons and daughters.... I will make them envious by those who are not a people; I will make them angry by a nation that has no understanding...He will take vengeance on his enemies and make atonement for His land and people. (Deuteronomy 32: 1-43)

This song of Moses was filled with prophetic content such as making Israel jealous with "those not a nation". This referred to God's choice of the Gentiles to be His people at a future time.

But I ask, didn't Israel know? First Moses says, "I will provoke you to jealousy with that which is no nation, with a nation void of understanding I will make you angry...I ask then, did they stumble that they might fall? May it never be! But by their fall, salvation has come to the Gentiles, to provoke them to jealousy. (Romans: 10:19,11:11)

Moses climbed Mount Nebo and God showed him the land He was giving to his descendants. Then Moses died and God buried him. Although he was 120 years old, Moses had remained physically strong right to the end. The Israelites were deeply saddened and mourned his passing for 30 days. Never had there been a prophet like Moses in Israel who spoke with God face to face as with a friend, and who had done amazing signs and miracles for all the Israelites to see.

This wasn't the end of Moses, however. He appeared on earth in spiritual form thousands of years later at the time when Jesus took Peter, James and John up on a mountain to pray. In that incident, Jesus was suddenly glorified before His disciples, His clothing a dazzling white, and His face shining like the sun. Moses, symbolizing the Law, and Elijah, representing the Prophets, also appeared and talked with Jesus about His death that was soon to occur. It was a mind-blowing sight and the disciples were completely awestruck, especially Peter who was overcome with amazement. He could hardly get his thoughts together as he gazed upon these two Old Covenant figures standing there alive before him. The Law and the Prophets all spoke of Jesus, foreshadowing Him as the supreme fulfillment of God's plan and purpose for mankind. This is why God's voice sounded from heaven saying: "This is my Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased. Listen to Him!" When the disciples looked up, they saw only Jesus, for Moses and Elijah had gone back to their resting place where they continued to wait for the time when Jesus would finish the atonement for sin and take them from Sheol up to heaven.

Joshua

CHAPTER 8



It was now about 1240 BC and Joshua, son of Nun, was Israel's new leader. "Joshua" is "Yehoshua," or "Yeshua," in Hebrew, the same name that appears in English as "Jesus." He had been Moses' second in command and had proven his faithfulness to God many times. He had been with Moses on Mt. Sinai when God gave the Law. He was a great military leader who defeated the Amalekites in the desert and had not been afraid of their size or the strength of their cities. As one of the twelve spies who traveled to Canaan, only he and Caleb had encouraged the people to trust God to deliver the Canaanites into Israel's hands. After Moses passed away God encouraged Joshua, reminding him to obey everything Moses had written in the Book of Teachings (Torah). He told Joshua not to be afraid because He, God, would never leave him or forsake him.

The people of Israel crossed over the Jordan River into the land of 'milk and honey' that God had promised to Abraham over 500 years ago. The next step was to conquer the territory. Joshua decided that the best plan was to drive a wedge into the center of the land in order to separate the north from the south. The city of Jericho stood directly in the path and thus became the first target. Jericho was a well fortified city with great high walls. In those days such cities were either taken by direct attack or surrounded by armies until the people were starved into submission. These methods often took weeks or months, and the attackers usually lost many soldiers. Joshua was hoping for a faster means of subduing the city so he sent out two spies to check out Jericho and bring back a report. The spies entered Jericho and decided that an inn was the safest place to stay. It was not uncommon for both an inn and a brothel to function within the same building, and such a place would have been a good source of information. They stayed with a woman named Rahab, a prostitute, whose house was situated on the wall of the city. Somehow the king of Jericho heard that there were two Israelite spies in his city, and that they had been seen at Rahab's house.

The king sent his soldiers with a message to Rahab to bring out the men, but instead she protected them by hiding them on her roof where stalks of flax were spread out to dry. Rahab covered them up with the flax and then went down to talk to the kings' soldiers, pretending that she hadn't known the two men were Israelites. She added that the spies were long gone, encouraging the soldiers to hurry after them on the road that leads to the Jordan River. The kings' men believed her and left, after which Rahab went back up to the roof to talk to the spies. She told them that the people of Jericho were fearful of the Israelites ever since they had heard how Israel's God had defeated the Egyptians at the Red Sea forty years earlier. However Rahab believed in the Hebrew God.

"I know that Yahweh has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you. For we have heard how Yahweh dried up the water of the Red Sea before you, when you came out of Egypt; and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites, who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and to Og, whom you utterly destroyed. As soon as we had heard it, our hearts melted, and there wasn't any more spirit in any man, because of you: for Yahweh your God, he is God in heaven above, and on earth beneath'. (Joshua 2:8-11)

Rahab agreed to help the spies escape if they would promise to protect her and her family in the upcoming battle. The spies agreed on condition that she mark her house by hanging a scarlet rope out of her window so the Israelites would know which was her home. They warned her that all the members of her family had to be inside the house during the battle or they would not be protected. Rahab tied the rope to her window and the spies used it to climb down the city wall. After they were gone, Rahab left the scarlet rope hanging there. The two spies returned to Joshua, eagerly reporting everything they had learned, saying that the Lord had given Israel all the land because the people of Canaan were terrified of them. Early next morning Joshua had the Israelites travel to the Jordan River. He commanded the priests to carry the Ark of the Covenant to the riverbank with all the people following. The Lord told Joshua that He would cause the people to respect him as their new leader by performing a miracle similar to the one He had performed with Moses at the Red Sea. He would cause the waters of the Jordan River to part so that the people could walk on dry land to the other side. This would remind the people of God's great power behind Moses when he had uplifted his staff over the Red Sea and it parted to let the people pass through. This miracle would be similar and it would affirm God's choice of Joshua as His chosen leader for Israel. The priests carried the Ark of the Covenant into the river and as their feet touched the water, the water upstream stopped flowing, piling up into a heap. The priests halted in the middle of the dry riverbed until all the people had safely crossed over. Then they also went to the other side and immediately the waters began to flow once again.

In 1927 there were earth tremors in this same spot and the Jordan River was dammed up for over 21 hours.

This event did not go unnoticed. The Canaanite kings in the surrounding lands heard of this miracle and were greatly afraid of facing the Israelites. The king of Jericho was especially fearful as he knew Israelite spies had already been to his city. He had the city gates closed and no one was allowed to enter or exit.

Joshua wanted the river crossing to be remembered by the Israelites so he had 12 stones taken from the riverbed and piled up as a marker showing where the priests had walked. Another 12 stones marked Israel's first base camp in the land. This was the same stretch of the Jordan where John the Baptist would later baptize Jesus, symbolizing the Lord's first step in publicly announcing His kingdom.

As the Israelite soldiers prepared for battle, Joshua encountered a man with a sword standing in front of him. He asked the man if he was a friend or an enemy and the man said he was neither. He identified himself as the Commander of the Lord's army and told Joshua to remove his sandals because the ground he stood on was holy. Joshua immediately fell on his face and addressed him as "Master" indicating that Joshua saw this being as either God Himself or an angel. Whether the commander of the Lord's army was angelic or divine, it was God communicating an important message to Joshua on to how to carry out the attack against Jericho.



He was to have seven priests carry the Ark of the Covenant as they marched around the city, blowing on their ram's horns. This was to be repeated once each day for six days. On the 7th day, they were to march around the city seven times and on a signal from Joshua, they were to give a long blast on their horns and the people were to give a loud shout. God told Joshua that after this, the walls of Jericho would fall and the people could go straight into the city. Joshua passed these instructions on to his men, warning that no one was to be left alive - not man, woman or child - except for Rahab who had helped the spies. All the bronze, gold, and silver was to be set apart for God. This was because Jericho, as the first conquered city in the Promised Land, was to be a first fruits offering to the Lord. Nothing was to be taken for the Israelites themselves.

The Israelites attacked Jericho and everything happened as God had foretold. The city's walls fell after the people gave the last shout and the Israelite soldiers were able to run right into the city, destroying with the sword all the people, young and old, as well as all the livestock. Only Rahab's family survived. The scarlet cord that hung out of her window and over the city wall, marked her home as being under God's protection. (The scarlet rope is also a foreshadowing of the blood of Jesus which rescues every believer in Christ from eternal death).

Joshua sent the two spies, who had formerly spied on the land, to Rahab's house and they brought her and her family out, putting them in a safe place outside the camp of Israel while the battle raged on. Then the Israelites burned down the city, saving only the gold, silver and bronze to be dedicated to the Lord. Joshua also placed a curse over the city.

Joshua commanded them with an oath at that time, saying, "Cursed is the man before Yahweh, who rises up and builds this city Jericho. With the loss of his firstborn he will lay its foundation, and with the loss of his youngest son he will set up its gates." (Joshua 6:26)

The mound of ruins was to lay undisturbed for 400 years until a man named Hiel rebuilt Jericho. The Bible says that Joshua's curse came true.

In his days Hiel the Bethelite built Jericho. He laid its foundation with the loss of Abiram his firstborn, and set up its gates with the loss of his youngest son Segub, according to Yahweh's word, which he spoke by Joshua the son of Nun. (1Kings 16:34)

Some have questioned why God commanded all the Canaanite people in the city to be destroyed, particularly the children. From other events in the Bible it is clear that God is very patient and long-suffering, but when the sinfulness of humans becomes too extreme, He sends destruction (as in Noah's time and at Sodom and Gomorrah). This was probably the case with Jericho, which was a center for idol worship and had an extremely wicked culture. The people practiced bestiality, incest, temple prostitution, and even child sacrifice. Deviant sexual practices were common. In spite of this, God had given the Canaanites over 400 years to repent and they were certainly aware of God's power (having heard of the miracle He had performed at the Red Sea), yet they continued their rebellion against God to the very end. Although the children were not guilty of the sins of their parents, ultimately every life belongs to God and He sovereignly decides when to take it in death. In this instance God chose to end the lives of the children along with their parents, perhaps because there was a strong likelihood that the children would have followed in their parents' footsteps when they grew up. Their continued idolatry and perversion would have brought a curse on the land and presented temptations and problems for the Israelites. God wanted Israel to end this wicked influence in Canaan so that the Israelites could be set apart as His holy nation.



In Rahab's case, although she was a Canaanite, she was also a believer in God and therefore accepted as a proselyte of Israel. She became the wife of Salmon, one of the two spies she sheltered, and the mother of Boaz, who married Ruth. Boaz and Ruth had a son named Obed from whom Jesse the father of David came. And of course David was the line through which Jesus was born. Thus Rahab, a Gentile prostitute, was an ancestor of none other than Jesus Himself! She is also mentioned in scripture as one of the heroes of faith.

By faith, Rahab the prostitute didn't perish with those who were disobedient, having received the spies in peace. (Hebrews 11:31)

After defeating Jericho, the people of Israel were confident that God would enable them to conquer another city nearby called Ai. They were so sure of victory that only about 3000 men went up to the city. However the people of Ai killed 36 Israelite soldiers and then chased the rest as they fled into the hills. Joshua was devastated and asked God why He had allowed this calamity. God informed him that it was the Israelites' own fault because they had taken some of the things from Jericho that they were commanded to destroy.

Not only was the entire city dedicated as a first fruits offering to God, but everything from Jericho was cursed, and for someone to take a forbidden item meant that the curse would rest on the entire nation of Israel. This was because the nation as a whole was in a covenant relationship with God. What one member did affected all.

Joshua made the people stand before the Lord and it was soon discovered that Achan, a man from the tribe of Judah, had stolen a beautiful coat, some silver and some gold. When confronted, Achan confessed that he had hidden the items in the ground under his tent. Joshua sent men to the tent and they brought back the stolen goods along with Achan's family and possessions. Then Achan and his family were taken to a valley and there they were executed by being stoned to death. The people piled rocks over their bodies and called the place the Valley of Trouble. Thirty-six innocent men had died at Ai because of Achan's sin.

*God explained to Joshua: **Therefore the children of Israel can't stand before their enemies. They turn their backs before their enemies, because they have become (accursed). I will not be with you any more, unless you destroy the devoted things from among you. (Joshua 7:12)***

Unfortunately the people had not remembered that the consequences of sin go beyond the initial sinner, just as Adam's sins affected not just himself, but spread to all of humankind. Achan's sin also spread to his entire family. It is likely that Achan's family had known of the stolen items and may even have helped to hide them, thus taking part in the crime. Thus the entire family perished and the Israelites came away with a renewed understanding of God's holiness and the need to obey Him or risk divine punishment.

After this incident, God told the Israelites to take the city of Ai and they did so without any difficulty. God had given Joshua a battle plan that involved a clever ambush and the men of Ai had fallen for it. The Israelite soldiers destroyed everyone, although God allowed the Israelites to keep the animals and other things for themselves. The king of Ai was hanged from a tree and then buried. Then Joshua built an altar and offered sacrifices to God. He took some stones and wrote down every teaching that Moses had given to Israel, after which he gathered all the people together and read the Book of Teachings to them.

At the time of Joshua, approximately 1400 BC, the Book of Teachings, or Torah (which is the Hebrew word meaning 'to teach') consisted of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. The Israelites recognized that they alone had been given these laws by God so that they could be a holy nation. This collection of 613 commandments was greatly honored by the Hebrew people down through the ages. However it must be understood that the Law of the Torah did not provide salvation for the Israelites because none of them could keep it. In fact, breaking even one commandment made one guilty of breaking the whole. Other scripture explains that salvation has always been by means of faith in the promised Seed (Messiah) who would one day come to deliver mankind from Satan, sin, and death. This was announced to Abraham and confirmed through Isaac and Jacob. The Old Testament saints who believed in the promised Seed were all saved on the basis of their faith.

When their bodies died, they went to the place of the dead (Sheol) and waited there until the Promised Seed arrived and brought deliverance. Their faith set them apart before the Law was even given to Moses, and after the Law came, it did nothing to change the Abrahamic faith covenant. However the Law did provide a moral restraint on Israel and that benefitted the nation. Nevertheless, as a means of salvation, the Law failed. Only One Person was able to keep the Law perfectly and that was Jesus Christ. He displayed perfect obedience to the Law in His life, fulfilling it in every way, thereby qualifying as the perfect Sacrifice for sin. This was foreshadowed in Leviticus 16, the ritual Day of Atonement, which was the most holy day of worship for Israel. On that day the high priest entered the Most Holy Place (Holy of Holies) of the Tabernacle and offered the sacrificial blood of a lamb on the mercy seat of the Ark of the Covenant. Then he sprinkled blood around the outer room of the Tabernacle in order to purify the people for the sins they had accumulated during the year. Another ceremony on that day involved driving away a scapegoat from the camp to symbolize the eradication of sin. By placing his hands on the head of the goat and confessing the sins of Israel, the priest symbolized the transference of the people's sin to the goat. The blood of the sacrificed goat and the living scapegoat both showed that they were substitutes for the people, bearing the penalty of their sin. This was a temporary measure that could not actually take away the sins of the people, but merely covered over their sins so that God wouldn't punish them for another year. However these animals foreshadowed the coming of Jesus Christ as our eternal High Priest and whose shed blood WAS able to save us from sin and corruption.

It is doubtful that the Israelites understood all of this as Joshua read the Torah to them that day in Canaan. The scriptures indicate that even the old covenant prophets did not clearly understand the full plan of God as they were writing about it. They could only wonder about all the shadows and symbols God was giving them, gazing at the truth as through a veil that blurred their sight. Only later would the followers of Christ see the marvelous mystery unfold before them as the Holy Spirit opened their eyes and enlightened their minds.

News west of the Jordan River spread fast to all the kings of Canaan and they began to prepare for war against the Israelites. The people from the city of Gibeon however decided that war was not the best choice when facing Israel. Gibeon was a large city, much bigger than the little town of Ai, and its men were good fighters, yet the possibility of being defeated in battle with Israel was too great, so they planned to use trickery to protect themselves. They gathered old sacks and wine bags and put on old shoes and clothing, taking with them some dry, moldy bread. Pretending to be from a far off country, they then went to make a peace agreement with Joshua. The old clothes and moldy bread persuaded Joshua and the Israelite leaders that the Gibeonites were telling the truth. Unfortunately Joshua didn't seek the Lord's guidance and so Israel made a peace agreement with the Gibeonites. It was not until 3 days later that they realized they had been fooled. However they could not go back on the oath they had sworn for fear that God would be angry with them. Oath breaking was forbidden by the Lord. Consequently, though there was much grumbling about it among the people, the leaders decided that Israel could not fight the Gibeonites. Nevertheless they came up with an idea to punish the tricksters. Joshua went to see the Gibeonites and confronted them about lying to him, telling them that they were now under a curse and would have to become slaves to Israel, carrying water and cutting wood for the altar of the Lord.

King Adoni-Zedek of Jerusalem heard about the agreement between Gibeon and Israel. This is the same Jerusalem (or Salem) that appears in the Bible at the time of Abraham when a king and priest named Melchizedek was ruler over Jerusalem. However now a king named Adoni-zedek (Adoni is a Hebrew word for 'the Lord') was the ruler of the city. Unfortunately Jerusalem had undergone a big change since Melchizedek's meeting with Abraham. Adoni-zedek was not of the same priestly order as Melchizedek. In fact, history and archaeology show that Jerusalem under the Canaanite kings was given over to worshipping gods like Baal and Ashteroth. There were altars to these idols situated all over Canaan. All the tribes of Canaan were polytheistic, meaning they worshipped a multitude of gods and goddesses. They had no use for Israel's monotheistic (one God) religion and belief system. Israel was a direct threat to the Canaanites and Adoni-zedek was enraged that Gibeon had made a peace agreement with them. He gathered five other kings together so they could all go to war against Gibeon. The Gibeonites were understandably afraid and they called on Israel to help them, citing the fact that as servants of Israel they were entitled to protection. The Lord encouraged Joshua, promising to give Israel victory over the five opposing armies. After an all-night march, Joshua took them by surprise and defeated them completely at Gibeon. Israel chased them as they fled and the Lord hurled large hailstones down on them, and more of them died from the hail than were killed by the swords of the Israelites. However, Joshua needed more time to win the battle because he had the enemy on the run and he didn't want them to get back to their fortified cities. Therefore he asked God to lengthen the day.

Then Joshua spoke to Yahweh in the day when Yahweh delivered up the Amorites before the children of Israel. He said in the sight of Israel, "Sun, stand still on Gibeon! You, moon, stop in the valley of Aijalon!" The sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the nation had avenged themselves of their enemies. ...There was no day like that before it or after it, that Yahweh listened to the voice of a man; for Yahweh fought for Israel. (Joshua 10:12-14)



Probably Joshua thought of the sun as moving around the earth, as most people would have in that day, which explains why he asked God to stop the sun. Some Bible scholars think that the sun "standing still" was actually an eclipse of the sun. Still others say the earth actually stopped rotating around the sun for almost twenty-four hours, or at least slowed down enough to lengthen the day by almost twenty-four hours. However it happened, the Lord listened to Joshua's request for more time, and He also caused a great hailstorm to come which killed many of the Canaanite soldiers as they were fleeing from the Israelites. The five kings ran away and hid in a cave but someone saw them and told Joshua where they were hiding. Joshua commanded the cave to be sealed with large boulders until the battle was over. Then after the battle ended, he and his men returned to the cave and the kings were brought out. Joshua killed them all and hung their bodies from five trees until evening.

Later their bodies were taken down and thrown into the cave they had hidden in, which was then sealed with large rocks. Joshua and the Israelites went on to capture and destroy many other Canaanite cities, defeating all the kings and destroying all the people as the Lord commanded.

There was not a city that made peace with the children of Israel, except the Hivites, the inhabitants of Gibeon. (All others were taken) in battle. For it was of Yahweh to harden their hearts, to come against Israel in battle, that he might utterly destroy them, that they might have no favor, but that he might destroy them, as Yahweh commanded Moses. (Joshua 11:19-20)

Joshua divided up the land among the 12 tribes and special cities were chosen as cities of refuge where those who accidentally killed someone could run for protection. The Levites were also given 48 towns and pastures throughout the land so that the nation's worship was spread around. Israel finally had peace on all sides and God kept every promise He had made to them. All their enemies were defeated because the Lord had handed them over to Israel.

The tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Manassah left Canaan to go back to the lands given to them by Moses. They built an altar in Gilead, which caused the rest of Israel to rise up in alarm, thinking they were turning back to idolatry. It was feared that this would make God angry and bring down a curse on the entire nation. However the three tribes explained that they merely wished the altar to remind future generations that they were part of Israel. After the misunderstanding was cleared up, Joshua gave some parting words to Israel, reminding them to be obedient to the Laws of God and to make no friends with any of the idolatrous people in Canaan. Then, at age 110, Joshua died and was buried on his own land.

Joshua is a type or shadow of Jesus Christ, as his name suggests. He was a faith warrior who led the people of Israel into victory over the tribes living in Canaan. Although a courageous master planner, his greatest strength lay in his faithfulness and constant obedience to God. His dependency on the Lord enabled him to defeat every foe and crush every enemy. In this he foreshadows Jesus Christ who led His Church (spiritual Israel) into victory over sin, death, and the devil. Jesus Christ's love for His Bride and His obedience to His Father led Him to the cross and ultimately to the grave, where He paid the penalty for sin and subsequently set His people free from death and captivity in hell.

I am the Living one. I was dead, and behold, I am alive forever more. I have the keys of Death and of Hades. (Revelation 1:18)...

You have ascended on high. You have led away captives. You have received gifts among men, yes, among the rebellious also, that Yah God might dwell there. (Psalm 68:18)

Therefore he says, "When he ascended on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men." (Ephesians 4:8)

This means that all who believe in Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection are freed from the condemnation of their sins, having been washed by His blood, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and being reborn with the divine nature and eternal life of Christ.

Joshua's parting words to the Israelites and Jesus' words to His Church are similar.

(Joshua speaking) Therefore be very courageous to keep and to do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses, that you not turn aside from it to the right hand or to the left; that you not come among these nations, these that remain among you; neither make mention of the name of their gods, nor cause to swear by them, neither serve them, nor bow down yourselves to them; but hold fast to Yahweh your God, as you have done to this day. For Yahweh has driven great and strong nations out from before you. But as for you, no man has stood before you to this day. One man of you shall chase a thousand; for it is Yahweh your God who fights for you, as he spoke to you. Take good heed therefore to yourselves, that you love Yahweh your God. (Joshua 23:6-11)

(Jesus speaking) Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world's rulers of the darkness of this age, and against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and, having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having the belt of truth buckled around your waist, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, ^{and} having fitted your feet with the preparation of the Good News of peace; above all, taking up the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; with all prayer and requests, praying at all times in the Spirit, and being watchful to this end in all perseverance and requests for all the saints.(Ephesians 6:10-18).

The New Testament uses military and war imagery to describe the battle we face against the enemies of God.



Jesus said we are to gird our waists with the belt of truth. Jesus is "the way, the truth, and the life" so this symbol speaks of the protection Jesus' words give us in the battle against the lies and deceptions of the enemy. Without understanding truth, we can be carried about by false doctrines and by the trickery of men.



We are to make sure the breastplate of righteousness is in place. This breastplate symbolizes the righteousness Jesus Christ has given us, making us new creations in Him. As Christians we have a new identity and a divine nature that is free of condemnation and guilt. This protects us from the accusations of the enemy who seeks to destroy us by making us afraid of God and unsure of His love. Knowing that we are perfect in Christ is essential to gain spiritual victory over sin and guilt.



Our feet are to be shod with the gospel of God's grace, which symbolizes going out to reach the lost who have never heard of the salvation of Jesus Christ. Wherever we go, we are to have a ready answer for those who ask us the reason for the hope within us. The Lord wishes to add many more to His Kingdom through the preaching of the Good News.



The shield of faith that extinguishes all the flaming arrows of the evil one refers to the protection faith gives when we rest on the promises of God. Our faith resists the tormenting doubts and fears that can attack the mind when facing difficult circumstances.



The helmet of salvation symbolizes the renewed mind which guards and protects our thought life and replaces false ideas and thoughts with the spiritual reality found in Jesus Christ. Understanding our salvation releases us into freedom. We are able to come to God with bold confidence in seeking answers to our prayers.



The sword of the Spirit is our offensive weapon with which we resist the enemy, cutting through his lies and turning aside his attacks. It symbolizes the Word of God, which has great authority to overcome any deception or oppression. With God's Word firmly anchored in our hearts, power is unleashed into our lives to overcome every spiritual battle.

The Bible reveals that much of what is going on in our world, as well as in the unseen spiritual realms, involves battle. Angels are assigned by God to protect us and they are described as great warriors in the Bible. They save us from accidents and premature death. Sometimes they are sent to bring messages to us from God.

Aren't they all serving spirits, sent out to do service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation? (Hebrews 1:14)

But Christians are called to be warriors too. We fight against dark forces when we pray against sin, sickness and death, etc. And just as God told Joshua that He would never leave or forsake him, we are also given this promise.

(God to Joshua) "No man will be able to stand before you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not fail you nor forsake you". (Joshua 1:5)

(God has said to us) "I will in no way leave you, neither will I in any way forsake you." (So now we may say with good courage): "The Lord is my helper. I will not fear. What can man do to me?" (Hebrews 13:5-6)

As a Warrior, there is none greater than Jesus Christ. Dying on a cross may not have looked like an act of war, but it was the single greatest act of warfare God has ever done for the sake of His people. It was on the cross that Jesus overcame the world, sin, and the devil, and He has made us over-comers with Him.

I have told you these things, that in me you may have peace. In the world you have oppression; but cheer up! I have overcome the world.”(John 16:33)

To this end the Son of God was revealed: that he might destroy the works of the devil. (1 John 3:8)

Since then the children have shared in flesh and blood, he also ... partook of the same, that through death he might bring to nothing him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might deliver all of them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. (Hebrews 2:14-15)

Having stripped the principalities and the powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them. (Colossians 2:15)

He who overcomes, I will give to him to sit down with me on my throne, as I also overcame, and sat down with my Father on his throne. (Revelation 3:21)

For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world: your faith. (1John 5:4)

Judges

CHAPTER 9



The Israelites served the Lord during Joshua's lifetime and during the lifetimes of the elders who had seen the great things God had done for Israel. But after they died, their children did not know the Lord or follow Him. They didn't carry out God's commands to destroy the remaining Canaanites in the land, but rather intermarried with them, even though Joshua had strictly warned against this. The scriptures say that God purposely left some Canaanites in the land after Joshua died, and He did this for two reasons.

Now these are the nations which Yahweh left, to test Israel by them...the five lords of the Philistines, all the Canaanites, the Sidonians, and the Hivites who lived on Mount Lebanon, from Mount Baal Hermon to the entrance of Hamath. They were left to test Israel by them, to know whether they would listen to Yahweh's commandments, which he commanded their fathers by Moses. (Judges 3:1-4)

This passage explains that God wanted to see if the descendants of Joshua's generation would be obedient to Him. The evil Canaanites served as a proving ground to see how the Israelites would proceed. Would they continue in the footsteps of their forefathers and obey God and His commands, or would they rebel?

God often tests His people. Adam and Eve were tested in Eden when they were warned not to eat the fruit of a certain tree. Abraham was tested as he waited endlessly for God to fulfill His promise to give him an heir. Noah was tested as he built the ark with not a cloud in the sky. Joseph was tested as he sat in prison as a slave after receiving a dream from God that he would be greatly honored.

The Israelites had been tested for 40 years in the desert. In all these instances, and in countless others, it is plain that God allows His people to suffer trials, often using evil if it can benefit His plan. Even in the case of His own Son, God allowed Satan (evil incarnate) to have a major role in bringing Jesus to the cross because it was necessary to create the Church. Jesus' constant conflict with Satan actually strengthened Him in His mission.

Though he was a Son, yet learned obedience by the things that he suffered. (Hebrews 5:8)

Christians today also have many trials as they live in a world that is filled with obstacles to their faith. The fact that we still struggle with our flesh is meant to train us to war against evil, just as God left some Canaanites in the land in order to train the Israelites how to battle against temptation. In all cases, God always has the best interests of His children at heart. Although He uses evil, God is never the author of evil; neither does He attempt to stumble anyone.

When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He tempt anyone (James 1:3)

Note: Isaiah 45:7 reads, "I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things." but the word 'evil' used here is from the Hebrew word meaning "distress or misery." It is making reference to the fact that God brings disaster on those who reject Him because they already have hard rebellious hearts. And when scripture states that God 'hardens' a heart, it does not mean that God opposes any righteous inclination existing within a heart, but rather He just makes more rigid the wickedness that is already there.

Although God had many times in the past restrained evil and overthrown wickedness in order to protect Israel, in the case of the Israelites living in Canaan, He chose not to do so, even though He knew the Canaanites would be a negative influence on Israel. He watched as the Israelites chose to follow the ways of their pagan neighbors instead of the laws He had given to their forefathers, and He was angered by their rebellion. Consequently He allowed bandits to attack and steal from Israel. When things got too bad, Israel cried out to God for help, and in His mercy, He chose leaders called judges to come to their aid. The period of these judges covered approximately 390 years.

DEBORAH

A noteworthy judge was a woman named Deborah. She was a prophetess and the Lord spoke through her as she held court under a tree called "the Palm of Deborah". One day God gave her a message for a man named Barak, telling him to summon 10,000 Israelites to attack King Jabin's army. (Jabin was the king of the Canaanites and the commander of his army was a man named Sisera. But Barak told Deborah that he would only go if Deborah went with him. Deborah agreed to accompany him but warned that the honor of victory would not go to him because of his response. A woman would defeat Sisera instead. Deborah and Barak then gathered 10,000 troops and attacked Sisera and his army, utterly defeating them.

Barak pursued the chariots and the army to Harosheth of the Gentiles; and all the army of Sisera fell by the edge of the sword. There was not a man left. (Judges 4:16).

Only Sisera escaped by fleeing on foot until he came to a Kenite camp. (The Kenites were descended from Moses' brother-in-law and they had separated from Israel and were at peace with King Jabin). Sisera ran to the tent belonging to Jael, the wife of Heber, and she greeted him and invited him inside to hide from the Israelites. Sisera asked her for something to drink and Jael gave him some milk and then covered him with a rug. The exhausted commander told her to keep watch at the tent's entrance, after which he fell into a deep sleep. Jael, who was a nomad's wife, would have been well used to hammering stakes into the ground when setting up tents. She now took a tent peg and a hammer and stealthily crept up to the sleeping Sisera. Then she drove the peg into his head, killing him instantly. Deborah's prophecy was fulfilled. That day the honor of killing the enemy of Israel went to a woman named Jael.

*Barak and Deborah sang a song of the battle, honoring Jael by name: **Jael shall be blessed above women, the wife of Heber the Kenite; blessed shall she be above women in the tent. He asked for water. She gave him milk. She brought him butter in a lordly dish. She put her hand to the tent peg and her right hand to the workmen's hammer. With the hammer she struck Sisera. She struck through his head. Yes, she pierced and struck through his temples. ... At her feet he bowed, he fell. Where he bowed, there he fell down dead. (Judges 5:24-27).***



The story is significant because it reveals that God's power can rest upon a woman as well as on a man. Deborah was a leader and prophetess, displaying wisdom, courage, and spiritual strength. God had chosen her to lead the nation as its judge and it was through her that God spoke to the Israelites. Jael was a brave warrior of fierce determination and commitment. God chose her to defeat the greatly feared commander of an enemy who had harassed Israel for many years. Both women were used by God to win a significant victory that day. After winning the battle with Sisera's army, Israel became stronger and stronger until Jabin was eventually completely destroyed. Then there was peace in the land for 40 years.

Then as now, Israel has had female warriors. Today Israel is one of few countries in the world where military service is compulsory for women. Since 2000 AD, Jewish female soldiers have fought in battle alongside the men of Israel. They fight against their enemies in the Middle East in order to retain the land once given to their forefathers. But physical Israel today is not the same as 'true' Israel, according to the Bible. The apostle Paul in the New Testament stated that not all those who live in Israel are actually true Israelites. Only those who have faith in Jesus Christ as the Messiah are true children of Israel.

For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, neither is circumcision outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit not in the letter; whose praise is not from men, but from God. (Romans 2:28-29)

For they are not all Israel, that are of Israel. Neither, because they are Abraham's offspring, are they all children. But, "your offspring will be accounted as from Isaac." That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as heirs. (Romans 9:6-8).

Know therefore that those who are of faith, the same are children of Abraham. (Galatians 3:7)

If you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring and heirs according to promise. (Galatians 3:29)

Today, God's nation of Israel is made up of Christian believers from all over the world. Lineage makes no difference. Neither does gender. There is complete equality in the kingdom. Israel, in the mind of God, was always a spiritual family of children loyal to Himself, no matter what their physical genealogy.

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:28)

GIDEON

In time, the Israelites again went off course and did what was wrong, so this time God handed them over to the cruel and powerful Midianites for seven years. (Midian was the fourth of the six sons of Abraham and his wife, Keturah, and the Midianites descended from him.) These people were raiders who joined together with other Canaanite tribes to attack Israel, stealing and destroying their crops so that the Israelites faced starvation. They took their animals as well, swarming over the land like locusts and camping on the land. The Israelites had to hide in caves and in the mountains in order to find safety from their foes. They were so oppressed that they finally cried out to God for help. God answered them by first sending a prophet with a message.

I delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of all who oppressed you, and drove them out from before you, and gave you their land. I said to you, "I am Yahweh your God. You shall not fear the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell." But you have not listened to my voice. (Judges 6:9-10)

Nevertheless God did not abandon the Israelites in spite of the fact that they had abandoned Him. The angel of the Lord came down to the tree of Ophrah that belonged to Joash, an Abiezrite. (The Abiezrites were one of the weakest tribes descended from the tribe of Manasseh). Joash's son, Gideon, was there threshing wheat in a winepress. Normally wheat would be threshed above ground, but Gideon had chosen the winepress so he could hide what he was doing from the roving Midianites. Because it was burrowed into the ground, the winepress could not be seen from a distance. The angel of the Lord interrupted Gideon's work and hailed him as a 'mighty warrior', telling him that God was with him.

Gideon's name means 'mighty warrior' or 'destroyer' but Gideon didn't feel like a mighty warrior and He had serious doubts about God being with him, or with anyone else in Israel. He voiced his doubts to the angel, saying that if God were truly with His people, then why was Israel having so much trouble. The angel of the Lord didn't reply to the question but simply instructed Gideon to go and save his people from the Midianites. Gideon questioned why someone like him, the weakest in the tribe of Manassah, and the least important in his family, should be the one to act as Israel's deliverer. Gideon felt totally unqualified to rescue Israel, contrary to what the stranger was telling him. The angel answered that He would be with Gideon and He would considerably weaken the Midianites. Gideon was still doubtful and asked for proof that he was speaking to someone with divine authority and not just an ordinary man. He would not commit himself to a divine rescue mission unless God was indeed behind it. Gideon may have thought that he was speaking with a prophet, so he went to prepare a goat and some broth for the visitor. The angel told him to place the food on a rock, whereupon the angel touched it with the end of his walking stick. Immediately the meat and broth caught fire and completely burned up. Gideon was amazed and cried out, finally realizing that he had been speaking to none other than God Himself. He was terribly afraid, fearing he would die, but God calmed him down and assured him He would not be destroyed.

Bible scholars believe that when the Scriptures speak of someone receiving a visit from "the angel of the Lord", they were actually meeting the pre-incarnate Christ. i.e. a theophany of God. It was believed by good men in the Bible that being in the direct presence of God would reveal their own sinful weakness and bring God's instant wrath and punishment upon them. They believed that no man could see God and live.

After the angel departed, Gideon built an altar to recall his meeting with God, naming it THE LORD IS PEACE. The Lord commissioned Gideon to take two of his father's bulls and tear down the altar to Baal and the Asherah idol that were on his father's farm. Using the stones from the dismantled altar, Gideon was to build a different altar to the Lord, burning one of the bulls as a sacrificial offering. With the help of 10 servants, Gideon did as he was instructed, but he did it at night so that his family and the men of the city wouldn't see what he had done. Gideon knew that they would not be pleased to see their religious idols destroyed. Next day the men of the city saw what had happened and they wanted to know who was responsible. Someone who had seen the previous night's work informed on Gideon. The enraged men went to Joash to demand that he deliver up his son to them for execution. Joash however took his son's side, reasoning that Baal could defend himself since it was his altar that had been torn down. Surprisingly the men backed off and because of Gideon's brave act he was thereafter known as Jerub-Baal, meaning 'let Baal fight against him'. Perhaps the men from the city, and even Joash himself, secretly admired Gideon for his willingness to stand up to his own family and tribe for what he believed in. His defiance against the dark religious forces that held them all in fear seemed to have impressed them. Perhaps this explains why the Abiezerites and certain other Israelite tribes later responded to Gideon's call to follow him.

After calling the Israelites together for war against the Midianites, Gideon was still filled with doubts. He needed assurance that he was truly hearing the voice of God so he asked God to perform a miracle involving some wool on a threshing floor. He asked God to cause dew to form on the wool overnight but for the ground next to it to remain completely dry. Next morning Gideon saw that it was exactly as he had requested and he managed to squeeze a whole bowl full of water out of the fleece. Gideon wondered if this was merely a coincidence, so he respectfully asked God to perform another test, this time causing the ground to be wet with dew and the fleece to remain dry. Again, it was done exactly as requested. It was all the proof Gideon needed and next morning he gathered 32,000 men for war against the Midianites. However before Gideon reached the enemy camp, the Lord told him that he had too many men with him. God didn't want the Israelites to later brag that they had saved themselves when they won the battle against the Midianites, so He instructed Gideon to tell the men that anyone who felt afraid could return home. Twenty-two thousand Israelites took Gideon up on his offer, leaving ten thousand in Gideon's army. Remarkably the Lord felt that there were still too many, so God had Gideon lead the men down to some water to quench their thirst.



Gideon was to separate all those who bent down to drink directly from the stream, from those who brought the water to their mouths, lapping it from their hands like a dog. (Those who lapped the water like a dog would not have taken their eyes off their surroundings, proving to be the more cautious ones.) Only three hundred lapped the water and these were the ones Gideon was to take into battle. All the rest of the men were sent home.

Each man in Gideon's army had only his sword, a clay jar and a trumpet to defend himself against the enemy who was described as being thick as locusts with camels as numerous as the grains of sand on the seashore. The night before the battle, the Lord commanded Gideon to go down into the Midianite camp to hear what was being said about the coming battle. God told him that this would encourage him and remove any fears he had about going to war. God also told him that he could take his servant, Purah, with him if he was afraid to go alone. Gideon took Purah and they sneaked into the camp together, just in time to overhear one Midianite telling another about a dream he had.

When Gideon had come, behold, there was a man telling a dream to his fellow. He said, "Behold, I dreamed a dream; .. a cake of barley bread tumbled into the camp of Midian, and came to the tent, and struck it so that it fell, and turned it upside down, so that the tent lay flat." His fellow answered, "This is nothing other than the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel. God has delivered Midian into his hand, with all the army." When Gideon heard the telling of the dream, and its interpretation, he worshiped. Then he returned into the camp of Israel, and said, "Arise; for Yahweh has delivered the army of Midian into your hand!" He divided the three hundred men into three companies, and he put into the hands of all them trumpets, and empty pitchers, with torches within the pitchers. (Judges 7:11-16)

God was amazingly patient and understanding with Gideon's inner doubts and fears. Not only did God perform the miracles Gideon asked for, but He also understood that Gideon would feel much more confident if he could go into the Midianite camp with his servant and He gave Gideon the go-ahead to take him along. (God did this for Moses too when He allowed his brother, Aaron, to speak for him in front of Pharaoh). The Lord then caused Gideon to hear words from the mouth of the enemy that would give Gideon all the assurance he needed to believe that he would have victory in the coming battle. This incident with Gideon reveals that God has great patience.

The New Testament indicates that God is even more sympathetic with Christians today because Jesus has joined Himself to our humanity and is our High Priest.

For we don't have a high priest who can't be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but one who has been in all points tempted like we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore draw near with boldness to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy, and may find grace for help in time of need. (Hebrews 4:15-16)

Gideon took one hundred of his men and approached the enemy's camp just as they were changing guards. On Gideon's signal, all his men blew their trumpets and smashed the jars, which had burning torches inside. They shouted together "A sword for the Lord and for Gideon!" and then just stood still as the Midianites panicked, shouting and running to escape. The Lord caused some of the Midianites to fight each other in their confusion while others ran for their lives. Gideon sent word to the tribe of Ephraim to attack the fleeing Midianites. They came down from the mountains and caught two of the main princes and executed them, bringing their heads to Gideon. But the men of Ephraim were not happy with their victory and confronted Gideon, demanding to know why he hadn't taken them into the battle in the beginning. Gideon politely calmed their anger, saying that their capture of the two princes was a far greater act than anything Gideon and his men had done. This satisfied them and they backed off.

Later Gideon and his three hundred men chased the remaining Midianites across the Jordan River, but when they stopped along the way at the towns of Succoth and Peniel to ask for food, the townspeople refused, scorning Gideon and his small army, doubting that the two kings of Midian - Zebah and Zalmunna - could be defeated. They said this because they didn't want to get into trouble with the Midianites. Gideon was angry and promised to punish the townspeople upon his return. There were still around 120,000 enemy soldiers to hunt down so Gideon went on his way until he caught up with them, attacking when they least expected, and gaining the victory over them. He captured Zebah and Zalmunna and brought them with him when he returned to Succoth and Peniel as promised. He had the elders of Succoth beaten with thorns and briars and he tore down a tower in Peniel. He also executed the two kings of Midian.

The Israelites were so grateful to Gideon for saving them from the Midianites that they wanted to make him king, but Gideon told them that the Lord would be their ruler. He was not seeking any glory of his own. However he did ask for one favor. He asked each Israelite to give him one gold earring from the spoils taken in battle. Altogether he collected 43 pounds of gold from which he fashioned an ephod, which he displayed in his hometown of Ophrah.



(Some scholars say the ephod was originally a linen garment but it eventually came to describe an idol used in divining the future.) Gideon's ephod was not worn as a vestment as it was made out of gold, but it was put on public display, so it is likely that it was some sort of object that acted as a sign of his authority as a judge in Israel, or served as a reminder of Israel's victory over Midian. It is hard to believe that Gideon had any unholy reasons for making it. Nevertheless the ephod soon became a stumbling block for the people who began to worship it as an idol.

Gideon went on to live to a ripe old age and he had many wives and 70 sons, including a son named Abimelech by a slave woman. After he died, he was buried in the tomb of his father.

The story of Gideon shows that God can use weak people to carry out His plans, as He did with Gideon and his pitifully small army of 300 against thousands.

But God chose the foolish things of the world that he might put to shame those who are wise. God chose the weak things of the world, that he might put to shame the things that are strong; and God chose the lowly things of the world, and the things that are despised, and the things that are not, that he might bring to nothing the things that are: that no flesh should boast before God. (1 Corinthians 1:27-29)

Gideon's story is also about overthrowing the power of the enemy and tearing down demonic strongholds. It speaks of the courage required to go against powerful religious systems that dominate a society, enslaving and deceiving the people. Gideon physically challenged the false belief system of his day and tore down the strongholds of spiritual wickedness that repressed the truth about God.

Today Christians do the same thing when we pray against the powerful forces that deceive the nations of our own world with false religions and political propaganda. Satan has the same agenda today that he had in Gideon's time. He seeks to hide the truth of what God has done through Jesus Christ in setting humanity free from sin and death. He does this by sowing lies, creating disturbances, and threatening aggression. His greatest challenge is to make the Church of Christ see herself as weak and helpless, as Gideon at first perceived himself to be. Faith in our identification in Christ and the mighty Holy Spirit residing within us is necessary if we are to go into battle against the enemy and defeat the opposing forces against truth and righteousness.

You have come to the general assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect. (Hebrews 12:23)

In him you are made full (complete, perfect, without condemnation), who is the head of all principality and power; (Colossians 2:10)

... even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved) (Ephesians 2:5)

.. even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and without defect before him in love; (Ephesians 1:4)

You are of God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is he who is in you than he who is in the world. (1 John 4:4)

Above all, taking up the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the evil one. (Ephesians 6:16)

Having been born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, through the word of God, which lives and remains forever. (1 Peter 1:23)

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellence of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light: (1 Peter 2:9)

Gideon's story has an epilogue concerning his son, Abimelech, who was least in his family because, unlike his 70 stepbrothers who were full sons of Gideon, he was the son of a lowly slave woman. His lower status no doubt contributed to his feelings of jealousy towards his brothers who ruled Shechem. He decided to seize power by using his relationship with his mother's family group to convince the men of Shechem to follow him, rather than his brothers. The leaders of Shechem gave Abimelech silver from the temple of their Baal god and he used the money to hire a gang of thugs. This gang followed him to his father's hometown and they murdered all his brothers, except for Jotham, the youngest, who managed to escape. Then the men of Shechem made Abimelech their king. The young brother, Jotham, climbed a mountain and delivered a prophetic curse against Abimelech and the people of Shechem.

Now therefore, if you have dealt truly and righteously, in that you have made Abimelech king, and if you have dealt well with Jerubbaal and his house...(for my father fought for you, and risked his life, and delivered you out of the hand of Midian; and you have risen up against my father's house today, and have slain his sons, seventy persons, on one stone, and have made Abimelech, the son of his female servant, king over the men of Shechem, because he is your brother); if you then have dealt truly and righteously with Jerubbaal and with his house today, then rejoice in Abimelech, and let him also rejoice in you; but if not, let fire come out from Abimelech, and devour the men of Shechem, and the house of Millo; and let fire come out from the men of Shechem, and from the house of Millo, and devour Abimelech." (Judges 9:16-21)

As it happened, Abimelech reigned in Israel for 3 years, after which God sent an evil spirit to punish him and the people of Shechem. First some people of Shechem tried to overthrow Abimelech, but the ruler of the city heard about it and told the king about their treachery. Abimelech then killed the men of Shechem but some of the leaders sought refuge in a tower.



Abimelech and his men set the tower on fire, burning all alive. Then Abimelech went to another city that was disloyal to him and attacked it, and the people rushed to their tower for safety. Abimelech got ready to burn the tower down as he had done in Shechem, but a woman on the roof threw down a millstone, which crushed Abimelech's skull. The dying Abimelech begged his armor bearer to kill him with his sword so it couldn't be said that he had been killed by a woman. When the people of Israel saw that their king was dead, they all returned home. Jotham's curse had come true. God had punished Abimelech and Shechem for the evil they had done.

This episode reveals that God sometimes uses evil spirits in His cause for justice. The Israelites had sunk back into their former wickedness, forgetting that the Lord had rescued them from Midian. They were also unkind to Gideon and his family in spite of all Gideon had done for them. This is why God sent an evil spirit to stir things up against Abimelech and the men of Shechem so that they would ultimately meet their doom.

Then God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem; and the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech. (Judges 9:23)

God does not ignore our sin. He has made it clear that "the soul who sins will die" (Ezekiel 18:4).

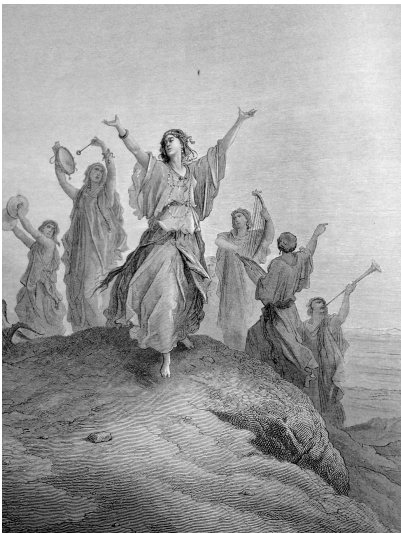
Thankfully God has made a way of escape from the judgment of sin through Christ Jesus. The consequence of sin is death, but "the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:2)

Jephthah

After Abimelech died, the Israelites sank back into wicked behavior, worshipping Baal and Ashtoreth and the gods of the Philistines. This angered God and He allowed the Philistines and Ammonites to overrun Israel. They suffered 18 years of oppression until the Israelites finally cried out to God for deliverance. At first God rejected their pleas but after they repented and kept crying out to Him, He felt sorry for them. At this point the Ammonites were gathered for war against Israel and the Israelites were desperately seeking for a leader. They eventually chose Jephthah, the son of a prostitute, who had lived with his father's family until he was grown up. His stepbrothers had eventually thrown him out of the house because of his low birth and because they didn't want him to inherit any of their father's property. Jephthah had gone to the land of Tob where he gathered a gang of thugs around him, and perhaps it was his reputation as a tough leader that led the Israelites to choose him as their commander. But when the Israelite elders asked Jephthah to lead Israel against the Ammonites, he wasn't interested at first. He still felt the insult of his former rejection.

However he agreed when the elders promised that he would rule all of Gilead if he agreed to their request. The first thing Jephthah did, as leader of Gilead, was to open a discussion with the Ammonite king who accused Israel of stealing the lands of the Moabites and Ammonites. Jephthah replied that it had been the Moabites and Amorites who had been hostile to Israel first. He said they had sinned against Israel and it was God who had given them their lands as a consequence. Of course the Ammonite king ignored this reasoning. Then God's Spirit entered Jephthah. He was so full of zeal that he made an oath of promise to God.

Jephthah vowed a vow to Yahweh, and said, "If you will indeed deliver the children of Ammon into my hand, then it shall be, that whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, it shall be Yahweh's, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering." (Judges 11:30-31)



Jephthah went on to win the battle against the Ammonites and he led Israel against 20 cities and they were all defeated. When he returned home, his only child, a daughter whom he greatly loved, came out to greet him, singing and dancing. With deep sorrow in his heart, Jephthah told his daughter of his oath to the Lord. It was a holy promise that he feared to break. His daughter seemed to have understood this and she gave no protest, merely asking for 2 months with her friends to mourn her virginity. After the 2 months were over, Jephthah **'did to her as he had promised.'** God had specifically forbidden offering human sacrifices (Leviticus 20:1-5) and the Bible never specifically tells us whether Jephthah actually sacrificed his daughter as a burnt offering. The daughter mourned that she would never marry; she did not mourn that she would die.

This indicates that Jephthah may have consecrated his daughter to serve in the tabernacle for the rest of her life, meaning she would remain a virgin and never marry or have children. After this event, it became a custom for young Israelite women to go out for 4 days to remember the daughter of Jephthah. It is highly unlikely they would have commemorated a forbidden pagan ceremony that offered up a human sacrifice, so this also implies that Jephthah's daughter was consecrated to serving God.

(In the case of Abraham preparing to offer up Isaac to the Lord, God sent an angel to stop him, indicating that human sacrifice was not God's will). Nevertheless the fact that Jephthah kept his oath, in some form, indicates his profound respect for the Lord and his obedient faith that held nothing back from Him, not even the daughter whom he loved best in the world. Jephthah ruled Israel for 6 years. He put down an uprising from the men of Ephraim but no other problems are mentioned. He died and was buried in Gilead.

The story of Jephthah reveals that the Lord sometimes casts unlikely people in the role of heroes. This son of a prostitute was a disreputable gang leader, yet he is mentioned in Hebrews 11:32 as one of the great examples of faith from the Old Testament. In spite of his low birth and association with ruffians, he was God's choice to deliver Israel from her enemies. This story reveals that God's grace looks beyond a person's outward circumstances, as it seeks to find the treasure of faith hidden inside a person's heart.

The refining pot is for silver, and the furnace for gold, but Yahweh tests the hearts. (Proverbs 17:3)

Samson

*The next judge worthy of note was an even more unlikely choice for a hero than Jephthah. He was born at a time when Israel had again turned back to her old sinful ways. Consequently God allowed the Philistines to oppress the Israelites for 40 years. However His grace and mercy came to the fore as usual and He decided to send another deliverer to rescue Israel. This one was to come on the scene in a special manner. God appeared as an angel to an elderly barren woman, the wife of a man named Manoah, both of whom were from the tribe of Dan. The angel of the Lord told the woman that she was to have a son but she was to be careful not to drink alcohol, eat anything unclean, or ever cut her son's hair. He was to be a Nazarite from birth (Nazarites were specially consecrated to God through a vow of separation) and God would raise him up to deliver Israel from the Philistines. When the woman told her husband about what she'd just seen and heard, he didn't take his wife's word for it and he prayed that God would come again, this time when he was present. God heard Manoah's prayer but He again appeared to the wife and not to the husband. This time the wife ran to get Manoah and he followed his wife to where God awaited. God repeated His instructions concerning the baby and Manoah offered to get a meal together for his guest but the angel of the Lord replied that He would not eat his food. He suggested that Manoah offer a burnt sacrifice to God instead. Up until that moment, Manoah still did not know the true identity of his visitor. **"What is your name?" he asked. "Then we will honor you when what you have said really happens."** This response revealed a lack of faith in Manoah concerning what the angel said. Knowing that Manoah was not grasping the significance of what was happening, the angel of the Lord responded by asking Manoah if he was finding His words too difficult to understand. Then God touched the goat and grain sacrifice on Manoah's altar and flames burst forth reaching into the sky. As it burned, the angel of the Lord rose up in the flame to heaven, leaving Manoah and his wife overcome with awe. They finally understood that they had just witnessed a theophany (God in human or angelic form) and Manoah was sure that they would now die as a result. He believed that no one could see God and live through the experience. His wife seemed to have the greater intellect for she reasoned that if God had wanted to kill them, then He wouldn't have accepted their offering or told them about the birth of a son. (Her intelligence and faith may have been the reason the angel of the Lord appeared to her instead of Manoah in the first place). Manoah's wife was right and 9 months later God blessed the couple with a baby boy and his mother named him Samson.*

Samson's parents were careful to follow the instructions of the Lord, never cutting his hair, never allowing him to eat anything unclean, and instructing him to stay away from alcohol.

However as Samson grew to manhood, he was not too concerned about the Nazarite vows that restricted him. For one thing, he was a great hulk of a man with a bad temper. When he wanted something, he wanted it NOW! This was especially evident when it came time for him to choose a wife. A Philistine woman from Timnah caught his eye and he wanted her for his bride. Samson told his father about her and demanded that he make the necessary marriage arrangements with the woman's parents. Samson's parents were dismayed, asking him why he couldn't choose an Israelite bride instead. *"Isn't there an acceptable woman among your relatives or among all our people? Must you go to the uncircumcised Philistines to get a wife?"*

The Philistines were Israel's enemy, an aggressive people of tall stature whose customs were foreign to Israel. Their men were clean-shaven (which was somewhat unusual); they wore heavy armor into battle; they were uncircumcised, and they drank lots of beer and wine. They were pagans who worshipped Dagon, a god associated with war and fertility, and a goddess called Ashtoreth, believed to be his mistress.

Although Samson's parents tried to reason with their son and persuade him not to form an ungodly alliance with the Philistines, Samson refused to take no for an answer. Samson said to his father, *"Get her for me! She's the right one for me."*

Samson would have been aware that what he was insisting upon was directly against God's will. In the law handed down through Moses, the Israelites had been commanded to remain apart from anything pagan. They were not allowed to even wear clothing that was a mix of fibers. This was not because of any divine fashion preference, but rather it was God's way to emphasize that His people were to be pure. They were not to mix with the pagans living nearby.

You shall not wear clothes of wool and linen woven together. (Deuteronomy 22:11)

When Yahweh your God brings you into the land where you go to possess it, and casts out many nations before you, the Hittite, the Girgashite, the Amorite, the Canaanite, the Perizzite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite, seven nations greater and mightier than you; and when Yahweh your God delivers them up before you, and you strike them; then you shall utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them, nor show mercy to them; neither shall you make marriages with them. You shall not give your daughter to his son, nor shall you take his daughter for your son. For he will turn away your son from following me, that they may serve other gods. So Yahweh's anger would be kindled against you, and he would destroy you quickly. But you shall deal with them like this. You shall break down their altars, dash their pillars in pieces, and cut down their Asherah poles, and burn their engraved images with fire. For you are a holy people to Yahweh your God. Yahweh your God has chosen you to be a people for his own possession, above all peoples who are on the face of the earth. (Deuteronomy 7:1-6)

Then there was the special Nazarite vow, which, although usually temporary (lasting a few weeks or months), was to be perpetual in Samson's case. This indicated that God's call on Samson's life required a lifelong consecration that went farther than usual.

No wine (to signify self control); no touching anything dead or unclean (to signify holiness); and no razor on his head (to signify submission).

In 1 Corinthians 14 of the New Testament, the Bible talks about a covered head as a sign of submission. In the case of a Nazarite's vow, an unshaven head (covering of long hair) signified the same thing.

Samson didn't seem to care about either God's law or his Nazarite vows. He was determined to form an unholy alliance with a pagan woman and he pressured his parents into going against their conscience and doing what he wanted.

At this point in the story, the Bible makes an interesting observation, stating that Samson's parents did not know that *'this was of Yahweh; for he sought an occasion against the Philistines. (Judges 14:3-4)* Samson was acting on his physical lust, but God's plan involved judging the Philistines for oppressing and ruling over Israel, and Samson's rebellion actually fit into that purpose. Samson may have appeared to be out of control, but God was in complete control of the situation, showing how God's sovereignty can never be overthrown, no matter what mankind or demonic forces attempt to do.

A man's heart plans his course, but Yahweh directs his steps. (Proverbs 16:9)

In whom also we were assigned an inheritance, having been foreordained according to the purpose of him who does all things after the counsel of his will. (Ephesians 1:11)



Samson went to visit his fiancé in Timnah and on the way there he encountered a lion that tried to attack him. Samson tore it apart limb by limb with his bare hands. His parents didn't know about this and he told no one else about it. Awhile later he went back to attend his wedding and out of curiosity he stopped by the carcass of the lion. He saw that a swarm of bees had made a nest inside the skeleton and there was some honey inside. He scooped out the honey and ate it, breaking another of his Nazarite vows which was to never touch anything dead or unclean. He kept the secret of his broken vow to himself and went on his way.

At the wedding feast, Samson entertained 30 male guests and he teased them by asking them a riddle involving the dead lion and the honey he had found. He was obviously trying to act superior to them by giving them this mystifying puzzle. But there was another motive involved. Although the thirty Philistines were Samson's wedding guests, they were also the enemy. Samson used the occasion as an opportunity to confound and humiliate his adversaries...and increase his wardrobe at the same time.

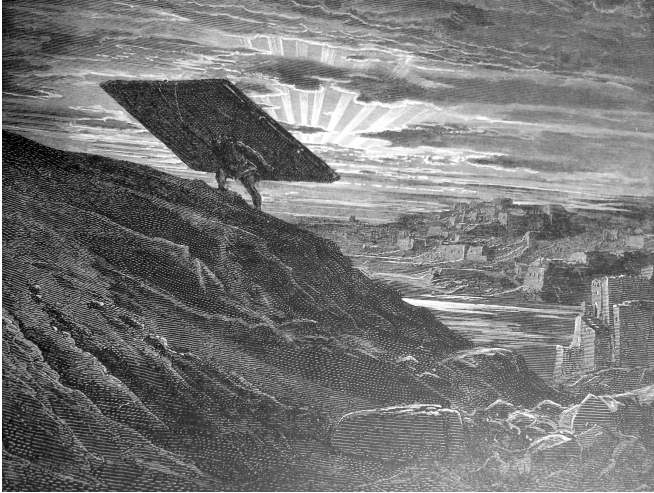
Samson said to them, "Let me tell you a riddle now. If you can declare it to me within the seven days of the feast, and find it out, then I will give you thirty linen garments and thirty changes of clothing; but if you can't declare it to me, then you shall give me thirty linen garments and thirty changes of clothing." They said to him, "Tell us your riddle, that we may hear it." He said to them, "Out of the eater came out food. Out of the strong came out sweetness." (Judges 14:12-14)

The guests tried to guess the riddle but after 3 days they still couldn't solve it, so they secretly went to Samson's wife and threatened to kill her and her family if she didn't find out the answer for them. (They correctly recognized that this wasn't a friendly game between equals but rather a contest between opponents.) Samson's bride was terrified and for the rest of the seven-day wedding celebration she pleaded with Samson to tell her the riddle's answer. After much crying and begging, she finally got Samson to give her the answer, which she then told the 30 guests. When Samson again demanded an answer to his riddle, the guests were ready for him.

"What is sweeter than honey? What is stronger than a lion?" (Judges 14:18)

Samson was enraged, knowing that the guests had gotten the answer from his bride. Without even consummating his marriage, he stormed off to the city of Ashkelon and killed 30 Philistine men, taking their belongings and then dispersing their clothing to the 30 wedding guests. Then he returned to his father's house.

Meanwhile Samson's bride and her father were in an embarrassing situation. The bridegroom had gone off in anger, leaving the bride without a husband. The father thought this meant that Samson no longer wanted his wife so he gave her in marriage to Samson's best man. But Samson had not forgotten his bride, even though it took awhile for his anger to cool off. At harvest time he returned to Timnah to see her, but the girl's father explained the situation and politely suggested that Samson take the younger sister as his bride instead. This just enraged Samson all the more and he declared that from then on no one would be able to blame him for hurting the Philistines. Samson next caught 300 foxes (or jackals) and tied them in pairs by their tails, attaching a burning torch to the tails and letting them loose in the grain fields, vineyards, and orchards of the Philistines. They caused vast destruction but Samson didn't stop there. From a cave he made forays into the countryside, killing many Philistines. The Philistines were greatly angered and wanted revenge. But since they couldn't capture Samson themselves, they camped near the tribe of Judah, threatening to fight them unless the Israelites surrendered Samson to them. The men of Judah were afraid of the Philistine warriors and 3000 of them went to Samson's cave to arrest him, promising not to harm him if he would go with them peacefully. Samson agreed and allowed them to tie him up with 2 new ropes. When the Israelites brought Samson to the Philistines, the enemy shouted with delight, thinking that now they finally had the victory over their hated enemy. However their joy didn't last long. The Spirit of God came upon Samson, giving him supernatural strength. The ropes fell off his hands like burned strings and Samson took up the jawbone of a dead donkey and used it to kill 1000 Philistine men! In this way God judged the Philistines for their oppression of Israel, with the side benefit of not permitting Samson to unlawfully wed a pagan woman.



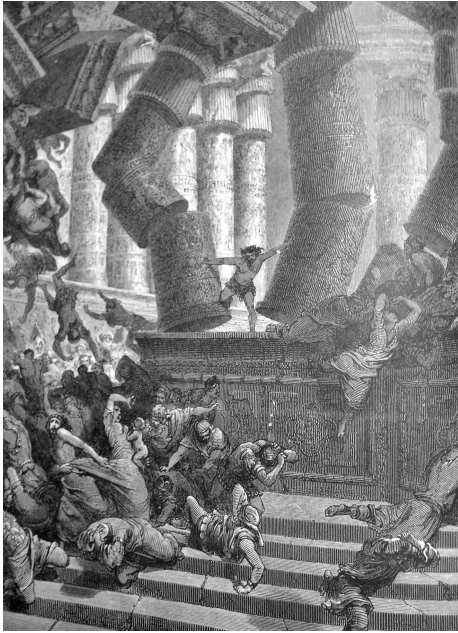
However Samson was a slow learner and one day he found another pagan woman he wanted in Gaza, this time, a prostitute. The people of Gaza heard that Samson was spending the night with her and they planned to attack him at daybreak. They locked the great city gates to make certain that he couldn't escape. However at midnight, Samson got up and left the city, pulling the gargantuan gates up by their posts, hoisting them on his shoulders, and carrying them up a hill!



After that Samson fell deeply in love for the first time. Her name was Delilah, and like the other women in his life, she was a pagan. The Philistine rulers approached Delilah, promising her a lot of silver if she could trick Samson into telling her the secret of his great strength and how he could be overpowered and captured. Delilah agreed to the deal and from then on she kept asking Samson why he was so strong and what could make him weak. Samson seems to have treated it all as a game. He teased her by telling her that tying him up with 7 new bowstrings would do the trick. The Philistine rulers brought the bowstrings and hid in the next room while Delilah tied Samson up. Then she cried out that the Philistines were coming. Immediately Samson broke the bow strings like pieces of burned string, much to the dismay of the Philistines hiding nearby. Samson was unaware of his hidden foes and probably treated the whole thing as a game between him and Delilah. However Delilah was not amused.

On several other occasions the ploy was repeated, each time with Delilah asking Samson for the secret of his strength. Samson just kept teasing her, once saying new ropes would weaken him, another time saying weaving 7 braids of his hair in a loom would do it. Each time Delilah was made to look the fool when Samson broke his bonds asunder, much to the dismay of the Philistines concealed nearby. One day Delilah accused Samson of not truly loving her because he wouldn't tell her the truth. She bothered him so much with her nagging that he finally told her about the Nazarite vow and that cutting his hair would take away his strength. This time Delilah sensed victory and she notified the Philistine rulers to bring the silver they had promised her. She then got Samson to go to sleep and shaved off his seven braids while he lay asleep in her lap. This time when she cried out that the Philistines were coming, Samson awoke to find his strength gone and he was easily overcome and captured. The Philistines tore out his eyes and put heavy bronze chains on him, making him grind grain along with some oxen in the prison. It was the ultimate humiliation and Samson must have spent many hours regretting his wasted life.

One day the Philistine rulers had a great celebration to offer a sacrifice to their god Dagon. They were extremely proud of their god, believing that it had delivered their enemy Samson to them. They thought it fitting to have Samson at the celebration so that they could mock and make fun of him, plus they planned to have him perform for them for their entertainment. He was taken from the prison and brought to the temple where all the Philistine rulers and 3000 men and women were assembled.



Samson had been blinded, so he asked the servant who was leading him to allow him to lean against the pillars of the temple. The servant complied, not suspecting any hidden motive from his prisoner. After all, his charge was as weak and helpless as a baby without his sight. However there were two things the Philistines were unaware of - Samson's hair had grown back while in prison, and the two pillars Samson was leaning against supported the entire temple. Samson braced himself against the pillars and prayed one last prayer. "Lord Yahweh, remember me, please, and strengthen me, please, only this once, God, that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes." (Judges 16:28-30) Then he pushed with all his might and the temple crashed down upon the rulers and all the people in it. In that one act, Samson killed many more Philistines than while he lived. Samson's family went to get his body and buried him in the family tomb. He had ruled Israel for 20 years.

Samson is mentioned in Hebrews 11 of the New Testament as one of the heroes of faith, along with Barak, Gideon, and Jephthah, all of whom had flaws and weaknesses but who, because of their faith, were nevertheless used by God to accomplish His plan for the people of Israel. Some might think that Samson was a poor example of faith. After all, he broke his holy vows, had sex with a prostitute, tried to marry a pagan woman, and had sexual relations outside of marriage. He was also stubborn, violent, and disobedient to his parents. However one must remember that the Old Testament saints were not new creations in Christ. None of them had a recreated spirit permanently in-dwelt by the Holy Spirit. Other judges like Barak, Gideon, and Jephthah also had noticeable character flaws. And, from what the Bible reveals about life in that time and place, it would seem that Samson's immorality was not all that unusual.

The Time After the Judges

The Bible indicates that after the time of the judges, the Israelite people seemed to have forgotten the things written in the Torah and many of them had no other guide other than their own clouded conscience. In fact, Israel sank so low that idolatry was not considered wrong or displeasing to God anymore.

The Bible singles out a man named Micah, an Israelite who secretly stole some silver from his mother. His mother put a curse on the thief, and when Micah heard of it, he thought better of his actions and confessed his crime. His mother was happy to receive back her silver, and as a reward to Micah she used some of it to get an idol made, which stood in Micah's house. Micah also had some other household idols made, along with an ephod, and these were used to worship at a shrine with one of his sons serving as priest. Later Micah met up with a Levite from Bethlehem and he offered him money to serve as the priest of his home. (Men from the Levite tribe served as worship leaders and lived in 48 cities spread throughout Israel, so it was unusual that this particular priest was without a home.) The Levite priest was actually from Bethlehem, which was not one of the designated cities, but he agreed to officiate as Micah's priest. It so happened that a war party of 600 men from the tribe of Dan were looking for land in Israel, perhaps because they were unable to drive out the Philistines in their area, and they passed by Micah's home. The war party stole Micah's idols and persuaded the Levite priest to go with them, arguing that it was better to serve as priest to an entire tribe than to just one household. The warriors went on their way with the idols, priest, and Micah's family and possessions. When Micah tried to stop them, he was warned to back off or else! The war party then traveled on and proceeded to attack a peaceful people living near Sidon, killing everyone, burning the city, and then rebuilding it for themselves. In what one might call a hypocritical act of piety for such an amoral, bloodthirsty group of killers, they then set up Micah's idols in the city and got one of Moses' grandsons to serve as a priest. Clearly these Israelites had lost all touch with God's laws and the moral requirements of a holy people serving the living God.

Another incident is mentioned which further reveals the dreadful immorality of that time. A Levite had bought a slave woman from Bethlehem but she left him to run back to her father's home. Four months later the Levite decided to go after her in order to get her back. He stayed with the slave woman's family for several days and then headed back home with her. Along the way he stopped at the Benjaminite city of Gibeah where an old man offered him and his slave overnight lodging at his house. Unfortunately a gang of thugs from the city banged on the door late at night, demanding that the old man surrender his guest because they wanted to gang-rape him.



The old man then made a suggestion that surpassed the horror of the gang's demand, telling the men to take his virgin daughter and the slave woman instead, to do whatever they wanted with them. It appears he thought this preferable to raping the male guest. (Remember that Abraham's nephew, Lot, also did something similar when all the men from Sodom surrounded his home demanding to have sex with the 2 angels inside). The Gibeah men refused to agree to taking the women instead, so the cowardly Levite took his slave woman and shoved her out the door. The rapists sexually assaulted the poor woman until dawn, after which she crawled home and died on the doorstep of the house where her master was staying. In the morning the Levite got ready to leave and found her there, her hands clasping the doorsill. He callously commanded her to get up, but of course she gave no answer.

Then realizing that she was dead, the Levite slung her corpse over his donkey and went on home. Once at home, the Levite took a knife and cut the woman's corpse into 12 parts, sending one part to each tribe of Israel. When the Israelites asked why he had done this, he explained the events in Gibeah, (not mentioning that rather than be the victim of a homosexual rape, he had sacrificed his slave woman to save his own skin). He put it this way:



The Levite, the husband of the woman who was murdered, answered, "I came into Gibeah that belongs to Benjamin, I and my concubine, to spend the night. The men of Gibeah rose against me, and surrounded the house by night. They intended to kill me, and they raped my concubine, and she is dead. I took my concubine, and cut her in pieces, and sent her throughout all the country of the inheritance of Israel; for they have committed lewdness and folly in Israel. Behold, you children of Israel, all of you, give here your advice and counsel. (Judges 20:4-7) The Israelites were filled with rage, and when the tribe of Benjamin refused to hand over the culprits of the rape, the avenging Israelites went out to slaughter them. But first they went to Bethel to ask God which tribe should go first to kill the Benjaminites.

The Bible states that God told them that Judah should go first, but when the tribe did so, 22,000 of their soldiers got killed. (The method used to 'ask' God was probably by means of the Urim and Thummim, where the priests would shake or toss colored stones to divine God's will. If they turned up the black stone, the Israelites would not go to battle, but if they turned up the white one, they would proceed into battle with the knowledge that they were in the will of God. This was one form of divination that God allowed in the Old Testament.)

Again the Israelites asked God if they should go to battle, and again God said to do so. This time 18,000 Israelites were killed by the Benjaminites. Again the Israelites sought God about whether they should attack the tribe of Benjamin, only now they wept, fasted, and brought offerings to the Lord. Phineas, grandson of Aaron, gave them the go-ahead and next day the Israelites won the battle. In fact, their victory was so thorough that they almost exterminated the entire tribe of Benjamin (about 25,000 men were killed), leaving only 600 alive.

The question arises as to why God was involved in this situation, which left so many Israelites dead. Perhaps it had something to do with the people trying to use God for their own ends, manipulating Him to give them power over the Benjaminites. Perhaps their methods resembled the pagan forms of divination used by the Canaanites to manipulate their pagan deities. By acting unpredictably, God was showing His people that He was sovereign. Only after the people wept, fasted and prayed, did God truly answer their prayers.

Afterwards the Israelites had second thoughts and felt sorry for the genocidal murder of their brethren. Their 'solution' was to wipe out Jabesh Gilead, a city that had not helped in the battle.



The Israelites had sworn that anyone who did not meet with them at Mizpah to fight the Benjaminites would be killed, so here was the perfect solution to their problem. In this battle, the Israelites murdered all the men and all the married women, sparing 400 virgins to give to the Benjaminites. However that still left 200 Benjaminites without wives, so the Israelites allowed the men of Benjamin to raid a Jewish festival at Shiloh where they kidnapped the unmarried girls who were dancing at the celebration. Apparently when the fathers and brothers of the girls complained, they were urged by the other Israelite tribes to be 'kind' to the Benjaminites because they didn't have wives. Amazingly it seemed to work because after that, the Israelites all went back to their homes in the land that God had given them.

Reading about Israel's bloody civil war against the tribe of Benjamin, raises disturbing questions as to why God would want the Israelites to fight each other and why He eventually sided against the tribe of Benjamin. Part of the reason must have been the brutal rape and murder of the Levite's slave woman and the impenitent attitude of the Benjaminites who refused to bring the murderers to justice. It is doubtful, however, that God approved chopping up the woman's body and sending it to the tribes of Israel, and even more doubtful that He approved of killing the people of Jabesh Gilead, or the abduction of the Shiloh girls, to get wives for the 600 Benjaminites. What is not in any doubt is how little knowledge the Israelites had of God and His law. The people had become lawless, turning away from the law God gave them and doing what was right in their own eyes. It is mentioned that Israel had no king at this time, indicating that strong leadership was missing.

*Even though there were Judges of great faith and courage like Deborah, there were also many weak judges. When a weak judge came on the scene, the people often turned to idolatry, and further generations forgot their Covenant with God. The sins of idolatry, immorality and war brought Israel to a condition similar to the immoral practices of the Canaanites. The man named Micah saw nothing wrong with making silver household idols, worshipping them at a shrine, and choosing his own priest to bring good luck to his home and family. The Israelite tribes saw no problem in engaging in a genocidal civil war that destroyed thousands of men in order to mete out justice for one Levite man who seemed to care more for his own loss of dignity and property, than he did for the murdered slave woman. Truly the Bible is not mincing words when it states repeatedly, **"In those days there was no king in Israel, and everyone did as he saw fit."** [Judges 21:25].*

Israel had no king at that time, but later God promised to send the Jews a King who would rule forever, bringing justice and righteousness. He would be Supreme King and Judge and He would come on the scene as a human baby born of a virgin.

For to us a child is born. To us a son is given; and the government will be on his shoulders. His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there shall be no end, on David's throne, and on his kingdom, to establish it, and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from that time on, even forever. The zeal of Yahweh of Armies will perform this. (Isaiah 9:6-7)

A shoot will come out of the stock of Jesse, and a branch out of his roots will bear fruit. Yahweh's Spirit will rest on him: the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of Yahweh. His delight will be in the fear of Yahweh. He will not judge by the sight of his eyes, neither decide by the hearing of his ears; but with righteousness he will judge the poor, and decide with equity for the humble of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; and with the breath of his lips he will kill the wicked. (Isaiah 11:1-4)

Jesus was from the kingly tribe of Judah. When He was born, wise men from the East came looking for the prophesied King of the Jews and a star led them to the home of Jesus. When Jesus became an adult and started His teaching ministry, He taught that He would one day sit on a glorious throne. Many people in Israel recognized Jesus as their long-awaited king, although not all realized that Jesus' kingdom is not of this world.

*At the end of Jesus' life, during His trial before Pilate, Jesus answered affirmatively that He was the King of the Jews. *Are you the king of the Jews?*" asked Pilate. *"You have said so,"* Jesus replied. (Mark 15:2) When the King of the Jews died on a cross, His followers were confused and disheartened, thinking that all the promises and prophecies had failed. However they quickly changed their minds when Jesus rose from the grave on the third day. John the apostle was given a special revelation that Jesus would return to Jerusalem, within their own lifetime, to bring judgment and to triumph over evil.*

These will war against the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings, and those who are with him are called, chosen, and faithful. (Revelation 17:14)

Today our world is in the throes of wickedness, not unlike what the people of Israel suffered in the time of the judges. Sometimes it appears that the forces of darkness are gaining over the Christian Church and all seems hopeless. Yet Jesus, our King, says this is not so.

I have told you these things, that in me you may have peace. In the world you have oppression; but cheer up! I have overcome the world."(John 16:33)

For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world: your faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? (1 John 5:4-5)

We are not left defenseless by any means. God has equipped us with heavenly battle armor that makes us invulnerable to the attacks of the enemy.

Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world's rulers of the darkness of this age, and against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and, having done all, to stand. (Ephesians 6:11-13) ... "Resist the devil and he will flee from you." (James 4:7)

We have the love of Jesus Christ, our glorious King, and His promise to never leave us or forsake us. Nothing can give more assurance and comfort than that.

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Could oppression, or anguish, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Even as it is written, "For your sake we are killed all day long. We were accounted as sheep for the slaughter." No, in all these things, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:35–39)

Ruth

CHAPTER 10



Next we come to a story in the Bible that wonderfully foreshadows the miracle of redemption found in Christ Jesus. This story is particularly powerful because it reveals the fulfillment of God's grace and mercy towards fallen humanity, emphasizing the everlasting love He has for all those whom He rescues and calls His own.

The story happened at the time of the Judges but it does not reflect the war and strife of that time. It opens with a Jewish family from the tribe of Ephraim who had left their home in Judah ten years earlier due to a famine in the land. The man was named Elimelech and the wife was Naomi. They had two sons, Mahlon and Kilion, who were probably teenagers when the family moved to the pagan land of Moab. The Moabites were no friends to Israel. They were the descendants of Lot and his daughter (conceived in incest) and were thus looked down upon by Israel for that reason. Also years earlier, Balak, King of Moab, had been greatly afraid of the Israelites and had asked a prophet named Balaam to put a curse on Israel. Balaam had been unable to do it, explaining to the king that he could not denounce a people whom God had not denounced. However he advised the king to have the Moabite women seduce the Israelite men at their pagan festivals, luring them into sexual immorality and idolatry. Because of this evil attempt to ensnare the men of Israel, God ruled that the Moabites were to be excluded from entry into the Jewish assembly up to the 10th generation. Thus there was continued racial and spiritual tension between these two people groups.

Nevertheless Elimelech took his family to Moab because there was food there, most likely planning to return to his hometown of Bethlehem once the famine was over. Unfortunately he died in Moab, leaving behind his widow and two sons. Instead of returning home, Naomi and her sons stayed in Moab and both young men ended up marrying Moabite women. One was named Orpah; the other Ruth. Then tragically, both young men died as well, leaving the three women to fend for themselves. After living in Moab for 10 years, Naomi heard news that the famine had ended in Israel. Living as widows in Moab did not offer much hope for the future so Naomi and her daughters-in-law packed up and headed to the land of Judah.

Apparently Naomi had second thoughts along the way, probably realizing the possible fate awaiting the two young women once they came to Bethlehem. As Moabites, Ruth and Orpah might very well have faced prejudice, rejection, and maybe worse from Naomi's people. Naomi, who genuinely loved Orpah and Ruth, felt unwilling to expose them to such danger. She told them to return to their mothers' homes with the hope that the Lord would give them new husbands and happy homes. Then she kissed them good-bye. At first both women wept and were unwilling to leave Naomi, but through persistence Naomi made them see that there was no hope of ever having a family if they stayed with her. Finally Orpah regretfully kissed Naomi good-bye and went back to her land, her people, and her gods. Ruth, however, had a different response. She understood the dangers and uncertainties of traveling to a new land, as well as the very real possibility that she might never have a husband or children of her own once in Israel. Nevertheless, with a heart full of emotion, Ruth replied: *"Don't urge me to leave you, and to return from following you, for where you go, I will go; and where you stay, I will stay. Your people will be my people, and your God my God. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. May Yahweh do so to me, and more also, if anything but death parts you and me."* (Ruth 1:16-17)

Ruth appears to have had a faith in God that Orpah did not. Naomi saw this and also recognized that Ruth would not be dissuaded, so she stopped arguing. Together the two women traveled on to Bethlehem. Once there, all the women from town gathered around Naomi and marveled at her. Perhaps the hardships in Moab had greatly aged her. Naomi herself told them that her life had been filled with tragedy because God had abandoned her. She was now destitute with nothing to her name.

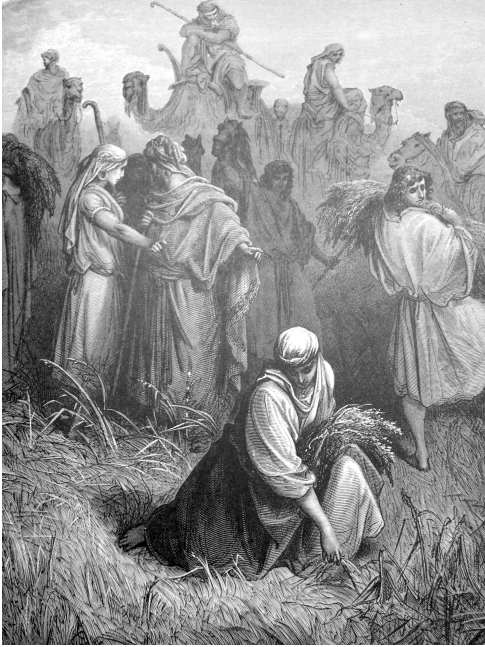
Naomi and Ruth's arrival in Bethlehem coincided with the barley harvest. According to Hebrew law, poor Israelites, and even foreigners, were allowed to glean in the harvest fields after the harvesters had passed through.

When you reap the harvest of your land, you must not wholly reap into the corners of your field, and you must not gather the gleanings of your harvest. You must leave them for the poor, and for the foreigner. I am Yahweh your God.' (Leviticus 23:22)

Without any other source of income, Ruth (with Naomi's blessing) went to a field nearby so that she could find some grain. She worked all day long, taking hardly any time to rest, gleaning in the field behind the harvesters. It just so happened that the field she was working in belonged to one of Elimelech's relatives, Boaz by name, who came from town to see how the harvest was going. He noticed Ruth and was curious about her.

After questioning the workers he learned that she had come from Moab with Naomi and that she was a very hard worker. Boaz was impressed and took the time to speak with Ruth.

Then Boaz said to Ruth, "Listen, my daughter. Don't go to glean in another field, and don't go from here, but stay here close to my maidens. (Ruth 2:8)



Boaz wanted to protect Ruth and he instructed her to drink water only from the jars of his workers and he commanded his servants not to bother her in any way. Ruth bowed to the ground before Boaz, amazed at his kindness. She asked him why he was being so kind to her and he replied that it had to do with all she had done for Naomi. He was aware of her sacrifice in leaving her home after she became widowed, and her courage in facing poverty and hardship in a foreign land. Boaz respected and admired her so highly that he pronounced a blessing upon her: *May Yahweh repay your work, and a full reward be given to you from Yahweh, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge. (Ruth 2:12)* But Boaz didn't stop there. He also showed her favor by inviting her to eat with the workers. Later he told his servants to allow her to glean even among the sheaves, and to purposely pull out grain for her to easily pick up. They were not to rebuke her or insult her in any way.

Ruth gleaned in the field until evening and took all her grain back to her mother-in-law. Naomi was amazed at what she had gathered and she asked in what field she had been gleaning. When Ruth told her the field's owner was named Boaz, Naomi was overjoyed. In fact, it restored Naomi's faith in God's love and protection.

Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, "May he be blessed by Yahweh, who has not left off his kindness to the living and to the dead." Naomi said to her, "The man is a close relative to us, one of our near kinsmen." (Ruth 2: 20)

Naomi informed Ruth that Boaz was one of their closest relatives and she told Ruth to make sure she stayed close to Boaz's maidservants, just as he had instructed. This was for her safety and also because Boaz had a family responsibility to look after them. The Levirate Law stated that when an Israelite man died childless, his brother was required to raise up an heir to him by his widow. This law extended to next of kin if the brother was unable to fulfill his responsibility. Naomi knew this law and she could see that all that had happened that day was not a coincidence. She began to see possibilities for Ruth's future and she acted quickly. She instructed her daughter-in-law to bathe, put on a clean dress, and daub on some perfume. Then Ruth was to go to the threshing floor where Boaz and his workers would gather that night for dinner. After their meal was finished, Ruth was to notice where Boaz lay down to sleep so that she could lay down at his feet under the covers. (Covering in the Old Testament symbolized marriage.)

Naomi assured Ruth that Boaz would tell her what she should do next.

Naomi was taking a chance with her plan. An unmarried woman caught sleeping with a man in Israel could be stoned as a prostitute. At the very least her reputation could be ruined and she would be in danger of assault and rape from other men who would see her as fair game. Also there was the possibility that Boaz might even reject her, so what Naomi was advising Ruth to do was very dangerous. However faith often involves risk that is superseded by trust and confidence. In this case, it is clear that Naomi trusted Boaz to be an honorable man who would not to take advantage of the situation, especially since he had already shown his desire to protect Ruth. Because of her faith in Boaz, and more importantly because of her faith in God's loving protection, Naomi was willing to expose Ruth to great risk. Ruth followed Naomi's instructions to the letter, indicating her own faith in Boaz, in her mother-in-law, and in God. Both women were stepping out in faith that God was behind the great favor that Boaz was showing to Ruth and that God's plan for them was a good one.

When Boaz awoke in the middle of the night, he was shocked to see a woman lying there at his feet. "Who are you?" he asked. "I am your servant Ruth," she said. "Spread the corner of your garment over me, since you are a guardian-redeemer of our family." (Ruth3:9)

Ruth was, in effect, asking Boaz to offer her his protection by marrying her. It deeply touched Boaz because he was much older than Ruth. (He had addressed her as 'daughter' on earlier occasions.) He commended her for choosing him when she could have gone after younger men instead, and he assured her that he would indeed marry her, but he could only do so if the legal claims of a closer relative were first dealt with.

'Stay this night, and in the morning, if he will perform for you the part of a kinsman, good. Let him do the kinsman's duty. But if he will not do the duty of a kinsman for you, then I will do the duty of a kinsman for you, as Yahweh lives. Lie down until the morning.' (Ruth 3:13)

Boaz waited until early dawn, while it was still dark enough for concealment, and then filled Ruth's shawl with barley before sending her away. Then he left for town. Meanwhile Ruth returned to Naomi and told her everything that had happened. Naomi was encouraged. She knew Boaz would not let the matter rest for a moment. She had complete faith that Boaz would accomplish all that he had promised.

Boaz went to the city gates and waited for the close relative to arrive. When he did, Boaz gathered the city elders together as witnesses and informed them all that Naomi wanted to sell her husband's land and that the close relative had first rights to buy it. The relative agreed to buy it but changed his mind quickly when Boaz added that buying the land would also require marrying Ruth, the Moabite widow of Elimelech's dead son. The close relative was agreeable to adding Naomi's land to his own inheritance but he was not willing to marry another man's widow and sire a son who wouldn't even be considered his own, and who would get Naomi's land in the end. Consequently he forfeited his rights to buy the land by taking off his sandal and giving it to Boaz. This was the custom in Israel whenever people traded or bought back something.

Then Boaz proclaimed before the elders that he would buy Naomi's land and take Ruth as his wife. The elders knew Ruth was a good woman and they all approved of the match, giving their blessing as a community. Then Boaz took Ruth home as his wife and soon the Lord blessed them with a baby boy. Naomi's friends were exceedingly happy for her.

The women said to Naomi, "Blessed be Yahweh, who has not left you today without a near kinsman. Let his name be famous in Israel. He shall be to you a restorer of life, and sustain you in your old age, for your daughter-in-law, who loves you, who is better to you than seven sons, has given birth to him." (Ruth 4:14-15)

Naomi held the child in her arms and looked after him. Interestingly enough, it was the neighbors who named the baby 'Obed', meaning 'servant of God, worshipper, follower'. Obed would later be the father of Jesse, who would be the father of David, Israel's greatest king. David would earn the high honor of being described as a man after God's own heart, an ancestor of the Lord Jesus Christ many hundreds of years later.

The story of Ruth happened at the time when Israel was a tribal society without a king. Each of the 12 tribes looked to their chieftains for leadership. When Israel's enemies became too threatening, God would send a Judge to rescue them, such as Deborah or Samson. As can be seen from reading the Book of Judges, it was a violent time with much war and strife going on. So it comes as a relief to hear a story of kindness, love, and commitment within this troubled time. But the story of Ruth is not just a sweet romance where two people fall in love and get married. It was especially important because it was a shadow of the most important event of the universe that was to come. It pointed ahead to an act of God that would change the world and everything in it forever. It was the climax of everything God had planned for humankind from the very beginning. The wedding of Ruth and Boaz was a prophetic picture and so it is not surprising that when God came to earth in the Person of Jesus Christ, He chose a Jewish wedding as the launching point for His ministry.

THE BRIDE

The idea of Israel being the bride, or wife, of God was a common theme in the Old Testament. The prophet Isaiah described God's relationship with Israel in this way:

For your Maker is your husband; Yahweh of Armies is his name. The Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer. He will be called the God of the whole earth. (Isaiah 54:5)

The prophet Ezekiel gives a particularly intimate picture of God's love for His people.

Now when I passed by you, and looked at you, behold, your time was the time of love; and I spread my skirt over you, (as Boaz did with Ruth) and covered your nakedness: yes, I swore to you, and entered into a covenant with you, says the Lord Yahweh, and you became mine. Then washed I you with water; yes, I thoroughly washed away your blood from you, and I anointed you with oil.

I clothed you also with embroidered work, and shod you with sealskin, and I dressed you about with fine linen, and covered you with silk. I decked you with ornaments, and I put bracelets on your hands, and a chain on your neck. I put a ring on your nose, and earrings in your ears, and a beautiful crown on your head. Thus you were decked with gold and silver; and your clothing was of fine linen, and silk, and embroidered work; you ate fine flour, and honey, and oil; and you were exceeding beautiful, and you prospered to royal estate. Your renown went out among the nations for your beauty; for it was perfect, through my majesty, which I had put on you, says the Lord Yahweh. (Ezekiel 16:8-14)

Jeremiah, another prophet, also spoke of God as Israel's husband. He prophesied that Israel would betray God but the Lord would make a new covenant with her in the future.

Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they broke, although I was a husband to them, says Yahweh. (Jeremiah 31:32)

Surely as a wife treacherously departs from her husband, so you have dealt treacherously with me, house of Israel," says Yahweh. (Jeremiah 3:20)

Because the Israelites were often wayward and neglectful of God, the Lord often used pictures and symbols to make them see the error of their ways. One time the Lord spoke to Israel through a prophet called Hosea, telling him:

"Go, take for yourself a wife of prostitution and children of unfaithfulness; for the land commits great adultery, forsaking Yahweh." (Hosea 1:2)

This was a shocking thing in Israel because prophets were supposed to lead holy lives and it was against the Law of God for them to marry prostitutes. However God made an exception in Hosea's case because He wanted to make His people pay attention. He wanted them to see how shocking and horrible their sins against Him really were. Yet, even though God was often angered by the Jews, He was always ready to forgive if they repented.

Go, and proclaim these words toward the north, and say, 'Return, you backsliding Israel,' says Yahweh; 'I will not look in anger on you; for I am merciful,' says Yahweh. 'I will not keep anger forever. Only acknowledge your iniquity, that you have transgressed against Yahweh your God, and have scattered your ways to the strangers under every green tree, and you have not obeyed my voice,' says Yahweh." "Return, backsliding children," says Yahweh; "for I am a husband to you. I will take one of you from a city, and two from a family, and I will bring you to Zion. (Jeremiah 3:12-14)

This typology was well understood by the Jews, and the fact that John the Baptist, a famous prophet at the time of Christ, used this symbolism when describing Jesus, revealed that he recognized Him as being God. John explained his own role as the best man (the groom's friend) whose life's mission was to introduce Israel to her Husband and Messiah.

He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. This, my joy, therefore is made full. (John 3:29)

Jesus also referred to Himself as a Bridegroom.

John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting, and they came and asked him, "Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples don't fast?" Jesus said to them, "Can the groomsmen fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they can't fast. But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then will they fast in that day. (Mark 2:18-20)

By referring to Himself in this way, Jesus was plainly identifying Himself with the Bridegroom of Isaiah 62:4-5, who would be happy with his bride, as God would be happy over Israel.

You will not be called Forsaken any more; nor will your land be called Desolate any more: ...for Yahweh delights in you.. As a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so your God will rejoice over you. (Isaiah 62:4-5)

In light of all these references to God being Israel's Husband, it was most fitting that Jesus launched His ministry and performed His first miracle at a wedding in Cana. Perhaps Jesus wanted this wedding to serve as a kind of symbolism to show that with His arrival, the Divine Romance had begun and God had come to claim His Bride.

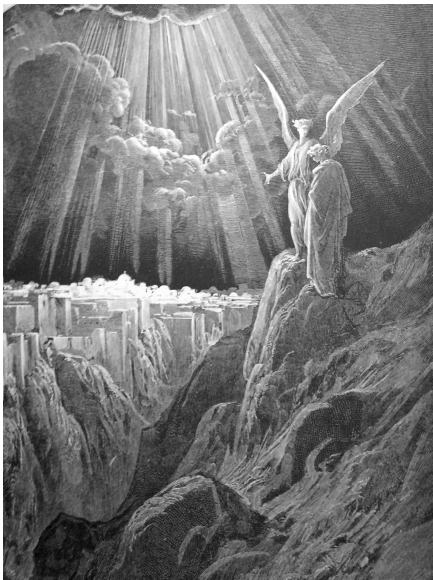
Later on, after Jesus Christ's resurrection, the apostle Paul was even clearer in explaining God's relationship with His people when he likened Christ's relationship to the Church as the relationship between husband and wife. He even went so far as to state that this spiritual bond between God and believers was the reason for designing Adam and Eve in the first place.

Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the (Church), and gave himself up for her; that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the Church to himself gloriously, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and without defect. Even so husbands also ought to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself. For no man ever hated his own flesh; but nourishes and cherishes it, even as the Lord also does the Church, because we are members of his body, of his flesh and bones. "For this cause a man will leave his father and mother, and will be joined to his wife. The two will become one flesh." (Genesis 2:24) This mystery is great, but I speak concerning Christ and of the Church. (Ephesians 5:25-32)

Clearly, from all the scriptures in both Old and New Testaments, we can see that God has always desired His people to be in a close, intimate relationship with Himself. Right from Genesis onwards, God's shadows of redemption provided glimpses that pointed ahead to the miracle of grace He would effect for His people in Jesus Christ, making them one with Him.

This is what the story of Ruth indicates - God and Israel in a close union. This story was included in the Old Testament to serve as is a symbol of God and Israel in a covenant relationship. The unusual part of the story, however, lies in the fact that a Gentile (non-Jew) played the role of the bride. While true that Ruth had converted to Judaism, it was still a fact that her origins were with a Canaanite tribe at enmity with Israel. She was an unusual choice for a symbol of God's Bride. Later on, in the New Testament, this mystery was finally cleared up in the writings of the apostles.

For he is our peace, who made both (Jew and Gentile) one, and broke down the middle wall of partition, having abolished in the flesh the hostility, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man of the two, making peace; and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, having killed the hostility thereby. (Ephesians 2:14-16)



The very last book of the New Testament was written by the apostle John who was particularly close to Jesus. The Lord gave him a vision of His Bride that could not have been clearer. One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls... loaded with the seven last plagues,.. spoke with me, saying, "Come here. I will show you the wife, the Lamb's bride." He carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God. Her light was like a most precious stone, as if it were a jasper stone, clear as crystal; having a great and high wall; having twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels; and names written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel... The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them twelve names of the twelve Apostles of the Lamb. (Revelation 21:9-14)

The apostle used symbolic language to describe God's people as the New Jerusalem, a spiritual city of great beauty. This holy city was built on the foundations of the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles of Jesus Christ, indicating both the Old and New Testament people of God. That the Gentile believers in Christ are included in the Bride is emphasized by the apostle Paul. He said it was a mystery that was not known in previous generations.

... You have heard of the administration of that grace of God which was given me .. how by revelation the mystery was made known to me, as I wrote before in few words, by which, when you read, you can perceive my understanding in the mystery of Christ; which in other generations was not made known to the children of men, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of his promise in Christ Jesus through the Good News. (Ephesians 3: 2-6)

This must have been very surprising for many of the Jews. They thought that being an Israelite according to physical birth made them the people of God. Paul told them that Israel was really a spiritual family of those who believed and trusted in God for salvation, and this included Gentile believers as well.

God said to Abraham, "Don't let it be grievous in your sight because of the boy, and because of your servant. In all that Sarah says to you, listen to her voice. For your offspring will be accounted as from Isaac. (Genesis 21:12)

For they are not all Israel, that are of Israel. Neither, because they are Abraham's offspring, are they all children. But, "your offspring will be accounted as from Isaac." That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as heirs. For this is a word of promise, "At the appointed time I will come, and Sarah will have a son." (Romans 9:6-9)

God had used the story of Ruth as a foreshadow, or symbol, of what He would do later when He came to earth as Jesus Christ. He would call the Gentiles (anyone who is not born a Jew) to Himself and they would become part of His Bride, along with the rest of spiritual Israel. It was a beautiful picture of God's grace and mercy to the lost and rejected of the world. The only reasonable response to such wonderful good news is celebration and that is what John, the apostle, saw in his vision of the Bride, the New Jerusalem.

Let us rejoice and be exceedingly glad, and let us give the glory to him. For the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his wife has made herself ready." It was given to her that she would array herself in bright, pure, fine linen: for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. He said to me, "Write, 'Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.' These are true words of God." (Revelation 19:7-9)

*It will be in that day," says Yahweh, "that you will call me 'my husband,
and no longer call me 'my master.'
I will betroth you to me in righteousness, in justice, in loving kindness, and in compassion.
I will even betroth you to me in faithfulness and you shall know Yahweh...
I will plant her for myself in the land;
and I will have mercy on her who had not obtained mercy;
and I will tell those who were not my people, 'You are my people;'
and they will say, 'My God!'"*

(Hosea 2:16-23)

